COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE INFORMATION

Program	**Empowering Community Engagement: Soft Skills Micro-Courses for Students and Staff**
University	**University of West Bohemia in Pilsen**
Department	**Department of Political Science and International Relations**
Course name	**Framing Community Challenges: Problem Analysis and Definition**
Course code	**ECE1.8**
Credits/hours	**Non-credit micro course – 4 hours total**
Language of instruction	**English**
Course dates	**On demand, flexible access**
Course schedule	**Asynchronous online**
Course coordinator	**PhDr. Mgr. Petr Jurek, Ph.D.**
Course instructor	**PhDr. Mgr. Petr Jurek, Ph.D.**
Contact details	**pjurek@ff.zcu.cz**

EUPeace

European University for Peace,
Justice, and Inclusive Societies

SHORT DESCRIPTION

This course introduces learners to the foundational phase of problem solving in community engagement contexts: identifying, analysing, and defining the problem. Participants learn to distinguish symptoms from root causes, analyse complex or "messy" situations through multiple perspectives, and formulate clear, actionable problem statements that can guide meaningful intervention.

The course emphasises critical and reflective thinking, systems-informed approaches, and collaborative problem exploration with stakeholders. Learners will apply problem-structuring methods to social and public-policy challenges, with examples drawn from social policy and linked to social justice and inclusion. By strengthening these competences, the course prepares participants to engage more effectively in community-based initiatives, participatory projects, and evidence-informed responses to societal needs.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Knowledge & Understanding

- Differentiate between ill-structured ("messy") and well-structured problems.
- Describe common problem-analysis frameworks (e.g., 5W, systems mapping, problem trees).
- Identify and categorise key constraints, assumptions, and stakeholder perspectives shaping a problem situation.

Applied Skills

- Formulate clear, neutral, and evidence-informed problem statements.
- Analyse underlying causes and causal relationships in complex problems.
- Apply visual structuring techniques (e.g., systems maps, causal loop diagrams) to organise and clarify problem dynamics.
- Evaluate and compare alternative problem framings and justify a selected definition based on context, stakeholders, and intended outcomes.

COURSE CONTENTS

1. What is a problem? Framing, context, and scope

2. Effective problem statements as a basis for community engagement in identifying the social problems

3. Stakeholders, assumptions, and constraints

4. Problem structuring methods (PSMs) for complex problems

5. Validating and communicating the problem definition – the foundation of the community engagement processes

TEACHING METHODOLOGY

The course is delivered in an online synchronous format combining short pre-recorded lecture inputs with interactive live sessions. During the course, participants work with practical examples and guided exercises linked to real community engagement contexts, allowing them to apply concepts collaboratively and reflect on their own communication and decision-making. Learning is consolidated through a final automatically evaluated quiz, which provides immediate feedback and confirms successful completion of the key learning elements.

ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

Assessment type	Assessment criteria	Overall weight
Questionnaires linked to 5 topics covered in the course (5 in total)	Up to five multiple choice questions per questionnaire, majority of the correct answers are required, students can re-take the test.	70 %
Final self-assessment and feedback	Self-reflection of the knowledge and skills acquired by the participation on the course, several open questions on the feedback to the course design and content.	30 %

STUDENT WORKLOAD (in hours)

Contact hours	Autonomous work	Overall
0	4	4

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READING LIST / RELEVANT REFERENCES

5 slideshows provided by the lecturer, available on Moodle UWB.

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Bacchi, C. (2012). Why study problematizations? Making politics visible. *Open Journal of Political Science*, *2*(1), 1–8. http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2012.21001

Crow, D. A., & Jones, M. D. (2018). Narrative policy framework: Foundations and empirical applications. *Policy Studies Journal*, *46*(2), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1332/030557318X15230061022899

Jonassen, D. H. et al. (2007). *Learning to solve complex scientific problems*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315091938 [accessible via Moodle UWB gateway to Taylor & Francis database]

- chapter 7 by Craig A. Ogilvie: *Moving Students From Simple to Complex Problem Solving*
- chapter 11 by John Jackman, Sarah Ryan, Sigurdur Olafsson, Veronica J. Dark: *Metaproblem Spaces and Problem Structure*