

World Movements for Environmental Justice

Joan Martínez Alier

**2020 Balzan Prize for Environmental Challenges:
Responses from the Social Sciences and the Humanities**

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AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main objective of Joan Martínez Alier's Balzan research project is to carry out research on the world environmental justice movement (or movements) through a mixture of methods of political ecology, including some fieldwork. One main tool is the EJAtlas, a large and growing database of over 3,350 "ecological distribution conflicts" built up at ICTA UAB since 2012 (ejatlas.org). The main hypothesis is that these conflicts arise from the growth and changes in the social metabolism at the frontiers of commodity extraction and of waste disposal.

Martínez Alier's Balzan research project will improve the geographical and thematic coverage of the EJAtlas as a tested tool for the study of comparative, statistical political ecology. The number of cases recorded in the EJAtlas has increased since its inception, thus improving geographical and thematic coverage, and the further work in the atlas undertaken by the Balzan project and the team's publications have established it internationally as a reliable database of environmental conflicts (Scheidel et. al., 2020; Temper et. al., 2020).

The team has concentrated on carrying out further work to improve the coverage of the EJAtlas, which will ensure that its contents be used not only for peer-reviewed publications (as per current practice) but also as support for environmental justice movements. Martínez Alier's Balzan Prize has contributed to this.

Underlying Martínez Alier's Balzan project is a research programme that actually started a long time ago (Guha and Martinez Alier, 1999). It was summarized by Professor Catherine Larrère, who contrasted it with fashionable *collapsologie* on the

one hand and with a powerful international school of “eco-modernism”, “eco-efficiency”, and “green economic growth” on the other.

WORLD MOVEMENTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: EVENTS AND PUBLICATIONS FROM THE SUB-PROJECTS

Martínez Alier’s Balzan Research project, *World Movements for Environmental Justice*, is divided into sub-projects that reach beyond the academic world and support movements for environmental justice. The main institution for the project is ICTA UAB, along with collaboration with other institutions, mainly China Agricultural University, the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Beijing; UNAM (Morelia campus), Mexico; the Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence, Italy; and the Escola Paulista de Política, Economia e Negócios da Universidade Federal de São Paulo (Unifesp), Brazil.

These **events** came out of the sub-projects:

- COSMOS talk, “Environmental Justice, Social Movements and Community Zction.” Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence, 21 October 2021 (Ana Margarida Fernandes Esteves, KSENIJA HANACEK, GRETTEL NAVAS, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, ICTA – UAB). [COSMOS - The Centre on Social Movement Studies | ScuolaNormaleSuperiore](#).
- Round table “Comparative Political Ecology: Theories and Methodologies for Mapping and Analysing Social Conflicts.” Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence, 14 June 2022 (JOAN MARTINEZ ALIER, DONATELA DELLA PORTA, GRETTEL NAVAS, with the participation of Daniela Del Bene, Marcel Llaveró-Pasquina, Brototi Roy, Teresa Sanz, and Mariana Walter). [Comparative political ecology: theories and methodologies for mapping and analysing social conflicts | ScuolaNormaleSuperiore](#).
- Interdisciplinary symposium InteR-La+B “ENVIRONMENT”, organized by the International Balzan Foundation, Milan, 13 September 2022. Keynote speaker: Joan Martinez Alier; Participation papers: Ksenija Hanacek, Brototi Roy. [InteR-La+B Seminar 2022: Summary - Fondazione Internazionale Premio Balzan](#)

Publications from these sub-projects include a number of articles in top academic journals and one book. All publications acknowledge support from Martínez Alier’s Balzan Research project. Deputy supervisor Dr Mariana Walter of ICTA UAB worked on the project part-time for three years. Her publications as well as those of Prof. Martinez Alier follow the sub-project publications listed below.

- Prof. Dr. Juan Liu (China Agricultural University, Beijing): part-time support for advancing and exploring the EJAtlas with her student Bowen Gu (ICTA UAB) and writing two articles for international and Chinese journals of political ecology.

- Bowen Gu, doctoral thesis 2024, UAB. *Black Gold and Environmental Justice: The Political Ecology of Coal in China and “Global China”*.
- Bowen Gu and Juan Liu. *Unburnable Coal and Unlabelled Climate Activism in China*. [The Routledge Handbook of Grassroots Climate Activism. 2024](#).

- Dr. Brototi Roy (Indian Society for Ecological Economics): part-time support to enter and analyse conflicts in the EJAtlas in India from a comparative political ecology perspective.
 - B Roy, A Schaffartzik. “Talk Renewables, Walk Coal. The Paradox of India’s Energy Transition.” *Ecological Economics* 180 (106871). 2022.
- Dr. Daniela Del Bene (ICTA UAB / visit to Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence) will write on her ten-year experience on the EJAtlas, in particular, conflicts on hydropower worldwide. In 2024, she moved to the Lab of Sustainability Transformations, Università Ca’ Foscari, Venice.
- Dr. Grettel Navas (ICTA UAB): part-time support for her work with the EJAtlas and a visit to the Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence, Publication in GEC:
 - Grettel Navas. *The Role of Working-Class Communities and the Slow Violence of Toxic Pollution in Environmental Health Conflicts: A Global Perspective*.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378022000127>
- Dr. Arnim Scheidel (ICTA UAB): collective articles on statistical political ecology with focus on disproportionate impacts on Indigenous peoples, and resistance by environmental defenders.
 - Scheidel, A., Liu, J., Del Bene, D., et al. (2022). “Ecologies of Contention: How More-Than-Human Natures Shape Contentious Actions and Politics.” *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 50(7), 2777–2798.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2022.2142567>
 - Arnim Scheidel et al. “Global Impacts of Extractive and Industrial Development Projects on Indigenous Peoples’ Lifeways, Lands, and Rights.” *Science Advances* 9(23), 2023. A collective paper on indigenous struggles, with acknowledgement of the Balzan Prize.
<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.ade9557>
- Dr. Ksenija Hanaček: postdoctoral contract at ICTA UAB and visit to the Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence.
 - Tran, D. & Hanaček, K. “A Global Analysis of Violence against Women Defenders in Environmental Conflicts.” *Nature Sustainability* 6, 1045–1053 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-023-01126-4>
 - Hanaček, K., Apostolopoulou, E., Kröger, M., Banrji, S., Dunlap, A., Landau, A., Martinez Alier, J. *Infrastructure-Led Development and Environmental Conflicts along the Polar Silk Road*. (2025).
 - Hanaček, K., Tran, D., Landau, A. et al. “‘We Are Protectors, Not Protestors’: Global Impacts of Extractivism on Human–Nature Bonds.” *Sustainability Science* 19, 1789–1808 (2024).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-024-01526-1>
- Teresa Sanz, ICTA UAB: Analysis of the iconography and other cultural expressions of environmental conflicts, based on the EJAtlas.
 - Doctoral thesis 2023 UAB: *Articulating Change across Environmental Conflict Stages: Socio-Spatial Transformation through Art Activism in Chile, the Philippines and the United States*.

- Teresa Saenz. “Arts, Place, and Sacrifice Zones: Restoration of Damaged Relational Values in a Chilean Sacrifice Zone.” *Sustainability Science* (2022). DOI:[10.1007/s11625-022-01252-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-022-01252-6)
- Dr. Beatriz Saes (Univ. Sao Paulo), Tatiana Roa (Censat/FoE Colombia), and Bobby Peek (GroundWork, FoE South Africa). This project on Business Management was not carried out because Tatiana Roa became vice-minister in Colombia’s government. The EJAtlas team published political ecology articles on the Vale company, Impregilo-Salini, TotalEnergies and the Zijin company.
 - Marcel Llaveró Pasquina (ICTA UAB) acknowledgement of the Balzan Prize in “*Driving Ecologically Unequal Exchange: A Global Analysis of Multinational Corporations’ Role in Environmental Conflicts.*” *GEC* (2025).
[Driving ecologically unequal exchange: A global analysis of multinational corporations’ role in environmental conflicts - ScienceDirect](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-025-01662-2)
- Dr. Sofia Avila-Calero: completion and launching of the Mexican EJAtlas (UNAM in cooperation with Dr. Aida Luz López, Conicet). The EJAtlas for Mexico and Mesoamerica is not yet published.
 - Sofia Avila (doctoral thesis at UAB). “Solar Capitalism: Accumulation Strategies and Socio-Ecological Futures.” *Sustainability Science* (2025).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-025-01662-2>

WORLD MOVEMENTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: PUBLICATIONS BY PROJECT DIRECTOR JOAN MARTÍNEZ ALIER AND DEPUTY SUPERVISOR MARIANA WALTER

BOOKS

Martínez Aliet, Joan. *Land, Water, Air and Freedom. The Making of World Movements for Environmental Justice.* Cheltenham: E. Elgar, 2023. With chapters co-authored by Dr Juan Liu and Dr Ksenija Hanacek. Open access. <https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/gbp/land-water-air-and-freedom-9781035312764.html>

ARTICLES

Bisht, Arpita and **Joan Martínez Aliet**. “Coastal Sand Mining of Heavy Mineral Sands: Contestations, Resistance, and Ecological Distribution Conflicts at HMS Extraction Frontiers across the World.” *J. of Industrial Ecology*, 27(1), (2023). 238-253. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jiec.13358>

Martínez Aliet, Joan. “Circularity, Entropy, Ecological Conflicts and LFFU.” *Local Environment* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2021.1983795>

Martínez Aliet, Joan. “Environmental Conflicts and the Making of World Movements for Environmental Justice. *Economía Política* 40, 765–779 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40888-023-00306-x>

Walter, Mariana with Yannick Deniau and Viviana Herrera Vargas. “The Politics of ‘Green’ Extraction Frontiers: Mapping Metals and Mineral Mining Conflicts Related to the Energy Transition in the Americas.” *Critical Sociology* (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205241305963>

Conde, Marta with **Mariana Walter**, Lucrecia Wagner and Grettel Navas. “Slow Justice and Other Unexpected Consequences of Litigation in Environmental Conflicts.” *Global Env. Change* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2023.102762>

WORLD MOVEMENTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: RECEPTION AMONG THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Martínez Alier’s work on the EJAtlas, subject of the Balzan Research Project, has attracted the attention of the general public for its emphasis on global environmental inequalities, mapping of real-world conflicts, and attention to grassroots movements that might go unheard in mainstream media. Since it addresses broader public concerns about inequality, human rights, and democracy, it is hence a valuable educational resource and inspiration to collective action. The following list provides some highlights of press coverage of Martínez Alier’s Balzan Prize and his life’s work.

<https://conversacionsobrehistoria.info/2020/11/13/joan-martinez-alier-premio-balzan-el-atlas-de-justicia-ambiental/>

<https://www.buzzsprout.com/2017560/episodes/15182686-in-conversation-joan-martinez-alier-on-environmentalism>.

["Hay que cambiar la manera de medir lo que hacemos y quitarle importancia a lo que digan los economistas": Joan Martínez Alier, economista ecológico - BBC News Mundo](#)

[Supporting the global movement for environmental justice | Research and Innovation](#)

[“La transición energética no solo costará dinero, sino muchos conflictos” | Alternativas económicas](#)

[Joan Martínez-Alier, impulsor del Atlas de la Justicia Ambiental - Nabarralde](#)