UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Sociology of Risk

2324-1-F8803N001

Learning objectives

The course aims to convey to students, on the one hand, the concepts and interpretative models about risk that have progressively developed in the social sciences and, on the other hand, knowledge of the main processes that generate transformations in the definition, perception and prevention of risks in contemporary social realities.
Knowledge and skills expected are manifold. At the end of the course, students will have acquired the specific vocabulary of this disciplinary branch. Secondly, they will have learnt the most relevant approaches and models adopted to analyse the dimension of risk in sociological terms. Thirdly, they will have acquired the ability to identify the reasons for the emergence and application of different approaches in relation to specific risks.

Contents

The central themes of the course are the different approaches used to analyse and understand the dimension of risk in contemporary societies. In recent decades, as a result of the processes of globalisation, Western societies have become increasingly interdependent in economic and technological terms. While this trend has led to an unprecedented improvement in the well-being of people in many contexts, it has also increased their exposure to potential risks at different levels. Moreover, processes of social change have shown ambivalent characteristics, especially with regard to cultural fragmentation and the weakening of social norms and traditions. The resulting feeling of uncertainty goes together with the awareness that each decision and action is inseparable from the dimension of risk. In this scenario, the discourses of experts, focusing on the tension between behaviour and expected outcomes, warn of multiple risks in different spheres of social life. Starting from these premises, the course addresses the mechanisms of risk definition, perception, representation and prevention in relation to the main processes of social transformation.

Detailed program

The course aims to provide students with concepts and tools for analysing risk in contemporary social realities. After dealing with the main approaches adopted in the social sciences, some concepts contiguous to that of risk and significant for investigating this dimension are explored. Subsequently, the course deals with risk communication, paying particular attention to the processes of exchanging information and opinions between parties responsible for risk assessment and management and other stakeholders. Finally, the course explores, also through case studies, how risk is defined and managed in relation to some of the main dimensions of social life.
Specifically, the course is divided into four parts:
I) the development of the concept of risk and the analysis of the main approaches to the study of the risk dimension in the social sciences;
II) the deepening of other concepts crucial to the analysis of the risk dimension: danger, uncertainty, trust, probability;
III) risk communication, understood as the exchange of information and opinions in order to make decisions and take protective and preventive measures;
IV) how risks are defined and managed in specific social areas. Particular attention will be paid to:

- urban risks
- environmental risks
- health risks
- the dimension of risk in organisations.

Prerequisites

No prerequisites.

Teaching methods

Lectures. During the course, students' active participation in the teaching activity will be encouraged through the assignment of short research papers, to be carried out individually or in groups, on the topics of the course. These papers will be discussed during the course.

Assessment methods

Attending and non-attending students will be assessed through an individual oral examination based on the reference texts.
The assessment criteria (for attending and non-attending students) are:

1. correct use of language - appropriate use of terms;
2. accuracy in the logical exposition of the arguments;
3. ability to make connections between the various topics;
4. completeness of exposition.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Course handout by the instructor.

Sustainable Development Goals

INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE