

**Political Ecology**

Code: 42406  
ECTS Credits: 6

Degree	Type	Year	Semester
4313784 Interdisciplinary Studies in Environmental, Economic and Social Sustainability	OT	0	1

The proposed teaching and assessment methodology that appear in the guide may be subject to changes as a result of the restrictions to face-to-face class attendance imposed by the health authorities.

**Contact**

Name: Sergio Villamayor Tomás  
Email: Sergio.Villamayor@uab.cat

**Use of Languages**

Principal working language: english (eng)

**Teachers**

Panagiota Kotsila  
Esteve Corbera Elizalde  
Sergio Villamayor Tomás

**Prerequisites**

If not native English speaker: valid IELTS (with a minimum score of 6.5) or TOEFL (minimum 550 paper based, 213 computer based, 79 web-based) score report or a Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English or Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English.

The students must hold an undergraduate degree with relevance to environmental or urban studies. Preferably with previous training in a social science (i.e., business, sociology, political science, economics)

**Objectives and Contextualisation**

In this course we will explore the interdisciplinary field of Political Ecology. Political Ecology is a theoretical and methodological approach for the study of socio-ecological systems that focuses on conflict, power and the uneven distribution of environmental costs and benefits. This course will familiarize you with core concepts used by political ecologists at ICTA and teach you how to apply these concepts to your empirical material. We will introduce you to a profoundly new, critical way of looking at and understanding environmental problems, politics and policies.

By the end of this course you should be able to conduct, if you wish, a political ecology research project on your own. In addition, you will learn how to read and analyze social science, and you will improve your writing and argumentative skills.

**Competences**

- Apply knowledge of environmental and ecological economics to the analysis and interpretation of environmental problem areas.
- Communicate orally and in writing in English.
- Continue the learning process, to a large extent autonomously.

- Integrate knowledge and use it to make judgements in complex situations, with incomplete information, while keeping in mind social and ethical responsibilities.
- Solve problems in new or little-known situations within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to the field of study.
- Work in an international, multidisciplinary context.

## Learning Outcomes

1. Communicate orally and in writing in English.
2. Continue the learning process, to a large extent autonomously.
3. Develop a holistic vision of the relationship between the economy, politics and biophysical systems.
4. Integrate knowledge and use it to make judgements in complex situations, with incomplete information, while keeping in mind social and ethical responsibilities.
5. Know the different approaches to environmental problems on the part of political ecology.
6. Solve problems in new or little-known situations within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to the field of study.
7. Work in an international, multidisciplinary context.

## Content

The course has twelve classes. Each class, except the first one that will be welcoming and introductory, is normally based on two readings, which in most cases provide a theoretical and an empirical perspective. The empirical reading typically applies the concepts and ideas presented in the theoretical reading through a case study. We will discuss the readings as a group in class and we expect everyone to participate actively in the discussions and to have read the readings in advance. The lectures will combine powerpoint presentations by the teachers, discussion of readings, and breakout group work based on specific issues, videographic material, and other.

The course is divided into three parts, of four classes each. Part I is taught by Esteve Corbera and Sergio Villamayor-Tomas it will introduce political ecology, and some of the core thinkers and concepts of the field and an example from the way political ecology lenses have been applied to the study of community-based natural resource management. Part II is taught by Esteve Corbera and will introduce seminal themes within political ecology, mostly associated with rural contexts. Part III is taught by Panagiota Kotsila and it will focus on urban political ecology and feminist political ecology, exploring also issues of social and environmental justice in cities. The final Part IV will consist on one session reflecting on methods used in political ecology.

All articles and reading material for the class will be made available through the UAB Campus Virtual / Moodle online platform before the course starts, and will stay there up to three months after the end of the class, after which it will be deleted. You will have to visit the link regularly and check for changes in the platform, such as the document with the weekly assignments. The final exam will be also uploaded through the Moodle platform. Please check that you can and know how to use the online platform before the start of the course.

### PART I - WHAT IS POLITICAL ECOLOGY?

Week 1 - What is political ecology? (Esteve Corbera)

Robbins, P., 2004. Political versus Apolitical Ecologies. (Chapter 1) in *Political Ecology*, Blackwell.

LeBillon P., Duffy R., 2018. Conflict ecologies: Connecting political ecology and peace and conflict studies, *Journal of Political Ecology*, 25(1): 239-260. <https://doi.org/10.2458/v25i1.22704>

#### Optional

Blaikie, P. (2008) Epilogue: Towards a future for political ecology that works. *Geoforum*, 39: 765-772.

Rocheleau, D.E. (2008) Political ecology in the key of policy: from chains of explanation to webs of relation. *Geoforum*, 39(2): 716-727.

Week 2 - Political ecology in the making: The case of research on the commons 1.0? (Sergio Villamayor-Tomas)

Ostrom, E. 1990. *Governing The Commons*. Cambridge University Press, New York.

(pp. 58-82)

Cole, D. H., Epstein, G., & McGinnis, M. D. (2014). Digging deeper into Hardin's pasture: the complex institutional structure of 'the tragedy of the commons'. *Journal of Institutional Economics*, 10(3), 353-369.

Week 3 - Political ecology in the making: The case of research on the commons 2.0 (Sergio Villamayor-Tomas)

Agrawal, A. 1994. I don't need it but you can't have it: Politics on the commons. *Pastoral Development Network* 36:36-55.

Scholtens, Joeri. 2016. The elusive quest for access and collective action: North Sri Lankan fishers' thwarted struggles against a foreign trawler fleet. *International Journal of the Commons*, 10(2).

## PART II - SEMINAL THEMES WITHIN POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Week 4 - Ecological distribution conflicts (Esteve Corbera)

Martinez-Alier, J., 2009. Social metabolism, ecological distribution conflicts, and languages of valuation. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 20(1): 58-87.

Demaria, F., 2010. Shipbreaking at Alang-Sosiya (India): an ecological distribution conflict. *Ecological Economics*, 70(2): 250-260.

### Optional

Scheidel, A., Del Bene, D., Liu, J., Navas, G., Mingorría, S., Demaria, F., Avila, S., Roy, B., Ertör, I., Temper, L., Martínez-Alier, J., 2020. Environmental conflicts and defenders: A global overview. *Global Environmental Change*, 63: 102104.

Atkins E. & Hope J. C., 2021. Contemporary political ecologies of hydropower: insights from Bolivia and Brazil, *Journal of Political Ecology*, 28(1): 246-265. <https://doi.org/10.2458/jpe.2363>

Week 5 - The social construction of nature (Esteve Corbera)

Robbins, P., 2004. Challenges in Social Construction (Chapter 6). In *Political Ecology*, Blackwell

Sleto B., 2008, The Knowledge that Counts: Institutional Identities, Policy Science, and the Conflict Over Fire Management in the Gran Sabana, Venezuela. *World Development*, 36(10): 1938-1955.

### Optional

Davis, D.K., 2005. Indigenous knowledge and the desertification debate: problematising expert knowledge in North Africa. *Geoforum*, 36: 509-524.

Benjaminsen, T.A., Aune, J., Sidibé, D. (2010) A critical political ecology of cotton and soil fertility in Mali. *Geoforum*, 41: 647-656.

Week 6 - Conservation and control (Esteve Corbera)

Neumann R.P., 2015. 'Nature conservation'. In: The Routledge handbook of political ecology, Routledge.

Bocarejo, D., Ojeda, D., 2016. Violence and conservation: Beyond unintended consequences and unfortunate coincidences. *Geoforum*, 69: 176-183.

### Optional

Corbera, E., 2012. Problematizing REDD+ as an experiment in payments for ecosystem services. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 4: 612-619.

Bluwstein J., 2018. From colonial fortresses to neoliberal landscapes in Northern Tanzania: a biopolitical ecology of wildlife conservation. *Journal of Political Ecology* 25(1): 144-168.

<https://doi.org/10.2458/v25i1.22865>

### PART III - URBAN POLITICAL ECOLOGY

For the next four sessions, please choose 2 (compulsory) readings out of the 3 articles listed for each session.

Week 7 - Urban political ecology and urban nature's neoliberalisation (Panagiota Kotsila)

Heynen, N., Kaika, M., Swyngedouw, E. (2006) Urban Political Ecology: Politicizing the production of urban natures. In *In the Nature of Cities* (pp. 16-35). Routledge.

Kotsila, P., Anguelovski, I., Baró, F., Langemeyer, J., Sekulova, F. and JT Connolly, J., (2021). Nature-based solutions as discursive tools and contested practices in urban nature's neoliberalisation processes. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 4(2), pp.252-274.

#### *Optional*

AbdouMaliq Simone on Cities, Neoliberalism and the Commons, Theory, Culture & Society:

<https://www.theoryculturesociety.org/abdoumaliq-simone-on-cities-neoliberalism-and-the-commons/>

Week 8 - Green gentrification and environmental justice struggles (Panagiota Kotsila)

Gould, K., & Lewis, T. (2016) Green Gentrification: Urban Sustainability and the Struggle for Environmental Justice. Routledge. Chapter 1 and 2.

Anguelovski I. (2013) Beyond a livable and green neighborhood: Asserting control, sovereignty, and transgression in the Casc Antic of Barcelona. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37: 1012-1034.

#### *Optional*

Agyeman, J., Schlosberg, D., Craven, L., & Matthews, C. (2016). Trends and directions in environmental justice: from inequity to everyday life, community, and just sustainabilities. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 41, 321-340.

Week 9 - Biopolitics and public health in the city (Panagiota Kotsila)

Foucault, M. (2003) '17th March 1976' (chapter 11). In: *Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*. Macmillan.

Ortega, A. A. C. (2020). Exposing Necroburbia: Suburban Relocation, Necropolitics, and Violent Geographies in Manila. *Antipode*.

#### *Optional*

Zeiderman, Austin (2013). "Living dangerously: Biopolitics and urban citizenship in Bogotá, Colombia." *American ethnologist* 40, no. 1: 71-87.

