

Social movement mobilization against hydroelectric projects

Short description: Developing hydroelectric capacities caters to various objectives, including the security of supply with electricity, economic development, and the renewable energy objectives of coal-reliant countries. Whether large-scale or small-scale, such projects have negative impacts on biodiversity, and affect the livelihood of people in various ways, e.g. cause water shortages, and impose the displacement of whole communities. As such, they can be highly controversial, result in grassroots opposition, and mobilize transnational conservation campaigns. For example, plans to dam the free-flowing rivers of the Balkan Peninsula, in the frame of some 2,800 hydroelectric projects (Weiss 2018, also [here](#) and [here](#)), poses a threat to biodiversity in river and lake ecosystems (Darwall et al., 2014). Local communities have mobilized against a number of these planned projects (e.g. womens' opposition to hydropower in Kruščica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or the opposition by village communities in the Albanian Alps to planned hydroelectric projects in the Valbonë Valley National Park). At the same time, the region-wide campaign "Save the Blue Heart of Europe", led by EuroNatur and Riverwatch, links activists across the region in efforts to protect Europe's riverine heritage. Similar cases can be found worldwide, and could be analyzed in the context of a master thesis.

A potential master thesis could focus, *inter alia*, on:

- how various logics (e.g. development, sustainability and technological concerns) are negotiated and articulated to make the case for, as well as against, these projects;
- the distinctiveness and affinities of storylines (e.g. Hajer 2006) among grassroots protest and transnational campaigns;
- dynamics between simultaneously occurring opposition to hydroelectric and other, conventional energy projects.

The analytical focus is open: students could draw on social movement studies, resistance studies or discourse analytical approaches, and they could focus on the mobilization of local grassroots protest, or on transnational campaigns for conservation.

Methods: qualitative interpretative approaches based on document analysis and (ideally) interviews.

Timeframe: for theses to be completed by the end of 2019

For how many students this topic is available: 1-2, depending on supervision capacities

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References:

Darwall, William; Carrizo, S.; Numa, Catherine; Barrios, Violeta; Freyhof, Jörg; Smith, K. (2014): Freshwater Key Biodiversity Areas in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot. IUCN. Cambridge, UK and Malaga, Spain.

Hajer, Maarten (2006): Doing Discourse Analysis: Coalitions, Practices, Meaning. In Margo Brink, Tamara Metze (Eds.): Words matter in policy and planning. Discourse theory and method in the social sciences. Utrecht: KNAG/NETHUR, pp. 65–74;

Weiss, Steven (2018): Endangered Fish Species in Balkan Rivers: their distributions and threats from hydropower development. Riverwatch & EuroNatur.