



Faculty of Social Sciences

## HEKN14, Human Ecology: Political Ecology, Crisis and Identity, 15 credits

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

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### Details of approval

The syllabus was approved by the board of the Department of Human Geography on 2016-09-06 (STYR 2016/1121). The syllabus comes into effect 2017-01-16 and is valid from the spring semester 2017.

### General information

The course is a compulsory component of the Master of Science programme in Human Ecology – Culture, Power and Sustainability (SAHEK), 120 credits, and is also offered as a freestanding course.

*Language of instruction:* English

*Main field of study*      *Specialisation*

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

### Learning outcomes

On completion of the course, students shall be able to

#### Knowledge and understanding

- demonstrate knowledge of and define key concepts such as climate justice, vulnerability, hegemony, denial, apocalypse, wilderness, pastoral, nature, society, construction, hybridity, agency,
- demonstrate knowledge of and identify connections between different forces and phenomena within societies and between nations and continents, for example how ecological crises are related to political conflicts and manifested through an unequal distribution of economic resources,

- demonstrate an understanding of and describe how politics, finance, ecology, cultural production and identity interact in different empirical cases from different geographical regions,
- demonstrate an understanding of how reactions to environmental crises vary in relation to and are marked by their social context, as expressed in narratives in literature and film, media and private consumption,

### Competence and skills

- apply theoretical perspectives based in political economy, political ecology, ecocriticism, environmental philosophy, modernity and postmodernity, commodity fetishism and cultural theory, among others,
- analyse how the interplay between different forces on several interlinked levels and scales, from local to global, shape concrete developments and trends in periods of ecological crisis,

### Judgement and approach

- demonstrate insight into and take a position on key issues in current environmental philosophy and relate them to an understanding of and intervention in ecological crises,
- critically reflect on the construction of their own identities and sociocultural belonging through consumption and lifestyle choices, and on the impact of these choices on culture and environment and the establishment of meaningful and sustainable lifestyles and societies.

### Course content

The course enables students to develop concepts and analytical tools for a critical approach to ecological crises at the intersection between political ecology, culture and identity. By approaching the climate crisis and associated problems from different theoretical angles, the students explore how the problems are reproduced, aggravated, explained and challenged by the culturally codified relations between people. Students will acquire specialised insight into the ways in which the dialectic between political economy and individual desire conditions the development of crises, the way in which the crises are reflected and interrogated in cultural products, and the way in which they put established conceptions of nature and society to the test.

The course consists of four parts on interrelated topics:

1. *The political ecology of the climate crisis* – This topic analyses the power relations in an increasingly warmer climate from international negotiations to the front lines of the climate crisis. Theories of hegemony and collective action are used to analyse the UN climate negotiations. The dependence on fossil fuel is placed in relation to economic power and inertia. Several local cases are used to explore and discuss the links between climate change, other ecological crises, migration and political conflicts.

2. *Ecological crises in emotional life, culture and identity* – This topic deals with the representation and treatment of ecological crises in contemporary culture. Theories of, for example, the collective organisation of emotional life and consumption as a form of identity construction are used to analyse psychological reactions to crises. Informed by the field of ecocriticism, the students read fiction and watch film, taking ecological themes into special account. Furthermore, the topic addresses how lifestyles, identities and the ability for collective action are affected by the Internet, social media and digitisation processes.
3. *Key problems in contemporary environmental philosophy* – The topic highlights currently contested issues of environmental philosophy against the background of climate change and other ecological crises. Points of view such as social constructivism, hybridism, new materialism, posthumanism, political ontology, ecological Marxism, world ecology and critical realism are reviewed. Among the subjects discussed in detail are the question whether nature is socially constructed or not, if and how mankind is different from other species, to what extent nature and society can be separated, to whom agency can be attributed, what constitutes an ecological crisis and how world-views are connected to political interests.
4. *Alternatives and practices in periods of crisis* – The topic explores different opportunities to intervene in ongoing crises in order to solve or mitigate them. Among the agents taken into account are grassroots environmental groups, movements of native populations and large-scale climate campaigns, as well as green entrepreneurs and political parties. The development of renewable energy, market mechanisms and large-scale technological interventions such as geoengineering are discussed. Furthermore, the basic conditions for a more sustainable society are addressed.

## Course design

The teaching consists of lectures, text seminars, student presentations and study visits. Major emphasis is placed on dynamic and interactive teaching and learning. Each component is based on active student participation in seminars and group work.

Unless there are valid reasons to the contrary, compulsory participation is required in the seminars, presentations 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

The assessment is based on oral and written seminar assignments during the course, and a final take-home exam.

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.

## Grades

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

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.

The seminar assignments are exempted from the grading scale above. These components are awarded one of the grades 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 grade on the whole course is determined by the grade of the take-home exam.

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.

## **Entry requirements**

To be admitted to the course, students must have

- Bachelor's degree including three terms (1-90 credits) of studies in Human Ecology or another subject of relevance to the programme, e.g. anthropology, sociology, geography, environmental studies, or the equivalent.
- Passed second-cycle courses amounting to 22,5 credits. Students from within the programme must have taken all of the 22,5 credits within the Master of Science (120 credits) in Human Ecology - Culture, Power, and Sustainability.
- English corresponding to English 6 from Swedish upper secondary school.

## **Further information**

The course cannot be included in a degree together with the course HEKN12 Human Ecology: Political Ecology, Consumption, and Identity, 15 credits.