



**Enhancing Young People Skills and Competencies in Social Entrepreneurship by Virtual Reality**

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**Course 5.3   
SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL ECONOMIES**

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# Introduction

Social sustainability, in the context of the environment and climate change, is a crucial perspective for addressing the global challenges our planet is facing. Accelerating climate change, growing inequalities, and loss of biodiversity require deep reflection on how our society interacts with the environment and the resulting social consequences. Social sustainability focuses on how human actions can be responsibly guided to preserve and restore the balance between human needs and those of the ecosystem in which we live. It involves promoting sustainable practices that reduce environmental impacts, improve people's quality of life and promote social equity. Social sustainability is not only about reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adopting renewable energy, but also about equitable access to clean water, protecting ecosystems, adopting climate change adaptation policies, and including vulnerable communities in decision-making. In this perspective, social sustainability becomes a key pillar to ensure a sustainable future for present and future generations, in which the environment and social welfare are in harmony.

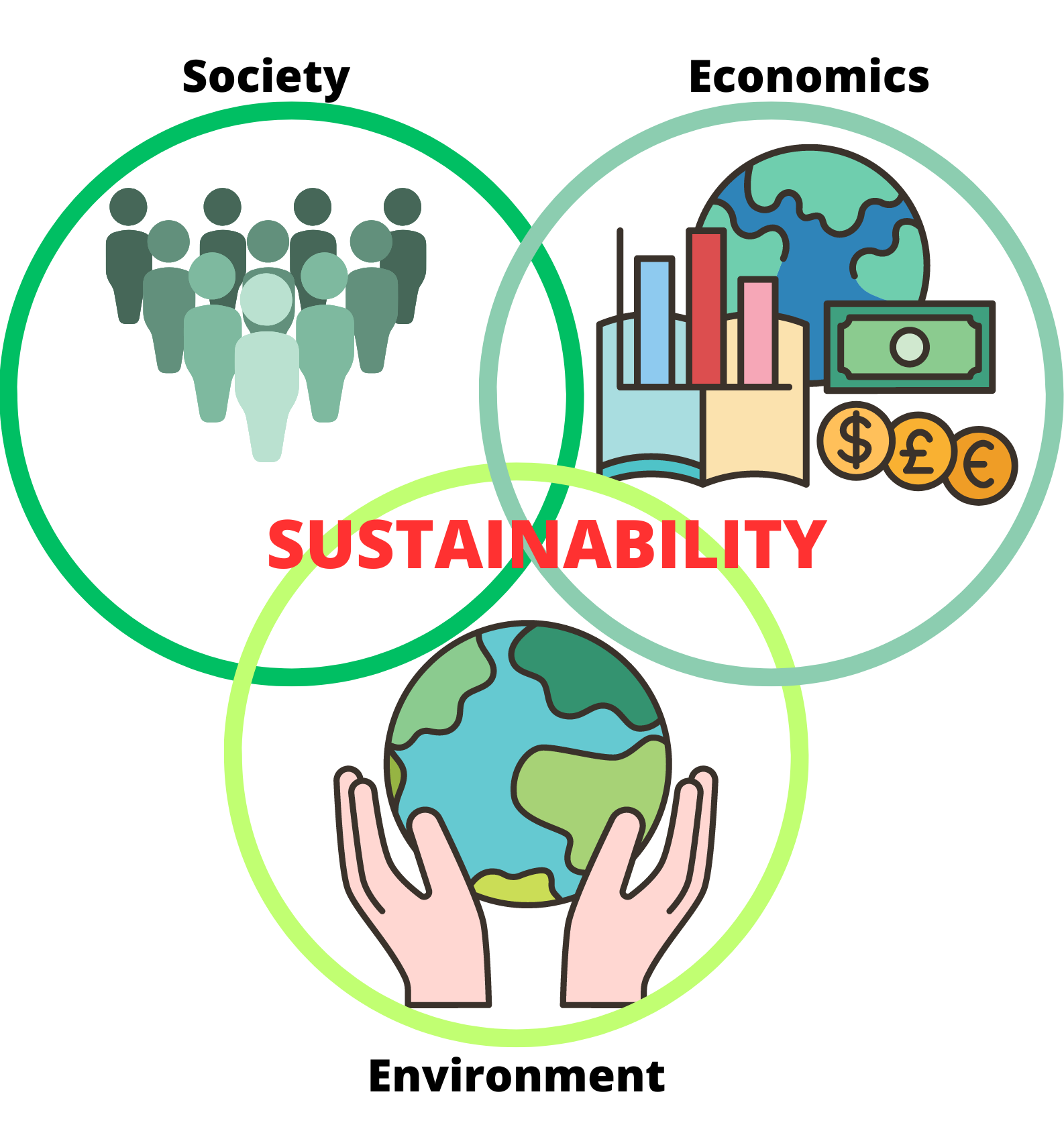
This course will provide an in-depth overview of sustainability and the concept of social economies, exploring how both can contribute to a better future for society and the environment. We will learn the basic principles of sustainability and discover how the social economies approach can help create positive impacts on the community.

Environmental sustainability is essential to ensure the survival of species, the preservation of ecosystems and human well-being. It is important to protect and preserve natural resources, reduce pollution and mitigate negative impacts on the climate.  
Indeed, climate change is one of the most pressing environmental problems we face today. Increased greenhouse gas emissions, caused primarily by human activities, are causing significant changes in the global climate, with consequences such as rising temperatures, melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and increased extreme weather events.  
The ecological footprint represents the amount of natural resources required to sustain a specific lifestyle or human activity. Reducing the ecological footprint means using resources more efficiently, reducing waste, promoting energy efficiency and adopting responsible consumption practices.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a programme of action for people and the planet and involves all countries and all parts of society, from private companies to the public sector, from civil society to information and cultural workers.

**Chapter 1  
Sustainability**By 'sustainability' we refer to an approach that aims to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is a balance between the responsible use of natural resources, economic efficiency and social equity.

Sustainability is based on three interconnected pillars:   
**-Environment:** Environmental sustainability focuses on conserving natural resources, protecting the ecosystem and reducing the environmental impact of human activities. It includes the sustainable management of forests, the conservation of biodiversity, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the transition to renewable energy sources. **-Economy:** Economicsustainability implies an economic system that can thrive in the long term without compromising the environment or social well-being. It includes the adoption of sustainable business models, efficient use of resources, technological innovation and the promotion of responsible investment.   
**-Society:** Social sustainability is about equity, social inclusion and people's well-being. It focuses on promoting social justice, combating poverty, access to education and health for all, and creating resilient and inclusive communities.



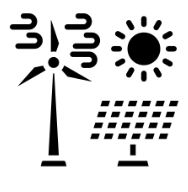
A key concept in the field of sustainability is sustainable development. It was introduced in the 1987 Brundtland Report as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Sustainable development considers the interconnection between environment, economy and society, recognising that global challenges require holistic solutions.

Today, we face many global challenges, such as climate change, resource scarcity, biodiversity loss and social inequalities. Sustainable action is becoming increasingly crucial to address these challenges and ensure a better future for all. Sustainability requires a collective effort, involving governments, businesses, civil society organisations and individuals.

In the pursuit of sustainability, there are some basic guiding principles to consider, including:  
 -Precaution: Take preventive measures to avoid negative impacts on the environment and society, even in the absence of complete scientific certainty.  
 -Responsibility: Organisations and individuals must take responsibility for their actions and the impacts they generate on the environment and society.  
 -Participation: Involve all stakeholders, including citizens, in planning and decision-making to ensure greater inclusion and support.  
 -Integration: Integrate sustainability principles into all aspects of human activities, including decision-making processes, product design, business models and policies.

