

Biocultural Diversity

Code: 43058
ECTS Credits: 6

2024/2025

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

Contact

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Teachers

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Teaching groups languages

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

Prerequisites

Students are expected to show interest in the intersections between biological and cultural diversity, and the social dimensions of conservation policy and practice. The course will build upon key concepts from different scholarly traditions, such as critical geography, political ecology, cultural anthropology, ethnobiology, or ecological economics. Some general background knowledge of the literature in these fields would be very beneficial, although is not strictly required. Some basic knowledge of conservation science would be recommended (e.g., general notions of conservation history, community-based conservation), since mainstream approaches to conservation will be critically examined during the course. English knowledge (both read and spoken) is required for this course.

Objectives and Contextualisation

The term "biocultural diversity" refers to the spatial overlap and interlinkages between biological and cultural diversity. There is growing evidence that some of the most ecologically undisturbed landscapes in our planet overlap with areas owned, inhabited and/or managed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Moreover, evidence is also growing that this overlap is by no means random, but rather it can be explained through the intricate relations between biological diversity at all its levels and cultural diversity in all its manifestations. As such, there is well-established evidence that losses of biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity are inextricably linked and driven by the same pressures.

In this course, we will explore biocultural diversity, what it is, why it is important and what factors can result in its erosion and maintenance. The course is divided in sessions with different topics related to current biocultural scholarship. Most lectures will combine theory with practical applications, use of support

video-graphic materials to illustrate the complex intersections between biological and cultural diversity. We will also present real-world case studies from ongoing research to exemplify the different challenges of doing field-based research with a biocultural lens. We will use debates, ethical dilemmas and environmental dispute resolution exercises to highlight how biocultural approaches to conservation often imply finding compromises between conflicting goals, views and values. At a methodological level, we will also introduce several tools for conducting literature reviews and meta-analysis of a given research topic (e.g., Web of Science, Scopus), as well as provide a general introduction to different field-based research methods in ethnobiology.

Competences

- Analyse how the Earth functions on a global scale in order to understand and interpret environmental changes on the global and local scales.
- Communicate and justify conclusions clearly and unambiguously to both specialised and non-specialised audiences.
- Integrate knowledge and use it to make judgements in complex situations, with incomplete information, while keeping in mind social and ethical responsibilities.
- Seek out information in the scientific literature using appropriate channels, and use this information to formulate and contextualise research in environmental sciences.
- 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. "Describe the concepts related to the idea of "biocultural diversity. "
2. Communicate and justify conclusions clearly and unambiguously to both specialised and non-specialised audiences.
3. Express ideas and opinions on a complex topic (regarding (relationships of human groups and protection of biodiversity).
4. Seek out information in the scientific literature using appropriate channels, and use this information to formulate and contextualise research in environmental sciences.
5. Solve problems in new or little-known situations within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to the field of study.
6. Work in an international, multidisciplinary context.
7. Work with different case studies on the concept of biocultural diversity.

Content

The term 'biocultural' is often used as a qualifier in a broad spectrum of contexts and endeavors, particularly in the fields of cultural heritage and ecosystem management. 'Biocultural relations', 'biocultural indicators', or 'biocultural assets' are just a handful of examples of the wide array of etymological and epistemic manifestations that are often brought together under the umbrella concept of 'biocultural diversity', often described as the total variety exhibited by the world's inter-related natural and cultural systems. Although the meaning of the term 'biocultural' is still open to scrutiny, and subject to interpretation, it essentially entails recognizing the symbiotic and mutually enriching relationships between humans and the environment, as part of global efforts to reduce the widening nature-culture divide. Its use often responds to a deliberate attempt to reflect the tightly interwoven links between nature and culture as expressed in land and seascapes all over the world. Not surprisingly, biocultural thinking is becoming a major

trend in applied ecology, ethnobiology and related disciplines, and is gaining traction as an effective and just model for conservation policy and practice.

The contents of this course will provide a broad overview of current topics in the study of human-nature relations through a biocultural lens, recognizing the culturally rooted dimensions of complex social-ecological systems. All the lessons highlight, drawing on recent methodological and theoretical developments, that biocultural thinking is critical to sustaining both the biophysical and sociocultural components of dynamic, interacting and interdependent social-ecological systems. The different lessons are distributed as follows:

Understanding human-nature interactions through the lenses of historical ecology and ethnobiology

Intersections between biological and cultural diversity

The domestication of organisms, landscapes and (socio)cultural niche construction

Addressing threats to Indigenous and local knowledge systems

Synergies and tensions between western and Indigenous knowledge systems

Approaching conservation from a biocultural perspective

The contributions of local knowledge to climate research

Advancing Indigenous Environmental Justice through a decolonized research agenda

Biocultural approaches to health

The diverse collection of lessons and themes covered in this course will essentially highlight the myriad ways in which biocultural approaches foster transformations towards just, equitable and sustainable futures, and lead to increasing appreciation of the interwoven feedbacks between ecological states and human well-being.

Activities and Methodology

| Title | Hours | ECTS | Learning Outcomes |
|---|-------|------|-------------------|
| Type: Directed | | | |
| Documentary film visualization and debate | 3 | 0.12 | 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 |
| Practical lectures | 13.5 | 0.54 | 2, 3, 5, 6 |
| Role play debriefing | 1 | 0.04 | 3, 5, 6 |
| Theoretical lectures | 13.5 | 0.54 | 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 |

Type: Supervised

| | | | |
|--|----|-----|---------|
| Personal work following instructions from teachers | 20 | 0.8 | 4, 6, 7 |
|--|----|-----|---------|

Type: Autonomous

| | | | |
|--|----|------|---------------|
| Essay writing and oral presentation | 28 | 1.12 | 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 |
| Search and reading of scientific texts | 66 | 2.64 | 4, 6, 7 |

The module consists in 12 sessions of 3 hours each. Sessions are divided in two parts. During the first part (1.5h), students attend a lecture and discuss associated readings (see program below). Students are expected to have read one article associated to each lecture before the class. During the second part (1.5h), students will learn about the different methods used to disentangle the interwoven relationships between biological and cultural diversity, as well as basic negotiation skills for resolving conservation conflicts. They will also learn how to write an essay in preparation for the final essay. These sessions are designed to offer students opportunities for horizontal knowledge sharing and active learning through various tools and methods, as detailed in the evaluation section below. Specifically, horizontal learning will be encouraged through two peer-review sessions of students' essays. Additionally, the integration of classroom material will be facilitated by engaging students in role-playing activities, promoting active participation in their learning process. Throughout this module, active learning will be further enhanced by providing ample opportunities for students to participate in discussions about the material covered in class.

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

Continous Assessment Activities

| Title | Weighting | Hours | ECTS | Learning Outcomes |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-------|------|-------------------|
| Active participation in class | 20% | 0 | 0 | 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 |
| Environmental negotiation (role-play) | 30% | 2 | 0.08 | 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 |
| Essay | 30% | 0 | 0 | 2, 3, 4, 7 |
| Oral presentation of the essay | 20% | 3 | 0.12 | 3, 7 |

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.

Students will be evaluated according to:

- Active participation in class (20%), showing understanding of the scientific topics discussed and the readings, as well as the discussions held in class. Teachers will keep a written record of all in-class attendance and interventions, and students will be evaluated based on whether they participate pro-actively with relevant, and timely contributions that move the conversation forward. All sessions will feature a short discussion of the assigned literature for each of the sessions, where the students will be provided with a space to critically reflect on the main ideas from the background readings. In-person

attendance to the course is mandatory. Recuperation: If a student misses a class, the student will have to inform the teachers and write a 500-word critical essay on the three readings for the missed class (to be delivered within a week after the missed class).

- Negotiation role play (30%). The performance of each student will be evaluated during the role play simulation, based on three main criteria: (a) the breadth and depth of the scientific arguments deployed during the negotiation; (b) the student's ability to reach optimal outcomes for the stakeholder they represent in the negotiation; and (c) use of the different negotiation techniques taught in the preparatory session before the class. Recuperation: If the student misses this session, the student will have to inform the teachers and write a 1000-word critical essay on a selection of readings (to be delivered within a week after the missed class).
- Essay (30%), connecting the discourses of 10-15 Indigenous Peoples' leaders with the scholarly literature on biocultural diversity.
- Short oral presentation (20%) of the essay during the last day of the course. Recuperation: If the student misses this session, the student will have to inform the teachers and send a video of the presentation

Not evaluable: If the student does not provide any essay and does not attend the session of the negotiation role play (or does not present any recuperation essay in case of absence to this session), the student will not be evaluated.

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Software

None specifically needed.

Language list

| Name | Group | Language | Semester | Turn |
|-----------------------|-------|----------|----------------|-----------|
| (TEm) Theory (master) | 1 | English | first semester | afternoon |