UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Networks, Platforms and Social Capital

2526-1-F6303M001

Learning objectives

The course aims at providing students with theoretical and methodological tools to understand, analyse and work in an economic systems: company also with the organizational form of the platform and/or territory. Students will learn theoretical concepts to be applied to practical case studies.

The course is structured into three parts. The first part is aimed at analysing the concept of social capital and its relationship with social networks. Attention will be paid to the operationalisation of social networks and social capital. Basic measures of Social Network Analysis (SNA) will be introduced, and students will have the chance to discuss how to apply them to companies (ONA); students will be asked to use a software for social network analysis during lab activities.

In the second part of the course, students will learn ho to use the concept of Social Capital through the analysis of empirical researches. Particular attention will be paid to the current changes experienced by contemporary economic systems, focusing on the platform economy.

The third part is complementary to the prior ones and is aimed at providing students with the necessary skills to realise a case study research (which will contribute to the final evaluation).

Both the theoretical and the empirical parts consist of individual and team online assignments: lessons are dedicated to the introduction of the course, the explanation of theoretical aspects and methodological issues, and the presentation of the work to be done online.

The discussion of theoretical issues is further developed through the individual reading of scientific articles and chapters and the elaboration of Power Point slides. The explanation of methodology is preliminary to the empirical work students must carry out both in the field and online, through the development of essays, Power Point presentations, and Word papers.

The final presentation of case studies will be held in class if possibile.

Knowledge and Understanding
Students acquire an in-depth understanding of the concepts of networks and social capital as they relate to the development and functioning of organisations, and how these concepts are useful for analysing the organisational form of platforms.

Applying Knowledge and Understanding
In addition to the analysis of relevant literature, practical examples will be carried out to highlight the contribution of sociology to the study and observation of social networks, platforms, and social capital. Students are also required to work in groups on applied projects, such as the simulation of an organisational restructuring and the design of a research project. These projects include data collection and analysis, the development and administration of questionnaires or interview guides, and the subsequent interpretation of the results. The course fosters students' ability to design and carry out empirical research.

Judgement and Critical Thinking
Through the analysis and implementation of projects and case studies, students are encouraged to formulate critical judgements about organisations and their use of social resources. Classroom discussions and feedback from lecturers support the development of independent evaluative skills concerning the role of networks and social capital in organisational and economic settings.

Communication Skills
Students are required to present their group projects orally to peers and lecturers, developing clear, concise, and effective communication skills. Active participation and peer exchange are promoted during interactive lectures and case study discussions.

Learning Skills
The course includes self-directed activities such as individual readings, case study analysis, and the development of field projects. Students are encouraged to learn from feedback, teaching materials, and hands-on experience in workshop settings.

Contents

The module aims at analysing the different forms of social capital identified in literature and their application to empirical studies. Particular emphasis will be put on the analysis of organisational networks within companies also the ones using the platform organization and within socio-economic local systems. We will be discussing the following concepts: network, (digital) trust, reciprocity, (digital) reputation. Furthermore, we will see how these concepts can be useful to understand the functioning of companies and local socio-economic systems.

Detailed program

The course is ideally structured into three parts.

In the first part, the concepts of social networks and social capital will be explored through the study of the main theories associated with them. Special attention will be paid to the operationalization of social networks and their structure from a methodological perspective. Basic measures of network analysis (SNA) will then be introduced.

Subsequently, the importance of informal networks within the company and the relationship between formal structure and informal structure within the company will be highlighted. Students will engage with Organizational Network Analysis (ONA) and have the opportunity to work with network analysis software in the laboratory. They will also conduct a small case study in which they apply ONA.

In the third part of the course, greater attention will be given to platforms, including contributions from external platform creators.

Cutting across these themes, students, supported by the instructors, will carry out a group case study and will have the opportunity to acquire skills such as constructing an interview script and a questionnaire, conducting them, and subsequently analyzing the collected data.

Both the theoretical and empirical research part foresee synchronous and asynchronous work: in particular, the lectures are dedicated to the introduction of the course and its organization, the explanation of some theoretical elements , the methodology of the case study and the presentation of the work to be carried out online.

Prerequisites

Fairly good skills in learning, writing and speaking, together with a general knowledge about the economic processes.

