UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

New Challanges for Social Research

2526-2-F8803N002

Learning objectives

The course aims to present, on the one hand, some basic concepts of quantitative and qualitative social research and, in particular, how to transform social problems into research questions. On the other hand, it aims to address the challenges and puzzles that contemporary society poses to researchers in the field of research. The complexity of global society is unique because, in addition to being perpetually unstable and dynamic, it cannot be traced back to or interpreted on the basis of linear (cause-effect) models. Social phenomena evolve/transform through multiple connections and levels of interdependence. This leads us to rethink the basic concepts, methods, and techniques of empirical research. The challenges concern the objects of study, methods, and data collection techniques. In particular, the course aims to provide theoretical and methodological tools for empirically analyzing complex social phenomena related to urban insecurity, exploring innovative methodologies in quantitative and qualitative social research. Students will acquire the skills necessary to transform social problems related to urban insecurity, risk, and deviant behavior into specific research questions, using different analysis techniques and addressing the ethical and social implications of such methodologies.
In line with the Dublin descriptors, students will acquire:
Knowledge and understanding: in-depth understanding of the theoretical and methodological concepts for the study of urban insecurity.
Ability to apply knowledge and understanding: ability to apply innovative research techniques to empirically analyze complex social phenomena.
Autonomy of judgment: ability to critically evaluate the quality and ethics of data used for social research.
Communication skills: ability to clearly present research results in academic and professional contexts.
Learning skills: ability to keep methodological knowledge up to date in relation to emerging phenomena of urban insecurity.

Contents

The topics covered include:
-research design related to complex social phenomena such as social security

-data sources and data construction
-participatory research techniques
-computational analysis techniques
-qualitative techniques in digital contexts
-ethics and management of sensitive data
-involvement and detachment in research practice

Detailed program

The course aims to provide students with the knowledge and skills to study complex social phenomena in light of recent methodological innovations. The course is divided into three parts.
The first part will review some basic concepts of social research methodology, with a particular focus on how to translate complex social phenomena such as security, deviant behavior, and rare and elusive populations into research questions. In this context, the main available data sources will also be presented, along with how to interpret statistical data (construction and analysis of indicators of well-being, vulnerability, and social exclusion).

The second part will present some innovative social research techniques (participatory research techniques, computational analysis, qualitative research techniques in digital environments).
Finally, the third part will focus on epistemological reflection and will explore the ethical dimension of social research, the problem of how to use sensitive data to avoid discrimination, and the ongoing tension between involvement and detachment in research practice.

Prerequisites

no prerequisites

Teaching methods

The course consists of 56 hours, approximately 50% of which will be taught in a traditional classroom setting (lectures with slides, audio, and video) and 50% through interactive teaching methods (exercises, small group work, presentation of case studies from which to develop individual and small group projects, prepared and discussed during the course).

For working students and those who are unable to attend classes in person, dedicated discussion meetings will be arranged.

Assessment methods

oral examination

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Amaturo, E., Aragona, B. (2019). Per un’epistemologia del digitale: note sull’uso di big data e computazione nella ricerca sociale. Quaderni di Sociologia, 81, 71-90.
Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic Autoethnography. Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 35(4), 373-395.
Arribas Lozano, A. (2017). Reframing the public sociology debate: Towards collaborative and decolonial praxis. Current Sociology, 66(1), 92-109.
Berger, R. (2013). Now I see it, now I don’t: researcher’s position and reflexivity in qualitative research. Qualitative Research, 15(2), 219-234.
Caliandro, A., Gandini, A. (2019). I metodi digitali nella ricerca sociale. Roma: Carocci Cap.1-2-3-5
Giorgi, A., Pizzolati, M., Vacchelli, E. (2021). Metodi creativi per la ricerca sociale. Bologna: Il Mulino. Cap. 1-2-3-6-7
Guillemin, M., Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, Reflexivity, and “Ethically Important Moments” in Research. Qualitative Inquiry, 10(2), 261-280.
Kennedy, H. (2018) Living with Data: Aligning Data Studies and Data Activism Through a Focus on Everyday Experiences of Datafication. Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy,1,18-30.
Kozinets, R. V. (2015). Netnography: redefined, London, Sage (cap.1-4-5-6-7).
Vargiu, A. (2008). Le diversità nella ricerca-azione partecipata: alcune implicazioni metodologiche e procedurali. Studi di Sociologia, 46(2), 205-232.
Weinhardt, M. (2020). Ethical Issues in the Use of Big Data for Social Research.Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung, 45(3), 342-68.

Sustainable Development Goals

SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES