

Transversal Movements between Gender and Environment: Interdisciplinarity in Higher Education

Movimientos transversales entre género y medio ambiente: la interdisciplinarietà en la educación superior

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Submitted / Recibido: 05/08/2024**Accepted / Aceptado:** 09/10/2024

To cite this article / Para citar este artículo:
Widegren, K. (2025). Transversal Movements
between Gender and Environment:
Interdisciplinarity in Higher Education.
Feminismo/s, 45, 323-350. <https://doi.org/10.14198/fem.2025.45.12>

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Abstract

Gender and environmental political analysis have had many common goals, articulated as, for example, ecofeminism. The two concepts can be thought of together, for example in regard to the unequal gendered vulnerability to the effects of climate change. However, in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, gender-specific indicators were integrated into most of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), though not into the goals directly aimed at ecological sustainability. This is one example of how gender is being marginalized in relation to environmental issues. A crucial context for combining gender and environmental studies is higher education and interdisciplinary education. The aim of this paper is to analyse syllabus texts that describe the content of courses with a joint focus on gender and environmental studies. Syllabi were retrieved through the Swedish admission system, which lists all courses and programmes offered at Swedish universities for the coming academic years. Using a qualitative method, intertextual relations of syllabi were mapped and the concepts of gender and environment analysed. The focus on intertextual relations

between syllabi and theoretical, scholarly, disciplinary and policy contexts places syllabi in the wider context of interdisciplinary higher education, with its implicit structures of disciplinary centring, marginalization and transversal shifting of perspectives, which also points to the disciplinary status of Gender Studies in academia. More than half of the syllabi found were for courses and programmes offered at Gender Studies departments (or their equivalent). In these contexts, gender and environment were articulated within a frame of meta-theoretical accounts of disciplinary power, scrutinizing categorizations and conceptualizations in, for example, Natural Sciences. In the courses taught in other disciplines, gender was merely a perspective on the core concepts of, for example, developmental studies and relied more on empiricist notions of gender as a preconceived category.

Keywords: gender; Gender Studies; environment; ecology; sustainability; interdisciplinarity; higher education; syllabi.

Resumen

Los análisis políticos sobre género y medio ambiente han compartido muchos objetivos, articulados como, por ejemplo, en el ecofeminismo. Ambos conceptos se pueden considerar como un conjunto, por ejemplo, en relación con la vulnerabilidad desigual de género frente a los efectos del cambio climático. No obstante, aunque los indicadores específicos de género se han integrado en la mayoría de los diecisiete Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) de la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible, no ha sido así en los objetivos dirigidos directamente a la sostenibilidad ecológica, lo cual es un ejemplo de la marginación del género en relación con las cuestiones medioambientales. Un contexto crucial para combinar los estudios de género y de medio ambiente es la educación superior y la educación interdisciplinaria. El objetivo de este artículo es analizar los textos de los programas de estudios que describen el contenido de cursos en los que se adopta un enfoque conjunto sobre los estudios de género y de medio ambiente. Los programas de estudios se recopilaron a través del sistema de admisión sueco, que enumera todos los cursos y programas ofrecidos en las universidades suecas para los próximos años académicos. Mediante el uso de un método cualitativo, se mapearon las relaciones intertextuales de los programas de estudios y se analizaron los conceptos de género y medio ambiente. El enfoque en las relaciones intertextuales entre los programas de estudios y los contextos teóricos, académicos, disciplinarios y políticos, junto con sus estructuras implícitas de centralización disciplinaria, marginalización y cambio transversal de perspectivas, permite emplazar estos programas de estudios en el contexto más amplio de la educación superior interdisciplinaria, lo que a su vez guarda relación con el estatus disciplinario de los Estudios de Género en el ámbito académico. Más de la mitad de los programas de estudios pertenecían a cursos y programas ofertados en departamentos de Estudios de Género (o sus equivalentes), contextos donde el género y el medio ambiente se

articulaban dentro de un marco de análisis metateórico sobre el poder disciplinario en el que se analizaban las categorizaciones y las conceptualizaciones en, por ejemplo, las Ciencias Naturales. En cursos impartidos en otras disciplinas, el género era simplemente una perspectiva sobre los conceptos centrales de, por ejemplo, los estudios de desarrollo, y se basaba más en nociones empiristas del género como una categoría preconcebida.

Palabras clave: género; Estudios de Género; medio ambiente; ecología; sostenibilidad; interdisciplinarietà; educación superior; programas de estudio.

Ecofeminism aims to have feminism and ecology mutually inform one another, developing a feminism that is ecological and an ecology that is feminist. Ecological feminism challenges people to understand the contribution of gender to the forms of culture and economic rationality that bring contemporary societies into ecological danger zones.

Plumwood (2002). *Encyclopaedia of Feminist Theories*

1. INTRODUCTION

The encyclopaedic entry *ecofeminism* underline the need for reciprocity between gender and the work against ecological crisis: an ecological feminism, and a feminist ecology (Plumwood, 2002). While the focus of this paper is on how the relation between gender and environment, with its many analytical levels, shifting epistemological traditions and reproduced preconceptions, is articulated in the specific context of Swedish higher education, the trope that gender and environment need to be articulated together can be found in many contexts. A sceptic approach to human-made climate change is associated with right-wing masculinity, while women have come to represent a willingness to scale down and break the cycle of economic growth and carbon-dependent cultures (Nagel, 2016; Sand, 2022; Vowles & Hultman, 2021). In the new environmental movement Mothers' Rebellion, women take their children's future and their own care and concern for them as the starting point for resistance against political passivity towards the climate crisis, echoing both of past connections between Earth and women's care work and today's focus on sustaining for the future (Gaard, 2011; Weisser,

2017). Continuing with the quote from *Encyclopaedia of Feminist Theories* it shows how the relation is articulated in a specific way: gender can be used to understand how present structures put us in ecological danger, thus casting gender as the problematizing concept that will open new lines of enquiries and offer new analysis and new results, while ecology is cast in the role of a relatively stable starting point (Dölling & Hark, 2000; May, 2002). The opposite does not seem as central: using ecological knowledges to cast new light on gender. However, the notion that gender analysis could contribute to knowledge and policy development for environmental issues is far from established in climate negotiations and other contexts where expertise is exercised (Detraz, 2016). Consider for example, the 2030 Agenda, a politically negotiated policy document and as such an expression of competing interests and conflicting goals; the tensions start already with the meaning of the concept of *gender*. Gender in a development agenda can be based on analyses of the social organization; how it assigns women and men different roles, responsibilities and expectations; and how this in turn reproduces gendered divisions within systems, such as labour markets, civil societies, cultural discourses, public decision-making and households (Beier, 2018; Rubin, 1975; Wallach Scott, 2010). However, many analyses show that the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) failed to recognize gender equality and its role in development (Azcona & Bhatt, 2020; Fredman et al., 2016) which gave rise to intense mobilization prior to the process of setting the 2030 Agenda to make sure this would not happen again. Persistent advocacy work by UN Women and feminist activists both within and outside the UN system used experiences from the work on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) in 1995 to inform the 2030 Agenda (Dhar, 2018; Goetz & Jenkins, 2016; Sen, 2019). The 1992 Earth Summit was also of importance, not only did it perceive the ecological crisis and the social situation of people as interconnected but it also placed the issue of gender equality at the centre of discussion (Mölders, 2019).

In an account of the women's organizations and their work to include gender in the 2030 Agenda by Professor of Public Health Gita Sen (2019), Sen briefly reflects on the technocratic environmentalist advocating for ecologically focused goals. These environmental experts did not necessarily

have any interest or knowledge about women's rights issues. When environmental problems are believed to be best managed through technology, without situating technology as always socially embedded, they present a risk of reproducing gendered norms related to technological rationality and masculinity (Bäckstrand, 2004; Wajcman, 1991). As it turned out, gender-specific indicators were integrated into most of the seventeen SDGs, but not into the goals that are directly aimed at ecological sustainability. In the goals for Clean Water and Sanitation; Affordable and Clean Energy; Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; Responsible Consumption and Production; Life below Water; and Life on Land, gender is nowhere to be found. The relation between gender and environment can thus also be characterized by absence and silence (Detraz, 2016; Farrelly, 2020) or in a negotiation of what Maria do Mar Pereira calls *epistemic status* (Pereira, 2017).

2. THE STUDY

2.1. Analysing interdisciplinary intertexts in higher education syllabi

Educational ambitions start with the formulation of a syllabus, a text that will guide forthcoming pedagogical actions, choices of reading and forms of examinations. The course syllabus sets out the content of a course, its learning goals and expectations of students (Afros & Schryer, 2009; Carrera Suárez & Viñuela Suárez, 2006; Neimanis & McLauchlan, 2022). The document is a pedagogical product as well as a regulating, juridical contract (Bergh & Arneback, 2019). Learning goals formalize the agreements in terms of an exchange: what the course offers in terms of knowledge and abilities, the students should offer in commitment to learn and, if so, eventually acquire a grade according to a pre-defined grading scale. The aim of this paper is to analyse how the relation between the concepts gender and environment and their shifting epistemological traditions are articulated in syllabi texts. The fact that these two subjects use shifting words (gender, feminist, women's and nature, ecological, environmental, sustainable) and that the same words have shifting meanings calls for careful reading of the syllabi's intertextual relations to contexts (Farrelly, 2020). Syllabi are usually rather short, and they are seldom explicit with definitions of scholarly concepts and names of research fields – these are the things that the

actual teaching of the course will (hopefully) reveal. Due to the few words, it is necessary to identify which contexts the text references: its intertexts. When analysing intertexts, the focus is on the relation between a statement and the surrounding and previous texts. Charles Bazerman argues that: Through intertextual references the text positions itself in relation to previous discourses. Through such relations a text evokes a representation of the discourse situation, the textual resources that bear on the situation, and how the current text positions itself and draws on other texts. (Bazerman & Prior, 2004, p. 86)

Since this is a higher educational context different research fields, disciplines, theoretical perspectives and traditions are likely intertextual references, and through these it is possible to retrieve the meaning of concepts but also the relation between them.

A close reading of the paragraphs that state «content» and «learning goals» of the syllabi lead to an analysis of intertextual relations, and the implied meanings of the concepts gender, environment, ecology, sustainability and nature. However, even a rather regulated genre such as the syllabus present unexpected references and formulations and make use of a multitude of meaning making procedures that are not formulaic in its nature (Bazerman, 2004). Qualitative close reading methodologies follow the material carefully and paying attention to different ways of producing meaning also beyond genre related regularities. Writing syllabus beyond genre limitations could be one way to situate course content, moving towards ‘worldly pedagogies’ that are placing the classrooms in material relation to environmental crisis as Astrida Neimanis and Laura McLauchlan suggest (Neimanis & McLauchlan, 2022; Verlie, 2017).

2.2. Finding and analysing syllabi

The paper analyses syllabi for university courses offered in the Swedish higher education system during the academic year 2024-2025. Syllabi were retrieved through the Swedish admission system *antagning.se*, where all university-level courses and programmes that are taught in Swedish during the coming academic years can be found. A separate system, *universityadmissions.se*, lists all courses and programmes in Sweden that are taught in English.

These are also the systems where applications to higher education courses and programmes are made, and the platforms are central parts of the Swedish authority Swedish Council for Higher Education's governmental assignment.

For this paper, combinations of *gender* and *sustainability*, *gender* and *ecology*, *gender* and *environmental studies* and *gender* and *nature* as well as combinations of *sustainability*, *ecology*, *environmental* and *nature* with *feminist* were used as search terms. The search was conducted on both *antagning.se* and *universityadmission.se*. Even if *ecology*, *sustainability*, *environment* and *nature* point to different aspects and discourses, they are conceptually linked together. They point to the fact that human and non-human creatures live in a world that we could not live without and yet it is being destroyed. I use *environment* as the umbrella term here, as it is inclusive and can encompass ecological systems and nature, as well as a policy concept like *sustainability* (Killingsworth & Palmer, 1992; Weisser, 2017).

The search resulted in 25 courses and programmes from seven Swedish universities. After a first reading of the syllabi, it turned out that 14 of them referred to *economic* and/or *social* sustainability, rather than *ecological sustainability* or, for example, *pedagogical learning environments*, and these were consequently excluded from the sample. For the remaining 11 educations, I retrieved syllabi and reading lists from the respective university's website. As syllabi are juridical documents, Swedish universities are required to have updated versions of their syllabi available online (Bergh & Arneback, 2019). For programmes, both the programme layouts and the included course syllabi were included.

Higher education in Sweden is financed and planned according to a system of full-year study placement (in Swedish *helårsstudieplatser*, HSP), the equivalent of the costs for one student's education full time in one year. These placements have different *price tags* depending on the cost of the education. They are distributed centrally to universities and after that among departments and different disciplines, or main fields of study, which is the formal name for a discipline in Swedish higher educational terminology. The main field of study can have plans for courses on different levels that can lead to a Bachelor's or Master's degree. Cooperation and sharing of costs with another main field of study is also possible, thus creating interdisciplinary courses or study programmes.

Figure 1, Courses and programmes with Gender and Environment in Swedish Higher Education, Academic Year 2024-25 shows the name of the course and/or programme, the reference, the main field of study, the responsible department and the university for the nine courses and two Master's programmes that are included plus the search terms that made the syllabus eligible for the study.

Table 1. Courses and programmes with Gender and Environment in Swedish Higher Education, Academic Year 2024-25

Name of course or programme	My reference	Main field of study	Responsible department and university	Identified search term
Social Sciences: Theories and Issues in Development	A1	Sociology of Law; Sociology; Developmental Studies; Social Anthropology; Political Science; Social Work; Media and Communication Studies; Cultural Geography; Gender Studies	Graduate School at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Lund University	gender, sustainability
Economic History: Environmental History from an Economic Perspective	A2	Economic History	Department of Economic History, Lund University	gender, environmental

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Master's Programme in Rural Development and Natural Resource Management Compulsory course in the programme: Rurality, Livelihood and Gender	A3	Rural Development; Environmental Science	Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences	gender, sustainability
Innovation, Gender and Sustainable Development	A4	Gender Studies	Department in Social Sciences, Technology and Art, Luleå University of Technology	gender, ecology sustainability
Gender, Science and Nature	A5	Gender Studies	Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala University	gender, nature
Feminist Environmental Humanities	A6	Gender Studies	Department of Thematic Studies (TEMA), Linköping University	gender, environmental, feminist
Humans, Animals and Environments	A7	Gender Studies	Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala University	gender, environmental

Perspectives on Environmental Theory	A8	Gender Studies	Umeå Centre for Gender Studies (UCGS), Umeå University	gender, environmental, ecology, nature
Master in Gender Studies and Environmental Humanities courses in the programme: Ecofeminist Philosophy	A9	Gender Studies	Department of Ethnology, History of Religion and Gender Studies, Stockholm University	gender, sustainability, environmental

Source: own production

A syllabus is usually processed through different institutional instances before becoming public. The text is thus discussed and edited according to the expectations of the syllabus genre, budgetary restrictions and disciplinary traditions and finally decided upon, usually by a departmental board, to receive its juridical status. My capacity as former Director of Study (2011-2015) gives me particular insights into this process. This hands-on experience of creating syllabi in an institutionalized higher education context situates my knowledge claims in specific ways, providing me with situated knowledge in the sense discussed by Donna Haraway. Haraway claims that all knowledge is situated, but that academic and scientific traditions have promoted objectivity as distant and uninterested (Haraway, 1988). In line with her argument, I rather think that my situatedness strengthens my knowledge claims. The intertwining of actual formulations of syllabi and submitting to educational regulations have shaped my gaze in specific ways and guide my interest in these texts.

2.3. Interdisciplinary transversality

It is commonly claimed that interdisciplinary education is necessary for students to develop an understanding of complex phenomena and processes: to identify, navigate and problematize different epistemologies implicated in contemporary challenges (Gibbons, 1994; Latour, 1993). The relationship between theoretical concepts that are not directly developed in conjunction with each other, like gender and environment, can be perceived as a micro-level of interdisciplinarity. How gender research is developed in disciplines, between disciplines and as a discipline in its own right has been the subject of lively discussions since the first PhD programmes in interdisciplinary Women's and Gender Studies were launched during the 1980s and 90s (Liinason & Holm, 2006; Wiegman, 2002). In Sweden, the interdisciplinary field of Gender Studies has been institutionalized for the last 30 years, and research and education are taking place both in the discipline of Gender Studies and as gender research in other disciplines (Manns, 2006; Pulkkinen, 2015; Widegren & Young Håkansson, 2023).

This situation is described by Nina Lykke as forming a «post-disciplinary discipline» (Lykke, 2004, 2010). Lykke's position is based on the critical epistemological position that disciplines are social and historical constructs that lack ontological validity. Rather, Lykke argues with Latour's perspectives that complex phenomena, such as climate change, must be studied as hybrid phenomena, in which perspectives from natural sciences, humanities, social sciences and economics need to be mutually integrated. Post-disciplinarity challenges the notion that disciplines ought to form themselves around specific issues or empirical phenomena. Instead, Lykke sees Gender Studies as a «post-disciplinary» discipline, reaching for any subject, phenomenon or issue, and analysing it with the critical approaches developed in the field.

Marjory Pryse uses the concept of transversality to foreground these movements between disciplinary grounding and interdisciplinary reaching out. Inspired by 'rooting' and 'shifting' as originally a method from feminist conflict resolution, transversality becomes a way of simultaneously acknowledge the condition of one's own situation and be able to shift perspective (Pryse, 2000). The interdisciplinary movements within the discipline of Gender Studies and other interdisciplinary fields of research and

education can be understood as such movements of transversality. *Reaching* and *grounded in* metaphorically illustrate different forms of relations: what is taken as a central starting point and what is seen as aspects of that central concept or perspective to take on in order to further understand the central phenomena.

In discussions about the organization of gender research and the institutionalization of Gender Studies as a discipline in its own right, some voices have argued that the critical potential of studying gender is lost if Gender Studies becomes a discipline in its own right. Dölling and Hark (2000) urge gender scholars to seek a transdisciplinary reach outside of any discipline; only then can gender research keep its relevance for society. Robyn Wiegman also claims that the counter tradition of Gender Studies must keep its close relation to the traditional disciplines, challenge and revise them (Wiegman, 2002). Unlike Lykke, Wiegman claims that when Gender Studies is institutionalized as a discipline, it cannot return to interdisciplinarity (Wiegman, 2002). However, another argument comes from Vivian M. May who claims that Gender Studies needs to be «a compounded space». If gender research is to remain open, reflexive and critical of all claims to epistemic purity, it is necessary to institutionalize it; otherwise Gender Studies will only be an *add-on* to the traditional disciplines (Harding, 1986; May, 2002). So, from the question of how the relation between gender and environment is articulated follows the question how gender is used in different disciplinary and interdisciplinary ways? When syllabi transversally reach towards different disciplinary contexts what is made their starting points and what is cast as problematizing perspectives? And how do the syllabi create intertextual relations to contexts outside the higher education sector?

3. RESULTS

3.1. Gender and environment in (inter)disciplinary courses

The results are presented in two clusters of course syllabi: three syllabi from disciplines other than Gender Studies (A1, A2, A3) and seven courses developed in Gender Studies (A4, A5, A6, A7, A8, A9). It may seem unfair, because the first cluster contains of courses different from each other, from very different disciplines with seemingly not much in common. How can an

analysis of these courses and programmes in Social and Natural Sciences say anything apart from stating their very divergent contexts of origin? However, it turns out that these syllabi have more in common than can be assumed. Two courses were developed in interdisciplinary cooperation between different fields (A1 and A3). Two courses and one study programme focus on developmental issues (A1 and A3). One stands out as it focuses on relations between economic systems and environmental issues and that is the only course that does not state any intentions towards interdisciplinarity and has only one main field of study, which is Economic History (A2).

In Economic History: Environmental History from an Economic Perspective (A2), the articulation of gender and environment as a central relation is integrated into its historical overview. The course offers an account of the historically shifting interaction between economy and ecology with a gender perspective, formulated in one of the learning goals: «know how humans during different times have related to their environment, including relevant gender perspective» (A2). The reference to the «human» is a gender-blind, universalizing description, which is then challenged by a gender perspective (Hearn & Husu, 2011). The very concept of gender becomes a reminder of the concept of *humanity* and its implicit universalizing premises. Although the course offers critical notions of economic growth, the universalizing of humanity points towards an anthropocentric account of nature, as a resource for human needs. This account of nature is also present in for example the Sustainable Development Goals (Killingsworth & Palmer, 1992; Kotzé & French, 2018). The same conceptualization occurs in the Master's programme Rural Development and Natural Resource Management (A3). Sustainable management of natural resources is one of its main subjects as well as managing different «development projects», thus makes intertextual references to the SDGs of Agenda 2030.

In a rhetoric analysis of definitions of sustainability in US higher education, Christian R. Wiesser discusses the term *sustainability* as an empty signifier filled with many different meanings in different contexts, only temporarily stabilized if one definition manages to be hegemonic. The Brundtland definition from 1987 seems to have reached such temporarily fixed status, a nodal point to which all other uses of the term must relate (Wiesser, 2017). The Brundtland definition relies on the notion of nature as a resource and

has made its temporal aspects central with its imperative of saving for future generations. Ecological sustainability could have pointed at saving, or conserving, biological diversity or complexity of ecological systems, but it has come to mean predominantly saving natural resources (Kotzé & French, 2018; Weisser, 2017). The programme syllabus for Rural Development and Natural Resource Management (A3) does not add other meanings to the concept, nor does it describe any critical interrogations with this particular concept as part of its curricula.

The two courses that focus on developmental issues are called Social Sciences: Theories and Issues in Development (A1) and Rurality, Livelihood and Gender (A3). In Social Sciences: Theories and Issues in Development, interdisciplinarity is expressed in two ways. First, through the main field of study that makes up its content. Nine different main fields of study have been combined to develop the course: Sociology of Law, Sociology, Developmental Studies, Social Anthropology, Political Science, Social Work, Media and Communication Studies, Cultural Geography and Gender Studies. Second, interdisciplinarity is explicitly formulated in the content paragraph: «This is an interdisciplinary course that focuses on problems such as poverty, inequality, human development and sustainability» (A1). The aim of the course is to increase understanding of the «conditions, origin, content and future» of development (A1). The syllabus asks the direct question of why poverty still exists despite great scientific progress, developmental policy, international projects and global goals. The intertextual relations position the syllabus in relation to global goals, development and sustainability, as these are articulated in the UN's overarching policy and, more specifically, the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals.

In Rurality, Livelihood and Gender the central subject is described as food security and social security, which, according to the syllabus, should be «partly drawing on gender analysis» (A3). Both the syllabus of Social Sciences: Theories and Issues in Development and Rurality, Livelihood and Gender show that gender has been an integrated aspect of developmental studies and policy, for example «a gender and development perspective» (A3) is a construction that implies that these two concepts form a unit. This reflects that gender has been a subject of interest in the field of development research for decades, and the field of developmental studies and policy is

the main intertextual relation for both these courses. An early example is *Woman's Role in Economic Development* (1970), a work in which economist Ester Boserup demonstrated that opportunities created by the gender-blind development policies pursued were distributed according to prevailing social structures, such as class and gender, much to the disadvantage of women (Cochrane & Rao, 2019; Miller & Razavi, 1995).

Based on different theoretical understandings of gender, feminist scholars and professionals have since analysed how development policy interacts with and sometimes challenges prevailing power structures in society. The so-called Women in Development (WID) movement that emerged as a response, advocating the idea that allocation of resources to women will prove productive to society, came to have a great impact on the views on women expressed in subsequent development policy (Miller & Razavi, 1995). However, the somewhat narrow, liberal feminist focus on women, largely neglecting the relational nature of their subordination, was soon to be questioned in the light of influential writings on the social construction of gender (Miller & Razavi, 1995; Rubin, 1975). Arguing for analyses of the social organization and how it assigns women and men different roles, responsibilities and expectations, the new critical approach was labelled Gender and Development (GAD) (Miller & Razavi, 1995; Rathgeber, 1990; True, 2003). That gender has become a naturalized aspect of this field is reflected in the formulation in *Social Sciences: Theories and Issues in Development* (A1): «inequality based on the intersections between class, ethnicity, gender, race, sex, etc». The intersectional approach shows a deepened understanding of power structures that questions the homogenization of the group *women*.

Gender and Development relies on what Sandra Harding has called «feminist empiricism», a notion that knowledge production and its methodological strategies are in principle adequate but will benefit qualitatively if analysis is added that is based on differentiation between the categories of men and women. Feminist empiricism challenges universalizing notions of humanity and pays attention to different living conditions for men and women. However, this approach is taking the categories men and women as natural and biologically fixed starting points (Harding, 1986). Jeff Hearn & Liisa Husu connects feminist empiricism with liberal strivings towards gender balance and a lack of perspective on power. Gender is produced and

reproduced within a system of inequality which tend to reproduce masculinity as a norm (Hearn & Husu, 2011).

When it comes to how environments and gender are articulated it is clear from the syllabi that neither Social Sciences: Theories and Issues in Development (A1) nor Rurality, Livelihood and Gender (A3) pays specific attention to the relation between the two concepts. The interdisciplinary transversality reaches many different subjects, of which gender is one, though not specifically in relation to the environment or ecological sustainability. In neither of the syllabi does gender challenge the understanding of the core content and gender is made marginal despite the course's intertextual relation to developmental studies; even when the course has 'gender' in its course name this aspect will still merely be an add-on. The intertextual relation to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and its widespread definition of sustainability as a question of economizing natural resources reproduces notions of the environment mainly in relation to human needs (Killingsworth & Palmer, 1992).

3.2. Gender Studies: Because the planetary crisis is also a crisis in humans' imaginative abilities

The seven courses and programmes from the sample that are developed in Gender Studies are rather different from each other. The course Innovation, Gender and Sustainable Development (A4) with Gender Studies as its main field of study does not have a departmental anchoring in Gender Studies, instead it is developed in a technological institution. However, the departmental context of the course, the Department of Social Science, Technology and Art is interdisciplinary and as such could offer problematizing perspectives on gendered norms related to technological rationality and masculinity (Bäckstrand, 2004; Wajcman, 1991). Furthermore, in Sweden, gender research has a specific historical tradition related to areas such as human-machine interaction and technology studies that make the link to social sciences and humanities less dominant than it is in other countries (Trojer, 2002). Two professors along with other resources – with the explicit roles of strengthening and developing gender research in relation to technology studies – were appointed by the Swedish government in the year

2000 (Trojer, 2002). One of these professors worked at Luleå University of Technology, but a department for Gender Studies was never established there.

The three concepts in the name of the course Innovation, Gender and Sustainable Development are all important for the content of the course, but innovation is central. According to the syllabus, innovation can be sustainable but also reproduce stereotypical norms around masculinity and femininity. The central question is thus stated as: Sustainability for whom? Following a tradition of questioning the universal relevance of concepts that do not imply an analysis of power relations.

Gender and ecological sustainability are related in one of the learning goals: to be able «to do an analysis of a problem with innovation and sustainable development using a gender perspective» (A4). Gender is stated as the operationalizing and problematizing perspective, much like in the opening quote about a «feminist ecology» (Plumwood, 2002). The other learning goal is formulated in a less analytical way, leaning more towards political activism. Students should learn how to «motivate a gender equality project and gender mainstreaming as instruments for sustainability». The starting point is thus normative rather than investigative, and it is claimed that gender equality is a way to reach sustainability. The explicit reference to UN policy and its definition of sustainability, as it was adopted by the UN in Rio 1992 (A4) with its intertwined aspects of ecological, economic and social sustainability, points towards a political aim of the course rather than a scholarly and analytical one. This is also stated in the first sentence of the content paragraph: «The course rests on a scientific ground but avoids being too theoretical» (A4).

Is this a covert criticism of Gender Studies being too theoretical without its close relation to women's movements? (Wiegman, 2002). Maybe. In the sample Innovation, Gender and Sustainable Development is the only course with the explicit goal to achieve gender equality. The course places technology at its centre and use that for transgressing traditional notions that research and education should be distant and value free. Instead, technology is seen in line with what Lena Trojer calls «reality producing» (Haraway, 1988; Trojer, 2013). As such it does not fully adopt to an empiricist notion

of gender as fixed categories but view technology and gender as intertwined and co-constructed.

The other courses and programmes that teach different relations between gender and environment, in the main field of study of Gender Studies, share some traits. They tend to make intertextual references mainly to disciplines that have had historical influence on humans' understanding of nature, humans and other's bodies, i.e. Natural Sciences. In, for example, Gender, Science and Nature (A5), one of the learning goals is to identify how «power operates within discussions of Nature Science and Technology» (A5) and the content starts out with «how notions of nature and scientific knowledge are produced» (A5). The constructivist perspective is not primarily directed at nature but rather the construction of scientific disciplines and their knowledge claims. The syllabus refutes the idea that «Nature is a pre-existing 'thing'» (A5) prior to social and cultural processes of norms. Here, transversality does not take place in the disciplinary context of Natural Science but rather as Nina Lykke suggests, the post-disciplinary discipline reaches out to relevant phenomena, using gender as a problematizing tool (Lykke, 2010; Pryse, 2000).