**1.1 Key areas for environmental sustainability**

In the current context, more and more attention is being paid to sustainable practices and their impact on different sectors of the economy. Organisations and businesses are realising the importance of adopting sustainable strategies to address the environmental, social and economic challenges facing our planet. In this chapter we will explore some of the areas where sustainable practices are driving change and creating new opportunities.

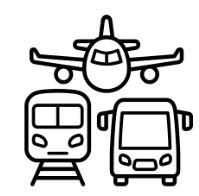
**Energy sector**: The transition to renewable and clean energy sources, such as solar, wind, hydro and geothermal energy, is crucial to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the impacts of fossil fuels.



**Agricultural sector:** The promotion of sustainable agriculture, which includes practices such as organic farming, soil conservation, water management and reduction of pesticide use, is essential for food security and the preservation of ecosystems.



**Building sector:** The construction of sustainable buildings, which use environmentally friendly materials, reduce energy use and promote indoor air quality, contributes to reducing environmental impact and improving people's health.



**Transport sector:** Promoting the use of public transport, electric vehicles, bicycles and shared mobility solutions can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality in cities.

Sustainable management of natural resources, such as water, forests, wildlife and minerals, is crucial to ensure their long-term availability. This involves responsible management practices, conservation of natural habitats, recycling and waste reduction.

Reducing pollution is essential to ensure a healthy and sustainable environment, so reducing industrial emissions, proper waste management, waste water treatment and the adoption of clean technologies are important.

**1.2 Sustainability in the social sector: Promoting long-term impact**

Sustainability in the social sector is critical to ensure that organizations can continue to play their role over the long term and address social challenges effectively. Financial sustainability is necessary to ensure business stability and continuity, while environmental sustainability focuses on responsible management of natural resources and mitigation of environmental impacts. In addition, social sustainability concerns the ability of social organizations to engage and meet the needs of stakeholders, create  
strong relationships, and contribute to building an equitable and inclusive society.  
Sustainability in the social sector presents several challenges:  
-dependence on external funding  
-the scarcity of resources, competition with other organizations  
-the complexity of social challenges   
-changes in the social and economic environment.   
However, there are also opportunities to be seized that can contribute to sustainability  
in the social sector:  
-the diversification of funding sources  
-the development of social business models  
-the collaboration among organizations  
- the use of digital technologies  
-the active involvement of the community   
To promote sustainability, social organizations can adopt several strategies:  
-develop a diversified funding strategy, seeking stable and long-term sources of funding, such as individual donations, partnerships with the private sector, social investments, and government grants;  
-adopt responsible practices in terms of resource use, waste management, emission reduction and promotion of sustainable behaviors within organizations and in the communities in which they operate.  
-recurring social business models, which combine finance and social impact, can contribute to financial sustainability.  
-collaborating and networking with other social organizations, the private sector and local institutions.   
Social sustainability involves actively engaging stakeholders, co-creating solutions, promoting equity and social justice, empowering beneficiaries, and building relationships based on trust and reciprocity.

**Chapter 2 Economic theory and sustainability**

Traditional economic theory has long provided a dominant model for understanding and analyzing economic activity. However, the environmental and social challenges facing society today call for a critical review of this model and the adoption of alternative approaches, such as the social economy and circular economy. In this chapter, we will explore the foundations of economic theory and its relationship to sustainability.

The traditional economic model is based on the idea that progress is measured primarily by the growth rate of gross domestic product (GDP). However, this measure does not take into account the negative impacts on the environment and society generated by resource intensive production and consumption. Increasing negative externalities, such as air and water pollution, ecosystem destruction, and climate change, are threatening the sustainability of our planet.

To address these critical issues, several alternative economic approaches have emerged that place sustainability at the center. The circular economy, for example, proposes a system in which materials are used efficiently and cyclically, minimizing waste and waste generation. The green economy, on the other hand, focuses on the adoption of sustainable practices and technologies to mitigate the environmental impact of economic activities.

The social economy views economic activity as a means to achieve goals of social equity, inclusion and collective well-being; promotes the creation of social value, rather than profit maximization; and encourages the active involvement of local communities in planning and implementing economic policies.

