

## Grant Project Report: Business Practices for Sustainability and Conservation in Spain: Focus for a New Study Abroad Experience

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## **Grant Project Report: Business Practices for Sustainability and Conservation in Spain: Focus for a New Study Abroad Experience**

**Abstract:** The primary aim of my project was to develop teaching materials that highlight the efforts of both public and private entities in the Andalusia region of Spain to promote sustainability and conservation in their business practices. While the materials were initially developed and used for a summer study abroad course in Spain, they can be adapted for other teaching contexts. The materials begin with an introductory lesson that emphasizes the importance of sustainability in business and provides an overview of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Following this introduction, the curriculum is divided into three concise units: 1) environmental sustainability and the promotion of renewable energy; 2) economic sustainability and the Spanish government's Law 28/2022 or "startups law"; and 3) social sustainability and the power of community. Each unit is designed around authentic resources and includes key components such as vocabulary, a general overview of the initiative, specific examples from public and private organizations, and a cross-cultural reflection. Together, these materials, and the tasks developed for learners to work with them, aim to foster a deeper understanding of sustainability and inspire students to take meaningful action.

*Keywords:* business, conservation, course design, environment, renewable energy, Spanish teaching materials, study abroad, sustainability

### **Project Rationale**

I have been teaching business Spanish for several years and have consistently found a limited selection of materials for teaching at the intermediate level<sup>1</sup>. "Intermediate" here refers to the stage where students need to reinforce grammar structures, expand their vocabulary and improve their fluency. I sought materials that not only analyzed business practices and supported language development but were also up-to-date to ensure relevance. The Spanish for business textbooks I had reviewed lacked recent business cases and were not rooted in authentic resources. Moreover, these materials focused on general business practices, providing only a brief introduction to the green economy. I believe it is essential to teach students about the green economy and its connection to sustainability in greater depth, not only to increase their awareness of how their actions impact the environment but also for practical reasons. As the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, n.d.) gain global significance, they are driving the growth of eco-friendly products, practices, and policies. Students must understand and keep up with these developments so that they can become transformational leaders in their communities, advocating for and helping implement sustainable solutions. Additionally, the expansion of the green

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economy is creating new job opportunities in emerging technologies, the nonprofit sector, government, and beyond, making sustainability knowledge an asset for future careers. Research indicates that there is a rising need for green education, the main goals of which include to raise awareness, deepen understanding, and inspire action in areas such as environmental conservation, sustainability, and responsible engagement with nature. It encourages individuals to adopt sustainable habits, actively contribute to community initiatives, advocate for policy reforms, and make environmentally conscious decisions in their daily lives (Akinsemolu & Onyeaka, 2025).

To address this perceived gap in the existing materials, I aimed to create scaffolded materials that delve deeper into sustainability. These materials emphasize the latest technological, economic, and social advancements in the field, while also exploring their potential impact on the planet and future generations. Since this was a study abroad course, I selected topics directly related to Andalusia, ensuring strong connections to site visits. For technological advancements, I focused on renewable energy in Spain, particularly solar energy and green hydrogen production. Given that Andalusia enjoys more than 300 days of sunshine annually, it made sense to highlight solar energy (Andalucia.org, n.d.). As part of the course excursions, students visited the *Planta Solar* (PS)10 and PS20 solar plants, gaining firsthand insight into Spain's leadership in renewable energy. Notably, the PS10 plant was one of the first commercial solar plants in the world, allowing students to understand Spain's pioneering role in solar technology (Abengoa, n.d.).

To examine social advancements, I focused on equity and community outreach programs. Students visited the nongovernmental organization (NGO) *Bioalverde*, which operates a small farm, store, and textile recycling initiative while also running a social inclusion program that hires recent immigrants and formerly incarcerated individuals. This program not only provides employment for a year but also offers education and skill-building opportunities to help participants secure long-term jobs afterward (Bioalverde, n.d.). Students visited NGO El Enjambre Sin Reina, which promotes community education on environmental topics, through practices including the creation of urban and school-based community gardens (El Enjambre Sin Reina, n.d.).

By incorporating current, real-world examples, the materials I developed seek to prepare students with the knowledge and tools needed to navigate the rapidly evolving landscape of sustainable business practices. Using these materials, I then designed and delivered a course in Spain that emphasized experiential learning. I also chose to focus on the region of Andalusia as it is one of Europe's leading areas for biodiversity protection and sustainability (European Commission, n.d.). Andalusia's unique climate and strategic geographic location—serving as a critical stopover for thousands of migratory birds traveling between Europe and Africa—have contributed to its status as the largest protected region in Europe, with 249 designated protected areas (Junta de Andalucía, n.d.). Furthermore, both regional and national governments have implemented diverse initiatives to safeguard the region's natural wealth and align with the goals of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Notably, Spain has demonstrated its commitment to these goals through three comprehensive assessments of how they are faring nationwide, reflecting its proactive stance (Government of Spain, 2024). The country also holds the 8th position globally in the *Renewable Energy Country Attractiveness Index 2022* and ranks second worldwide in the *Hydrogen Investability Index (H2i) 2021*, highlighting its leadership in renewable energy and sustainable innovation (ICEX-Invest in Spain, n.d.).