This meta-theoretical perspective on scientific knowledge claims is a core element of institutionalized Gender Studies, avoiding the feminist empiricists claims of stable gender categories ready to use for scientific analysis. The reliance on theories of meaning-making in relation to gender, as well as nature and/or environmental issues, accounts for the interest in interdisciplinary relations with humanities and the relatively new field of environmental humanity. The course Feminist Environmental Humanities (A6) connects this field with feminist theory, placing gender and environment in dialogue with each other. The Master's programme Gender Studies and Environmental Humanities (A9) also makes the relation between gender and environment central as a meaning-making process. The view that the critical inquiry of *conceptualizations* and *categorizations* is central to Gender Studies is also clear in Humans, Animals and Environments (A7), Perspectives on Environmental Theory (A8) and Feminist Environmental Humanities (A6). In all these syllabi, variations in investigating constructions of meaning are central. In, for example, the course Humans, Animals and Environment it is

claimed that «various definitions of nature and human» (A7) also influence how environmental problems are defined.

Perspectives on Environmental Theory makes references to intertextual discussions about political and technological actions and solutions in regard to the environmental crisis, asking «What problematizations and solutions do [different notions of nature] imply? Are the only options modern technology or romantic holism?» (A8). The critical stance towards these kinds of dichotomizations is an important trait of Gender Studies and feminist theory, but the sentence also provides a critical perspective on the history of ecofeminism. The word *romantic* is used as a reference to critique against parts of women's movements that connected women as closer to nature, with inherent feelings of care towards everything alive, and discourses on Mother Earth as feminizing nature (Merchant, 1980; Moore, 2008). The explicit critical stance against *modern technology* as an overarching solution to, for example, the climate crisis is a trait that the course shares with Innovation, Gender and Sustainable Development.

In the programme syllabus of Gender Studies and Environmental Humanities, the relation between «humans, animals, nature and the scrutinizing of conceptualisations and categorizations» (A9) is described as «fluid». In this context, «fluid» must be understood as a reference to an ontology of interconnectedness rather than dividing it into categories and dichotomies. Feminist theory problematizes a range of dichotomies like sex/gender, body/mind, emotion/rationality and nature/culture, which are reproduced in Western conceptual structures (Braidotti & Åsberg, 2018; Gaard, 2011). Feminist new materialism has engaged extensively in the development of alternative understandings of the intertwinements of nature, ecology, technology, human and more-than-humans, leaving anthropocentric thinking behind (Braidotti & Åsberg, 2018). In feminist new materialist theories, fluidity changes and transforms in relation to social structures, its own material composition as well as the particular context that encompasses it (Neimanis & McLauchlan, 2022). Describing the analytical enterprise itself as fluid shows a strong intertextual relation to a theoretical body of work that renders the materiality of our thinking minds agency beyond the dichotomy between body and mind. This is far from accounts of nature as objects or merely a resource and approaches an interpretation of nature as a

spirit, animate and unruly (Weisser, 2017), co-creation of the world, as well as our «subjectivity, embodiment and situatedness», as it is expressed in the syllabus of Ecofeminist Philosophy (A9).

In her critical encounter with sustainability, Stacey Alaimo warns not just about greenwashing tendencies of sustainability policy but also that the world that the concept promises to *sustain* is an empty one, inhabited only by humans and soon their yet to come offspring, the coming generations with which the Brundtland declaration urges us to share resources: «Has the term sustainability become articulated too firmly to a technocratic, anthropocentric perspective? Is it possible to recast sustainability in such a way that it ceases to epitomize distancing epistemologies that render the world as resource for human use?» (Alaimo, 2012, p.563).

Sustainability is only mentioned one time in the sample of the Gender Studies syllabi. In the syllabus for the Master's programme in Gender Studies and Environmental Humanities (A9), sustainability is one concept that the programme gives a «new perspectives on» alongside «technology and human behavior» (A9). For the world to appear as something more than a storage of resources for us to consume or an object to study, Alaimo argues that we need many shifting ways to understand nature and also to analyse how natural and human environments interact with power structures, subjectivities and identities. Perhaps there is also a shortage of descriptions of the concrete materiality of the world, the environment, as well as the different forms of catastrophic scenarios that are currently unfolding. Only two of the syllabi describe environmental problems, or the actual material contexts in which gender and the environment meet: «pollution and climate change» (A8) and «agriculture, science, pandemics and environmental change» (A7). It may be possible to remedy this emptiness with meaning-making and imagining, as is stated in the Gender Studies and Environmental Humanities syllabus: «Environmental humanities is working mainly with methods from the humanities, but also with artistic methods, because the planetary crisis is also a crisis in the abilities for humans to imagine». To work with imaginaries in the classroom could be one way to include «wordly pedagogies», to teach not from a distant «nowhere» but situate learning where the classroom and the surrounding world meet (Berger, 2020; Neimanis & McLaughlan, 2022).

4. DISCUSSION

Do environmental issues have anything to do with gender or feminism? The main objective of this paper is not to answer this question but to take as a starting point that these concepts are used in relation to each other in different contexts. In the higher education context in Sweden, this becomes a question of how gender and the environment are conceptualized in different disciplinary and educational settings and as such a question of (inter)disciplinarity. The focus of this paper is on how the relation between gender and environment, with its many analytical levels, shifting epistemological traditions and reproduced preconceptions, is articulated.

