UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Building Urban Security: Actors, Practices and Conflicts

2627-1-F8804N033

Learning objectives

The course deals with the topic of security, focusing on cities and urban areas, and analyzes security not merely as a response to crime, but as a social, political, and institutional construct that takes shape in the spaces of everyday life.
The course aims to provide students with theoretical and methodological tools to understand how urban security is defined, represented, negotiated, and governed by a variety of actors: local governments, law enforcement agencies, residents, neighborhood committees, social and health care providers, the media, and private security operators.
Particular attention will be given to the relationship between security, public space, urban inequalities, social marginalization, territorial conflicts, perceptions of insecurity, and local policies. The course will analyze the tensions between control and inclusion, prevention and repression, public decorum and the right to the city, protection and stigmatization, demonstrating how urban security policies can produce both protection and cohesion, as well as exclusion and conflict.
Learning Objectives Aligned with the Dublin Descriptors

1. Knowledge and Comprehension
   Students will acquire theoretical and conceptual knowledge of urban security, understood as a social, political, and institutional construct. They will be able to understand the relationship between security, crime, perceptions of insecurity, public space, inequalities, marginalization, and urban conflicts.
2. Applied knowledge and comprehension
   Students will be able to apply the knowledge they have acquired to the analysis of policies, practices, and concrete cases of urban security. They will be able to use data, indicators, empirical sources, policy documents, and media materials to interpret phenomena of insecurity, control, prevention, and inclusion in urban contexts.
3. Independent judgment
   The course will develop students' ability to critically evaluate urban security policies, distinguishing between empirical data, social perceptions, and media representations. Students will be able to form independent judgments on the social effects of policies related to control, public decency, prevention, and the governance of public space.

4. Communication Skills
   Students will be able to clearly and coherently communicate concepts, analyses, and findings related to urban security. They will be able to present and discuss case studies, local policies, and urban conflicts using appropriate sociological language.
5. Learning Skills
   Students will develop theoretical and methodological tools useful for independently deepening their study of urban security. They will be able to navigate the literature, select relevant sources, and construct critical analyses of phenomena, policies, and transformations in the contemporary city.

Contents

The course focuses on urban security as a multidimensional field in which crime, social perceptions, the quality of public space, local policies, and intergroup conflicts are intertwined. The following topics will be covered: the city as a space of contemporary insecurity; urban security, fear, and perceptions of insecurity; public space, public order, and urban conflicts; actors in urban security; local security policies; the construction of urban anxiety; and technologies and surveillance.

Detailed program

The course focuses on urban security as a multidimensional field in which crime, social perceptions, the quality of public space, local policies, and intergroup conflicts are intertwined.
Module 1 — The City as a Space of Contemporary Insecurity
The first module introduces the topic of urban security, situating it within the context of the transformations of contemporary cities.
Security will be considered as an issue that concerns not only crime but also the quality of urban coexistence, the livability of neighborhoods, trust in institutions, the availability of services, conflict management, and the perception of protection or neglect.
Module 2 — Urban Security, Fear, and the Perception of Insecurity
The second module explores the relationship between objective security and perceived security. The social dimensions of urban fear will be analyzed, demonstrating how insecurity does not necessarily correlate with crime trends but is influenced by conditions of vulnerability, isolation, perceived urban decay, institutional distrust, demographic shifts, and media representations. Concepts such as fear of crime, urban disorder, incivility, social vulnerability, territorial stigmatization, and social alarm will be discussed.
Module 3 — Public Space, Decorum, and Urban Conflicts
The third module focuses on public space as a site of encounter, conflict, and social regulation. It will analyze the tensions between different uses of the city: residents and city users, young people and the elderly, merchants and residents, tourists and local populations, marginalized groups and institutions.
Particular attention will be given to conflicts related to nightlife, the presence of migrants, urban decorum, and local ordinances. The module will critically discuss the risk that the language of security transforms social problems into public order issues.
Module 4 — Actors in Urban Security
The fourth module analyzes the actors involved in shaping urban security. Alongside the police, prefectures, municipalities, and regions, organized citizens and neighborhood committees will also be considered. The module will demonstrate how urban security is increasingly the result of multi-actor and multi-level governance, in which control, prevention, care, mediation, and participation combine in often ambivalent ways.
Module 5 — Local Security Policies: Prevention, Control, Inclusion
The fifth module presents the main strategies for addressing urban security. It will analyze security pacts, mayoral ordinances, local police, territorial control, public lighting, video surveillance, urban renewal, and social, educational, and community-based prevention. The module will compare repressive, situational, social, and

integrated approaches, highlighting the strengths, limitations, and social consequences of the various policies. Attention will be given to the relationship between urban security and local welfare, demonstrating how many forms of insecurity have social, housing-related, economic, and relational roots.
Module 6 — Marginalization, Inequalities, and Urban Criminalization
The sixth module addresses the relationship between urban security and inequalities. It will analyze the ways in which certain populations and territories are constructed as security problems: young people, migrants, homeless people, the urban poor, minorities, sex workers, squatters, and residents of the suburbs. The module will discuss the processes of territorial stigmatization, the criminalization of poverty, and the selective management of urban space, demonstrating how security policies can sometimes displace, conceal, or repress social problems without addressing their root causes.
Module 7 — Media, Communication, and the Construction of Urban Alarm
The seventh module analyzes the role of the media in the construction of urban insecurity. It will discuss the processes of news selection, risk amplification, moral panic, the representation of urban decay, and the symbolic construction of neighborhoods, groups, and behaviors as threatening.
Module 8 — Technologies, Surveillance, and Digital Urban Security
The eighth module addresses the technological transformations of urban security. It will analyze video surveillance, smart cities, sensors, digital platforms, predictive systems, algorithmic control, urban data management, and applications for citizens to report problems. The module will discuss the ambivalence of digital security: on the one hand, new possibilities for prevention, coordination, and urban management; on the other, risks of surveillance, discrimination, opaque decision-making, profiling, and the technological oversimplification of complex social problems.

Prerequisites

None

Teaching methods

The course consists of 56 hours, of which approximately 50% will be dedicated to traditional teaching (lectures using slides, audio, and video) and 50% to interactive learning (exercises, small-group work, and the presentation of case studies that will serve as the basis for individual and group assignments, which will be prepared and discussed during the course). For working students and those who are unable to attend in-person classes, dedicated review sessions will be held to summarize the course’s key topics.

Assessment methods

Assessment may include:
• an oral exam on the course texts and topics;
• a written assignment, either individual or in groups.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Required Reading (At the beginning of the course, the professor will indicate the selected chapters from each text)

1. David Garland, La cultura del controllo. Crimine e ordine sociale nel mondo contemporaneo, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 2004.
2. Robert Castel, L’insicurezza sociale. Che significa essere protetti? Einaudi, 2004.
3. Loïc Wacquant, Punire i poveri. Il nuovo governo dell’insicurezza sociale, DeriveApprodi, 2006.
4. Zygmunt Bauman, Fiducia e paura nella città, Bruno Mondadori, 2005.
5. Michel Foucault, Sicurezza, territorio, popolazione. Corso al Collège de France 1977-1978, Feltrinelli, 2005 (lezioni 11/1/1978; 18/1/1978; 25/1/1978; 8/2/1978)
6. Jane Jacobs, Vita e morte delle grandi città, Einaudi, 2009.
7. Stanley Cohen, Folk Devils and Moral Panics, Routledge, 1972 .

Optional readings
Seta Low, Behind the gates, Routledgw, New York, 2003
Tamar Pitch, Contro il decoro, l'uso politico della pubblica decenza, Laterza, 2013
David Lyon, La cultura della sorveglianza, Luiss University Press, Roma, 2018

Sustainable Development Goals

NO POVERTY | GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES