

Honours Certificate

Concepts that Matter: Sustainability and Democracy

Module 1 (10 ECTS)

Understanding Key Concepts in Social and Political Life

This module aims to familiarize students with practices of conceptual analysis and existing literature on key concepts in social and political life, most notably democracy, sustainability and related concepts. Students will gain a thorough understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of each concept and an appreciation of the contingency and complexity of many concepts that underpin social practices. The module integrates different disciplinary perspectives to encourage students to examine each concept from various angles and explore how it has come to accommodate various and sometimes conflicting ideological messages. Participants will engage in critical reflection about how concepts and their divergent and sometimes conflicting meanings impact how we frame and address various challenges, such as those arising from attempts to put the ideals of sustainability and democracy into practice. They will be encouraged to think of ways in which meanings attributed to taken-for-granted concepts might contribute to framing societal challenges in ways that can potentially both promote and obstruct democratic and sustainable practices, thus fostering a more reflective and rigorous debate on the key issues at stake in European society today.

Knowledge

A student who has completed this module will:

- account for how the discourse around shared values is based on implicit understanding of certain concepts;
- have a thorough understanding of the importance of conceptual analysis for the debate on democracy and sustainability;
- identify constellation of concepts associated with democracy and sustainability;
- elaborate informed arguments in debates relating to a range of key concepts, including sustainability and democracy.

Skills

A student who has completed this module will be able to:

- appreciate and be able to think through the historical, disciplinary and cultural contingency of various definitions of key concepts that underpin social and political practices
- develop a heightened sense of civic engagement and participate meaningfully in the various debates taking place in our democratic societies
- prepare and deliver a coherent and clear presentation of textual data to a group of peers and experts, to a high standard and in good timing.
- use corpus analysis tools effectively to analyse textual data and key concepts that underpin the sustainability agenda;

General competence

A student who has completed this module will:

- be able to promote and take part in informed discussion of common values and how they shape our future.
- learn how to work in interdisciplinary teams and constructively collaborate across disciplines on topics pertaining to democracy and sustainability

Teaching forms and structure

- Total hours: 32
- 60% student driven learning = 20 hours
- 40% lecture and seminars based = 12 hours
- Approx. 500 pages literature based on norm for 10 ECTS at UiO

The teaching form and structure of the course incorporates hybrid research seminars and student driven activities. The teaching will start with research seminars and supervised group discussions, leading to student-driven group work.

Examination form

The evaluation will be in the form of group presentations. The purpose of the assessment is to record learners' progress and achievement toward the intended learning outcomes listed above. The presentation will focus on one to three concepts that the students will have chosen for further exploration. Students will be expected to justify their choices, outline their rationale for selecting the relevant concepts and the questions they want to explore further. They will provide a short bibliography of works consulted and to be consulted.

- Grading: Pass/fail.

Organisation

The module will consist of twelve hour-long sessions in total. The first eight will take the form of hybrid (online & face-to-face) research seminars. The seminars will be delivered face to face for students and staff in the partner institution delivering the seminar on any given week and online for the remaining cohort of students in other partners institutions. Students in each institution will meet in person to join an online seminar, accompanied by the key contact at the institution, who will be in charge of facilitating discussion and supervising student progress. Students will work towards a presentation to be delivered online to the entire cohort in the last week of the course. No seminars will be scheduled for the penultimate week, in order to allow time for supervisors to meet with students individually and offer feedback on draft presentations.

Indicative list of concepts to be covered in the syllabus:

- Democracy: Models and Practices
- Emancipation and empowerment
- Sustainability and degrowth

- Equality and equity

Indicative readings:

- Castoriadis, C., 1997. Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime. *Constellations* 4, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00032>
- Chatterjee, P., 2019. *I Am the People: Reflections on Popular Sovereignty Today*. Columbia University Press.
- Engelbrechtsen, E., Heggen, K., 2015. Powerful Concepts in Global Health; Comment on “Knowledge, Moral Claims and the Exercise of Power in Global Health.” *Int. J. Health Policy Manag.* 4, 115–117. <https://doi.org/10.15171/ijhpm.2015.19>
- Engelbrechtsen, E., Heggen, K., Ottersen, O.P., 2017. The Sustainable Development Goals: ambiguities of accountability. *The Lancet* 389, 365. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(17\)30152-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(17)30152-6)
- Goodland, R., 1995. The Concept of Environmental Sustainability. *Annu. Rev. Ecol. Syst.* 26, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.es.26.110195.000245>
- Lumley, S., Armstrong, P., 2004. Some of the Nineteenth Century Origins of the Sustainability Concept. *Environ. Dev. Sustain.* 6, 367–378. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:ENVI.0000029901.02470.a7>
- Manderson, A.K., 2006. A Systems Based Framework to Examine The Multi-contextual Application of the Sustainability Concept. *Environ. Dev. Sustain.* 8, 85–97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-005-2787-6>
- Proietti, F., Zanettin, F., 2021. «Representative democracy». An inquiry on the origins of a political concept (1778-1799). *Storia Pensiero Polit.* 41–66. <https://doi.org/10.4479/100746>
- Santos, B. de S. (Ed.), 2007. *Democratizing Democracy: Beyond the Liberal Democratic Canon*. Verso Books.
- Tarragoni, F., 2021a. Populism, an ideology without history? A new genetic approach. *J. Polit. Ideol.* 0, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2021.1979130>.