



Centre for Sustainable Development

- Founded in 1995
- **Multidisciplinary** research centre (but transdisciplinarity is a key aspect)
- Hosted by the **Department of Political Science (UGent)**
- Further embedded in a network of 13 other departments
- 1 FTE lecturer and +/- 10 researchers
- Identity: lies in its adherence to a nuanced **constructivist** epistemological stance, which is reflected in the use of a **critical policy analysis** framework, a **participative research** approach and, last but not least, the framing of sustainability issues as **'political' issues**.



Political issues

Far from agreement on norms and values

Close to agreement on norms and values at stake

Close to certainty on required and available knowledge

Far from certainty

Moderately structured problems: discussion ethical, acceptability of goals

Unstructured, 'wicked' problems

Structured problems

Moderately structured problems: discussion about suitable means

Hoppe (2008)

facts uncertain values in dispute stakes high decisions urgent

Decision Stakes

Uncertainty

Academic Science

Professional Consultancy

Post-Normal Science

Funtowicz and Ravetz (1993)

Mono-disciplinary

Multi-disciplinary

Inter-disciplinary

Trans-disciplinary

Non-academic environment

Bunders (2011)

Course 'Politics of sustainability'

- **Lecturers:** Thomas Block & Erik Paredis
- Focus on contested concept, the current political-economic regime, power mechanisms, transition thinking, etc.
- Using **sustainability issues** such as climate change, sustainable cities, circular economy, science and technology, sustainable food,...
- **A group writing assessment:** students make a discourse analysis on a specific sustainability controversy.

Research fields CDO

- Sustainability transitions
- Future scenarios & sustainability visions
- Sustainability indicators & monitoring
- Sustainability Impact Assessment
- Science, technology and the politics of sustainability
- Complex decision-making & multi-level governance
- Sustainable production & consumption
- Sustainability education

- Focus on the interface between science and society
- Often **policy-oriented research**, (too) less fundamental research




(1) CDO: sustainability issues as political matter

(2) Transition UGent: agenda setting for sustainability education

What is Transition UGent?

- A **vibrant think-tank** (more and more a do-tank)
- This bottom-up initiative consists of **250** academics, students and people from the university management
- **Suggests objectives and actions** for the Sustainability Policy of Ghent University, and tries to place sustainability high on the policy agenda.

A short history of Transition UGent

- **First drivers:** Ghent Climate Alliance (2011) and transition research at CDO (sinds 2007)
- Initiator: envir. coordinator **Riet Van de Velde**
- **Steering committee:** environmental coordinator, representatives of the Board of Governors, UGent1010 (student association), CDO (research centre), internal experts (acad. + admin.)
- First transition arena: March **2012** (75 'frontrunners')
- Followed by six arenas in 2012 (200 participants)

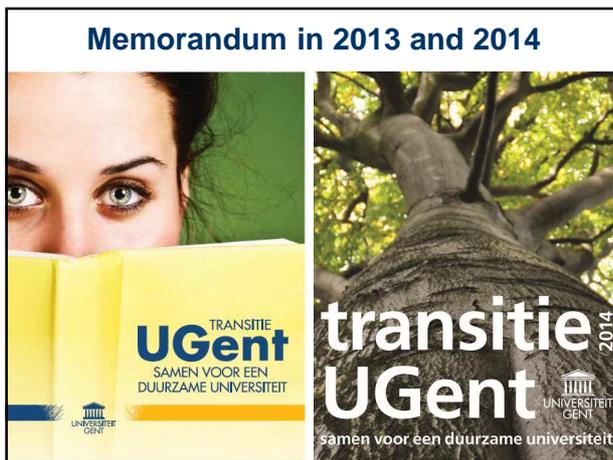
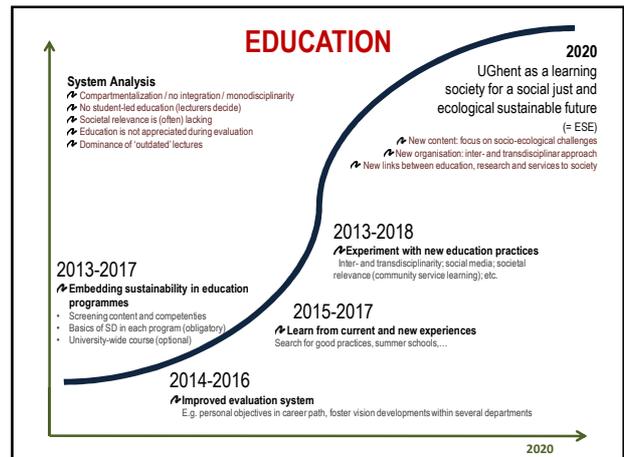
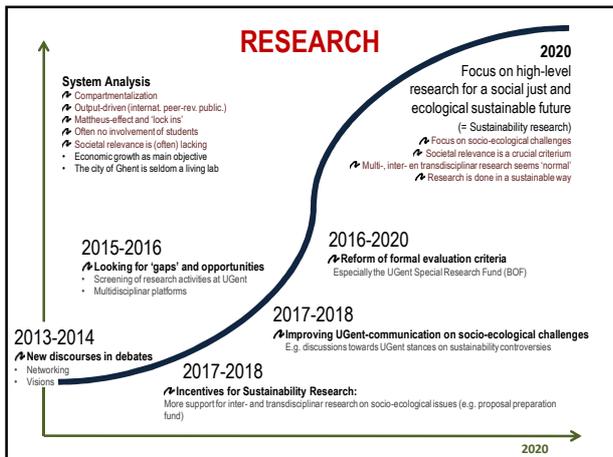
Socio-technical systems at Ghent University

