ES2423 Sustainable development: A case study approach
Advanced level, 15 higher education credits

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Collaborating department: Department of Economy and Society (Unit for Human Geography)

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This document will give you an overview of the course with more details about the course aim and content as well as more practical information that you will need throughout the course, which has been changed to another version due to the requirement of distance learning at GU March 2020. If you have any questions about the course, or if you feel that some information is unclear or missing, please get in touch with the course coordinator Andreas Skriver Hansen (andreas.hansen@geography.gu.se).

Background
The current Corona virus situation makes it an interesting case to study, as it not only have serious global, but also regional and local consequences. Furthermore, it is very much associated with sustainability issues, both those of a social, economic and ecological nature. For instance, the lock down of almost all countries in Europe and elsewhere has led to many daily issues, such as elderly care, collective responsibility, fear, food supplies, etc. These are all social issues. Then there are also the devastating blows to small businesses and large industries in our society and how they will survive in the coming time, when limited or no people use their services or products, or when logistics are limited or fail due to more border control. This is very much an economic issue. Finally, if anything is positive in this, it is the message that we traveling less now, which means fewer impacts on the environment. On the other hand, the use of disposable materials, such as plastic and rubber as well as medicine used in hospitals, is increasing drastically and may turn into an environmental disaster. These are clearly ecological issues. Additionally, the spreading of the virus and threats to the health of the human population is basically a natural science issue. Altogether, the Corona crises is a truly multidisciplinary issue of fundamental importance for sustainability, which creates a good opportunity to study the impacts and effects of the current crisis on our society in the months to come.

Course aim
The course aim is to provide you with an understanding of sustainable development as a complex phenomenon and to work with issues related to sustainability in both theory and practice, with special attention given to the current Corona virus situation.

Course description
During the course, you are to map, analyze, model and evaluate real problems, challenges and opportunities related to sustainability in society and at different scales (i.e. local, regional and national levels). Special for this year, this means that you are to follow and study the Corona virus

situation over the next couple of months, and to report on a relevant topic of your own choice, including relating your observations and findings to one or several sustainability aspects.

The course builds on the pedagogic approach called problem based case study work. This involves designing and conducting a case study based on a topic, a problem and a given case study area of your choice, wherein you identify, study, analyze and discuss sustainability issues and challenges related to your topic. The case study is to be carried out by yourself during the course time, which is 10 weeks. During this time, you are to work actively with your topic and the notion of sustainability in a local, regional or national context, and thereby obtain a better understanding of the concept both in theory and in practice. To do this, you must make a detailed time plan for the case study work that you do. You are free to use whatever materials and methods you find relevant, and to contact relevant stakeholders for opinions, both inside and outside university. Based on your work, you are to propose future sustainability paths/strategies for the specific topic and case area that you have studied. We strongly encourage that you work towards producing real results rather than mere descriptions. In other words, the work you carry out should primarily be seen as consultant work with you as the consultant and us, the teachers, as customers receiving your report.

Learning goals and outcomes
Due to the changes of the course to distance learning and consequently more focus on individual studies, the learning goals and outcomes have been modified as follows:

After the course, you should be able to:
   a) Identify, formulate and evaluate sustainability issues in a local, regional or national context
   b) Plan, carry out and present a case study report within an established time frame

Knowledge and understanding
   1) In an advanced way, explain sustainability issues in both theory and practice
   2) Provide original examples of sustainability issues through a case study approach
Competences and skills
   3) Organise, perform and communicate a problem based case study
   4) Determine and apply relevant methods and material to understand and analyze real issues on sustainability
Analytical and evaluation skills
   5) Evaluate on the meaning and consequences of your results
   6) Formulate strategies for continued sustainable development in the case study area
   7) Relate the results to your own disciplinary background

The learning goals and outcomes are the foundation of the examination at the end of the course (see below). Each learning goal and outcome will be explained at the introduction in the beginning of the course. Please learn them well and let us know if you have any questions.

Task description

You are to write a report about a topic and a problem of your choice with a focus on the current Corona situation. One or several sustainability aspects must be considered in the report, both in terms of how they relate to the focus and problem in the report, the observed Corona process and the impacts you see as a result of this process on society.

Before you start, please read the selected literature on case study research and methodology in the literature list. From this, you should gain an idea about what a case study is about, what it can and cannot do, and why it is important to work with. Some of you may have worked with case studies before in various projects, but it can be good to reflect more critically about it and to prepare for what you will do during the course.

Then start by thinking about a topic related to the current Corona situation that interests you. As there are many relevant topics to choose from, it is important that you choose only one topic. Interesting topics that we have identified (and which may be combined) include but are not excluded to:

- Over (under?) tourism (i.e. not many people traveling any more)
- Air pollution (fewer cars in the streets and planes in the air, industries closing)
- Water quality (less human activities in and around water bodies)
- Economic breakdown (small businesses and larger industries struggling)
- The elderly and homeless people (social responsibility as a challenge)
- Transports and logistics (getting goods from A to B with closed borders)
- The health care system (under unseen heavy pressure)
- The fear factor (people are nervous and irrational, how to work with panic)
- The role of the media (friends or enemies? Role and ethic responsibility)
- Effects from changed human activities on the global and local carbon balance (CO2 emissions)
- Etc.

You do not have to choose one of the above topics, they are just examples. If you want to work with a different topic that is fine as long as you have a strategy for how to work with it throughout the course, both in terms of chosen methods and data collection strategies.

Once you have chosen a topic to work with, try to narrow down the topic to a problem or a challenge that you would like to study and formulate it into one main question, and 1-3 sub questions. Those questions will be guiding your focus in the report.

After this, please read the selected literature on sustainable development. From this, find out what part(s) of the three sustainable dimensions that your topic will relate to and describe this relation. The focus that you choose for this should be kept throughout the report as a red thread that you must come back to and comment. Ultimately, at the end of the report, you are to propose suggestions, based on your findings, on how the work towards more sustainable solutions and strategies in your case study area so that these can continue after the Corona outbreak is over.

Next, after you have decided what topic, problem as well as sustainability angle you want to work with, think about how you want to investigate it all. What materials and data are relevant? How will you get it? What method strategies will you use? More about data collection is mentioned below under 'Report requirements'. Write down your thoughts on this. Inspiration for how to structure this work can be found in the Robson & McCartan (2016).

Following this, make a plan for how you want to work with and analyze your data, i.e. make an analysis strategy. Methods for analysis could be (but are not excluded to) various types of text analysis (e.g. discourse analysis) but there are many more methods to choose from (see Robson & McCartan 2016). Set a limitation to your analysis work so that it does not become too big or complex. The data analysis should reflect the focus of your study.

After the analysis is done, discuss then the results of the analysis and what key messages you want to emphasize as the most important ones. This includes thoughts about and suggestion to how you would come with solutions to the problem or challenges you have identified, and to come up with strategies for how these solutions can continue after the Corona virus situation has passed.

Finally, reflect also on what you consider your own disciplinary contribution in the work you have done, i.e. how your discipline is particularly good to analyze and evaluate on the work you have done. Furthermore, go back to the case study literature and evaluate how your work can be considered a case study based on your work and experiences during the course.

Important! In the end of week 2, everyone will be asked to make a 2-3 page PDF wherein you are to summarize the above steps. The PDF must include a time plan for your work. Use the PDF as a guideline throughout the curse and an update it regularly if changes occur. All PDFs will be shared on Canvas so that everyone can see what topics will be in focus.

Important! The report is to be written <u>individually</u>. However, we do encourage you to share information that you find on Canvas and to arrange for group discussions and feedback, either on Canvas or via Zoom. Such activities will be up to you.

Report requirements
You are free to plan, structure, write and present a case study report based on your previous experiences with case study work. However, there are a few specific requirements in terms of what the report must contain:

> <u>Length:</u> between 20-25 pages, excluding references and appendices. Many of you will face the problem that you have too much text and/or data, and that the report easily will go beyond 25 pages. However, we put a strictly 25 pages as a maximum, both because we cannot go through many lengthy reports and because you have to learn to write and formulate yourself briefly and to the point. If you have a lot of text and/or data, put it in an appendix instead of in the main text.

> <u>Theory:</u> as this course focuses on describing real-life situations and contexts, we do not require that you include lengthy theoretical sections in the report. However, we do require

that you reflect critically about the notion of sustainable development and how it applies to your focus and work in the case study, as described above. This means thinking about the concept in relation to the topic and problem that you are investigating and how you apply it in practice. In other words, and more specifically, you are required to critically reflect on one or several aspects of sustainable development (i.e. ecological, economic and social sustainability) in your work and draw lines from your work to the current Corona situation. What are the key sustainability issues? Why and how are they relevant in your case study? How can the issues be addressed now and continue as a main strategy in the years to come?

Methods and data collection: due to the nature of the situation, you will have limited methods available to do your data collection. One particular strategy to frame the work is what is often referred to as desk-based work, that is, data collection done from your workstation at home (see Robson & McCartan 2016). Data collection in this course version will therefore mostly by done via desk-based work. Examples of relevant method and data collection strategies include everything from literature studies and reviews to online or phone based interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders and experts. Depending on the topic and focus of your report, you will surely come to work with at least one of these method and data collection strategies in order to acquire data for your report. You free to choose and adopt any methods and data collection strategies that you want as long as you carefully describe what you have done and why in the report. This means thoughts about choices and delimitations that you have made as well as critical reflections on challenges with your method and data collection strategies.

Stakeholders and experts: if possible, we urge you to take contact with different stakeholders and experts during the case study work. The stakeholders and experts can be locally och globally based and are useful to gain insight into the topic you are investigating. They should also be seen as potential receivers of your report. Examples of stakeholders and experts include researchers, journalists, planers, politicians, consultants, researchers, local people, etc. For us to gain an overview of how you work with your stakeholders and experts, i.e. who they are and why they are important, a requirement is that you present and discuss your choice of stakeholders and experts in your project report.

A long perspective: the topic you work with will not only have relevance now but also in years to come or for other regions near and far. A requirement therefore is that you reflect and discuss the perspectives of your results in the report, particularly those related to a sustainable future. It can be a time perspective, where you discuss what will happen 10, 25 or 50 years ahead, or it can be a geographical perspective where you compare with other similar cases regionally or globally. Or it can be a combination of both. The choice is up to you as long as you include reflections on this in the report.

Layout, etc.: please use Times New Roman, font 12, 1,15 line spacing in your report. Also, please use a table of content, headings and section numbers to structure your report. Include a reference list and potential appendices at the end of the report. The final report must be in PDF or Word formats before uploading it on Canvas.

Canvas

We encourage that you use Canvas as a platform to share documents and have discussions with each other. Any course literature will be made available on Canvas as will also presentations from the introduction and other work presented during the introduction days. Any changes to the course will be announced on Canvas as well as via email. Please check Canvas regularly.

The course schedule

The course length is 10 weeks. During the 10 weeks, you are to work individually on the topic and case study area that you have identified and chosen to work with during the course. The first few days of the course will include an introduction to the new course content and structure as well as a few workshops related to the work you will be doing. You find the schedule on TimeEdit, where you also find more information about deadlines.

After the introduction, all student must prepare to work independently. The remaining time on the course is therefore allocated individual work from home (i.e. desk-based work). Each person is responsible for planning his or her own from then and until the exam in June. A webinar one week after the course start as well as half way through the course, in May is planned. You are expected to present your ideas and work during those webinars (see the course schedule. More information about this day will be given during the course introduction). Finally, a few days before the examination, each person is to hand in a final case study report.

Important! Please note that this course requires that you work <u>full time</u>. What this means is that you should see the course as a regular 40-hour workweek. This may be quite intensive for some of you during these times, but is decided in order for you to produce a high quality report in the end. That is why we say that you should view the project as a consultant task, given to you by a potential future employer, for you to work with during 10 weeks. This is to reflect a real life work situation, where such a task is easily what is required of you.

