



# **Sustainability – Social Ecology**

## **Summer School**

### **2026**



Course title	Sustainability – Social Ecology
Credit/contact hours	6 ECTS / 30 hours
Course prerequisites	none
Course description	<p>The course aims to provide students with a holistic understanding of sustainability by combining theoretical lectures with practical engagement. Participants will explore key concepts of social ecology, the interconnectedness of social and environmental systems, and the role of communities and civil society in promoting sustainable futures. By working directly with local NGOs, students will gain hands-on experience in addressing ecological and social challenges, bridging theory and practice. The program emphasizes sustainability as both an environmental and a social issue, highlighting how questions of justice, equity, and participation are inseparable from ecological concerns. Students will critically engage with contemporary debates on urban sustainability, environmental justice, and alternative economic models, while reflecting on the complex relationships between stakeholders such as governments, businesses, local communities, and non-governmental organizations.</p>
Course goal	<p>Through lectures, field practice, and collaborative workshops, the summer school creates an interdisciplinary learning environment where theory is tested against lived experience. Students will be encouraged to analyze how global challenges manifest in local contexts, and how grassroots initiatives can inspire broader systemic change. The combination of academic and experiential learning will enable participants to develop not only analytical skills but also practical insights, preparing them to act as responsible and creative contributors to more sustainable societies.</p>
Learning objectives	<p>By the end of the program, students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Understand the main theories and principles of social ecology and sustainability.</li> <li>– Critically analyse the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability challenges.</li> <li>– Recognise the importance of community-based approaches and grassroots initiatives in sustainable development.</li> <li>– Apply interdisciplinary perspectives to real-world ecological and social problems.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Reflect on personal and collective responsibility in shaping sustainable futures.</li> <li>– Present findings and insights in a structured, collaborative group format.</li> </ul>
<p>Assessment</p>	<p>Active participation Group Presentation: Students (in groups of 4–5) will design and present a sustainability project proposal inspired by their NGO experiences. Projects should integrate ecological and social dimensions, demonstrate awareness of community needs, and reflect on possible long-term impacts. Presentations will be given on the final day, followed by collective feedback and discussion.</p>
<p>Recommended readings</p>	<p>Khan, A.S., Srivastava, P. (2025). Bridging the Gap Between Environmental Justice and Ecosystem Management: A Comprehensive Framework for Equitable Sustainability. In: Gupta, J., Verma, A. (eds) Green Equilibrium. Green Energy and Technology. Springer, Singapore. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-3993-9_14">https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-3993-9_14</a></p> <p>Guha, S. (2025). Women, Gender Equality, and Environmental Justice. In S. Chakraborty &amp; S. Satapathy (Eds.), <i>Gender, Environment, and Human Rights: An Intersectional Exploration</i> (pp. 245-268). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <a href="https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-6069-9.ch013">https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-6069-9.ch013</a></p> <p>Schlosberg, D. (2004). Reconceiving Environmental Justice: Global Movements And Political Theories. <i>Environmental Politics</i>, 13(3), 517–540. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/0964401042000229025">https://doi.org/10.1080/0964401042000229025</a></p> <p>Schlosberg, D. (2013). Theorising environmental justice: the expanding sphere of a discourse. <i>Environmental Politics</i>, 22(1), 37–55. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2013.755387">https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2013.755387</a></p> <p>Nesshöver, C., Assmuth, T., Irvine, K. N., Rusch, G. M., Waylen, K. A., Delbaere, B., Haase, D., Jones-Walters, L., Keune, H., Kovacs, E., Krauze, K., Külvik, M., Rey, F., van Dijk, J., Vistad, O. I., Wilkinson, M. E., &amp; Wittmer, H. (2017). <i>The science, policy and practice of nature-based solutions: An interdisciplinary perspective</i>. <i>Science of the Total Environment</i>, 579, 1215–1227. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2016.11.106">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2016.11.106</a></p> <p>Frantzeskaki, N. (2019). <i>Seven lessons for planning nature-based solutions in cities</i>. <i>Environmental Science &amp; Policy</i>, 93, 101–111. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2018.12.033">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2018.12.033</a></p> <p>Sipos Y, Battisti B, Grimm K (2008), "Achieving transformative sustainability learning: engaging head, hands and heart". <i>International</i></p>



	<p><i>Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education</i>, Vol. 9 No. 1 pp. 68–86, doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1108/14676370810842193">https://doi.org/10.1108/14676370810842193</a></p> <p>Leal Filho, W., Shiel, C., Paço, A., Mifsud, M., Ávila, L. V., Brandli, L. L., Molthan-Hill, P., Pace, P., Azeiteiro, U. M., Ruiz Vargas, V., &amp; Caeiro, S. (2019). <i>Sustainable Development Goals and sustainability teaching at universities: Falling behind or getting ahead of the pack?</i> <i>Journal of Cleaner Production</i>, 232, 285–294. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.05.309">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.05.309</a></p> <p>Ceulemans, K., Molderez, I., &amp; Van Liedekerke, L. (2015). <i>Sustainability reporting in higher education: A comprehensive review of the recent literature and paths for further research.</i> <i>Journal of Cleaner Production</i>, 106, 127–143. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.09.052">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.09.052</a></p> <p>Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A Ladder Of Citizen Participation. <i>Journal of the American Institute of Planners</i>, 35(4), 216–224. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225">https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225</a></p> <p>Kitchin, R. The real-time city? Big data and smart urbanism. <i>GeoJournal</i> <b>79</b>, 1–14 (2014). <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-013-9516-8">https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-013-9516-8</a></p>
<p>Instructional methods</p>	<p>Interactive lectures Peer learning Problem-based learning Field visit Field practice Project-based learning Guided classroom discussion Group work</p>
<p>Course content</p>	<p>Unit 1 <b>Introduction to Social Ecology and Sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Concepts of ecology and society as interconnected systems.</li> <li>– Historical development of sustainability thinking.</li> <li>– Overview of ecological crises and social inequalities.</li> </ul> <p>This lecture introduces the foundations of social ecology, examining the interdependence of social systems and ecological systems. Students will explore the evolution of sustainability as a concept, key global challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss, and the role of human agency in shaping ecological futures.</p> <hr/> <p>Unit 2 <b>Environmental Justice and Social Inequality</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How environmental degradation disproportionately affects vulnerable groups.</li> <li>– The concept of environmental justice.</li> <li>– Stakeholders: conflict of interest and values</li> <li>– Case studies from global and local contexts.</li> </ul> <p>Focusing on the unequal distribution of environmental risks and resources, this lecture explores how disadvantaged communities are disproportionately affected by pollution, resource scarcity, and climate change. It also highlights stakeholder conflicts (such as tensions between corporations, governments, local communities, and NGOs) when economic development clashes with ecological and social well-being. Real-world case studies will illustrate how power relations shape sustainability outcomes.</p>
	<p>Unit 3</p> <p><b>Urban Sustainability and Community-Based Solutions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Sustainable cities and the challenges of urbanization.</li> <li>– Community gardens, urban farming, and green public spaces.</li> <li>– The role of citizen initiatives in urban resilience.</li> </ul> <p>This lecture addresses the challenges of sustainability in urban environments, including overconsumption, waste management, and green infrastructure. Students will examine grassroots responses such as community gardens, cooperative housing, and participatory urban planning, considering how local initiatives foster resilience and social cohesion in cities.</p>
	<p>Unit 4</p> <p><b>Education, Participation, and Inclusion in Sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The role of education and participatory processes in sustainability.</li> <li>– Involving marginalized groups and fostering social inclusion.</li> <li>– NGOs and civil society as educational actors.</li> </ul> <p>The focus here is on the human and cultural dimensions of sustainability. Topics include participatory education, civic engagement, and inclusive practices that empower marginalized groups. Case examples will show how NGOs and civil society play key roles in fostering awareness, agency, and long-term cultural change.</p>
	<p>Unit 5</p> <p><b>Rethinking Economy and Future Pathways</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Alternative economic models: circular economy, degrowth, solidarity economy.</li> <li>– Linking economic change with ecological balance and social justice.</li> <li>– Visions of sustainable futures.</li> </ul>



	<p>This session challenges students to think beyond traditional economic models by engaging with concepts such as circular economy, degrowth, and solidarity economy. Emphasis will be placed on linking economic systems with ecological integrity and social justice, while envisioning practical pathways toward sustainable and equitable futures.</p>
	<p>Unit 6 <b>Practice – Field replacement</b></p>
	<p>Unit 7 <b>Practice – Field replacement</b></p>
	<p>Unit 8 <b>Practice – Field replacement</b></p>
	<p>Unit 9 <b>Workshop: Reflection and Integration</b> After the field practice, students will participate in a one-day workshop facilitated by the teaching team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Structured group discussions about experiences in the NGOs.</li><li>– Comparative analysis: what ecological and social sustainability mean in different contexts.</li><li>– Linking field experiences with theoretical concepts from lectures.</li><li>– Preparing for the final group presentations.</li></ul>
	<p>Unit 10 <b>Group Presentation</b></p>
Course coordinator	<p>Viktória BORDA <a href="mailto:borda.viktoria@pte.hu">borda.viktoria@pte.hu</a></p>
Lecturers	<p>dr. prof. Judit FARKAS, PhD, university professor dr. Pál BALOGH, PhD, assistant professor dr. Viktor Varjú, PhD, associate professor Dr. Inez KOLLER, PhD, assistant professor Viktória Borda, assistant research fellow</p>