

Course title:	Pathways to a Better Future: Concepts and Projects for a Transformation to Sustainability
Instructor:	Dr. Edgar Göll
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Track:	B-Track
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.

Course description

The course introduces students to the grand challenges of today's world (for example climate change, loss of biodiversity, the crossing of planetary boundaries) and the necessity for action to save the conditions for human life on this planet. Students will explore how societies can respond to these interconnected crises through systemic change, collective action and innovative practices to push transformations toward a sustainable development of our communities.

Since the 1990s, a great many projects, policies and regulations that seek to advance sustainable development have been introduced and tried in many communities, organizations and countries. For instance, local and national Sustainable Development Strategies, circular economies, urban agriculture, ecovillages, co-housing, renewable energy projects. Nevertheless, the major trends and policies in most societies are still not sustainable and remain destructive in nature, despite symbolic actions and many declarations.

Students will analyze the specific power structures, behavioral and cultural barriers that impede transformative change, such as unlimited economic growth, over-consumption, environmental pollution, CO₂-emissions, exploitation of people and resources, accelerated cultural changes and overwhelmed people. These aspects will be analyzed by strengthening our understanding of the systemic characters and the complex dynamics in today's societies, including the individual, organizational, community, regional, national and international levels and their relations and interactions.

We will investigate which social actors – individuals, groups, organisations – contribute to a transformation towards a better and sustainable way of life. We will learn to understand how this happens, which inertias and obstacles stand in the way and how these could be overcome. What has the German government done, what is the German parliament doing, what is the function of business, the sciences or civil society organizations – what happens in Berlin? How do these activities function in other countries? We want to consider the broadest possible spectrum of approaches, strategies and actors for a reflected change and transformation. Of course, we will consider and reflect different national, regional and cultural systems and backgrounds for all this. Interesting examples will be described, shown and visited on field trips. Depending on students' interests and motivations, we will relate some of our

seminar's aspects and questions to very relevant theories, i.e. social systems theory, practice theory and the concept of "real utopias". These will give basic insights into societal factors for stability as well as for change.

A new concept for our seminar comes from climate research, investigating specific patterns in complex processes and changes, and is being used for guiding paths for transformation: positive tipping points. It seems to be an interesting tool which enables us to understand and even create tipping points, i.e. situations and actions which accelerate and support changes faster than before. This concept has recently been used to analyze ways to accelerate a transformation towards sustainable development. It is currently being tested and further developed.

The course will in the end enable students to understand societal developments, its mainly short-minded actions and unintended consequences, and on the other hand also intended developments, labelled "Transformations", often based on evidence-based decision-making and smart collective activities.

Student profile

The course is designed for students with different academic backgrounds and a general interest in sustainability and sustainable development. There are no special prerequisites for the course.

Course requirements

- 1.) Class participation
- 2.) Presentation
- 3.) Exam

Required language skills

The language of instruction is English. Language proficiency on an advanced Intermediate level (Mittelstufe II) 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>

Attendance

Each class consists of six teaching modules (45 minutes each). If you miss 6 modules (unexcused), your final course grade will drop by one grade. Coming more than 20 minutes late counts as one missed module (this also applies to excursion days). If you come late to class six times (up to 20 minutes) your entire course grade will also drop by one grade. If you miss 14 modules or more (unexcused), you will fail the class. Excused absences, such as those with medical documentation, do not count toward these totals.

Grading

Class participation: 30%
Presentation: 30%
Exam: 40%

Reading

A digital course reader will be provided.

Course schedule

Date	Program*
Tuesday, July 21, 2026	<p>A better world is possible: Sustainability as an existential challenge</p> <p>In a first step we will get an overview of major problems and several megatrends on our planet and in today's societies. For example: planetary boundaries, socio-economic disparities and inequalities, unsustainable trends (unlimited growth and expansion; great acceleration, post democracy, militarization, imperialism, neo-colonialism, overexploitation, peak everything).</p> <p>How can those phenomena be discovered, be felt and understood? Who is affected by these tendencies? What are concrete and different forms of affectedness? What societal forces, national and international organizations, actors are sensing these and are trying to bring these into public debate and policy? Who is coming up with solutions and what are the perspectives?</p>
Friday, July 24, 2026	<p>A long way: Improving lifestyles and achieving sustainability as an urgent civilizational task</p> <p>How can we understand and explain the increase of global challenges and problems? What are the root causes, the structures and procedures, the specific cultures which make such maldevelopments possible? We will learn about a variety of explanations, theories, concepts as well as practical examples from various scientific fields and backgrounds, we will learn to use a multidisciplinary approach.</p> <p>Students are asked to bring in their own experiences and their favorite examples.</p> <p>Visit to a Local Agenda 21 project (Projekt Tempelhofer Feld)</p>
Tuesday, July 28, 2026	<p>Concepts for making civilizations survive through sustainable development</p> <p>Based on different cultures, world views and ideologies, there are different theories and concepts, and many "belief systems" about a better life and about sustainability. Some types focus solely on ecological aspects, others on technological innovations, others on individual or local change. Right now, in Western societies, for instance, there seems to be a backlash with regards to more social, ecological and sustainable policies. How is the situation in other countries? What are the reasons for differences and changes? What are the driving forces and good concepts?</p> <p>Visit to a Local Agenda 21 project (id22)</p>
Friday, July 31, 2026	<p>Individual steps towards a better life and sustainable development</p> <p>Over the last decades a huge number for approaches, tools, ideas for individuals and families to act and live more sustainably have emerged and been practiced. Some are easy to</p>

	<p>follow, others are very demanding or expensive. What are interesting and surprising examples? What are their real effects, what are their preconditions, which socio-cultural milieus are acting strong, and which are opposing this?</p> <p>Students' Presentations</p>
Tuesday, August 4, 2026	<p>Local steps towards a sustainable development In the 1990s, after the international Sustainability Summit in Rio de Janeiro an almost global movement grew: "Local Agenda 21". Based on specific criteria and proposals many people engaged in manifold projects and activities in communities. They did not want to wait for a top-down policy and state regulations, because problems had to be solved soon and sufficiently. What happened there? How did this happen? What have been the effects?</p> <p>Visit to a Local Agenda 21 project (UFA-Fabrik)</p>
Friday, August 7, 2026	<p>National steps towards a sustainable development In various international and national documents sustainable development is proposed as a major framework and orientation for policies, business actions, societal practices and individual behavior. Currently, the so-called SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) are leading those concepts. What has been done so far? What are the effects? Which countries are affected most? Which countries are "leading" on that path (free market, regulatory state, authoritarian systems...)?</p> <p>Students' Presentations</p>
Tuesday, August 11, 2026	<p>Transformation to a better future: What are the many specific lessons learned from all the concepts, projects, policies and activities in the direction of a transformation towards a better, sustainable world? How can an intended and reflexive change for a sustainable development be implemented? And by whom? What factors and aspects have to be considered? Are there possible and realistic roads and steps to be taken?</p> <p>While there is no "silver bullet" for solving all the challenges at once, the outcome for the students of this course will be manifold. First, a better understanding of major challenges, secondly, an improved ability for understanding complexity, third, stronger analytical abilities, and fourth, more knowledge about concepts and ways to make practical contributions to the creation of sustainable development. Last not least: empowerment can happen.</p> <p>Students' Presentations</p>
Friday, August 14, 2026	<p>Final Exam</p> <p>FUBiS Farewell Ceremony</p>

*The field trips may be subject to change depending on the availability of appointment and speaker. On field trip days, adaptation of class times is possible.