Application Form
Innovative Teaching Award 2024[1]

APPLICANT	
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GENERAL INFORMATION	
Course level bachelor's **Course number:** 0325 **Semester:** WS2023/24 **ECTS credits:** 4 **Course title:** Civil Society: Navigating Collaborations and Conflicts in the Pursuit of the Common Good	
Further information on the course: (e.g. number of students, prior knowledge of students, position in the curriculum/program) This course is part of the SBWL Public and Nonprofit Management, and is designed for 3rd year BSc students. In WS2023/24, 17 students have been enrolled in this program (26 in SS2023). We were happy to welcome 7/17 incoming students. The course is taught in English, therefore basic communication skills in English are required. However, being fluent in oral	

communication is no requirement. Average English skills as taught in high school (equivalent to a B2 level in reading, writing, speaking and listening according to the CEFR standards) are sufficient. Students attend with prior theoretical knowledge in Public and Nonprofit Management, as taught in the first two mandatory introduction course to the specialisation "Public and Nonprofit Management".

If applicable links to the course's online environment:

Here you can provide the jury with links to the contents of your course's online environment for review.

https://canvas.wu.ac.at/courses/4456

1. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE DESIGN (max. 180 words)

If your course is selected for an award, this text will be published on the WU website along with the submitted application form.

The semester is structured in 3 topical blocks, each consisting of (i) introduction to the relevant theory, (ii) exercises for connecting the theory to the experiential and emotional level, (iii) reflection.

Part (i) consists in preparatory readings and in-class group discussions of the theory. This design allows students to approach the theoretical content at first individually, then in discussion with their peers, and lastly by discussion with the instructors. Thereby, autonomy in accessing new content shall be fostered.

Part (ii) relies on simulations and interactive exercises. Students work in different groups for all the three blocks, thus get in to work together with many different peers during the course of the semester.

In part (iii), students individually reflect their experiences about part (ii) in written form. The questions posed for reflection invite students to reflect on a personal, emotional level, but also to connect their experience to the theory of part (i). Subsequently, the main insights are discussed in class in a plenary setting.

2. DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE DESIGN

2a.) Overview
- What are the learning outcomes to be achieved by the students?
- What are the content elements of the course and how is the course structured?
- What are the elements on which the final grade is based?
- What kinds of peer learning and student collaborations are integrated in your course design?

All learning outcomes are centered on better understanding the political dimensions of civil society and the role students themselves can play in these. Specific learning outcomes are the following:

At the end of the course, students will…

1. …be able to reflect on how civil society can change the rules of the game and link theory to individual experiences.
2. …know the basics of framing theory and can apply those to critically analyze news content.
3. …be aware of how social change can be brought about through institutionalized channels.
4. …be skilled to formulate a political position.
5. …be able to reflect on conflicting interests in the political arena.
6. …know how to negotiate policy outcomes within governance networks.
7. …be able to recognize practices of commoning and their effects in an urban environment.

Beyond these content-wise goals, we also aim at strengthening the qualities of active listing, tolerance for opposing opinions, arguing one own's opinion in public, and working collaboratively in groups.

Finally, the course is designed throughout to strengthen social bonds among students, as those bonds are known to be a major factor for academic success, especially among disadvantaged groups.

Course elements:

The course consists of 8 units in total. It kicks off with an introduction meeting (2,5h), where the container for the unusual format is carefully built up. We use Ice-breaker games and every students get to introduce himself on a personal level to the whole group. We also introduce modus for group discussions, based on Theory U settings for generative dialogues, that aims at building an atmosphere where students are encouraged to speak up for their own opinions, fosters tolerance for other opinions and brings the focus to common ground between opposing stances.

In the main body of the course, three main topics are covered. These are 1) Network Governance and Negotiation, 2) Urban commons, and 3) Civil Society in the Media.

The course is concluded with a final wrap-up session, in which the three course topics relate to one another and general learnings are reflected upon. The last session also provides space for students' open and direct feedback to each other and the teachers, and for the presentation of absence-compensation assignments.

Students are graded based on the following examination elements:

- For each of the three course topics, students are expected to answer questions (on Canvas) about the course literature in advance of the theoretical session (20% in total)

- After each of the three interactive sessions, students are expected to write a reflection paper of 1.000 – 2.000 words in which they critically analyze their own role and behavior within these sessions, and connect their experiences to theory (3 x 20%)
- Each student is graded for active participation during classroom sessions (20% in total)

Peer learning and student collaborations:
We aim to foster continuous active engagement from the students through the implementation of plentiful interactive elements. In the beforementioned theoretical sessions, we combine lecturing with class discussions and small scaled group assignments that encourage peer reflection on the theoretical concept of focus. We see an opportunity in inviting as many incoming students as possible, to foster intercultural exchanges of societal perspectives. Additionally, the use of the English language is mandatory in class, to create an inclusive and safe environment for all students involved.

As already mentioned above, students work in different groups over the course of the semester. In these groups, they participate in activities where they (can) get to know each other on a more personal level than usually in a university setting. Thereby, *collaborative networks among students* shall be strengthened.

In the first part of the course, students learn about Network Governance and Negotiation Theories. After the theoretical session, students are allocated in five groups that all represent a societal urban actor. Students prepare their role as a group by means of a preparatory negotiation strategy and opening statement assignment. In the interactive session that follows, students – in the role of the societal actors – negotiate a policy outcome and together tackle a challenging urban governance issue. The simulation is based on a semi-fictive case that is inspired by the Lobau area in Vienna, and is aimed at *collective problem solving*.

In the second part of the course, students get allocated to a Viennese neighborhood in Vienna. They receive a physical map of this neighborhood, and the instruction to focus on manifestations of either *solidarity* or *exploitation* and will analyze these by walking around on-site in small groups and recording their observations. Students with the same neighborhood but with foci on conflicting manifestations will subsequently come together in bigger groups in class and compare their findings. Together, the students will then present their neighborhood's profile to their peers and generate an active discussion on how 'solidary' or 'exploitative' the neighborhood is and why. This exercise helps students to further advance their perception on how physical space shapes their daily experiences, and on how different the experiences thereof are.

In the third part of the course, students' dialogue skills are being further trained through exercises that practice the four levels of listening (based on Otto Scharmer's work). Additionally, students use embodiment to express their stances physically and emotionally towards various societal issues. Students experience different ways to interpret and react to each other's emotions through theatre pedagogy, facilitating *constructive communication*.

2b.) Teaching methods

- Which teaching methods do you use to help your students achieve the intended learning outcomes?
- What methods do you use to support student collaboration and enable peer learning?
- Why did you choose this/these particular method(s)? What specific advantages does it/do they offer in your teaching? What do your students learn through the use of this/these method(s)?
- In which way do the students benefit from the teaching methods used in the course?

To let students delve into the topic of network governance and negotiation, the first interactive session presents a **negotiation simulation game**. The 4,5h long negotiation simulation is based on the Model United Nations format and translated into an urban environmental case. The simulation starts with all parties presenting their political position and preferences in an opening statement, followed up by several rounds of formal and informal negotiations. The formal negotiations ensue at a round-table setting with the Municipality as a formal chair of negotiations (managing the speakers' list, structuring the debate, drafting the policy), and informal negotiations where students are free to roam around campus and experiment with strategic negotiation tactics to get other parties on board. In the last formal negotiation round, all parties – all with highly conflicting interests – should vote for the final policy outcome, which only succeeds if a unanimous agreement exists. Students are challenged to stand up for their (allocated) political position, reflect on conflicting interests between parties, and find a middle ground through experimenting with various negotiation techniques. Even though these skills are being applied to the urban political arena, students are expected to benefit from these skills on a smaller scale as well, for instance through future group work in university projects. Afterwards, differences in the outcome to the real-world-outcome are discussed, and conclusions are drawn regarding governance structures within our society.

The next teaching method is focused on **critical mapping**. In small groups, students analyze public urban space and critically reflect on how they can recognize *solidarity* (caring for nature, caring for people, democratization, sharing and public goods, and redistribution) and *exploitation* (exploitation of humans, exploitation of nature, exclusivity, expansion, cost shifting to future generations, and cost shifting to other places) in the neighborhood's streetscape. Students then compare and justify their observations to one another and shape a critical debate on how aspects of the *Imperial Mode of Living*-theory can be recognized on the neighborhood level. They learn from each other's critical thinking and analysis and are encouraged to reflect on urban societies' footprint. Students will not only take away the skill of critical reflection on societal issues, but they will also be challenged to rethink their own (un)sustainable patterns of living.

