

CLIMATE ACTION & SUSTAINABILITY: DRIVERS OF CHANGE AND POLICY OPTIONS

Professor: **Tancrède VOITURIEZ**

Session: **July 2026**

Language of instruction: **English**

Number of hours of class: **36h**



Objective of the Course

This course will equip students with the intellectual tools to understand the rationale for, and the challenges of, sustainable development and climate action and inaction. Students will develop a critical understanding of the drivers of change, exploring the relationships between knowledge and beliefs, science-based policy prescriptions, and contemporary politics. They will also debate propositions made by policymakers, entrepreneurs, NGOs and scholars from different academic fields in order to address the most pressing environmental and development-related challenges of our time.



Summary

Available evidence of environmental changes in the 21st century has revealed that said changes pose a major threat to our economies and societies. To ring the alarm, some scholars even coined a new term, the “Anthropocene”, to describe the unprecedented influence of human activities on the Earth system.

In 2015, the United Nations solemnly agreed with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change to strengthen the universal response to the threat of global warming by keeping a global temperature rise in this century well below 2°C. The same year, UN member countries set the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and decided on 17 new and universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Yet burning questions remain on the amount of change delivered by global commitments. How do rich and poor societies confront and act on climate change targets today? What is the theory of change for civil societies, CEOs and scientists confronted with inertia, denial or obstruction? Is litigation a way out? Can climate change policies frame a new social contract and deliver stability in international

relations in the coming decade, as the rejection of international cooperation has become a popular and populist argument among the biggest emitters? Students will encounter these questions throughout the course.

In the first part, we will identify various environmental and development-related challenges and map out the policy responses at global level. We will discuss the contemporary politics of global environmental and development changes, and observe that which has been achieved so far. In the second section of the course, we will look at different academic disciplines and stakeholders' initiatives in order to flesh out options likely to solve the challenges of implementation. A negotiation simulation game will conclude the course.



Organization of the course & Bibliography

- **Theme 1: Sustainable development challenges and global policy responses**
- **Theme 2: Options to solve implementation challenges**

THEME 1: Sustainable development challenges and global policy responses

Session 1: Introduction – two narratives on “Development”

In this session, students will become familiar with two contrasting narratives on sustainable development. The first narrative maintains that economic growth is the core objective of societies, with the aim of minimising harmful social and environmental effects. The second narrative prioritises solving environmental challenges, expecting economic growth and positive social outcomes as a consequence or by-product.

Readings:

- Steffen, W. et al. (2011). The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship. *Ambio* 40, 739–761.
- Voituriez T. (2020). Environmental changes. In Dirk Berg-Schlosser, Bertrand Badie, Leonardo Morlino (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science – A Global Perspective*, Part 7, chapter 85, London., SAGE.

Session 2: Leaving no one behind: can poverty be history?

At the beginning of the 21st century, United Nations member countries pledged to end absolute poverty within a generation. In this session, we will examine the progress made towards this goal, as measured by various indicators of poverty, and consider different approaches proposed by scholars to eliminate absolute poverty by 2030.

Reading:

- Edward, P., Sumner, A. (2015). Philanthropy, Welfare Capitalism, or Radically Different Global Economic Model: What Would It Take to End Global Poverty within a Generation Based on Historical Growth Patterns? CGDEV Working Paper 413.

Session 3: Taking income inequality reduction seriously

Reducing inequality among and within countries is one of the Sustainable Development Goals. Using the World Inequality Lab database, we will compare the inequality trajectories of the countries in which our students live and discuss the challenges and policy measures associated with changes in inequality.

Readings:

- Chancel L., Hough A., Voituriez T. (2018) Reducing inequalities within countries: Assessing the potential of the sustainable development goals. *Global Policy*, 9 (1): 5-16.
- Chancel, L., Piketty, Th. (2021). Global Income Inequality, 1820–2020: the Persistence and Mutation of Extreme Inequality. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, Volume 19, Issue 6, December 2021, Pages 3025–3062, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeea/jvab047>

Session 4: Inserting the environment in the development equation

About 50 years ago, environmental protection became part of the global policy agenda, with the policy cycle experiencing ups and downs since that time. Several attempts have been made to 'popularise' environmental protection and make it more resilient to shifts in policymakers' preferences, e.g. the Anthropocene, environmental or carbon footprints, the green transition. We will recount the story of how environmental issues emerged in the global debate, and explain why the agenda remains 'dominated' in many respects.

Readings:

- Chancel, L. Global carbon inequality over 1990–2019. *Nat Sustain* **5**, 931–938 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-022-00955-z>
- Chancel, L., Bothe, P. & Voituriez, T. The potential of wealth taxation to address the triple climate inequality crisis. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* **14**, 5–7 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-023-01891-2>

Sessions 5&6: Climate action as a litmus test for sustainable development

Using global warming as an example of a global environmental issue, we explore the science of climate change, the international policy framework and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which was signed in 2015. We will explain how negotiations actually occur, as well as what remains to be negotiated.

Readings:

- IPCC (2023). Summary for Policymakers. In: *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 1-34, doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001
- UNEP (2025). Emission gap report 2024. Executive Summary. UNEP, Geneva, Switzerland.

Session 7: Getting to net-zero emission and the case of hard-to-abate sectors

The Paris Agreement emphasises the need for net zero emissions, requiring states to 'achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century'. This session will address the technical options for achieving this, particularly in sectors that are difficult to decarbonise.

Readings:

- Edelenbosch, O.Y. (2022). Mitigating greenhouse gas emissions in hard-to-abate sectors, PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, The Hague.
- IEA (2021). Net Zero by 2050. Executive summary.
- Rosa, L., Gabrielli, P. (2023). Achieving net-zero emissions in agriculture: A review. *Environ. Res. Lett.* **18** 063002 <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/acd5e8>

THEME 2: Options to solve implementation challenges

Session 8: Carbon border adjustment and carbon clubs

A carbon tax or price, favoured by economists, is intended to reflect the true cost of goods and services, thereby encouraging behavioural change. In this session, we will review the successes of carbon pricing and carbon clubs thus far and weigh up the pros and cons of incentives versus more restrictive measures. As in all the other sessions, students will share their knowledge of the current situation in their country and what could happen next, based on a political economy analysis.

Readings:

- What can Least Developed Countries and other climate vulnerable countries expect from the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)? Report authored by Tim Gore (IEEP), Eline Blot (IEEP), Tancred Voiturez (IDDRI), Laura Kelly (IIED), Aaron Cosbey (IISD), 2021.
- World Bank (2025). State and Trends of Carbon Pricing 2025. The World Bank, Washington:DC.

Session 9: To offset or not to offset?

Reducing CO₂ emissions in a given sector may be considered too challenging or costly, prompting the implementation of offsetting mechanisms. These mechanisms involve investing in projects that reduce global emissions in other sectors or companies, with the aim of compensating for the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere resulting from industrial or other human activities. We will examine evidence showing that offsetting can be a zero-sum game if the use of offsets leads to increased emissions elsewhere, and consider how the mechanism can be improved.

Readings:

- Von Tin Fischer und Hannah Knuth (2023). Phantom Offset and Carbon Deceit. Die Zeit 19 January 2023. <https://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2023-01/co2-certificates-fraud-emissions-trading-climate-protection-english>

- Seddon, N., et al. (2020). Understanding the value and limits of nature-based solutions to climate change and other global challenges. Phil. Trans. R. Soc. <http://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2019.0120>

Session 10: Leveraging development finance

Development finance institutions play a pivotal role in bridging the sustainable development gap by raising capital at low cost on global capital markets and lending it at low interest rates. In this section, we will address the following questions: What are these institutions? What drives their financing? And could they do more or better?

Readings:

- Fay, M., Hallegatte, S., Vogt-Schilb, A., Rozenberg, J., Narloch, U., Kerr, T. (2015). Decarbonizing Development: Three Steps to a Zero-Carbon Future. Climate Change and Development. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Planet Tracker (2023). Financial markets roadmap for transforming the global food system. A guide for the financial sector. March.

Session 11: Greening trade with trade wars?

Trade involves the movement of goods and services between countries with different definitions, preferences and policies regarding sustainable development. Long ignored in climate discussions, this issue is now causing disputes among the leading economies. In this session, we explore how aligned trade practices are with the two narratives presented in the first section.

Readings:

- Mazzucato, M. and Rodrik, D. (2023). Industrial Policy with Conditionalities: A Taxonomy and Sample Cases. UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, Working Paper Series (IIPP WP 2023-07). Available at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose/wp2023-07>
- Voituriez, T. (2023). We Need More Hybrid Trade And Environment Agreements. IISD Policy Analysis.

Session 12: Is climate litigation the way out?

In the face of delayed climate and environmental action by companies and governments, citizens are now taking legal action, building up a body of case law from different courts and jurisdictions. This article examines how effective climate or environmental litigation has been to date, as well as possible next steps.

Readings:

- Bouwer, K. (2018). The Unsexy Future of Climate Change Litigation. Journal of Environmental Law, Volume 30, Issue 3, November 2018, Pages 483–506, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jel/eqy017>
- Setzer, J., Higham, C. (2025). Global trends in climate change litigation: 2025 snapshot. London: Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment and Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Session 13 & 14: Getting to yes – A simulation game

The students are divided into four teams, each of which represents one of the stakeholders involved in negotiations over the creation of a natural reserve. Each team receives a confidential role description, which provides additional information and sets out specific goals to be achieved by the end of the negotiations. This game enables students to apply some of the lessons learned in previous sections.

Reading:

- Fisher, R., Ury W.L., Patton, B. (2011). Getting to Yes. Penguin Books.

Session 15: Conclusion and evaluation



Requirements for validation

- Oral participation: 20%
- Mid-term paper: 30% provides a personal and critical analysis of one of the course readings
- Final essay: 50%, students should present their theory of change for the next decade.



Professor's Biography



Tancrède Voiturez has a PhD in Economics and is Senior researcher on Global Governance at Iddri. His research focuses on trade and green innovation relationships, and on the causes of inertia in the implementation of sustainable development policies. Tancrède Voiturez has been involved as a coordinator and/or expert in numerous research projects on globalisation and sustainable development for the European Commission, the European Parliament, the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment, among others. He has been teaching at Sciences Po since 2005.