

GLOBAL STUDIES PROGRAMME

GLOBAL PUBLIC SPHERE & CIVIL SOCIETY

Course Syllabus 2025

CHAIR | Prof. Dr. Alejandro Pelfini (apelfini@flacso.org.ar) and Prof. Dr. Adrián Beling (abeling@flacso.org.ar)

GUEST LECTURERS | Dr. Mariano Fressoli (mfressoli@fund-cenit.org.ar) and the collaboration of João Collita

DATES AND TIME | Thursdays from Aug. 21st to Nov 30th, from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm; Parts II and III from 10:30 to 1pm

CREDIT HOURS (total) | 30 hours

1. INTRODUCTION

In a historical context of increasing global multi-dimensional interdependence, but also of mounting tensions and vulnerability in the socio-economic, ecological, and military realms, the question of democratic steering of global developmental trajectories seems more relevant than ever. Indeed, the production of collective outcomes is increasingly a *global* affair; and democratic accountability seems the only possible basis for their legitimacy. Furthermore: critically; what is at stake in current global affairs (particularly in the ecological and military realms) is possibly the survival of the species itself (and that of most life on earth in its current form).

But an effective and legitimate steering of world affairs also appears as more problematic than ever before: Both the political institutions inherited from the 'Westphalian era' and their theoretical underpinnings come under stress and are in need of a profound revision in the face of the unfolding 'global age'. For better or for worse, the liberal democratic state does not provide any applicable model for global (democratic) governance. The absence of a constitutional regime (typically a sovereign power with representatives democratically appointed to office through elections) is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it yields the obvious problem of lack of enforceability at the global level; but then again frees the transnational/global from the polarizing and short-term logic of electoral politics. How can democratic governance be thought of at a global level; then? Challenges notwithstanding, a *deliberative democracy* seems particularly well placed to take on the global challenge: indeed, the lack of any empowered decision-making authority to put an end to talk means that joint action necessarily requires persuasion – but how consequential can this deliberative governance expected to be? And can it be democratic? The *public sphere* and *civil society* are arguably the key socio-political instances to facilitate the transition from the

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Westphalian to the global world order, not least because they seem the most promisingly adaptable to deal with truly global issues, as opposed to the international or inter-governmental bias of formal political institutions. Yet transnationalizing (let alone globalizing) the public sphere and civil society implies major redefinitions and adjustments.

This course will deal with two dimensions of the emerging global public sphere and global civil society: The first part of the course will address the theoretical and practical problems derived from the transnationalization of these instances themselves, placing particular emphasis on the implications thereof for the effectiveness and legitimacy of democratic governance at the global level. The second part of the course is aimed at introducing the most burning question posed to the emerging global polity for debate: how to bend the current unsustainable global developmental trajectory towards one that allows all societies and individuals to thrive within the ecological limits of the planet; as well as the main discourses in dispute for providing the answer.

In sum, the purpose of this seminar is to critically address the emergence of a global public sphere and a global civil society from a dual perspective: as a *locus* of discursive construction of alternative futures or utopias for a sustainable society, on the one hand; and as a regulatory mechanism for the governance of a (proxy-) global polity in the post-pandemic scenario, on the other.

In addition to these theoretical questions, this course aims also at offering an “experience” of the global public sphere by setting up a *deliberative forum* for the students engaging with each other on diverse views by role-playing different discourses around a social-ecological transformation. During the exercise students represent relevant organizations with a stake in social-ecological debates, seeking to examine different visions of alternative futures in the frame of the “Ecosocial, economic and intercultural pact for Latin-America” (Pacto Ecosocial del Sur) emerged as a mirror image of the idea of a “Green New Deal” in the Global North. This ideal-typical representation will not only allow the students to become familiar with the diversity of approaches and with their potential contributions to solving the world’s most pressing problems, but also help them in identifying which voices are marginalized and excluded from real-world discussions, and reflect on the implications thereof for the assessment and the improvement of actually existing deliberative global governance.

