

# **Socio-Ecological Change, Policy, and Innovation**

**Aalborg University, Denmark**

## **General description**

It is widely recognised that human-induced climate change, long-term sustainable development and social and environmental justice represents some of the most pressing and multifaceted societal challenges which requires decisive and resolute actions, and rests on a multitude of factors, stakeholders, and actors. Tackling the aforementioned issues is central to achieving the green transition of societies around the world and addressing the 2030 Agenda. The aim of this elective is to understand the processes of socio-ecological change and to explore how state and non-state actors are responding to these challenges and shaping the green transition in the global North and South. These topics can be formulated within three interdependent themes that each or in combination form the overall focus of the ESST thesis.

### **Theme 1: Ecological Change, Ecocide, and Environmental Policy**

The first theme focuses on the problems and dilemmas related to environmental sustainability, the emergence of environmentalism as a political force, and policy responses to addressing environmental challenges. From a political ecology perspective, this theme discusses the relationships and dynamics between political, economic, and social factors that are central to environmental issues from a range of spatial scales.

### **Theme 2: Climate Change, Environmental Justice, and Rights**

The second theme considers the relationship between environment and society by examining the environmental injustice of climate change and its impact on human and environmental rights. Through an environmental justice lens, this theme focuses on climate policy and the power dynamics associated with climate change, the role of knowledge of climate change and its drivers, the inequalities, and injustices of climate change, as well as environmental and climate justice movements.

### **Theme 3: Innovation and the Green Transition**

The third theme discusses changes to the social, economic, and political landscape to enable the green transition towards a sustainable society and the changing ways society views and values the environment. This theme looks at different innovative 'green' solutions and policy instruments for green growth and innovation as countries embark on the green transition.

## **Elective structure**

To address the issues related to socio-ecological change, policy and innovation, the elective combines both theoretical and practical insights through problem-based learning (PBL). The PBL-based pedagogical model of Aalborg University has become both nationally and internationally recognised by universities, researchers and students as an advanced and efficient learning model. The elective (including thesis supervision) is conducted in collaboration with Department of Politics and Society, which is dedicated to the study of political and societal developments with local, national and /or international relevance.

To support the individual thesis work, ESST students will follow the draft thesis module. The draft thesis acts as input for a thesis which can be submitted at the ESST students home university.

## **Draft thesis module**

**Language of instruction: English**

**Date of instruction: February till the end of May**

**Content, progress and pedagogy of the module**

## **Objectives**

The objectives of this module are:

- To enable students to identify a relevant problem within the subject area of the elective and independently structure and carry out a project analysing this problem at a specialised level.
- To enable the students to communicate their findings to an academic audience in the form of a master's thesis.

## **Contents**

As part of the draft thesis module, the students will be introduced to the three themes (policy, rights, and innovation) through tutorials so they can make an informed choice about the specific focus of their thesis. The tutorials will serve as a means of (1) providing students with knowledge of selected topics and current issues within the specialisation; (2) enabling students to consider relevant theoretical perspectives and discuss key elements in relation to empirical cases and reflect on these on a scientific basis and (3) preparing students for the writing the thesis by enabling them to define and delimit a potential topic and problem field within one theme of the specialisation.

To support students in the time management of their thesis project Aalborg University organises an infrastructure that provides meetings and deliverables. Students define a problem relevant to one of the themes of the elective. The university provides academic supervision. Students must discuss various theories and select one or several, which they deem to be relevant. Unless it is a purely theory-based project, students must discuss which type of empirical data might be relevant in this context and organise the data collection. The topic of the project must be formulated as a problem, and students must seek to answer this problem. The answer must be based on theoretical reflection and – unless it is a purely theory-based project – be empirically grounded.

### **Type of Instruction**

The module consists of the written student draft thesis. To help students with their time management, students submit the first draft of their thesis with a minimum of 45 pages and maximum of 70 pages. This paper includes the following:

- Introduction and background of the thesis topic (including explanation and justification of the research question)
- Literature review
- Theoretical framework
- Method section
- Analysis
- Conclusion

### **Type of instruction**

The master's thesis will be written on the basis of supervision, but students must organise their own thesis process and choose the topic/problem independently and find relevant literature and empirical material of their own accord.

### **Oral exam based on a project**

The examination for the thesis module is an external (in person or virtual) oral examination based on a written draft thesis. The examination is based on the draft thesis produced by the students. Grading is based on the 7-point grading scale. The criteria of assessment are stated in AAU's Examination Policies and Procedures.

## **Extracurricular additional training (Not obligatory, only on a voluntary basis)**

ESST student will also have the opportunity to participate in skills training for which they will receive a document to certify they have completed the course.

### **Skills training: Sustainability and Project Management Course**

**Language of instruction:** English

**Date of instruction:** February till the end of March

### **Content, Progress and Pedagogy of the Module Objectives**

- The objective of this module is: to provide students with knowledge of current issues and theoretical perspectives related to sustainability and global governance, including global partnerships and transnational problem-solving
- to provide students with a broad understanding of the skills and strategies required for project management as well as key theories, concepts and tools of the field
- to enable students to apply distinct theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of selected cases in relation to various types of sustainability, such as social, political, economic and environmental

### **Content**

The module provides students with a broad understanding of project management and its related theories, concepts, and tools. It also provides students with the analytical skills and empirical knowledge required to address and understand the complexities of and responses to global challenges related to sustainability. Emphasis will be on democracy and institution-building; interrelations between different levels of governance; local and transnational civil society perspectives on global challenges such as climate change, inequalities, and resource governance.

### **Type of Instruction**

The module consists of lectures, exercises, and student contributions

**Type of exam:** Active participation/continuous evaluation

The examination for Sustainability and Project Management is an internally assessed individual examination consisting of a requirement of active

participation in the module's teaching sessions and activities. The module coordinator will define the requirements for active participation, which will be communicated to the class at the beginning of the semester. Any re-examination will be a 72-hour take-home assignment set by the course instructor. The assignment paper must not exceed 8 pages. The criteria of assessment are stated in AAU's Examination Policies and Procedures