

POLITICAL ECOLOGY

PhD Course Spring 2016, 7,5 cp

Division of History of Science, Technology and Environment
KTH Royal Institute of Technology Stockholm

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This course intends to offer a global overview of the current ecological crisis in its multiple interconnections: politico-economic, cultural and epistemological, governmental. Students are supposed to learn about the historical processes which led to the current crisis, as well as the diversity of implications that environmental problems pose to different social groups in different geo-historical contexts (viz. environmental inequalities), while also individuating their trans-scalar nature and global implications. The ultimate scope of the course is for students to acquire the ability to develop new and imaginative ways of conceptualizing nature/society relationships in different geo-political and cultural contexts, in order to contribute to the formulation of more inclusive and socially just environmental policies. The course will familiarize students with the key concepts and tools used by political ecologists and help students do political ecology if they wish.

The course explores the interdisciplinary field of Political Ecology. Political Ecology is a theoretical and methodological approach to the study of socio-ecological systems that focuses on conflict, power relationships and the unequal distribution of environmental costs and benefits. It seeks to “politicize” debates about environmental problems, and stands in contrast to a-political ecologies that explain environmental issues in terms of universal population, bio-physical, or human-behavioural drivers. Unlike other sciences with which students might be familiar, political ecology does not work with experiments, model or quantitative analysis; it works with theoretical concepts, which it documents with case-studies that combine qualitative and quantitative information in an empirically-backed narrative (“story”).

Each class of this course will focus on a different key concept of political ecology, and use an important, published case-study article to illustrate how this concept is “put to work” in a real case. Classes will follow a seminar format with a combination of teaching by the instructor, discussion in class of assigned readings. For each class we will read two articles. Typically one of them will be theoretical, presenting the main concept to be discussed in this class, and the second will include a case-study.

Students are expected to have read these articles in advance and write short commentaries. A group of 2 students will be responsible for synthesizing the commentaries of the week at the beginning of the class. A critical discussion of the key ideas of the articles will take place under the facilitation of the instructor. This might also include discussion in small groups, games, use of audiovisual material, etc..

The course is structured in 13 sessions of 2 hours each (total 26 hours).

Schedule

25 April

2-4 pm

1. Introduction: what is Political ecology and Genealogies

Paul Robbins, What is political ecology, 11-24

Paul Robbins, A tree with deep roots, 25-48

Sinead Bailey and Raymond Bryant, An emerging research field, 10-25 (Third world)

27 April

2-4 pm small seminar room

2. Methods and tools

Part I

Paul Robbins, 49-81

Alex Loftus, A time for Gramsci, 89-102 (The International Handbook)

Diana Davis, Historical approaches to Political ecology, 263-275 (Handbook)

2 May

10-12

3. Methods and tools

Part II

Amity Doolittle, The best of many worlds: methodological pluralism in political ecology, 551-529 (The international handbook)

Matthew D. Turner, Integrating politics and ecology through mixed methods, 530-544 (The international handbook)

A. H Neely and T. Nguse, Relationships and research methods, 140-149 (Handbook)

4 May

2-4 pm small room

4. The politics of science and knowledge

Escobar, Arturo. "Whose knowledge, whose nature? Biodiversity, conservation, and the political ecology of social movements." *Journal of political ecology* 5.1 (1998): 53-82.

S. Funtowicz and J. Ravetz, Post normal science, <http://isecoeco.org/pdf/pstnormsc.pdf>

9 May

2-4 pm

5. Major themes in PE

I – Commons vs. Enclosures

Karen Bakker, commons versus commodities. The political ecology of water privatization, 347-370 (Global PE)

Silvia Federici, Feminism and the politics of commons, <http://uzbuna.org/en/journal/conversations-new-feminism-and-art/feminism-and-politics-commons>

Alex Jeffrey, Colin McFarlane and Alex Vasudevan, Rethinking Enclosure: Space, Subjectivity and the Commons, *Antipode Volume 44, Issue 4*, pages 1247–1267, September 2012

11 May

10-12 am

6. Major themes in PE

II – Extractivism, transnational corporations and indigenous rights

Héctor Alimonda, Mining in Latin America: Coloniality and Degradation, 149-162 (International handbook)

Emily T. Yeh and Joe Bryan, Indigeniety, 531-544 (Handbook)

Bryant and Bailey, Business, 98-23 (Third World)

23 May

10-12 am

7. Environmental conflicts and environmental justice

Bryant Bailey, Grassroots actors, 151-179 (third world)

P. Robbins, Environmental conflicts, 199-214

M. Armiero, Seeing Like a protester, Left History

<http://lh.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/lh/article/viewFile/24610/22830>

25 May

10-13

8. Feminist political ecology

Rocheleau, Dianne, Barbara Thomas-Slayter, and Esther Wangari. *Feminist political ecology: Global issues and local experience*. Routledge, 2013, 3-23

Aya H. Kimura, Understanding Fukushima: Nuclear Impacts, Risk Perceptions and Organic Farming in Feminist Political Ecology Perspective, 260-273 (International Handbook)

Harding, Sandra. *Strong objectivity and socially situated knowledge*. 1991.

30 May

10-12

9. Study groups Part I

The students read a selected book and then discuss it in groups. Then the groups report their discussion to the class.

The book can be chosen from the list below or proposed by students to the instructor.

In their analysis of the book the students should consider:

- a. which is the main research questions
- b. which methodologies and sources have been employed
- c. which contribution to the understanding of PE

d. strengths and weaknesses

e. how it might help in the research project each student is pursuing (ideas, sources, design etc.)

List of books:

M. Armiero, *A Rugged Nation. Mountains and the Making of Modern Italy* (White Horse Press, 2011)

S. Barca, *Enclosing Water. Nature and Political Economy in a Medietraenan Valley* (White Horse Press, 2010)

R. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie, Class, and Environmental quality* (Westview 1990).

J. Corburn, *Street science: Community knowledge and environmental health justice* (The MIT Press, 2005)

R. Nixon, *Slow Violence and the environmentalism of the poor*, Harvard University press, 2011

N. Peluso, *Rich forests, poor people: Resource control and resistance in Java* (Univ of California Press, 1992)

Erik Swyngedouw, *Liquid modernity. Contested Hydro-Modernities in 20th Century Spain* (The MIT press, 2015)

2 June

10-12

10. Study groups Part II

Final examination

- Writing a 500-1000 word page review of the selected book
- Writing an essay in which the student explores how a political ecology approach will contribute to her/his PhD research project (max 2500 words)

Basic textbooks

Perreault, Tom, Gavin Bridge, and James McCarthy, eds. *The Routledge handbook of political ecology*. Routledge, 2015 – referred in the syllabus as “Handbook”

Bryant, Raymond L., ed. *The international handbook of political ecology*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015 – referred in the syllabus as “The International handbook”

P. Robbins, *Political ecology*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2012

Bryant, Raymond L., and Sinead Bailey. *Third world political ecology*. Psychology Press, 1997.- referred in the syllabus as “Third world”

Peet, Richard, Paul Robbins, and Michael Watts, eds. *Global political ecology*. Routledge, 2010 – referred in the syllabus as “Global PE”

Suggested readings

Paul Buckett, *Marxism and ecological economics*, Haymarket 2005

Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the web of life*, Verso 2015