

SPRING SEMESTER 2007
ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY
SYLLABUS

INSTRUCTOR: Magalie BOURBLANC
magalie.bourblanc@sciences-po.org

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Ecology is often described as the study of natural communities while sociology is described as the study of human communities. Environmental sociology is the study of both together, the study of the “*community*” in the broadest sense –people, water, land, plants, animals etc- (Bell, 2004). Indeed, society and the physical environment are tightly linked in various ways. During this course, we will explore these linkages at various levels from the local to the global.

The first ambition is to reflect on environment and natural resources issues from a different perspective than usual, namely from the social perspective (a broad social theory perspective). We will see that social-natural interactions can be understood in very different ways since the “environment” itself can be conceived very differently itself: we can speak about environment as an idea; environment as a living place/space; environment as a (material) resource. Or we can speak about the natural environment, the modified environment, the built environment and even about the social environment (Humphrey, Lewis, Buttel, 2003).

However we certainly do not want to underestimate the natural side of the environment. In that respect, we want to account for linked human/natural systems from an “environmental sociology” viewpoint rather than from a “sociology of the environment” viewpoint. In other words, this course on environmental sociology will not be conceived as another subdiscipline in sociology, but rather will tend to explore new intellectual pathways. In that sense, environmental sociology raises questions that contemporary “mainstream” sociology has been very concerned with too these last years. Indeed, environmental sociology is highly emblematic for the challenges the “modernity” project is facing. Since the modernist dichotomy between social systems and natural systems becomes less and less tenable, new ways to account for the real and social entangled world have to be found.

The course is mainly oriented towards a theoretical perspective and is geared towards getting students acquainted with different schools of thought. The concepts, theories and paradigms of the discipline will be mainly derived from the North American academic tradition and the European one. Each time, empirical examples will be provided to support the discussion. The course will be divided into two parts, the first one deals with the ideal/constructionist debate and the second part is addressing the question of change and new modes of governance.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

First of all, the course suggests that there is no one way to look at environmental issues and that representations of environment are manifold. In addition, these representations evolve over time. The first goal is thus to grasp the complexity of social understandings about environmental issues.

The second goal is even more challenging. During the class, we will introduce the complexity of the interactions between the social and the natural. Thus the ambition here is to evoke the hybridity of the object “environment.” In this respect, we will address whether or not, and to what extent, the current development of the discipline has thus far been successful in bringing environment and biophysical variables into sociology. To be sure, we will not solve this question, but at least we will engage the debate and reflect on ways of which the study of the environment has been able (or not) to integrate natural and social perspectives together.

Other questions will be raised at some points from session to session, revolving around the idea that environmental challenge is characterized by some of the new features our contemporary societies are experiencing. In this respect we will point at new ways to think about the link between politics and territory that environment may reveal; new links to knowledge, experts and lay people that environment might display; the renewal of democracy and participation that environmental issues may favour.

Procedures and Requirements for the Spring Semester

Tests: There will be no test in this class.

Undergraduate students taking the course for credit have three types of assignments. First, each student is expected to write a short (1-3 pages) memo every four weeks starting **the third week**. The idea is much more to comment on the assigned readings for the week than to summarize them (only). And students should also reflect on what they are currently reading not especially for the class but in the newspapers, journals etc on topics that relate to the course, or on their own experience. From time to time, I might ask for comments on a particular reading during the class, which means that everybody has to do the readings prior to the class even if s/he does not have to send his/her memo this particular week. Memos will be sent electronically, and they are due **the day before the class by 5:00 p.m.** (it means by Sunday 5.00 p.m). Memos will need to be sent to the following email address: <magalie.bourblanc@sciences-po.org>. These memos are individually graded (50% of the final grade); Second, since this class is meant to be interactive, 25% of the final grade will be based on class participation (and of course to commit yourself to do the assigned readings is a good way to get prepared for the class discussion). The ability of students to build on each other’s thoughts will be reflected in this part of the grade (not how often or how long s/he has actually been speaking). In other words, a real class discussion rather than monologues is encouraged during the class. Third, an oral presentation is required. This presentation is worth 25% of the final grade. Each student will be expected to select a (environmental) topic of his/her choice and (as much as possible) to make (a critical) use of (two or more) approaches, concepts and theories we have been covering during the semester. The idea is to address different viewpoints, perspectives or ways of thinking about an issue and any problem or conflict this may cause. The ambition is to help people understand the dynamics of environmental issues by mobilizing a theoretical and critical viewpoint.

These are general suggestions to be thinking about. More directions will be provided during the class.

General manuals, textbooks:

Michael M.Bell, *An invitation to environmental sociology*, Sage Publications, 2004

Craig R.Humphrey, Tammy L.Lewis, Frederick H.Buttel, *Environment, Energy, and Society: exemplary works*, Wadsworth, 2003

Craig R.Humphrey, Tammy L.Lewis, Frederick H.Buttel, *Environment, Energy, and Society: a new synthesis*, Wadsworth, 2003

Peter Dickens, August Gijswijt, Frederick H.Buttel, Riley E. Dunlap. *Sociological theory and the environment. Classical foundations, contemporary insights*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2002

John Barry, *Social Theory and the Environment*, London: Routledge, 1999

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS:

The order of the following sections can be subject to change depending on class discussions' progression.

