

Political Ecology

Code: 42406
ECTS Credits: 6

2025/2026

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

Contact

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Teachers

Panagiota Kotsila

Marina Requena Mora

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 consists of twelve classes. Each class, except the first-which will serve as an introduction-is typically based on two readings that provide both theoretical and empirical perspectives. The empirical reading generally applies the concepts and ideas from the theoretical reading through a case study. We will discuss the readings together in class, and we expect everyone to participate actively in the discussions and read the assigned articles in advance. The lectures will combine presentations by the instructors, group discussions of the readings, and breakout sessions focusing on specific issues, videographic material, and other resources.

The course is divided into three parts of four classes each. Sergio Villamayor-Tomas and Esteve Corbera teach Part I, which 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 and will include one session focused on the research methods used in political ecology. Marina Requena and Esteve Corbera will teach Part II, which will introduce seminal themes within political ecology, including the relationship between wealth-growth and environment; the social construction of nature; and the politics and social challenges behind global biodiversity conservation approaches. Panagiota Kotsila and Sergio Villamayor-Tomas will teach Part III, which will focus on urban and feminist political ecology, exploring also issues of social and environmental justice in cities.

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. 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? (Sergio Villamayor-Tomas & Esteve Corbera) - 20th October 2025.

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) - 27th October 2025

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) - 3rd November 2025

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).

Week 4 - Can you sumup a poem? A critical survey of political ecology methods (Sergio Villamayor-Tomas & Esteve Corbera) - 10th November 2025

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.

PART II - SEMINAL THEMES WITHIN POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Week 5 - Social metabolism, affluence, and environmental impact: Who is "too poor" or "too rich" to be green? (Marina Requena) - 17th November 2025

Martinez-Alier, J. (1995). The environment as a luxury good or "too poor to be green"? *Ecological Economics*, 13(1), 1-10.

Requena-i-Mora, M., & Brockington, D. (2021). Seeing environmental injustices: the mechanics, devices and assumptions of environmental sustainability indices and indicators. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 28(1).

Optional

Inglehart, R., 1995. Public support for environmental protection: objective problems and subjective values in 43 societies. *PS. Polit. Sci. Polit.* 28, 57-72. <https://doi.org/10.2307/420583>.

Martinez-Alier, J. (2004). Ecological distribution conflicts and indicators of sustainability. *International Journal of Political Economy*, 34(1), 13-30

Week 6 - Public support for environmental protection (Marina Requena) - 24th November 2025

Requena-i-Mora, M., Brockington, D., & Fleischman, F. (2025). Eco-paradox USA: The relationships between economic growth and environmental concern generally, and by different income groups. *Ecological Economics*, 235, 108648.

Martinez-Alier, Joan (2025) "The environmentalism of the poor: its origins and spread." A companion to global environmental history: 479-492.

Optional

Martinez-Alier, J (2024) 1: Introduction: comparative political ecology - the EJAtlas, geographical and thematic perspectives in Martinez-Alier Land, water air and freedom, Edwar Edgar DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035312771>

Gugushvili, D. (2021). Public attitudes toward economic growth versus environmental sustainability dilemma: evidence from Europe. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 62(3), 224-240.

Week 7 - The social construction of nature (Esteve Corbera)- 1st December 2025

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 8 - Conservation and control in the neoliberal era (Esteve Corbera) - 12th December 2025

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

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.

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.

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.

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

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

PART III - URBAN POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Week 9 - Urban political ecology and urban environmental justice struggles (Panagiota Kotsila) - 15th December 2025

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.

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

Optional

Tzaninis, Y., Mandler, T., Kaika, M., & Keil, R. (2023). "Introduction: Urban political ecology for a climate emergency". In *Turning up the heat*. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press. Retrieved Oct 3, 2023, from <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526168016.00007>

Giovanna Di Chiro (2018). "Canaries in the Anthropocene: storytelling as degentrification in urban community sustainability," *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, Springer; Association of Environmental Studies and Sciences, vol. 8(4), pages 526-538.

Week 10 - Feminist Political Ecology in urban contexts (Panagiota Kotsila) - 12th January 2026

Doshi, S. (2017). Embodied urban 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.

Week 11 - Urban commons and coproduction processes with the state (Sergio Villamayor-Tomas) - 19th January 2026

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

Week 12 - Book Review (all instructors) - 26th January 2026

EXAM - 28th January 2026

Activities and Methodology

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: Supervised

Readings	30	1.2	5, 3
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Type: Autonomous

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

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

Continous Assessment Activities

Title	Weighting	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
Final exam	50%	3	0.12	1, 5, 3, 6, 4, 2
Weekly assignments	50%	6	0.24	1, 6, 4, 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. The evaluation is based on three main items:

1. Weekly in-class essays (30% of final grade)

Each week you will have to write 100 words "educated opinion essay" in class, focused on a question related to the readings for that week. At the beginning of each session the instructor will formulate the question, and then you will have 15 minutes to write the essay, individually. Then we will go through your responses together in class. Instructors will collect the essays and will use them for evaluation. To evaluate the essays, every week the instructors will randomly select four out of the collected assignments and grade them. If you want to discuss your assignments or our evaluation, you can ask for an appointment with the correspondent teacher.

Failure to attend write the essays 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 should inform the instructors in advance and then deliver the essay later as agreed (it will not be graded though).

Auditors should also write the weekly assignment but are exempt from the book review and the exam (more information on these below).

The essays will be graded based on:

- Correctness, i.e., your ability to properly refer to key concepts from the reading.
- Strength and effective development of the argument used to support your position.
- Application of theoretical concepts through concrete examples, demonstrating your ability to connect course readings with real-world cases and practical instances that illustrate political ecology dynamics.
- Clear analytical connections to appropriate PE and PE-related concepts.
- Communication (clarity, concision).

2. Exam (40% of final grade)

This will take place on Wednesday, 28th of January 2026. 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.

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.

3. Book review (30% of the final grade)

Instructors will post at the beginning of the course a series of books to write a two-page book review (Times New Roman, 12 pt, single space). The instructions of the book review will be presented in the first session of the course. You will need to pick a book one week after the third session of the course. We will devote the last day of the course to group presentations of the reviews. Additionally, you will need to answer questions from the instructors (all of them will be present). The session will have three parts. 1. Instructors will formulate a series of questions to the groups based on the books they have proposed. 2. Students will convene to prepare answers to the questions. 3. The groups will present their book review and answer the questions one by one. All members of the group will be expected to participate in the presentation and answering the questions. If there are issues regarding contribution to the group work you will need to write the coordinator of the course so we can assess and adjust gradings if necessary.

IA Disclosure

In this course, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies is not permitted at any stage. Any assignment that includes AI-generated content will be considered a breach of academic integrity and may result in a partial or total penalty on the grade for the activity, or more serious sanctions in severe cases.

Bibliography

See Contents section

Software

None

Groups and Languages

Please note that this information is provisional until 30 November 2025. You can check it through this [link](#). To consult the language you will need to enter the CODE of the subject.

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