UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Tourism and Local Development

2627-1-F4902N011

Learning objectives

The course "Tourism and Local Development" aims to provide students with a critical and interdisciplinary understanding of the role that tourism can play in local development processes. By exploring the interrelations between economy, society, culture, and the environment, students will be encouraged to view tourism not only as an economic sector but also as a social and cultural phenomenon with the potential to shape and transform local areas.
Special emphasis will be placed on understanding how tourism interacts with local resources—natural, cultural, and human—and how these can be enhanced through strategies that promote sustainability and inclusive growth. The course also seeks to strengthen students' project design and planning skills, offering theoretical frameworks and practical tools to support the development of responsible tourism initiatives rooted in community participation and integrated governance.
Throughout the course, students will analyze real-world case studies and local tourism policies in order to develop a critical awareness of the impacts tourism can have, both positive and negative, particularly in relation to territorial transformation, social inclusion, and urban and rural regeneration. The course will adopt a multidisciplinary teaching approach, drawing on perspectives from sociology, economics, geography, and territorial sciences, in order to equip students with the analytical tools needed to understand the complexity of tourism in relation to local development dynamics.The course aims to provide theoretical-conceptual and design tools to understand and analyze the complex relationship between tourism and local development.
Specifically, students will acquire the following competences.

1. Students will acquire theoretical and conceptual knowledge about the relationship between tourism and local development.
2. Students will be able to apply theoretical tools to the analysis of case studies.
3. Students will be encouraged to develop a critical perspective on local tourism phenomena.
4. Communication skills will be enhanced through oral presentations and written reports.
5. The course promotes an active learning approach through group work, discussions, and in-depth studies.

Contents

The course offers a critical and in-depth exploration of the relationship between tourism and local development, combining theoretical frameworks with the analysis of diverse real-world contexts. In the initial phase, key concepts such as tourism, development, and territory will be introduced and discussed. Subsequently, attention will be given to how tourism can act as a catalyst for reinforcing local identity, enhancing endogenous resources, and stimulating socio-economic innovation.
By examining a range of national and international case studies, the course will cover various territorial settings—from urban tourism to rural communities, from neighborhoods in large metropolitan cities to inner and peripheral areas. A specific focus will be placed on the role of cultural institutions—such as museums, ecomuseums, and territorial interpretation centers—in designing community-based tourism initiatives that aim to foster sustainable local development.
Another core component of the course will address the growing influence of environmental challenges, particularly climate change, on tourism planning and the adaptive capacities of territories facing global uncertainties. The adopted approach will encourage critical reflection on the transformative power of tourism while also considering the structural barriers that hinder effective local development. These include environmental vulnerabilities, excessive human pressure on ecosystems, the economic unsustainability of mainstream tourism models, as well as social inequalities and the exclusion of local communities from strategic decision-making processes.

Detailed program

The course is organized in three parts. The first part deals with issues relating to local turn in tourism and the controversial relationship between tourism and the local community. The second one deals with issues relating to the role of museums and ecomuseums in guiding tourism in the direction of sustainability and local development. In the third, and last part, issues related to tourism and resilience are tackled.

First part
The issues addressed in the first part of the course concern: what is the meaning of local development, what is the role of the local community in the local development strategies. How and why tourism can be an instrument of local development. How local community can react to the tourism development strategies in different contexts: for example in a large city like Chicago, in peripheral areas or in low-income countries.

Second part
The issues addressed are about the relationship between museums, ecomuseums and tourism development. Specifically, it discusses how these institutions can become a vehicle for activating local development processes and forms of sustainability.

Third part
The last part of the course aims to present best practices in which tourism is an activator of resilence processes. .

Prerequisites

No specific requirements, but an adequate knowledge of English

Teaching methods

Lessons will be held in person and will provide guidance on both theoretical and practical issues.
In-depth seminars with experts will be organized.
Furthermore, discussion sessions and group exercises will be proposed with the aim of making the concepts covered more understandable and promoting social interaction and horizontal learning.
Specifically, the following are planned:
15 lectures of 2 hours each, delivered in person in a traditional lecture format; (30 hours)
3 sessions of 2 hours each, during which students' level of learning will be assessed (assignments); (6 hours)
2 seminar activities with experts, each lasting 4 hours, held in an interactive in-person format; (8 hours)
3 workshop activities of 2 hours each, aimed at discussing the content of assigned readings, in an interactive in-person format (6 hours);
3 sessions of 2 hours each, dedicated to the development of a final paper (6 hours).
The course will be taught in English; therefore, particular care and attention will be dedicated to ensuring comprehension of the content, with a focus on key concepts.

Assessment methods

Assessment is based on an individual oral examination to verify knowledge of the course content, the reference texts, and the teaching materials provided by the instructor.
Students who attend classes regularly are encouraged to take part in interim assessments and to produce a final paper.
The final paper may consist of a short essay, a case study analysis, or a project work.
It will be presented during the final weeks of the course and constitutes an integral part of the overall assessment.
In general, for all students, the evaluation takes into account: knowledge of the course topics (and the related bibliography), appropriate use of academic language, and critical-interpretative skills.
he evaluation criteria, both for the mid-term assessments and for the final presentation, will be as follows:

- Attendace/Participation
- theoretical knowledge
- Ability to construct critical arguments
- Relevance and clarity of presentation
- Overall quality of the final work

Textbooks and Reading Materials

1. Borrelli, Dal Santo, Davis, 2023, Ecomuseums and Climate change, Ledizioni (opensource) (Introduction, chapters. 3; 10;12;14))
2. Higgins-Desbiolles, F., & Bigby, B. C. (Eds.). (2022). The Local Turn in Tourism: Empowering Communities (Vol. 95). Channel View Publications. (Introduction; chapter 1; 4;12;14)

Other Readings
Borrelli, N., & Adams, K. M. (2018). Analysing Pilsen Mexican Neighbourhood in Chicago through the lens of competitiveness and social cohesion. In Moving Cities–Contested Views on Urban Life (pp. 133-151). Springer VS, Wiesbaden.
Borrelli, N., & Kalayil, A. L. (2011). Tourism and planning in Chicago. The experience of Devon Avenue. Tourism Planning & Development, 8(4), 345-357.
Brown K (2019) Museums and Local Development: An Introduction to Museums, Sustainability and Well-being, Museum International, 71:3-4, 1-13,
Borrelli, N., & Davis, P. (2013). Developing capacity building: Reflections on Chicago's field museum USA. Museum Management and Curatorship, 28(5), 455–466. (Tourism and Museums)

The list, presented above, may be change.

Sustainable Development Goals

REDUCED INEQUALITIES | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES | CLIMATE ACTION