SUSTAINABILITY CODE

“Sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (Brundtland-Bericht, 1987)

Securing dignified living conditions for present and future generations is probably the greatest challenge that modern societies face. When it comes to effectively tackling the climate crisis, the loss of biodiversity and also global inequalities universities bear a special responsibility as engines of change through research, teaching and transfer. In its mission statement, Heidelberg University therefore names sustainability as its declared goal in all dimensions of action. Reaching this goal calls for a common understanding of sustainability and a strategy based on the following principles:

– Sustainability is a challenge that extends to all aspects of human action and can only be achieved through integrating its **environmental, economic and social dimensions**.

– Diversity and sustainability are closely connected. A diverse community promotes innovation, strengthens societal cohesion and enables the involving of different perspectives in decision-making processes. Hence, promoting diversity contributes directly to creating long-term resilient structures and comprehensively implementing the key ideas of sustainability.

– Sustainable development is an interactive process which can only proceed successfully when it is shaped and enriched by different perspectives, opinions and skills. The participation of all members of the university will ensure a **pluralist, interdisciplinary and transparent** process of setting priorities and taking decisions.

– The **United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and the **concept of planetary boundaries**[1] form a framework for our activities which calls for continuing development through research.

– Digital technologies offer great potential for driving sustainability – for example through a more efficient use of resources, better data analyses or more inclusive teaching and learning formats. However, sustainable development can only be shaped in a way fit for the future when digital innovations are used responsibly and with an eye to their ecological and societal impacts.

1 Planetary Boundaries Science (PBScience), 2025: Planetary Health Check 2025. Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), Potsdam, Germany.

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Following the ‘whole institution approach’, sustainability is embedded as a normative principle of global and intergenerational justice **in all performance dimensions** and with the participation of all status groups:

– **Research**: Alongside disciplinary approaches, sustainability research calls for inter- and transdisciplinary approaches for the generation of system, goal and transformation knowledge. As a comprehensive university, Heidelberg University aspires to establish a clearly recognizable research profile in the area of sustainability, building on its disciplinary strengths.

– **Teaching**: Following the principle of research-related teaching and learning, the imparting of knowledge and skills is intended to enable students to meet the challenges of sustainable development appropriately and to take responsible, future-focused action.

– **Transfer**: Having society share in knowledge and transferring research findings into applications is a fundamental prerequisite of sustainability. Transfer forms a key interface for our sustainability activities, together with the action fields of application, advice and communication.

– **Organization and operations**: As a university we also seek to live up to our function as a role model in the area of sustainability, both towards students and staff and towards the public. With the central goal of resource-saving operations, the university is engaged in a process of continual improvement which covers both technical as well as organizational and behavioral dimensions and requires appropriate governance.