

GD908-20 Leading Transformation in the Anthropocene

21/22

Department

Global Sustainable Development

Level

Taught Postgraduate Level

Module leader

Alastair Smith

Credit value

20

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

The Anthropocene defines human existence on our home planet earth and requires significant and radical change to reduce uncertainties about the continued positive, collective, socially just improvement in the human lived experience. Many of us aspire to contribute to something we understand as positive change - but often have limited opportunity to reflect critically on how best to conceptualise and practice such a desire. The entirety of human history – particularly that of efforts to promote “civilisation” and “development” – demonstrates that good intentions are often insufficient to ensure broadly acceptable outcomes. While positive agendas are marred by apathy or consciously captured and manipulated by special interests, there are many examples of genuine unintended yet problematic consequences. The legacies of colonialism, fossil-fuelled capitalist relations and patriarchy have proved widely intractable, and significant work remains to ‘decolonise’ the Sustainable Development agenda. The module is designed to support students in contributing to such re-imagining and reshaping our collective world.

Module aims

This module allows students to explore in a fully transdisciplinary fashion - drawing on knowledge, inter alia, from Philosophy, sociology, economics, ecology - interpretations and tools associated

with positive social change in a variety of contexts: the ultimate aim being that students construct their own more fully informed and critically reflective personal methodologies of positive agency. This is achieved by creating opportunities for critical encounters with foundational thinking as well as prominent responses to the fundamental questions of: who should or should not, be doing what and how, for the purposes of positive global transformation?

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1) "Setting the Anthro'scene: The context for transformation"

Limits to growth. Ecological crisis, planetary boundaries and the Anthropocene. Problems of value and accounting.

Week 2) Breaking all the Western "Rawls": Philosophy fit for the future

Rawls, Sen, competing discourses of 'sustainable development'

Week 3) Subaltern Culture of Progression: Why the West is not necessarily the environmental best

Western environmentalism, alternative ontologies, romanticisation of ecological indigenous

Week 4) Problem based and response focused thinking

The scientific method undone, backcasting as methodology, visioning creative responses

Week 5) Sustainable Development and the Whiteman's burden

Colonial legacies, capitalism and world systems of global unsustainable development

Week 6) Change Making in this skin

Interpersonal politics of identity and agency. Colonisation and decolonisation of 'progress'

Week 7) Bottom Up: Social Movements, Radical Action, Participation

Civil rights, non-violent disobedience, law and extra-legal measures.

Week 8) Archaeology of the Ecological

Environmental subjects, environmental accounting, environmental racism and justice

Week 9) Governing Transitions: Individuals and Markets, States, Structures, Institutions and power

Freedoms to develop; philosophy of markets, states; international organisations and authority

Week 10) Discussion Circle: Preliminary sharing of student reflections and personal methodologies

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Understand the profound implications that the Anthropocene creates for those aspiring to lead positive human change and transformation
- Identify, deconstruct and critically engage with existing normative discourses and their tools

for the improvement of human lived experience.

- Think creatively to imagine alternative futures for the Anthropocene and evaluate them against normative principles.
- Reflect critically on mainstream agendas for change, including that for Sustainable Development, its discourses and practices, from social, economic and environmental, as well as transdisciplinary perspectives.
- Adopt a research grounded, trans-disciplinary approach, to reflect the personal motivations to contribute towards positive change.
- Build coherent personal methodologies of change-making, drawing on philosophical ideas, considering personal identity politics and wider issues of hard and soft power.
- Articulate rigorous and personally reflective accounts of involvement in the intellectual and practical activities of positive and sustainable change, in both the oral and written medium.
- Demonstrate an aptitude for building communities of practice for normatively motivated, collaborative learning and development.

Indicative reading list

Bignall (2016). Three Ecosophies for the Anthropocene: Environmental Governance, Continental Posthumanism and Indigenous Expressivism. *Deleuze Studies* 10 (4). [Online].

Chandler, D.C. (2013). Where is the human in human-centred approaches to development? A critique of Amartya Sen's 'Development as Freedom'. *The biopolitics of development: reading Michel Foucault in the postcolonial present*. New Delhi: Springer.

Hickel, Jason (2019). The contradiction of the sustainable development goals: Growth versus ecology on a finite planet. *Sustainable development* 27(5). [Online].

Klitgaard, R. (1971). Gandhi's Non-Violence as a Tactic. *Journal of Peace Research*, 8(2). [Online].

