



Tübingen International & European Studies (T-IES)

Doshisha EU Campus European Studies Program

September 1, 2025 – January 31, 2026

Course title:	Sustainable Development: History, Concepts, Policies
Date:	December 1 – 12, 2025
Language of instruction:	English
Lecturer:	Dr. Simon Meisch
Contact hours:	25 (incl. exam and wrap-up) + field work

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In 1987, the United Nations (UN) *World Commission on Environment and Development* (WCED) (known as the *Brundtland Commission*) introduced sustainable development as a global vision. It famously defined sustainable development as a “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Since the UN *Conference on Environment and Development* (UNCED) (or the Rio Summit) in 1992, all levels of government and most sectors in Germany adopted sustainability goals. Sustainable development was even introduced as a national goal in the German constitution. Meanwhile, it has evolved globally as a guiding principle and policy goal culminating in the UN *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs).

This course consists of three elements. Firstly, we discuss the conceptual origins and development of sustainable development: How did the WCED and the famous Brundtland definition come about? How did the global vision of sustainability develop since then up to the adoption of SDGs? Secondly, we learn about ethical foundations of sustainable development: Why ought we to act in the spirit of sustainable development? What are contentious issues? Thirdly, we focus on a bitter-sweet case study: chocolate.

COURSE SCHEDULE

	Date	Topic	Optional Reading
1 (= 90 minutes)	Monday, December 1 (I): 10:15-11:45	Get to know each other Sustainable Development	[2] [6]

2	Tuesday, December 2 (I): 10:15 – 11:15	Case Study: Chocolate	
3	Tuesday, December 2 (II): 13:15 – 14:45	Guest lecture: Anna Wunderlich <i>Kallari Futuro</i>	
4	Wednesday, December 3 (I): 10:15 – 11:45	Sustainable Food Governance	[7]
5	Wednesday, December 3 (II): 13:15 – 14:45	Sustainable Food Governance	[3]
	Wednesday, December 3 (III) after 14:45	<i>Visiting the Tübingen Chocolate Market (optional, depending on the weather)</i>	
	Thursday, December 4	Field work: Ritter Sport (Waldenbuch) <i>A pioneer in sustainable chocolate production</i>	
	Friday, December 5	Day Off	
6	Monday, December 8 (I): 10:15 – 11:45	Sustainable Development Ethical Reasoning	[4] [5], p. 3-30
7	Tuesday, December 9 (I): 10:15 – 11:45	Ethics: Prudence	[1], p. 83-88
8	Tuesday, December 9 (II): 13:15 – 14:45	Ethics: Justice	[1], p. 89-96

9	Wednesday, December 10 (I): 10:15 – 11:45	Ethics: The Good Life	[1], p. 97-103
10	Wednesday, December 10 (II): 13:15 – 14:45	The Ethics of Cacao and Chocolate	
11	Thursday, December 11 (I) 11:15-12:45	Sustainable Development: History, Concepts, Policies	
12	Friday, December 12 (I): 10:00 – 11:00	Exam	
	Friday, December 12 (II): 11:30-12:15	Wrap-Up	

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The course follows and builds on the UNESCO's conception of key competencies for sustainability:

- **Normative competency:** the abilities to understand and reflect on the norms and values that underlie one's actions; and to negotiate sustainability values, principles, goals, and targets, in a context of conflicts of interests and trade-offs, uncertain knowledge and contradictions.
- **Critical thinking competency:** the ability to question norms, practices, and opinions; to reflect on own one's values, perceptions, and actions; and to take a position in the sustainability discourse.

(UNESCO 2017: Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives, Paris, p. 10)

PREREQUISITES

The course does not require any special knowledge. The course is designed for undergraduate students from Doshisha University with different academic backgrounds who are generally interested in Germany, Europe and the European Union. A very good command of English and the willingness to actively participate in the course and during field work are required.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

Each course concludes with a written exam at the end of the program. The grade of each course will be calculated by the result of the written exam (70%), active participation in class as well as by field

work assignments (30%). Active participation in class as well as during field work includes: attendance, asking questions, taking part in discussions, showing interest, giving presentations.

OPTIONAL READING

- [1] Eser, U, et al. (2014): *Prudence, Justice and the Good Life. A typology of ethical reasoning in selected European national biodiversity strategies* (Bonn: Bundesamt für Naturschutz).
- [2] Meadowcroft, James (2000): *Sustainable Development: a New(ish) Idea for a New Century?* In: Political Studies 48, 370–387.
- [3] Meisch, S. (2013): *Green food consumption: whose responsibility?* In: The ethics of consumption: The citizen, the market, and the law, ed. by Röcklinsberg, H., Sandin, P. (Wageningen Academic Publishers, Wageningen), 160-165.
- [4] O'Neill, O. (2009): *Applied Ethics: Naturalism, Normativity and Public Policy*. In: Journal of Applied Philosophy 26(3), 219-230.
- [5] Sandel, M. (2009): *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux)
- [6] Springett, D.; Redclift, M. (2015): *Sustainable Development: History and evolution of the concept*. In: Routledge international handbook of sustainable development, ed. by Redclift, M.; Springett, D. (New York: Routledge), 3-38.
- [7] Voget-Kleschin, L., Meisch, S. (2019): *Concepts and Conceptions of Sustainable Development for Agriculture and Food Production*. In: Sustainable governance and management of food systems: ethical perspectives, ed by Vinnari, E., Vinnari, M. (Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers), 41-46.

INFORMATION ON THE LECTURER

Simon Meisch studied Political Science and Modern German Literature at the Universities of Tübingen and Edinburgh (Scotland) and received his doctorate in Political Science. From 2003-2017, he worked at the International Centre for Ethics in the Sciences and Humanities (IZEW) at the University of Tübingen and from 2018-2019 at the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (Potsdam) on ethical and epistemological issues in the (sustainability) research. Amongst other projects, he led the junior research group »Ethics of Science in the Research for Sustainable Development« (2013-2017) or »Changing Water Cultures (CANALS)« (MSCA-IF, in collaboration with the Centre for the Study of the Sciences and the Humanities (SVT) at the University of Bergen, Norway, 2021-2023). Since January 2020, he is Senior Lecturer for Applied Ethics at the IZEW. His research focuses on ethical questions of water governance and research, the role of the humanities in sustainability research, ethics and concepts of sustainable development and the relationship between science and society. Recent publications are *Bruns, A., Meisch, S., Ahmed, A., Meissner, R. & Romero-Lankao, P. (2022): Nexus disrupted: Lived realities and the water-energy-food nexus from an infrastructure perspective. In: Geoforum 133, 79-88; Hanusch, F. & Meisch, S. (2022): The temporal cleavage: the case of populist retrotopia vs. climate emergency. In: Environmental Politics 31:5, 883-903; Meisch, S., Bremer, S., Young, M. & Funtowicz, S. (2022): Extended Peer Communities: Appraising the contributions of tacit knowledges in climate change decision-making. In: Futures 135, 102868; Bremer, S., Glavovic, B., Meisch, S., Schneider, P. & Wardekker, A. (2021): Beyond rules: How institutional cultures and climate governance interact. In: WIREs Climate Change 12(6), e739.*