



*TRAINING*  
*Specialised Intensive Course*

*Research in Design and Methods in  
Political Ecology*

This report (1) outlines the objectives of the ‘Specialized Intensive Course on Research Design and Methods in Political Ecology’ which was held in June 2013 during Year 1 of ENTITLE; (2) explains how these objectives were realized; and (3) identifies issues emerging from the Course and lessons learned which can be taken forward via the ENTITLE project.

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## 1. Objectives

ENTITLE aims to train researchers in the emerging supra-disciplinary field of Political Ecology, giving them the theoretical, analytical and complementary skills that will make them employable in jobs related to environmental policy analysis and advocacy. To further this goal, a Specialized Intensive Course (hereafter SIC) on **Research Design and Methods in Political Ecology** was hosted by the Institute for Environmental Science and Technology (ICTA) of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), a partner in the ENTITLE project. The SIC was designed as an intensive teaching week geared towards the training needs of the Early-Stage Researchers (ESR) and Experienced Researchers (ER)<sup>1</sup>. It was the second major event in the ENTITLE programme and the second time that the Fellows assembled together. The SIC took place at ICTA-UAB and ran from Sunday June 2<sup>nd</sup> until Friday 7<sup>th</sup> 2013.

Specifically, the SIC had three objectives:

- (1) to introduce Fellows to a variety of methodology approaches within the field of political ecology;*
- (2) to train Fellows in the essential skills and tools for conducting interdisciplinary political ecological research; and*
- (3) to further dialogue and social networking for new political ecologists in conducting fieldwork research .*

## 2. Realizing the objectives

### **Objective 1: Introduce Fellows to a variety of methodology approaches within the field of political ecology**

The SIC was structured around a core series of presentations and discussions by leading researchers in political ecology who are collaborating within the ENTITLE, or were invited to participate from outside. Presentations included Interviewing, Discourse Analysis, Methodological Design, Critical Physical and Geography and. Lecturers shared their own experience in the research field and the process of learning the application and choice of various methodological perspective. The SIC sought not only to introduce methodology approaches and engage the Fellows in discussion, but also to facilitate the application (and further development) of these approaches to the Fellows emerging research topics, as we will detail below.

All sessions included extensive time for discussions: sessions were actively chaired to ensure a wide exchange of ideas and views.

A video recording was made of most sessions and this will be available via the ENTITLE website.

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter we will use 'Fellows' to refer to both ESR and ER.

***Objective 2: Train Fellows in the essential skills and tools for conducting interdisciplinary political ecological research***

Presentations were accompanied by much appreciated supervised group-work where an actual progress on the Fellows methods' statement has been made. Fellows were also offered specific guidance individually, were encouraged and able to present their actual research questions/problems, while the group work created the appropriate environment for them to improve/rephrase their research questions, hypotheses and methods.

Prior to the SIC, Fellows were asked to prepare a Methods' Statement and discuss it in a group of maximum 4 other fellows. They had the opportunity to work directly on these Statements among themselves in the groups during the third day of the SIC as well as during the last day (in groups of 2 at their own choosing as well as in larger groups under the direct coordination from Lecturers). Fellows could, therefore, observe how their work is gradually taking a different, improved look, incorporating the knowledge accumulated throughout the SIC and given the direct, close coordination of the Lecturers. On the first day of the SIC, Fellows were also required to present and discuss their interview guides as to receive feedback and advice.

The second day has also complemented the lecture on Discourse Analysis with more practical work: in the group exercise participants worked with an empirical case - the creation and operationalization of an institution, the IPBES. In preparation for this part of the session, students were asked to familiarize themselves with the platform's website - <http://www.ipbes.net/> - and to select a document, event, community or discursive thread that they would like to examine more closely.

***Objective 3: furthering dialogue and social networking for new political ecologists in conducting fieldwork research***

The schedule for the SIC on *Research Design and Methods in Political Ecology* included a number of social activities and events designed to further develop a sense of community among the researchers and create opportunities to develop collaborative work and new and networks. Activities included a Welcome Reception on arrival; an historic walking tour centred on the '**Spanish Civil War**' in the city of Barcelona, film screening, route to the urban squatter in Collserola (**Can Masdeu**) and several lunch and evening dinner events.

One special public event took place on the third day of the SIC: the screening of the documentary called **Toxic Amazon**, which was produced by one of the PhD Fellows, Felipe Milanez from the University of Coimbra. The events gather more than 25 people from the UAB and other people at the Civic Center "Sant Agusti" and was opened with a discussion about extractivism from Prof. Joan Martinez-Alier. The event was followed by a public discussion.

Another social learning event took place on the last day of the SIC: the visit to the squat Can Masdeu where a panel on **Activist Research** took place with the participation of around 30 people (fellows, professors, other students/researchers from UAB, inhabitants of Can Masdeu).

Network building activities were also extended by inviting a small number of non-ENTITLE PhD students (studying political ecology at the University of Manchester and UAB) to participate in discussion sessions and social activities; and through the involvement of researchers and scholar/activists from outside ENTITLE in the SIC.

### 3. Emerging issues and lessons learned

*Discussion during the SIC covered a wide range of themes. The following four points are among the more general issues emerging from the course and are presented here as a brief indication of how some of the issues emerging are being taken forward. The SIC identified:*

- (i) different practices, approaches and expectations among partner institutions to the involvement of Fellows in research; this issue will continue to be discussed by Fellows and the ENTITLE team during the Syros Summer School.*
- (ii) an emerging cluster of research among the Fellows around qualitative/ethnographic work suggests opportunities for shared future collaboration on fieldwork experiences as study topics in themselves as well as collaboration with grassroots organizations in the form of Activist or Participatory Research. These common lessons could function as important inputs for the future Manual for NGOs, a project deliverable.*
- (iii) a desire among some Fellows to engage in their research with ecological and physical sciences in order to produce robust accounts of environmental change requires further training on such methods.*