UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Environmental Anthropology and Climate Crisis

2526-2-F0101R074

Course title

Desires of relatedness: cultural imagination within climate crisis

Topics and course structure

The accelerated environmental changes involved in the dynamics of the “climate crisis” impose a major paradigm shift, both epistemological and methodological, for the toolbox of anthropology: an epochal threshold on the one hand disorienting and uncanny, on the other fertile and generative. An anthropology of the environment is an anthropology in the environment: reading cultural dynamics in their relations, co-construction and entanglement with environmental dynamics and actors, starting from deconstructing the device in crisis of “nature” as a mute, silent field, opposed to culture, its colonial archaeology and its crisis in modernity.
Through the study of ethnographic cases in contexts of ‘modernisation’ of the multiple representations water, earth, forest, seeds, food, we will analyze the frictions, the forms of contestation, the cosmologies and cultural models in other environmental contexts but also the encounters and clash with fossil cosmology and the carbon economy.
Specific attention will be devoted to the role of anthropology in the context of climate change: perceptions and multiple cultural constructions of “climate”, atmospheric imaginaries, fossil cultures and their symbolic apparatus, processes of cultural denial, and the redefinition of meanings of the human in relation to the non-human, including with the tools of multispecies anthropology.

Objectives

Knowledge and understanding;
The ability to relate cultural models in environmental relations will be supported, with a focus on the “rigour of the

qualitative” in dealing with contexts of modernisation, the realm of quantitative models of understanding. The problematisation of development ideologies and the critique of epistemological models based on a clear nature/culture dichotomy will be central in gaining an understanding of the dynamics at “home” and elsewhere.

Application of applied knowledge and understanding
The study of applied contexts in resource management, the dynamics of co-option, diversion and selection of resources -symbolic and material- by local populations within projects, the anthropological analysis of institutions and organisational cultures are intended to form useful skills for the profession of anthropologist in institutional contexts, development cooperation and environmental change.

Autonomy of judgement
Understanding the complexity of cultural and ecological processes together, accepting and valuing different perspectives, human and non-human, taking an empathetic and responsible attitude in the environmental crisis.

Communication skills
Express ideas, knowledge and arguments clearly at a time of symbolic collapse of the cosmology of neo-liberalism.

Learning skills
Develop and refine their learning methodologies, building in the collective communication space of the lessons the capacity for collaboration and intellectual and critical exchange.

Methodologies

The didactic delivery will inevitably be interactive and circular, with the centrality of the analysis of ethnographic case studies as a space for didactic communication, common reflection and debate on the texts and articles under examination. This will comprise 40 hours.

Interactive teaching will consist of workshop participation 16 hours:
-two exercises at the North Park on ‘nature in the city’ and ‘social relations in the atmosphere’, to learn by doing, to denaturalise the cultural construction of a place and to build an initial alphabet in understanding the carbon economy and environmental relations in the city in situ: 6 hours
-10 hours of seminar activities with methodological focus will be the analysis of the cultural imaginary of environment and fossil cosmologies through pop/popular song, with workshop activity of audio-video materials.

The vehicular language of the course is English.

Online and offline teaching materials

Relevant lecture notes and forum discussion on specific case studies will be provided.

Programme and references

1-Mauro Van Aken, Campati per aria, 2020, eleuthera

2-Mauro Van Aken, Decarbonizzare l’immaginario, cantando, Anima Mundi, 2026

3-List of selected papers, “Climate changes: denials and desires of environmental relatedness”:
comprehensive of exctrats of "Marcell Mauss, Season variations of the eskimo: a study in social morphology”(1904), it will be uploaded at mid March 2026, after the beginning of the course.

Assessment methods

The exam consists of an oral dialogue test on the course of the texts, ethnographic cases and theoretical and cultural analyses in relation to the teaching experiences of the in-presence course (for those attending): an oral dialogue that allows one to move on the metaphorical, symbolic and emotional dimensions of the climate crisis.

There are no in itinere tests. The ability to put into play the theoretical and ethnographic tools of the course and the ability to create critical and transversal connections between the texts will be emphasised.
The final oral test will therefore resume the dialogue and discussion held during the lessons for a final evaluation of the course and the solidity of the tools acquired.

Attending students are considered those who participate to 75% of the lectures.

1. Low level (0-17/30): Not sufficient
   The student demonstrates limited and fragmentary knowledge of the texts and topics covered, with misunderstandings of the texts proposed.
2. Medium level (18-24/30): Sufficient - Good
   Knowledge and Understanding: The student shows a general knowledge of the texts and topics covered, although with gaps, imprecision on specific but not essential aspects, or some misunderstandings in the analysis of the texts.
3. High level (25-30/30): Distinguished - Excellent
   Knowledge and Comprehension: The student demonstrates thorough and solid knowledge of the texts and topics addressed; understands and analyses the proposed texts without uncertainty.
   NB: Students with PUOI must email the document to the lecturers before the examination.

Office hours

On mail appointment

Programme validity

Course programm hold two academic years

Course tutors and assistants

Della Costa Francesco, Aiolfi Barbara

Sustainable Development Goals

CLIMATE ACTION