The Theoretical : Realists versus Social Constructionists Debate

- Session 1 : definition of terms ; academic origins of the discipline ; the discipline's new challenge for social theory ; main issues, topics and objects of research in Environmental Sociology

Assigned Readings:

John Barry, *Social Theory and the Environment*, London: Routledge, 1999, chap.1 "Nature, environment and social theory"

Peter Dickens, August Gijswijt, Frederick H.Buttel, Riley E. Dunlap. "Sociological theory and the environment. An overview and introduction", *Sociological theory and the environment. Classical foundations, contemporary insights*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2002, pp.3-32.

- Session 2: Historical and religious perceptions of natural-society relationships:

The idea here is to understand the time and space situatedness of our interest for environmental issues nowadays; Contrasting it with former pre-modernist and modernist views of the environment

Assigned Readings:

John Barry, *Social Theory and the Environment*, London: Routledge, 1999, chap.1 “Nature, environment and social theory”

John Barry, *Social Theory and the Environment*, London: Routledge, 1999, Chap. 2 “The role of the environment historically within social theory”

John Barry, *Social Theory and the Environment*, London: Routledge, 1999, Chap.3 “The uses of ‘nature’ and the nonhuman world in social theory: pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment accounts”

Supplemental reading:

Keith Thomas, *Man and the natural world*, Penguin Press History, 1983

- Session 3: **Risk Society thesis**

Global risk; science and technologies; Risk and Rationality ; insights from the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK) and Scientific and Technology Studies (STS): social construction of scientific knowledge

Assigned Readings:

A.Irwin, “The risk society thesis: the end of the world as we know it?”, in A.Irwin, *Sociology and the environment*, Cambridge: Polity, 2001, pp.50-69

Steven Yearley, *The green case*, chap.4 “the science of saving the planet”, 1991

Session 4: the **social constructionist perspective** on environmental problems:

Assigned Readings:

J.Hannigan, *Environmental sociology. A social constructionist perspective*. Routledge, London and NYC, 1995, chap.2 “Social construction of environmental problems”

J.Hannigan, *Environmental sociology. A social constructionist perspective*. Routledge, London and NYC, 1995, chap.8 “Biodiversity loss: the successful “career of a global environmental problem”

Supplemental readings:

Steven Yearley, *The green case. A sociology of environmental issues, arguments and politics*. London: Routledge, 1992, chap.2 “Putting the green case together”

- Session 5: **Environmental Ethics**

Assigned Readings:

J. Baird Callicott, *In defense of the land ethic*, State University of New York Press, 1989, chap.3 “Animal liberation and environmental ethics: back together again” pp.49-59 and chap.5 “The conceptual foundations of the land ethic”, pp.75-100

William Cronon (ed.), “The trouble with wilderness; or getting back to the wrong nature”, in *Uncommon ground: toward reinventing nature*, New York: W.W.Norton & Co., 1995, p.69-90

Supplemental reading:

Murray Bookchin, “against the megamachine, empire and the earth”, in Michael E. Zimmerman (ed.), *Environmental philosophy: from animal rights to radical ecology*, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2005

- **Session 6: Eco-feminism**

Assigned Readings:

John Barry, *Social Theory and the Environment*, London: Routledge, 1999, Chap. 5 “Gender, the nonhuman world and social thought”

Mary Mellor, “Ecofeminism and environmental ethics: a materialist perspective”, in Michael E. Zimmerman (ed.), *Environmental philosophy: from animal rights to radical ecology*, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2005

- **Session 7: Ecological Modernization**

Assigned Readings:

A.P.J.Mol and G.Spaargaren, “Ecological modernization and the environmental state”, in *Research in social problems and public policy*, vol.10, 2002, pp.33-52

Andrew Blowers, “Environmental policy: ecological modernization and the risk society?”, *Urban studies*, 1997, 34 (5-6), pp.845-871

Supplemental readings:

Maurie J.Cohen, “Ecological modernization, environmental knowledge and national character. A preliminary analysis of the Netherlands”, *Environmental politics*, 9 (1), pp.77-105

A.P.J.Mol, "Ecological modernization: industrial transformation and environmental reform", in C.R.Humphrey, T.L.Lewis and F.H.Buttel, *Environment, Energy, and Society: exemplary works*, Wadsworth, 2003, pp.401-412

- Session 8: **Ecological (Neo)Marxism**

Assigned Readings:

Allan Schnaiberg, David N. Pellow and Adam Weinberg, "The treadmill of production and the environmental State", in *Research in social problems and public policy*, vol.10, 2002, pp.15- 32

Peter Dickens, "A green marxism? Labor processes, alienation, and the division of labor", in Peter Dickens, August Gijswijt, Frederick H.Buttel, Riley E. Dunlap. *Sociological theory and the environment. Classical foundations, contemporary insights*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2002, p.51-73

Supplemental readings:

