UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Change and Innovation in Complex Organizational Systems

2627-2-F9202P035

Learning objectives

The course focuses on the analysis of change and innovation processes in complex organisational systems within the public sector — in particular, justice, healthcare, and higher education — through a comparative and multidimensional approach.

- ***Knowledge and understanding***: acquisition of theoretical and conceptual knowledge of the main approaches to the study of public organisational systems, with particular attention to structural, behavioural, and systemic features.
- ***Applying knowledge and understanding***: application of acquired knowledge to the empirical analysis of institutional and organisational innovation in the three sectors, with emphasis on internal functioning, interdependencies between levels and actors, and overall system governance.
- ***Making judgements***: critical assessment of change and innovation processes in the public sector, considering their institutional, social, economic, and political implications.
- ***Communication skills***: clear and coherent presentation of analyses and arguments, including in collective discussion contexts, using appropriate disciplinary language and comparative frameworks.
- ***Learning skills***: strengthening of autonomous learning through critical reading of academic texts, comparative case study analysis, and independent reflection on the topics addressed.

Contents

The central theme of the course is the analysis of change and innovation processes within complex organisational systems in the public sector, with particular focus on three areas: justice, healthcare, and higher education.

The course is structured as a comparative pathway, which will explore in depth the following dimensions:

- the structural features and interdependencies among organizational units;
- behavioural characteristics;
- the actors' room for maneuver at various levels
- the central-peripheral relationship;
- interaction with other actors in the legal-organisational field;
- the overall governance of the system;
- the social, economic, and political implications connected to the change and innovation in the various branches of public administration.

Detailed program

This course aims to provide students with the theoretical and methodological tools necessary to understand the logic behind the functioning of complex organisational systems in the public sector, particularly focusing on three areas: justice, healthcare, and higher education. It also encourages students to critically examine the processes of change and innovation within these sectors. The course is based on the understanding that comprehending the "public machinery" and its relationships with the business world and the third sector is a crucial skill for future experts in reliability, risk, and compliance in organisations, regardless of their field of employment. Public administration, in its various articulations, indeed plays a pivotal role in the legal-organisational field. Furthermore, its functioning and performance have a direct and clear impact on both the life and well-being of individuals and the socio-economic development of various territories. Beyond theoretically and empirically framing these topics, the course also aims to enable students to conduct their own organisational analysis in the public sector. To this end, thematic focuses and group projects will be carried out, incorporating organisational research methodologies and techniques such as document analysis, questionnaires, interviews, and non-participant observation.

Prerequisites

Basic knowledge of logic and general knowledge are sufficient.

Teaching methods

The course is delivered in Italian and includes lectures, case analyses, guest talks, and group work. The teaching approach is interactive: key concepts are presented alongside the examination of case studies, group assignments, and the practical application of organisational research methods. Contributions from experts and practitioners will also be included.
Specifically, the course will feature:

- 9 lectures, each three hours of expository teaching (DE) (47%);
- 10 lectures, each three hours of interactive teaching (DI) (53%).

All sessions (both expository and interactive teaching) are conducted exclusively in-person.

Assessment methods

No interim assessments are scheduled. Both attending and non-attending students will be assessed through an individual oral examination, based on the core textbook and supplementary materials such as slides, articles, and case studies.
The assessment pursues two interconnected objectives: on the one hand, to verify students' knowledge of the course content; on the other, to evaluate their ability to reflect autonomously and critically on the main thematic issues addressed during the course.
The evaluation criteria for the oral exam, which apply to all students, are as follows:

1. completeness of the presentation;
2. accuracy of language and appropriate use of terminology;
3. clarity and logical coherence in the organisation of content;
4. ability to establish connections between different topics;
5. ability to apply theoretical and methodological tools to the analysis of case studies and to the design of empirical research projects on complex organisational systems.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

The required textbook for all students, both attending and non-attending, is:

Dallara C., Verzelloni L. (2025), *Il sistema giustizia. Innovazione, complessità e tensioni con la politica*, Mondadori: Milan.

A set of supplementary materials, including slides and/or selected in-depth articles, will also be made available on the e-learning platform. These materials are an integral part of the syllabus for all students, both attending and non-attending.

Erasmus students who do not understand Italian may agree with the professor on an ad hoc syllabus in one of the following languages: English, Spanish, or Portuguese.

Sustainable Development Goals

PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS