AK2210 Political Ecology 7.5 credits

Politisk ekologi

This is a translation of the Swedish, legally binding, course syllabus.

If the course is discontinued, students may request to be examined during the following two academic years

Establishment

Course syllabus for AK2210 valid from Autumn 2017

Grading scale

A, B, C, D, E, FX, F

Education cycle

Second cycle

Main field of study

Environmental Engineering

Specific prerequisites

180 credits in optional field. Students from all KTH programmes are welcome to apply.

Language of instruction

The language of instruction is specified in the course offering information in the course catalogue.

Intended learning outcomes

On completion of the course, you should be able to

â€¢ describe the present-day ecological crisis in the world from multiple perspectives: political-economic, cultural and epistemological

â€¢ analyse the historical processes that have led to the current crisis and how different social groups have been influenced by environmental problems in different geohistorical contexts;

â€¢ develop new and imaginative ways to conceptualize natur-society relationships in different geopolitical, historical and cultural contexts in order to contribute to the design of a more inclusive and socially just environmental policy.

Course contents

The course explores the interdisciplinary field of political ecology with a special focus on its historical dimension. Political ecology is a theoretical and methodological approach to the study of socio-ekological systems. It focuses on conflicts, power relations and uneven distribution of environmental costs and benefits. The field seeks to "politicise" debates about environmental problems, and thereby stands in contrast to â€ a-politicâ€ ecologies that tries to understand environmental issues in terms of universal driving forces related to, for example, population trends or biophysical factors.

The course intends to familiarise you with central concepts and tools used by political ecologists and thereby help you to take an active role in the political-ecological field if you wish. Unlike other sciences that you may be familiar with so far, political ecology does not work with experiments, modelling or quantitative analysis; instead, the course takes as its point of departure theoretical concepts that are documented through case studies which combine qualitative and quantitative information in an empirically-backed narrative ("story"). Each course occasion will focus on different key concept from political-ecological theory and use an important, published case study to illustrate how this concept is "put to work".

Disposition

Teaching is based on seminars that combine smaller lecture components with discussions in class of texts that the students have read in advance. Before each seminar, the students read two articles. In the typical case one of these is theoretical (with a focus on the central concept around which the seminar should revolve), while the other article usually contains a case study.

All students are expected to read these two articles in advance and write a short comment to them (see further below). A group of two students takes responsibility for synthesising the comments, and presents this in the beginning of the seminar (5 minutes). After this, a critical discussion of the most important ideas in the articles follows. This can also include discussions in small groups, role plays, use of audio-visual material, etc.

The course consists of 15 seminars in total, each of which takes two hours (30 hours of class-room teaching in total).

1. Introduction: What is political ecology?

2. Keywords in environment and society

3. Environmental justice in historical perspective

4. Environmental conflicts in past and present, urban and rural

5. The politics of science and knowledge in the environmental field

6. Enclosures

7. The commons, global and local

8. Globalisation and neoliberalism

9. Extractivism, transnational corporations and indigenous rights

10. Climate policy, local and global

11. The political ecology of disasters

12. The political ecology of conservationism

13. Migration and the environment

14. Presentations of group projects

15. Presentations of group projects

Course literature

The reading list mainly consists of a collection of articles, totalling about 1000 pages.

Examination

- INL1 - Essay, 5.0 credits, grading scale: A, B, C, D, E, FX, F
- PRO1 - Group project, 2.5 credits, grading scale: A, B, C, D, E, FX, F

Based on recommendation from KTH's coordinator for disabilities, the examiner will decide how to adapt an examination for students with documented disability.

The examiner may apply another examination format when re-examining individual students.

The examination is based on written reflections/comments (about 350 words in length) before each seminar, a group project and an individual essay.

In the group project, 2-3 students work together on an analysis of an environmental conflict. At the end of the course, the project is presented to the class. The presentations should not be longer than 10 minutes and all group members are expected to participate. The project should focus on an environmental conflict of interest and present basic data about the conflict (geography, history, social and environmental impacts, etc), the main actors in the conflict, their interests, values and â€□ language€□ (narratives about the conflict) and describe the institutional and social arenas through which the conflict is mediated. A good project uses one of the main concepts in political ecology that has been presented in the course to explain the conflict and challenge the most common conceptions of it.

The individual essay should target a topic with close connections to the course contents.

The weekly comment/reflection is not graded, but half a grading step will be subtracted from the final grade for each comment that is not submitted in time (if you, for example, miss to deliver two comments in time during the course your highest possible final grade will be reduced from A to B). Exemptions apply in exceptional cases (e.g. serious illness) and with prior information to and consent of the course coordinator.

Other requirements for final grade

Completed group project, completed essay and completed written reflections/comments

Ethical approach

- All members of a group are responsible for the group's work.
- In any assessment, every student shall honestly disclose any help received and sources used.
- In an oral assessment, every student shall be able to present and answer questions about the entire assignment and solution.