



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

## SYLLABUS DEL CORSO

### Environmental Justice and Geopolitics of The Sea

2324-1-F7502Q039

---

#### Aims

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

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

Providing a general picture of Environmental Justice, examining its political, social, and economic aspects from a geographical perspective.

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 of the course deals with more specific issues of political ecology and covers the topics of environmental justice/injustice, with particular reference to the themes of protection/conservation of marine areas, ocean grabbing and the rights of indigenous peoples.

#### Detailed program

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 and Cruise tourism as an example of globalization

Geopolitics of the oceans and environmental justice

Ecology and Sustainability in the Anthropocene

Concepts and methods in Environmental Justice

Case studies and research examples

## **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

## **Textbook and teaching resource**

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 geo-graphy of the sea? (thinking about the sea / representing the sea / exploiting the "geopolitical features" of the sea)

Steinberg, P.E. (1999) Navigating to Multiple Horizons: Toward a Geography of Ocean-Space, *The Professional Geographer*, 51, 3, pp. 366-375

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

Dividing (and naming) the ocean sea

Steinberg, P.E. (1999), Lines of division, lines of connection: Stewardship in the world ocean, *Geographical Review* 89, 2, pp. 254-264

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)

Suk Kyoon Kim (2008), Understanding Maritime Disputes in Northeast Asia: Issues and Nature, *Int'l J. Marine & Coastal L.*, pp. 213-247

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

McCormack G. (2013), Much Ado over Small Islands: The Sino-Japanese Confrontation over Senkaku/Diaoyu, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 11, 21, pp. 1-20

climate change and vanishing islands/reefs (Okinotori: 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)

Sumida J. (1999): Alfred Thayer Mahan, geopolitician, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 22, 2-3, 39-62

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

Vine D., (2015) *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*, Metropolitan Books, New York, Introduction, Capp. 1 and 2

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

Vine D., (2015) *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*, Metropolitan Books, New York, Cap 3.

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

Sand P.H. (2012), 'Marine protected areas' off UK overseas territories: comparing the South Orkneys Shelf and the Chagos Archipelago, *The Geographical Journal*, 178, 3, pp. 201-207

Leenhardt P., Cazalet B., Salvat B., Claudet J., Feral F. (2013). The rise of large-scale marine protected areas: Conservation or geopolitics? *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 85, pp. 112-118

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

10. Political Ecology: a Critical Introduction. Robbins, P. (2012). Wiley-Blackwell. ISBN 9780470657324
11. Environmental justice (local and global). Martínez-Alier, J. (1997). *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, 8(1), 91–107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455759709358725>
12. Environmental (in)justice in the Anthropocene ocean. Bennett, N. J., Alava, J. J., Ferguson, C. E., Blythe, J., Morgera, E., Boyd, D., & Côté, I. M. (2023). *Marine Policy*, 147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2022.105383>

## **Semester**

Second Semester

## **Assessment method**

2 papers 2,000-2,500 word paper on two issues analyzed during the course and selected together with the instructor - oral discussion

No mid-term assessment

It will be evaluated the student's ability to critically analyse situations using the conceptual tools learned during the course.

The evaluation criteria adopted are:

- (a) the relevance of the topic
- (b) the ability to synthesize
- (c) the property of language/lexicon
- (d) the ability to make connections, the use of critical and strategic thinking

## **Office hours**

by appointment, in person or online  
Room 358/U7 third floor

## **Sustainable Development Goals**

GENDER EQUALITY | CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | CLIMATE ACTION |  
LIFE BELOW WATER | PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

---