



# Engaging critically with environmental governance practices

## MX0157, 40155.2324

15 Hp  
Pace of study = 100%  
Education cycle = Advanced  
Course leader = Klara Fischer, Malte Rödl

### Evaluation report

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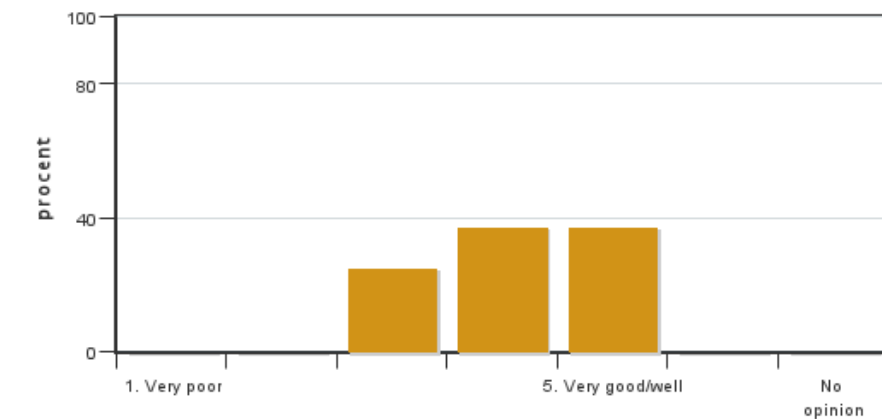
Evaluation period: 2024-05-26 - 2024-06-16

Answers 16  
Number of students 28  
Answer frequency 57 %

### Mandatory standard questions

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#### 1. My overall impression of the course is:

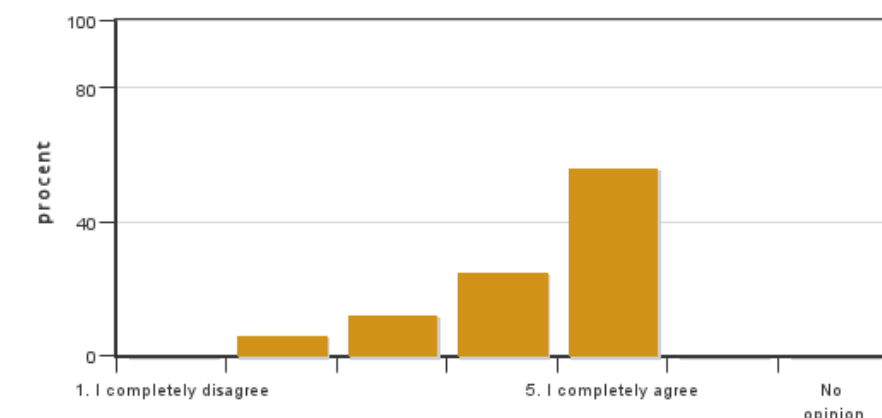


Answers: 16  
Medel: 4,1  
Median: 4

1: 0  
2: 0  
3: 4  
4: 6  
5: 6

No opinion: 0

#### 2. I found the course content to have clear links to the learning objectives of the course.

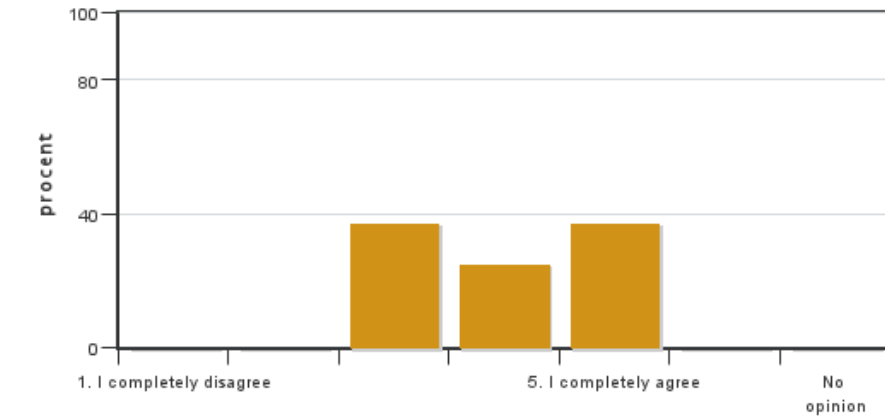


Answers: 16  
Medel: 4,3  
Median: 5

1: 0  
2: 1  
3: 2  
4: 4  
5: 9

No opinion: 0

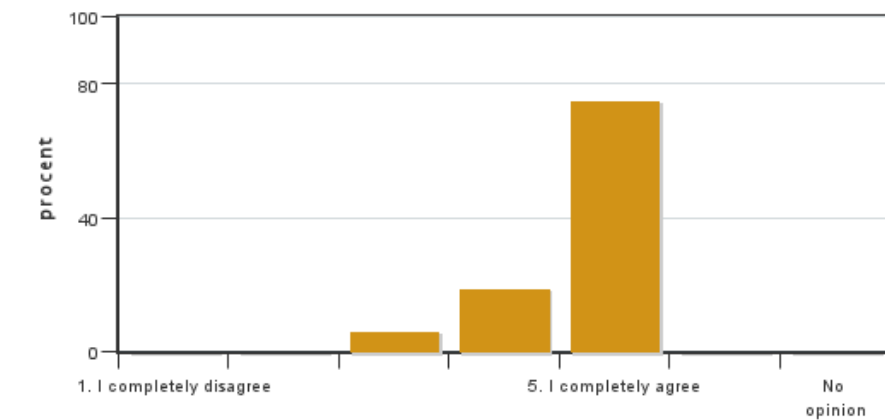
**3. My prior knowledge was sufficient for me to benefit from the course.**



Answers: 16  
 Medel: 4,0  
 Median: 4

1: 0  
 2: 0  
 3: 6  
 4: 4  
 5: 6  
 No opinion: 0

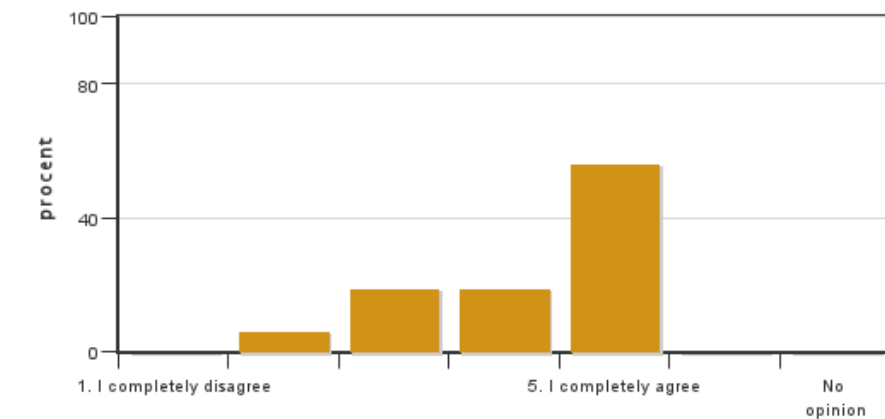
**4. The information about the course was easily accessible.**



Answers: 16  
 Medel: 4,7  
 Median: 5

1: 0  
 2: 0  
 3: 1  
 4: 3  
 5: 12  
 No opinion: 0

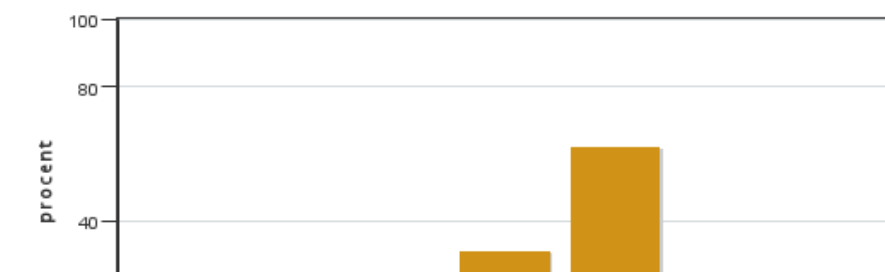
**5. The various course components (lectures, course literature, exercises etc.) have supported my learning.**



