

Course syllabus for PhD course

Course part of the research school: People, Society and Sustainability

Department of Economics/Department of Urban and Rural Development

# **Environmental communication and the politics of disagreement**

## **Swedish title**

Miljökommunikation och oenighetens politik

## **Higher education credits**

5 HEC

## **Subject**

Environmental Communication

## **Possible Additional subject/subjects**

Other social science

## **Course type**

Subject course

## **Language**

English

## **Prerequisites**

Accepted as a PhD student

The course is open to all PhD students working in the social sciences, humanities and environmental sciences.

## **Objective**

In this course, environmental communication, understood as the joint construction of meaning related to the environment, is approached from interactional, ideational and infrastructural perspectives, with a focus on the role of disagreement in the performance of the political.

Participants will engage with three central and interrelated aspects of environmental communication, reflecting meanings (ideas), processes (interaction) and technologies (infrastructure) of meaning-making, through concepts, methodologies and insights from (i) symbolic interactionism, (ii) ideational perspectives (such as discourse theory) and (iii) scholarship on the role of information infrastructures (including digitalisation and algorithms). These will be presented and discussed with a focus on understanding disagreement, conflict and environmental communication in the political sphere – i.e., in the space between governing and its challenges. In particular, the course explores how disagreement in contemporary societies is both politicised and depoliticised (and suppressed), and how contestation of meaning is employed in political struggles over power. All three perspectives will contribute to an exploration of these phenomena.

The overarching aims of the course are to:

- i. explore different perspectives on environmental communication and related research and encourage critical reflection of the different approaches and perspectives
- ii. facilitate discussion between researchers (PhD students and others) engaging with different aspects of environmental communication, disagreement and contested political issues in their work
- iii. support the participating PhD students in situating and contextualising their research in the spaces of inquiry delineated by these different approaches, and to reflect on their perspectives and contributions to academic and applied debates in environmental communication.

While the framing of the course refers to environmental communication, the exploration and critical discussion of different social science perspectives will also be of relevance to PhD candidates in related fields such as environmental governance, rural development or landscape planning. Similarly, also PhD candidates working on environmental communication-related issues with perspectives other than the three focused on in this course are very welcome and will have ample opportunity to discuss their work.

Upon completion of the course, the PhD students shall be able to:

- Situate their research in relation to the perspectives and debates on environmental communication covered in the course
- Apply the concepts, theoretical standpoints and considerations covered in the course to their own and other scholars' research
- Critically reflect on the contribution of their work to current academic debates in environmental communication and related research.

## **Content**

The course will consist of three phases:

1. **Engagement with literature, preparation.** A literature list will be provided that covers foundational literature on environmental communication and the three perspectives covered in the course, as well as key writings on disagreement and politics. Participants prepare a written summary of their work (to be submitted in advance of the residential week), a presentation and questions to be discussed in the literature seminars.
2. **Residential week** (5 days) with literature seminars, impulse talks, focused discussions, field excursions, and presentations and discussions of the PhD candidates' work. One day each will be devoted to the three focal perspectives of the course, with the last two days exploring the relationships of the three perspectives to another and their contributions to our understanding of the politics of disagreement.
3. **Reflection:** 2-3 weeks after the end of the course, participants will share their reflections from the course in an online seminar.

The residential week includes literature seminars (to engage with key thought and concepts in the field), impulse talks (to provide short, engaging introductions into emergent research), discussions and workshops with SLU-based teachers as well as Leah Sprain (communication scholar from the University of Colorado Boulder), Jutta Haider (professor of information studies, SSLIS, University of Borås) and Nataša Lovric (researcher on forest policy and communication, University of Eastern Finland). The programme is complemented by fieldtrips to explore conflicts over environmental management in situ.

Throughout the course, participants will reflect on how their perspectives influence their choice of methods and the resulting insights, what sets environmental communication apart, and how this research field connects to the broader environmental social sciences.

A reading list will provide the foundation for the literature seminars and discussions.

### **Examination**

To successfully complete the course, the PhD students will:

- Engage in the reading assignments (e.g., in preparation of the literature seminars and thematic discussions)

- Write a one-page summary of their PhD research that situates their work in the context of the course
- Prepare and give a talk (15 min) on aspects of their PhD research that they want to discuss in the context of the course
- Participate actively in the course discussions and workshops
- Prepare and present a short reflection (5-10 min) on the insights gained from the course in a final seminar.

If a student fails a test, the examiner may give the student a supplementary assignment, provided this is possible and there is reason to do so.

If a student has been granted targeted study support because of a disability, the examiner has the right to offer the student an adapted test or provide an alternative form of assessment.

If this course is discontinued, SLU will decide on transitional provisions for the examination of students admitted under this syllabus who have not yet been awarded a Pass grade.

### **Contact for application and further information**

Anke Fischer

### **Literature**

Required reading will be assigned to students four weeks before the course starts.

### **Additional Information**

This course is part of *People, Society and Sustainability*, a joint research school between the Department of Economics and the Department of Urban and Rural Development. It is co-funded by Mistra Environmental Communication.

Participating teachers:

- Lars Hallgren
- Sofie Joosse
- Jutta Haider, Högskolan i Borås
- Leah Sprain, University of Colorado Boulder
- Nataša Lovric, University of Eastern Finland