

Sustainability education at UGent: two CDO courses



Kick-off meeting
ITN Sustainability Education
Ghent
1-3 June 2016

Thomas Block
Centre for Sustainable Development
Ghent University

Two CDO courses

(1) *'Politics of Sustainability'*

(2) *'Sustainability thinking'*

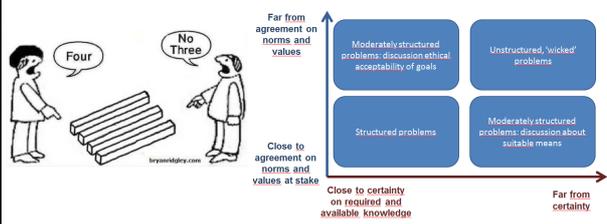
'Politics of Sustainability'

Sustainability issues as political issues



Focus

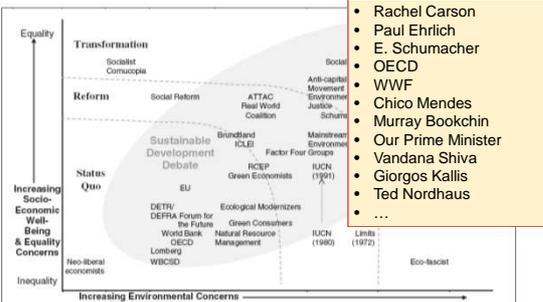
- Lecturers: Thomas Block & Erik Paredis
- This course approaches sustainable development as **a central political issue** for the following decades and from a (nuanced) constructivist perspective.



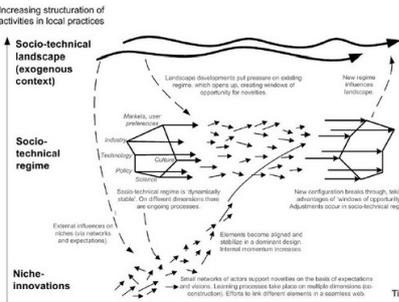
Hoppe (2008)

8 lectures

- (1) Introduction (challenges and 'pivot')
- (2) Historical outline + interpretations (+ *role-playing game*)



(3) Transition thinking (+ case circular economy)



- (4) Summits / conferences (case climate change)
- (5) Science-policy nexus (case climate change)

- (6) Complex decision-making (case food & agriculture)
- (7) International session 'Studium Generale'
- (8) Common themes and alternatives (e.g. 'ecological economics & degrowth') + group discussion (on political strategies)



Group writing assessment

- **Small groups** of maximum 5 students make a **discourse analysis** on a specific **sustainability controversy**.

• **Choice list:**

- Can we eat meat in a sustainable world?
- Slums: leave, upgrade or clean?
- **Are GMOs and sustainable agriculture compatible?** solution?
- degrowth the alternative?
- Is COP21 a success?
- ...

'Solve hunger problem'

- Higher productivity is necessary to address the world hunger problem
- Less pesticides
- Highyielding crop plants
- **Biotech experts + multinationals**

'Seldom useful'

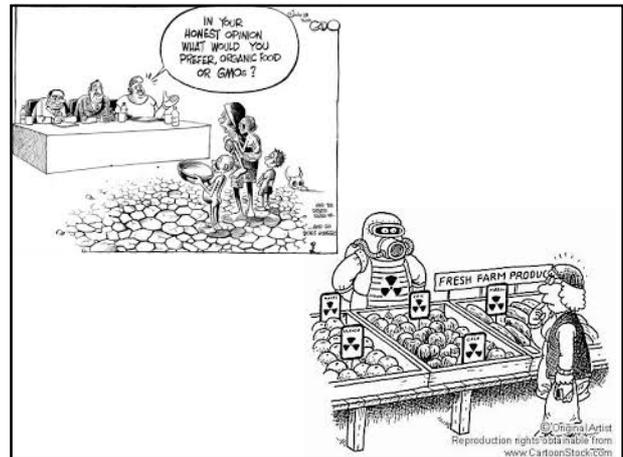
- Only in extreme situation
- Independent research
- Ongelijke verdeling van voedsel is probleem (niet technisch!)
- **Some politicians, (bio)farmers, consumers, NGOs,...**

'Freedom of choice'

- GMOs are one option
- Use labels (to deal with risks)
- Opportunity in several cases
- **Some politicians (e.g. USA), academics, private companies,...**

'Too many risks'

- Against every GMOs (precaution principle)
- Disaster for biodiversity and independency of farmers
- **Some NGOs, politicians, acad.**



Elements of a discourse analysis

(o.b.v. Dryzek; Hajer)

- (1) **Arguments?** How they try to convince others? What metaphores are used? Etc.
- (2) Actors en their motives? Who says what? What are the discourse coalitions?
- (3) **Worldviews** (behind arguments)

+ own position

A discourse analysis is not ...

- a list of **pro and contra arguments**
- a list of **advocates and opponents**
- An analysis of the scientific debate (in peer reviewed international **journals**)

Dive into the societal debate !!
(journals, debate evenings, blogs, websites, TV programs, books,...)

4 phases

- First step (February):
a brief **research proposal**
- Second step (end of March):
Feedback moment → interim results are summarised in a draft paper that is presented to and **discussed** with the lecturers (and their research group collaborators).
- Third step (May):
a **final group paper** (max. 6000 words)
- Fourth step (May):
Seminar → results are presented to lecturers and colleague students.



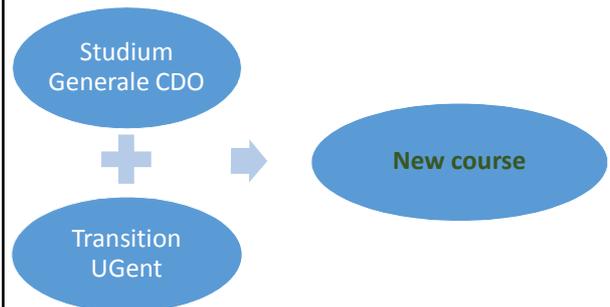
'Sustainability thinking'

University-wide elective course



Prof. dr. Thomas Block & dr. Erik Paredis

Context



Structure of the course

Two introductory lessons

- Basics sustainability thinking
- Sustainability Science

February

Studium Generale

- Four evenings with 1 or 2 keynotes and some reflections
- Location: Art Centre Vooruit

March & April

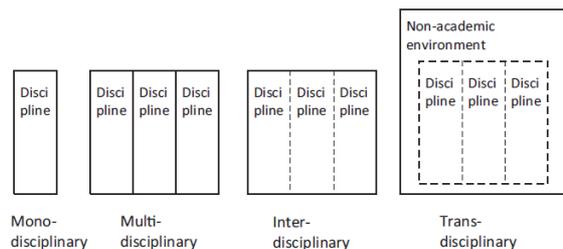
Two concluding lessons

- Reflections and group discussions
- Transition Thinking

May

Studium Generale

- Each year one specific, but varying sustainability theme (e.g. food, cities, economy, consumption)
- Approached in an inter- and transdisciplinary way.



Studium Generale

During the series of lectures, it becomes clear that problems are defined differently, that attempts at answers often vary and that sustainable development is a normative and ambiguous concept of struggle.



Reflections

- A university-wide elective course = low hanging fruit
- A **time-consuming job** to organise every year such an event (and it becomes also a routine)
- Too much '**ex cathedra**' → lectures of 'experts' and students take note

→ Rethink the course!

More interaction. Let the students work with controversies and wicked issues (future thinking, field work, student-led education,...)

→ ITN help us!