The course I developed not only integrated authentic materials and real-world case studies, but also immersed students in practical applications of sustainability practices within the Spanish context. By combining language development, cultural insight, and hands-on learning, the project advances key Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) objectives, such as promoting interdisciplinary education and preparing students for the challenges of global business. My course is designed to integrate the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—along with cultural elements in each lesson. I selected authentic materials, including an article from the European Parliament on the benefits of the circular economy and a video from *La Sexta* about the habits that have led to increased recycling in Spain, to determine the key vocabulary terms I wanted my students to learn (European Parliament, n.d.). For instance, in the case of the circular economy, I chose terms such as *recycling*, *save*, *consumers*, *throw away*, and *dependent*. Then I created structured activities that allowed students to engage with the topic before and after reading the article and watching the video. I incorporated tasks designed to practice the three modes of communication: interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational. The interpersonal communication skills are practiced through directed impromptu conversations in class with peers as well as outside the classroom, with members of students' host families in Seville and language tutors. Finally, each lesson culminated in a presentational task, where students either delivered a presentation on their research findings or wrote a formal letter to someone they have met, such as a guest speaker or another individual relevant to the topic.

### Project Goals

My overarching goal with this project was to work with authentic materials to create an up-to-date, thematically organized, and engaging instructional program addressing sustainable business practices in Spain.

The targeted skills and competencies were aligned with the World Readiness Standards for Language Learning of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, n.d.), commonly referred to as the “5C’s”: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. Activities and assessments in each unit were designed using a bottom-up design method to ensure that the desired learning outcomes were achieved. Below are the ways each standard was achieved:

- **Communication:** Integrated Performance Assessments (IPAs) were used in every unit to develop and assess interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational communication skills.
- **Cultures:** Several cultural practices and perspectives were explored in each unit, such as recycling as a part of daily life, public transportation usage, energy and water conservation, buying local products, the Mediterranean diet, etc. The objective was to foster an understanding of a sustainable lifestyle in Spain.
- **Connections:** The curriculum establishes interdisciplinary connections with science (renewable energies), business and economics (green and circular economies), and history (the evolution of recycling from the Romans to modern practices).
- **Comparisons:** Each unit includes cross-cultural reflections that encourage students to compare products, practices, and perspectives related to sustainability in the United States and Spain.

- **Communities:** Business examples highlight organizations with significant community impact. These include NGOs like *El Enjambre Sin Reina*, *Bioalverde*, and *CEI Cambio*, which lead initiatives such as community gardens, farmers' markets, and recycling programs, promoting social change and education.

### Project Process and Outcomes

I developed a comprehensive set of teaching materials consisting of an introductory lesson and three focused units on sustainability in Spain. These materials were specifically created for a new course I designed, *Sustainability and Conservation in Spain*, which was first offered as a study abroad course in Spain in the summer of 2024. The course was aimed at the intermediate level as described previously, and eight participants were enrolled.

### Course Description

There is growing global momentum toward fostering green economies, which the United Nations Environment Programme (2011) defines as low carbon, resource-efficient, and socially inclusive. In Spain, both public and private sectors are innovating ways to restructure investments to protect natural resources, create jobs, and promote social equity. This course focuses on Andalusia, a region celebrated for its leadership in biodiversity conservation and clean energy initiatives. It seeks to examine the environmental and conservation practices that position Andalusia as a global model for sustainability. Site visits to solar plants, biological research stations, and community gardens were conducted in order to provide hands-on learning experiences that connect theory with practice.

While engaging in these activities, students developed their Spanish language skills through targeted vocabulary and grammar exercises centered on the course theme. This course offers an immersive exploration of sustainability within a culturally rich context. The course objectives are as follows:

1. Develop vocabulary and grammar: Acquire specialized Spanish vocabulary related to sustainability and environmental conservation, as well as grammatical structures useful for communication about these issues.
2. Analyze regional practices: Examine the environmental and conservation practices that make Andalusia a leader in biodiversity protection and clean energy.
3. Recognize global connections: Understand how Andalusia's sustainability efforts align with global initiatives, such as the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
4. Apply knowledge in context: Interpret observations from site visits (e.g., solar plants, community gardens) using the language and concepts learned in class.

Although this course was primarily designed as a study-abroad experience in Spain, it can also be adapted to a non-study-abroad context. The teaching materials include authentic resources such as interviews, videos, and case studies, which help to bring the culture to life even when learners are not physically in Spain. These materials provide rich context and supplement the learning experience, making elements of the course adaptable to classroom settings without the site visits.

Initially, the project was more ambitious, with plans for each unit to include additional business case studies as well as a greater variety of vocabulary and grammar exercises. I view intermediate level courses as an opportunity to balance content mastery with the acquisition of specialized vocabulary and targeted grammar practice. My original intent was to incorporate detailed grammatical explanations with examples contextualized for discussing specific aspects of environmental sustainability and conservation. However, due to time constraints, I had to scale back the number of practice activities and omit the explicit grammatical explanations. While this adjustment allowed me to focus on the core content, it highlighted the importance of further refining the material in future iterations to ensure a more comprehensive learning experience.

The course achieved several measures of success. First, it was approved by the department, reflecting its alignment with institutional academic standards and program objectives. Additionally, there was significant interest from students, as demonstrated by high engagement during informational sessions, where over 20 students expressed enthusiasm for enrolling. However, despite this initial interest, many were ultimately unable to participate due to financial or personal constraints. Several students sent emails asking when the course was going to be offered in the following years as they were very interested in the topic. The study abroad course was well-received by students, as their reflection journals indicated that they had gained a deeper understanding of sustainability and the impact of small, everyday actions. They recognized simple yet meaningful changes they could implement in their daily lives, such as turning off lights in unused rooms, taking shorter showers, recycling, and supporting local businesses. This strong interest underscores the course's appeal and potential for growth in future offerings. As an alternative to the study abroad experience, the department is considering offering this course as a hybrid format in the future, incorporating guest speakers to enrich the cultural component.

### Conference Presentation

In addition to funding this course development project, the Business Language Research and Teaching (BLRT) grant supported me to travel to Washington, DC, and present the project process and outcomes at the 7th International Symposium on Languages for Specific Purposes (ISLSP) & Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) Business Language Conference at the George Washington University in May, 2024. The title of my presentation was *Business Practices for Sustainability and Conservation in Spain*. During the presentation, I provided an overview of my project, explained the structure of each unit, and highlighted several business case studies. For example, I discussed the Heineken factory in Seville, which prioritizes renewable energy utilization in its operations. I also explained Spain's startups law and showcased innovative start-ups like *Vanwoow*, a company that organizes road trips to promote rural tourism, and *Esco Eficiencia Energética*, which focuses on reducing energy consumption. I also emphasized the critical role of green hydrogen in Spain's sustainability efforts and highlighted the significant contributions of the Spanish petroleum company *Cepsa* (*Compañía Española de Petróleos*, now known as Moeve) to advancing green hydrogen initiatives. These examples showcased the innovative and impactful ways Spanish businesses are driving environmental conservation while aligning with global sustainability objectives.

Attending the ISLSP-CIBER BL conference offered numerous benefits. Attendees gave me useful feedback on my project, and I reflected on how I could improve it in future iterations. Participants asked questions about my rationale for the project, the methodology used in developing activities, and the criteria used to select business case studies. Additionally, I had the opportunity to network with colleagues who were either teaching business courses or exploring the development of similar courses focused on sustainability. Finally, the presentations I attended were highly informative and provided valuable insight into curriculum development, experiential learning, and the use of technology in language for specific purposes (LSP).

### **Project Reflection**

I believe I achieved most of my goals with this project. However, if I were to undertake a similar initiative again, I would prioritize incorporating business case studies from various parts of the Spanish-speaking world to provide a broader perspective. Additionally, securing a course release from my university would be essential, as it would give me the dedicated time needed to expand the content. This would allow me to include more detailed grammatical explanations and a greater variety of exercises, enhancing the overall depth and quality of the materials. Developing a new Spanish for the Professions course for our Spanish program expanded the range of course options available to students pursuing a minor in Spanish for the Professions at Marian University. More broadly, this project addressed the lack of appropriate Spanish teaching materials that are focused on the theme of sustainability, expanding the offerings in the field of LSP.

### **Future Directions and Next Steps**

My ultimate goal for this project is to publish my teaching materials as an Open Educational Resource (OER) or a low-cost textbook. To achieve this, I will need to revise the units and further enhance them by adding additional vocabulary and grammar exercises. Furthermore, I will need to secure permission to reproduce any authentic resources such as videos, journal articles, information from company websites, and other copyrighted materials. Sharing such resources with a broader faculty audience through an OER platform would benefit the LSP community by offering novel approaches to teaching sustainability in Spain.

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