

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE



SYLLABUS

VU Amsterdam Summer School

22-26 July 2024



Any general questions for the Summer School support team? Contact amsterdamsummerschool@vu.nl.

Course Details

Title	Environmental Justice in Theory and Practice
Coordinator(s)	Marije Schaafsma, Ina Lehmann
Other lecturers	See below
Study credits	2
Form(s) of tuition	On campus, excursion
Approximate contact hours	23.5 including group work
Approximate self-study hours	26.5

Teaching staff (in order of appearance)

Ina Lehmann

Marije Schaafsma

Camille Venier Cambron

Heidi Mendoza

Mirja Schoderer

Joshua Nooij

Veerle Siegerink

Toon Haer

Madeline Werthschulte

Eszter Szedlacsek

Course description

Across the world, the most vulnerable people are most severely affected by the detrimental consequences of global environmental change. Policies and practices for mitigation of and adaptation to global environmental change impact people in highly uneven ways. These impacts are exacerbated by a lack of voice and agency, as well as a lack of recognition of diverse worldviews and practices among more vulnerable groups. Such injustices hamper achieving SDGs 14 and 15 (life below water and life on land) as well as SDG 1 (zero poverty) and SDG 10 (reduce inequalities). Scholars, environmental activists and policy makers are increasingly sensitive to these patterns, and calls for environmental justice abound. But how to achieve a more just and sustainable future?

Some people support just environmental policies and practices because they are convinced that treating each other justly is inherently the right thing to do – there is a moral imperative. Research also shows that environmental policies that are perceived as “just” can more effective because people are more likely to comply with them. However, it is far less clear what environmental justice really is, and what it demands in practice. Moreover, ideas of justice differ across people and contexts.

This summer course will introduce students to environmental justice from a variety of perspectives. We will engage with philosophical attempts to identify normative standards for what can be considered a just allocation of the benefits and burdens of environmental action. This includes questions such as: Should everybody have equal access to vital ecosystem services? Should rich countries pay for climate change adaptation in poorer countries? If so to what extent? But we will also critically scrutinize the value of philosophical reasoning as an approach to environmental justice. Does philosophy provide us with much needed impartial principles to guide our actions or is it too much of an armchair discipline, removed from what is going on in the ‘real world’? Is listening to stakeholders’ claims and the demands of environmental justice movements and activists a more practically relevant way to make sense of environmental justice? What are their objectives and strategies and how successful are they?

We will also engage with environmental justice aspects of the assessment of impacts of conservation and other environmental policies and interventions. The Intergovernmental Platform of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) has well laid out that people hold diverse values for nature, linked to the way they engage with nature and their worldviews. Then how to best assess such values? What are the advantages of expressing such values in monetary terms, and what are the counterarguments? What is the role of environmental economics and socio-cultural studies in assessing values of nature? How can the process of valuation be organized in a such a way that the resulting outcomes are supported by the people whose values are at stake?

In discussing different approaches, we will link these to concrete case studies and examples of struggles for environmental justice. These will come from different environmental issue areas such as climate change (SDG 13), terrestrial ecosystem conservation (SDG 15), and ocean protection (SDG 14). Environmental justice plays out differently in these settings due to different spatial and temporal scales; whereas in some cases the impacts are felt nearby and immediately (e.g. forest conversion), other issues such as climate change span vast areas and multiple generations. This may lead to different approaches to reduce injustices.

The course will be highly interactive. Lecturers will provide input on key concepts, methods and empirical trends in the field of environmental justice, and guest lectures by practitioners will demonstrate how these concepts are operationalized, feeding into discussions of theory versus practice. Students will be given considerable room to work with these inputs and apply them to cases of environmental injustice or environmental justice movements that they themselves choose to work on. The teachers for this course will come from different backgrounds and departments and have expertise in different environmental issue areas, making this a truly interdisciplinary learning experience. As environmental justice also plays out in urban design, we will include one local guided walk discussing environmental justice issues at city level.

Learning objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- understand different approaches to environmental (in)justice
- apply environmental justice theories and approaches to case studies
- assess and evaluate situations of potential environmental (in)justice
- explore policy options for enhancing environmental justice
- work as a team on questions involving personal (normative) judgement.

Assignments

Small groups of ~3 students will choose a method and concept of environmental justice and apply this to a case study of environmental policies or practice. They can either assess the case from a normative point of view, asking whether or to what extent environmental justice is realized in their chosen case. Or they can take a more analytical approach, asking how issues around environmental justice are debated or contested in their case. Other approaches are also possible in agreement with the course coordinators. Participants are suggested to explore the [EJAtlas](#) or suggest own ideas, in agreement with the course coordinators. The final assignment will be a 15 minutes presentation of the group work on the final day of the course.

Grading

Criteria	Points
<p><i>Introduction</i></p> <p>The problem that motivates your presentation is clearly identified and the selection of a specific method and concept well justified.</p>	1
<p><i>Summary of method and concept</i></p> <p>The chosen method and concept are succinctly summarised and there is a clear explanation how they will be applied to the case study.</p>	1
<p><i>Application to case study</i></p> <p>The analysis clearly applies the method and concept to the chosen case. Relevant and accurate evidence that supports the analysis is presented. The presentation relies on appropriate literature and/or primary sources.</p>	3
<p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>The conclusion summarizes the main results, reflects on their implications for the generalisability of theory/concept, and spells out areas for future research.</p>	1
<p><i>Presentation – Structure and style</i></p> <p>The presentation is logically and clearly organised. Signposting is effective. Technical terms or unusual words are clarified. The presentation does not last longer than 15 minutes.</p>	1,5
<p><i>Presentation – Speech and slides</i></p>	2

Articulation is clear throughout, speed of talking is adequate, slides are clear and neat with appropriate amount of text and clear visuals where appropriate.	
<i>Referencing</i> The presentation is complemented by a complete and consistent list of references, which meets academic standards.	0,5

Preliminary Course Schedule (minor changes are still possible)

Day	Hours	Teacher / Moderator	Topic
Monday 22 July <i>Concepts & methods of environmental justice</i>	10:00-12:00	Ina Lehmann, Marije Schaafsma	Introduction: Dimensions of environmental justice & values of nature
	13:00-15:00	Ina Lehmann, Marije Schaafsma	Start group work: Choose and explore topic (case studies on environmental in/justice)
	from 15:00		Summer School social program
Tuesday 23 July <i>Spatial aspects of environmental in/justice</i>	9:00-09:50	Camille Venier-Cambron	Land use and just food futures
	10:00-10:50	Heidi Mendoza	Water epistemologies
	11:00-11:50	Mirja Schoderer	Miningscapes
	14:00-16:00	Ina Lehmann	Guided tour / excursion on environmental in/justice in Amsterdam
	16:15-17:00	self-organized	Continue group work (case studies on environmental in/justice)
Wednesday 24 July <i>Biodiversity and Nature's Contributions to People</i>	09:00-09:50	Joshua Nooij	Traditional ecological knowledge
	10:00-10:50	Veerle Siegerink	Values and ethics of land use
	11:00-11:50	Ina Lehmann	Justice in global conservation governance

	from 12:00		Summer School social program; alternatively: Nature-based learning (with Ina Lehmann and Joshua Nooji)
Thursday 25 July <i>Global climate change</i>	09:00- 09:50	Toon Haer	In/justice in climate change adaptation
	10:00- 10:50	Madeline Werthschulte	Distributional issues of the energy transition
	11:00- 11:50	Eszter Szedlacsek	In/justice in global climate governance
	13:00- 17:00	self-organized	Continue group work (case studies on environmental in/justice)
Friday 26 July <i>Stock take and outlook</i>	9:00- 12:00	Ina Lehmann	Presentation and discussion of group work
	13:00- 14:30	NN	Activist perspective on environmental justice
	14:30- 15:00	Ina Lehmann	Course evaluation and wrap up

Reading list

The reading list will be made available closer to the starting date of the course. Participants can expect one to two readings per session. All reading materials reading materials will be made available via the course online learning environment before the start of the course.

