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 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 to more fully understand the nature of the corporate form and its socio-ecological impacts.

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. 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 session, a group of students (3-4 people) will summarize the assigned readings, including a brief presentation for the class and accompanying PowerPoint slides (one slide per reading is sufficient). Please also take a few minutes before class to familiarize yourself with the case by reading 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.

Note that this syllabus is subject to minor changes.

## Project / Exam

The exam is a short paper (max. 15 pages) responding to the following prompt:

*Select a case of corporate (un)sustainability that has been sufficiently covered in the news media and/or academic literature, but which has* ***not*** *been covered in the lectures. Cases brought up during discussion (but not in the lecture) are allowed.*

*Drawing on theories and topics from political ecology and environmental anthropology, formulate a research question and choose appropriate methods (or methodological approach) to answer it. Note that the essay does not have to present a final answer to a complex problem, but can/should instead offer a critical assessment of the problem itself and ways of solving it.*

It is of course possible to start and finish the exam within the 72 hour time limit of the scheduled exam, but you are allowed (and encouraged!) to start thinking about the essay beforehand. One way to do this is to take advantage of the feedback opportunity offered in Week 3. Note that while you are technically allowed to wait until 11 July to submit your research question for approval, I would encourage you to start thinking about this sooner!

## Learning Objectives

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

* Demonstrate a critical understanding of sustainability as both a theory/concept and in practice
* Be able to distinguish between sustainability and greenwashing based on a real-world cases
* Demonstrate an understanding of qualitative methods used in political ecology and environmental anthropology and their relevance for sustainability research and practice
* Be able to critically assess corporate sustainability reports and media coverage of corporate un/sustainability

## 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](https://we.riseup.net/assets/317006/Raymond+L.+Bryant+%28ed.%29-The+International+Handbook+of+Political+Ecology-Edward+Elgar+%282015%29.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](https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kbhnhh-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3025589))

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: Introduction

* Introductions
* Course Overview
* Exam Overview
* What is sustainability? What is political ecology? What is environmental anthropology? What is environmental humanities?

Required readings:

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

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.

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.

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](https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.219).” 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.

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

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

# Class 2: Major themes in environmental anthropology and political ecology

* Nature vs culture, environment vs society, naturecultures, socioenvironments
* Actor networks
* Knowledge(s) and power
* Class, race, and gender
* Affect and emotion
* (Post)colonialism and indigeneity
* Posthumanism
* Antipolitics
* Where does the corporation fit in all this?

Required readings:

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.

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.

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

Panelli, Ruth. 2010. “[More-than-Human Social Geographies: Posthuman and Other Possibilities](https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132509105007).” 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: 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: 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: Communities and stakeholders (BHP Billiton)

* Stakeholder engagement
* Precarity
* Performativity
* Materiality
* Land and people

Required Readings:

Hébert, Karen. 2014. “[The Matter of Market Devices: Economic Transformation in a Southwest Alaskan Salmon Fishery](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.01.012).” Geoforum 53: 21–30.

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.

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.

# Class 6: Measuring sustainability (Rainforest Alliance, Chr. Hansen)

* 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.

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).

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.

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

# Class 7 Lightening talks

*For this class, please send me your slides by* ***9am on 12 July****. 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 classes.*

# Class 8: Knowledge, power, development, and the environmental movement (Greenpeace and Enel)

* 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 9: Work, Time, and Bodies (Union Carbide/Dow)

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

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](https://www.acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1539).” 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.

# Class 10: 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: Course Review and “Big Questions”

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: link