UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

SYLLABUS DEL CORSO

Dinamiche Socio-Economiche e Organizzazioni Criminali

2526-2-F8803N030

Learning objectives

Knowledge and understanding (Dublin 1)
By the end of the course, students will have acquired:

- a solid knowledge of the main sociological, economic, and criminological theories concerning the development and functioning of criminal organizations;
- an understanding of the organizational models, internal hierarchies, and leadership logics adopted by different forms of organized crime;
- interdisciplinary knowledge of the socio-economic and cultural conditions that foster the emergence and entrenchment of criminal phenomena, both locally and globally.

Applying knowledge and understanding (Dublin 2)
Students will be able to:

- critically analyze social and economic contexts to identify factors of vulnerability to organized crime;
- design an assessment of the impact of criminal activities on the legal economy and social cohesion at local, national, and transnational levels;
- identify and decode illegal economic practices, particularly money laundering mechanisms and strategies for infiltrating the legal economy.

Making judgments (Dublin 3)
By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- integrate various theoretical and methodological approaches to independently interpret complex criminal phenomena;
- critically assess information sources and public policies addressing organized crime;
- reflect independently on the ethical and social implications of prevention and enforcement strategies.

Communication skills (Dublin 4)

Students will be able to:

- effectively and clearly communicate their analyses and reflections on organized crime, both in written and oral form;
- present case studies, research findings, and evaluations in a rigorous yet accessible manner to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;
- use appropriate technical and multidisciplinary language in different academic and professional contexts.

Learning skills (Dublin 5)
Students will develop:

- the ability to independently find and interpret scientific literature and documentary sources on organized crime and security policies;
- a strong attitude toward continuous learning and critical deepening of knowledge, to support further academic study or entry into the labor market;
- the capacity to apply the acquired knowledge to new fields of research and professional practice in areas such as security, welfare, and social justice.

Contents

The central theme of the course is the study of the interrelations between socio-economic contexts and dynamics in the North and South of the world and the functioning of organized crime groups. The course delves into the main theoretical perspectives on organized crime and examines its various manifestations in terms of types of organizations and their relationships with the societies in which they operate. Topics covered include:
• Introduction to the course and to the learning verification strategies
• Conceptual, definitional, and theoretical framework of organized crime
• Mafia-type organized crime
• Non-Western perspectives on organized crime
• Illicit financial flows
• Organized crime and terrorism
• Concepts of illegal markets and transnational crime
• Interpretive theories of illegal markets and transnational crimes
• Drug market and drug trafficking

Detailed program

The course analyzes the interrelations between socio-economic contexts and the functioning of organized crime groups at local and global levels. Students will be introduced to the main conceptual, definitional, and theoretical frameworks of organized crime, focusing on the different manifestations and types of criminal organizations both in the Western world and in non-Western perspectives.
The analysis will cover crucial aspects such as mafia-style organized crime, transnational illegal markets, and the distinction between organized crime and terrorism, as well as the mechanisms regulating the illegal markets in which organized crime groups operate.
Through lectures, seminars, case study analysis, and group work, the course aims to provide students with a deep understanding of the dynamics characterizing organized crime and its impacts on contemporary society. Students will be guided in understanding the specificities and complexities of the scientific analysis of criminal phenomena, developing critical and methodological skills essential for addressing global security and risk management challenges.
The course pays particular attention to themes with high demand for qualified personnel from private companies

and public institutions, such as the evolution of drug markets and the infiltration of criminal groups into the legal economy. More generally, by analyzing aspects like mafia-style organized crime and transnational criminal networks, the course equips students with the necessary skills to identify and counter security threats.
These educational elements enable future professionals to intercept and manage the causes and mechanisms that lead to the emergence of complex criminal dynamics, providing effective prevention strategies and tools, thus improving the security and resilience of communities and organizations.

Prerequisites

Basic understanding of written English.

Teaching methods

The course includes a total of 56 hours of in-person teaching, structured as follows:

- approximately 60% delivered through lecture-based (erogative) teaching (DE), consisting of traditional frontal lectures in english supported by slide presentations;
- approximately 40% delivered through interactive teaching (DI), including classroom discussions, presentation and analysis of practical examples and case studies, and individual or group exercises.

In addition to classroom activities, students are expected to engage in independent study, which includes reading the assigned textbooks and selected scientific articles, preparing for class discussions, and reviewing lecture materials.

This teaching structure is designed to balance the transmission of core knowledge with the development of critical thinking and applied analysis skills, in line with the learning objectives of the course.

Assessment methods

Assessment is based on an individual oral exam, valid for both attending and non-attending students. The interview consists of three open-ended questions, each concerning the main topics of the course and the bibliography.

Assessment method and grading criteria:

- Each question contributes 33.3% to the final grade.
- Each answer is graded on a scale from 0 to 31 points:
  • 0 points: unanswered or irrelevant content.
  • 18 points: minimum pass, basic understanding.
  • 24 points: positive result, generally accurate with some gaps (average performance).
  • 27–29 points: good command of the subject and clarity of presentation.
  • 30 points: excellent performance.
  • 31 points: outstanding answer, equivalent to 30 with honors (cum laude).

The average score from the three questions is converted into a final grade on a scale of thirty.

Evaluation criteria:

1. Accuracy of content;
2. Logical organization of the answer;
3. Conceptual and verbal clarity;
4. Ability to synthesize;
5. Proper use of technical terminology;
6. Critical thinking skills.

Skills assessed according to the Dublin Descriptors:

- Dublin 1 (knowledge and understanding): mastery of key concepts and core notions;
- Dublin 2 (applying knowledge and understanding): linking theory to real-world social phenomena;
- Dublin 3 (making judgments): critical reflection on theoretical frameworks and criminal phenomena;
- Dublin 4 (communication skills): clear exposition, correct terminology, logical structure;
- Dublin 5 (learning skills): independent and deep understanding of the material.

In the overall assessment, the following approximate weights are assigned to the competencies:

- Accuracy of content (Dublin 1): 25%
- Application of knowledge (Dublin 2): 20%
- Critical thinking and independent judgment (Dublin 3): 20%
- Clarity and logical structure of exposition (Dublin 4): 20%
- Appropriate use of discipline-specific terminology (Dublin 4): 10%
- Learning autonomy and independent re-elaboration (Dublin 5): 5%

Self-assessment activities:
Throughout the course, in-class self-assessment activities will be proposed, including exercises and exam simulations with immediate feedback from the instructor.
These activities **will not contribute to the final grade**, but are intended to:

- support students in their independent study;
- clarify the expectations of the final exam;
- help identify any weaknesses in preparation.

Sample questions

1. How do classical and contemporary sociological theories interpret the rise of organized crime?
2. Discuss how structural inequality can facilitate the establishment of criminal organizations in urban or rural settings.
3. Compare the explanatory power of the rational choice theory versus cultural criminology in understanding organized crime.
4. Explain the operational differences between hierarchical and networked models of organized crime.
5. What are the socio-economic consequences of illicit financial flows on local communities?
6. Critically examine a real-world example of transnational organized crime and its interaction with global economic systems.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Given the international orientation of the discipline and the lack of Italian textbooks that cover all the course topics, the bibliography includes material in English. The course bibliography is provided to both attending and non-attending students in a file available on the instructor's webpage and includes readings from:
• Letizia Paoli (Ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2014.
• Alberto Aziani. *Illicit Financial Flows: An Innovative Approach to Estimation*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer. 2018.

• Andrew Silke (Ed.). *Routledge Handbook of Terrorism and Counterterrorism*. New York – Abingdon: Routledge. 2019.
• Scientific papers.

Sustainable Development Goals

PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS