UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

# COURSE SYLLABUS

# Impact Evaluation of Social Innovation

**2627-1-F8804N007**

## Learning objectives

*Knowledge and Understanding*
The course aims to provide students with an introduction to the logics and tools for evaluating social innovation, with particular focus on programs, policies, and interventions operating in this field.
The goal is to introduce different forms of causal inference underlying impact evaluation, along with an overview of the related techniques.

*Applying Knowledge and Understanding*
The course seeks to develop participants' ability to design and implement controlled experiments and case studies, and, where possible, to integrate the two approaches.

*Independent Judgment*
By focusing on two very different yet unexpectedly convergent evaluation tools—controlled experimentation and case study—the course aims to foster critical thinking in the application of the various approaches underlying these techniques.

*Communication Skills*
A key objective of the course is to enable students to write a case study protocol as well as design and report on a controlled experiment.

*Learning Skills*
The limitations posed by these two tools, along with the evident need to combine them with other techniques, lead students to identify innovative solutions to research problems.

## Contents

Knowledge of impact evaluation and skills in designing and using the tools of randomized controlled trial and case

study, two important techniques with potential and limitations when facing causal inference for evaluation purposes.

## Detailed program

Introduction to impact evaluation and its relationship with causal inference.
Overview of evaluative approaches to social innovation and related techniques.
Focus on key characteristics of randomized controlled trials and case studies.
Reasons for recalling each of the two techniques in the evaluation field.
Designs of randomized controlled trials and case studies.
How to present evaluative results.
Examples of randomized controlled trials and case studies in various application areas, with a focus on the evaluative one.
Potential and limitations of the two techniques and opportunities provided by their integration.

## Prerequisites

Basic knowledge of quantitative and qualitative research tecniques and on the mixed methods approach.

## Teaching methods

Theoretical lectures
Lectures on empirical examples of randomized controlled trials and case studies applied with different research aims, particularly in evaluation processes.
Hands on experience in designing a controlled experiment and a case study, for evaluation purposes.
The course consists of 56 hours, approximately 65% of which is dedicated to expository teaching (lectures using slides, audio, and video) and 35% to interactive teaching (exercises, subgroup work, presentation of empirical cases discussed during the course).
Lectures will be held in Italian, in person, and will not be recorded. Occasional sessions may be delivered online, with prior notice from the instructor.
All slides and materials used in class will be made available on the e-learning platform. Students are strongly encouraged to review them and integrate them into their study of the reference texts.

## Assessment methods

In the oral exam, in addition to the usual questions about the texts' content, students will be asked to:

- critically discuss one of the randomized controlled trials analyzed during the course;
- present a design for a randomized controlled trial and/or a case study aimed to evaluate a social innovation process.
  Students may also participate to the design and implementation of a collective randomized controlled trial.

## Textbooks and Reading Materials

Sena B. (2021) Il case study nella ricerca sociale, Roma: Carocci.
Argentin G. (2026) Che effetto fa? I field experiment nelle scienze sociali, Bologna: Il Mulino OR Torgerson, D. J. & Torgerson, C. J. (2023) Designing Randomised Trials in Health, Education and the Social Sciences An Introduction, London: Palgrave Macmillan

van der Have, R. P. & Rubalcaba, L. (2016) "Social innovation research: An emerging area of innovation studies?" in Research Policy, Volume 45, Issue 9, Pages 1923-1935, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2016.06.010.
Goldthorpe J. H. (2006) Sulla Sociologia, Bologna: Il Mulino, chapter 7 “Causazione, statistica e sociologia”.
Lumino, R. (2018) “La valutazione delle politiche pubbliche: il contributo informativo degli approcci orientati alla teoria” in SINAPPSI - Connessioni tra ricerca e politiche pubbliche, vol. 1 scaricabile al link https://oa.inapp.org/xmlui/handle/20.500.12916/208
Peyton D. J e Scicchitano M. (2017) “Devil is in the details: Using logic models to investigate program process” in Evaluation and Program Planning, vol. 65 available at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2017.08.012
Weiss, C. H. (2007), “La valutazione basata sulla teoria” in Stame N. (a cura di) Classici della Valutazione, Milano: Franco Angeli.
Argentin G. (2017) chapter 15 “Inferenza causale e approccio controfattuale” in Barbera F. e Pais I. (editors) Fondamenti di Sociologia Economica, Milano: Egea.

Additional readings on empirical cases will be distributed during the course.

## Sustainable Development Goals

REDUCED INEQUALITIES