

The Psychology of Sustainability

Course syllabus

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Objectives

The course has the following main objectives:

- Develop knowledge in theory and methodology of Psychology of Sustainability and Environmental Psychology.
- Develop knowledge and skills in designing and conducting studies in Psychology of Sustainability.
- Gain insight and skills in practical application of research in Psychology of Sustainability.

Main Competencies Developed Throughout the Course

Knowledge

- Knows key concepts in the field of Environmental Psychology and Psychology of Sustainability.
- Knows major theories explaining people-environment relationships.
- Knows research methods applied to study human-environment relationships.

Skills

- Can reflect upon and evaluate research questions, designs and methods in this topic area.
- Can analyze sustainability-related issues with relevant concepts and theories from psychology.
- Has gained experience with presenting research in the field of Environmental Psychology and Psychology of Sustainability.
- Can apply Environmental Psychology theory and methodology to resolve practical problems.

General competences

- Can search, structure, and reflect upon scientific literature in this topic area.
- Can participate in discussions dealing with human-environment relationships.
- Can communicate research in the field of Environmental Psychology and Psychology of Sustainability.

Course Content

Introduction to Environmental Psychology

Origins and history of Environmental Psychology. Inter- and cross-disciplinary nature of Environmental Psychology. Main theoretical perspectives in Environmental Psychology. Complexity, time and change in Environmental Psychology. Environmental Cognition and Perception.

Introduction to Sustainable Development

Definitions of sustainability. The environmental and social consequences of economic growth. Finding sustainable alternatives to commonly used indicators of social and economic wealth. The Geography of Sustainable Development.

Relationships with Nature: Restoration, Connectedness and Conservation

Environmental overload and the attention restoration theory. The restorative capacity of natural environments. Anthropocentric, biocentric and ecocentric views of the world. The New Environmental Paradigm. Connectedness with nature. Environmental degradation: human causes and return impacts on human health and well-being. Conservation Psychology: building the capacity for our survival amidst the environmental change.

The Psychology of Pro-Environmental Action

Psychological drivers of pro-environmental behaviour: environmental attitudes, norms, beliefs, values, identity. Environmental behaviour, habits and social practices. Biases in environmental cognition. Environmental behaviour spillover. The NIMBY. Environmental education. Building capacities for pro-environmental action in institutions. Environmental activism.

Creating Sustainable Urban Environments

Urban stress and its causes. Housing, health and wellbeing. Socially and environmentally sustainable housing. Culture and convivance in urban environments. Connection to place and community as a driver of sustainable development. Urban sprawl. Consequences, limits and alternatives to growth in cities. Ecological problems of modern cities and ways to overcome them. Future: transition to green, sustainable cities.

Climate Change: A Pressing Agenda, an Imminent Threat

Definitions, scale and possible consequences of climate change. Social, psychological, economic and political dimensions of climate change. Human reactions to climate change threats: risk perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. Facing climate change: building prevention, mitigation, resilience and adaptation strategies. Communication, and education on climate change. The whole-society approach.

Linking Theory, Research and Practice in Psychology of Sustainability

Psychology's contributions to sustainable environmental planning. Environmental Psychology approaches to Programme Evaluation. How to collaborate with policy-makers and practitioners on environmental sustainability issues. The importance and rules of disseminating research findings to academic and non-academic audiences.

Course Plan

Topic	Total hours	Class hours		Independent work hours
		Lectures	Seminars	
Introduction to Environmental Psychology	14	4		10
Introduction to Sustainable Development	12	2		10
Relationships with Nature: Restoration, Connectedness and Conservation	16	4	2	10
The Psychology of Pro-Environmental Action	20	4	4	12
Creating Sustainable Urban Environments	18	4	2	12
Climate Change: A Pressing Agenda, an Imminent Threat	18	4	2	12
Linking Theory, Research and Practice in Psychology of Sustainability	16	2	2	12
TOTAL HOURS	114	24	12	78

Knowledge Assessment

Students' knowledge will be assessed using a combination of: 1) formative (continuous) assessment and 2) summative (final) assessment. Assessment will be focussed on gradual learning (knowledge and skill acquisition) rather than control and competition.

6.1. Continuous Assessment

Every week students will engage in various forms of short assessment tasks (individual or mini-groups): problem solving, quizzes, journal article discussions, mini-essays or mini-presentations based on the contents of the previous week (both in-class and independent work). Students' work will be assessed on a weekly basis.

6.2. Final Assessment

Throughout the course, students will work in order to produce their own evaluation projects. At the end of the course, students will present their projects in written, as well as orally. The project report will normally be 10-20 pages long. It will consist of an introduction, a short literature review, definition of research aims and questions, hypotheses, outcomes and impact, research tools, and conclusion.

Knowledge will be assessed in 10-point scale. The total grade formula will consist of:

$$G_{total} = 0,5 * \text{Continuous assessment} + 0,5 * \text{Final assessment}$$

Key Bibliography

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