Maastricht University

FSE

Post-growth Cities: from theory to practice

Course code: 8571MinDegro
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Full period of this minor: Semester I
ECTS credits in total of this minor: 30
Language of instruction: English
Teaching methods: PBL
Assessment methods: Different methods depending on the course (e.g. final paper, presentation, written exam, assignment, etc.).

Keywords/short description:
Consider this minor if you want to understand how cities can respond to climate change while creating a fairer and more sustainable future. It challenges traditional ideas about economic growth and explores innovative ways to make urban life more liveable within the limits of our planet.

Note: This minor contains a combination of mandatory and elective courses making up a total of 30 ECTS for the semester. The first two courses listed, "Less Is More? An Introduction to Degrowth" and "Challenge Team," are mandatory courses comprising of 13 credits which means the remaining 17 credits will be open for your selection from the remaining 6 courses listed subsequently.

Full course description

Almost no day goes by without newspaper or journal headings like:" Earth beyond seven of nine planetary boundaries" (Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research 2025). Our planet is clearly threatened by climate change. And cities are at the center of this process.

Planetary boundaries are defined as the threshold of earth-systems. The state of the system is evaluated as a consequence of anthropogenic activities that influence these systems. When planetary boundaries are crossed, this will lead to a fundamental change in the earth's system as a result of human activity.

The concept of "postgrowth" has gained traction in discussions that deal with stepping across planetary boundaries. Postgrowth challenges the conventional economic paradigm that equates growth with prosperity. It advocates for a shift from expansion of gross domestic product (GDP) to a more sustainable and equitable society, prioritizing human well-being and environmental sustainability over GDP maximization. Proponents argue that the current growth-driven model is unsustainable, pushing us beyond planetary limits, and propose a balanced relationship with nature, emphasizing resource conservation, mindful consumption, and equitable distribution of resources.

Postgrowth interpreted as reducing our strains on the earth systems seems the straightforward solution to a sustainable future. Postgrowth cities is more of an ideal than completed reality, and

refers to practices that reduce cities' impact on the planet while improving their livability for everybody. Postgrowth cities seek to downscale, slow down, and close urban metabolisms in a just and democratic manner. However, this is not an easy and straight-forward endeavour, and many cities seek guidance in this process.

Course objectives (Intended learning outcomes)

- Students understand the key arguments in the debate on the limits of growth.
- Students understand the impact of growth on cities and urban development.
- Students understand basic tenets of different conceptualizations of post-growth and their criticisms.
- Students apply their understanding of post-growth to create and evaluate a post-growth approach for urban development.
- Students communicate their findings in a clear and efficient way to urban stakeholders.

Prerequisites

B2 English proficiency

Disclaimer
The University makes every effort to ensure that information about the programme/courses is accurate and up to date. Exceptionally, changes may be required due to reasons such as legal or regulatory changes, industrial action, lack of demand, staff changes, changes in government policy, or funding changes.

This minor has a limited number of spots available. After application you will be informed a.s.a.p. about your acceptance.

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The full minor period is offered in 8 courses:

1

Course name: Less Is More? An Introduction to Degrowth (Mandatory)
Course code: USS2001
Course Period: P1

ECTS credits of this course: 5

Full course description

Degrowth is an emerging paradigm in economics and political science countering the “green” growth paradigm as a mainstream strategy for sustainability transitions. The “green” growth paradigm centres on the absolute decoupling of Gross Domestic Product growth from environmental impacts such as greenhouse gases emissions. Degrowth proponents argue that decoupling is impossible at scale, especially considering the urgency of the climate crisis, which requires a rapid phaseout of fossil fuels and reduction of emissions. They argue that developed economies should abandon the stimulation of GDP growth as the main goal of their economic policies (a certain amount of economic growth is still required in developing countries). Wealthy countries should instead scale down “destructive and unnecessary forms of production to reduce energy and material use, and focus economic activities around securing human needs and well-being”. Degrowth can therefore be seen as a “purposeful strategy to stabilize economies and achieve social and ecological goals, unlike [economic] recession which is chaotic and destabilizing” (Hickel et al., 2023)[1] . In this course, students will critically explore the scientific base of the degrowth paradigm. Is “green” growth indeed impossible, and how would we know? How is growth tied to global production-consumption systems and their destructive impacts? How does the economic growth paradigm influence not only countries and organisations but also individuals who strive for performance maximization and more productive and marketable uses of their time? Through the lens of three different academic perspectives, students will also explore and discuss what “de-growing” economic systems, policies and individual behaviours could look like: Economics: What is the impact of production-consumption systems on planetary boundaries? Political science: what is the role of economic growth in liberal democracies? To what extent are degrowth policies feasible? Can degrowth have a decolonial component and benefit the Global South? Daily life: How does the economic growth paradigm impact daily lives, e.g. work and consumption? And what would be needed for a “degrowth mindset”

Course objectives (Intended learning outcomes)

Students understand the concepts of planetary boundaries and a safe operating space for humanity, and analyse how anthropogenic activities influence earth-systems, leading to fundamental changes in the environment. Students critically evaluate, compare and question (1) the mainstream paradigm of sustainability transition through “green” growth, and (2) the alternative paradigm of degrowth. Students apply and critically evaluate the principles of degrowth to (real-life/ hypothetical) cases where degrowth principles are implemented, considering the potential impact on societal well-being, environmental sustainability, and economic dynamics. Students critically evaluate degrowth pathways using economic, political and behavioural perspectives

Prerequisites

Please check the course requirements yourself to make sure you are eligible.

Assessment methods

Podcast (by a team of two students) on a course-related topic pre-approved by the teaching team. Weekly diary (individual); every week, students pick a news story and relate it to the course contents.

2

Course name: Challenge Team (Mandatory)
Course code: USS2002
Course Period: P1 & P2
ECTS credits of this course: 8

Full course description

In this course, students work in a team on a 'Challenge' to address an urban sustainability problem presented by an external client [a representative of "to be determined"]. Students need to translate the challenge into a researchable problem, write a problem statement and research plan, gather data relevant for understanding and addressing the problem, and develop actionable recommendations and/or support tools for the client. The student team will be coached in weekly tutorial sessions to support and monitor the progressing work.

Course objectives (Intended learning outcomes)

Students have an applied understanding of sustainability issues in urban areas. Students work together in a team and develop skills concerning organization of work, and collaboration in a team. Students set up a joint problem analysis and a research plan based on the assignment given by an external client. Students apply relevant research methods to gather relevant data. Students generate new knowledge and actionable recommendations that help the client to tackle the problem identified.

Prerequisites
Please check the course requirements yourself to make sure you are eligible.

Assessment methods

None

3

Course name: Principles of Economics
Course code: SSC1027
Course Period: P2
ECTS credits of this course: 5

Full course description

According to a classic definition, economics is the study of the use of scarce resources that have alternative uses. This course introduces basic economic ideas and concepts. In the lectures, we first study markets, the most common allocation mechanism for scarce resources of any kind in many economies. We analyze behaviour on markets, outcomes of markets, and different market forms. Here, we also introduce game theory to study situations with strategic interaction (e.g., oligopolistic competition). We then turn to the idea of comparative advantage as an explanation of trade patterns. While the first part of the course mainly covers microeconomic topics, the second part is devoted to macroeconomics. Here, we first consider macroeconomic indicators (e.g., GDP) and then study economic fluctuations (e.g., the Great Recession of 2007–2009) as well as economic policy. Further topics (e.g., the monetary system) will be covered in the tutorials. Through presentations and special debates (e.g., on Behavioral Economics), the tutorials give the opportunity to apply and reflect on some of the contents of the course. The course provides a foundation for many other economics courses at UCM. It is a strict or recommended prerequisite for courses such as SSC2020 (The Economics of Information), SSC2038 (International Macroeconomics), SSC2043 (Development Economics), or SSC2048 (Intermediate Microeconomics).

Course objectives (ILOs)

Get acquainted with basic ideas and concepts to understand economic debates and be prepared for possible further economics courses.

Prerequisites
Please check the course requirements yourself to make sure you are eligible.

Assessment methods

Written final exam, presentation, debate.

4

Course name: Circular Economy as a Societal Change
Course code: external course at the University of Eastern Finland
Course Period: P1 & P2 (actual beginning and ending times may vary)
ECTS credits of this course: 3

Full course description
The course studies circular economy as a societal change that touches many aspects of life. Both social, political and judicial preconditions of the circular economy are examined. The course is multidisciplinary and provides perspectives on circular economy through environmental policy, environmental law and geography. The different sections of the course examine objectives related to circular economy from the perspective of different actors, industries, social responsibility and legislation.

The main themes discussed on the course include inter alia: • Circular economy solutions to the challenge of natural resources overconsumption • The societal change required by circular economy and steering of the change • The social and cultural dimensions of circular economy • Circular economy as a regional phenomenon • Circular economy through topical example sectors
Modes of study
The course is an online course. Completing the course requires passing the assignments given during the course. The assignments are related to the different sections of the course and are completed independently.
If you plan to complete course assignments, you must register on the DigiCampus MOOC platform no later than the first week of the course. The registration deadline is announced on each course's instruction page
The course runs twice a year in spring and autumn semesters.

Course objectives (Intended Learning Outcomes)
After completing the course, the student

- can analyze circular economy from a social scientific perspective
- can apply the concepts and theories used in social scientific research into circular economy
- understands the premises of circular economy and the different dimensions and actors of the societal transition related to circular economy

Prerequisites
Course can be taken by students from any discipline. The course does not require previous background with social scientific studies.

Assessment methods:
0-5. The course grade is based on the evaluation of different learning assignments completed during the course.

5

Course name: Sustainable.now
Course code: external course at the University of Eastern Finland
Course Period: P1 & P2 (actual beginning and ending times may vary)
ECTS credits of this course: 5

Full course description
The course offers a substantial knowledge package on the concept of sustainable development, its ecological, social, economic and cultural dimensions, as well as the connections and tensions between the dimensions. The ethical viewpoint through the course provides a foundation for examining sustainable development also as a political and normative concept. The course also emphasises the importance of agency and the different roles of an individual. A student gets the

opportunity to examine the sustainability of their lifestyle from the perspective of their individual choices, but on the other hand, sustainability and climate challenges are also presented as structural and systemic problems. There are plenty of practical examples and cases that illustrate sustainability challenges and how to solve them. Student plans and performs assignment to study chosen theme from different perspectives of sustainability and reports the results in an essay.

Course objectives (Intended Learning Outcomes)
After the course, the student is familiar with sustainable development as a political and normative concept, and recognises its ecological, social, economic and cultural dimensions and the connections and conflicts related to them. The student understands that sustainable development and the wicked problems related to it, such as climate change, require multidisciplinary cooperation and problem-solving skills. The student understands the significance of individual agency and global responsibility as well as the need for comprehensive transformation. Student learns sustainability related data collection, problem-solving and analysing through phenomenon-based learning.

Prerequisites
None

Assessment methods:
Multiple-choice questions, learning assignments, summary, essay. The grade (0-5) will be given based on the essay.

6

Course name: Sustainable Development: an Introduction
Course code: SCI1016
Course Period: P2
ECTS credits of this course: 5

Full course description
Today it is acknowledged that achieving sustainable development at the local, regional and global scale is one of the greatest challenges for the 21st century. But in many cases the term ‘sustainable development’ functions as little more than a vacuous buzzword. So what does sustainable development actually mean? How unsustainable is our global society at the moment? Are we contributing to irreversible climate change? Are we already passing dangerous global environmental tipping points? Why are humans acting in such unsustainable ways? And, of course, what are sustainable ways forward? This course aims to enhance student’s understanding of ‘sustainable development’, based on the notion that human development can only be sustainable when environmental boundaries are respected. The course introduces the main concepts, ideas and theories related to the term sustainable development. Students will gain insights into (the limits to) humanity’s immense impact on the earth’s systems and the underlying drivers of these unsustainable trends. Furthermore, sustainable development requires an understanding that inaction has consequences. Students will learn about some of the contemporary ideas about how to

achieve a more sustainable society. As part of the examination students will link theories/concepts/ideas discussed in the course to a self-selected case study (a promising way forward towards sustainability) in a poster presentation.

Course objectives (Intended Learning Outcomes)
To gain a basic understanding of the (various perspectives on the) concept of sustainable development and some of the main related ideas, concepts and theories. To gain insights into (the limits to) our immense global human impact on the earth's systems and the underlying drivers of these unsustainable trends To explore ideas about how to achieve a more sustainable society.

