



## MESS55, Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science: Political Ecology and Sustainability, 7.5 credits

*Miljö- och hållbarhetsvetenskap: Politisk ekologi och hållbarhet, 7,5  
högskolepoäng*

Second Cycle / Avancerad nivå

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### Details of approval

The syllabus was approved by The Board of the Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies on 2017-09-05 to be valid from 2017-09-05, autumn semester 2018.

### General Information

The course constitutes a 3rd term elective (non-compulsory) course at LUMES, Lund University Master's Programme in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science, 120 credits.

*Language of instruction:* English

*Main field of studies*

Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science

*Depth of study relative to the degree requirements*

A1F, Second cycle, has second-cycle course/s as entry requirements

### Learning outcomes

Upon the completion of the course, the student shall:

#### Knowledge and understanding

- Discuss key assumptions, central debates and methodological approaches in the political ecological field
- Demonstrate the ability to critically and in a qualified way reflect on how local natural resources use and environmental degradation are connected to wider political economy conditions and global environmental change

### Competence and skills

- Demonstrate the ability to systematically and in a qualified way apply political ecology concepts and theories related to power, discourses and biophysical processes to specific sustainability questions and empirical cases,
- Critically and independently reflect on asymmetrical relations of power in environmental issues and the way these are embedded in environmental representations and governance

### Judgement and approach

- Demonstrate a critical approach to sustainability issues in an in-depth way that integrates environmental, social, economic and political drivers and dynamics

### Course content

The course introduces students to the interdisciplinary field of political ecology as an approach to understand and analyze the interactions between social and environmental change.

The course focuses on the 'political' character of sustainability issues, that is, the necessarily power-laden nature of both sustainability problems themselves, and the solutions that are proposed to address them. The course provides an overview of main theoretical concepts, debates and methodological approaches in current political ecology research. The introduction to theoretical debates is complemented with empirical case studies from different parts of the world to illustrate specific thematic focuses. The knowledge acquired in the course is meant to provide one of the theoretical building blocks that students can draw on for their thesis work, and later apply in future work, for instance teaching, research, journalism, environmental and development work.

The course is structured around four key themes, which aim to both give the student an overall understanding of political ecology as approach in relation to questions of sustainability, and provide more in-depth engagements with some of the main topics in contemporary political ecology:

#### *1. Introduction to political ecology*

This theme introduces the course and focuses on the emergence and development of political ecology as an analytical approach (rather than a coherent theory) and provides an overview of fundamental assumptions, concepts, key debates and current streams of political ecology research.

#### *2. Power and social difference in local-global relations*

This theme focus on how multi-scalar analysis can be applied to understand and analyze how environmental degradation and natural resource use at local scales is connected to and influenced by broader political economy conditions and global environmental change processes. It introduces feminist political ecology scholarship and intersectionality as an analytical tool to analyze how overlapping relations of power rooted in class, gender, race and ethnicity shape, and are shaped by, the environment and natural resource use.

#### *3. Environmental narratives and representations*

This theme focuses on critical examinations of environmental narratives and representations of 'nature'. We will look into questions such as: how are particular sustainability challenges typically represented and who has the power to influence

problem framings? How and why have certain narratives on environmental degradation and change emerged and persisted? And what are the consequences in terms of environmental governance and interventions?

#### *4. Ecology and materiality in political ecology*

This theme focuses on potential tensions between material and constructivist perspectives in relation to environmental issues, and ongoing debates on engagements with the 'political' and the 'ecology' in political ecology scholarship. In this part of the course, we explore the various ways in which political ecology scholarship engage with the biophysical and material dimensions of environmental processes and how these influence how problems are understood and portrayed.

## **Course design**

Teaching consists of lectures, seminars and group exercises. The course is mainly seminar-driven, in which we discuss and engage with texts in depth. Individual and group-based exercises and assignments are combined to stimulate and evaluate students' ability to conceptualize and analyze specific environmental problems in terms of their interlinked ecological, political, social, and economic dynamics at local to global scales. Theoretical concepts and debates from the course are applied to concrete empirical cases.

Unless there are valid reasons to the contrary, compulsory participation is required in the seminars, group exercises and study visits. Students who have been unable to participate due to circumstances such as accidents or sudden illness will be offered the opportunity to compensate for or re-take compulsory components. This also applies to students who have had to be absent because of duties as an elected student representative.

## **Assessment**

Course assessment is based on written and oral assignments performed in relation to each course theme, as well as one written take-home exam at the end of the course. Theme 1 and 2 are examined through one individual reflection assignment each. Theme 3 is examined through a written group assignment, and Theme 4 is examined through an oral group assignment.

Three opportunities for examination are offered in conjunction with the course: a first examination and two re-examinations. Two further re-examinations on the same course content are offered within a year of the end of the course. After this, further re-examination opportunities are offered but in accordance with the current course syllabus.

A student who has taken two examinations in a course or a part of a course without obtaining a pass grade is entitled to the nomination of another examiner, unless there are special reasons to the contrary. Students getting a passing grade cannot re-take an exam or re-submit a paper to get a higher grade.

The examiner, in consultation with Disability Support Services, may deviate from the regular form of examination in order to provide a permanently disabled student with a form of examination equivalent to that of a student without a disability.

*Subcourses that are part of this course can be found in an appendix at the end of this document.*

## **Grades**

Marking scale: Fail, Three, Four, Five.

The highest grade for the course as a whole is 5 and the lowest passing grade is 3. The grade for a non-passing result is Fail. The student's performance is assessed with reference to the learning outcomes of the course. The grade 5 denotes outstanding performance in all learning outcomes. The grade 4 signifies very good performance in all learning outcomes. To receive the grade 3, the student must obtain minimum criteria in fulfilling all course learning outcomes. The grade of Fail signifies that the student has not fulfilled the learning outcomes of the course, or that additional work is required before the grade can be awarded.

At the start of the course, students are informed about the learning outcomes stated in the syllabus and about the grading scale and how it is applied on the course.

### Overall course grade:

The grade awarded for the assignments in Theme 1, 2 and 4 are Pass or Fail. For the grade of Pass, the student must show acceptable results. For the grade of Fail, the student must have shown unacceptable results. The written group assignment in Theme 3, as well as the individual take-home exam is graded according to the 5-4-3-Fail grading scale.

The grade for the entire course consists of the average grade of all assessed assignments. The individual take-home exam is worth 60% of the final grade, the written group assignment is worth 40% of the final grade. For a grade of 3 on the entire course the student must have been awarded at least 3 or Pass on all assessments. The student must also have actively participated in all compulsory components.

## **Entry requirements**

To be admitted to the course, students must be admitted to Lund University International Master's Programme in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science 120 credits, and have fulfilled course requirements of at least forty higher education credits in the programme.

Subcourses in MESS55, Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science:  
Political Ecology and Sustainability

Applies from H18

1801 Political Ecology and Sustainability, 7,5 hp  
Grading scale: Fail, Three, Four, Five