2. OBJECTIVES

- Providing the students with a synthetic yet solid conceptual framework for public sphere and civil society and their potential and limitations in the governance of a global world.
- Developing an alternative, complementary perspective to the current institutionalist approach to global governance.
- Identifying key issues and discourses around a social-ecological transformation as key debates of the emerging global public sphere, as well as the forces shaping these debates.
- Developing communicative and argumentative skills through activities of representation, advocacy, and deliberation through role-playing in a political

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forum.

3. COURSE SECTIONS

1. Theoretical Foundations: Public Sphere as a Global Sphere?
2. Legitimacy and Efficacy of the public sphere in a *geo-historical* context
3. Forum exercise: Discussing the civil society proposal under the rubric of the “Eco-social, economic and intercultural pact for Latin America”

4. STRUCTURE & SCHEDULE

Part I: Theoretical Foundations. The Public Sphere as a Global Sphere?

1.1. August 21: Presentation of the course. Discussion on the concepts Public Sphere, Civil Society, Public goods, and Citizenship. The Public Sphere in Latin America

- Hunter, Emma and Leslie James (2020). “Introduction: Colonial Public Spheres and the Worlds of Print”. *Itinerario*, pp. 1-16. doi:10.1017/S0165115320000248

- Piccato, Pablo (2010): Public sphere in Latin America: a map of the historiography, *Social History*, 35:2, 165-192
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071021003795055>

1.2. August 28: The Transnationalisation of the Public Sphere. The conditions for an intercultural public sphere

- Castells, Manuel (2008): “The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance”. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), (pp. 78–93)
- Fraser, Nancy (2007): “Transnationalizing the Public Sphere. On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World”, *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 24(4), (pp. 7-30).

1.3. September 4: Global and National Public Goods: Cosmopolitan citizenship (Pelfini with the collaboration of João Collita)

- Delanty, Gerard (2006), “The cosmopolitan imagination: critical cosmopolitanism and social theory”, *The British Journal of Sociology* 2006 Volume 57 Issue 1 (25-47).
https://oneworlduv.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/cosmopolitan_imagination.pdf

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- The globality of global public goods. Case discussion in class: The Yasuni-ITT initiative. Input for the discussion:
 - o Acosta, Alberto, Eduardo Gudynas, Esperanza Martínez, and Joseph H. Vogel, "Leaving the Oil in the Ground: A Political, Economic, and Ecological Initiative in the Ecuadorian Amazon," Americas Program Policy Report (Washington, DC: Center for International Policy, August 13, 2009) Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/16/ecuador-approves-yasuni-amazon-oil-drilling>

1.4. September 11: The current conditions of the Public Sphere: Postdemocracy and Posttruth

- Arias Maldonado, Manuel (2017): "Rethinking Populism in the Digital Age: Social Networks, Political Affects and Post-Truth Democracies". XIII Congreso AECPA, Santiago de Compostela, 20-22 September 2017
<https://riuma.uma.es/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10630/14500/Rethinking%20Populism%20in%20the%20Digital%20Age%20-Manuel%20Arias%20Maldonado%2C%20GT%201.8%2C%20XIII%20Congreso%20Aecpa.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Seeliger, M., & Sevignani, S. (2022). "A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere? An Introduction." *Theory, Culture & Society*, 39(4), 3-16.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764221109439>

1.5. September 18: Global Media and Citizenship in the platform society

- Bonini, Tiziano and Emiliano Treré (2024). *Algorithms of resistance. The Everyday Fight against Platform Power*, MIT Press, Chapters 1 and 2.
- García Canclini, Néstor (2018). Disposal and Reinvention: Citizenship in an Era of Electronic Capitalism, in *Open Cultural Studies* 2(1):273-284. DOI: 10.1515/culture-2018-0025
- Dijck, José van, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal (2018), *The Platform Society. Public values in a connective world*. Oxford University Press, chapters 1 and 2.