Answers: 16  
 Medel: 4,3  
 Median: 5

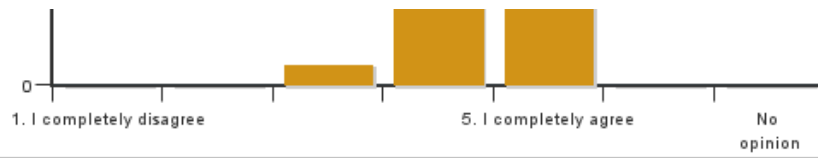
1: 0  
 2: 1  
 3: 3  
 4: 3  
 5: 9  
 No opinion: 0

**6. The social learning environment has been inclusive, respecting differences of opinion.**



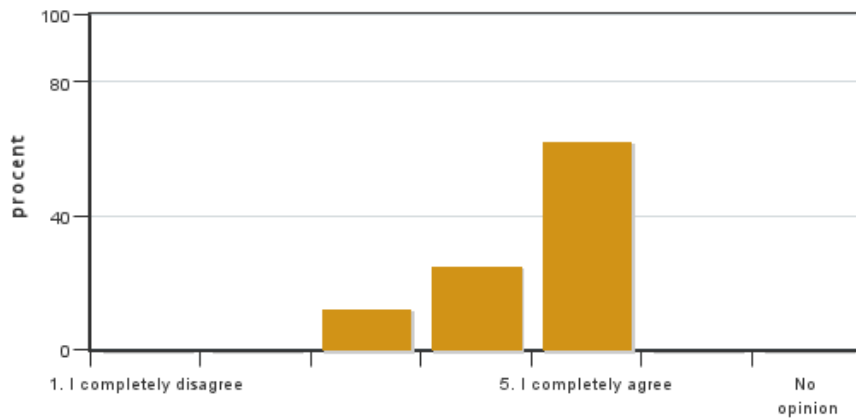
Answers: 16  
 Medel: 4,6  
 Median: 5

1: 0  
 2: 0  
 3: 1  
 4: 5  
 5: 10



No opinion: 0

**7. The physical learning environment (facilities, equipment etc.) has been satisfactory.**



Answers: 16

Medel: 4,5

Median: 5

1: 0

2: 0

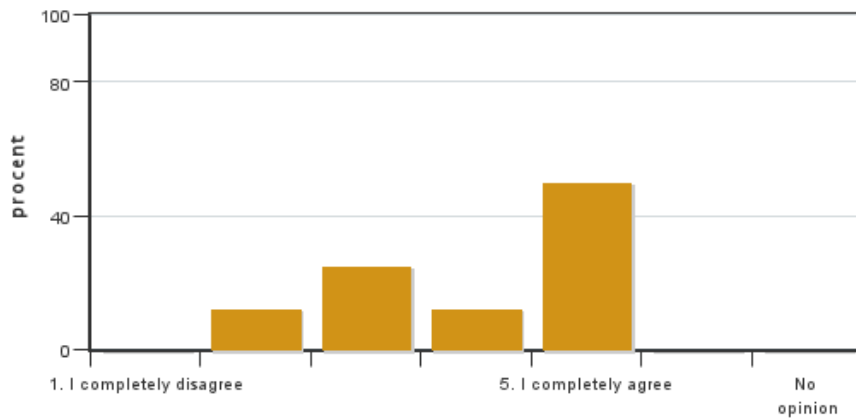
3: 2

4: 4

5: 10

No opinion: 0

**8. The examination(s) provided opportunity to demonstrate what I had learnt during the course (see the learning objectives).**



Answers: 16

Medel: 4,0

Median: 4

1: 0

2: 2

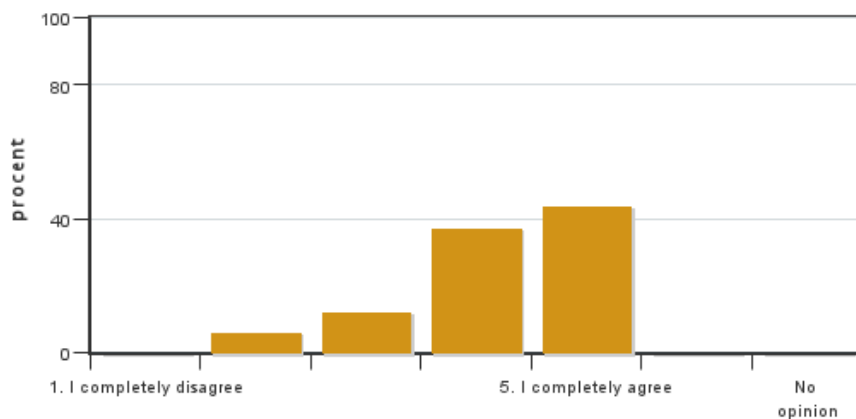
3: 4

4: 2

5: 8

No opinion: 0

**9. The course covered the sustainable development aspect (environmental, social and/or financial sustainability).**



Answers: 16

Medel: 4,2

Median: 4

1: 0

2: 1

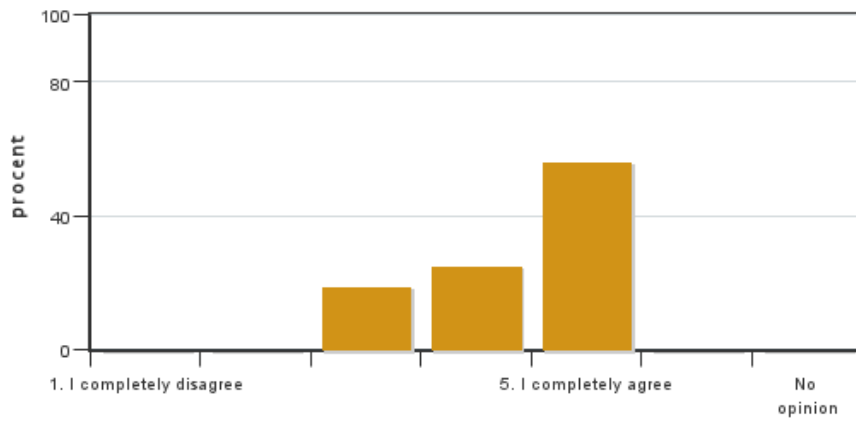
3: 2

4: 6

5: 7

No opinion: 0

**10. I believe the course has included a gender and equality aspect, regarding content as well as teaching practices (e.g. perspective on the subject, reading list, allocation of speaking time and the use of master suppression techniques).**