Cole HVS, Anguelovski I, Baró F, Garcia Lamarca M, Kotsila P, Pérez-del-Pulgar, Shokry G, Triguero-Mas M. (2020). The Future of Cities: What the COVID-19 pandemic is teaching us about power and privilege, gentrification, and urban environmental justice. *Cities & Health*.

### PART III - FEMINIST POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Week 10 - Feminist Political Ecology in urban contexts (Panagiota Kotsila)

Heynen N. Urban political ecology III: The feminist and queer century. *Progress in Human Geography*. 2018;42(3):446-452.

Truelove, Y. (2011). (Re-)Conceptualizing water inequality in Delhi, India through a feminist political ecology framework. *Geoforum*, 42(2), 143-152.

*Optional*

Mollett, S. (2017). Feminist political ecology, postcolonial intersectionality, and the coupling of race and gender. (Chapter 9). In *Routledge handbook of gender and environment*, London and New York: Routledge, 146-158.

Doshi, S. (2017). Embodied urban political ecology: Five propositions. *Area*, 49(1), 125-128.

Week 11 - Feminist Political Ecology in rural contexts (Sergio Villamayor-Tomas)

Agarwal, B. (1992). The gender and environment debate: Lessons from India. *Feminist studies*, 18(1), 119-158.

Nightingale, A. J. (2011). Bounding difference: Intersectionality and the material production of gender, caste, class and environment in Nepal. *Geoforum*, 42(2), 153-162.

PART IV - POLITICAL ECOLOGY METHODS

Week 12 - Can you sum up a poem? A critical survey of political ecology methods (Sergio Villamayor-Tomas)

Rocheleau, D. (1995). Maps, numbers, text, and context: Mixing methods in feminist political ecology. *The Professional Geographer*, 47(4), 458-466.

Zimmerer, K. S. (2015). Methods and environmental science in political ecology. In *The Routledge handbook of political ecology* (pp. 172-190). Routledge.

Exam - 7th of February 2022

**Methodology**

See evaluation

Annotation: Within the schedule set by the centre or degree programme, 15 minutes of one class will be reserved for students to evaluate their lecturers and their courses or modules through questionnaires.

**Activities**

Title	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
Type: Directed			
Work in large group (classroom)	30	1.2	1, 5, 3, 2, 7
Work in small groups	6	0.24	1, 5, 3, 7
Type: Autonomous			
At home short assignment(s)	19	0.76	7
Readings	25	1	5, 3
Self-study	61	2.44	4, 6, 2

## Assessment

### 1. Weekly homework

Each week you will have to write a 250 words essay, focused on a question related to the readings for that week. You will have to hand in the essay to the teacher before the beginning of each class in digital format (via the Moodle platform, in principle). The assignment will be graded (1-10) and returned to you with comments at the start of the following class. If you want to discuss your assignments or our evaluation you can ask for an appointment with the correspondent teacher.

The average grade of the assignments will not be taken into account for the final grade, unless it is higher than the grade of your final exam, in which case it will count towards 50% of your overall grade. The weekly assignments will help you recognize weaknesses and improve your writing, given that the final exam will consist of questions with the same style as the weekly assignments.

Failure to deliver an essay will have an impact on your overall final grade: half a point will be taken out of your final grade for each essay left undelivered. In case you miss a class, you are sick, etc., you have to inform us in advance and then deliver the essay the following week or later as agreed with the teacher (it will not be graded though).

Auditors have also to write the weekly assignment but are exempt from the exam.

Weekly assignment evaluation criteria:

- Strength and effective development of the arguments used to support your position.
- Clear analytical connections to appropriate PE and PE-related concepts.
- Effective use of secondary information for both descriptive and analytical purposes.
- Ability to synthesise and make skillful use of information from various sources.
- Communication (clarity, concision).

### 2. Participation in class

Participation in class is encouraged, but it will not be evaluated or graded. Different people have different communication styles, some like to talk a lot, others less. We encourage discussion and participation with our teaching style, and we will try to encourage as many of you to speak up and position yourself with respect to the readings and the discussion. We run the discussions assuming you have done the readings, and you should be able to talk about the readings if and when prompted by the teacher.

### 3. Exam

This will take place on the 24th of January and it will count for 100% of your final grade if it is higher than the average of your essays, or 50% if your essay average is higher. The material under examination will consist of all the materials read and discussed during the semester. The style of the questions will be similar to those handed in the weekly homework, i.e. short questions which you will have 250 words to answer. The exam will be "take-home", and you will be expected to use whatever resources you wish to answer the questions with. It will be uploaded in the Campus Virtual platform of the class at 9 a.m the day of the exam and should be handed in by email to the course instructors by 6 p.m. the same day. The exams will be graded anonymously.

## Assessment Activities

Title	Weighting	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
Final exam	50%	3	0.12	1, 5, 3, 4, 6, 2
Weekly assignments	50%	6	0.24	1, 4, 6, 7

## Bibliography

See Contents section

## **Software**

None