Supervision

A supervisor will be assigned to each person from week 2 until the examination. We assign the supervisor based on your chosen topic. We aim to assign a supervisor to a topic that is close to the main competences of the supervisor, although we do not guarantee that in all cases. The supervisor has several functions, including:

     a) Advising and supporting you in questions that you may have
     b) Quality checking the work
     c) Providing stakeholder contacts (if possible)
     d) Discussing the process and progress with you
     e) Being a confidant for you

In short, the supervisor should mainly be seen as your coach. The supervisor will not make any decisions on your behalf, but can come with his/her opinion and advice on matters that you need help with. We suggest that you have a supervisor meeting regularly during the course time in

order to keep the supervisor updated. Supervisor meetings are arranged by you and the supervisor together once you have been allocated a supervisor. Please contact the supervisor in good time before a meeting. If a person prefers to switch supervisor, this must first be discussed with Andreas and the new supervisor.

Important! The supervisors have a limited amount of hours available (40 hours in total for all supervising), so use your hours wisely and strategically and discuss it with your supervisor.

Literature

For logical reasons, there is not much literature out on the situation upon which we can base a literature list. Consequently, the literature list for the course mostly includes literature on case study methodology and sustainable development. However, whatever academic literature that is available on the topic that you choose to work should be included as relevant and valid literature. This includes background information such as reports and statistics about the Corona virus situation, which is all relevant data. Aside from that, there is plenty of secondary data online and in newspapers, such as newspaper articles, forum threads, blogs, on YouTube, etc. These are circulating between people in and from all nations across the globe on the Corona virus and makes up a new form of dynamic literature, where it is possible to read and analyze what is said and discussed. We therefore encourage you to also pay attention to these materials and consider them sources of information (although please read them with a critical eye!).

Diary

In order to assess your process and progress during the course, you are all required to fill in an individual diary. The diary should describe your work efforts but with a focus on your disciplinary and individual progress. The diary is a personal document, which will only be shared with your supervisor and Andreas. Both the supervisor and Andreas will treat the diary as a confidential document, where you are free to describe everything you want to share. You are required to hand in your individual diary every Friday during the course, both to your supervisor and Andreas.

Important! The diary must be taken seriously, as it will be a part of the examination. A diary template is found on Canvas and will be explained during the introduction.

Examination

The examination form has been changed to match the current course version. This means that there the course now has three examination parts:

1) A written report (50%)
2) An oral examination (25%)
3) A diary (25%)

The written report concerns the overall quality of the report based on its content, clarity, structure, readability, etc. The oral presentation concerns your knowledge about the content in the report and how well you critically can explain and reflect upon it, and put it into perspective

during the exam. The diary, as explained above, concerns your reflexions about your own process and growth throughout the project time, what you have learned and what challenges there have been, and how you have overcome them.

The grade for each part is set after the normal three-scale system used at the university:

- Pass with Distinction – VG (Väl Godkänd)
- Pass – G (Godkänd)
- Fail – U (Underkänd)

Pass with Distinction (VG) means that you have understood and reflected on each learning goal and outcome in the respective exam part, but in an advanced way. This can achieved by, for example, giving a more critical and insightful presentation of the topic investigated in the report, showing more advanced thoughts about the concept of sustainable development and its significance to the report findings, and by making an extraordinary effort during the course.

Pass (G) means that you show that you have understood and reflected on each learning goal and outcome in the respective exam part. This can achieved by, for example, giving an acceptable presentation of the project theme and problem investigated in the report, demonstrating a basic understanding of sustainable development in practice and by being active throughout the course.

To pass with Distinction (VG), you must get at least two VG out of the three examination parts. To pass the course (G), you must pass all three examination parts.

If you fail one of the thee parts, you will not pass the course. However, in case you fail, there is a possibility to compensate the part(s) that you failed and thus pass the course.

Course evaluation
At the end of the course, you are all kindly asked to fill in the course evaluation. The course evaluation is a helpful document for us in order to improve the course. Please share your thoughts and comments, and feel free to also give suggestions in the evaluation, which can be found on Canvas after the examination.

Contact
If you have any questions or comments for the course, please contact course coordinator Andreas Skriver Hansen (andreas.hansen@geography.gu.se).