Teaching methods

The course is based on different of teaching methods (also dependet on the Covid situation), namely classes, practices , team work. Lessons will be supported also by video projections on the topics of the course.
This course is provided in blended method.

Assessment methods

There are two assesment methods.

For those undertaking pathway 1, there are five assignments, one of which is not graded. Specifically, the assignments are as follows: 1. Organizational restructuring project (ONA); 2. Research subject (not graded), 3. Research design and interview and/or questionnaire script, 4. Slides, 5. Final report. All assignments are graded out of thirty. Additionally, two quizzes are scheduled to be completed during the course, on the dates specified in the platform. The quizzes are to be completed online, independently. The quizzes are graded out of thirty. The quizzes will account for 20% of the final grade, the organizational restructuring project for 20% of the final grade, and the case study for 55% of the final grade, divided as follows: 30% for research design and script, 10% for slides; 60% for the final report. Students who do not achieve a score of at least 18 in the evaluation tests will be required to retake the test. The test can be retaken a maximum of two times within the specified time limits.5% is related to the participation.

In the second case, for those who will not submit the deliveries, the exam will consist in an activity of company organization analysis through the Social Network Analysis technique to be delivered through the e-learning page of the course one day before the appeal in which you intend to carry out the quiz. The QUIZ on the entire program is composed by 60 closed questions and an open one. For more details on the realization of the company organization analysis , it is necessary to watch the videos created ad hoc and uploaded on the course page.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Andreotti, A., Benassi, D.A., Kazepov, Y. (a cura di). (2018). Western Capitalism in Transition. Global Processes, Local Challenges. Manchester . Introduction to the book
Rahman, K. S., & Thelen, K. (2019). The Rise of the Platform Business Model and the Transformation of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism. Politics & Society, 47(2), 177-204.
Scott, J. (1991 - ed. ita 1997) L'analisi delle reti sociali, La Nuova Italia Scientifica, Roma. Limitatamente ai: Cap. 1 (pp. 25-32); Cap. 2 (pp. 33-68); Cap. 4 (pp. 101-122); Cap. 5 (pp. 123-144).
Burt, R. (2005) "Brokerage and Closure", Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press. Da p. 1 a p. 38 inclusa.
Andreotti, A. (2009) Che cos'è il capitale sociale, Carocci, Roma. Limitatamente all'Introduzione e al Cap. 1.
Cross, R. L., Parise, S., Weiss L. M. (2006), "The role of networks in organizational change", in «The McKinsey Quarterly», n. 3, pp. 28-41.
Stark, D., Pais, I. (2021) "Algorithmic Management in the Platform Economy", in Economia & lavoro. Rivista di politica sindacale, sociologia e relazioni industriali, 3/2021, 57-80, doi: 10.7384/103627.

Testi per il percorso 2

Programma
Andreotti, A., Benassi, D.A., Kazepov, Y. (a cura di). (2018). Western Capitalism in Transition. Global Processes, Local Challenges. Manchester . Introduction to the book
Rahman, K. S., & Thelen, K. (2019). The Rise of the Platform Business Model and the Transformation of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism. Politics & Society, 47(2), 177-204.
Andreotti, A. (2009) Che cos'è il capitale sociale, Carocci, Roma. Limitatamente all'Introduzione e al Cap. 1.
Burt, R. (2005) "Brokerage and Closure", Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press. Da p. 1 a p. 38 inclusa.
Scott, J. (1991 - ed. ita 1997) L'analisi delle reti sociali, La Nuova Italia Scientifica, Roma. Limitatamente ai: Cap. 1 (pp. 25-32); Cap. 2 (pp. 33-68); Cap. 4 (pp. 101-122); Cap. 5 (pp. 123-144).
Ramella, F. (2013), "I piccoli mondi della creatività e dell'innovazione", in Sociologia dell'innovazione economica, Il Mulino, Bologna, pp. 119-150.
Cross, R. L., Parise, S., Weiss L. M. (2006), "The role of networks in organizational change", in «The McKinsey Quarterly», n. 3, pp. 28-41.
Stark, D., Pais, I. (2021) "Algorithmic Management in the Platform Economy", in Economia & lavoro. Rivista di politica sindacale, sociologia e relazioni industriali, 3/2021, 57-80, doi: 10.7384/103627.

Sustainable Development Goals

GENDER EQUALITY | INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES