E9: Introduction to Political Ecology

Instructor: Nitin Rai (nitinrai@atree.org)

Credits: 2 credits (32 contact hours)

Duration of the Course: 11th September to 27th November 2014

Time and Days: 10:00 – 12:50 AM on Thursdays

Field trip: 24th to 26th October 2014

Course description

The course aims to introduce a political ecology approach to study interactions between society and the environment. We will explore in detail the idea that the environment is produced by both social and bio-physical processes. The course will discuss how a range of actors are implicated in this production of nature and how some have more power than others in shaping the environment. Dominant approaches and narratives in conservation and development leave lasting impacts on people and ecosystems. Discussions will cover such topics as the theoretical basis of political ecology, critiques of current conservation approaches, the production of environmental knowledge, and narratives of environmental change. An identified gap in the political ecology literature is the insufficient attention to ecological processes. The course will introduce approaches in political ecology that incorporate ecology.

Grading:

Class participation (30%): Students are expected to be fully involved in discussions and read the assigned chapters of the text book and assigned papers as these form the basis for discussions. Two students will summarise one reading each in class.

Written critique (20%): Two students will present one paper each in class and present a written critique of the paper (1000 words) a week after class. Every student will submit two such responses during the course.

Final paper (50%): Students will submit a paper (about 3000 words) that will either critically review recent literature, or explore a contemporary human-environment question from a political ecology perspective. Students will submit an outline of their paper midway through the course to ensure progress and clarity on objectives.


Schedule and readings:
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<tr>
<th>Session # (Date)</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>What is political ecology?</td>
<td>Robbins chapter 1, Greenberg and Park (1994), Bryant (1998)</td>
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<td>Session 2</td>
<td>Cultural ecology</td>
<td>Robbins chapter 2, Conklin (1957), Rappaport (1967)</td>
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<td>Session 3</td>
<td>Malthussian myths</td>
<td>Robbins chapter 3, Harvey 1974, Hardin 1968</td>
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<td>Session 4</td>
<td>Karl Marx</td>
<td>Guest lecture</td>
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<td>Session 5</td>
<td>Antonio Gramsci</td>
<td>Guest lecture</td>
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<td>Session 6</td>
<td>Liberation ecology</td>
<td>Robbins chapter 4, Peet and Watts (1993)</td>
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<td>Session 7</td>
<td>Michel Foucault</td>
<td>Michel Foucault (1991)</td>
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<td>Session 8</td>
<td>Discourse and narrative</td>
<td>Bryant (2002), Brosius (1999)</td>
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<td>Session 9</td>
<td>Degradation and marginalisation</td>
<td>Robbins chapter 4 and 5, Blaikie and Brookfield (1987), Bassett and Zueli (2000)</td>
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Readings


