

# Politics of Sustainability Course at University of Ghent

## Organising institution:

University of Ghent

## Faculty/Department/Programme/External partners:

Faculty of Political and Social Sciences / Department of  
Political Sciences / Centre for Sustainable Development

## Abstract:

This course aims to introduce students to the complex field of sustainability thinking. The ambition is to approach sustainability challenges as central political issues for the following decades.

## Contact:

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## Website:

[www.CDO.UGent.be](http://www.CDO.UGent.be)  
<http://studiegids.ugent.be/2015/EN/studiefiches/K001013.pdf>

## Related literature:

DALY, H., FARLEY, J. (2011, 2nd ed.), Ecological Economics: Principles and Applications. Washington: Island Press.  
DRYZEK, J.S. (2005), The Politics of the Earth. Environmental discourses. Second Edition. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.  
GRIN, J., ROTMANS, J., SCHOT, J. (eds.) (2010), Transitions to Sustainable Development. New Directions in the Study of Long Term Transformative Change. New York: Routledge.  
HULME, M. (2009), Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity. Cambridge University Press.

## Description:

This course aims to introduce students to the complex field of sustainability thinking. A number of great worldwide challenges are heading towards us all at the same time: the limits of the ecological capacity we are repeatedly faced with, the growth economies in the South combined with the continuing poor-rich divide, the structural crisis of the capitalist financial-economic system, and new migration flows. The ambition is to approach sustainable development as a central political issue for the following decades in a way that ties in with a post-positivistic perspective on science and a 'critical policy analysis'. The lectures will present theories, concepts and perspectives to identify and analyse the political significance of socio-ecological challenges and the political implications of possible solutions. During group work students will be asked to apply them when analysing a specific, self-selected sustainability issue.

In a first step, the lectures will introduce the basic concepts and most important perspectives (e.g. Brundtland, UN / Rio, Ecological modernisation, OECD, Limits to Growth, Factor four, Ecological Economics, Environmental Justice, etc.), as well as the most widely used analytical frameworks for sustainability (a.o. the various schools of thought in sustainable transition discourse: Rotmans, Geels, Grin). In a second step, topical sustainability issues will be dealt regarding specific themes or from specific angles (e.g. climate, sustainable cities, North-South issues, science and technology, food). In particular, sustainability will be approached as a political issue, which means that the socio-ecological challenges raise questions about power, interests, norms and values, democracy, policy, governance, etc. Does the current dominant political-economic-social-technological regime suffice to tackle the issues or does it require a fundamental reorientation?

During the group work, small teams of maximum 5 students will be asked to make a discourse analysis on a specific sustainability issue. In a first step, each team presents the self-selected issue (a list of suggestions is available) in a brief research proposal together with a research approach (step-by-step plan, distribution of work, etc.). Interim results will be summarised in a draft paper that is presented to and discussed with the lecturers concerned and a number of collaborators from the Centre for Sustainable Development (not to/with fellow students). Following further autonomous group work the final group paper (maximum 6,000 words) is presented to the lecturers and fellow students.

This subject is part of the 'Political Sciences' programme and the 'Social Work' programme, but is also taken by students from many other programmes as optional subject.

MARTINEZ-ALIER, J. (2002), *The Environmentalism of the Poor. A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

MEADOWS, D., RANDERS, J., MEADOWS, D. (2004), *Limits to Growth: the 30-year up-date*. Chelsea Green Publ.

WCED/United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), *Our Common Future*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.