The Political Ecology of Development

Instructor: Prof. Giorgos Kallis (ICREA-Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)  
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Date: June 26 - 30  
Time: 4.30 pm - 6.30 pm  
Room: 24.224 - Mercè Rodoreda Building 24 (Floor 2)

The course is an examination of the Political Ecology of Development. We will look at the interdisciplinary field of Political Ecology, the study of ecological distribution conflicts and the ways in which power affects access over resources as well as opportunities for human-centred development. Drawing from a range of approaches in Political Ecology—particularly, ecological economics, post-structuralism and neo-Marxism—we will introduce and discuss key concepts and theoretical frameworks that underlie the contemporary critique of development and growth. We will then explore these issues through analysing two empirical case studies of struggles around development and natural resource extraction in Latin America. First, drawing insights from the case of neoliberal ‘extractivism’ in Peru, we will discuss how Michel Foucault’s notions of ‘biopolitics’ and ‘governmentality’ can help us to uncover the discursive mechanisms mobilised by governments and international institutions to de-politicise development and legitimise the violence necessary to sustain it. Second, by looking at the case of Bolivia under the leftist government of Evo Morales, we will reflect on the contradictions of extraction-based development in its progressive variant, and on the challenges involved in overcoming this model. Finally, we will discuss the impossibility theorem of making growth-based development compatible with environmental sustainability, and explore alternatives to economic growth.
Session 1. Introduction to Political Ecology (Giorgos Kallis)

This class introduces what Political Ecology is, distinguishing it from other related fields, and presenting its core theses, intellectual origins and evolution.

Required reading:


Further reading:


Session 2. Nature, development and dispossession (Diego Andreucci)

Review of key concepts from Marxist political ecology approaches to development, with a focus on resource extraction as a form of ‘dispossession’.

Required reading:


Further reading:


Session 3. Violence, resource extraction and ‘eco-governmentality’: the case of Peru (Diego Andreucci)

Exploration of post-structural approaches, through the analysis of green discourses of the World Bank versus the violent practices of the Peruvian government in the Amazon, justified in the name of national ‘development’.

Required reading:


Further reading:


Session 4. Extractivism, populism and the left-turn in Latin America: the case of Bolivia (Diego Andreucci)

Draws on the ideas of Antonio Gramsci to analyse recent political, economic and ecological changes in Latin America. Discussion of the limitations faced in attempts to move beyond extraction-based development.

Required reading:


Further reading:


Session 5. Growth vs. the environment. The degrowth hypothesis (Giorgos Kallis)

The impossibility and undesirability of perpetual economic growth and the attempt to rethink human wellbeing beyond growth-based development.

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Further reading: