

Sustainable Development Course

Organising institution:

University of Ghent

Faculty/Department/Programme/External partners:

Faculty of Political and Social Sciences/Department of Conflict and Development Studies/Master of Science in Conflict and Development

Abstract:

This course aims to impart to students an insight into the complexity of implementing the concept of sustainable development, in terms of both content and policy.

Contact:

Bernard MAZIJN

Website:

<http://studiegids.ugent.be/2015/EN/studiefiches/K000253.pdf>

Description:

Since the beginning of the 90s, the term 'sustainable development' has been widely adopted in common language. It is defined as a 'development that meets the needs of today without jeopardising the provision of needs for future generations'. The global pursuit of this objective gained momentum in the UN report 'Our Common Future' (1987) and during the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992). Yet, the results of both the report and the conference need to be seen as a provisional synthesis of what preceded. The subsequent international conferences on issues such as population growth, social development, human settlement ... and the Millennium Development Goals, however, cannot be seen as anything other than part of this preliminary synthesis. The most recent synthesis was made at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio de Janeiro, June 2012), the so-called Rio+20 conference.

In the first section of the course, we will go briefly into the history and the conceptual framework. Next, the international agreements emerging from the UN Conference in Rio de Janeiro (1992) constitute an important starting point from which the developments of the past decades will be outlined, on the basis of, among other things, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change/Kyoto Protocol and other UN conventions and conferences. We will also discuss the results of the so-called Rio+20 conference to make up a state of play. Finally, we will present a state of affairs concerning the implementation of sustainable development at the different levels of policy. Against the background of Europe 2020, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, the EU Climate and Energy Package, the EU Natural Resource Strategy, among other things, will also be discussed, as well as the Belgian, federal and Flemish strategies for sustainable development. During the first part, students are asked to work out a topic in team and to present it.

The second part of the course is a 'status quaestionis' of the way in which the concept is operationalised. We will try to come up with an answer to different questions. How can sustainable development be measured at various levels of policy? Does environmental utilisation space constitute a framework for testing, for example, for calculating the 'ecological debt'? What are the patterns in sustainable production and consumption? Does innovation play a role? What is transition? Which criteria are used to assess goods and services? Central to our elaboration are the mutual relations between the different pillars of sustainable development. In this second part of the course, the lectures will be alternated with workshops presupposing active participation by the students.