Langhelle, Oluf (2000). "Sustainable Development and Social Justice: Expanding the Rawlsian Framework of Global Justice". *Environmental Values*, 9(3). [Online].

Malier (2019). Greening the poor: The trap of moralization. *British Journal of Sociology*, 70(5). [Online].

Vergragt & Quist (2011). Backcasting for sustainability: Introduction to the special issue. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 78(5). [Online].

Zunes (1999). The role of non-violent action in the downfall of apartheid. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37(1). [Online].

Research element

Healey & Jenkins (2009) propose that Research-led-teaching design should consider four discrete opportunities. This module has been designed to include two of these opportunities.

1. Research-led learning, where the module syllabus is developed from current research in relevant fields, being based on contemporary and seminal, peer reviewed and other high

quality research literature. As such, all knowledge for student engagement will be consciously and specifically chosen for its merits in reference to broader academic understanding. This will involve literature concerning the concept of the Anthropocene, critical reviews of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, seminal work on the philosophy of the concept of Sustainable Development etc.

2. Research-tutored learning, where students engage actively in discussing high quality, contemporary and seminal research literature.

The format of the contact sessions will present initial introductions knowledge (in the "Lecture" slot), but then rely on independent student reading, so that students themselves are placed at the centre of providing knowledge content for graduate seminar discussions (in Seminar slots, as mediated and validated by staff tutoring).

Interdisciplinary

Positive global transformations are widely recognised to require transdisciplinary approaches and this approach is adopted in the design and delivery of learning opportunities. Leadership is broadly conceived and the module draws on knowledge from Philosophy, Development Studies, Sociology, Political-Ecology etc.

Authentic assessment will require students to demonstrate transdisciplinary aptitude, through the production of a Personal Methodology of change that draws on a range of disciplinary knowledge sets. Transdisciplinary aptitude will be explicitly embedded in the marking rubric, as adapted from the standard university scale and descriptors.

International

This is a module on the Master's in Global Sustainable Development which offers learning experiences that draw on a range of different national and international and subjects. Literature will be chosen according to the principles of decolonising the curriculum, with space consciously created for the expression of usually more marginal discourses. For example, the module will include literature authored by stakeholders in the Global South, as well as covering these geographies and local narratives about them, as a point of subject.

Subject specific skills

The students will develop a transdisciplinary aptitude for reflecting on the nature of appropriate, positive intellectual leadership for transformation, including an ability to engage effectively with varied vocabularies and the knowledge sets they represent, as well as how to combine these authentically and innovatively.

Students will also have the opportunity to develop skills for personal research, note taking, synthesis of information, the communication and discussion of information, necessary for change agency.

Transferable skills

Students will be required to learn together as a community as an inherent part of the pedagogical structure - therefore reflecting on the role and nature of 'leadership' as praxis rather than just abstracted knowledge.

Students will have the opportunity to develop skills for the oral presentation of knowledge and its constructive discussion - for example, via the regular implementation of induction learning concerning non-violent communication etc - as a regular part of contact time learning opportunities. They will be encouraged to understand that they will receive weekly feedback from their seminar experiences that should be used for such development.

While learning will be contextualised as that for socially positive change and transformation, students will engage with structural process learning around the behaviours of reflective practice.

Specific content on the role of personal identity characteristics will be transferable to many other life experiences.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	10 sessions of 1 hour (5%)
Seminars	10 sessions of 2 hours (10%)
Private study	95 hours (48%)
Assessment	75 hours (38%)
Total	200 hours

Private study description

7-9 hours of private reading will be allocated between students on a weekly basis; adjust to provide time for engagement in assessments. Students will have both common and individually allocated reading (distributed in the "Lecture"), which they will be required to share knowledge about in the workshops on a weekly basis.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time
Community Learning Participation	15%	10 hours
Engagement in community learning will be assessed based on workshop contributions		
Personal Methodology for Change Agency	50%	40 hours
A formally philosophised reflection on the praxis of positive change		
Learning Circle Sharing and Discussion	35%	25 hours
Students will share orally a draft of their personal methodologies for change in week 10.		

Feedback on assessment

Substantive annotated comments will be provided on submitted assessment artefacts with overview summary addressing how work was judged against the marking rubric for the assessment and what areas should be prioritised for future development.

Tutor observation of community learning and learning circles will result in written feedback.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core for:

- Year 1 of TGDA-L801 Postgraduate Taught Global Sustainable Development