UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Third Sector Cultures and Practices

2627-2-E3902N021

Learning objectives

Knowledge and Understanding
The Third Sector is a world of organizations and practitioners shaped by specific cultures that are, at the same time, subject to change over the course of their development and in relation to the conditions of the welfare system in which they operate.
Examining the cultures from which these organizations draw and how they vary over time and space are therefore essential to understanding the Third Sector. At the same time, these cultures are shaped and developed around work and organizational practices, with which they maintain a circular relationship of mutual influence.
The course aims to introduce students to the key frameworks for interpreting and analyzing Third Sector organizations, examining the interdependence between cultures and organizational and operational practices, their connections to the cultural, social, economic, and political environment in which they operate, and how this relationship varies over time and across different contexts.
The course will therefore focus on the rationales for action of third-sector actors and the public, civil society, and private-sector actors with whom they interact within the local welfare contexts in which they operate.
Special attention will be given to the role and working dynamics of social workers within the most common third-sector organizations.

Ability to apply knowledge and understanding
Identifying the analytical elements presented in cases of actions, interventions, projects, and programs of and with third sector actors.
Understanding dilemmas, tensions, conflicts, and compromises that arise at different levels of organizational work: management, planning, operations, and volunteers.

Autonomy of judgment
The course aims to develop the ability to critically interpret ideas, actions, and projects adopted and organized by actors in the Third Sector, in light of the analytical categories presented in the course.

Communication skills
Students will be given the opportunity to practice, compare, and learn various forms of knowledge communication.

Different forms of communication will therefore be used: digital presentations, discursive presentations, argumentative, dialogic, and deliberative debate, adapting language to different interlocutors and professional contexts, including from a multidisciplinary perspective.
Learning skills

Learning skills
The course aims to promote learning skills through the study of scientific literature, through the independent analysis
of cases and documents produced by actors, through the use of data in publicly accessible archives and repositories,
and through qualitative research techniques such as interviews and ethnographic observation.

Contents

- Humanitarian and solidarity organisations in the pre-modern period

- Early forms of interaction with public intervention by states

- Mutual and cooperative experiences

- Mobilisations and movements for social rights

- The first forms of public welfare state

- The welfare state in the 20th century

- Associations during the 'glorious thirty years' period

- The movements of the 1970s and 1980s

- The emergence of new Third Sector actors

- The forms of institutionalisation of the Third Sector

- Professionalisation

- Mutual accommodation

- Economic crises and the responses of organisations

- Forms of social innovation

- Hybrid development paths

- The corporatisation of the third sector

- Social impact

- The reform of the Third Sector

- The new role of philanthropy

- New forms of advocacy

- The new mutualism

- Organisational cultures

- Scene styles

- Social cooperatives

- Voluntary organisations

- Foundations

- Philanthropy

- Systemic constraints

- Organisational dilemmas

- Social work and its tensions

- Human resource management

- Hybridizations and contaminations

Detailed program

The course will first present the approaches to the topic and the teaching method adopted in the course.

It will then present the historical steps of development of non-profit organisations and social enterprises, highlighting the constants, changes and national and territorial specificities.

The course will focus in particular on the systemic transformations that have taken place over the last decade and the different ways in which the non-profit actors are responding to them: social innovation, hybridisation with other territorial institutions and with the profit actors, the new mutualism and the emerging experiences of advocacy coalitions, the reform of the Third Sector and the new Third Sector and Social Enterprise Code, the new forms of co-planning and co-programming, the role of philanthropy, with particular reference to banking foundations.

The course will then focus on the internal dynamics experienced by third sector organisations, with particular reference to the dynamics of entrepreneurial development, emerging organisational cultures, the effects on workers and volunteers, organisational forms, relations with users and citizenship, and the impacts on the organisations' founding missions.

Prerequisites

Post-secondary education skills in logic, general culture, learning, writing and oral communication

Teaching methods

Lessons are planned to be 50% lecture-based and 50% interactive teaching, through group work, analysis of written and audiovisual documents, testimonies of practitioners and observers in the sector and field visits.

No more than 20% of lessons may be delivered remotely.

Classes will be held in Italian.

Assessment methods

The examination will take place in with two possible modes:

- In oral form, through an interview with questions related to the readings that will be offered at each lecture and that will be indicated on the course e-learning platform. The oral interview aims to verify the specific content of the readings, the ability to connect them to each other and to real-life examples, and their relevance to the thesis.
  For the final assessment, consideration will be given to the mastery of the topics covered in the readings and the authors' arguments, the connection with examples from the course and the realities of the Third Sector, and the clarity of the answers
- As a supplement to the oral exam, students may complete one or more short case study analyses according to the instructions that will be provided on the course's e-learning platform. Those who will take advantage of this supplement have to participate to 3/4 of the course and can benefit from a discount on the compulsory readings

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Draft texts. The final version will be provided at the beginning of the course.

Silvano Giovanni (a cura di) (2011) *Origini e sviluppi del Terzo settore italiano*, in Silvano Giovanni, *Società e Terzo settore: la via italiana*. Il Mulino, pp. 13-78.

Marcon Giulio (2004) *Le utopie del ben fare: percorsi della solidarietà: dal mutualismo al terzo settore, ai movimenti*. L'ancora del Mediterraneo, pp.159-207

Evers Adalbert; Laville Jean-Louis (2004)* Defining the third sector in Europe* in *The third sector in Europe* Edward Elgar, pp.11-42.

Moro Giovanni (2014), *Contro il non profit* (cap.2,3,4) Laterza, pp.16-67

De Leonardis Ota (1996) *I welfare mix. Privatismo e sfera pubblica* in Stato e mercato, 46 (1), pp. 51-75.

Busso Sandro (2017) *Quarant'anni (e due crisi) dopo. L'equilibrio fragile tra ruolo economico e politico del Terzo settore*, in Autonomie locali e servizi sociali, Quadrimestrale di studi e ricerche sul welfare 3, pp. 483-502

Polizzi Emanuele (2020) *Cortili, Piazze, Mercati. I tre luoghi del Terzo settore* in Bolognini S. (a cura di) *Prospettiva ponte e Genius loci. Materiali per una ricerca*, Mimesis, pp.717-726.

Istat (2025). *Struttura e profili del settore non profit.* Sintesi del rapporto del Terzo Censimento permanente delle

istituzioni non profit, Struttura e profili del settore non profit.

Citroni Sebastiano (2025) *Il terzo settore italiano tra espansione e contrazione. Leggibilità, problemi e prospettive*, in I Quaderni
Quadrimestrale n. 96–97 dicembre 2024

de Leonardis O., Vitale T., (2001), “Forme organizzative del terzo settore e qualità sociale”, in M. La Rosa (a cura di), Le organizzazioni nel nuovo Welfare: l’approccio sociologico. Pubblico, privato sociale, cooperazione e non profit, Maggioli, Rimini, pp. 113-130.

Fazzi Luca, (2016) *Le caratteristiche degli assistenti sociali nel terzo settore; Le competenze professionali,* in *Il servizio sociale nel terzo settore*, Maggioli, Rimini.

Fazzi Luca, (2019) *Struttura e modelli organizzativi per l’innovazione; Leadership e potere; Le risorse* in *Costruire l’innovazione nelle imprese sociali e nel terzo settore*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.

Sustainable Development Goals

DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS