![University of Zurich logo]

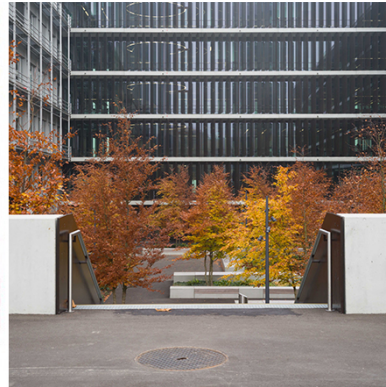**Department of Geography**

GEO425
Political Ecology: From critique to transformation

Spring semester 2023

Core elective module

Time

Wednesday 9:15-12:00

Room

tbc

Lecturers

Norman Backhaus (NB; norman.backhaus@geo.uzh.ch)

Sierra Deutsch (SD; sierra.deutsch@geo.uzh.ch): module responsible

Guests

Annina Michel, (AM; GIUZ)

Johanna Jacobi (JJ; ETHZ)

Clara Guardado (CG; GIUZ)

Language

English

Syllabus

1. Course description

Despite global efforts to stop and reverse climate change, biodiversity loss, and growing social inequality, these processes only seem to be accelerating. The urgency to address these issues has now led to a global call for 'transformative change,' but what exactly does this mean and how can we make sure it is different than all the other failed solutions? To tackle these glaring contemporary issues, this course encourages students to dig deep into the structures of power that maintain the status quo and hinder meaningful transformation. Specifically, the course provides students with critical theoretical insights into socioecological relations, the production of knowledge about these relations, and the power dynamics inherent in governing these. It focuses on key debates and critiques within the wide field of political ecology and on challenges arising from land and natural resource governance, access, and use. With these critiques in mind, the final sessions of the course focus on some of the current approaches to, and critical debates surrounding, societal transformation initiatives.

The course will be run as an intensive seminar: lectures and close reading of canonical texts will be complemented by classroom discussions and smaller exercises. The course will illustrate practical applications of theoretical concepts through case studies and offer students the option to apply course concepts in a service-learning project. The course will also guide students through the process of writing a seminar paper on a selected topic of interest related to course material.

2. Preconditions and learning outcomes

In order to be able to participate you need to have completed a Bachelor thesis. Upon completion of the course, you will
– be able to articulate key theories and debates in political ecology,
– have specialized in one topic and within it formulated arguments of environment-society relations,
– be able to relate abstract concepts to concrete problems,
– have improved your skills in presenting scientific debates in discussions, papers and talks.
The module can be repeated once.

3. Course examination and workload

Achievement	Description	Single/team	Grading	Weight
Reading reflections	written	single	pass/fail[*]	1/3
Service-learning/Research paper	written	single	1-6	2/3
TOTAL achievements				**1**

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[*] To each of the compulsory texts a short reflection has to be written. Each reflection will be graded as "pass" or "fail". The cumulation of passes will be graded with a mark (number of passes/2+1 = mark).

Activity	Workload [%]
Presence during the sessions	30
Reading and discussion of texts (incl. reflections)	30
Paper proposal outline	15
Service-Learning/Research paper writing	25
TOTAL activities	**100**
	6 ECTS

We expect **attendance** in all classes. If an absence is unexpected and unavoidable (e.g. in cases of illness or accident), then please email the lecturers with sufficient notice.

Students who commit **plagiarism** in their seminar papers will automatically fail the course. They will not be allowed to resubmit a new seminar paper. In accordance with the University of Zurich's legal standards we reserve the right to pursue disciplinary measures against authors of plagiarism. The definition of plagiarism is based on the guidelines elaborated by the University's Lehrkommission. Universität Zürich (2007, accessed: 17 February 2021):
http://www.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:00000000-591f-4c87-ffff-ffffe62562b4/20110314_LK_Plagiarism.pdf

4. Tasks

Reading texts

This is a postgraduate level course, so you are expected to engage in more autonomous work than in earlier levels of study, and this involves reading avidly and engaging actively. You are expected to read compulsory texts for the classes during the semester (see workload above). These compulsory readings can be found on OLAT and are underlined in the bibliography list below. They will give you an entry point into the lecture topic, and importantly, they will be the basis for class discussions. To make the best out of this course, it is important that you engage deeply with these texts (making notes about your thoughts, about unclear passages…), and that you engage actively in the debates that will be fostered in small group and class discussions.

A list of further readings is also proposed for every teaching week based on the theme covered. You can find this list in a separate file on OLAT. These readings are also recommended as points of departure for the seminar paper you will write towards the end of the course.
You will also find useful advice here to help you read actively and critically on our OLwA online course (www.olwa.ch): https://www.geo.uzh.ch/microsite/olwa/olwa/en/html/unit3_kap33.html
There are political ecology handbooks that you will find useful (i.e. the Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology, and the International Handbook of Political Ecology).

The compulsory texts are listed here, and you can find them as pdf on OLAT. A list with other texts (also on OLAT) shall give you inspiration for your paper and poster or if you are interested to know more about a certain topic.

Week 1: Introduction

Read Syllabus

Week 2: Capitalism, authoritarianism, and the environment

– Deutsch, S., 2021. Populist authoritarian neoliberalism in Brazil: making sense of Bolsonaro's anti-environment agenda. Journal of Political Ecology 28(1). doi: https://doi.org/10.2458/jpe.2994

Week 3: *First conservation attempts: Fortress conservation, neoliberal conservation and governmentality*

– Apostolopoulou, E., Bormpoudakis, D., Paloniemi, R., Cent, J., Grodzińska-Jurczak, M., Pietrzyk-Kaszyńska, A. and Pantis, J.D., 2014. Governance rescaling and the neoliberalization of nature: the case of biodiversity conservation in four EU countries. International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology, 21(6), pp.481-494.

– Schleicher, J., Zaehringer, J. G., Fastré, C., Vira, B., Visconti, P., Sandbrook, C. 2019. Protecting half of the planet could directly affect over one billion people. Nature sustainability. doi:10.1038/s41893-019-0423-y

Week 4: Failed conservation and "radical" solutions: New Conservation, Half Earth, Convivial Conservation

– Büscher, B., Massarella, K., Coates, R., Deutsch,S., Dressler, W., Fletcher, R., Immovili, M. and Koot, S. 2022. The Convivial Conservation imperative: Exploring "Biodiversity Impact Chains" to support structural transformation. In Transforming Biodiversity Governance. Visseren-Hamakers, I.J. and Kok, M.T.J. (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 244-263. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108856348

Week 6: Global change, carbon offsetting and REDD+

– Liverman, D. 2015. Reading Climate Change and Climate Governance as Political Ecologies. In: Perreault, T., Bridge, G. & McCarthy, J. (eds.). The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology, 303–319. London/New York: Routledge.

Week 7: Urban political ecology

– Tubridy, D. 2020. Green climate change adaptation and the politics of designing ecological infrastructures. Geoforum, 113, 133-145.

Week 9: The ontological debate: What is "nature"?; Indigenous Peoples' stewardship perspectives; A new perspective on an old practice

– Theriault, N., Leduc, T., Mitchell, A., Rubis, J.M. and Jacobs Gaehowako, N., 2020. Living protocols: remaking worlds in the face of extinction. Social & Cultural Geography, 21(7), pp.893-908.

==*Week 10: Environmental justice in nature conservation*==

– Svarstad, H. & Benjaminsen, T. A. 2020. Reading radical environmental justice through a political ecology lens. Geoforum 108: 1–11.

==*Week 11: Agroecology/Food democracy*==

– ==Reading TBD==

Week 12:

Week 13:

Week 14: Transformative change

–   Turnhout, E. and Lahsen, M., 2022. Transforming environmental research to avoid tragedy. *Climate and Development*, pp.1-5.

Reading reflections

For each of the compulsory texts (available on OLAT) you will write a short reflection (approximately 1 page). The purposes of these reflections are to give you an opportunity to process the theoretical interventions and concepts in the texts, prepare ideas for class discussions, and to compose a permanent record of your thoughts related to the course. Reflections should generally include the aspects below, but can take a variety of forms. For example, you may include extracts from the text with commentary; interweave your critiques and reflections into the summary; or add comments on personal experiences, field research, or current events related to course materials. Try to avoid mechanistic collections of extracts from the texts. Rather, use the reflections as a means for development of your own ideas and impressions.

Reading reflections must be submitted on **OLAT by 12h (noon) on the Tuesday** before the session for which the text is assigned. Grading of the reflections will be pass/fail and will be based on the quality of the reflections and to what extent they demonstrate a close reading of the text, critical thinking and imagination, and the capacity to relate the materials to class discussions and to your own experiences. Each reflection **must** contain a summary, reflection, two questions for discussion, and an AI Statement:a)   Summary of the text:
–   What is the text about?
–   What are the main arguments of the author(s)?
–   What is their conclusion?
b) Your reflection on the text:
–   What resonated with you and why?
–   What did you disagree with and why?
–   How useful do you find the text?
–   How did you feel reading the text? Did anything make you uncomfortable and why?
c) Questions:
–   Formulate two questions based on the text that could be discussed in class. For example, questions may address things that you didn't understand or want to explore more.
d) AI statement
   -   State whether you used ChatGPT or other Generative AI Tools to complete the assignment. If you choose to use such technologies, you must also indicate where and how you have used it and how it helped you in completing the assignment.

Semester Project

Option 1. Research paper

Based on the topics and texts presented in the course, you should find a topic you want to focus on in your paper. You will think about and write down 3 possible essay topics and bring these along to the session where we discuss the outlines (see program). Following the decision on a topic, an outline has to be submitted. This should contain the following information on 1-2 pages:

– Title and reflection on what the paper is about
– Problem statement and research question
– Aims of the paper
– Bibliography w/minimum of 10 peer-reviewed references

After receiving feedback on the outline of the paper you start working on your paper, which should be drafted as a scientific paper (i.e. as in a scientific journal, including abstract and keywords), and comprise of approx. 5'000 words without bibliography.

Option 2. Service-learning project/paper

As an alternative to the research paper, you may do a service-learning project/paper. Students who choose this option will be expected to find a local organization to volunteer with for a minimum of four hours (all at once or spread out), using mainly participant observation. You will then apply a concept or concepts from the course to your experiences with the organization as a case study to explore the concept(s). You will think about and write down 3 possible concepts with examples of organizations from which to explore these and bring these along to the session where we discuss the outlines (see program). Following the decision on an organization and topic, an outline has to be submitted. This should contain the following information on 1-2 pages:

– Title and reflection on what the paper is about
– Problem statement/Service-learning organization and research question
– Aims of the paper
– Bibliography w/minimum of 5 peer-reviewed references

After receiving feedback on the outline of the paper you start working on your paper, which should be drafted as a scientific paper (i.e. as in a scientific journal, including abstract and keywords), and comprise of approx. 5'000 words without bibliography.

5. Program

W	Date	Wednesday 9:15-11:45
Part I: Foundations of Political Ecology		
1	21.02.24	Introduction: What is political ecology in the "Anthropocene"? (NB)
	Tuesdays noon	*For all sessions: read the compulsory texts and write a reflection, upload it until Tuesday noon before the respective session*
Part II: Political Economy Approaches to Political Ecology		
2	28.02.24	Capitalism, authoritarianism, and the environment (SD)
3	06.03.24	First conservation attempts: Fortress conservation, neoliberal conservation and governmentality (SD)
4	13.03.24	Failed conservation and "radical" solutions: New Conservation, Half Earth, Convivial Conservation (SD)
Part III: Brainstorming and topic exploration		
5	20.03.24	Brainstorming service-learning or research paper topics
		Bring along 3 possible topics (in written form)
Part IV: Global change and Political Ecology		
6	27.03.24	Global change, carbon offsetting and REDD+ (NB)
	03.04.24	*Easter break, no session*

7	10.04.24	Urban political ecology (NB)
	11.04.24 midnight	*Submit paper outline on OLAT*
8	17.04.24	Outline feedback
Part V: Approaches to transforming socio-ecological relations		
9	24.04.24	The ontological debate: What is "nature"? Indigenous Peoples' stewardship perspectives (SD); A new perspective on an old practice (NB)
10	01.05.24	No class; was Environmental justice in nature conservation (AM)
11	08.05.24	Agroecology/Food democracy (JJ)
	14.05.24 midnight	*Upload slides for the presentation on OLAT*
12	15.05.24	~~**Lightning Presentations**~~
13	22.05.24	~~Conservation and environmental values (MC)~~
14	29.05.24	Transformative change (SD)
	12.06.24 midnight	*Submit paper/report on OLAT*

1 lesson less (1. May), instead of Mollie CG + evtl. another input by CG; where to put Annina's input?