**2.1 Indicators of economic sustainability**

Measuring economic sustainability is a complex task that requires the use of appropriate indicators that can assess not only economic efficiency, but also the environmental and social impact of economic activities. While GDP (Gross Domestic Product) has traditionally been used as the main measure of economic well-being, there is growing evidence that this indicator does not take into account the environmental and social costs associated with production and consumption.

To overcome this limitation, several indicators of economic sustainability have been developed that seek to integrate both monetary and nonmonetary aspects. One such indicator is Green GDP, which is an evolution of traditional GDP and takes into account the negative environmental impacts of economic activities by subtracting the costs of environmental externalities from the GDP measure. This includes, for example, the costs of pollution, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss. The goal of green GDP is to provide a more accurate assessment of economic welfare by also taking into account the impact on the environment.  
However, it too has some limitations, such as not providing detailed information on income distribution or people's quality of life. In addition, green GDP may still give a partial view of environmental impact, as it focuses mainly on negative externalities, neglecting the positive externalities generated by sustainable activities.

To overcome these limitations, broader indicators of economic sustainability have been developed that integrate social and environmental aspects. Among these indicators is the index of well-being and human development (IBSU), which considers a range of economic, social and environmental factors to assess the overall well-being of people and communities. The IBSU includes indicators such as life expectancy, education, income, access to clean water, air pollution and more; its goal is to provide a more comprehensive assessment of a society's progress, which goes beyond just the economic aspect. Other measures of economic sustainability include sustainable development indicators, which provide a comprehensive assessment of sustainability in different sectors, such as energy, agriculture, land use, water and more; they consider economic, social and environmental aspects, providing a comprehensive overview of sustainability in a given context. Importantly, economic sustainability indicators should be used in a complementary and integrated manner, as no single indicator alone can fully capture the complexity and multidimensionality of economic sustainability. The choice of indicators will depend on the specific context and sustainability assessment objectives.

In conclusion, traditional economic indicators such as GDP are limited in providing a comprehensive assessment of economic sustainability. Economic sustainability indicators, such as the Green GDP, the Welfare and Human Development Index, and sustainable development indicators, seek to integrate social, economic, and environmental aspects to provide a more comprehensive view of human well-being and sustainability. Using a diverse set of indicators is essential to gain a more accurate understanding of progress toward a more sustainable society.

**CHAPTER III The 2030 Agenda**

The 2030 Agenda represents an ambitious global action plan for achieving a sustainable future for all. Adopted by the United Nations in 2015, the 2030 Agenda is based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that cover a wide range of challenges, including poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, access to clean water, clean energy, decent employment, technological innovation, environmental protection and more. The 2030 Agenda recognizes the interconnectedness of the goals and the need to take an integrated approach to address social, economic and environmental challenges simultaneously. It promotes an inclusive approach, involving governments, civil society, the private sector and local communities in the implementation process. Agenda 2030 aims to ensure sustainability in all its dimensions by encouraging international cooperation, knowledge sharing, promoting sustainable policies and practices, and mobilizing the necessary resources. The ultimate goal of the 2030 Agenda is to create an equitable, prosperous and sustainable world in which no one is left behind. To achieve this goal, it is critical to take concrete action, monitor progress, and strengthen collaboration at all levels, from local to global. The 2030 Agenda is a guide for the future, a shared commitment to build a better world for present and future generations.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an action programme for people, planet and prosperity, adopted by the United Nations in September 2015. It represents a global plan of action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. The 2030 Agenda is based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which represent a universal commitment to promote sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

The Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda include:

* No Poverty: eliminate poverty in all its forms and dimensions everywhere.
* Zero hunger: end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and agricultural sustainability.
* Health and wellbeing: ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all at all ages.
* Quality education: ensuring inclusive, equitable and quality education for all.
* Gender equality: achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.
* Clean water and sanitation: ensuring access to clean water and sanitation for all.
* Clean and affordable energy: Ensure access to clean and affordable energy for all.
* Decent work and sustainable economy: promote inclusive, sustainable economic growth with decent work for all.
* Innovation and infrastructure: build resilient infrastructure, promote industrialisation and innovation.
* Reducing inequalities: reducing inequalities between people, communities and countries.
* Sustainable cities and communities: make cities and communities resilient, sustainable, safe and inclusive.
* Responsible consumption and production: promoting sustainable production and consumption patterns.
* Combating climate change: take urgent measures to combat climate change and its effects.
* Underwater life: protect marine life and promote sustainable management of the oceans.
* Life on Earth: protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems.
* Peace, justice and strong institutions: promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies and strengthening institutions for sustainable development.
* Partnerships for the goals: strengthening global partnerships for sustainable development

The goals set by the 2030 Agenda are global, with the aim of creating and achieving a better and sustainable future for all countries.

**Chapter iv  
social economies and sustainability: principles and practices**To begin with, it is important to understand what is meant by 'social economies'. Social economies are economic models that emphasise the creation of social value and equity, in addition to the pursuit of profit. These economies put people, communities and the environment at the centre, promoting a more inclusive and sustainable vision of economic development.

They are based on a set of **core principles** that guide their activities towards sustainability and concrete practices adopted at global, national and local levels:

**-Social purpose:** their mission is to create value for people and for society as a whole by fostering social cohesion, justice and equity.

**-Democratic participation:** people involved in economic activities have a voice and can contribute to the strategic direction of the organisation.   
**-Solidarity and cooperation:** people come together to collaborate and share resources, knowledge and benefits, working together for the common good.   
**-Sustainability:** the adoption of practices and policies that reduce environmental impact, promote social equity and ensure long-term economic sustainability.

To promote sustainability, social economies adopt a number of concrete **practices including:**

**-Responsible resource management:** to minimise environmental impact and promote energy efficiency, responsible water use and waste reduction.   
**-Social inclusion and equity:** to provide opportunities for decent work, access to basic services and combat inequalities.   
**-Community involvement:**to address their specific needs, thus contributing to sustainable local development  
 Social innovation: to address social and environmental challenges, this may include developing sustainable products or services, adopting new business models or applying technologies for social purposes.

Social economies play an important role in promoting sustainability and addressing the social and environmental challenges of our time.  
 Through the adoption of principles, they contribute to a more equitable, inclusive and environmentally friendly economy The concrete practices adopted by social economies to promote sustainability highlight how these organisations are driving change towards a more sustainable future.

**4.1 Social and environmental impact assessment**

Social and environmental impact assessment has become increasingly important in the field of sustainability and social economy. In this section, we will explore the methodologies used for social and environmental impact assessment, as well as the reporting and certification practices used to communicate relevant information.

Social impact assessment requires the identification, measurement and evaluation of the outcomes and effects of economic activities on people and communities. There are several methodologies and approaches used to conduct social impact assessment, including:

-Social performance indicators: this approach is based on the identification and measurement of key indicators that reflect the impact of economic activities on society. For example, indicators such as job creation, access to education, social inclusion, poverty reduction, gender equity and more can be considered.

-Cost-benefit analysis: this approach assesses the impact of economic activities by comparing the associated social and economic costs and benefits. Both positive and negative impacts are considered and given a monetary value. Cost-benefit analysis helps make informed decisions based on the quantitative and qualitative information gathered.

-Environmental impact assessment: in addition to social impact assessment, it is also essential to assess the environmental impact of economic activities. This may include assessing the impact on climate, biodiversity, land use, water management, and other relevant environmental aspects. Methodologies such as Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) and Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA) are often used to assess the environmental impact of economic activities.

An organization or product is evaluated against certain sustainability standards and criteria through sustainability certification. There are a number of certifications available internationally, nationally and sectorally that attest to commitment to and achievement of specific sustainability standards. Some well-known examples are ISO 14001 certifications for environmental management, organic or fair trade product certifications, and sustainable building certifications such as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design).

# References

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