A Critical Analysis of Environmental Politics and Management

Department of Urban Environmental Policy & Planning
Instructor: Liat Racin, Liat.Racin@tufts.edu
Monday and Wednesdays, 6:00pm-9:30pm

Office hours: Wednesday 3:00 pm–5.00pm by appointment

Course Description:

This course explores the different ways of conceptualizing and theorizing urban environments, and the ever-changing relationship between ideology, power and the natural environment. Theories, techniques, and tools from political ecology are drawn to address and define environmental concerns and identify the links between environmental knowledge, practices, and decision-making. It particularly investigates the impact of power and politics in the deliberate and systematic making of urban landscapes, and the processes of environmental change and degradation in the urban context. Case studies on green spaces, water and food are drawn from around the world to demonstrate how specific forms of ecological knowledge are narrated and validated by interrelated biophysical, political and cultural contexts.

Learning Objectives:

- Examine how ecological issues have socio-cultural and political definitions, implications, and origins.
- Recognize how ideas of the urban environment are constructed and shaped by various actors, networks and power hierarchies.
- Investigate how knowledge of and access to ecological resources are structured, shaped, and normalized by science, political economy, and social structures.

Course Readings: Required readings are available in the ‘resources’ folder on Trunk, in boxes that correlate to each class 1-11. Students are required to read all assigned texts before each class and participate in related class discussions.

Requirements:

- Participation in class discussions 15%
  Active class participation is a critical part of this course. I expect that you critically engage with the literature, co-facilitate class discussions, come ready to pose provocative questions and apply theories and students’ comments to real-world situations.

- Weekly forum contribution 20%
  A 500-750 word ‘thought piece’ is due each week by Saturday at 7:00pm. This commentary will help you gather your own thoughts and questions. It can include an abstract and/or your reflections on 2-3 of the readings, and any points you are unclear on and/or would like to discuss further in class. You are welcome to reflect on any aspect of the readings, drawing
connections with other texts as well as your own experiences. It must contain some original thought, analysis and/or criticisms (i.e. points of agreement and disagreement).

- Two short essays 25%
At two points during the course I will ask you to critically analyze 1) how the ways in which we represent and understand nature may (re)shape our political actions, and 2) how a dominant narrative of the urban environment, which may include themes of ‘sustainability’ and ‘greenery’, may provide political opportunities and be effective/ineffective for analyzing environmental problems. In both essays, I’d like you to also highlight how exploring each issue, with a political ecological framework, may inform your professional practice and/or interest.

- Presentation 40%
Choose a city and a specific ‘environmental’ problem in your policy/planning area of interest. Address how critical insights from political ecology contribute to inquiry, policy, and a range of methods to address the problem. Your presentations will need to contain the following points but feel free to include others:
  o A description of the problem (using terms from both the natural/biological and social/political sciences), and an identification of the different actors involved - explaining their relationships to each other and to the problem itself. For instance, highlight who may be most affected by and/or responsible for creating the problem, and who does each actor support, work for and/or against, and for what reasons?
  o Choose a position on the issue. What arguments are made against and in support of the position? How do the two different perspectives relate to each other and to the key actors identified? Who stands to benefit and lose?
Session 1 - Introducing political ecology

Required readings:

Suggested readings:

Session 2 – Nature in the city vs. the urbanization of nature

Required readings:

Suggested readings:

Session 3 – The production of nature in an age of globalized capitalism


Suggested readings:
Session 4 - The geography of difference

Required readings:

Suggested Readings:

Session 5 - Land and urban greenery, part 1

Required readings:

Suggested readings:

**Session 6 - Land and urban greenery, part 2**

**Required readings:**


**Suggested readings:**


**Session 7 - The political nature of water**

**Required readings:**

- Truelove, Y. (2011). (Re-) Conceptualizing water inequality in Delhi, India through a feminist political ecology framework. GeoForum, 42(2), 143-152.

**Suggested readings:**

Session 8 - The power of eating

Required readings:

Suggested readings:

Session 9 - Environmental justice

Required readings:

Suggested Readings:
Session 10 - Environmental governance and local action

Required readings:

Suggested readings:

Session 11 – Class presentations