COURSE SYLLABUS

Political Geography and Geopolitics of The Sea

Aims

Understanding of the main questions raised by studying oceanic and transnational spaces in a critical geopolitics perspective.

An advanced ability to critically analyze and interrogate scholarship and discourse framing the oceans, and the geopolitical dynamics underway to conquer sea-power.

An understanding of the major challenges (acidification, oil and gas drilling, overfishing, and, in the long term, deep-sea mining, bioprospecting, and geo-engineering) posed by the deep seabed.

An engagement with the challenges of inter-disciplinary study and research.

Contents

After a short introduction to the most recent theoretical approaches to political geography and critical geopolitics, the course focuses first on the historical representation of the ocean as a "political and social space" and on how the sea can be framed by international geopolitical discourse, in relation to the processes of territorialisation, geo-power and extra-territoriality of marine spaces. The second part relates to the geopolitics of the deep see and in particular it focuses on the definition, value, ownership, access, health and future state of the resource-rich and highly contested sub-surface ocean.
Detailed program

Elena dell’Agnese

Part I - Political geography of the sea

The political geography of the sea: a classical approach (maritime boundaries and Law of the Sea, transport and trade, strategy and warfare)

A (critical) political geo-graphy of the sea? thinking about the sea / representing the sea / exploiting the “geopolitical features” of the sea
Geo-graphy and the power of representation /Dividing (and naming) the ocean sea: the East Sea/ Sea of Japan issue

The territorialisation of the sea /Territorial claims and islands disputes: the Dokdo-Takeshima issue

Geographical definitions and island disputes: the Sankeku-Diaoyu issue/ climate change and vanishing islands/reefs: Okininotori: a shima, or a reef?

A classical approach to the geopolitics of the sea/ the myth of sea power: A.T. Mahan theoretical positions / China as a maritime power and the South China Sea competition (Spratly, Paracel and more)

Sea power, sea nodes and islands as U.S. bases: The Hawai’i and Pearl Harbor, Midway and Wake, Guam

Sea power, sea nodes and islands as overseas U.S. bases/ bases of empire and lily pads: Guantanamo, Micronesia and Marshall Islands, Okinawa, Diego Garcia

LSMPAs (Large Scale Maritime Protected Areas): conservation or geopolitics?

Extra-territoriality 1: Pirates as enemies of all nations The golden age of piracy and the “pirate commonwealth” against the “world political map”; pirates of today, popular geopolitics of ”pirates”

Extra-territoriality 3: Seasteading: “How Floating Nations Will Restore the Environment, Enrich the Poor, Cure the Sick, and Liberate Humanity from Politicians” (maybe)

Extra-territoriality 2: Cruising ships: Cruise tourism as an example of globalization? (History and Development, Crews, Employment, exploitation)

Marco Grasso

Part II – Geopolitics of deep oceans

The tragedy of the commons

Harvesting the Commons: the Oceanic frontier and the devolution of the seas

Deep oceans: potential and problems
The deep seabed governance: the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Seabed Authority (ISA)

The deep seabed governance

The deep seabed governance: the mining regime

Claiming the commons: Sovereignty and the deep seabed

Claiming the commons: the Arctic deep seabed

Protecting the commons

Climate change and the future of the deep oceans

Prerequisites

An adequate grasp of the perspectives of the relevant social sciences (geography, politics, economics, law, and sociology).

Capacity of working according to multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives.

Teaching form

Lectures (class teaching)

Textbook and teaching resource

Elena dell’Agnese

Part I - Political geography of the sea

1. Political geography, geopolitics, critical geopolitics.

The political geography of the sea: a classical approach (maritime boundaries and Law of the Sea, transport and trade, strategy and warfare)

Glassner M.I., The new political geography of the sea, *Political Geography Quarterly*, 1986, pp. 6-8

A (critical) political geography of the sea? (thinking about the sea / representing the sea / exploiting the “geopolitical features” of the sea)

2. Geo-graphy and the power of representation: The geo-graphy of the ocean sea

Dividing (and naming) the ocean sea


The East sea/ Sea of Japan case study

Chi Sang-Hyun, *One feature, two names and many issues: The political geographies of naming the sea between Korea and Japan*, eastsea1994.org/data/bbsData/14912842071.pdf

3. The “political geography of the sea”: the territorialisation of the sea

Territorial claims and islands disputes (Dokdo-Takeshima)


4. Geographical definitions and island disputes (Sankeku-Diaoyu)


climate change and vanishing islands/reefs (Okininotori: a shima, or a reef?)

Yamamoto L., Esteban M. (2010), *Vanishing Island States and sovereignty*, *Ocean & Coastal Management* 53, pp. 1–9

5. A classical approach to the geopolitics of the sea: the myth of sea power (A.T. Mahan)


China as a maritime power and the South China Sea competition

Nohara J.J. (2017) *Sea power as a dominant paradigm: the rise of China’s new strategic identity*, *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 6, 2, pp. 210-232

6. Sea power, sea nodes and islands as U.S. bases

The Hawai‘i and Pearl Harbor, Midway and Wake, Guam

7. Sea power, sea nodes and islands as overseas U.S. bases: bases of empire and lily pads

Guantanamo, Micronesia and Marshall Islands, Okinawa, Diego Garcia


8. LSMPAs (Large Scale Maritime Protected Areas): conservation or geopolitics?


9. Extra-territoriality 1: Pirates as enemies of all nations The golden age of piracy and the “pirate commonwealth” against the “world political map”, pirates of today, popular geopolitics of “pirates”


10. Extra-territoriality 2: Cruising ships: Cruise tourism as an example of globalization? (History and Development, Crews, Employment, exploitation)


Marco Grasso
Part II – Geopolitics of deep oceans


- Scientific articles and policy briefs pointed indicated below. They are all accessible from within the campus; for accessing them from outside the campus see here:

https://www.biblio.unimib.it/it/risorse/accesso-alle-risorse-remoto

The tragedy of the commons


Harvesting the Commons: the Oceanic frontier and the devolution of the seas

- Hannigan (2016): Introduction and Chapter 1


Deep oceans: potential and problems


The deep seabed governance: the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Seabed Authority (ISA)

- Hannigan (2016): Chapter 2

- Wolfrum, R. (2008). Legitimacy of international law and the exercise of administrative functions: the Example of the International Seabed Authority, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and International Fisheries
The deep seabed governance


The deep seabed governance: the mining regime


Claiming the commons: Sovereignty and the deep seabed

- Hanningan (2016): Chapter 3

Claiming the commons: the Arctic deep seabed

- Borgerson, S. (2013). The coming Arctic boom: as the ice melts, the region heats up. Foreign Affairs, 92, 76.

Protecting the commons

- Hanningan (2016): Chapter 4

Climate change and the future of the deep oceans

- Hanningan (2016): Chapter 5
Semester
Second Semester

Assessment method

Elena dell’Agnese

Parte I - Political geography of the sea

2,000-2,500 word topical paper on an issue analyzed during the course and selected by the instructor.

Marco Grasso

Parte II – Geopolitics of deep oceans

2,000-2,500 word topical paper on an issue analyzed during the course and selected by the instructor.

Office hours

Elena dell’Agnese

Tuesday martedì 2,30-4,30 PM

Room 358/U7 third floor

Marco Grasso

Thursday 15:30 - 17:00

Room 333/U7 - Third floor