



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Political Sociology

2021-3-E4001N098

Learning objectives

Knowledge and understanding:

The course aims at providing basic knowledge on the perspectives and theoretical interpretations concerning political and social transformations of contemporary societies, with regard to the configuration and redistribution of forms of power and of individual and collective agencies within the frame of the national state and on the supra-, inter- and transnational level. It aspires to develop critical and reflexive skills for the analysis of socio-political phenomena, and the ability to understand the complexity and contradictions of transformative processes unfolding on the local, national, European and global level.

Applying knowledge and understanding:

The course provides skills for understanding the dynamics of transformations taken into consideration, while training students for concrete civic and political agency both in the professional field and in the field of civil society.

Communicational skills

The active and continuous participation of the students is one of the prerogatives of the course. Seminar activities and group work are an integral part of the educational project.

Contents

The course aims to explain the basic notions that distinguish political sociology in the ways of thinking and investigating the complex dialectic between politics and society, compared to other disciplines of the social sciences. The political sphere is considered here in dynamic interaction with other social institutions, exploring the

way in which different social agencies and actors challenge and co-construct, produce and reproduce social structures, specific forms of action, events and movements. Traditionally, political sociology investigates power relations within the framework of a national state; today it is essential to rethink these processes beyond the borders of a single states, in their supra- and trans-national dimension, within the globalized world. European integrations become thus a new privileged field of sociological analysis capable of shedding light on the ways in which new political and social interests are configured and compete in the political arena, by the new actors attributing alternative meanings to individual and collective action, to institutions, and to political and social structures. Therefore, new questions have been emerging as a challenge to dominant interpretations of political action and society as such, in a postnational constellation. The course will allocate a space for observation and participatory discussion on selected dimensions of these processes.

Detailed program

The lectures will advance on two parallel and intertwined paths - the first concerning the basic concepts of political sociology treated in the form of an interactive frontal lecture; the second providing various forms of participation on selected themes proposed by the teacher and agreed with the students. Both modalities aim to create a space for discussion and exchange of ideas and require active participation.

Firstly, the fundamental theoretical approaches for the understanding of socio-political phenomena will be explained and discussed, in the light of contemporary transformations of the European and global societies. The concepts of state, political systems, civil society, will be problematized as spaces of conflict between different interests of social groups and between ideological and cultural conceptions of the world. Secondly, the participation in the political community will be interpreted through the lens of specific political cultures creating collective identities and forms of association, reproduced in time through the process of socialization. Moreover, we speak here about socialization as constantly challenged by the new social and political actors and their re-interpretations. Thirdly, the constitution and legitimation of both political parties and social movements are considered as crucial for understanding the dynamics between the political sphere in the narrow sense, and the social sphere, in these turbulent times of transition from the 'short century' and its cognitive patterns to the new millennium. Fourthly, specific attention will be paid to the tension regarding the configuration of European and Western liberal democracies today, in relation, on the one hand, to the global domination of neoliberalism, and on the other to the rise of illiberal and authoritarian trends in these societies. Finally, we will analyze forms and practices of a structural political violence, typical for totalitarian and post-totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, and at the same time intrinsic of the modern national state. The political violence re-emerges in the more visible way within discourses and practices of radical right parties and movements, while it is less transparent in the new ways in which contemporary national states exercise their power over society.

The seminars will be organized as an integral part of the course, both with the participation of the invited guest-lecturers, and as regards the reading, presentation and discussion of selected texts carried out by the students enrolled in the course. The topics of nationalism, populism, citizenship, and social inequalities, will be proposed in an intersectional perspective in regard to the specific belonging to class, gender, religion, and ethnonational identification. All topics will be addressed with a critical approach to methodological nationalism.

Prerequisites

No specific prerequisite is required. A basic knowledge of English is desirable, but not essential.

Teaching methods

The course will combine lectures and participatory activities – students will be invited to present and discuss several selected texts. We will host experts in the field during our seminars. Italian is the official language of the course.

If the Covid-19 emergency should continue over time, the lectures will be proposed in a mixed modality: in presence, whenever possible, and with a few uploaded video-lectures (asynchronous mode) and other interactive lectures and participatory seminars (in remote synchronous mode). In any case, I will record and upload all teaching hours in order to guarantee the availability of audio-visual documents to all students. The course does not distinguish between attending and non-attending students, but rewards participation. A certain number of afternoon meetings with working students may be arranged; Erasmus students may ask for short seminars in English, both in remote synchronous mode.

I will receive students via Skype – the appointment should be agreed by mail a few days in advance.

Assessment methods

The oral examination consists in an interview concerning the topics and argumentation treated by the relevant literature and during the lectures and seminars.

All students are invited to write a paper (max 2500-3000 words including references), on a selected topic proposed by and agreed with the teacher; the paper must be delivered at least 10 days before the first session of oral examination in June 2021; each paper will be evaluated by assessment of points (min 0 - max 2). Students can write their papers in English, Slovenian, Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian language. Writing a paper is not compulsory. Active role in seminar presentations will be taken into consideration.

In the case of Covid-19 emergency, the oral examination will proceed in remote mode, by videoconference, using the WebEx platform. The e-learning page of the course will contain a public link for access to the exam.

Evaluation criteria:

The oral exam test:

- Understanding of the specific concepts related to the course topics;
- Ability to present the topic in a coherent way;
- Ability of critical and reflective thinking.

The paper evaluation (not compulsory):

- Ability to grasp the fundamental conceptual elements proposed by the course;
- Ability to unfold synthetically a subject chosen for the paper in an original and autonomous way;

- Ability to develop a critical and reflective discourse in written form.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Main literature:

Ceccarini L., Diamanti I. (2018), *Tra politica e società. Fondamenti, trasformazioni e prospettive*, Bologna: il Mulino.

A collection of selected texts will be available on the elearning platform by February 2021.

Other relevant literature:

Brubaker R. (1998), *I nazionalismi nell'Europa contemporanea*, Roma: Editori Riuniti.

Favell A. and Guiraudon V. (Eds.) (2011), *Sociology of the European Union*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kauppi N. (Ed.) (2013), *A Political Sociology of Transnational Europe*, Colchester: ECPR Press.

Kochenov D. (2020), *Cittadinanza*, Bologna: il Mulino.

Linz J., Stepan A. (2000), *Transizione e consolidamento democratico*, il Mulino.

Nash K. (2006), *Political Sociology. Globalization, Politics, Power*, Blackwell Publishing, MA.

Sekuli? T. (2020), *The European Union and the Paradox of Enlargement. The Complex Accession of the Western Balkans*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (Chapters 1, 2 e 3)

All texts will be available in the University library and, where possible, in electronic format. Other selected materials will be uploaded on the course web platform. Each student may create his/her selection of references regarding the specific topic of the paper (not compulsory).
