

Power, politics and environmental change

MA Environmental Humanities 2016-17

Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

Class 1: Introduction

Christos Zografos, PhD

Institute of Environmental Science & Technology (ICTA)

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

czografos@gmail.com

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 forcefully shape the environment we live in
- If this is so, explain how to study the influence of power upon environment: **different ways** in which power shapes nature and human-environment relationships
- Environmental Social Science: mostly field of **political ecology**

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**' (understandings) **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	Mon 7 Nov.	13.30-15.00	Hall
2	Green materialism	Tue 8 Nov.	18.45-20.15	P22
3	The power of structures	Wed 9 Nov.	15.15-16.45	U33
4	The power from within	Thu 10 Nov.	17.00-18.30	P21
5	The power of discourse and incomplete dominations	Fri 11 Nov.	15.15-16.45	U32
6	Transforming nature (movie screening class)	Mon 14 Nov.	09.45-11.15	P24

Structure of classes 2/2

- Classes 2, 3, 4, and 5
 - read reading + answer question
 - **Upload answers 2 hours before class**
 - **Exception: tomorrow by 12.00**
 - In class: discuss answers
- Class 6: watch video - class discussion; no reading
 - Class will finish at 12.30
 - First 1h30min: movie
 - Will have no break (but will pause movie for 5-10 min because it's long)

Course evaluation 1/2

Evaluation tool	Portion of final mark
Final essay	80% of final mark
Class participation (including answers to class questions)	20% of final mark

Course evaluation 2/2

Essay (80%)

- Max 2,000 words (excluding references)
- **Deadline: Monday 9 January 2017**
 - Late submissions: **'Fail'**
 - If you get less than 50% overall mark, then chance for another short essay (couple of weeks approx.)
- **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:** Klein, N. 2016. Let Them Drown. The Violence of Othering in a Warming World.
- **Questions on topic?**
- **Performance criteria:**
 1. Explain in own words (i.e. without copy-pasting Klein's text) what Klein means by "othering" as a source of clim change vulnerability that is violent.
 - 1,000 words max. (40% of the final mark)
 2. Present another example of "othering" which produces victims of environmental change.
 - Explain what it involves, and how it happens.
 - Use knowledge from the class to answer
 - 1,000 words max. (40% of the final mark).
- Using support bibliography

Class participation (20%)

- 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 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 czografos@gmail.com
- 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”
 - In political ecology: 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”¹

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 two main approaches:

- Power forces from ‘the outside’, in particular social structures (cl. 3)
 - Traditional view: dominance, hegemony, subjugation, marginalisation, neglect
- Power is exercised within individuals (class 4)
 - people internalise power by learning, accepting, and not breaking rules of how to act
 - Relevant to this approach: discourses (stories we tell about humans and nature) can exercise power and produce nature, although dominations can be incomplete (class 5)

Also:

- major explanation (PE) “why” environmental change+ conflict happen (cl. 2) - NEXT