

SO2G6-15 Environmental Sociology

24/25

Department

Sociology

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Alice Mah

Credit value

15

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

Environmental sociology offers important insights for understanding the social roots of environmental problems, unequal exposures to toxic pollution and risks from ecological disasters, and political and economic interests in environmental conflicts. This module introduces students to environmental sociology, a field that examines the role that power and social inequality play in shaping human and nonhuman interactions, while drawing attention to the inseparability of humans and nonhumans. It explores a range of perspectives and topics within the field, including political ecology, ecological Marxism, consumption and production, global environmental justice, risk, toxicity, eco-feminism, environmentalism of the poor, and environmental crisis.

Module aims

The module aims to introduce students to the field of environmental sociology, which interrogates the relationship between society and the environment, while simultaneously challenging the idea that society and the environment can be meaningfully separated. By taking this module, students will gain an understanding of key theoretical perspectives, debates, topics, and new directions within environmental sociology and the importance of this critical area of sociological study for understanding global environmental problem and change.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be

covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1: Introduction to Environmental Sociology,
Week 2: Sociological Perspectives on Environmental Problems,
Week 3: Political Ecology and Ecological Marxism,
Week 4: Consumption, Growth, and Capitalism,
Week 5: Risk and Toxicity,
Week 6: Reading Week,
Week 7: Environmental Justice,
Week 8: Environmentalism of the Poor,
Week 9: Eco-feminism,
Week 10: Confronting Ecological Crisis

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Identify and critically analyse key theoretical perspectives, approaches, and debates within environmental sociology, how these relate to sociology and to other disciplines, and how these have changed over time
- Contextualise, synthesise, and draw links between environmental problems, social inequalities, and power, drawing on examples from key environmental issues (e.g., risk, toxicity, pollution, climate change, unsustainable growth) and situated in relation to particular contexts and scales (e.g. global, regional, national, local)
- Demonstrate a critical understanding of the complex interrelationships between society and the environment, and the strengths as well as limitations of sociology for understanding and tackling environmental problems.

Indicative reading list

Armiero, M. and Sedrez, L. eds., 2014. *A History of Environmentalism: Local Struggles, Global Histories*. London: Bloomsbury.

Beck, U. 1992 *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. Translated by Ritter, Mark. London: Sage Publications.

Boudia, S. and N.Jas. 2014. (Eds) *Powerless Science? Science and Politics in a Toxic World*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Brown, P. 1997. "Popular Epidemiology Revisited." *Current Sociology* 45: 137-156.

Bullard, R.D., 1990. *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Carson, R. 1962. *Silent Spring*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Davies, T. and A. Mah. (Eds) 2020. *Toxic Truths: Environmental Justice and Citizen Science in a Post-Truth Age*. Manchester University Press.

Downey, L. 2015. *Inequality, Democracy, and the Environment*. New York: New York University Press.

Foster, J.B. 2020. *The Return of Nature*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Gould, K. A, and T. L. Lewis (Eds). 2009. *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Guha, R., 2014. *Environmentalism: A Global History*. London: Penguin.

- Irwin, A. 1995. *Citizen science: A study of people, expertise and sustainable development*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Klein, Naomi. 2019. *On Fire: The Burning Case for the Green New Deal*. Penguin.
- Latour, B., 2004. *Politics of Nature*. Harvard University Press.
- Lockie, S. 2015 *What is Environmental Sociology?*, *Environmental Sociology*, 1:3, 139-142.
- Markowitz, G.E., and D. Rosner. 2002. *Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Martinez-Alier, J., L. Temper, D. Del Bene and A. Scheidel (2016) *Is there a global environmental justice movement?* *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 43(3): 731-755.
- Mayer, B. 2011. *Blue-Green Coalitions: Fighting for Safe Workplaces and Healthy Communities*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Mol, A. J.P. 2006. "From Environmental Sociologies to Environmental Sociology? A Comparison of US and European Environmental Sociology." *Organization and Environment* 19(1): 5-27.
- Nixon, R., 2011. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Pellow, D.N. and H.N. Brehm (2013) *An Environmental Sociology for the Twenty-First Century* *Annual Review of Sociology* 39:1, 229-250
- Pellow, D.N. 2018. *What Is Critical Environmental Justice?* Cambridge: Polity.
- Schlosberg, D., 2013. *Theorising environmental justice: the expanding sphere of a discourse*. *Environmental Politics*, 22(1), pp.37-55.
- Sealey-Huggins, L (2018) *The climate crisis is a racist crisis: structural racism, inequality and climate change*, in Johnson, A., Joseph-Salisbury, R., and Kamunge, B [eds] *The Fire Now: Anti-Racist Scholarship in Times of Explicit Racial Violence*. Zed Books: London pp.99-113.
- Shiva, V. and M.Mies. 2014. *Ecofeminism*. Zed Books Ltd.
- Stavis, D. and Felli, R., 2020. *Planetary Just Transition? How Inclusive and How Just?*. *Earth System Governance* 6: 100065.
- Szasz, A. 2007. *Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- Tsing, A. L. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press.
- Whyte, K. 2017. "Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene." *English Language Notes* 55(1): 153-162.

Interdisciplinary

While this module is framed in terms of a subfield within sociology, the topic is highly interdisciplinary, and the subfield engages with perspectives from across the social sciences and indeed the natural sciences. The most clear interdisciplinary connection is with the Global Sustainable Development programme, as this course would be complementary to the perspectives offered there. The orientation of the module is to highlight the valuable and distinctive contributions of sociology to interdisciplinary debates on environmental issues, while opening up engagements across disciplines for synergies and cross-fertilisation.

Subject specific skills

- critical understanding of key perspectives, approaches, debates, and topics within a key subfield with the discipline, demonstrating breadth as well as critical depth of knowledge;

- an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge, particularly regarding other disciplines and perspectives;
- use a range of sociological methods of research and inquiry to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis;
- develop existing skills and acquire new competences in research analysis and critical thinking that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations.

Transferable skills

- critical thinking, analysis, and research skills would be valuable skills for working in organisations
 - effectively communicate and demonstrate the value of sociological approaches for understanding, interpreting, and confronting complex social and environmental issues.
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Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (50%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (50%)
Total	18 hours

Private study description

Students are expected to read set texts each week in preparation for the seminar.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time
Essay	100%	132 hours

Weighting

Study time

Assessed essay

Feedback on assessment

Students will receive written, electronic feedback on all work through the Tabula system. They can receive verbal feedback during Advice and Feedback hours.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- USOA-L301 BA in Sociology
 - Year 2 of L301 Sociology
 - Year 2 of L301 Sociology
 - Year 2 of L301 Sociology
- Year 2 of USOA-L314 Undergraduate Sociology and Criminology

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-VL15 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with a term in Venice)
- Year 2 of UPOA-ML13 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology