

## Case Study in Sustainable Development

The format Case Study in Sustainable Development was developed by Professor Roland Scholz (e.g. Scholz et al., 2006) and is based on transdisciplinary project work addressing relevant and complex societal problems in a local pre-defined context. Each year, a new location for the case study is chosen. Working in interdisciplinary groups, students identify and frame a specific current environmental problem in the focal area which they subsequently map and analyze with appropriate research methods, e.g. interviews and surveys. Students are granted a large degree of freedom in designing their project. For ten weeks, student groups plan, carry out and evaluate their project based on the problem identified in close collaboration with authorities and other relevant stakeholders. Students bring in experiences and competencies from their diverse fields of study, whereas supervisors from academia contribute with subject knowledge.

The format allows students not only to create transdisciplinary knowledge, they also gain valuable experiences in interacting with diverse actors and stakeholders in society. Students get to practice project management skills, evaluate different types of knowledge and work in an independent, self-directed manner. Furthermore, the format gives students the opportunity to work intensely with the concept of sustainable development in a local context, dealing with opportunities and challenges of the phenomenon in both theory and practice. Students gain an advanced and critical understanding of the notion of sustainable development as a complex phenomenon and strategic tool.

### *Phase 1 – Planning*

Identify a topic for thematic and geographic focus of the case study. The participating students should come from different disciplines and form groups of three to four people.

### *Phase 2 – Start*

First, students execute literature studies and participate at initial lectures on theoretical background.

Second, an excursion is organized to the area under study. The student teams identify and frame a specific problem which they want to address.

### *Phase 3 – Project development*

Over a definite period, the students plan, implement and evaluate a project based on the problem identified in close collaboration with relevant stakeholders, such as authorities, companies, NGOs, and citizens.

### *Phase 4 – Reflection & evaluation*

Each student writes a personal project diary throughout the process to keep track of his/her work progress of himself/herself and within the team.



With the support of the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

The work results in a written report, which is presented orally and discussed in class at the end of the course. Depending on the topic chosen, an additional presentation e.g. at a relevant conference can be an opportunity.

---

*“We provided information to one of the cooperation partners that they had an opportunity that they were not aware of. If that will work out, that would make me very happy.” Master Student, Environmental Sciences, University of Gothenburg, Sweden*

---

#### **Benefits**

- Working hands-on with consultant-like sustainability-oriented assignments
- Gain experience in interacting with wide range of stakeholders
- Opportunity for teachers to develop and improve coaching competencies
- Career opportunities and contacts
- Learn to define a problem, about focus and limitations of a project

#### **Success factors**

- Students are granted freedom in designing their project
- Excursion, introducing students to the area under study
- Teachers as coaches instead of experts
- Students acquire in-depth knowledge about local challenges before deciding on project

#### **Challenges**

- Partners' high expectations on communication skills of students
- Coaching to help students to handle problems and stress
- Handle diversity and differences in prior knowledge of students in the introductory part
- Raising resources for a high quality transdisciplinary course

