POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Instructors

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Objectives

The course offers a critical introduction to the interdisciplinary field of Political Ecology (PE), the study of the ways in which power affects socio-environmental relations and processes. The course will offer a global view of the current ecological crisis and its political, economic, cultural and epistemological dimensions and interconnections. Drawing from a range of critical approaches, the course will examine key concepts and theoretical frameworks that underlie the contemporary political ecological critique of capitalism and development. Students will learn to think politically about environmental problems, and to critically engage with “apolitical” approaches that explain environmental issues in terms of population, bio-physical, or human-behavioural drivers.

Structure

The course is broken into two main parts. In the first part, we will focus on key themes that have been critically studied from a PE perspective, starting to discern central premises and main strands of PE through central debates. Case-study articles will be used to illustrate how this analysis is ‘put to work’ in a real case. The second part will introduce key concepts and ideas that are mobilised in PE research. It will do so by analysing how some key actors in global environmental governance - namely, capital, the state, development agencies, and social movements - “see” nature and seek to shape environment-society relations.

Each class’s readings consist of two required texts (journal articles or academic book chapters). There are also additional (suggested) readings for most topics. While we do not expect you to read all additional readings, we will address some key ideas raised in them. All readings will be made available in digital format beforehand.
**Classes** will follow a seminar format with a combination of lecture and discussion of the assigned readings. This might also include discussion in small groups, debates, games, use of audiovisual material, and other activities.

**Assignments and evaluation**

This class does not require a final exam. Students will be evaluated on the basis of weekly responses to the readings, and of a final group-written review and oral presentation.

1. **Responses to the readings**

Before each class, starting from week 2, you will be asked to hand in an assignment where you will answer one question about the readings (250 words). You should hand in the assignment to us at the beginning of each class. If after the class you wish to resubmit the assignment, you can do so in the following class. These will be assessed and count towards the final grade (60% of the overall grade). These will be returned to you at the end of the course.

2. **Group presentations and book reviews**

The course will require reading and critically reviewing a book. The class will be divided into four groups; students in each group will choose a book from the list below (first come, first served), read it and discuss it among themselves. Each group will a) write collectively a book review; and b) give a 20 minute presentation of the book to the class (last session). Both the review and the presentation will be evaluated and count towards the final grade (20% and 20% respectively). Instructions for writing the review and preparing the presentation will be provided in advance.

**Programme outline**

1. **Introduction to Political Ecology (Marta & Diego)**

   **Required readings:**


   **Further readings:**

Part one: Key themes in PE (Marta Conde)

2. Capitalism and the commodity frontiers

Required readings:


Additional readings:


3. Feminism and feminist political ecologies

Required readings:


Additional readings:


4. Culture and power in PE

Required readings:


Additional readings:


5. Politics of science and knowledge

Required readings:


Additional readings:


Part two: Ways of seeing and making nature (Diego Andreucci)

6. Capital: Nature and dispossession

Required readings:


Additional readings:


7. The State: Regulation and environment-making

**Required readings:**


**Additional readings:**


8. Development institutions: Governmentality and nature’s legibility

**Required readings:**


**Additional readings:**


9. Social movements: From ‘environmental conflicts’ to counter-hegemony

**Required readings:**


**Additional readings:**


**10. Group presentations**

Books suggested: