Critical Perspectives on Sustainability

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Overview

This course provides some of the tools needed to critically analyze the relationship between society and the environment as it manifests in theories and practices of corporate sustainability, sustainable finance, and certain (business-led or business-dependent) sustainable development initiatives. In doing so, it draws heavily from disciplines such as political ecology and environmental anthropology, which have a long history of problematizing many of the assumptions that many of these initiatives and assessments of their success (or failure) rely on. The point of the course is to learn how to deploy the conceptual vocabularies of these disciplines and their theoretical foundations in order to more fully understand the nature of the corporate form and its socio-ecological effects. In that sense, a big focus in lectures and discussions will be on different theoretical approaches to understanding corporate sustainability.

It is important that the assigned readings are done *before* class in order to facilitate class discussion. It is also important that you attend class; otherwise, you will miss important concepts and theories related to but not necessarily discussed in the assigned readings, and you will not be able to participate in the discussions. Lectures will focus more on the theoretical background of papers and the literature the assigned papers are part of, rather than a summary of the papers themselves. Each week before class, students are expected to submit a max. one page response to the readings, including any questions or concerns you have about the readings. These should be submitted on Canvas by Tuesday afternoon at 5pm. Students should also spend a few minutes before class familiarizing themselves with the case by reading a few relevant news articles and press releases. All the cases are relatively highly-publicized (most have Wikipedia pages), and it is easy to find information and analyses using Google.

This syllabus is subject to revisions.

Project / Exam

The exam format is a 20 page (**maximum**) paper on a topic of your choosing that allows you to demonstrate that you have met the learning objectives. There will be two opportunities for feedback from the course instructor and your peers on the topic for your essay: a presentation in class ("lightening talk" followed by questions and comments) and a written description of your project sent to the instructor for project approval.

Learning Objectives

To achieve the grade 12, students should meet the following learning objectives with no or only minor mistakes or errors:

- be able to write a well-structured and clearly argued essay analyzing a company's sustainability performance
- be able to deploy relevant theories from anthropology and political ecology to their case company and argue why those theories are appropriate
- demonstrate familiarity with mainstream theories of corporate sustainability
- demonstrate an ability to critically assess the relative strength and weakness of mainstream theories of and approaches to corporate sustainability, drawing on both critical theories presented in the course and the case company

Some useful resources

The Ethnobotanical Assembly, an online ethnobotany magazine: https://www.tea-assembly.com/

The Political Ecology Network (POLLEN): https://politicalecologynetwork.org/

Journal of Political Ecology: https://journals.uair.arizona.edu/index.php/JPE/index

Bryant, Raymond L. (ed.). 2015. *The International Handbook of Political Ecology.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. (link to PDF)

Dove, Michael, and Carol Carpenter. *Environmental anthropology: A historical reader*. Vol. 10. Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.

Haenn, Nora, and Richard Wilk, eds. *The environment in anthropology: A reader in ecology, culture, and sustainable living*. NYU Press, 2006. (available online through CBS Library)

Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html

Academic integrity at CBS: http://libguides.cbs.dk/c.php?g=443633&p=3025632

Class 1 (4/9): Introduction

- Introductions
- Course Overview
- Exam Overview
- What is sustainability? What is political ecology? What is environmental anthropology? What is environmental humanities? How do they fit together?

Required readings:

Pigg, Stacy Leigh. "Investing social categories through place: Social representations and development in Nepal." *Comparative studies in society and history* 34, no. 3 (1992): 491-513.

Wang, Ting-Jieh. "Green Governmentality." In *International Handbook of Political Ecology,* R. Bryant, ed. (2015): 318-331.

Warde, Paul. "The invention of sustainability." *Modern Intellectual History* 8, no. 1 (2011): 153-170.

Additional readings:

Barnes, Jessica, Michael Dove, Myanna Lahsen, Andrew Mathews, Pamela McElwee, Roderick McIntosh, Frances Moore et al. "Contribution of anthropology to the study of climate change." *Nature Climate Change* 3, no. 6 (2013): 541.

Benson, Peter, and Stuart Kirsch. "Corporate oxymorons." *Dialectical anthropology* 34, no. 1 (2010): 45-48.

Freeman, R. Edward, Jeffrey S. Harrison, Andrew C. Wicks, Bidhan L. Parmar, and Simone De Colle. *Stakeholder theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Friedman, Milton. "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits." (1970).

Hastrup, Kirsten, 2013. "Anthropological Contributions to the Study of Climate: Past, Present, and Future." *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 4, no. 4: 269–81.

Porter, Michael E., and Mark R. Kramer. "The Big Idea: Creating Shared Value." Harvard Business Review, 2011.

Schwartz., Mark S. and Archie B. Carroll. "Corporate social responsibility: a three-domain approch." Business Ethics Quarterly 13, no. 4 (2003): 503-530.

Spindler, Edmund A. "The History of Sustainability the origins and effects of a popular concept." In Sustainability in tourism, pp. 9-31. Springer Gabler, Wiesbaden, 2013.

West, Paige. "Translation, value, and space: theorizing an ethnographic and engaged environmental anthropology." *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 4 (2005): 632-642.

Class 2 (11/9): Major themes and theories in environmental anthropology and political ecology

- Dualisms
- Performativity
- Affect and materiality
- Discipline and surveillance
- Knowledge and power
- Networks and rhizomes
- Antipolitics

Required readings:

Callon, Michel. 2007. "What does it mean to say that economics is performative?" Chapter 11 in *Do Economists Make Markets? On the performativity of economics.* D. MacKenzie et al, eds., pp. 311-357. https://wtf.tw/ref/mackenzie.pdf [NB: Different parts of this entire book will be relevant for different projects and discussions throughout the course.]

Sultana, Farhana. "Suffering for water, suffering from water: emotional geographies of resource access, control and conflict." *Geoforum* 42, no. 2 (2011): 163-172.

Vaughn, Sarah E. 2017. "Disappearing Mangroves: The Epistemic Politics of Climate Adaptation in Guyana." *Cultural Anthropology* 32, no. 2: 242–68.

Additional readings:

Agrawal, Arun. "Dismantling the divide between indigenous and scientific knowledge." *Development and change* 26, no. 3 (1995): 413-439.

Dove, Michael R. "Living Rubber, Dead Land, and Persisting Systems in Borneo: Indigenous Representation of Sustainability." *Bijdragen tot de Taal, Land-en Volkenkunde*154, no. 1 (1998): 20-54.

Pulido, Laura. 2016. "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity, II: Environmental Racism, Racial Capitalism and State-Sanctioned Violence." *Progress in Human Geography* 41, no. 4: 524–33.

Forsyth, Timothy. *Critical political ecology: the politics of environmental science*. Routledge, 2004.

Gaard, Greta. "Toward a queer ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): 114-137.

Panelli, Ruth. 2010. "More-than-Human Social Geographies: Posthuman and Other Possibilities." *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 1: 79–87.

Rocheleau, Dianne E. "Political ecology in the key of policy: From chains of explanation to webs of relation." Geoforum 39, no. 2 (2008): 716-727.

Vallentin, Steen, and David Murillo. "Governmentality and the politics of CSR." Organization 19, no. 6 (2012): 825-843.

Class 3 (18/9): Methods Fieldtrip and Discussion

Topics and Research Questions due! *For this assignment, please choose a company (or two or three if you're unsure and want feedback) and a scandal (or success story) regarding the company's sustainability performance, and come up with a draft research question for your final exam essay. Ideally, you'd also have a draft abstract of your essay so I can see what direction you're thinking of taking your arguments. This should include some indication of the methods you plan to use (e.g., Will you collect some primary data or rely on secondary data?) and the theories you plan to use. This will help me give better feedback. If you'd like comments on your research topic/question/plan, please send me one (1) page Word document by the end of today, including your name and email in the header.*

- Participant observation
- Discussion

Required Readings:

Souleles, Daniel. "How to Study People Who Do Not Want to be Studied: Practical Reflections on Studying Up." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 41, no. S1 (2018): 51-68.

Nader, Laura. 1972. "Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained From Studying Up." Washington, DC: US Department of Health Education & Welfare Office of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED065375). https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED065375.pdf

Additional readings:

Baba, Marietta L. "The anthropology of work in the Fortune 1000: A critical retrospective." *Anthropology of Work Review* 18, no. 4 (1998): 17-28.

Gusterson, Hugh. "Studying up revisited." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 20, no. 1 (1997): 114-119.

O'Doherty, Damian, and Daniel Neyland. "The developments in ethnographic studies of organising: Towards objects of ignorance and objects of concern." *Organization* (2019).

Ortner, Sherry B. "Access: Reflections on studying up in Hollywood." *Ethnography* 11, no. 2 (2010): 211-233.

Welker, Marina. "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the Corporation." *Seattle UL Rev.* 39 (2015): 397-422.

Class 4 (25/9): Trust and responsibility (Volkswagen emissions scandal)
- Trust in the global economy
- Are corporations agents? (ANT and semiotics, agency as rights and responsibilities, agency as affect)
- Ethics

Required Readings:

Sampson, Steven. "The "right way": moral capitalism and the emergence of the corporate ethics and compliance officer." *Journal of Business Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (2016): 65-86.

Orssatto, Renato J., and Stewart R. Clegg. "The political ecology of organizations: Toward a framework for analyzing business-environment relationships." *Organization & Environment* 12, no. 3 (1999): 263-279.

Seshia Galvin, Shaila. "The farming of trust: Organic certification and the limits of transparency in Uttarakhand, India." *American Ethnologist* 45, no. 4 (2018): 495-507.

Class 5 (2/10): Expertise and legitimacy in corporate sustainability
- Environmental justice
- Environmental racism
- Knowledge, power, and expertise
- "Modernity"

Required Readings:

Escobar, Arturo. "Power and visibility: Development and the invention and management of the Third World." *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 4 (1988): 428-443.

Dowie, Mark. "Conservation refugees." *Orion Magazine* (2011).
https://orionmagazine.org/article/conservation-refugees/

Heglar, Mary A. "I work in the environmental movement. I don't care if you recycle." *Vox* (2019).
https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/28/18629833/climate-change-2019-green-new-deal

Purdy, Jedediah. "Environmentalism's Racist History." *New Yorker* (2011).
https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/environmentalisms-racist-history

Osterhoudt, Sarah. "Sense and sensibilities: Negotiating meanings within agriculture in northeastern Madagascar." *Ethnology: An International Journal of Cultural and Social Anthropology* 49, no. 4 (2012): 283-301.

Additional Readings:

Dove, Michael R. "Hybrid histories and indigenous knowledge among Asian rubber smallholders." *Dove, Michael R* (2002): 349-359.

Dove, Michael R., and Daniel M. Kammen. "Vernacular models of development: An analysis of Indonesia under the "New Order"." *World Development* 29, no. 4 (2001): 619-639.

Mitchell, Timothy. *Rule of experts: Egypt, techno-politics, modernity*. Univ of California Press, 2002. (mosquitos chapter, especially)

Seymour, Nicole. *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age*. U of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Zeng, Lily, Deepti Chatti, Chris Hebdon, and Michael R. Dove. "The Political Ecology of Knowledge and Ignorance." *Brown J. World Aff.* 23 (2016): 159.

Class 6 (8/10): Writing Workshop
Bring your computers for structured writing and peer feedback opportunities.

Class 7 (9/10): Lightening talks
*For this class, please send me your slides by **9am on 8 October**. You will have 3-5 minutes to present your research topic to the class and a few minutes afterword to answer questions from me and your classmates. There are no readings assigned for this class, so please take it as an opportunity to get caught up, or to get a jump on the readings for the final three sessions.*

Class 8 (23/10): Connections (Maersk) *Guest Lecture*
- Supply chain capitalism
- Globalization
- Infrastructure

Required Readings:

Carter, Craig R., and Dale S. Rogers. "A framework of sustainable supply chain management: moving toward new theory." *International journal of physical distribution & logistics management* 38, no. 5 (2008): 360-387.

Hébert, Karen. 2014. "The Matter of Market Devices: Economic Transformation in a Southwest Alaskan Salmon Fishery." *Geoforum* 53: 21–30.

Tsing, Anna. "Supply chains and the human condition." *Rethinking Marxism* 21, no. 2 (2009): 148-176.

Additional readings:

Bridge, Gavin. "Contested terrain: mining and the environment." *Annu. Rev. Environ. Resour.* 29 (2004): 205-259.

Freeman, R. Edward. "The politics of stakeholder theory: Some future directions." *Business ethics quarterly* (1994): 409-421.

Freeman, R. Edward, Kirsten Martin, and Bidhan Parmar. "Stakeholder capitalism." *Journal of Business Ethics* 74, no. 4 (2007): 303-314.

Powell, Miles A. ""Pestered with Inhabitants": Aldo Leopold, William Vogt, and More Trouble with Wilderness." *Pacific Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (2015): 195-226.

Welker, Marina A. ""Corporate security begins in the community": mining, the corporate social responsibility industry, and environmental advocacy in Indonesia." *Cultural Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (2009): 142-179.

Class 9 (30/10): Measuring impacts (Rainforest Alliance and climate impacts of industrial agriculture)

- Ignorance, uncertainty, ambiguity
- Agnotology
- Zones of unknowing
- Knowledge, power, experts
- Governing through indicators
- Accounting and accountability

Required Readings:

Eren, Ayşen. "The political ecology of uncertainty: the production of truth by juridical practices in hydropower development." *Journal of Political Ecology* 24, no. 1 (2017): 386-405.