1.6. September 25: Latin American peculiarities: Lessons for a democratization of a global public sphere

- Avritzer, Leonardo (2012): *Democracy and the Public Sphere*, Princeton University Press (pp. 38-50).
- Rivera Cusicanqui, Silvia: "Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization" *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 111:1, Winter 2012
 DOI10.1215/00382876-1472612 <http://www.adivasiresurgence.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Silvia-Rivera-Cusicanqui-Chixinakax-Eng1.pdf>
- Segato, Rita (2018): "A Manifesto in Four Themes". *Critical Times* (2018) 1 (1): 198–211. https://doi.org/10.1215/26410478-1.1.198_198segato.pdf (silverchair.com)

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1.7. October 2: Introduction to Forum dynamics: *Futuring* towards a socio-ecologically sustainable world. Self-presentation of the different organisations taking part in the forum

WRITTEN EXAM: 9th October

There won't be GSP activities during the week of 13th October

Part II: Legitimacy and Efficacy of the public sphere in a geohistorical context.

2.1. October 23 (Adrián Beling; Online session): Social-ecological transformation and the global public sphere: key narratives.

- Adloff, Frank, and Sighard Neckel (2019): "Futures of Sustainability as Modernization, Transformation, and Control: A Conceptual Framework." *Sustainability Science*, March 9, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-019-00671-2>.
- Gudynas, Eduardo, Miriam Lang, and D. Mokrani. "Debates on Development and Its Alternatives in Latin America: A Brief Heterodox Guide." In *Beyond Development. Alternative Visions from Latin America*, 15–40. Transnational Institute & Rosa-Luxemburg Foundation, 2013.

http://rosalux-europa.info/userfiles/file/Beyond_Development_RLS_TNI_2013.pdf#page=16.

2.2. October 30 (Adrián Beling; Online Session): Articulating situated discourses in a global public sphere: dialogues of knowledges and South-North synergies

- Beling, Adrián E., Julien Vanhulst, Federico Demaria, Violeta Rabi, Ana Estefanía Carballo, and Jérôme Pelenc (2018): Discursive Synergies for a 'Great Transformation' towards Sustainability: Pragmatic Contributions to a Necessary Dialogue between Human Development, Degrowth, and Buen Vivir. *Ecological Economics* 144: 304–13.
- Escobar, Arturo. 'Degrowth, Postdevelopment, and Transitions: A Preliminary Conversation'. *Sustainability Science*, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-015-0297-5>.

2.3. November 6 (Adrián Beling; Online Session): Sustainability governance, civil society and the public sphere. Outlook and conclusions - Introduction to forum role-play and build-up of working groups

- Hausknost, Daniel (2020). "The Environmental State and the Glass Ceiling of Transformation." *Environmental Politics* 29, no. 1: 17–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2019.1680062>

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- Vanhulst, Julien, and Adrian E. Beling (2019). "Post-Eurocentric Sustainability Governance: Lessons from the Latin-American Buen Vivir Experiment." In Routledge Handbook of Global Sustainability Governance, 115–28. London: Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Handbook-of-Global-Sustainability-Governance-1st-Edition/Kaifagianni-Fuchs-Hayden/p/book/9781138048287>

2. 4. November 13: Transformation in progress? Technology, social innovation and socioeconomic change (Dr. Mariano Fressoli, Cenit – Centro de Investigaciones para la Transformación)

- Arvidsson, Adam (2019): "Capitalism and the Commons", *Theory, Culture & Society* 0(0) 1–28
- Benkler, Y. (2016): Peer production, the commons, and the future of the firm. *Strategic Organization*, 15(2), 264–274. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127016652606>
- Pansera, Mario & Fressoli, Mariano (2020): "Innovation without growth: Technological change in a post-growth era", *Organizations*.

Part III: Forum Exercise

3.1. November 27: Forum exercise Discussing the "Ecosocial, economic and intercultural pact for Latin-America" or Pacto Ecosocial del Sur (<https://pactoecosocialdelsur.com/#1592362596334-8e141cec-613c>)

Forum preparatory readings: to be defined

5. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Discussion in Class on the different readings (Part I) (15%)
- Written Exam on the contents of part I (40%)
- Discussion in Class on the different readings in relation to the position of the selected actor/organization (Part II) (15%) - from the perspective of organization represented in the deliberative forum) - role-play, individual assignment.
- Participation in the forum: role play, group task, including the submission of a brief report on the experience within the forum (30%) - group task