Prerequisites
Please check the course requirements yourself to make sure you are eligible.

Assessment methods:
Practical assignment (poster presentation) and written exams.

7

Course name: Data Analysis and Visualisation for the Humanities and Social Sciences
Course code: HUM2059
Course Period: P2
ECTS credits of this course: 5

Full course description
Have you ever wondered how you could analyse 20 years' worth of articles without reading them one by one or get insights from a spreadsheet with thousands of entries? Big data research is not just for those in the sciences. In the humanities and social sciences we are increasingly faced with reading material that is beyond what a researcher can cope with using traditional reading methods: one article, one book, one small spreadsheet at a time. This way of reading is no longer fit for research in an era of big data. The purpose of this course is to provide you with an introduction to Digital Humanities through a new method of reading. Theoretically it is called distant reading, methodologically it goes by several names: data analysis, text analysis, text mining, and data mining. In this course we are going to focus on the first of these methods, data analysis: an algorithmically-driven method of extracting text from (large) corpora. In this course, we will focus on literary and historical sources. The data analysis tools we will introduce you to will visualise, clean, and sort the text, making it easier to see patterns to glean insights and develop research questions. It is suitable for students from any discipline and the datasets we work with are rich enough to support a wide variety of research questions from many disciplinary perspectives. This course will take you through a mini big data project to provide you with hands-on experience and understanding of the affordances and limitations of data analysis methods. No background in the methods or programming skills are needed. We will be using easy-to-learn, free, web-based tools and software. Theoretically, we will explore how the representation of text in more visual formats which are removed from its semantic contexts, offer opportunities for both new insights as well as

misrepresentation. Concepts to be covered include distant reading, algorithmic visualisation, social justice, and data feminism. An overarching goal of the course is to help you become more savvy users of digital information. We will explore the implications and challenges that these new methods and technologies pose to traditional research, analysis and publication, including issues such as transparency, authenticity, and bias. We will also have a pass/fail exercise in which you will explore the use of Generative AI in the discovery phase of research to allow you to critically understand its strengths and weaknesses.

Course objectives (Intended Learning Outcomes)
Explore different methodological approaches to computationally analyse textual corpora; Use text analysis to develop and respond to research hypothesis and questions; Understand how to analyse text (non-semantically) through visualisations; Critically reflect on the challenges researchers face when working with textual data through concepts including distant reading, social justice, and data feminism.

Prerequisites
Please check the course requirements yourself to make sure you are eligible.

Assessment methods:
A group presentation on the affordances and limitations of data analysis and visualization (50%) A pass/fail assessment in which you will use AI to explore research topics (pass/fail) A final essay on one of the datasets introduced in class, exploring the data/text methodologically, theoretically, and historically (50%).

8

Course name: The Social Study of Environmental Problems: Between Nature, Society and Politics
Course code: SSC3006
Course Period: P1
ECTS credits of this course: 5

Full course description
Scholars in the social sciences and humanities have developed diverse ways of interrogating the relationship between nature, society, and politics. These methods and theories transgress spatial and temporal scales, often in ways that yield surprising results. From the water management systems of Los Angeles to Indonesian palm oil plantations, work on the intersections and entanglements of nature and culture has consistently emphasized the role of power and politics in mediating our relationships with each other and with (and within) the environment.
Through close readings and targeted discussions of recent monographs from environmental anthropology, environmental sociology, political ecology, and environmental humanities, this course offers students an opportunity to look beneath the “objective” veneer of sustainability science to

better understand the way our knowledge, ignorance, and uncertainty regarding the environment are formed and deformed. Through these in-class discussions and debates, students have a chance to develop reading, analysis, and argumentation skills while at the same time developing a critical perspective on the social and political forces that shape “the environment” and our place within it.

Course objectives (Intended Learning Outcomes)
To introduce students to central themes and concepts in the interdisciplinary social study of the environment. Enables students to engage in normative reflection and valuation of major socio-ecological challenges.

Prerequisites
Please check the course requirements yourself to make sure you are eligible.

Assessment methods:
Group (two people) presentation of a case study (50%), take-home exam (mini essay) with possible oral defense (50%).