

Class 7: Action, Economics, & Society

Themes:

- Adaptation and action, cognitive dissonance & eco-anxiety
- Green growth vs. degrowth, circular economy
- Carbon pricing, RSE/corporate roles, social justice, public policy

This class addresses one of the most urgent questions of the climate crisis: how societies can move from awareness to effective collective action. Students will explore how psychological barriers such as cognitive dissonance—the gap between knowledge and behavior—and eco-anxiety—the distress provoked by climate awareness—shape public and individual responses to environmental challenges. These dynamics are critical for understanding why climate action is often delayed despite overwhelming scientific evidence.

At the structural level, the class investigates competing economic paradigms. The green growth model suggests that technological innovation and sustainable practices can decouple economic development from ecological harm. In contrast, the degrowth movement argues that infinite growth is incompatible with planetary limits, and calls for reducing consumption, redistributing resources, and reimagining prosperity. Students will assess these debates not only theoretically but also through case studies of climate policy and Indigenous perspectives on sustainable economies.

The circular economy will be introduced as a framework that moves away from the linear "take–make–dispose" model toward regenerative systems where waste becomes a resource. Here, Indigenous relational economies offer a valuable alternative perspective, emphasizing reciprocity, stewardship, and interdependence between humans and ecosystems. This adds cultural and ethical depth to a discussion that is too often framed in purely technical or economic terms.

We also focus on policy and governance tools, such as carbon pricing (taxes, cap-and-trade) and corporate social responsibility (RSE), evaluating both their promises and limitations. These tools are analyzed not in isolation but through the lens of social justice: who benefits, who bears the costs, and how power and inequality shape ecological transitions. The notion of a “just transition” will serve as a guiding principle, tying climate adaptation to labor rights, Indigenous sovereignty, and equitable participation in decision-making.

By integrating scholarship, Indigenous perspectives, cultural analysis, and artistic works, this session encourages students to confront the complexity of climate economics and social transformation—recognizing that sustainability is not only a scientific or technical challenge, but also a profoundly political and ethical one.

Articles:

- New Research: Indigenous Perspectives on Climate Adaptation & Clean Economy (Canadian Climate Institute, 2025)

→<https://climateinstitute.ca/news/new-research-indigenous-perspectives-energy-climate-issues-canada/>

Questions:

- *How do Indigenous governance models and worldviews contribute uniquely to climate action and the transition to a cleaner economy in Canada? Give examples from the case studies in the article to support your answer.*
- *What are the potential benefits and challenges of expanding Indigenous participation in the development, delivery, and security of clean electricity systems? How might this affect broader societal climate adaptation and justice?*
- “Degrowth in a settler state: climate-just economic transitions and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada” (2025)

→ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0921800925000321>

Questions:

- *How does the framework of degrowth intersect with Indigenous calls for climate justice and reconciliation? Discuss how these perspectives can shape more equitable and effective climate policies.*
- *In what ways can Indigenous relational economy theory challenge conventional Western sustainability and circular economy models to promote social and ecological well-being?*
- “Indigenous Wisdom and Circular Economy: When Indigenous Relational Economy Theory Meets Western Sustainability” (2024)

→ <https://kogod.american.edu/news/indigenous-wisdom-and-circular-economy-when-indigenous-relational-economy-theory-meets-western-sustainability-and-circular-economies>

Questions:

- *How does Indigenous relational economy theory differ from Western economic models, particularly regarding the values of reciprocity, care, and sustainability? Why are these differences important for addressing environmental challenges today?*
- *What lessons can Western sustainability and circular economy approaches learn from Indigenous governance systems to create more balanced and long-lasting solutions for social and ecological well-being?*

Podcasts:

- "How Degrowth Can Keep Us Under 1.5°C" – Circular Metabolism Podcast → <https://youtu.be/R1MNMWkDNY?si=SDeC-p-YdrnifPYq>

Questions:

- *What are some key reasons Lorenz Keysser gives for why current IPCC climate models rely heavily on continued economic growth and technological solutions? Why might this reliance be risky?*

- *How does the degrowth approach differ from mainstream climate scenarios in terms of energy use, economic growth, and social change? What are the potential benefits and challenges of adopting a degrowth strategy to meet climate goals?*
- "Episode 85: Economics, Justice, and Carbon Price Solutions" – Citizens' Climate Radio
→<https://citizensclimatelobby.org/blog/podcast/episode-85-economics-justice-and-carbon-price-solutions/>

Questions:

- *How does carbon pricing work as a tool to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and what are some of the main challenges in making it both effective and equitable for marginalized communities?*
- *What role does bipartisan support play in advancing climate policies such as carbon pricing, and why is it important to engage across political divides to achieve meaningful climate action?*

Music:

Listen carefully to the three assigned songs and read through their lyrics. In preparation for class, reflect on the following questions: How do these songs connect to the themes we are exploring this week? In what ways do they highlight social, cultural, or ecological dimensions of the climate crisis? Finally, describe your personal response to the music—what emotions, images, or ideas did it evoke, and why do you think it felt meaningful (or not) in relation to our discussions?

- "Cuyahoga" – R.E.M
- "Beds Are Burning" – Midnight Oil
- "Truth to Power" – One Republic