

EXPLORING THE SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS OF CONSERVATION

Resource Person(s)



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DETAILS

Duration: 5 days

Dates: 15-19 September

Capacity: 20

Location: Bangalore

(Visthar, Kothanur)

Conservation today is a broad church. A dizzying, sometimes contradictory diversity of regulatory, extractive, economic and organizational practices fall within the rubric of conservation. In the widest sense, conservation can be viewed as a diverse set of ideas and practices that mediate relationships between human and non-human nature. These ideas and practices are historically situated and deeply social. This recognition throws up critical questions concerning the structure and dynamics of global conservation.

Where and when did conservation ideas and practices originate? What are the social and political contexts that have influenced and transformed them? How have certain ideologies come to dominate conservation discourse? What are the socio-historical processes that diverse conservation practices respond to and influence in turn?

Through a series of historically informed case study sessions, this course will undertake an interactive enquiry into these questions by examining three distinct epochs in conservation history. Focusing on key events, people, institutions and movements, the sessions will illuminate how larger global structures and processes—from European imperialism and global capitalism to the evolution of knowledge systems and the emergence of nation states—have shaped contemporary conservation ideas and practice.

The course will trace a chronological arc from the late 19th century colonial period through post-World War II decolonisation to the contemporary era of market-based conservation. We will explore each epoch through detailed case studies that examine conservation objectives, key players and their social locations, approaches adopted, and broader political-economic contexts. Afternoon sessions will focus on analyses of political economy, investigating how conservation creates "winners" and "losers" and examining the role of institutions, knowledge systems, funding sources, and power structures in shaping conservation choices and outcomes.

The final sessions will explore emerging alternatives to mainstream conservation, examining community-led movements and devolutionary approaches that challenge dominant paradigms.

The course, open to conservation practitioners of all persuasions, will necessarily sacrifice comprehensiveness to focus on helping participants develop a broad flavor for and a critical appreciation of the complex social and historical dimensions of conservation. Across scales, from place to planet, our attempt will be to collectively interrogate and re-imagine the ideas and practices that characterise current conservation.