Freidberg, Susanne. "Calculating sustainability in supply chain capitalism." *Economy and Society* 42, no. 4 (2013): 571-596.

Power, Michael. "How accounting begins: Object formation and the accretion of infrastructure." *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 47 (2015): 43-55.

Additional Readings:

Cooper MH (2015) Measure for measure? Commensuration, commodification, and metrology in emissions markets and beyond. Environment and Planning A 47: 1787–1804

Davis, Kevin, Angelina Fisher, Benedict Kingsbury, and Sally Engle Merry, eds. *Governance by indicators: global power through classification and rankings*. Oxford University Press, 2012.

Geissler, P. Wenzel. "Public secrets in public health: Knowing not to know while making scientific knowledge." *American Ethnologist* 40, no. 1 (2013): 13-34.

Oreskes, Naomi, and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of doubt: How a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*. Bloomsbury, 2011.

Proctor, Robert N., and Londa Schiebinger. "Agnotology: The making and unmaking of ignorance." (2008).

Lehtonen, Markku, Léa Sébastien, and Tom Bauler. "The multiple roles of sustainability indicators in informational governance: between intended use and unanticipated influence." *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 18 (2016): 1-9.

Seshia Galvin, Shaila. "The farming of trust: Organic certification and the limits of transparency in Uttarakhand, India." *American Ethnologist* 45, no. 4 (2018): 495-507.

Walter, Maggie, and Chris Andersen. *Indigenous statistics: A quantitative research methodology*. Left Coast Press, 2013.

Class 10 (6/11): Limits of Sustainability (Danske Bank)

Guest Lecture (tentative): ESG at Danske Bank

- Financialization
- Natural and social capital
- Impact investing
- Datafication and "big data"

Required Readings:

Christophers, Brett. "Environmental Beta or How Institutional Investors Think about Climate Change and Fossil Fuel Risk." *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* (2019): 1-21.

Hansen, Hans Krause, and Mikkel Flyverbom. "The politics of transparency and the calibration of knowledge in the digital age." *Organization* 22, no. 6 (2015): 872-889.

Sullivan, Sian. "Making Nature Investable." Science & Technology Studies (2018): 47-76.

Additional Readings:

Bracking, Sarah. "How do investors value environmental harm/care? Private equity funds, development finance institutions and the partial financialization of nature-based industries." *Development and Change* 43, no. 1 (2012): 271-293.

Bracking, Sarah. "The anti-politics of climate finance: the creation and performativity of the green climate fund." *Antipode* 47, no. 2 (2015): 281-302.

Cooper M (2010) Turbulent worlds: Financial markets and environmental crisis. Theory, Culture & Society 27(2– 3): 167–190

Sullivan, Sian. "Banking nature? The spectacular financialisation of environmental conservation." *Antipode* 45, no. 1 (2013): 198-217.

Class 11 (13/11): The temporality of sustainability (Union Carbide/Dow) and Course Review

- Disasters
- Ruins
- Toxicity
- Temporality
- Future-making
- Politics of the body

Submit your questions about the class here. It will be open throughout the course, and we will go through as many of them as possible in the last class: https://forms.gle/F16kKJ4XC5eXzZEA6

Required Readings:

Calvão, Filipe. "When boom goes bust: ruins, crisis and security in megaengineering diamond mining in Angola." In *Engineering earth*, pp. 367-382. Springer, Dordrecht, 2011.

Davis, Heather, and Zoe Todd. 2017. "On the Importance of a Date, or, Decolonizing the Anthropocene." *ACME* 16, no. 4: 761–80.

Rydin, Yvonne. "Justice and the geography of Hurricane Katrina." *Geoforum* 37, no. 1 (2006): 4-6.

Additional Readings:

Appadurai, Arjun. *The Future as a Cultural Fact.* London: Verso, 2013.

Buell, Lawrence. "Toxic discourse." *Critical inquiry* 24, no. 3 (1998): 639-665.

Chen, Mel Y. *Animacies: Biopolitics, racial mattering, and queer affect*. Duke University Press, 2012.

Jasanoff, Sheila, and Sang-Hyun Kim, eds. *Dreamscapes of modernity: Sociotechnical imaginaries and the fabrication of power*. University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Kern, Leslie. "From toxic wreck to crunchy chic: Environmental gentrification through the body." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33, no. 1 (2015): 67-83.

Simone, AbdouMaliq. "People as infrastructure: intersecting fragments in Johannesburg." *Public culture* 16, no. 3 (2004): 407-429.