One finding of this study is that from the point of view of course syllabi, gender does not represent a critical and challenging stance in traditional disciplines. Rather, gender appears as an add-on, a perspective that is described in conditioned terms, not compulsory or central, much as has been warned about in previous research (Harding, 1986; May, 2002). Within Gender Studies, discussions about environment, ecology and accounts of nature are vital and intense, reaching transversely towards subjects and phenomena that need scrutiny or new knowledge, as well as disciplinary powers of, for example, Natural Sciences. As a means for spreading this knowledge to new generations of students, the rather complex theoretical content is being transformed into educational enterprises.

A weakness of the study is that syllabi are very short texts, and problematizing, more in-depth discussions could take place in the classrooms of the universities where these courses and programmes are taught. Matter such as how lectures, seminars and assignments are designed fall outside the scope of this paper. At the same time, research on syllabi underlines the pedagogical importance of the frames and intentions that these texts formulate, and my experiences of working on developing courses and writing syllabi are that careful attention is given to articulate pedagogical ambitions, and to try to capture the content with high precision. Further studies, including participant observations during syllabi processes as well as in classrooms, could follow the pedagogical intentions and realizations in regard to both interdisciplinarity and problematizing approaches in more detail.

The discussions about how to organize gender research and if Gender Studies should be a discipline in its own right – the organizational level of interdisciplinarity – is for Nina Lykke and her conceptualization of «post-disciplinary discipline» a question of organizational autonomy and the possibility to take control over issues like educational orientations. Others have argued that it is crucial to stay within traditional disciplines to affect them in critical ways. This paper shows that courses and programmes that put environment, sustainability and developmental issues at the centre tend to marginalize gender as an add-on, an aspect but not a problematizing force. These courses and programmes are not influenced by the new materialist turn or environmental humanities with their conceptualization of nature beyond dichotomies between nature and culture, or their problematization of nature as merely a resource for human needs.

The intense debates around gender research and Gender Studies as a discipline in its own right lie a couple of years back, perhaps because Gender Studies is now established in higher education in large parts of the world. And, as the political rise of anti-gender sentiments from the far and extreme right have come to question the very existence of gender research as well as gender politics, these issues have come more to the fore also for gender researchers (Dahl & Kennedy-Macfoy, 2020; Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Martinsson, 2020). However, the question of gender and its epistemological status within universities is still a pressing issue. As Maria do Mar Pereira's ethnographic study of teachers' and researchers' working conditions in (inter)disciplinary Gender Studies in Portugal shows they still need to negotiate their epistemological positions in all those situations that precede the making of a course syllabus (Pereira, 2017). The political de-legitimation of gender research outside of universities should cause more studies of its status within higher education settings, not fewer, and my hope is that this paper can contribute to a new interest in these issues.

5. CONCLUSIONS

After analysing the syllabi of courses and programmes to find out how gender and environment are articulated together, I want to go back to the research questions of this paper to point out the main results. The first was the

question of how gender is used in different disciplinary and interdisciplinary ways. In the courses and study programmes developed in traditional disciplines, gender was mainly used as a perspective but from the syllabi it is not clear how problematizing this perspective was. It seems gender refers mainly to rather fixed empirical categories, not diversified in intersectional analysis or connected to theories of power. In Gender Studies courses gender was almost never articulated as an empirical category but used perspectives from feminist materiality theories to discuss disciplinary power, undermining of dichotomies between for example nature/culture and meta-theoretically challenge naturalisation of categorization and conceptualizations. Second, when syllabi transversally reach towards different disciplinary contexts what is made their starting points and what is cast as problematizing perspectives? Both Gender Studies and other disciplines join forces in interdisciplinary course and programme development. Transversally, the syllabi reach out and include many different subjects, of which gender is one. Only the Gender Studies courses cooperate explicitly with the humanities to engage in the meaning-making processes of concepts and conceptualizations. All Gender Studies' syllabi relate to how different disciplinary knowledge claims, especially from Natural Sciences, exercise discursive power. Reaching out towards these disciplines is part of what Lykke calls «post-disciplinarity». The category of *nature* is most central, as well as *environment*, but *sustainability* is only mentioned one time. The courses in Gender Studies tend not to frame the transversally reaching in terms of centre and problematizing perspectives. In the syllabi from traditional disciplines gender did not seem to challenge the understanding of the core content. Even when the course's intertextual relation was to developmental studies which has a long-standing tradition of including gender as an important power structure gender seemed marginal and merely an add-on. The syllabi create intertextual relations to contexts outside the higher education sector and the paper shows that policy documents, such as the UN 2030 Agenda and other developmental policies, have a central role in many disciplines that are concerned with environment, gender and sustainability, both as central discourses for students to relate to in their future professions and as a material to ask critical questions. Syllabi also relate to discourses on the role of technological advancements as answers to environmental problems such as climate change, as well as

discourse on economic growth, food security, pollution, climate change, agriculture, science and pandemics.

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