Method: Transition Management (TM)

- Start with frontrunners
- Long-term process in shadow of 'real' politics
- Creating space for innovation (experiments)
- Learning-by-doing and doing-by-learning

Transition arenas







Sustainability vision UGent

Ghent University wants to be a leading knowledge institute for a future that is ecologically, socially and economically sustainable within a local and global context. To this end Ghent University [...] integrates sustainability in its education, research and services to society [...]

(Board of Governors, December 6th, 2013)

Details for education - vision

Higher education is a major (potential) catalyst for sustainable development, primarily through its educational, research and service mission. During the last two decades, institutes of higher education worldwide and in Flanders have signed international declarations (such as the COPERNICUS Charter) to demonstrate their commitment.

Through its education programme, we want to make our contribution to a more sustainable society and familiarize its students with social, environmental and economic sustainability issues and with potential solutions. A university-wide optional subject 'Sustainable Development' may be an important first step on this road.

The integration of sustainable development in the full range of education programmes will have to be implemented substantively and systematically. In terms of substance, what is needed is education with a high degree of social relevance, connected with and inspired by today's and tomorrow's challenges. The progress made in this process will have to be shown during the educational establishment's review, where 'sustainability' as a policy theme has been included in the evaluation framework.




University-wide elective course

- Title course: **"Sustainability thinking"**
- Lecturers: Thomas Block & Erik Paredis
- Central part of this course is the **'Studium Generale'**, in which each year one specific, but varying sustainability theme (e.g. food, cities, economy, consumption) is approached in an inter- and multidisciplinary way.








ESE innovation and research project

- Funded by the UGent Department of Educational Policy (€ 45,000)
- **20% FTE** – Spring 2014 till Winter 2016
- Shift from self-evaluation approach for all programmes (survey) to a quite **intensive process in three pilot cases** (Electromechanical Engineering; Business Administration and a programme in the Faculty of Sciences)
- **Several workshops** to further embed sustainability in the educational programme's curriculum.
 - ✓ screening programmes and courses
 - ✓ detecting gaps
 - ✓ fostering discipline-specific visions
 - ✓ preparing strategies and action plans



Sustainability office / Green office

- Funded by UGent (€ 30,000) → 1 coordinator (100% FTE) + 6 students (20% FTE) initiate, facilitate or conduct actions

- Actions:

Tipping point

Sust. pact

Restfest

Relevant theses

...

- Pop-up office



Some reflections (1/2)

(1) Transition management: mixed feelings

- stimulates long term visions, networking; experiments,...
 - insufficient acknowledgement of complex power settings
- *important element for agenda setting (but not in a linear way)*

(2) More widespread support for the sustainable development of management and organisation issues at UGent, a lot of **scepticism and resistance on core business**, i.e. research and education



Some reflections (2/2)

(3) Importance of some '**policy entrepreneurs**'

(4) Involvement of **students** (i.c. UGent1010) was/is crucial.

(5) Visions more or less radical (on the long term). Current actions go hand in hand with the **low hanging fruit**

(6) **Social issues and challenges** were too often hidden away in Transition Ugent (reasons: focus + not grab all current initiatives)

