

Syllabus

Course Description

Course Title	Social sustainability through innovation
Course Code	17329
Course Title Additional	
Scientific-Disciplinary Sector	GSPS-08/A
Language	English
Degree Course	Bachelor in Communication Sciences and Culture
Other Degree Courses (Loaned)	
Lecturers	Dr. Federica Viganò, federica.vigano@unibz.it https://www.unibz.it/en/faculties/education/academic-staff/person/21735
Teaching Assistant	
Semester	First semester
Course Year/s	3
CP	6
Teaching Hours	45
Lab Hours	0
Individual Study Hours	105
Planned Office Hours	18
Contents Summary	How can firms create sustainable innovation? What kinds of organisations enable it, and in what territories does it flourish? Drawing on the sociology of organisations and economic sociology, the course equips students with theoretical, analytical, and methodological tools to understand sustainable innovation not as a purely technical phenomenon, but as a social and organisational achievement embedded in institutional contexts and territorial systems.
Course Topics	The course is structured in four thematic blocks. 1. Internal dynamics of organisations — how values, practices, and

	routines shape the capacity to innovate sustainably . 2. Institutional pressures that drive or constrain such innovation from the outside. 3. From the firm to the territory, exploring how clusters, industrial districts, and creative ecosystems shape innovation. 4. Methodological block that equips students to conduct original empirical research through qualitative case study methods.
Keywords	Sustainable innovation; institutional pressure, sociology of organization; case study methodology
Recommended Prerequisites	The course of the second year of Sociology of labour is a good basis. But no specific prerequisites are required.
Propaedeutic Courses	
Teaching Format	The course foresees: -Lectures and interactive lessons with Case study analysis -Individual and group project work -A mandatory didactic field visit which will be communicated at the beginning of the course.
Mandatory Attendance	In accordance with the regulation
Specific Educational Objectives and Learning Outcomes	Educational Objectives • explain the main theoretical frameworks in the sociology of organisations relevant to sustainable innovation, including neo-institutionalism, sensemaking, and practice-based approaches; • identify and critically evaluate the organisational practices, routines, and human resource strategies through which firms translate sustainability commitments into action; • apply concepts of embeddedness, industrial districts, and creative ecosystems to understand the territorial dimension of sustainable innovation; • design and conduct a small-scale qualitative case study, including semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis; Learning outcomes Knowledge and Understanding Students will acquire command of the sociological literature on organisations, institutions, and territorial systems as applied to sustainable innovation. Applying Knowledge and Understanding

	Students will be able to apply organisational and institutional frameworks to analyse real-world cases of sustainable innovation at firm and territorial levels, and to design a small empirical research project using qualitative methods. Making Judgements Students will be able to critically assess the gap between sustainability commitments and organisational practice (decoupling, greenwashing), evaluate the role of territorial context in enabling or constraining sustainable innovation, and reflect on the ethical dimensions of corporate sustainability. Communication Skills Students will develop the ability to communicate sociological analyses of sustainable innovation using appropriate conceptual vocabulary. Learning Skills Students will develop the capacity for autonomous inquiry into the evolving landscape of sustainable innovation.
Specific Educational Objectives and Learning Outcomes (additional info.)	
Assessment	a. Attending students will be evaluated on the basis of an individual or in pairs project work (case study) which counts for the 70% of the whole exam plus an individual discussion of two article of their choice in the list of the programme (30%) during the exam session. The project work should reflect the qualitative methodology of the case study including an empirical data collection (interviews), and the theoretical understanding introduced through the articles. The excursion is part of the exam (mandatory). Exceptions will be admitted only upon a justified request. The project work must include: •A research question grounded in course frameworks •A justified case selection and research design (approx. 1 pages) •At least 2 semi-structured interviews or equivalent documentary analysis

