

Course title:	Sustainable Business: Strategy & Innovation
Instructor:	Oliver Schmidt
Email address:	oliver.schmidt@fu-berlin.de
Language of instruction:	English
Contact hours:	48 (6 per day)
ECTS credits:	6
Prerequisites:	Students should be able to speak and read English at the upper intermediate level (B2) or higher. Basic interest and curiosity in sustainability and in getting to know or working with businesses to improve the world.

Course description

Climate change, environmental pollution, waste of resources and the decline of biodiversity clearly show mankind that processes of change are necessary. On a policy level, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris climate agreement and the Green New Deal are setting the stage, at the corporate level, standards such as environmental social and governance (ESG) reporting, supply chain integrity and voluntary certification, and diversity are critical to long-term business success.

How are companies innovating towards more sustainability today? What are the criteria, the success factors and the strategic approaches to tackle consumer, policy, employee and societal demand for more sustainability?

This course will look at current sustainability frameworks, sustainable companies and sustainable innovation. The participants will get to know and to apply collaborative tools to be better prepared for a business environment. One focus will be on the development of a sustainable business model or project, based on which we will learn and try out modern methods such as the Sustainable Business Canvas, Design Thinking, Effectuation and the Blue Ocean Strategy.

Student profile

Students interested in evaluating and creating business-related sustainability strategies that are relevant for future business development and leadership positions, entrepreneurs, sustainability consultants, NGO- and policy-related careers, and policy in general and public debates.

Course requirements

1. Regular attendance and active participation in class.
2. Group presentation in class (about 30 minutes) on a project of the course.
3. Final Exam with questions on the course project and the course contents.

Required language skills

The language of instruction is English. Language proficiency on an advanced intermediate level (B2) is a prerequisite for participation. For orientation purposes, you can assess your language skills here (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bb52>)

Grading

Class Participation: 30%
Presentation: 40% (learning groups)
Exam: 30% (individual)

Class Participation means regular, active participation.

The presentation will be a presentation on a project of the course students will prepare in a small learning group. It will provide a useful opportunity for cohort cooperation and feedback. The final exam will include questions on the course project and the course contents.

Readings

A digital reader will be provided.

Steffen, W., Richardson, K., Rockström, J., et al. (2015). Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet. *Science*, 347(6223), 736–746.

Raworth, K. (2012). A safe and just space for humanity: Can we live within the doughnut? Oxfam Discussion Papers. Oxford: Oxfam.

Schoneveld, G. (2020) Sustainable business models for inclusive growth: Towards a conceptual foundation of inclusive business, *Journal of Cleaner Production* Volume 277, 20 December 2020, 124062

Geissdoerfer M et al., (2020), Circular business models: A review, *Journal of Cleaner Production* Volume 277, 20 December 2020, 123741

Sarasvathy, S. D. (2001). Causation and Effectuation: Toward A Theoretical Shift from Economic Inevitability to Entrepreneurial Contingency. *The Academy of Management Review* 26(2).

Course schedule

Date	Program*
Wednesday, January 7, 2026	Course basics Introduction to sustainability, green & circular economy Sustainability frameworks and operationalization
Thursday, January 8, 2026	Corporate Social Responsibility & business sustainability strategy. How do we understand the political and social framework, and how does a business model emerge?

Monday, January 12, 2026	<p>Entrepreneurship, Social entrepreneurship and Sustainability-oriented Business Model Development.</p> <p>How does dealing with stakeholder demands help us develop a business strategy?</p>
Wednesday, January 14, 2026	<p>Field Trip: Green Tour</p> <p>We will drive through Berlin's center (Mitte, Kreuzberg, Schöneberg, Neukölln), visit green places and companies, and have the opportunity to exchange ideas with employees and leaders.</p>
Thursday, January 15, 2026	<p>Management methods for dealing with uncertainty. Design Thinking and principles of innovation.</p> <p>What are the differences between management methods and which are suitable for which challenge?</p>
Monday, January 19, 2026	<p>Field Trip: Profund Innovation, the service institution for knowledge and technology transfer within the research division of Freie Universität Berlin.</p> <p>We will meet startups of green and social industries and have the opportunity to address our questions to them.</p>
Wednesday, January 21, 2026	<p>Presentation of sustainable business model and strategies</p>
Thursday, January 22, 2026	<p>Final Exam</p> <p>FUBiS Farewell Ceremony</p>

*Field trips are subject to change depending on the availability of appointments and speakers. On field trip days, class hours may be adjusted.