James O'Connor, "Is sustainable capitalism possible?", *Is Capitalism sustainable? Political Economy and the Politics of Ecology*, Martin O'Connor, New York: Guilford Press, 1994, pp.152-175

John Bellamy Foster, "The crisis of the Earth", in Craig R.Humphrey, Tammy L.Lewis, Frederick H.Buttel, *Environment, Energy, and Society: exemplary works*, Wadsworth, 2003, pp.120-136

The Practical : organizing and governing the ecological society

- Session 9: **common-pool resources' governance**

overcoming the 'tragedy of the Commons'; statist versus private management of common-pool resources; self-governance and community collaboration; micro versus macro scales debate

Assigned Readings:

M.M.Bell, *An invitation to environmental sociology*, Sage Publications, 2004, pp.223-234

Elinor Ostrom, "Reformulating the Commons". *Swiss Political Science Review*, vol 6, n. 1, 2000, p 29-52.

Supplemental reading:

O.R.Young, "The problem of scale in Human/Environment relationships", in R.O.Keohane and E.Ostrom, *Local commons and Global Interdependence. Heterogeneity and Cooperation in two domains*, London: Sage publications, 1995, pp.27-45

- **Session 10: environmental movements between the local and the global**

Assigned Readings:

Christopher Rootes (ed.), "Acting globally, thinking locally? Prospects for a global environmental movement", in *Environmental movements. Local, National and Global*. London and Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999

Kenneth A. Gould, Allan Schnaiberg, Adam S.Weinberg, *Citizen activism in the treadmill of production*, Cambridge University Press, chap 2 "The Terrain of Environmental Conflicts: Local Wetland Watchers and a National Movement Organization", 1996

Supplemental reading:

Andrew Jamison, *The making of green knowledge. Environmental politics and cultural transformation*. Cambridge, 2001, chap. "On the dilemmas of activism" pp.147-175

- **Session 11: environmental justice movement**

Assigned Readings:

S.M. Capek, "the 'environmental justice' frame: a conceptual discussion and an application", *Social problems*, 40, 1993, pp. 5-24

Pieter Leroy, Andrew Blowers, "Power, Politics and environmental inequality: a theoretical and empirical analysis of the process of 'peripheralization'", in Piers Stephen, John Barry, Andrew Dobson (eds.), *Contemporary environmental politics: from margins to mainstream*, 2006, pp.203-230

Supplemental reading:

Robert D. Bullard, "Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement." *Confronting Environmental Racism : Voices From the Grassroots*. 1st ed., Robert D Bullard, Boston, Mass.: South End Press, 1993, chap.1 pp.15-39 and chap. "Environmentalism with justice", pp.195-206

Conclusion: the future of green social theory

- Session 12: open to suggestion: a case study

Suggested topic: **intensive cattle farming and animal ethics**

Risks (GMO, pesticides etc), Globalisation ...

Suggested readings:

Michael M.Bell, *Farming for us all*, Penn State University Press, 2004, pp.1-21 and pp.29-59

Frances Moore Lappé and Anna Lappé, *Hopes's edge. The next diet for a small planet*. New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 2002

- Session 13: **A post-realist/post-constructionist/post-modernist approach of the environment: a sociology of environmental flows?**

Assigned Readings:

G.Spaargaren, A.P.J. Mol, "Toward a sociology of environmental flows: a new agenda for 21st century environmental research", in G.Spaargaren, A.P.J. Mol, F.H.Buttel (eds.), *Governing environmental flows. Global challenges to social theory*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006, chap.12, PP.39-82

G.Spaargaren, A.P.J. Mol, F.H.Buttel (eds.), *Governing environmental flows. Global challenges to social theory*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006, chap.12, PP.351-369

Supplemental (optional) readings:

John A. Hannigan, "Environmental constructionism and the postmodern condition", in *Environmental sociology*, J.A.Hannigan, Routledge, 1995, pp.178-187

- Session 14: Summing-up; debating the future of green social theory

Assigned Readings:

David B. Tindall, "What is Environmental Sociology? An inquiry into the paradigmatic status of Environmental Sociology", in *Environmental Sociology. Theory and Practice*, Michael D.Mehta, Eric Ouellet (eds.), Captus Press Inc., 1995, pp.33-59

R.E.Dunlap and W.R.Jr Catton, "Struggling with Human Exemptionalism: the Rise, Decline and Revitalization of Environmental Sociology", in Craig R.Humphrey, Tammy L.Lewis, Frederick H.Buttel, *Environment, Energy, and Society: exemplary works*, Wadsworth, 2003, pp. 97-119

Supplemental (optional) readings:

Arthur P.J. Mol, “From Environmental Sociologies to Environmental Sociology? A comparison of US and European Environmental Sociology”, *Organization and Environment*, vol.19, n°1, March 2006, p. 5-27

Richard York, E.A.Rosa, T.Dietz, “Footprints on the Earth: the environmental consequences of modernity”, *American Sociological Review*, vol.68, april 2003, pp.279-300

John Barry, *Social Theory and the Environment*, London: Routledge, 1999, chap.9