Syllabus

Course Description

Course Title	Political Ecology
Course Code	96109
Course Title Additional	
Scientific-Disciplinary Sector	SPS/04
Language	English
Degree Course	Master in Eco-Social Design
Other Degree Courses (Loaned)	
Lecturers	Prof. Dr. Andreas Bernhard Josef Metzner-Szigeth, Andreas.Metzner-Szigeth@unibz.it https://www.unibz.it/en/faculties/design-art/academic-staff/person/36698
Teaching Assistant	
Semester	First semester
Course Year/s	1st and 2nd year
CP	6
Teaching Hours	30
Lab Hours	0
Individual Study Hours	about 120
Planned Office Hours	18
Contents Summary	Based on their interests and focus, students select courses in areas Observe, Analyse & Apply and of Make & Intervene, to which the course in Political Ecology. The course introduces core concepts and interdisciplinary methods of political ecology, drawing from fields like sociology, economics, anthropology, ecology, and sustainability science. It examines how society and ecology interact in the "Anthropocene", with a focus on socio-ecological crises and models of sustainable development. Students critically explore the transformative potentials of frameworks such as ecological modernization, along with strategies like efficiency, sufficiency, and consistency. The course investigates

	how socio-cultural worldviews and psycho-social attitudes frame and shape responses to environmental challenges and corresponding political-economic conflicts. Special focus is given to application-oriented research approaches that address utilization competencies and societal struggles—ranging from land and resource use to environmental pollution, climate change, urban and landscape planning, nature conservation, and animal welfare.
Course Topics	The curricular concept of this course aims to provide an introduction to essential approaches to political ecology, including: 1. topics and approaches of political ecology in connection with complementary areas of research and teaching regarding the interplay of human societies and ecological environments within established scientific disciplines (like sociology, economics, anthropology and ecology) as well as emerging inter- and transdisciplinary endeavors (like sustainability science, environmental studies or science technology studies); 2. models for exploring the shifting relationship of ecology and society, for understanding the whole range of what is taking place in the Anthropocene, and for analyzing crucial patterns and the cumulative dynamics of the advancing socio-ecological crisis; 3. the concept of sustainable development as an alternate vision of civilizational progress, the reasons for its elaboration and necessity, its dimensions and how they interact, as well as in derivative concepts like ecological modernization and eco-social transformation and how they correspond with contrasting strategies like efficiency, sufficiency and consistency; 4. the meaning of socio-cultural constructions of nature, society, the human being and other important entities with reference to different framings of our reality which are leading to distinct world views and competing concepts of what to understand as problems and how to figure out possible solutions for them; 5. utilization competencies and environmental conflicts (e.g. political struggles about land use, pollution or the degradation of landscapes) as field of scientific research and central concern of public debate with regard to the constellation of winners and losers within the decisive network of human actors, environmental conditions and features dependent to agricultural and industrial economies and technological infrastructures; 6. the question of how design, engineering and other professional activities (especially those referring to governance and

	management and other spheres of decision-making) are involved in these troubles and what they can offer to better our perspective for shaping social change and human ecology.
Keywords	Political Ecology, Socio-Cultural Constructions, Sustainable Development, Eco-Social Conflicts, Design Perspectives
Recommended Prerequisites	none
Propaedeutic Courses	none
Teaching Format	Frontal lectures as well as accompanied exercises, interactive discussions, common reading and elaboration of assignments in groups and as individuals, partly in conjunction with other components of the corresponding master's programs
Mandatory Attendance	recommended
Specific Educational Objectives and Learning Outcomes	Knowledge and understanding Students will have developed their own individual project practice and will be able to: - understanding the social, cultural, economic and environmental dimensions of projects and contexts - understand the relationships between environment, economy, society and politics - understand conflict situations on the way to greater sustainability and resilience in specific regions and situations - understanding the requirements, conflicts and potentials in specific regions and situations and working productively in that context Applying knowledge and understanding Students will be able to: - develop projects and practices suitable for addressing complex challenges. - respond to the needs and requirements of a given habitat, group or situation, based on observation, listening and dialogue Making judgements Students will be able to: - compare and evaluate concepts, practices and projects in their various contexts - assess the sustainability of projects - judging independently and critically a) the effects of a project

	within an environment, group or community b) one's own behaviour and contribution (through reflection and self-criticism) Communication skills Students will be able to: - show how the social, ecological and economic aspects of sustainability interact in their projects Learning skills Students will be able to: - work independently to learn according to different situations and in a personal way through reading and studying
Specific Educational Objectives and Learning Outcomes (additional info.)	The course invites students to reflect on the complex interrelations between ecological concerns, political processes, and societal dynamics, with attention to both local and broader contexts. Learners will explore how public discourse and decision-making frameworks shape understandings of environmental issues and their implications for communities and territories.
Assessment	The course assessment is based on a combination of continuous coursework and a final examination. Students are expected to read selected papers and prepare introductory presentations, which will be shared and discussed in class. In addition, each student must complete two major assignments: one focusing on compiling and analyzing projects related to sustainable development strategies, and the other on exploring and mapping eco-social conflicts. Drafts of both assignments must be presented during the course to receive feedback from peers and the instructor, allowing for revision and improvement. The final versions of both assignments must be submitted in written form one week before the final exam. The average of the two assignment grades (each weighted at 50%) will serve as the anticipated final mark, which will be confirmed or adjusted based on a brief oral examination discussing the final work. For not attending students: Not attending students are those not regularly present in class and not delivering all required assignments during the time span of the course. They have to study completely on their own on the basis of a list of essential literature (that will be published in the MS TEAMS

	domain of the course) in order to prepare themselves to an extensive written final examination that will provide the final mark.
Evaluation Criteria	For this course the appraisal of the students' performance will be carried out under careful application of the following criteria: - mastery of language for expressing course related contents (also under consideration of the fact that the teaching language might not be the students mother tongue) - ability to work in a team and use individual faculties successfully in interactive processes - consistency in the elaboration of written reports - clarity in the preparation of oral presentations - capability to summarize, evaluate, and establish relationships between topics - ability to reflect about different standpoints, perspectives and preferences and discuss these issues critically, appropriate and mindful - distinctness in answering questions about the results of the assignments and explicitness in displaying the outcome of the students' work. Criteria relevant for the assessment of not-attending students are: - distinctness in answering the questions of the extensive written examination correct and complete - ability to summarize, evaluate, and establish relationships between topics - ability to reflect about different standpoints, perspectives and preferences and discuss these issues critically, appropriate and mindful.
Required Readings	• Zimmerer, Karl S. (2015): Methods and Environmental Science in Political Ecology. In: Perreault, Tom; Bridge, Gavin; McCarthy, James (Eds.): The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology. London, N.Y. (Routledge), pp. 150-168 • Michelsen, Gerd; Adomßent, Maik; Martens, Pim; von Hauff, Michael (2016): Sustainable Development - Background and Context. In: Heinrichs, Harald; Martens, Pim; Michelsen, Gerd; Wiek, Arnim (Eds.): Sustainability Science - An Introduction. Dordrecht/NL (Springer), pp. 5-30 • Metzner-Szigeth, Andreas (2023j): Utilisation Competitions over Ecological Resources – Uncovering the Social Nature of the Environmental Problem. In: Metzner-Szigeth, Andreas (Ed.): Approaches in Studying the Entanglement of Ecology

	and Society, Florence (Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki), pp. 99-122 • Hirsch Hadorn, Gertrude; Bradley, David; Pohl, Christian; Rist, Stephan; Wiesmann, Urs (2006): Implications of Transdisciplinarity for Sustainability Research, Ecological Economics, vol. 60, no. 1, pp. 119-128 • Metzner-Szigeth, Andreas (2023n): Exploring Distinct Sustainable Development Strategies: How do they Recombine Technology and Culture?. In: Metzner-Szigeth, Andreas (Ed.): Approaches in Studying the Entanglement of Ecology and Society, Florence (Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki), pp. 155-172 • Shmueli, Deborah; Elliott, Michael; Kaufman, Sanda (2006): Frame Changes and the Management of Intractable Conflicts. Conflict Resolution Quarterly. vol. 24, issue 2, pp. 207-218 • Yaneva, Albena; Heaphy, Liam (2012): Urban Controversies and the Making of the Social. Architectural Research Quarterly. vol. 16, issue 1, pp. 29-36 The complete listing will be communicated the first day of class and provided in the courses MS TEAMS domain.
Supplementary Readings	• Metzner-Szigeth, Andreas (2022c): Exploring the Interplay of Images, Imaginaries and Imagination in Science Communication – Basic Considerations. In: Metzner-Szigeth, Andreas (Ed.): On the Interplay of Images, Imaginaries and Imagination in Science Communication, Florence (Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki) 2022, pp. 33-47 • Scheidel, Arnim; Temper, Leah; Demaria, Frederico; Martínez-Alier, Joan (2018): Ecological Distribution Conflicts as Forces for Sustainability: An Overview and Conceptual Framework, Sustainability Science, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 585–598 The complete listing will be communicated the first day of class and provided in the courses MS TEAMS domain.
Further Information	
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Sustainable cities and communities, Climate action, Responsible consumption and production