

MODULE TITLE	Sustainability and Collapse in Past Societies			CREDIT VALUE	15
MODULE CODE	ARC2123	MODULE CONVENER		Prof. José Iriarte	
DURATION	TERM	1	2	3	Number Students Taking Module (anticipated)
	WEEKS		11		

DESCRIPTION – summary of the module content (100 words)

Can we learn any lessons for sustainable futures by studying human-environment relationships in ancient societies? Although we often envisioned the world of ancient people as a land of pristine natural beauty and untouched environments, the study of past coupled human environmental systems show us that this was not always the case. On the contrary, many past societies had heavily impacted their environments and/or have been impacted by catastrophic natural events to the extent that social and political systems need to be transformed or ultimately collapsed. Drawing on a wide range of interdisciplinary case studies from all around the world –from El Niño events in the Pacific coast in pre-Columbian Peru to the Little Ice Age in Medieval Europe– in this module we are going to examine the impact that past societies had on their world. More importantly, we will discuss if there are any valuable lessons from the past that can inform future sustainable land-use policies.

MODULE AIMS – intentions of the module

The module aims to provide an inter-disciplinary understanding for the study of human environmental relations in past societies. It will introduce you to the concepts of cultural collapse, resilience and sustainability by looking at a wide range of case studies around the world. The module will mainly focus on the diversity of human responses that were triggered by human-induced and natural climatic changes, including catastrophic events. We will pay particular attention to the ecological vulnerability of different socio-political systems within particular environments, human resilience to change and the regeneration of complex societies after collapse.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES (ILOs) (see assessment section below for how ILOs will be assessed)

On successful completion of this module ***you should be able to:***

Module Specific Skills and Knowledge:

- 1 Understand fundamental anthropological and ecological concepts that are critical for analysing past coupled human environment systems including cultural collapse, resilience and sustainability
- 2 Understand methodological aspects of commonly used environmental techniques to investigate how humans impacted past environments and how natural climatic fluctuations and catastrophic events have triggered a diversity of cultural responses

Discuss a selection of coupled human environment systems examples and their relationship to contemporary sustainability issues

Discipline Specific Skills and Knowledge:

- 4 Have a competent overview of the use and acquisition of practical data
- 5 Interpret a variety of information forms and assimilate/manage numerical and graphical data

Personal and Key Transferable/ Employment Skills and Knowledge:

- 6 With limited guidance manage data and display it graphically
- 7 Acquire a range of observational and analytical skills which are applicable in the wider world.
- 8 Contribute to group discussions, ask pertinent questions and co-operate with and learn from peers

SYLLABUS PLAN – summary of the structure and academic content of the module

The syllabus plan **should not be provided on a week-by-week basis** unless the delivery pattern can be guaranteed

1. Key concepts and approaches in sustainability
2. The archaeology of collapse, transformation and resilience
3. Environmental Archaeology methods to study human-environment relationships
4. Human responses to El Niño in the Central Andes
5. Amazonia: Untouched forest or manufactured landscape?
6. The 1492 Columbian Encounter
7. The impact of agrarian systems in the Near East
8. The Norse colonisation of Greenland: Failed experiment?
9. The Little Ice Age in Europe
10. Seminar presentations
11. Seminar presentations

LEARNING AND TEACHING**LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING METHODS (given in hours of study time)**

Scheduled Learning & Teaching activities	22	Guided independent study	128	Placement/study abroad	0
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DETAILS OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING METHODS

Category	Hours of study time	Description
Scheduled learning and teaching activities	22	11 scheduled classes will be 2 hours long
Guided independent study	128	Independent study to include reading, preparation for classes and assessments.

ASSESSMENT**FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT** - for feedback and development purposes; does not count towards module grade

Form of Assessment	Size of the assessment e.g. duration/length	ILOs assessed	Feedback method

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT (% of credit)

Coursework	60	Written exams		Practical exams	40
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DETAILS OF SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Form of Assessment	% of credit	Size of the assessment e.g. duration/length	ILOs assessed	Feedback method
Essay	60%	2000 words	1-8	Mark and written

Oral presentation	40%	20 minutes	1-8	comments Mark and comments
DETAILS OF RE-ASSESSMENT (where required by referral or deferral)				
Original form of assessment	Form of re-assessment	ILOs re-assessed	Time scale for re-assessment	
Essay	Essay	1-8	Refer/Defer period	
Presentation	Printed copy of presentation	1-8	Refer/Defer period	
RE-ASSESSMENT NOTES – give details of how re-assessment will be calculated. This section can also be used to indicate where re-assessment is not available				

RESOURCES

INDICATIVE LEARNING RESOURCES - The following list is offered as an indication of the type & level of information that you are expected to consult. Further guidance will be provided by the Module Convener.

Basic reading:

- BAWDEN, G. & REYCRAFT, R. M. 2000. *Environmental Disaster and the Archaeology of Human Response*, New Mexico, Maxwell Museum of Anthropology.
- BLEWITT, J. 2008. *Understanding Sustainable Development*, London, Routledge.
- DIAMOND, J. M. 2006. *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, New York, Viking.
- MCANANY, P. A. & YOFFEE, N. 2010. *Questioning Collapse: Human Resilience, Ecological Vulnerability, and the Aftermath of Empire*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- REDMAN, C. L. 2001. *Human Impact on Ancient Environments*, Tucson, University of Arizona Press.
- SCHWARTZ, G. M. 2010. *After Collapse: The Regeneration of Complex Societies*, Tucson, University of Arizona Press.
- SHEETS, P. & COOPER, J. 2012. *Surviving Sudden Environmental Change. Answers from Archaeology*, Boulder, University Press of Colorado.
- TAINTER, J. 1990. *The Collapse of Complex Societies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

ELE – [College to provide hyperlink to appropriate pages](#)

CREDIT VALUE	15	ECTS VALUE	7.5
PRE-REQUISITE MODULES	None		
CO-REQUISITE MODULES	Not taking ARC3123		
NQF LEVEL (FHEQ)	5	AVAILABLE AS DISTANCE LEARNING	NO
ORIGIN DATE	March 2013	LAST REVISION DATE	
KEY WORDS SEARCH	Societies, Archaeology, Sustainability		

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