

Course syllabus for PhD course  
Course part of the research school: People, Society and Sustainability  
Department of Economics/Department of Urban and Rural  
Development

## **Political ecology: foundations and emancipatory trends**

**Title in Swedish: Grundstenar och strävan mot emancipation**

### **Higher education credits**

7.5 HEC

### **Dates:**

September 16 - October 18

Classes to be held week 39 (September 23-27) & week 41 (October 7-11)

### **Subject:**

Rural Development

### **Possible Additional subject/subjects:**

This course could be of broad interest to a range of students in the Departments of Rural and Urban Development, The Department of Economics, and the Department of Ecology

### **Course type**

Hybrid

### **Language**

English

### **Prerequisites**

Accepted as a PhD student

### **Time of studies**

Daytime

### **Objectives**

Upon completion of this course, the students will be able to:

1. Trace the history of debates in the developing of political ecology as a field, from the 1980s to contemporary discussions;
2. Describe and operationalize key analytical approaches that form the political ecological 'toolkit';
3. Apply political ecological analysis to key contemporary human-environment challenges;
4. Utilize political ecology tools to analyze opportunities for socio-environmental transformations

**Content**

The course will provide a foundation in political ecology as a key field of critical human-environmental analysis. The course will trace its intellectual development from the 1980s until the present day, while exploring some of the theoretical strands and analytical approaches that form the broader “political ecology” toolkit. Students will learn how political ecology analysis has been used to analyze key human-environmental challenges of the present era and gain experience in applying political ecology analysis to their own field of study. The course will also explore recent theoretical developments and identify areas for further theoretical development in the study of socio-environmental transformations.

**Course leaders**

Harry Fischer  
Noémi Gonda

**Examination**

Students will:

1. Present a memo /note and questions from the readings (1- 2 pages) for each day of the course, submitted 1 day before the discussion;
2. Write a paper at the end of the final week. The paper should apply a political ecology analysis to their own thesis topic, while referencing literature and debates covered in the course. The paper should be at least 10 pages long.

**Contact for application and further information**

Harry W. Fischer (Course leader)

To apply, please send us a brief introduction of yourself and your research, and tell us what you hope to get out of the course.

**Deadline to apply**

September 1, 2024

**Literature**

Required reading will be assigned to students four weeks before the course starts.

**Additional Information**

This course is part of the research school People, Society and Sustainability, a joined research school between the Department of Economics and the Department of Urban and Rural Development.

## **Introduction**

Session 1: What is “political” about ecology? Theoretical antecedents and emergence of the field

This session asks what it means for something to be “political”. It introduces “critical” social science perspectives and explores the early antecedents of political ecology in older debates of the intersection between “cultural ecology” and “political economy”.

Session 2: The critical tools & a field crystalizes

This session gives a broad and overarching look at subsequent developments in the field, tracing its development from political economy roots toward post-structural analysis, STS, and work on gender, emotion, and beyond. The session also explores some of the key analytical tools that have emerged as cornerstones of political ecological analysis.

Session 3: Conservation conflicts, biodiversity, & constructions of nature

This session explores long-standing debates in political ecology relating to ideas of restrictive conservation and social constructions of ‘nature’.

Session 4: Social vulnerability & climate adaptation

This session explores historical work on social vulnerability and examines its insights for contemporary discussions on climate change.

Session 5: Feminist political ecology (FPE)

In this session, we will discuss some additional set of issues that FPE can bring into the analysis of human-environmental challenges. In particular, we will talk about feminist understandings of power, knowledge politics (with a focus on embodied and emotional knowledge) and gender justice and apply this understanding to climate change politics.

Session 6: Decolonial political ecology

In this session, students will engage with decolonial political ecology perspectives on development and territory through concepts such as the pluriverse, relationality, and the eco-territorial turn. We will in particular rely on Latin American political ecology to broaden critiques of modernity, development, and climate politics offering perspectives from the vantage points of affected groups.

### Session 7: Far-right political ecology (FPE)

Far-right political ecology is a field that is emerging in the face of the rise of authoritarianism across the world. Far-right political ecology centers democratic challenges in the analysis of socio-environmental changes. In this session, we will discuss how far-right political ecology can help explore the power processes through which socio-environmental governance can lead to consolidating undemocratic political regimes via e.g. the exploitation of national natural resources to buy political support; the intensification of tensions between rural and urban areas, and; the silencing of environmental activism and research.

### Session 8: Methods – a panel: how does one “do” political ecology?

In this session, invited political ecologists will explain the methods they use to do political ecology research and the students will discuss these in relation to their own research projects.

### Session 9: Toward emancipatory futures: Taking stock of the field and future directions

In this session, we will first take stock discussing the main take-away messages of the previous sessions. Second, we will discuss aspects of positionality, reflexivity and ethics in political ecology research: if political ecology is committed to a better understanding of environmental degradation and socio-environmental marginalisation, how can political ecologists adopt a committed academic positionality that can help disrupt injustices in knowledge production about these processes?

### Session 10: Students present their papers