UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Geography (blended)

2627-2-F0102R019

Course title

Geographies of the Sea. Places, Powers and Imaginaries.

Topics and course structure

‘The sea is ever-present in our lives and yet remains one of the least understood and most difficult spaces to depict’ (Casati, 2022). This blended learning course aims to develop students' knowledge and understanding of territorial practices applied to marine spaces. Starting from the sea, an essential element for life on the planet and at the same time one of the most complex spaces to interpret, some key concepts of contemporary geography will be addressed, such as space, place, territory, environment, landscape, heritage, gender, biodiversity, highlighting the intrinsically interdisciplinary nature of geography. In line with the spatial turn that has affected the social sciences and cultural studies, the course explores the sea as a social, cultural, and political construction, challenging its representation as a mere natural background. Through the analysis of case studies and diverse materials, students will be invited to reflect on the relations between human communities and marine environments, on the forms of orientation and disorientation that characterize the experience of the sea, on gender dimensions, and on the relations between the human and the non-human. Particular attention will be dedicated to marine biodiversity, ocean literacy, ocean citizenship, climate change, and the vulnerabilities of coastal and island communities, with specific reference to the Maldives. The sea will also be analyzed as a natural and cultural heritage, a space of imagination and memory, but also as a place crossed by conflicts and global governance practices

Objectives

In line with the educational objectives of the Degree Programme, the course aims primarily to introduce students to

the theoretical and methodological foundations of human geography, with particular reference to the geographies of the sea and the relationships between societies and marine environments.
The course provides students with the conceptual tools to analyse the socio-spatial, cultural and environmental processes affecting marine and coastal environments, recognising the role of imaginaries, heritage and cultural representations. It also aims to foster independent judgement and the ability to critically interpret the complexity of marine geographical processes by embracing different perspectives, overcoming stereotypes and assessing the consequences of human actions on marine ecosystems with a sense of environmental responsibility.
The course also seeks to strengthen students' communication skills by encouraging the clear presentation of ideas, knowledge and scientific arguments, integrating information from diverse and reliable sources. Finally, it aims to develop independent learning and research skills that will also be valuable in the preparation of the degree dissertation.

Methodologies

The course is taught in Italian in a blended-learning format, with 33 hours of in-person teaching, including lectures and seminars, and 23 hours of asynchronous online learning and interactive activities on the e-learning platform. Blended-learning activities will include guided readings and discussions of scientific articles, analysis of audiovisual and visual materials, and the progressive development of the final project.
The final project consists of a geographical analysis of a marine case study, developed through at least three of the perspectives addressed during the course and with reference to the proposed bibliography. It includes a short individual written paper (2–3 pages) and a final presentation and will form part of the discussion during the oral examination.

Online and offline teaching materials

Articles:

1. Steinberg, P., Peters, K. (2015), "Wet ontologies, fluid spaces: Giving depth to volume through oceanic thinking", Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 33(2), pp. 247–264
2. Peters, K. e Steinberg, P. (2019), “The ocean in excess: Towards a more-than-wet ontology”, Dialogues in Human Geography, 9(3), pp. 293–307.
3. Lobo, M. e Parsons, M. (2023), “Decolonizing ocean spaces: Saltwater co-belonging and responsibilities”, Progress in Environmental Geography, 2 (1–2), pp. 128–140.
4. Schmidt di Friedberg, M., Malatesta, S., & dell'Agnese, E. (2020), "Rischio, resilienza e sviluppo: il caso di due isole alle Maldive", Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana, 3(2), 11-23.
5. Schmidt di Friedberg, M. (2026), “Tentacoli. Geografie fluide tra umano e non umano”, Geotema, 79, pp. 34-40 or
6. Fantò, M., «L'invasione biologica del granchio blu e le politiche d'identità: una riflessione etnografica alle Isole Kerkennah, Tunisia», Geotema, 79, pp. 87-94
7. Farr, A. e Melo Zurita, M. de L. (2025), “‘Never turn your back on the Ocean’: Conversations with Fear on Yuin Sea Country”, Geoforum, 158, 104165.
8. Kim, Y. (2026), “From seascape to memoryscape: Tourism and the reframing of living heritage”, Tourism Geographies, 28(3), pp. 887–905.

Programme and references

Texts:
Casati, R. Oceano. Una navigazione filosofica. Turin: Einaudi, 2022.
Squarcina, E. Mare, terra e marinai. Una breve riflessione. Milan: Unicopli, 2026.
Articles:

1. Steinberg, P., Peters, K. (2015), "Wet ontologies, fluid spaces: Giving depth to volume through oceanic thinking", Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 33(2), pp. 247–264
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Additional readings and scientific articles will be communicated at the beginning of the course. Audiovisual materials and online resources will be made available through the University e-learning platform.
Attending students are required to participate in classroom and online activities, prepare a final PowerPoint presentation and write a short paper (2-3 pages) on a topic agreed with the lecturer within the field of the geographies of the sea.
Incoming Erasmus students may agree on an alternative bibliography in English with the lecturer and may also take the examination in English.

Assessment methods

For all students, the final exam will consist of an oral interview aimed at verifying the knowledge acquired through critical study of the texts included in the exam syllabus and the work carried out in class.
The choice of the oral interview as the examination method is consistent with the objectives of the course, as it allows, through a dialogic communicative situation, interaction with the student in order to assess their critical understanding of the course topics, their pedagogical analysis skills, and their ability to connect theory and practice.
There are two examination options:
For attending students, participation in synchronous and blended learning activities is required; in addition, the preparation and presentation of a PowerPoint and a short paper (2-3 pages)on the geography of the sea.
For non-attending students, the final exam consists of an oral interview.
The oral interview is intended to verify knowledge of the materials listed in the bibliography, in order to acquire competencies on the topics covered by the instructor through lectures and classroom discussions, which can also be consulted through the PDF lecture slides uploaded to the website.
The assessment will be graded on a scale out of thirty, according to the following evaluation criteria:
Failing grade (insufficient):
The student:
does not identify the characteristics of the concepts and is unable to formulate a coherent explanation;
is not able to apply the concepts to different territorial realities;
provides only a basic argument, and does not use disciplinary language correctly;
cannot imagine didactic applications of the concepts and struggles to connect different experiences in a coherent

framework.
18–24:
The student:
only partially identifies the characteristics of the concepts and sometimes cannot formulate a coherent explanation;
is only partially able to apply the concepts to different territorial realities;
develops an imprecise argument, and does not always use disciplinary language correctly;
applies the concepts to didactic activities imprecisely, and has some difficulties connecting different experiences in a coherent framework.
25–30:
The student:

identifies the characteristics of the concepts and is able to formulate a coherent explanation;
is able to apply the concepts to different territorial realities;
develops precise arguments, and uses disciplinary language correctly;
is able to apply the concepts to didactic activities and connects different experiences in a coherent framework.
Incoming Erasmus students will be provided with alternative reading material in English (or another language) and will have the opportunity to take the exam in a language other than Italian.
Students with specific learning disabilities (DSA) who wish to make use of compensatory tools are kindly requested to send their P.Uo.I. at least ten days before the exam.

Office hours

From Monday to Friday, by appointment by e-mail

marcella.schmidt@unimib.it

Programme validity

Programs are valid two academic years

Course tutors and assistants

Tutor: Giulia Demara
Assistent: Massimiliano Fantò

Sustainable Development Goals

GENDER EQUALITY | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | CLIMATE ACTION | LIFE BELOW WATER | PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS