

# **Power, politics and environmental change**

MA Environmental Humanities 2014-15

Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

## **Class 1: Introduction**

**Christos Zografos, PhD**

Institute of Environmental Science & Technology (ICTA)

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

[christos.zografos@uab.cat](mailto:christos.zografos@uab.cat)

# Introduction

- Purpose of this class:
  - Introduce course
  - Introduce some key terms for course
- Why you should know these:
  - Know what is expected and by when
  - Background to develop rest of course

# Class outline

- Introduction to the course
- Quickly take you through **topics** and some key **concepts** to be presented in classes
- The **political** 'character' of environmental change

# But before, let's introduce ourselves!

- CZ:
  - Current post
  - Education
  - Thesis
  - Research interests
  
- What about you?
  - Where do you come from?
  - Background (academic, professional)

Block 1

# **INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE**

# Course aims

- Mission statement: power and politics shape the environment we live in; but also, power and politics are shaped by the environment we live in (last part of course)
- If this is so, explain how to study the influence of power upon environment: **different ways** in which power shapes nature but also human-environment relationships
- Environmental Social Science: political ecology and environmental history

# Learning outcomes

- After the end of the module, students should be in a position to:
  1. Explain how **power** and **politics** are useful for understanding and studying environmental change
  2. Use several '**models**' of how **power operates** to explain the role politics play in producing environmental change

# Structure of classes 1/2

	Class	Day	Time	Room
1	Introduction	Thursday 12 March	17:00-18:30	P52
2	Ecological distribution conflicts	Friday 13 March	09:45-11:15	P52
3	Green materialism	Monday 16 March	18:45-20:15	U34
4	The power of structures	Tuesday 17 March	18:45-20:15	U34
5	<i>'Open clinic' session</i>	Wednesday 18 March	17:00-20:15	U34
6	The power from within	Thursday 19 March	18:45-20:15	U34
7	Incomplete dominations: post-structuralism	Friday 20 March	15:00-16:45	M117
8	The agency of nature	Monday 23 March	18:45-20:15	U34
9	The force of nature	Tuesday 24 March	08:00-10:15	P52



# Structure of classes 2/2

- Classes 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8
  - read reading + answer question
    - **Upload answers 2 hours before class**
  - In class: discuss answers
  - Feedback on your answers: clinic session – if want more, ask
- Class 9: watch video - class discussion; no reading
- Class 5: Clinic session: my feedback + any other questions you may have

# Course evaluation 1/2

Evaluation tool	Portion of final mark
Final essay	75% of final mark
Class participation (including answers to class questions)	25% of final mark

# Course evaluation 2/2

## Essay (75%)

- Max 3,000 words (excluding references)
- **Deadline: Friday 23 April 2015**
  - Late submissions: **'Fail'**
- **Individual** or **Collective** essay
  - Collective: maximum 2 students per group
  - Group will produce *one* essay
  - I mark the essay, i.e. both students get same mark
- **Topic**
- **Questions on topic?**
- **Performance criteria:**
  - data collection
  - analysis of power and politics role at different scales
    - How do they produce vulnerability
    - How they interact with other factors, e.g. climatic ones, to produce vulnerability
    - How this happens at different scales, e.g. int'l negotiations on climate change, local political decisions, etc.
- Use and misuse of **start-up documents**

## Class participation (25%)

- Student commitment and performance in answering class assignment: 5% per assignment
- Also: eager to participate and constructive comments
- I don't provide feedback to each class assignment (class answers should indicate this) but will do in Clinic Session + more than happy to do so if you ask me

## Grades:

- I personally mark all assignments using **ECTS marking scheme:** a, b, c, d, e and f: for fail
- But: for **MUNI system** purposes I only assign 'Pass' or 'Fail'
- i.e. if you want to know more about your mark, email me
- **Erasmus** students: need grades before? Contact me

# A note on answering assignments

- File name of your assignments
  - Your\_name\_assignmentnumber
  - E.g. **Christos Zografos 3**

NOTHING ELSE PLEASE!

How to answer

- First, **answer** the question, e.g. in one sentence
- Then, substantiate, **support** your answer with **arguments** and **evidence** from the text
  - Avoid being descriptive: don't answer by simply describing a situation and don't re-state what the question says!
  - Instead, try to be **analytical** (freedictionary): “reasoning or acting from a perception of the parts and interrelations of a subject”
  - Support, substantiate your answer: show (1) what are the **key factors** in the issue; and (2) their **interrelations** (how they relate to each other)

# Other

- Can reach me through my email [christos.zografos@uab.cat](mailto:christos.zografos@uab.cat)
- Help with English (unknown words): <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>
- Do you have any questions re: course programme, structure, outputs, etc.?

Block 2

# **POLITICAL 'CHARACTER' OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE**

# Political ecology (Simsik, 2007)

- Academic field that seeks to understand relationship human societies – nature
- PE: puts **politics** in the centre of its explanation of the relationship
  - E.g. **environmental change** (major topic of focus for PE) is political
  - But what exactly do we mean by ‘political’?

# Political

## Political

- “Political”: practices + processes through which **power** is yielded and **negotiated** (Paulson et al., 2005)
  - Yield: “give up control or responsibility of something” (Cambridge Dictionary)
- Politics: study of power
  - Other definitions: “art of government”, etc.

## Power

- But: what is **power**?
- Power: key analytical term in politics
  - Max Weber: “chance of a man or a number of men to realise their own **will** in a social action **even against** the resistance of others”
  - Social relation built on **asymmetrical distributions** of resources and risks (Hornborg, 2001)



# “Environmental change is political”

- How do we see this in the Robbins text? How has power shaped the “current environment in Yellowstone?”
  - The current environment in Yellowstone is the **result of power struggles** between different actors who have different priorities re: what to do with environment and how to do it
- Which actors? What priorities?
  - Actors: Native Americans, etc. (humans); fire (i.e. nature)
  - Priorities: Designed to produce: elk for hunters; wolves for scientists & environmentalists; open range for wildlife; vistas for visitors
- Important (explanation): whose view dominates?
  - Not one that any of parties would want: “political actors create ecology of Yellowstone, but not Yellowstone of their own choosing” - NOTE: power asymmetries
  - “Complicated interactions: create world of un-intended consequences”E

# Political ecology (PE)

- **Changes** in ecology and landscape are not a-political
  - e.g. eco-scarcity position : environmental conflict is the result of limited/scarce (not enough) natural resources available for satisfying human needs
- Instead PE says **change is political**: environmental change is a result of specific public decisions, which are not unavoidable (matter of choice)
  - Decisions artificially create NR scarcity and conflict

# Operation of power

- Course focuses on explaining “how does power operate?” or else show different ways in which political and economic power interact with each other and with nature to shape ecology and humans
  - Illustrate *some ways* in which power operates

In this course, we examine three main approaches:

- Power forces from ‘the outside’, in particular social structures (cl. 4) and can be incomplete (cl. 7)
  - Traditional view: dominance, hegemony, subjugation, marginalisation, neglect
- Power is exercised within individuals (class 6)
  - people internalise power by learning, accepting, and not breaking rules of how to act
- Not only social but also ‘natural’ systems exercise power (cl. 8, 9- env hist)

Also:

- major explanation (PE) “why” environmental change+ conflict happen (cl. 3)
- illustrate how PE studies env change and conflict as political (cl. 2) – NEXT