

# **Power, politics and environmental change**

MA Environmental Humanities 2013-14

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 nature 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: ‘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. Use several '**models**' of how **power operates** to explain the role politics play in producing environmental change

# Structure of classes

	<b>Class</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Classroom</b>
1	Introduction	Monday 2 December	18:00–19:30	U33
2	The power of structures	Tuesday 3 December	18:00–19:30	U53
3	The power of nature	Wednesday 4 December	08:00–09:40	P52
4	The power “from within”	Thursday 5 December	18:00–19:30	U42
5	The power of rationality	Friday 6 December	16:00–17:40	U32
6	Class exercise	Monday 9 December	08:00–09:40	U34

- Classes 2, 4, and 5
  - read reading + answer question
    - **Upload answers 2 hours before class**
  - In class: discuss answers
  - Don't give personal feedback (i.e. class), but happy to do it – please ask!
- Class 3: watch video - class discussion; no reading
- Class 6: simulation exercise



# Course evaluation

Evaluation tool	Portion of final mark
Final essay	70% of final mark
Class participation (including answers to class questions)	15% of final mark
Class exercise	15% of final mark

## Essay (70%)

- Max 3,000 words (excluding references)
- Deadline: **Friday 31 January 2014**
  - 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**
- **Performance criteria:**
  - data collection
  - analysis of power and politics role on 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 (15%)

- 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)

## Class exercise (10%)

**Simulation game** on last class of the course

- Student participation: how much and well engage in game
- How well use of knowledge in course as to how power operates

## 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
  - 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 anyway!
  - Try to be analytical:
    - Analytical (freedictionary): “reasoning or acting from a perception of the parts and interrelations of a subject”
    - Support, substantiate your answer by showing what are the **key factors** in the issue and their **interrelations**

# 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 'NATURE' 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
  - It is the result of power struggles between different actors who have different priorities re: what to do with environment and how to do it

# “Environmental change is political”

- How do we see this in the Robbins text?
- How has power shaped the “current environment in Yellowstone?”
- Which actors have interfered?
- Actors: Native Americans, etc. (humans); fire (i.e. nature)
- **PE focus of explanation:**
  - explain the current environment in Yellowstone
    - Designed to produce: elk for hunters; wolves for scientists & environmentalists; open range for wildlife; vistas for visitors
- **Way of explaining:**
  - Not one that any of parties would want: “political actors create ecology of Yellowstone, but not Yellowstone of their own choosing”
  - “Complicated interactions: create world of in-intended consequences”

# 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.
- But question: 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)

# 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 (class 2)
  - Traditional view: dominance, hegemony, subjugation, marginalisation, neglect
- Power is exercised within individuals (class 4 and class 5)
  - people internalise power by learning, accepting, and not breaking rules of how to act
- Power not only characteristic of social but also ‘natural’ systems (classes 3 and 4, environ history and political ecology)



# 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)

# 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

# Next class

- Read:
  - Brownlow, A. 2006. An archaeology of fear and environmental change in Philadelphia. *Geoforum* 37, pp. 227-245
- Question:
  - Brownlow (2006) argues that “...the uncontrolled growth of weeds and their emerging dominance in the landscape do appear to symbolize disorder, decay, and the absence of control that accompany years of political and fiscal neglect. Socially speaking, the significance of weeds is not what they do but, rather, what they represent; the same can be said for the abandoned autos, heaps of garbage, discarded needles, condoms, and drug paraphernalia, and broken glass that are pervasive throughout the park” (p. 242).
  - Why, according to Brownlow, have disorder and decay fallen upon Cobbs Creek?
- Send me your **500-word (maximum!) answer before 16:00 tomorrow**
- Bring your answer tomorrow in class