

Power, politics and environmental change

MA Environmental Humanities 2012-13

Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

Class 1: Introduction

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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
- The political nature of environmental change
- Environmental governance
- Quickly take you through topics to be presented in classes

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: ‘convince’ that “environmental change and governance **are** and **should be** political”
- If this is so, explain how to study:
 - Political aspects (e.g. motivations of) environmental change
 - Power dimensions of environmental governance
- Environmental Social Science: political ecology, ecological economics, 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. Explain the relevance of **value plurality** and **deliberative democracy** for improving environmental governance

Structure of classes

	Class	Day	Time	Classroom
1	Introduction	Tuesday 23 October	18.00-19.30	P22
2	Rationality and environmental decision-making	Wednesday 24 October	18.00-19.30	U23
3	Democracy and environmental governance	Thursday 25 October	16.00-17.40	U34
4	The politics of environmental change and conflict	Friday 26 October	12.00-13.30	U34
5	Environmental change and power I: structuralism	Monday 29 October	18.00-19.30	U33
6	Environmental change and power II: poststructuralism	Tuesday 30 October	16.00-17.40	P22
7	The power of nature	Wednesday 31 October	19.45-21.15	
8	Nature's agency	Thursday 1 November	16.00-17.40	U34
9	Class exercise	Friday 2 November	10.00-11.40	U32

- Classes 2, 3, 5, 6, 8
 - read reading + answer question
 - **Upload** answers 2 h before class
 - In class: discuss answers
 - Don't give personal feedback (i.e. class), but happy to do it – please ask!
- Class 7: watch video - class discussion; no reading
- Class 4: no reading
- Class 9: simulation exercise; not marked, but crucial for essay (75%) will help you

Course evaluation

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

Essay (75%)

- Max 3,000 words (excluding references)
- Deadline: **Friday 1 February 2013**
 - Late up to one week: **25% penalty**
 - Late beyond one week: **'Fail'**
- **Individual or Collective** essay
 - Maximum 2 students per group
 - group will produce *one* essay
 - Split mark in two: both students get same mark
- **Topic**
- **Questions**
- **Performance criteria:** data collection; analysis of power and politics role on different scales
- 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 more than happy to do so on one-to-one)

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

Other

- Can reach me through my email 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 'NATURE' OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

Political ecology (Simsik, 2007)

- Academic field that seeks to understand relationship human societies – nature
- Posits that environmental change is intrinsically **political**
 - And so are its implications, e.g. conflict

“Environmental change is political”

suppresses fire and the next allows it. To be sure, in order to explain the current environment of Yellowstone, its species distribution, its forest cover, its water drainage patterns, there is simply no way to ignore the pounding political rhythms that thrum behind the visible backdrop of trees and snow-capped mountains.

- How does power shape the “current environment in Yellowstone?”
 - What does “current environment” stand for?

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

Political

Political

- But what exactly do we mean by ‘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)

Power

- Politics: the study of power
 - Other definitions: “art of government”, etc.
- 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)



WikiLeaks cables: Shell's grip on Nigerian state revealed

CLASS QUESTION 2

Power in PE: a *social relation* built on **asymmetrical distributions** of resources and risks (Hornborg, 2001)

1. Resources & benefits: which?
2. Risks: what?
3. Asymmetrical distribution risks/ resources: who gets what?
4. How “ability to control” happens?

US embassy cables reveal top executive's claims that company 'knows everything' about key decisions in government ministries

David Smith in Lagos, Wednesday 8 December 2010



Despite billions of dollars in oil revenue, 70% of people in Nigeria live below the poverty line. Photograph: George Osodi/AP

The oil giant Shell claimed it had inserted staff into all the main ministries of the Nigerian government, giving it access to politicians' every move in the oil-rich Niger Delta, according to a leaked US diplomatic cable. The company's top executive in Nigeria told US diplomats that Shell had seconded employees to every relevant department and so knew "everything that was being done in those ministries"...Nigeria is Africa's leading oil producer and the eighth biggest exporter in the world, accounting for 8% of US oil imports. Although a recent UN report largely exonerated the company, critics accuse Shell, the biggest operator in the delta, and other companies, of causing widespread pollution and environmental damage in the region. Militant groups engaged in hostage-taking and sabotage have proliferated.

Type of research that tries to...

- ...reveal winners and losers, hidden costs and differential power that produces unequal social and environmental outcomes
- ...address research questions, such as:
 - What causes ecological/ landscape degradation (e.g. forest loss)?
 - Who benefits and who loses from ecological change (e.g. biodiversity conservation)?
 - What political movements grow out of environmental change (e.g. local land use transitions)?
- ...identify **causes** rather than symptoms of environmental problems/ issues (e.g. soil erosion, landlessness, resource conflict, biodiversity or human health decline)

Robbins (2004)

Operation of power

- Section 2 of course (classes 4-8) focus on explaining “how does power operate?” or else how political and economic power shape ecology
 - Illustrate *some ways* in which power operates

In this course, we examine three main approaches:

- Power forces from the outside (class 5)
 - Traditional view: dominance, hegemony, subjugation, marginalisation, neglect
- Power is exercised within individuals (class 6)
 - people internalise power by learning, accepting, not breaking and monitoring other’s behaviour towards rules of how to act (governmentality)
- Power not only characteristic of social but also ‘natural’ systems (classes 7 & 8, environ history)
- Class 4: demonstrate political ‘nature’ of environmental issues (on an empirical case study)

Block 3

ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

Normative aspects

- Possible **normative** aspects of study of environmental change
 - Section 1 (classes 2 + 3, ecological economics)
- **Ways:**
 - ‘balance’ (sic) power within **formal system of environmental decision-making**
 - Deal with “asymmetrical power”
- **Socio-Ecological Economics (SEE) ‘sub-field’**
 - environmental decision-making processes

Public decisions on environmental issues

- “While **states** ultimately continue to make and enforce ... law, they are increasingly dependent upon **multilateral** institutions, organized **science**, **NGOs** and social **movements**, and **business** and **industry** for formulating their views and for conducting policy” (Kanie & Hass, 2004)

Environmental governance

- To understand and study this process, concept of **governance** has emerged
 - Governance as different from **government**: governance includes the actions of those disparate groups (i.e. not only actions of government) when studying policy formulation
- **Environmental governance**: “a set of regulatory processes, mechanisms and organizations through which political actors *influence* environmental actions and outcomes” (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006)

Environmental governance

- When a public decision re: environment is formulated non-state political actors:
 - **Do** interfere and influence decision
 - During decision-making (e.g. protest, lobby)
 - During implementation (e.g. block, sabotage)
 - **Must** influence decision: their opinions should be taken into account: good EG
 - in a society where environmental decisions are taken democratically

Issue

- How could we ‘balance’ (sic) power within the **formal system of environmental decision-making**, and go at least some way in dealing with the issue of “asymmetrical power”?

Rationality

- First issue we consider (class 2):
 - Start: a key/ influential method/ logic to make public environmental decisions: CBA
 - used and proposed by economists in order to make sound environmental decisions
 - Look at key assumptions behind logic: what it means to make ‘rational’ decisions
- Consider shortcomings of this logic and its implications
 - How ecological economics criticises this and goes deeper into one alternative type of rationality proposed by the field (SEE)

Deliberative ecological economics

- Ecological economics suggests re: ways round limitations (class 3)
 - be **inclusive** of multiple values in environmental decision-making
- Consideration of deliberative democracy (deliberative ecological economics)
 - Present approach
 - Discuss limitations

Next class

- Read:
 - Monbiot, G. 1994. The tragedy of enclosure. *Scientific American*. January 1994
 - Wolfensohn, J.D. 2002. Global Priority. *Our Planet* **13**(3). pp.4-5
- Question:
 - Monbiot explains that Hardin's model of individual action (how the herdsman acts in the commons pasture) has provided a rational argument for multi-lateral institutions and governments to pursue widespread privatisation of natural resources and massive transfers of communal lands to the state or individuals around the world.
 - How does Wolfensohn use Hardin's model to explain why biodiversity declines?
 - According to him (Wolfensohn), what sorts of mechanisms are established to help avoid this decline?
- Send me your 500-word (maximum!) answer before 16:00 tomorrow
- Bring your answer tomorrow in class