Doctoral Program in Economics

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI FIRENZE | UNIVERSITÀ DI SIENA | UNIVERSITÀ DI PISA

Academic year 2026/27

HAPPINESS, SUSTAINABILITY AND WELLBEING

Period:
First Term: November /December 2026

Course hours: 20

Teachers:
Stefano Bartolini (12) and Simone D'Alessandro (8)

Exam methods:
Oral presentation

Prerequisites:
No

1. Bartolini's module

Program

The new science of happiness has developed in the past two decades across all social sciences thanks to the discovery of several reliable methods to measure human happiness. The measurement of happiness, through subjective and objective measures, has come to challenge established thought in economic and social theory and policy. Discussing human happiness raises issues related to the current "crises of capitalism" under discussion by prominent scholars from all social sciences, including big questions about the level of our material consumption, the impact of the economy on the sustainability of natural and social resources. Serious consideration is now being given to happiness as a policy goal by a number of governments.

Based on the data and the research literature in psychology, sociology, and economics, this course will examine, from both the theoretical and empirical point of view, the impact of economic growth on people's happiness. Such an impact is critically dependent on the influence of economic growth on social relationships and environmental resources. The course pays particular attention to the role of the social and economic organization in shaping such an influence and to the determinants of the happiness of individuals and communities.

Educational objectives

The goal of the course is to provide students with the capacity to critically appraise the nexus between social and economic organization and happiness, in both macro social contexts and in smaller contexts concerning organizations such as a school or a company.

Bibliographical references

Stefano Bartolini and Francesco Sarracino, THE ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION ACCORDING TO STUDIES ON WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL CAPITAL, Quaderni del Dipartimento di Economia Politica, 2023

Stefano Bartolini, "Manifesto for Happiness. Shifting society from money to well-being", forthcoming in 2023, Palgrave-McMillan.

Stefano Bartolini, Marcin Piekalkiewicz, Francesco Sarracino, Giulia Slater,, The moderation effect of social capital in the relationship between own income, social comparisons and subjective well-being: Evidence from four international datasets, forthcoming on PLOS 1, 2023

Kasser, T. 2002, The High Price of Materialism, Mit Press, Cambridge (Ma)

Bartolini S. and Sarracino F., 2015, The dark side of Chinese growth: declining social capital and well-being in times of economic boom, World Development, 74: 333–351, 201

Bartolini S. and Sarracino F, Do People Care About Future Generations? Derived Preferences from Happiness Data", *Ecological Economics*, 143, pp. 253–275, 2018

2. <u>D'Alessandro's Module</u>

Program

Topic 1 – Stylized facts and theoretical discussion

- The relationship between planetary boundaries and social goals
- Climate change, global emissions drivers and IPCC scenarios
- Decoupling, Material footprint in rich and poor countries
- Irreversibility, societal collapses and maladaptation

· **Topic 2 – From Sustainable Development to the Green Deal**

- Definition and limits of sustainable development approach
- Feasibility of the green growth strategy
- Alternatives to green growth

· **Topic 3 – *Ecohesion:* social cohesion in the ecological transition**

- Ecological Macroeconomics
- System thinking and mapping

Educational objectives

The main objective of this module is to allow the Ph.D. students to access to the broad (and interdisciplinary) literature on climate change and sustainability. The module aims at clarifying the interlinkages between the socioeconomic and environmental dimensions. Moreover, it introduces to the use of scenarios analysis for policy evaluation. At the end of the course the student will be able to apply system thinking methodology as a tool for group-oriented research.

Bibliographical references

Steffen W. et al. (2015), "Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet", Science 347, No. 1259855. ·

O'Neill, D. (2018), "A good life for all within planetary boundaries", Nature Sustainability 1, 88-95.Raworth, K. (2017) "A Doughnut for the Anthropocene: humanity's compass in the 21st century", Lancet Planetary Health 1.

IPCC (2018) "Global warming of 1.5◦C", Summary for Policymakers, 3-27.

Weidmann, et al. (2015) "The material footprint of nations", PNAS 112(20), 6271-6276.

Haberl, H. et al. (2020) “A systematic review of the evidence on decoupling of GDP, resource use and GHG emissions, part II: synthesizing the insights”, Environmental Research Letters 15, 065003. ·

Beddoe, R. et al. (2009) “Overcoming systemic roadblocks to sustainability: The evolutionary redesign of worldviews, institutions, and technologies.” PNAS 106.8, 2483-2489. ·

Norton, M. I., & Ariely, D. (2011) “Building a better America – One wealth quintile at a time” Perspectives on psychological science 6(1), 9-12. ·

Hallegatte, S., Heal, G., Fay, M., & Treguer, D. (2012). “From growth to green growth – a framework”, National Bureau of Economic Research no. 17841. ·

Antal, M. and J.C.J.M. Van Den Bergh (2014). “Green growth and climate change: conceptual and empirical considerations”, Climate Policy 16(2), 165-177. ·

Jacobs, M. (2012). “Economic Theory and Political Discourse” Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy, WP no. 108. ·

Janicke, M. (2012). “Green growth: From a growing eco-industry to economic sustainability”. Energy Policy 48, 13-21. ·

Hardt, L. and D. W. O’Neill (2017). “Ecological macroeconomic models: Assessing current developments” Ecological Economics 134, 198-211.

D’Alessandro S. et al. (2020) “Feasible alternatives to green growth” Nature Sustainability 3, 329-335.

Exam

There is a single exam for the two modules. Students will work by forming four groups. Each group must produce a presentation commenting on a statement or answering a question. Students can compose the groups independently. Once the groups are composed, they will be informed of the statement to be commented on or the question to be answered. A date will be communicated for the students to make their presentation and discuss the other students' presentations. Students’ participation in the general discussion is part of their evaluation.