Sustainability Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities: Approaches and Methodology

Educational subject description sheet

Basic information

Field of study Joint Bachelor in Sustainability **Speciality** Social Sciences & Humanities **Organizational unit** Faculty of Law and Administration **Study level** first cycle (joint degree programme) **Study form** full-time degree programme **Education profile** General academic **Mandatory** obligatory	**Education cycle** 2025/26 **Subject code** UJ.WPAJBSSSHS.840.16579.25 **Lecture languages** english **Subject related to scientific research** Yes **Disciplines** Sociology of science, Learning about the culture and religion, Political science and administration **ISCED classification** 0288 Interdisciplinary programmes involving broad field 02 **USOS code**

Subject coordinator	Piotr Szwedo
Lecturer	Basil Bornemann

Period Semester 3	**Examination** graded credit **Activities and hours** Discussion class: 28	**Number of ECTS points** 3.0

Goals

C1	The primary goal of this course is to provide students with a comprehensive foundation in the theoretical and methodological aspects of social sciences and humanities (SSH) approaches to sustainability research. Students will gain an understanding of how SSH-based sustainability research is conducted, familiarize themselves with a variety of research methods, and engage in practical exercises to apply these methods. The course aims to equip students with the skills to critically evaluate and design research projects, fostering both academic competence and cohort cohesion through collaborative learning and discussions. The course lays the foundation for the acquisition and application of specific methodological knowledge in the course “Sustainability Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities: Applications and Explorations.”

Subject's learning outcomes

Code	Outcomes in terms of	Effects	Examination methods
Knowledge – Student knows and understands:			
W1	the foundations of sustainability research, including its origins and institutional positioning, with a particular focus on the challenges, roles, and contributions of the social sciences and humanities to sustainability research.	JBS_K1_W01, JBS_K1_W02, JBS_K1_W06	written credit, credit with grade, presentation
W2	a variety of approaches and methods used in sustainability-oriented research in the humanities and social sciences.	JBS_K1_W07	written credit, credit with grade, presentation
Skills – Student can:			
U1	recognize, classify, differentiate, critically evaluate, and present SSH-based sustainability research approaches and methods.	JBS_K1_U01, JBS_K1_U02	written credit, credit with grade
U2	apply selected research methods in practical exercises.	JBS_K1_U03	written credit, credit with grade
Social competences – Student is ready for:			
K1	to actively participate in academic discussions on sustainability research, arguing for and against the potential and limitations of the social sciences and humanities.	JBS_K1_K04, JBS_K1_K05	credit with grade, presentation

Calculation of ECTS points

Activity form	Activity hours*
Discussion class	28
preparation of a multimedia presentation	32
preparation for classes	18
paper preparation	12

Student workload	Hours	ECTS
	90	3.0

* hour means 45 minutes

Study content

No.	Course content	Subject's learning outcomes
1.	Introduction to SSH-based Sustainability Research • Overview of course goals, structure, and expectations • Origins and developments of sustainability research • Importance of SSH in sustainability research • Clarification of organizational matters	W1, W2
2.	Foundations of SSH-based Sustainability Research (Part I) • Challenges and principles of SSH-based sustainability research • Key theoretical approaches in SSH sustainability research • Knowledge types and ways of knowing between empiricism and interpretivism	W1, W2
3.	Foundations of SSH-based Sustainability Research (Part II) • Overview of qualitative and quantitative methods • Research designs: case studies, comparative studies, large-n studies, experiments • Discussion of seminal works in the field	W1, W2
4.	Interviews and Focus Groups • Designing and conducting interviews • Facilitating focus groups • Practical exercise: Doing interviews	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1
5.	Surveys and Their Analysis • Basics of survey design • Analyzing survey data • Practical exercise: Designing survey questions	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1
6.	Q-Methodology • Introduction to Q-Methodology • Exploring value orientations and latent understandings • Practical exercise: Conducting a Q-Methodology study	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1

No.	Course content	Subject's learning outcomes
7.	Discourse Analysis • Fundamentals of discourse analysis • Methods for analyzing textual and visual data • Practical exercise: Conducting a discourse analysis	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1
8.	Ethnographic Methods • Fundamentals of ethnography • Conducting fieldwork and participant observation • Ethical considerations in ethnographic research	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1
9.	Content Analysis • Introduction to content analysis • Methods for coding and analyzing textual data • Practical exercise: Conducting a content analysis	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1
10.	Practical Workshop: Applying Methods • Hands-on practice with selected methods • Group exercises and feedback • Integration of different methods in research	U1, U2, K1
11.	Participatory Research Approaches • Introduction to participatory research • Techniques for engaging stakeholders • Case studies of participatory research in sustainability	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1
12.	Transdisciplinary and Transformative Research • Principles of transdisciplinary research • Methods for transformative research • Case studies and practical examples	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1
13.	Current Trends and Innovations in SSH Sustainability Research • Overview of emerging trends and innovations • Case studies of cutting-edge research • Discussion of future directions	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1

No.	Course content	Subject's learning outcomes
14.	Conclusion and Course Wrap-up • Review of key learnings • Reflection on methodological skills • Discussion of next steps in SSH sustainability research	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1

Course advanced

Teaching methods :

text analysis, conversation lecture, discussion

Activities	Examination methods	Credit conditions
Discussion class	written credit, credit with grade, presentation	Active participation (no more than 2 lessons missed), completion of written assignments (50% of grade), presentation (50% of grade)

Entry requirements

None

Literature

Obligatory

1. Bornemann, B., & Simoens, M. (Hrsg.). (2026). Handbook of Research Methods and Applications in Sustainability Transformations: Social Science Perspectives. Edward Elgar.
2. Fahy, F., & Rau, H. (Hrsg.). (2013). Methods of sustainability research in the social sciences. Sage.
3. Franklin, A., & Blyton, P. (2011). Researching sustainability: A guide to social science methods, practice and engagement. Earthscan.
4. Moses, J. W., & Knutsen, T. L. (2012). Ways of knowing: Competing methodologies in social and political research (2nd ed). Palgrave Macmillan.

Effects

Code	Content
JBS_K1_K04	The graduate can critically assess and verbalize own competencies and skills related to different aspects of sustainability as well as their need for development.
JBS_K1_K05	The graduate can defend the importance of scientific data and methods as a basis for decision-making.
JBS_K1_U01	The graduate can critically analyse academic literature, formulate research questions and conduct research under supervision.
JBS_K1_U02	The graduate can present and report knowledge, methodologies, ideas, problems and solutions, clearly and comprehensively, in different forms destined for different audiences – including discussions and debates which require defending a substantiated opinion, as well as conversations in a foreign language at the CEFR B2 level.
JBS_K1_U03	The graduate can apply adequate methods and tools, including selected IT tools, to solve problems related to data collection, analysis, and management in the context of sustainability.
JBS_K1_W01	The graduate can describe the concept of sustainability and recognize the differences in relevant definitions, models and approaches.
JBS_K1_W02	The graduate can explain the axiological background of sustainability and summarize key stages of development of the concept.
JBS_K1_W06	The graduate can describe interconnections between various aspects of sustainability and identify their significance in the context of natural and social sciences, with a special focus on disciplines included in the selected specialisation track (law and politics; chemistry and physics; chemistry and biology; economics and geography; economics, management and engineering; humanities).
JBS_K1_W07	The graduate can apply the theory and methodology of disciplines included in the selected specialisation track to sustainability-related problems, taking into consideration practical limitations such as protection of intellectual property.