UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Human Geography of Small Island Systems

2627-1-F7504Q010

Aims

Mainly referring to the general framework of the Island Studies, the course aims to provide a set of tools useful to the analysis of socio-spatial dynamics within island systems. Furthermore the course aims to provide tools and interpretative models useful to understand how, at local scale, human communities (privately, socially and politically) cope with socio-environmental changes, crises, conflicts and transitions by producing a set of resilient practices, knowledge and adjustments
In details the course will act on the following skills:

- **Knowledge and understanding skills**: Participants will gain knowledge on the geographical patters of small islands as places and on specific topics relate to human-environmental interaction in small places
- **Ability to apply knowledge and understanding**: Participants will be able to apply the acquired knowledge to case studies in the fields of human geography and island studies. Participants will be able to apply trans-scalar approaches to the understanding of human geography
- **Independent judgment skills**: Participants will be able to independently identify relevant issues and the most effective methodologies for studying and discussing human-environmental interaction in small places
- **Communication skills**: Participants will be able to express themselves clearly and in a scientifically accurate manner on topics related to human geography and island studies
- **Learning skills**: Participants will be able to independently deepen their understanding of topics related to human geography by developing cross-disciplinary links and connections. Participants will be able to frame contents and information into specific geographical context

Contents

Geography of Archipelagos and Island States; Human Geography of Islands; Human Ecology of Island Systems; Environmental and Climate Change challenges in Small Island States; Trans-scalar Spatial Analysis of Island Systems; Environmental Policies of Small Island States; Islands as Ecotones, Archipelago and Aquapelagos.

Detailed program

The course will be structured in two parts:

I. The first part of the course will be dedicated to the study of the human geography of islands and archipelagic states. Students will apply, even by adopting a critical perspective, a set of patterns and paradigms (such as isolation, vulnerability, distribution, concentration, center-periphery relationship and spatial dispersion), in order to understand the role of spatial features in shaping socio-environmental processes. Furthermore reading these socioenvironmental processes by adopting a trans-scalar perspective helps students and researchers to stress the complexity of the human ecology of islands, coastal areas and archipelagic systems.

II. The second part of the course will be dedicated to the understanting of Climate Change related challenges on small islands. In particular lectures will adress the reading, at different scales, of the set of social, political and spatial measures and adjustments that human communities adopt to deal with the environmental challenges affecting island systems.

- SIS and International Chessboard
- SIS and Env Protection
- Italian Small island Geographies·
- Mediterranean, Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific Small island geographies
- Island temporalities
- Small islands: and climate change
- SIS and Adaptation

Prerequisites

NONE

Teaching form

Classes will be provided by lessons, discussions of scientific papers, analysis of national and international reports, and reading of environmental assessments.
Students will be asked to work directly on a set of case studies, focusing on the geographical relevance of the environmental changes affecting small island systems in local, regional and supra-regional contexts. The human geography of the global insular regions (e.g the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean Sea…) will represent a reference for the understating of the interactions among human and environmental systems in small island states and archipelagos.

Oral classes + slides (weekly uploaded on moodle)

Teaching will be organized as follow:

- 8 two-hours lectures, in person, Delivered Didactics
- 3 two-hours lectures, in person, interactive teaching
- 4 two-hours lectures, online, interactive teaching
- 6 two-hours lecture, online, Delivered Didactics

Readings, paper discussions and question time sessions will be included.
Lectures will be recorded, students may request to view them.
Teacher and students will focus on the development of a set of scientific and soft skills and knowledge (see assessment method):
work on scientific literature, oral presentation, preparation of a presentation, reading, teamwork skills, deal with research question, literature review, knowledge of topics and models provided during the lessons, transcarlar thinking

Textbook and teaching resource

A selection (to be defined by October 2026) of papers from:
Island Studies Journal (https://islandstudiesjournal.org/)
Shima (https://www.shimajournal.org/index.php)
And lectures slides on moodle

Semester

Second Semester

Assessment method

ORAL EXAM.

Assessment is based on three assignment:

- Chapter presentation (oral) (to assess: work on scientific literature, oral presentation, preparation of a presentation, reading)
- Teamwork activity (to assess: work on scientific literature, teamwork skills, deal with the research question, literature review)
- Interview on an essay written by students (to assess: scientific writing, literature review, knowledge of topics and models provided during the lessons, transcalar thinking)

The average of the marks obtained in the three tasks
Please note: students are asked to work on paper, case studies and other documents according to the guidelines provided.

Assessment levels
Not sufficient:
The student:
• does not identify the characteristics of the concepts and is unable to formulate a coherent explanation;
• is unable to apply the concepts to different geographical areas;
. develops a basic argument and does not use the language of the discipline correctly;
• is unable to imagine applications of the concepts and has difficulty in linking different experiences into a coherent framework.
18-24:
The student:

• only partially identifies the characteristics of concepts and is sometimes unable to formulate a coherent explanation;
• is only partially able to apply concepts to different geographical areas;
develops an imprecise argument, does not always use the geographical lexicon correctly;
• applies concepts to teaching activities imprecisely and has some difficulty in linking different experiences within a coherent framework.
25-30
The student
• identifies the characteristics of concepts and is able to formulate a coherent explanation;
• is able to apply concepts to different geographical contexts;
• is able to develop precise arguments and uses the geographical language correctly;
• knows how to apply concepts to teaching activities and connects different experiences within a coherent framework.

Office hours

To be scheduled with the teacher: stefano.malatesta@unimib.it

Sustainable Development Goals

REDUCED INEQUALITIES | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES | RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION | CLIMATE ACTION | LIFE BELOW WATER | LIFE ON LAND