The last interactive teaching session focuses on public discourses about controversial topics in public media, and how language shapes our perspective on these topics. The methods used here are **embodiment and theatre pedagogy**. Students form groups that represent a certain societal issue, for instance the climate crisis or women's rights. They collect newspaper articles on the issue from different conflicting perspectives and political colors. During the 4,5h interactive session, students read the texts out loud and practice several emotional expressions while doing so, by physically approaching peers in a certain way (I.e. attracted, repelled), or by using certain vocal tones (I.e. despair, dismissal). The aim of this exercise is to not only let students rationally reflect on the essence of media content, but to analyze it from an emotional perspective. This helps students to get to the essence of written texts, and it provides them with experience in framing societal issues – a skill that is of paramount importance when conveying strong arguments. Additionally, students are challenged to empathize with the political actors behind the various texts and act out their personas and ideologies in theatre play. This will aid students in recognizing the practice of framing, and to better understand the backgrounds and contexts of diverting ideological frames.

Student collaboration is promoted through the numerous group work settings where communication and empathy skills are strengthened, and students *can* get to know each other on an emotional, personal level in unconventional situations.

We chose the particular methods because pedagogical research shows that learning is fostered by connecting abstract content to personal experiences. All interactive elements invite students to take account of and reflect on their personal emotional experiences (in adversarial discussion settings, in physical space, and in expressive theater exercises). Moreover, we think that a habit of respectful peer-to-peer collaboration is build most successfully if students can bring their authentic personalities and experiences to class, similar to classical team-building events. From a theoretical perspective, the course design also draws on Freire's critical pedagogy. Freire focuses on students own role in acquiring new knowledge, which must always be translated to students' specific life world and cannot be served ready-made by the instructors.

Thus, students specifically benefit from the methods applied in the areas of *critical thinking/ autonomy* and *social collaboration*.

2c.) Innovative character of the course

- Which didactic elements of your course design do you consider particularly innovative with regard to the focus of this year's award "Peer-Learning: Innovative ways of promoting student collaboration"?
- In which ways can your course design be adapted for other courses? Which didactic elements of your course can also be used in other courses?
- Which elements could be improved/reconsidered in further editions of the course?

All three of the earlier mentioned interactive sessions present a unique opportunity for peer learning and student collaboration. In the **negotiation simulation**, students are challenged to work together in groups to preform an effective negotiation strategy, to successfully argue and convince others of their stances, and to eventually find a middle ground in a negotiation process. They do not only directly apply public management theories on network governance, they also get well-acquainted with the very useful practical skill of negotiation, which can be applied to many other aspects of professional and social life as well. For instance, when students negotiate a certain modus operandi with regards to university projects or when they negotiate conditions for their first career steps. The negotiation game is designed in the context of urban governance, but can easily be modified to fit a wide variety of other course concepts as well, from business administration to socioeconomics.

In the **critical mapping** assignment, students learn from each other's critical thinking and analysis skills, by collectively walking around in public space and carefully reflecting on the human footprint therein. This assignment is expected to not only ignite a critical view from students on how cities are organized and designed, it also sparks reflection on one's own sustainable practices. Our aim is to make students collectively question a taken-for-granted way of living and organizing. These newly gained skills in critical analysis and rethinking of norms can be applied and benefit students in future university courses and theses, and it can positively affect sustainable behaviors on the individual scale. The critical mapping assignment has been applied on the neighborhood level (meso) within our course, but can be tailored to other contexts – like for instance the national (macro) or the own university/company/workplace/household level (micro) as well.

In the third part where we analyze how civil society is treated in the media through **embodiment and theatre pedagogy**, students are challenged to reflect on the effects that language has on their emotions and behaviors. Additionally, through exercises where different modes of communication are practised, students' social skills are being activated and developed. In a safe classroom setting, students are invited to interact and connect with each other in a different way than usual. With our innovative physical and emotional exercises, they are activated to empathize with and critically reflect on the effect of lamguage in a playful manner. The embodiment and theatre methods can be applied to other courses as well, and are not bound to focus on the topic of civil society. The essence of the exercises are for students to get in touch with their emotions towards controversial topics - which can also occur in a business- or socio-cultural setting – with the aim of generating empathy, creating understanding, reducing polarization, and finding middle ground. These skills will greatly benefit students in their further social and professional lives.

Our course is relatively new, and has just ran its 3rd semester. Therefore, we are constantly inviting students to openly share any feedback that they may have. Current points of improvement are a better theoretical embedding of the interactive sessions, and to create a stronger connection between the differing conceptual elements. More specifically, we will in the future be more careful how to allocate students to groups in the negotiation simulation, in order to create a more equal power dynamic between negotiating parties (while still maintaining inequalities between societal actors as well, to keep the simulation realistic), and spend more time on the group reflection in parts (iii).

Note: By sending the application form and documents, the applicant confirms that the course design has not received any other awards or grants.

Attachment: Please attach evaluation results, if available.