

SGO2501 – Energy Geographies and Just Transitions

Course description

This course introduces students to the challenges of just energy transitions from a geographical and critical perspective. The materiality of different forms of energy not only affects nature and climate but also shapes economic development and resource allocation. The burdens and benefits of energy systems and energy transitions are unevenly distributed, within and between countries. People in the Global South often have less access to energy while disproportionately experiencing the impacts of climate change, making questions of justice key in debates over energy transitions. Energy justice issues are also present in the Global North, where resource-rich regions face the dilemmas of green transitions. The course examines how the systems and conditions underpinning energy transitions are shaped by historically uneven relations at both global and local scales. Teaching includes applied seminars where students investigate, formulate and present the positions of different social actors in global and local debates on energy and just transitions.

Learning outcome

Knowledge

Through this course, you will be able to

- explain key concepts, theories, and perspectives in energy geography, including the spatial organisation of energy production, distribution, and consumption.
- describe how energy systems have shaped economic development, political power, and socio-spatial inequalities across different places and scales and at different times.
- discuss the socio-spatial dimensions of energy and link these to ongoing socio-economic and political processes, including infrastructure development, resource governance, struggles over resource extraction, labour relations, energy justice and energy poverty.

- understand why and how the shift towards renewable energy production and consumption involves both contradictions and unevenness as well as opportunities for just transitions.

Skills

The course will enable you to

- evaluate energy systems and energy transitions issues from an energy justice perspective, being attentive to spatial differences and processes.
- identify the relation between processes at different geographical scales on issues related to energy resources, actors and institutions.
- apply your knowledge about energy and justice issues to a practical setting and prepare an intervention to a meeting.
- formulate the energy perspective of specific social actors, as well as listen to and respond to the perspectives of others.

Competences

After completing the course, students

- Have a broad and critical understanding of how energy transitions are geographically grounded and contested.
- Have practice in group work and discussion, and to give and take constructive feedback on the topics of the course.

Teaching

Teaching is delivered through (i) 3-hours sessions that combine lectures, case discussions and group work, and (ii) applied seminars where students formulate and present the energy perspectives of different social actors in global and local contexts.

The course is designed for both Norwegian and international students. Teaching will be held in English.

Examination

A 4-hour school exam.

Preliminary course outline

	Thematic sessions	Concepts	Cases
1	Foundations	place; territory; scale; resource construction; socio-technical systems; energy landscapes	historical energy transitions
2	Fossil capitalism	capitalism; uneven development; carbon lock-in; path dependency; resource dependence	Industrial Britain; North Sea oil; or case from South
3	Extraction	political ecology; resource frontiers; territorialisation; environmental justice; the materiality of energy: natural resources; environmental liabilities	oil in Niger Delta; lithium extraction in South America
4	Infrastructure	networks; circulation; geopolitics; territory; energy security and gas pipelines; the materiality of energy: the built environment; environmental liabilities	spaghetti electricity in Nairobi; or new infrastructure (hydrogen, etc), smart grids
5	Labour	labour agency; just transition; workers in different energy industries	offshore oil workers; wind energy employment; critical mineral supply chains (Devyn's work?)
6	Consumption	energy demand; social practice; urban metabolism; mobility systems; everyday energy use	suburban car dependence; district heating systems; public transport transitions; smart cities
7	Justice	K Jenkins et al: Distributional justice; procedural justice; recognition justice; energy citizenship; energy poverty; ; environmental liabilities	rural electricity, community struggles
8	Transition futures	decarbonisation; sociotechnical transition; energy democracy; energy sovereignty	green industrial policy; net-zero strategies

	Applied seminar	Roles	Issue
1	The global phase-out dilemma	Student groups are allocated roles as global social actors (e.g. African oil-producing nations, coal workers in Poland/US) to present their views.	Who should phase out fossil fuels first?
2	Local energy struggles	Student groups are allocated roles as local actors in Norway (e.g. municipality, developer, community groups) to present their views.	Who should be allowed to extract, connect to grid?