

HEKN12, Human Ecology: Political Ecology, Consumption and Identity, 15 credits

Human Ecology: Political Ecology, Consumption and Identity, 15 högskolepoäng
Second Cycle / Avancerad nivå

Details of approval

The syllabus was approved by Faculty Board of Social Sciences on 2011-11-17. The syllabus comes into effect 2012-01-01 and is valid from the spring semester 2012.

General information

The course is a mandatory course in Human Ecology within the Master of Science Programme in Social Sciences, with a major in Human Ecology -Culture, Power, and Sustainability (SASAM: HUEK). It is also offered as an independent course.

Language of instruction: English

<i>Main field of study</i>	<i>Specialisation</i>
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Human Ecology	A1F, Second cycle, has second-cycle course/s as entry requirements
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Learning outcomes

On completion of the course the student shall be able to:

- define key concepts such as social identity, cultural tradition, hegemony, class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, production, consumption, place, space and landscape;
- apply theoretical perspectives including political economy, political ecology, commodity fetishism, cultural construction of the body, modernity and post-modernity, commodity chain analysis, feminist and postcolonial theory, and transnational studies;
- identify connections among diverse forces and phenomena—such as uneven patterns of human consumption and production and uneven distribution of economic and environmental consequences—within societies and across nations and world regions;

- describe how politics, economics, ecology, consumption, and identity interact in a range of empirical cases from different geographical regions;
- analyze how multiple forces interact on a set of interlocking scales from local to global to shape specific cases;
- implement research and analytic methods such as ethnographic observation, visual interpretation, discourse and policy analysis, ecosystems assessment, semiotic analysis, social surveys, and economic analysis;
- demonstrate understanding of the influence of personal and socio-cultural identity on consumption and environment, and vice versa, including the construction, expression,
- and reproduction of social difference via bodily consumption and display and via construction of environments;
- critically reflect on construction of one's own personal identity and socio-cultural belonging through consumption and lifestyle choices, the impact of these choices on culture and environment, and ways to forge meaningful and sustainable lifestyles and societies.

Course content

This course develops conceptual and analytic tools to look critically at consumption, identity and political ecology in the context of local ethnographic detail and global historical forces. Studies in specific contexts explore ways in which people fashion self, community and nation, and reveal how consumption practices produce and reproduce status, power, authority, and hierarchy as well as values and meanings. Students will seek to understand how a mutually constituting dialectic between political economic forces and individual desire and defiance shapes people's bodies, preferences, and pleasures as well as the appropriation and transformation of environmental resources and landscapes.

The course comprises four modules focusing on intersecting themes:

1. Our things, our bodies, ourselves in spaces of status, power, and pleasure

This module analyzes social systems of consumption- applies Bourdieu's concepts of capital that encompass economic, educational, social and cultural assets; compares power exercised in consumer choice to power exercised in political voice; observes late modern shifts in status and identity construction that enhance the importance of consumption in relation to more traditional identity markers such as ethnicity, religion, education, career, and income; and reflects on implications of this shift for cultural and environmental sustainability.

2. Global forces/local identities: Cultural and ecological sustainability

This module explores ways in which humans imagine and fulfill needs/desires, and ways in which this fulfillment impacts the environment. Changing relations between culture and environment are analyzed in light of the rise of mass production, mass consumption, and the seemingly inexorable advance of constantly expanding production and consumption. Movements to establish "alternative" lifestyles and consumption patterns are discussed as expressions of identity and as potential means for influencing resource management and contributing to social justice. The module looks at how human lifestyles and identities around the world have been influenced by the expansion of media, travel, and Internet; by increased flows of capital,

commodities, images, ideas, and immigrants; and by more pervasive and globalized forms of capitalism.

3. Political ecology: Theory and methods

The module explores intellectual and political genealogies; the history of environmentalism from conservationist to environmental justice paradigms; scale and cross-scale analyses; distributional conflicts: unequal ecological, economic and cultural exchange; globalization of production-consumption linkages; (under)development and (un)sustainability in the global South; economic growth, environmental conflict and degradation in the global North.

4. Critical challenges to theory: Community practice, social movements, non-dominant visions

This module examines common property resources, place-based knowledge, environmental governance and management; diverse environmental movements and identifications; state environmental visions and policies; global environmentalism; post-structural political ecology (ethnicity, race, and gender in environmental distribution and conflict); discourse, science, knowledge, and democracy in environmental politics; relations between neoliberalism and environmental management; and future challenges and directions for political ecology.

Course design

Teaching includes lectures, discussions, student presentations, videos, and excursions. Assessment of students' progress is based on active participation in seminars and essays written on each module.

Assessment

In connection with the course students are offered three examinations, a regular examination, a re-examination and one additional re-examination before the start of the following term. Within one year after the course, students are offered a minimum of two additional re-examinations. Thereafter, more examinations are offered but in accordance with current course content.

Grades

Grading scale includes the grades: U=Fail, E=Sufficient, D=Satisfactory, C=Good, B=Very Good, A=Excellent

The highest grade is A and the lowest passing grade is E. The grade for a non-passing result is Fail.

The student's performance is assessed with reference to the learning outcomes of the course. For the grade of E the student must show acceptable results. For the grade of D the student must show satisfactory results. For the grade of C the student must show good results. For the grade of B the student must show very good results. For the grade of A the student must show excellent results. For the grade of Fail the student must have shown unacceptable results.

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 in the course.

Entry requirements

A passing grade or higher on the courses (30 credits) of the first semester in the program, or, if chosen as an independent course, on other courses (30 credits) at the Master level.

A high level of proficiency in the English language is necessary: IELTS with a minimum of 6.0 and none of the sections under 5.0, or TOEFL with a minimum of 550 p (computer-based test 213 p; internet-based test 79 p), or Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency (A-C), G.C.E.O. level (A-C). Exemption from Swedish language requirements is granted.