

SOSANT9100A/B

WATER, SOCIETY, ECOLOGY: Situated Knowledges of Flows and Models

Autumn 2026

Teaching was done collectively by Kregg Hetherington (Concordia University), Heather Swanson (UiO and Aarhus University), Pierre du Plessis (Aarhus Institute of Advanced Study), Patrizio McLelland (Concordia University) and Knut G Nustad (University of Oslo), plus additional guest instructors linked to the Oslo river case study. Knut G Nustad was responsible for the course.

Course Description

This doctoral course was arranged as part of the Intpart funded project *Network for Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies*.

The course encouraged participants to think comparatively and connectively across disciplines and places. Taking two riverscapes as its starting point – one in Oslo, Norway, and the other in Montreal, Canada – the course explored water-related social histories and ecological assemblages at each site. The course also explored how these riverscapes can be productively analysed by working at the experimental edges of environmental ethnographic practice through multi-modal approaches. Taught simultaneously at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo and The Concordia Ethnography Lab, Canada, the course aimed to prepare graduates for ecological dialogue and environmental governance questions across two unique regional contexts. Participants meet online to discuss common readings, as well as the two river cases.

Analytically, the course attended to water's centrality to political economy and colonial projects. But it also focussed specifically on the materiality of water - liquid flows around hard surfaces; flows through bodies; urban streams and oceans; urban biogeochemistries - with the aim of further developing our critical thinking skills about water, its many political, social, and economic framings, and their enactment in water-related infrastructures. While grounded in anthropology, the course explored different disciplinary knowledges and conceptualisations of water, and different ways of understanding both the histories and the futures of rivers.

Methodologically, the course introduced different field practices for knowing riverscapes. Field activities will include mapping, stream walks, expert talks/dialogues, and observation techniques drawn from ethnographic methods and natural history.

Student's feedback

Participants completed a questionnaire on the last day of the course. They reported that they were positive about the lectures, the group work, and how the course incorporated visits to the river and put these in dialogue with the theoretical work. The students were also very positive about the quality, content, and quantity of the course readings. The lecturers also received

positive feedback. Both the guided tour along the river and the visit to the Bekkelaget cleaning facility were seen as valuable components. The online lectures, together with the Montreal component, were useful, but the alignment with activities in Montreal should have been structured so as to bring out the full potential of the comparison between cases. More time should also have been spent on exchanging experiences across sites.

Overall assessment and further development

We are confident that the overall quality of the course was high. If the course is given again, we will put more effort into collaborative practices so activities on both sides are better coordinated and dialogue across sites is enhanced. It is clear that the course reinforces the value of bringing field excursions and hands-on activities into dialogue with readings and lectures, and future iterations of the course will continue to develop that approach.