

GESTS-2002: Sustainable Development and Organisations

Spring semester 2020

Instructors: Profs Estelle Cantillon and Bruno van Pottelsberghe

Course Description: “Sustainable Development and Organisations” provides an introduction to the concept of sustainable development, with an emphasis on the central role of governance and organisations in the slowing or facilitation of action and innovation.

The course is divided into three parts:

1. A set of lectures provides an introduction to the key concepts and references on the subject and shows how policy and managerial thinking about sustainable development co-evolved with our scientific understanding of the interaction between Earth System and human society.
2. Guest speakers provide insights into how different kinds of organisations respond to sustainable development challenges, their drivers and constraints.
3. Group projects provide an opportunity for students to critically examine the way an organisation approaches a specific sustainable development issue.

The course is part of the “Sustainable Development @SBSEM” initiative and provides an introduction to some of the issues that are developed in more depth in courses from the Energy, Circular Economy and Human Development pathways. We also expect students to leverage their learning from other pathway courses into their group projects.

Learning objectives: Sustainable development issues are typically complex and multifaceted, and so are their solutions. At the same time, sustainability has become such a buzzword that firms and politicians are tempted to leverage it for marketing purposes, rather than to describe genuinely sustainable solutions. Critical thinking is therefore paramount.

Upon completion of the course, you should be able to:

- Describe the intellectual and scientific underpinnings of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility;
- Contextualize a sustainable development issue, and describe the stakeholders and the relevant links between this issue and other social, economic and environmental dimensions;
- Analyse a mechanism of governance and assess its impact on stakeholders’ incentives;
- Draw on relevant scientific and grey literature sources to critically assess a proposed solution (policy, strategy, product, ...) from a sustainable development perspective.

Prerequisites: There is no prerequisite for this course.

Teaching methods: The course combines standard lectures, pre-class readings and assignments, in-class interactive activities, guest speakers and a group project.

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Assessment: The final grade is based on class participation (10%), a written group project (45%) and performance in an oral exam (45% of the grade). The participation grade is based on attendance to the sessions with guest speakers, pre-class assignments and quality of discussions in class.

Course material: All course material will be posted on the UV. The lectures build on pre-class compulsory reading, slides, and suggested further reading. A reader containing all of the pre-class reading is available for purchase at the PUB.