

**Prosjekt:**            **Critical Citizens (CRICIS)**

**Fagmiljø:**            **filosofi**

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## Project title: Critical Citizens (CRICIS)

In recent years the public sphere in the West has fragmented into groups, which increasingly turn into echo chambers of the like minded. New media has expanded the problem of fake news and opened the gates for insidious propaganda. Trust in science and expertise is ebbing, old party loyalties are crumbling, and nationalism and populism are on the rise. At the same time, social and economic inequalities give people not just vastly different life prospects, but also vastly different tools for engaging in political life as critical citizens.

In this project, we argue that forming critical citizens is of extreme importance in meeting the many challenges posed by our globalized world to the core values of liberal democracy, i.e. liberty, equality, and solidarity. The main decisions that affect our lives cannot be left to global financial interests, or to ever more selective political and economic elites. But nor should political discontent be channelled into xenophobic and demagogic movements. To realize these values, however, the people must be up to the task, and for this two things must be done. We must (1) understand what critical thinking demands today, how public reason is to be sustained and formed, and how dissent should be understood and dealt with; and (2) we must form critical citizens who participate and engage in the public arena in a constructive way. Underlying the whole project is the belief that a healthy, robust liberal democracy that respects the basic rights not just of its citizens, but of “outsiders” too, requires an environment where analytic and critical skills are fostered at all levels of education.

To achieve these goals, the project has a research and an educational component. The research component is focused on a closer examination of critical thinking, public reason and dissent in our current world. The pedagogical component consists in the creation of a course on critical thinking open to all students at all levels, and of a bachelor program in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE).

We think this project is timely in the context of the current discussion about the role that humanities should play within society in Norway. There are many signals pointing in this direction, among them: the recent White Paper on *Humaniora i Norge* (Meld St. 25); the revision of the curriculum of school teachers; and the revision of the Langtidsplan for forskning og høyere utdanning (2015–24).

## I. Project members and interdisciplinary collaboration

Core members: Dragana Bozin, Reidar Maliks, Alejandra Mancilla, Ole Martin Moen, Anna Smajdor, Caj Strandberg, Franco Trivigno.

Within IFIKK, the project will benefit from collaboration with the Practical Philosophy Working Group (PPWG) and the Concept Lab.<sup>1</sup> The PPWG seeks to develop the department's emergent strengths in ethics, law, and politics, and includes members from the entire university.

Outside IFIKK, the project will have collaborators from the Faculty of Economics (TBC) and the Department of Political Science (Anne Julie Semb and Robert Huseby), as well as from the Faculty of Pedagogy (TBC) and the Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law (TBC).

## II. Research component

To be able to form critical citizens, it is key to have a clearer idea of what critical thinking demands today, how public reason is to be cultivated and fostered, and how different forms of dissent challenge these values in our contemporary society. The project has consequently three main areas of research. Here is a preliminary account of them and their subtopics:

### 1. Critical thinking

We see critical thinking as an enabler, a necessary skill to be in a position to make a difference as citizens. It is a shared know-how, a common ground required for democratic dialogue.

- Practical reason and judgment
- Collective deliberation and opinion-formation
- The nature of ideology, bias, and prejudice
- Scientific expertise in a democratic society
- Education for critical thinking

### 2. Public reason

- What kind of reasoning should be used in public justifications?
- Pluralism and neutrality
- The nature and justification of toleration
- The nature and conditions for a public sphere
- Deliberative democracy

### 3. Dissent

- Freedom of expression
- Whistle blowing

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.hf.uio.no/ifikk/english/research/research-groups/practical-philosophy-working-group/> and <http://www.hf.uio.no/ifikk/english/research/projects/cl/>.

- Civil disobedience, conscientious objection
- Obligation and loyalty
- Legitimacy

An advantage of the project is that it builds over already existing research projects and groups within IFIKK (PPWG and Concept Lab), and in other faculties and departments (XXX). Another advantage is that, given its timely focus of interest, it is likely to attract external sources of funding, like the NRC's programs IKTPLUS and VAM; and the ERC's calls under the working groups Widening European Participation, Strengthening International Participation and Open Access.

### **Research group**

The research group will consist of the core members from the University of Oslo mentioned above, as well as the following hires:

- One full-time permanent position. Coordinator of the PPE program and the project, plus research duties within the focus areas.
- One PhD student to conduct research on one of the research topics above.
- One postdoctoral research fellow to conduct research on one of the topics above.
- Bursaries for MA students who wish to write their thesis on a relevant topic

### **Events**

- Three conferences on the research topics
- Weekly reading groups
- Bi-weekly seminars with national and international speakers which will be an obligatory component of the PPE program, but will be open to the rest of the academic community.
- Workshops for academics in the humanities to train them to communicate effectively in the media, especially in the written press.

### **Organization**

Advisory Board. This will have the purpose of overseeing both the research and the teaching component of the project. It will consist of the Coordinator as well as six senior scholars from:

- The PPE program at the University of Oxford
- The PPE program at Lund University
- The Department of Political Science
- The Department of Economics
- IAKH
- IFIKK

### III. Teaching component

The educational component of our project focuses on the creation of a PPE program for bachelor students, and the development of a critical reasoning course open to all undergraduates the goal of which will be the formation of individuals who possess the necessary analytical and argumentative skills to approach the challenges above in a manner that is critical, yet constructive.

#### **1. PPE program (Politics, Philosophy and Economics) for bachelor students**

After its creation in Oxford in 1920, PPE bachelor programs have been created in a number of other prestigious universities around the world and they have contributed to the formation of future decision-makers in their countries.

The 80-group will consist of 20 ECTS credits each from philosophy, political science, and economics, and additionally 20 credits from one of them, or 10 from two of them. The program will have a 40-group and 40 free subjects. The 40-group should be composed of a number of different subject areas and these free subjects are to be used to qualify for MA studies within one of the subjects. The Oslo PPE program will take around 25 new students each year, and will be advertised especially among political youth organizations, NGOs and other similar environments.

We consider that it answers the request from the Humaniorameldingen, where the government recommends that «Institusjonene bør derfor vurdere å åpne opp i større grad for studieprogrammer som de nevnte, der humaniora kombinert med andre fag kan gi verdifull tverrfaglig kompetanse». (s. 28).

The program will largely use existing subjects, including (in Philosophy), FIL1003 Etikk, FIL2310 Normativ etikk og metaetikk, [FIL2311 Politisk filosofi](#), FIL2207 Fordypning – Handlingsfilosofi, and FIL2302 Anvendt etikk. Yet, bearing in mind that the program will be especially tailored towards the formation of critical citizens, the new subject in critical thinking will be obligatory. Resources can be saved through collaboration on existing subjects, for example topics in political theory at the Department of Political Science, where philosophers could contribute teaching resources, while at the same time the course could be included as a part of the required 80-group for entering the MA program in each field. There may be options for collaboration in several other cases.

Other features that may be included:

- Mandatory attendance in bi-weekly seminars taught by national and international decision-makers, academics and researchers in the three areas of study. This seminar will be open to the rest of the academic community, which will give momentum to the general project.
- Tutorials with faculty members. This would be one-on-one or two-on-one meetings with faculty in conjunction with seminars, where the purpose would be intensive writing and advising sessions.

- An honours thesis. This could be an opportunity for select students to engage in intensive research within a focused area of the PPE program.
- An internship-subject (“Praksisemne”). This would involve an internship in business, public administration, or civil society, as well as a scholastic component. It would strengthen the students’ chance at getting a relevant job upon graduation. IFIKK has been in contact with Are Turmo, the head of *kompetanse* at NHO, who has expressed great interest in the PPE degree, and who could connect to major Norwegian businesses for internships.

Moreover, bearing in mind the increasing importance given to the study of environmental issues in Norway and abroad, and given Norway’s international reputation as an environmentally-minded country, there will be the option of pursuing an «Environmental PPE» where students will have taken at least one subject in each area dealing with environmental questions. For example: Environmental Economics (ECON4910), Environmental Philosophy FIL 4390), and International Environmental Governance (STV4214B).

## **2. Undergraduate course on critical thinking**

This will be developed by the core members and will be open to all students at all levels.

## **IV. Preliminary budget**

The budget will be used for the following purposes:

- One full-time permanent position. Coordinator of the PPE program and the project, plus research duties.
- One PhD student to conduct research on one of the topics above mentioned.
- One postdoctoral research fellow to conduct research on one of the topics above mentioned.
- Four conferences (one each year), one on each of the research topics
- Organization of a bi-weekly seminar with national and international speakers which will be an obligatory component of the PPE program, but will be open to the rest of the academic community.