

Political Ecology

Code: 42406
ECTS Credits: 6

2024/2025

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

Contact

Name: Sergio Villamayor Tomas

Email: sergio.villamayor@uab.cat

Teachers

Panagiota Kotsila

Brian Thomas Rosa

Esteve Corbera Elizalde

Sergio Villamayor Tomas

Teaching groups languages

You can view this information at the [end](#) of this document.

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

This course explores 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. We will familiarize you with core concepts used by political ecologists 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 the 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 is divided into three parts of four classes each. Part I is taught by Sergio Villamayor-Tomas and it will introduce political ecology, and some of the core thinkers and concepts of the field. It will also have examples of how political ecology has 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 and conservation. Part III is taught by Panagiota Kotsila, Brian Rosa and Sergio Villamayor-Tomas, and will focus on urban political ecology and feminist political ecology, exploring also issues of social and environmental justice in cities. Part IV will consist of one session focused on the research methods used in political ecology.

All readings for the class will be made available through the UAB Campus Virtual / Moodle online platform before the course starts, and they 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? (All) - 21 October. This class will be from 3 to 6PM

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

Forsyth, T. (2008). Political ecology and the epistemology of social justice. *Geoforum*, 39(2), 756-764.

Optional

Sultana, F. "Political ecology 1: From margins to center." *Progress in Human Geography* 45, no. 1 (2021): 156-165.

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) - 28 October

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) - 4 November This class will be from 3 to 6PM

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) - 11 November

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

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.

Optional

Atkins E. & Hope J. C., 2021. Contemporary political ecologies of hydropower: insights from Bolivia and Brazil, *Journal of Political Ecology*, 28(1): 246-265.

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

Week 5 - The social construction of nature (Esteve Corbera)- 18 November

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

Sletto 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

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

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

Week 6 - Conservation and control (Esteve Corbera) - 25 November

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

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.

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

Week 7 - Neoliberal conservation (Esteve Corbera) - 2 December

Apostolopoulou E., Chatzimentor A., Maestre-Andrés S., Requena M., Bormpoudakis D. 2021. Reviewing 15 years of research on neoliberal conservation. *Geoforum* 124, pp. 236-256.

Igoe J. and Brockington D. 2007. Neoliberal conservation: a brief introduction. *Conservation and society* 5(4), 432-449.

Optional

Corbera, E., Lave, R., Robertson, M., Maestre-Andrés, S. (2021) [Neoliberal policy refugia: The death and life of biodiversity offsetting in the European Union and its member states](#). *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 46(2): 255-269.

Apostolopoulou E. and Adams W.M. 2017. Biodiversity offsetting and conservation: reframing nature to save it. *Oryx* 51(1):23-31.

Week 8 - Climate change vulnerability & adaptation (Esteve Corbera) - 9 December

Adger, W.N. (2006) Vulnerability. *Global Environmental Change*, 16 (3): 268-281.

Eriksen, S.H., Nightingale, A.J., Eakin, H. (2015) Reframing adaptation: The political nature of climate change adaptation. *Global Environmental Change*, 35: 523-533.

Optional

Chakraborty, R., C. Rampini, and P. Y. Sherpa. 2023. Mountains of inequality: encountering the politics of climate adaptation across the Himalaya. *Ecology and Society* 28(4): 6.

Sultana, F. (2014) Gendering Climate Change: Geographical Insights. *The Professional Geographer*, 66:3, 372-381

PART III - URBAN POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Week 9 - Urban political ecology and urban environmental justice struggles (Brian Rosa) - 16 December

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.

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

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

Lindner, C. and Rosa, B. (2017) Deconstructing the High Line: Postindustrial Urbanism and the Rise of the Elevated Park. Chapter 1. Rutgers University Press.

Week 10 - Feminist Political Ecology in urban contexts (Panagiota Kotsila) - 13 January

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

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.

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

Week 11 - Urban commons and coproduction processes with the state (Sergio Villamayor-Tomas) - 20 January

Becker S., Naumann M., Moss T. 2017. Between coproduction and commons: understanding initiatives to reclaim urban energy provision in Berlin and Hamburg. *Urban Research and Practice* 10(1), 63-85. DOI: 10.1080/17535069.2016.1156735

Bianchi, I., Pera, M., Calvet-Mir, L., Villamayor-Tomás S., Ferreri, M., Reguero, N., Maestre Andrés, S. 2022. Urban commons and the local state: co-production between enhancement and co-optation. *Territory, Politics, Governance*. 10.1080/21622671.2022.2108491

PART IV - POLITICAL ECOLOGY METHODS

Week 12 - Can you sum up a poem? A critical survey of political ecology methods (Sergio Villamayor-Tomas) - 27 January

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 - 29th of January 2025

Activities and Methodology

Title	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
Type: Directed			
Work in large group (classroom)	30	1.2	1, 2, 3, 5, 7
Work in small groups	6	0.24	1, 3, 5, 7
Type: Supervised			
Readings	30	1.2	3, 5

Type: Autonomous			
At home short assignment(s)	19	0.76	7
Self-study	56	2.24	2, 4, 6

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.

Assessment

Continuous Assessment Activities

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

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 correspondent instructor before the beginning of each class in digital format (via the Campus Virtual platform, in principle). All assignments except for 4 of them (see below) 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.

Four of the assignments will not be graded or assessed by the instructors. Instead, they will be assessed through in-class interaction: the class will be split into 4 groups, each of which will be responsible for writing and presenting their essay in one session that will be agreed on the first day of class. All the students in those 4 sessions who are not part of the presenting group will still need to write and submit their essay and use it to critically comment on the response of the group in class. The discussion will take place during the first 20 mts. of the corresponding session and everybody will be expected to participate.

The average grade of the assignments will not count towards 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. Essays delivered late without proper justification (sickness, or similar) will not be accepted or commented and will not be included in the overall grade calculations. In case you miss a class, you are sick, etc., you should inform the instructors in advance and then deliver the essay the following week or later as agreed (it will not be graded though).

Auditors should also 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 synthesize and make skilful use of information from various sources.
- Communication (clarity, concision).

This module does not offer Single Assessment, as agreed with the coordination of the degree and with the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Sciences.

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 when prompted by the teacher.

3. Exam

This will take place on the 29th of January 2025, and it will count towards 100% of your final grade if it is higher than the average of your essays, or 50% if your essay average is higher. This rule does not apply if you get less than 50% of all points available in the exam. If you fail the exam you will need to retake it (see point 4 below). The exam will be an in-class, hand-written exam and you will be allowed to bring (non-digital) notes with you. The exam will last 2 hours and include questions related to the essays, mandatory readings, and in-class discussions. Being familiar with the optional readings may be important to aspire to a high mark. The style of the questions will be like those handed in the weekly homework, i.e. short questions with an expected answer of approx. 250 words. We can accommodate to special cases if students need more time or adjustments to the exam conditions. Please contact the course coordinator at the beginning of the module if you may need such adjustments. The exams will be graded anonymously.

4. Not evaluable status and exam make up

Students who do not submit at least half of the essays and do it on time will not be evaluated.

Students who fail the exam (less than 50% of all available points) will have a chance to retake it two weeks after the exam grades are posted. If they fail the exam for second time, they will fail the module. Passing the exam is necessary to pass the course.

Bibliography

See Contents section

Software

None

Language list

Name	Group	Language	Semester	Turn
(TEM) Theory (master)	1	English	first semester	morning-mixed