	•A thematic analysis of the empirical material •A written report of 3,000-4,500 words connecting findings to course theory -a brief post visit note (study trip) (800 characters) Suggested empirical contexts: a local firm with an explicit sustainability strategy; a cooperative or social enterprise; a territorial cluster or agri-food supply chain; an industrial reconversion or creative ecosystem initiative. b. For not attending students the primary assessment will be an oral exam on the basis of the program.
Evaluation Criteria	A — Attending Students Project Work — Case Study (70%) The project work is assessed along four dimensions: theoretical grounding; research design and methodology (clarity of the research question, rigour of interview conduct and thematic analysis); empirical quality and interpretation (capacity to bring data into dialogue with theory); writing and presentation (structure, argumentation, academic English, correct referencing, word count respected). For projects completed in pairs, the same criteria apply. Article Presentation and Discussion (30%) The individual presentation of two articles chosen from the reading list is assessed on: comprehension and synthesis; critical positioning; communication, quality of responses during discussion. Study Visit Attendance is compulsory and absence should be justified or the student can choose to be considered as non attending. A post-visit reflective note is an integral part of the project work. B — Non-Attending Students Oral Exam on the full programme (100%) The oral exam covers all four thematic blocks. Block 4 is addressed in theoretical terms. Assessment is based on: knowledge and understanding of required readings and main theoretical frameworks; analytical capacity to apply concepts, argue responses, and connect blocks coherently; communication in clear, well-structured academic English.

Required Readings	Required readings 1. DiMaggio, P.J. & Powell, W.W. (1983). The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields. <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 48(2), 147-160. [PDF: ResearchGate] 2. Weick, K.E., Sutcliffe, K.M. & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking. <i>Organization Science</i>, 16(4), 409-421. [PDF: ResearchGate / sietmanagement.fr] 3. Di Marco, R. et al. (2026). Toward Sustainable Organizations: Routines to Embed Sustainability in Corporate Culture. <i>Creativity and Innovation Management</i>. [Open Access — Wiley] 4. Liu, X. et al. (2025). How Green Human Resource Management Impacts Employee Green Behavior: The Role of Age in the Sensemaking Process. <i>Business Strategy and the Environment</i>. [Open Access — Wiley] 5. Christensen, H.B. et al. (2024). An Overview of Corporate Sustainability Reporting Legislation in the European Union. <i>Accounting in Europe</i>. [Open Access — Taylor & Francis] 6. Granovetter, M. (1985). Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness. <i>American Journal of Sociology</i>, 91(3), 481-510. [PDF: Semantic Scholar / ResearchGate] The student can choose one article between the two directions: Direction A — Creative-Industrial Ecosystems (choose one) 1. de Bernard, M., Comunian, R. & Gross, J. (2022). Cultural and Creative Ecosystems: A Review of Theories and Methods, Towards a New Research Agenda. <i>Cultural Trends</i>, 31(4), 332–353. DOI: 10.1080/09548963.2021.2004073 2. Vigano, F., England, L. & Comunian, R. (2023). Connecting Craft, Design and the Wood Industry in South Tyrol: From Clusters to Creative Ecosystem, <i>Journal of Rural Studies</i> (open access) Direction B — Agri-food Supply Chains (choose one) 1. León-Bravo, V., Caniato, F., Caridi, M. & Johnsen, T. (2017). Collaboration for Sustainability in the Food Supply Chain: A Multi-Stage Study in Italy. <i>Sustainability</i>, 9(7), 1253. DOI: 10.3390/su9071253. [Open Access — MDPI] 2. Mancini, M.C., Menozzi, D., Donati, M., Biasini, B., Veneziani, M. & Arfini, F. (2019). Producers' and Consumers' Perception of the Sustainability of Short Food Supply Chains: The Case of Parmigiano Reggiano PDO. <i>Sustainability</i>, 11(3), 721. DOI: 10.3390/su11030721. [Open Access — MDPI]
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	Access — MDPI] The articles will be uploaded on Ole.
Supplementary Readings	For the case study • Baxter, P. & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. <i>The Qualitative Report</i>, 13(4), 544-559. [Open Access] • Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. <i>Qualitative Research in Psychology</i>, 3(2), 77-101. [Open Access] The articles will be uploaded on Ole.
Further Information	
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Gender equality, Affordable and clean energy, Decent work and economic growth, Peace, justice and strong institutions, Reduced inequalities, Responsible consumption and production, Climate action, Industry, innovation and infrastructure