



# Political Ecology of Developing Landscapes

## SFS 3840

### Syllabus

The School for Field Studies (SFS)  
Center for Amazon Studies (CAS)

Iquitos, Peru

This syllabus may develop or change over time based on local conditions, learning opportunities, and faculty expertise. Course content may vary from semester to semester.



## COURSE CONTENT SUBJECT TO CHANGE

***Please note that this is a copy of a recent syllabus. A final syllabus will be provided to students on the first day of academic programming.***

SFS programs are different from other travel or study abroad programs. Each iteration of a program is unique and often cannot be implemented exactly as planned for a variety of reasons. There are factors which, although monitored closely, are beyond our control. For example:

- Changes in access to or expiration or change in terms of permits to the highly regulated and sensitive environments in which we work;
- Changes in social/political conditions or tenuous weather situations/natural disasters may require changes to sites or plans, often with little notice;
- Some aspects of programs depend on the current faculty team as well as the goodwill and generosity of individuals, communities, and institutions which lend support.

Please be advised that these or other variables may require changes before or during the program. Part of the SFS experience is adapting to changing conditions and overcoming the obstacles that they may present. In other words, the elephants are not always where we want them to be, so be flexible!

## Course Overview

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Environmental problems such as land degradation and deforestation are complex processes and often cannot be understood in isolation from broader processes of economic and social development, struggles over access and rights to resources, or conflicts originating from historical grievances. Yet, their complexity is not always acknowledged by researchers, governments, and development interventions seeking to identify, measure, and correct or alleviate them. Knowledge of the underlying drivers is often framed in ways that put direct blame on some actors, for instance farmers practicing subsistence farming, while leaving others out, such as large-scale investments in mining or agribusiness.

Political Ecology asserts that the way we know environmental problems affects the solutions we identify, which implies that science and knowledge of environmental problems are inherently political and intrinsically linked to economic and social context. Further, Political Ecology is keenly invested in understanding how local processes of environmental change are linked to past and present wider regulatory frameworks and market processes.

In broad terms, political ecology is the study of the multiscale interaction between humans and the natural environment. It examines how local events resonate at the regional and global level, and vice versa. Accordingly, the different ways humans see, use, and dwell in any particular environment are mediated by political, economic and social factors that come from global, regional and local forces.

Political Ecology draws on various disciplines to frame studies on resource and management challenges in fields such as environment and development, climate change, land-use, and conservation. We will deal with development theories and anthropological works, employ tools developed by geographers, and engage with political discussions of indigenous peoples.

In this course we will focus on long trends and events in Amazonia, relating to the experiences of the Peruvian lowlands with regional and global developments. Readings, lectures and discussions will help us develop a conceptual framework to understand our observations in the field. The course illustrates how Political Ecology is useful to understand processes of natural resource management, use, and contestations around these. Participants in this course will be challenged to re-think and reconsider mainstream understandings of environmental problems and how they are produced.

Along with the classes on ecology and conservation, this course should provide the student with a critical view on Amazonian environmental challenges, and prepare her/him to rethink other environments and regions.

## Learning Objectives

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Upon completing this course, the students should be able to:

- Explain various methods to evaluate and discuss environmental change and its causes (e.g., major strains of political economy of relevance to Political Ecology)
- Understand some major trends in Amazonian environmental history and how these have shaped the existing landscape
- Understand ideas, concepts, and theories that underlie PE, and be able to apply them in a practical setting to case studies of uses and practices pertaining to nature and natural resources.
- Apply qualitative research methods for a fieldwork project.
- Reflect on the perceptions of nature that underlie different notions of conservation and development

- Recognize and explain how alternative worldviews can be useful for natural resource management

## Assessment

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The evaluation breakdown for the course is as follows:

Assessment Item	Value (%)
Participation	10
'In your own words' (4 small quizzes)	15
Student presentations/feedback (16/4)	20
Reflective papers (2x10 points)	20
Field exercises	15
Final Exam	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

**Participation and topic discussions (10%):** Active participation in all facets of the course is expected, to promote productive dialogue and hence, learning. This requires active thinking, or engagement, with all course materials. Part of the goal of a field course is to demonstrate concepts in action; thus, first-hand observations coincide with materials from readings and lectures. In this way, concepts and methods are better understood and applied to other situations. Students who are actively engaged and involved in discussions learn more and are better able to understand and incorporate course materials. Students are expected to read the required literature, as indicated in the semester description, *before* class.

**In your own words (15%):** Four short exercises to make sure that literature content has been understood. Each will consist of 2-4 aspects or concepts of the readings that students will be asked to explain in their own words. One of the questions may be a 'multiple choice' -type.

**Student presentations and peer-to-peer feedback (15%):** The students will each thoroughly read a chapter or an article assigned from the optional readings list and present the arguments made in it to their fellow course participants (16%). Each student will also read a second text in order to be the main opponent to one of the other student's presentations (4%). The second paper can be read lightly, the idea is that the student is able to follow when the fellow course participant presents the argument.

**Reflective papers (20%):** The reflective papers give the student the opportunity to show an understanding of field experiences using the concepts we have become familiar with (10 points each).

**Field Exercise (FEX) (15 %):** A field exercise will be conducted, including different methods for qualitative data collection. With these FEX students will gain experience for the Directed Research component at the end of the semester. The FEX require field observation and data collection and presentation and discussion of data. We will use participatory mapping, participant observation, informal and semi-structured interviews. Students will be assessed based on their ability to plan and apply the methods in the field, bring back and reflect on the data (orally) in plenary.

**Final Exam (20%):** A written exam will be given based on material covered in lectures, readings, and field experiences. The exam will be open-note and a combination of short-essay questions.

Grade corrections in any of the above items should be requested in writing within 24 hours after assignments are returned. No corrections will be considered afterwards.

## Grading Scheme

A	95.00 - 100.00%	B+	86.00 - 89.99%	C+	76.00 - 79.99%	D	60.00 - 69.99%
A-	90.00 - 94.99%	B	83.00 - 85.99%	C	73.00 - 75.99%	F	0.00 - 59.99%
		B-	80.00 - 82.99%	C-	70.00 - 72.99%		

## General Reminders

**Plagiarism** – using the ideas or material of others without giving due credit – is cheating and will not be tolerated. A grade of zero will be assigned for anyone caught cheating or aiding another person to cheat either actively or passively.

**Deadlines** – Deadlines for written and oral assignments are instated to promote equity among students and to allow faculty ample time to review and return assignments before others are due. As such, deadlines are firm; extensions will only be considered under extreme circumstances. Late assignments will incur a penalty of 10% of your grade for each day you are late. After two days past the deadline assignments will not be accepted anymore. Assignments will be handed back to students after a one-week grading period.

**Participation** – Since we offer a program that is likely more intensive than you might be used to at your home institution, missing even one lecture can have a proportionally greater effect on your final grade simply because there is little room to make up for lost time. Participation in all components of the course is mandatory, it is important that you are prompt for all activities, bring the necessary equipment for field exercises and class activities, and simply get involved.

## Course Content

**Type: D:** Discussion, **FL:** Field Lecture, **GL:** Guest Lecture, **L:** Lecture, **O:** Orientation, **E:** Exercise

No.	Title and Description	Readings	Type	Hours
<b>Introduction to Political Ecology (PE) and Amazonian history</b>				
PE 1 Week 1	<b>Course overview and introduction to Political Ecology and the Amazonia:</b> We will review the syllabus, dates, assignments, and field trips. We will review some of the social and environmental problems in the region, and begin to understand what Political Ecology is about.	Syllabus	L, O	1.5
PE 2 Week 1	<b>Introduction to Political Ecology and the invisible history of the Amazon region:</b> We will further explore the aspects of political ecology. In the second part, we will challenge some assumptions about Amazonian peoples,	Paul Robbins (2012): Chapter 1.  <i>Optional: Mann</i>	L, D	2.0

No.	Title and Description	Readings	Type	Hours
	natures and histories.	(2011). 1491.		
PE 3 Week 1	<b>Amazonian history:</b> We will visit Iquitos' downtown, its buildings and museums. In the late 19th century the Iquitos elite concentrated a significant portion of the wealth made by the exports of rubber. Richard Bodmer (owner of Casa Morey and researcher knowledgeable of local history) will give a 1hr. guest lecture on regional history.	<i>Optional: John Hemming. Chapter 6</i>	FL, GL	3.0
<b>The Political Ecology of Development</b>				
PE 4 Week 2	<b>Development aspects and theories:</b> In this class some of the classical development theories will be outlined, as well as aspects of development interesting to political ecology. We will touch briefly upon issues related to economic and world system theory.  We will start with discussing what we learned in Iquitos, and also briefly talk about our trip to Nauta.	Christoffersen, L. (2018)  Gilbert Rist (2007) 485-491  <i>Optional readings: Gudynas, E. (2011).</i>	D, L	2.0
PE 5 Week 2	<b>Roads and infrastructure:</b> Along the road and walking around town we will see the infra-structure, markets and towns developed from the Center to the port of Nauta. We will learn about local history, observe and think about the social and environmental consequences of building roads and infrastructure. We will also visit the radio of the local indigenous people, the Kukama, to hear their view on planned infrastructures, and learn about their actions to support Kukama livelihoods and culture.	Penny Harvey, Hannah Knox. Chapter 1. (pp. 21-25 and 40-51)  <i>Optional reading: Penny Harvey, Hannah Knox. Chapter 2: (pp. 52-63)</i>	FL	3.0
PE 6 Week 2	<b>Roads and infrastructure:</b> We will discuss what we observed, relate to readings and reflect on development and the impacts of roads/other infrastructures.  <b>In your own words 1</b>	<i>Optional reading: John Hemming. Chapter 10</i>	D, L	1.0
<b>Indigenous peoples in Amazonia (Sucusari): Livelihoods, organization/Qualitative methods</b>				
PE 7 Week 3	<b>Indigenous peoples' livelihood strategies and social organization.</b> We will talk about who indigenous peoples are and how they organize socially.  <b>Qualitative methods in practice:</b> Mapping and interviewing.  We will prepare for the fieldtrip to Sucusari, trying out	Christoffersen, L. (2018)  Dewalt and Dewalt (2002)  Mikkelsen, B. (2005)	E, L	2.0

No.	Title and Description	Readings	Type	Hours
	semi-structured interviews with the staff, and agreeing on the information we want to take home from the field. This will also be in conjunction with a session on qualitative methods for directed research preparation.	p. 102-116		
PE 8 Week 3	<b>Livelihoods:</b> We will visit some lands devoted to shifting cultivation, and see native crops and techniques. Students will observe and informally (and respectfully) ask questions regarding land-use, livelihoods and social organization. (Remember field-diary).		E, FL	3.0
PE 9 Week 3	<b>Participatory mapping:</b> With the help of Sucusari's community members we will draw maps of the community to illustrate their use of the commons.  <b>Interviews (semi-structured)</b> with community members and/or leaders about land-use and social organization.	<i>Optional: Mac Chapin (2006).</i>	E	5.0
PE 10 Week 4	<b>Sucusari Presentations:</b> Student groups will present the results of the participatory mapping exercise in Sucusari, and the data from the interviews and informal conversations. They should also reflect on the data collection itself, what could possibly influence the answers you had? Afterwards we will triangulate our results and discuss what we learned about livelihoods and social organization, and evaluate our experiences with the methods. Students will get the guidelines for the first reflection paper (Due by Thursday February 21.)		D	2.0
<b>Land-use, conservation and nature perception</b>				
PE 11 Week 4	<b>PE Aspects of Nature Conservation:</b> Preparing for the Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo field-trip, we will look at political ecology aspects of nature conservation and land-use. We start by exploring important issues and concepts. What do we for example mean by degradation?	Robbins, P. (2012). Chapter 5  <i>Optional reading: Sprugel, D. (1991)</i>	L, E	2.0
PE 12 Week 4	<b>1. Conservationist International NGOs</b> Following up on the development critique from PE 4, we will look at the operations of some of the leading global environmental players  <b>2. Indigenous peoples and nature conservation</b> Overlapping interests or territorial strategy? We will see how indigenous peoples appropriated the space of protected areas, but also how they even with clear rights are still subject to greater powers, when state interests change.	Mac Chapin (2004)  <i>Optional reading: Little, P. (2010)</i>	L,D	2.0
PE 13 Week 4	<b>Perceptions of nature.</b> We start by discussing the chapter by Anthropologist	Hvalkof, S. (2006)	L, D	1.5

No.	Title and Description	Readings	Type	Hours
	Søren Hvalkof. How can culture and worldviews, including nature perceptions, shape the landscape? What may the different perceptions of nature imply for conservation?  <b>In your own words 2.</b>			
<b>Conservation and indigenous peoples. Visit to Tamshiyacu -Tahuayo</b>				
PE 14 Week 5	<b>Community Visit.</b> We will visit a local community of Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo ACR and explore the role of the community in the management of the reserve.		FV	1.5
PE 14 Week 5	<b>History of Conservation Landscape in Loreto:</b> Richard Bodmer will give a guest lecture on the history and politics of conservation using protected areas in Loreto, contrasting alternative protected area strategies and how they have come create the current conservation landscape.		GL	1.5
<b>Andean peoples, communities, conservation and food diversity/sovereignty (Cuzco)</b>				
PE 15 Week 6	<b>History of the Andean Peasant</b> Andean communities and the agrarian reform	Velasco Alvarado, Juan (1969)	FL	1.0
PE 16 Week 6	<b>In your own words 3</b> After the exercise we will distribute papers for student presentations and feedback.		L	1.0
PE 17 Week 6	<b>Pilco Grande:</b> We will examine the relation of a peasant community with a private conservation organization and Manu National Park. We can draw comparisons with Tamshiyacu and Sucusari. Who benefits and what are the delimitations, who makes decisions?  <b>Visit to a Cuy Farm.</b> Food diversity, -sovereignty and diets. Literature corresponds to this visit and the Potato Park	Hunter and Fanzo: Agricultural biodiversity, diverse diets and improving nutrition  Patel, R.(2009). p. 663-672	FL	3.0
PE 18 Week 6	<b>Sunchubamba Visit.</b> Land-distribution. Land-reform.		FL	1.0
PE 19 Week 6	<b>Potato Park:</b> During a visit to six communities organized into a cooperative formed to conserve both cultural and crop diversity, we will examine the following themes: (1) Food diversity and food sovereignty (2) Cosmologies and nature perceptions (3) Cooperation and organization between communities, and with the outside, to preserve the genetic material.	<i>Optional: Mann (2011).</i>	FL	3.0
<b>Week 7</b>	<b>Spring break</b>			

No.	Title and Description	Readings	Type	Hours
<b>Global connections, local realities</b>				
PE 20 Week 8	<b>Global Environmental Governance</b> Attempts of intergovernmental responses to environmental issues. The Rio-conventions, COPs, and the role of indigenous peoples and NGOs in that regard.	CLARA 2018 (Introduction p. 1-4)	D, L	1
PE 21 Week 8	<b>Political Economy</b> We will explore a major strain of political economy of relevance to Political Ecology, which is that of Marxist political Ecology	Stilwell, F. (2002) Ch. 12-15 (selected pages) Caceres, D. (2015)	L, E	2
PE 22 Week 8	<b>Student presentations 1</b> We will learn a lot, getting to know in depth the content of 9 different optional readings. Students are encouraged to participate actively in discussing the papers/chapters once the principal 'opponent' has posed her questions.		E	2
PE 23 Week 9	<b>Student presentations 2</b> (Continue PE22)		E	3
<b>Indigenous struggles and politics</b>				
PE 24 Week 9	<b>Film: Crude.</b> Viewing of documentary about the legal case of 30.000 rainforest dwellers in Ecuador challenging Chevron followed by a discussion of PE aspects and concepts related to the story.	<i>Optional reading:</i> <i>Cepek, M. (2012)</i>	D	2.0
PE 25 Week 9	<b>Visit to Civil Society Organizations</b> <i>Organización Regional de los Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente (ORPIO):</i> We'll hear from the main indigenous organization in Loreto about the formation of indigenous organizations, lands and politics in Peru. <i>Instituto del Bien Comun-Peru:</i> We'll examine the use of mapping of land for land-rights and designating conservation areas.	<i>Optional Reading:</i> <i>Christoffersen, L. (2018)</i>	L	2.0
PE 26 Week 9	<b>Film: When two worlds collide.</b> Viewing of documentary about the 2009 conflict surrounding land and natural resources in the Peruvian Amazon that turned into deadly violence followed by a discussion of PE aspects and concepts related to the story.		D	2.0
PE 27 Week 9	<b>In Your Own Words 4</b>		E	0.5
<b>General review of the course</b>				
PE 27 Week 10	We will review the main concepts and aspects of Political Ecology that we have applied and discussed during the course. Students can propose specific topics they would like to re-consider or repeat.			2.0

No.	Title and Description	Readings	Type	Hours
PE 28 Week 10	Final Exam			2.0
			<b>Total hours</b>	<b>60.5</b>

## Reading List

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- Caceres, D.M. 2015, "Accumulation by Dispossession and Socio-Environmental Conflicts Caused by the Expansion of Agribusiness in Argentina", *Journal of Agrarian Change*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 116-147.
- Cepec, M. 2012, "The Loss of Oil: Constituting Disaster in Amazonian Ecuador", *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 393-412.
- Chapin, M. 2006, *Mapping Indigenous Lands: Issues and Considerations*, Center for the Support of Native Lands.
- Chapin, M. 2004, "A Challenge to Conservationists", *WORLDWATCH magazine* pp. 17-31.
- Christoffersen, L. 2018, *Amazonian Alternatives. Imagining and Negotiating Development in Lowland Bolivia*, University of Copenhagen.
- DeWalt, K.M. & DeWalt, B.R. 2002, *Participant Observation. A Guide for Fieldworkers*, AltaMira, Lanham.
- Dooley, K. & Stabinsky, D. 2018, *Missing Pathways to 1.5°C. The role of the land sector in ambitious climate action*. Climate Land Ambition and Rights Alliance (CLARA).
- Gudynas, E. 2011, "Buen Vivir: Today's tomorrow", *Development*, vol. 54, no. 4, pp. 441-447.
- Harvey, P. & Knox, H. 2015, *Roads. An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London.
- Hemming, J. 2008, *Tree of Rivers. The Story of the Amazon*. Thames and Hudson.
- Hunter, D. & Fanzo, J. 2013, "Introduction: Agricultural biodiversity, diverse diets and improving nutrition" in *Diversifying Food and Diets: Using Agricultural Biodiversity to Improve Nutrition and Health. Issues in Agricultural Biodiversity* Earthscan, UK, pp. 1-13.
- Hvalkof, S. 2006, "Progress of the Victims: Political Ecology in the Peruvian Amazon" in *Reimagining Political Ecology*, eds. A. Biersack & J.B. Greenberg, Duke University Press, Durham & London, pp. 195-232.
- Little, P.E. 2001, *Amazonia: Territorial Struggles on Perennial Frontiers*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Michigan.

- Mann, C.C. 2011, 1491. *New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, Second Edition edn, Vintage Books, New York.
- Mann, C.C. 2011, *How the Potato Changed the World*.
- Mikkelsen, B. 1995, *Methods for development work and research. A guide for practioners*. Sage Publications, New Delhi.
- Patel, R. 2009, "Food sovereignty", *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 663-706.
- Rist, G. 2007, "Development as a buzzword", *Development in Practice*, vol. 17, no. 4-5, pp. 485-491.
- Robbins, P. 2012, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edn, John Wiley & Sons.
- Sprugel, D.G. 1991, "Disturbance, Equilibrium, and Environmental Variability: What is 'Natural' Vegetation in a Changing Environment?", *Biological Conservation*, vol. 58, pp. 1-18.
- Stilwell, F. 2002, *Political Economy: The Contest of Economic Ideas*, Oxford University Press.
- Velasco Alvarado, J. 1969, "The Master Will No Longer Feed Off Your Poverty " in *The Peru Reader. History, Culture, Politics*, eds. O. Starn, C.I. Degregori & R. Kirk, Seecnd Edition edn, Duke University Press, Durham, pp. 279-284.