

SOCIETIES AND THEIR NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS IN A LONG TERM PERSPECTIVE

Archaeology, Anthropology and Human Ecology

Introduction:

Humans and their natural environment are involved in a dialectic relationship of mutual influence. The deep history of this relationship is explored in archaeology where studies of human-environment relationships and interactions long have held a central position in archaeology. Archaeology offers a unique long term perspective on human and environmental history, and more specifically on the history of the relationship between the two. As a truly interdisciplinary subject that transgresses the boundaries between the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences, archaeology is well positioned to address these complex relationships.

Over the past decades the development in the field has been significant and come to include not only reconstructions of human-nature interaction in the past, but also reflections on how our understanding of the long term change and continuity of the dialectic relationship, and of models from the past, may allow us to reflect over sustainable solutions for future human-nature interactions. This engagement with the contemporary world allows archaeology to step out of a narrow focus on the past and play an activist role aimed at affecting policy making and motivate consensus building in the political arena. This course aims at balancing both roles for archaeology. On the one hand it pursues the traditional academic role of understanding of the past through a global approach to the long term history of human-environment interaction. On the other hand it also seeks to explore what role archaeology can play in building an ecologically sustainable future.

The course seeks to move beyond the so called “shallow” environmentalism that tends to dominate the mainstream debate (Drengson & Inoue: 1995) and explore the deep ecology formulated by Arne Naess in the 1970s (ref) which aims at a more in depth exploration of our socio-cultural systems and life styles and aims at achieving a fundamental change of the ways in which we live – culturally, socially, economically etc. In this course, this philosophical position is combined with an archaeological and anthropological perspective which allows us to explore these issues in a long term perspective. One aim of this course is that the students become aware and mindful of the complexities of these relationships.

Structure of the course

The course is structured in six sections. The first is an introduction to Deep Ecology and Human Ecology and how they relate to archaeology. The following four sections are thematically organized to explore four large questions of human history and prehistory which also influence the current debate on sustainability. The subject chosen are: (1) Evolution, (2) Food, (3) Habitat I: Landscape, and (4) Habitat II: Dwelling. The sections will all rely on a long term perspective that binds together how what we can learn from the past may inform our choices in the present. It is important that the past is not presented as a nostalgic model of “better days” but rather that it serves us in understanding the diversity of human-nature interactions across time and space. For each of the themes the class will explore the dynamics of the human-nature interaction and how they both affect each other to varying degrees. Problems as well as solutions will be addressed from a perspective that puts human culture and choice at the center. Sustainable choices will be explored in depth as models for the future. The final section of the class is a reflection and discussion of the value of understanding the past when reflection over the future. Can archaeology participate in building a sustainable society for tomorrow? What can we learn from the past that can be successfully applied in the present and future?

Learning outcomes:

The projected learning outcomes for this class are:

- 1) That the students integrate mindfulness about the relationships involved in human-nature interactions.
- 2) That the students are able to reflect critically and creatively on the long term perspectives of human nature interaction, the choices people make and their intended and unintended consequences.
- 3) That the students are able to reflect critically and creatively on the ways in which learning from other cultures and from the past can provide solutions for the future (while avoiding exotization and nostalgia).

Examination:

The students ability to meet the learning outcomes will be measured against the following examination forms:

- *Seminar participation:* The seminar will be organized in smaller groups (6-8 students per group would be ideal). Each student will post their personal general reflection about the reading on Blackboard the day before the seminar. What did they think about it? What did they find interesting? What questions does the reading raise? For each seminar one of the students in each group will be responsible for leading the discussion. To prepare for this they will use their colleagues’ posts. After each seminar the participants post their reflection about the discussion: did new questions arise? What was interesting about the discussion? In addition, they also reflect over a specific question formulated by

the seminar leader that week. The participation will be obligatory and graded. The grade will count as 40% of the overall grade.

- *Papers relating to each of the four thematic sections:* At the end of each of the thematic sections the students will write a paper (6-10 pages) relating to a topic of that section. The papers will be obligatory and graded. The grade will count as $10\% \times 4 = 40\%$ of the overall grade.

Course plan

The sections will all be organized as a combination of lectures and seminar discussions. The lectures will introduce and structure what to many of the students will be a new information and new perspectives. The seminar discussions will provide an important opportunity for the students to process their reading through discussion.

1. Introduction to Human Ecology and Deep Ecology (3 weeks)

The first segment introduces Human Ecology in general and Deep Ecology in particular and how they relate to the long term perspectives of human nature interaction which is the focus of the course.

2. Archaeology, Environment and Human Evolution(3 weeks)

This section discusses the role of the environment and of environmental change in human evolution (including the evolution of human behavior), starting with the emergence of mankind and addressing contemporary issues of epidemics, resistance, adaptation etc. The main questions of this segment are: *How does the environment affect people, their biology, their culture and choices? How do people, their culture and choices affect their environment? How can we understand these complex relationships in a long term perspective?*

3. Food in a long term perspective: production and consumption (3 weeks)

This section discusses food production and consumption as a cultural practice that in the past was intimately linked to the natural environment but that today has become increasingly separated from it. The segment will look at the transition away from a close proximity to the natural environment and its positive and negative consequences. *Hunter-Gatherer Ecology:* This part addresses the wide variety of hunter-gatherer ecologies, and how hunter-gatherers across space and time have developed different relationships with their environments. The cases presented will be mainly archaeological but will also include examples from the ethnographic literature. This segment will not be limited to systems in balance, but will also address cases of environmental degradation in the past. The course will also discuss the vulnerability of this model.

The Ecology of the Neolithization: The process of neolithization, with the domestication of wild plant and animals, changed the relationships between humans and their environment gradually but dramatically. In this segment of the class we will discuss the dynamics of this process: both how environmental change affected, and possibly stimulated the process, and how neolithization, in turn, affected the environment. The approach will be global and include case studies from the Middle East, the Americas and East Asia. We will ask why people chose neolithization. What were the positive and negative aspects of the change of the economy and culture? What were the long term consequences?

4. Habitat I: Landscape (3 weeks)

This segment of the course explores the interconnectedness of the symbolic and resourceful landscape. Through concrete case studies from ethnography and archaeology we will discuss to what degree landscapes shape the people that inhabit them and how people inscribe their natural habitat with symbolic and cultural meaning. We will discuss the definition of landscape and the concept or “nature” as a construction in opposition to culture.

5. Habitat II: Dwelling (3 weeks)

This segment of the course will look more in detail at how humans organize their living space in the natural landscape. We will discuss classic models of resource use in human communities and how they relate to the physical landscape and the organization of settlements (from temporary hunting camps to cities). We will especially discuss the case of the city, often unfairly viewed as an icon of a modern unsustainable solution to human habitat, cities are today being re-evaluated as the solution for the future. We will discuss to what extent we can use models from the past to rethink solutions for the future.

6. Sustainability and long term perspectives on human ecology (2 week).

The final segment of the class will address how archaeology can be a part of developing strategies for sustainability in the present and future. The segment will be taught as a combination of lectures and a workshop. Drawing on the content of the class the students will prepare a case study of their choice and present it to the class. This exercise will not be graded but participation is obligatory.

References:

Selected readings from the following books:

- Ashmore, W. and Knapp, B. A. (eds.) 1999. *Archaeologies of Landscape: Contemporary Perspectives*, Wiley-Blackwell.
- Barker, G and Gilbertson D. D.(eds.) 2000. *The Archaeology of Drylands: Living on Margins*. Routledge.
- Barnard, A.(ed) 2004. *Hunter-Gatherers in History, Archaeology and Anthropology*. Berg.
- Bateson, G.:2000. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology*. University of Chicago Press.
- Cantwell, A.-M. and diZerega Wall, D (eds.) 2003. *Unearthing Gotham: The Archaeology of New York City*. Yale University Press.
- Drengson, A. & Inoue, Y. (eds.) 1995, *The Deep Ecology Movement : an introductory anthology*. North Atlantic Books.
- Ehrlich,P. R and Ehrlich, A. H. 2008.*The Dominant Animal: Human Evolution and the Environment*. Island Press.
- Ellison, P. 2001. *Reproductive Ecology and Human Evolution*. Transaction Publishers.
- Ingold and T. Riches, D. and Woodburn, J. (eds.) 1988. *Hunters and gatherers*. Berg.
- Keiner, M and Koll-Schretzenmayr, M. and Schmid, W. A. 2005. *Managing Urban Futures: Sustainability and Urban Growth in Developing Countries*. Ashgate Publishing.
- Manzanilla, L. (ed.) 1996. *Emergence and Change in Early Urban Societies*. Springer.
- Mayne A. J. and Murray, T. (eds.) 2001 *The Archaeology of Urban Landscapes*, Cambridge University Press.
- McIntosh, R. J. and Tainter, and McIntosh, S. K. (eds.) 2000.*The Way the Wind Blows: Climate Change, History, and Human Action*, Columbia University Press.
- Moran, E. F. 2006. *People and Nature: An Introduction to Human Ecological Relations*, Wiley, John & Sons.
- Nyerges, E. (ed) 1997 *The Ecology of Practice: Studies of Food Crop Production in Sub-Saharan West Africa*. Routledge
- Riddell, R. 2004. *Sustainable Urban Planning: Tipping the Balance*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Stanford, C. B. and Bunn, H. T. 2001. *Meat-Eating and Human Evolution*. Oxford University Press.
- Ucko, P. and Layton, R. (eds.) 1999. *The archaeology and anthropology of landscape : shaping your landscape*. Routledge.

- Zetter, R. and Butina Watson, G. 2006 *Designing Sustainable Cities in the Developing World*, Ashgate Publishing.

FILMS TO VIEW IN CLASS:

- Varda, A. 2002. *The Gleaners and I*. Zeitgeist Video.
- Sheehy, C. 2009. *Out of the Past*.