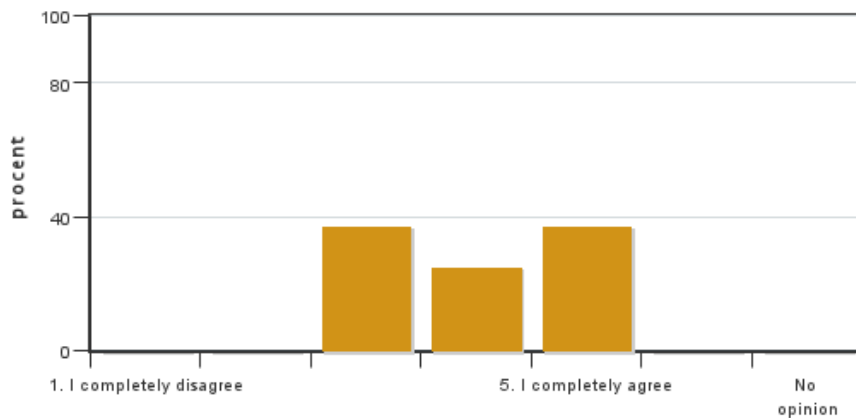


Answers: 16  
 Medel: 4,4  
 Median: 5

1: 0  
 2: 0  
 3: 3  
 4: 4  
 5: 9

No opinion: 0

**11. The course covered international perspectives.**

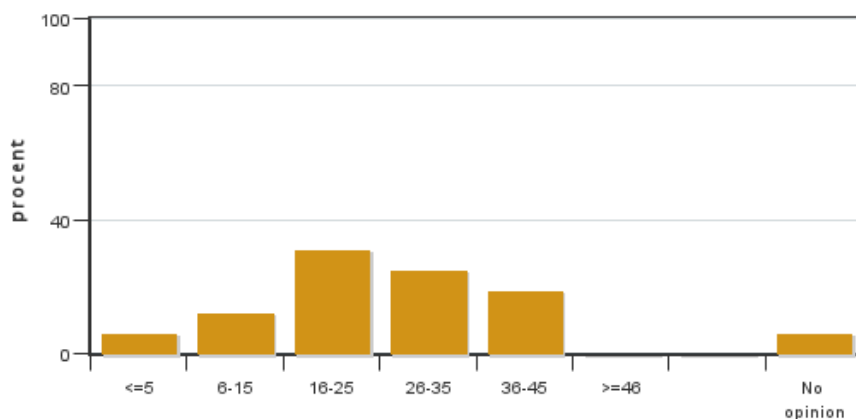


Answers: 16  
 Medel: 4,0  
 Median: 4

1: 0  
 2: 0  
 3: 6  
 4: 4  
 5: 6

No opinion: 0

**12. On average, I have spent ... hours/week on the course (including timetabled hours).**



Answers: 16  
 Medel: 24,2  
 Median: 16-25

≤5: 1  
 6-15: 2  
 16-25: 5  
 26-35: 4  
 36-45: 3  
 ≥46: 0

No opinion: 1

**Course leaders comments**

In the oral course evaluation we got more “meat on the bones” from the written evaluation. They are written below and in the end I summarize how I think we can improve the course based on the students' oral and written comments and our experiences as teachers.

**Learning experience Expectations, Learnings, Remaining puzzles, “aha” moments)**

Students had an overall positive outlook towards the course, particularly appreciating its comprehensive and clear

structure at different moments. Some students also commended the course for helping them approach social science. They also highlighted the possibility of engaging both theoretical and practical components in their learning, a testament to the course's successful design. However, the students also stressed the difference in intensity between the theoretical and practical components of the course and suggested more integration between both, indicating a potential area for improvement.

When asked about "what they would have needed from the course", some of the students who are not part of the ECM program nor have studied communication before expressed that it was a challenge for them to catch up with the rest of the class since some theories or tools had been already "given" to the rest of the group in previous courses. They suggested the inclusion of more material (i.e. readings, toolbox, etc.) and some meetings to check up/support their progress at the beginning of the course to even out everyone's knowledge.

## **Overall Structure (timing, course components, lectures and assignments)**

Regarding the lectures, in general, students agreed that they were very useful and suggested holding even more theory lectures during the course and on campus. They also gave positive feedback on the scheduling of morning sessions, which worked well for most of them. Still, several students indicated that they would like the course to foster more integration between the theory sessions and the practical part of the course.

Some students expressed that the second half of the course had several online sessions, which made them feel a bit disconnected and not so active in the course. They indicated that they enjoyed the sessions with guest lecturers from the US and South Africa, and the session was held together with other international students, but they also explained that their limited absence was due to the project deadline. They also stressed that holding sessions so close to the examination might discourage student participation but suggested moving some of the sessions that happened after the field trip to the beginning of the course. A student added that perhaps labelling sessions as "open lectures" might also discourage participation.

Students had mixed reactions regarding the hall examination. While some appreciated that it was done early on in the course, which allowed them to then focus on the practical component of the course, others suggested holding the exam later in the semester. At the same time, one student expressed their criticism towards the hall examination as a strategy to prevent plagiarism, and the pressure of the grade on just "one assignment". Some suggested having the analysis of the case as a home examination, where they can engage with the different theories, while one student suggested adding a final examination to connect theory and practice better.

Few students suggested more flexibility in the scheduling of mandatory lectures, especially for those part of an *erasmus* program/exchange. Indeed, this is something that has been accounted for in the design of the schedule, but some students are taking several courses at the same time, which limits their engagement in the course. The latter was discussed with the students in the classroom.

## **Theoretical part (theoretical perspectives, lectures/seminars, exam, etc.)**

In this regard, students generally agreed with the content and felt that it was useful for their learning. One student also remarked on the inclusion of a communication perspective on governance. However, some students indicated that they would like to have more space for reflecting on theories during the course, especially governance theory.

Students also appreciated the mandatory discussions. One commented that having these assignments encouraged them to read and practice for the exam, stating that "preparing for the exam lined up very nicely because of that." Discussions in class were easier to follow after submitting the posts, and other students also enjoyed the literature seminars. Only two suggestions emerged in this regard: 1) to leave more time for reading so students can engage with more literature and prepare better for the seminars, and 2) to discuss more real-life cases in class so students can practice and reflect more on the use of theoretical perspectives before the project work.

## **Practical part (field trip, research project, stakeholder workshop, support, etc.)**

Another significant component of the course, the project work and field trip, was met with high praise from the students. They highly appreciated the field trip and suggested that it remain in future versions of the course, a clear indication of its value in their learning journey. They commended the division for covering housing and transportation costs, which made the trip accessible to everyone, and the flexibility towards students with small children, demonstrating the teaching team's efforts in ensuring inclusivity and accessibility.

The students also appreciated the experience of designing a workshop and engaging with the stakeholders, although they suggested having more detailed guidelines for the workshop and holding it in real life if possible. Other students commented on the challenges of organising as a whole classroom and their experience with their perceived uneven distribution of tasks.

## Comments about the Stakeholder workshop:

### Enablers or hindrances for the stakeholders:

- The stakeholders knew each other and may have felt more comfortable talking to each other, but at the same time, they might have felt constrained to sharing their own perspectives.
- The stakeholders were using their "leadership-hat" most of the session, so perhaps it made it harder to gather more personal reflections about the area and the project.
- Zoom could be seen as a constraining set-up for dialogue and collaboration. It is also harder to see how people react, gestures, and vibes.
  - Zoom might limit the diversity of activities that can be done with the audiences.
  - Communication is also dependent on available internet connection.
- Students could collaborate with the selection of topics with the stakeholders
  - Informing them early about the workshop during the interviews, explaining the aim and asking about interests, topics, and expectations. Including a question about the most available time for them, and then setting the workshop based on that.
  - Setting up posters in Vildmarksriket to collect information and inviting people to join.
- A shorter session might be more engaging on Zoom (although students were encouraged to decide the length of the workshop on their own, since the beginning).

### Students experience:

- Students were surprised about their experience being on the other side of the screen (having a facilitator role), dealing with an audience, and the challenges of getting reactions from the audience.
- Students appreciated the session with Sue Senecah but suggested that they provide more examples of digital meetings.
- There is a Big challenge in organising as a whole classroom and assigning roles to everyone. Students suggested working in smaller groups (in the end, that's how they organised themselves).
  - Uneven commitment and a great challenge in incorporating everybody and making collective decisions.
  - Other students suggested having more mandatory collaborative sessions on campus, where people can actually engage in the collective planning.
  - The students understand EG as relying on everyone and everyone being responsible for the processes, including humans and non-humans.
  - On a final note, the students also reflected on how "keeping quiet" is also a choice that affects any process design and participatory exercise.
- Students would have liked to discuss the stakeholder workshop earlier so that they understand the purpose and the usefulness of the space. Additionally, they can promote it better to the stakeholders in Vildmarksriket.
- At the same time, the students argued for the need for clearer and more detailed instructions of the workshop so that they know in advance what is expected from them. They also suggested having a session where everyone shares their findings so that they find connecting points and can design the workshop more cohesively.
- One student commented to her group that the last sessions had been on Zoom, so they didn't feel like participating.
- Finally, students reflected that it's easier to be critical when engaging with literature or projects as an outsider. However, there is difficulty in Vildmarksriket because of the "social responsibility"; students want to "be nice", so it is hard to be critical. Students also reflected on the challenge in making space for reflection in a project such as Vildmarksriket, and the experience of being the first to reflect but as outsiders of the process. In a way, they felt as if they helped the participants reflect in their own process.

### Course leader reflections

I think some conclusions from me for next year are that:

- we should try to better balance the work load for the students over the course. I think one way to do this is to reduce the number of theories they engage with and to streamline these better to actually help the students think and act throughout the course. In particular, I want the theories to be helpful for thinking about how to "engage critically". Therefore, I think that we should take out the literature seminars on representation and expertise and on SPT and remove these two perspectives completely from the course (this is also in line with how I discussed with Anke and Sara in one of the program development meetings we had this term). Instead we should place a bit more emphasis on governance throughout the course. We stick with governance which we raise to a theoretical perspective, and we keep discourse analysis but also add a theoretical perspective on collaboration/ public deliberation etc that can follow the students throughout the course and that they can actually make use of in planning the stakeholder workshop. I think this could be called eg "theories on collaborative processes" or "theories that help understand and practice collaborative governance" where we could use the following three papers:

1. Sues paper on 'trinity of voice',

2. Bertolini L, Laws D, Higgins M, et al. (2010) Reflection-in-action, still engaging the professional? *Planning Theory & Practice*, 11(4), 597–619. And

3. Connelly S, Richardson, T., & Miles, T. (2006). Situated legitimacy: Deliberative arenas and the new rural governance. *Journal of Rural Studies* 22(3), 267–277.

This would help the students see a continuity throughout the course I think. I think that maybe we can also move some of the early lectures to later in the course, and have fewer online lectures towards the end.

It is nice to know that the students appreciate the field trip and we should keep that, but probably try to go to a new place next year, as the stakeholders become “exhausted” from being interviewed repeatedly on the same topic. We need to continue thinking about how to make the stakeholder workshop work well. The idea with zoom is to make the workshop accessible to the stakeholders with the budget we have, as we can't afford to go back once more to report back. The proposed change in theories will better prepare the students for the stakeholder workshop, as will the moving of some lectures to earlier in the course. We should somehow evaluate the students individually towards the end too, eg an oral examination based on their learning from the field trip and project report. We need to think a bit about how to do this oral examination but I think it could be a good idea. An oral examination towards the end will facilitate keeping all students committed throughout the group work which will be helpful.

## Student representatives comments

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### Course evaluation

**For the “Engaging critically with environmental governance” course evaluation, 16 students out of 28 responded, for a 57% percentage of response.**

**The ratings go from 1 to 5, 1 being disagreement to the evaluation point and 5 being completely in agreement with it.**

**Most points from the report have a medium response between 4-5, making the overall experience of the students very positive and in line with the evaluation points.**

**The overall impression of the course (point 1) was very good (avg. 4,1). Some students pointed out the good structure and learning experience. Some expressed disappointment, exposing the issues relating to examination timing, which also caused low attendance to lectures around that period. Furthermore, the issue of uneven workload and freeriding among students in the second part of the course was brought up.**

**Most students agreed positively with the connection between content of the course and learning objectives (point 2), (avg. 4,3) . Of the few lower rates, it was pointed out that students would have liked to cover more theoretical aspects.**

**The prior experience of students (point 3) was overall rated sufficient for the course purposes, with an average rate of 4,0 and no negative responses.**

**The accessibility of course information (point 4) had very good responses (avg. 4,7), with the students mostly agreeing that it has been easy to have all the necessary information. It was brought up that the information relating to the stakeholder workshop could have been clearer.**

**The learning that resulted from the elements of the course (point 5) (avg. 4,3) was positive, and exposed some interesting points. Students brought up the fact that in the first half of the course the learning outcome was very good because of the amount of lectures, while during the second half (field trip, report and stakeholder workshop) the learning was focused on the case and not on the theories. It was suggested to have more lectures in the final part of the course to link the two, or an exam to make sure that the students would do so on their own reflections.**

**The inclusivity of the learning environment (point 6) (avg. 4,6) had a vast majority of positive votes. One comment pointed out that freeriding between classmates hindered the learning experience.**

**The satisfaction relating to physical learning environment (point 7) (avg. 4,5) was very high, with comments appreciating the free field trip opportunity, However, some comments related to the amount of classes and activities held on Zoom in the late part of the course, wishing for more in person engagement.**

Examinations (point 8) (avg. 4,0) showed a lot of different opinions. While the majority of votes were still very positive, students brought up different points.

Some thought that the exam came in too early in the course, or that its time limit was too strict. One person pointed out that the first exam could have been done in an home exam format, despite of the AI risks. It was brought up that the report time restraints were too limited and disconnected to the course learning objectives. It was also noted that the examination came early and made the rest of the course less pressuring, suggesting a final exam to make students reflect more on the course contents.

The links to sustainability (point 9) (avg. 4,2) showed positive votes, with a comment on the fact that the project was focused on business rather than ecology.

Gender and equality perspectives (point 10) (avg. 4,4) received mostly positive votes, showing a good inclusivity and balance for everyone.

International perspectives (point 11) (avg. 4,0) received mostly positive votes. One person commented that the interaction with external lecturers (South Africa, USA) was very interesting.

The hours per week spent on the course (point 12) was on average 24,2 hrs, with most students declaring between 16 and 25 hours. However, results differ, with 7 people spending more and 3 spending less. One comment pointed out that in the first part of the course the engagement/effort was much more demanding, while in the second part it was minimal.