

Degree programme	Type	Course
Interdisciplinary Studies in Environmental, Economic and Social Sustainability	OP	1

Contact lecturer

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Teaching staff

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Group languages

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

Prerequisites

Students are expected to have an interest in the intersections between biological and cultural diversity, as well as in the social dimensions of conservation science, policy, and practice. Throughout the course, students will engage with key concepts drawn from a range of academic traditions, including critical geography, political ecology, cultural anthropology, ethnobiology, and ecological economics. Some familiarity with the scientific literature in these fields would be beneficial, although it is not a strict prerequisite. A basic understanding of conservation science (e.g., general knowledge of the history of conservation or the fundamental principles of community-based conservation) is also recommended, as the course critically examines the social and ecological outcomes of different conservation approaches. Proficiency in English, both written and spoken, is required for this course.

Objectives

The term "biocultural diversity" refers to the spatial overlap and interconnections between biological diversity and cultural diversity. A growing body of evidence shows that some of the world's most ecologically intact landscapes coincide with territories that are owned, inhabited, and/or managed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. There is also increasing consensus that this overlap is far from coincidental and can be explained by the deep interrelationships between biological and cultural diversity. In this regard, robust scientific evidence demonstrates that the loss of biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity is inextricably linked and driven by many of the same underlying pressures.

This course explores the concept of biocultural diversity: what it is, why it matters, and the factors that contribute to either its erosion or its maintenance. It also examines how biocultural diversity can be sustained and how biocultural approaches are increasingly being incorporated into both scientific research and public policy.

The course is organised around thematic sessions covering key topics in contemporary biocultural research.

Most classes combine theoretical foundations with practical applications and audiovisual materials to illustrate the complex relationships between biological and cultural diversity. Students will also engage with real-world case studies drawn from ongoing research projects to examine the methodological, ethical, and practical challenges of conducting fieldwork from a biocultural perspective. Through debates, ethical dilemmas, and socio-environmental conflict resolution exercises, students will explore how biocultural approaches to conservation often require navigating trade-offs among competing goals, worldviews, and values.

From a methodological perspective, the course provides an introduction to a range of field research methods commonly used in ethnobiology and related disciplines, as well as to biodiversity databases and spatial datasets widely employed in biocultural research. Students will also develop skills in writing for impact by learning how to tailor research outputs to different audiences and objectives, and how to select the most appropriate communication strategies to maximise research impact.

Learning outcomes

- CA44 (Communicate complex ideas and opinions about biocultural diversity, its challenges and conservation approaches, to expert and amateur audiences.) Communicate complex ideas and opinions about biocultural diversity, its challenges and conservation approaches, to expert and amateur audiences.
- CA45 (Critically evaluate the ethical and social implications of interventions in contexts of biocultural diversity.) Critically evaluate the ethical and social implications of interventions in contexts of biocultural diversity.
- KA45 (Describe the concept of biocultural diversity, the intersections between biological, linguistic and cultural diversity, and human-nature interactions analysed from historical ecology and ethnobiology.) Describe the concept of biocultural diversity, the intersections between biological, linguistic and cultural diversity, and human-nature interactions analysed from historical ecology and ethnobiology.
- KA46 (Describe biocultural approaches to conservation and health, as well as mechanisms for maintaining biocultural diversity (land and cultural rights) in relation to environmental justice and decolonisation.) Describe biocultural approaches to conservation and health, as well as mechanisms for maintaining biocultural diversity (land and cultural rights) in relation to environmental justice and decolonisation.
- KA47 (Explain the threats to indigenous and local knowledge systems, and the synergies and tensions with scientific knowledge systems, including the role of digital technologies and their risks and opportunities.) Explain the threats to indigenous and local knowledge systems, and the synergies and tensions with scientific knowledge systems, including the role of digital technologies and their risks and opportunities.
- SA42 (Select information in the scientific literature to support and contextualise research on biocultural diversity.) Select information in the scientific literature to support and contextualise research on biocultural diversity.
- SA43 (Determine strategies for the co-production of knowledge with local communities in biocultural diversity studies.) Determine strategies for the co-production of knowledge with local communities in biocultural diversity studies.
- SA44 (Select relevant community and institutional actors in biocultural diversity and conservation projects.) Select relevant community and institutional actors in biocultural diversity and conservation projects.

Contents

The term "biocultural" is widely used as a qualifier across a broad range of contexts and initiatives, particularly in the fields of cultural heritage and ecosystem management. Expressions such as "biocultural relationships", "biocultural indicators", and "biocultural heritage" are just a few examples of the diverse conceptual and epistemological manifestations commonly grouped under the umbrella concept of biocultural diversity, often understood as the total variety exhibited by the world's interconnected natural and cultural systems. Although the meaning of the term biocultural remains open to debate and interpretation, it fundamentally entails recognising the symbiotic and mutually reinforcing relationships between people and the environment as part of broader efforts to overcome the long-standing separation between nature and culture. Its use generally reflects a deliberate attempt to acknowledge the deeply intertwined connections between nature and culture as

they are expressed across terrestrial and marine landscapes worldwide. It is therefore unsurprising that biocultural thinking is gaining increasing prominence in applied ecology, ethnobiology, and related disciplines, where it is emerging as an effective and socially just framework for conservation policy and practice.

The course provides a broad overview of contemporary perspectives on human-nature relationships through a biocultural lens, recognising the cultural dimensions of complex social-ecological systems. Drawing on recent theoretical and methodological advances, each session highlights the central role of biocultural thinking in sustaining both the biophysical and the sociocultural dimensions of dynamic, interactive, and interdependent social-ecological systems. The course covers the following topics:

- Understanding human-nature interactions through the lenses of historical ecology and ethnobiology.
- Intersections between biological, linguistic, and cultural diversity.
- Threats to Indigenous and local knowledge systems.
- Synergies and tensions between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems.
- Biocultural approaches to conservation.
- Environmental justice, decolonisation, and Indigenous Peoples.
- Sustaining biocultural diversity: land rights and cultural rights.
- Biocultural approaches to health.
- Contributions of local knowledge to climate change research.
- Risks and opportunities of digital technologies and participatory mapping in community-based research.

Taken together, these themes illustrate the many ways in which biocultural approaches can foster transformations towards more just, equitable, and sustainable futures. The course also encourages students to develop a deeper appreciation of the feedbacks between ecological conditions and human well-being, as well as the ethical dilemmas involved in applying biocultural approaches in both research and practice.

Learning activities and methodology

Title	Hours	ECTS	Learning outcomes
Preparation of the written assignment and oral presentation	27	1.08	CA44, CA45
Practical lessons	13	0.52	KA45, KA46, KA47
Independent work following the instructor's guidance	18	0.72	SA42
Role-play exercise debrief	2	0.08	CA44, SA43, SA44
Documentary film screening and debate	2	0.08	CA44, CA45
Theory lectures	13	0.52	KA45, KA46, KA47
Searching for and reading scientific articles	45	1.8	SA42, SA44

The module consists of 15 two-hour sessions. In general, each session is divided into two parts. During the first hour, students will attend a lecture and engage in a discussion of the assigned readings. Students are expected to come to class having completed the required readings in advance.

During the second hour, students will be introduced to a range of research methods used to investigate the complex relationships between biological and cultural diversity, as well as to basic negotiation skills for addressing conservation conflicts. They will also develop skills in writing for impact by tailoring their communication to different audiences, including policymakers, academic audiences, and the general public, in preparation for the course's assessed final essay.

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	Weight	Hours	ECTS	Learning outcomes
Environmental negotiation (role play)	30%	1	0.04	CA44, SA43, SA44
Oral presentation	20%	4	0.16	CA44, CA45, SA42
Essay	30%	0	0	KA45, KA46, KA47, SA42
Active participation in class	20%	0	0	CA44, KA47

This course does not offer a Single Assessment option, in accordance with the agreement reached by the Master's Programme Coordination and the Faculty of Science Academic Office.

Assessment is based on the following components:

Active class participation (20%). Students are expected to demonstrate a sound understanding of the scientific topics discussed in class and of the assigned readings, as well as active engagement in class discussions. The instructor will keep a record of attendance and participation, assessing the relevance and quality of each student's contributions. Every session includes a discussion of the required readings, providing students with an opportunity to critically reflect on the main ideas. Attendance is compulsory. Students who are unable to attend a class must notify the instructor in advance and submit a 500-word critical reflection on the assigned materials within one week of the missed session.

Negotiation simulation (30%). Students' performance during the negotiation exercise will be assessed according to three criteria: (a) the breadth and depth of the scientific arguments presented during the negotiation; (b) their ability to achieve the best possible outcome for the stakeholder they represent; and (c) the effective application of the negotiation techniques introduced during the preparatory session.

Writing for impact (30%). Students will submit either an academic article, a newspaper or magazine article, or a policy brief on a topic of their choice related to the themes addressed throughout the course.

Oral presentation (20%). A short oral presentation of the final written assignment will be delivered during one of the final sessions of the course.

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools is not permitted at any stage of this course. Any assignment containing AI-generated content will be considered a breach of academic integrity and may result in a partial or complete loss of marks for the assessment, as well as additional disciplinary measures in serious cases.

In accordance with UAB regulations, any form of plagiarism, including the partial or complete reproduction of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, constitutes a serious academic offence. Any irregularity that may lead to a significant distortion of the assessment process will result in a mark of zero for the corresponding assessment task, regardless of any disciplinary proceedings that may follow. Repeated irregularities in different assessment activities within the same course will result in a final course grade of zero.

Students who do not meet the minimum assessment requirements may be eligible to complete a resit assessment under the conditions and deadlines established by the instructor. The resit will consist of an in-person oral examination covering the course contents and will take place on the date and time scheduled by the Master's programme. Eligibility for the resit requires prior participation in the continuous assessment activities. The specific format of the resit assessment will be tailored to the learning outcomes that have not yet been achieved.

Bibliography

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Software

No specific software is required.

Course groups and languages

The information provided is provisional until November 30. After this date, you will be able to consult the language of each group through this [link](#). To access the information, you will need to enter the course CODE

Type of teaching	Group	Language	Semester	Shift
(TEm) Theory (master)	1	English	second semester	afternoon