

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Doctoral Scholarship in Sustainable Development Research

Chair of “Fondation Diane” - CEEDD

The Chair of “Fondation Diane” in Education for Eco-Citizenship and Sustainable Development, at Saint Joseph University of Beirut (USJ)-CEEDD, announces a call for applications for a PhD scholarship for the 2025-2026 academic year.

Research Theme

Municipality Governance for Sustainable Development

Research Context

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), implementing the SDGs is essential for countries at the local level, as aligning local policies with these goals enables communities to contribute meaningfully to the global 2030 Agenda. Community engagement and action are vital in this regard; by bringing global goals to the local stage, municipalities can help achieve broader sustainability outcomes while addressing the specific needs of their communities.¹ Municipalities, as local governance bodies responsible for resource management, regulatory establishment, and community well-being, play a distinctive role in advancing sustainable development. Since they tackle issues that impact citizens’ daily lives, municipal governments are tasked with balancing environmental conservation, social equity, and economic growth. Additionally, they must adopt strategies to confront urgent challenges like climate change, which threatens both environmental stability and community resilience. Through these efforts, municipalities play a crucial role in building sustainable communities that can thrive now in the future.²

¹ Gill, A., & Stangeby, E. (2018). How the SDGs became the solution for merging municipalities. *UNDP*. <https://www.undp.org/policy-centre/governance/news/how-sdgs-became-solution-merging-municipalities>

² UNDP. (2021). *Municipalities and Unions of Municipalities in Lebanon propose new development projects responding to urgent needs in their communities*. UNDP. <https://www.undp.org/lebanon/press-releases/municipalities-and-unions-municipalities-lebanon-propose-new-development-projects-responding-urgent-needs-their-communities>



In Lebanon, municipalities are often the institutions closest to the people, making them critical actors in advancing the SDGs. However, despite several projects aimed at equipping Lebanese municipalities with skills for sustainable governance, significant governance challenges remain. Initiatives such as the UNDP-funded Municipal Empowerment and Resilience Project (MERP), for example, have provided support for Lebanese municipalities to implement community-focused projects, boost economic development, and attract funding.³ Yet, there is still a lack of tools to evaluate municipal performance in sustainable development, hindering municipalities' ability to identify areas of improvement and refine their approaches.

Lebanese municipalities face ongoing governance challenges that limit their effectiveness in addressing community needs sustainably. Among these challenges are limited knowledge and awareness among municipal employees, decision-makers, and citizens, as well as political commitment issues and financial constraints⁴. In Lebanon specifically, issues related to centralization further weaken municipalities' ability to respond to community needs and promote sustainable development. Central government control, funding shortfalls, and restrictive regulations often prevent local authorities from effectively managing critical services such as solid waste management and public safety. Local responses regularly face limitations from central authorities, restricting municipalities' resources and flexibility in addressing community challenges.⁵

These obstacles underscore the need for improved governance structures, resources, and evaluation tools that can support Lebanese municipalities in their role as sustainable development leaders at the local level. This PhD research opportunity seeks proposals that address these specific governance gaps, particularly through innovative, evidence-based solutions that empower municipalities to drive sustainable development in Lebanon effectively.

³ Levesque, V. (2019). Chapter 5: The Role of Municipalities in Advancing Sustainability. In *Sustainability Methods & Perspectives*. Pressbooks.

⁴ Hawxwell, T., Mok, Sophie, Mačiulytė, E., Sautter, J., & Dobrokhotova, E. (2019). *Municipal Governance for Nature-Based Solutions: Executive Summary of the UNaLab Municipal Governance Guidelines*. Fraunhofer Institute for Industrial Engineering IAQ. <https://unalab.eu/system/files/2020-02/municipal-governance-nature-based-solutions2020-02-17>

⁵ Geagea, N., & Sleiman, A. (2017). *Local Governance in Lebanon: The Way Forward*. Democracy Reporting International (DRI). <https://democracy-reporting.org/en/office/global>



Application Process

Qualified candidates are invited to prepare the following documents:

- 1. Thesis Proposal (maximum 5 pages):** The Thesis proposal should cover the following sections:
 - **Project Title:** Choose an innovative title.
 - **Relevance of the chosen topic:** Describe the innovation, relevance, and significance of the chosen topic, emphasizing its alignment with global challenges in municipal sustainable governance, and specifically, its relevance to the Lebanese context.
 - **Literature Review:** Summarize key studies relevant to the topic, drawing on both national and international sources.
 - **Problem Statement:** Clearly define the research problem, its importance, and the primary objectives of the study in the Lebanese context.
 - **Theoretical Framework:** Outline the theories, concepts or models that will support and frame the research.
 - **Research Methodology:** Describe the innovative research methodology: Qualitative, Quantitative or Mixed methods, selected tools, and approaches that will be used in conducting the research.
 - **References:** Enlist main references related to the topic (APA style).
- 2. Additional Required Documents:**
 - A recent Curriculum Vitae
 - A recent photo of the applicant
 - A Motivation Letter

Eligibility and Requirements

- Hold a master's degree in sciences, geography, environmental studies, sociology, or educational sciences.



- Commit to dedicating 10 hours per week to Chair-related projects aligned with the thesis topic.
- Conduct the thesis in either English or French.
- Project duration: 3 years.

Evaluation and Selection

The selection of candidates will be based on a comprehensive evaluation process that includes:

1. **Application assessment:** assessment of the written Thesis Proposal and the required documents. The application should contain all the required documents as a main condition for eligibility.
2. **Oral Presentation assessment:** The candidate will present the research proposal in front of an academic jury (20 minutes).

The Chair offers a scholarship covering full registration fees for the entire three-year research project. The selected candidate will conduct in-depth research into the economic, sociological, and environmental aspects of sustainable development. Key responsibilities will include applying advanced research tools, conducting regular site visits, and submitting detailed progress reports.

Application Deadline

The Application must be submitted by **Monday, March 10, 2025.**

Selected candidates will be notified of the date for the oral presentation in front of the jury.

How to Apply

Submit applications by email to: ceedd-fondation-diane@usj.edu.lb

For More Information

Email: ceedd-fondation-diane@usj.edu.lb

Phone: +961 1 421000 ext. 5722 or +961 71 354017

