UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Local Welfare Systems

2627-2-F8702N014

Learning objectives

Knowledge and Understanding

The primary objective of the course is to understand why and how welfare is characterised by a fundamental local dimension. Within this dimension, global, national, regional, and specifically territorial social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics intersect. The course will therefore focus on this complex interweaving and on the role played by its various components in shaping forms of knowledge, policy frameworks, systems of governance, the action of public and private organisations providing social interventions, the work of practitioners, and the role of citizens as welfare users.

The course will consider both phenomenological and institutional elements in the everyday life of the main components of local welfare: the ideas that shape social policy choices, together with the tensions, conflicts, and hegemonies that emerge over time; the most widely used policy instruments and their consequences in terms of actors' capacity for action; the role played by private actors, such as philanthropy and businesses; the everyday functioning of services, both public and those provided by Third Sector organisations, as well as the work of their practitioners; forms of local adaptation and innovation emerging within local networks; social, cultural, and political mobilisations; and the lived experiences of citizens and families in relation to the welfare system.

Particular attention will therefore be paid to the cultural, cognitive, and political-normative components underlying the discourses, instruments, and practices implemented by the various actors within welfare systems.

Specific focus will be placed on: the new institutions of community-based healthcare, such as Community Houses; different initiatives in community welfare; instruments of shared administration in practice; and selected issues such as interventions in the fields of mental health and disability.

Applying Knowledge and Understanding

Students will be expected to understand the analytical elements addressed in the course through examples of actions, interventions, projects, programmes, and local welfare policies, considering their mutual relations and their

interaction with other levels of government from a multilevel perspective.

The course will focus on social innovation in welfare, its forms of diffusion, and the obstacles and failures it may encounter.

Students will learn to understand how, and to what extent, different forces operate across territories; the power asymmetries among them; which ideas and instruments support public action; how actors and instruments influence one another within interdependent relationships; and how exogenous and endogenous variables, conflicts, compromises, forms of governance, and the impacts of different trajectories shape local welfare systems.

Making Judgements

The course aims to develop students' ability to critically interpret ideas, policies, programmes, projects, and actions within local welfare systems. Particular attention will be devoted to: the hegemonic dynamics of discourses; the most commonly used policy instruments; approaches based on the concepts of community and local networks; the use of accountability and impact assessment frameworks for projects; the role of private and philanthropic actors; and prevailing forms of governance and participation.

Communication Skills

Students will be given the opportunity to practise, engage with, and learn different forms of knowledge communication. A variety of communicative formats will therefore be used, including digital presentations, oral presentations, argumentative debate, dialogical and deliberative discussion, with attention to adapting language to different audiences and professional contexts, including from a multidisciplinary perspective.

Learning Skills

The course aims to promote students' learning skills through the study of scientific literature; the independent analysis of case studies and documents produced by relevant actors; the use of data available in public archives and repositories; and qualitative research techniques such as interviews and ethnographic observation.

Contents

- The social, economic, cultural and political contexts of the welfare development

- The institutional dimension of social policies

- The territorial turn

- Subsidiarity and public sphere

- From the bureaucratic State to the New Public Management

- Instruments and practices of welfare governance

- The Lombard Welfare

- Welfare and the crisis

- Governance and third sector

- Third sector and civil society: theories and approaches

- Places and culture in third sector organizations

- The new role of philanthropy

- Bank foundations and the local welfare

- Social innovation

Detailed program

The first part of the course will present the configurations of the Italian model of local welfare, including comparisons with other countries: its political and normative elements, its policy instruments and the governance models developed in the last thirty years, with a special attention to the Lombard context.

The second part of the course will focus on institutional and social actors in local welfare systems, their approaches to public action and the relationships they have developed over the years.

Attending students will have the opportunity to practice learning by participating to working groups, analyzing documents and audiovisual products, lectures with guests from the fieldwork.

Prerequisites

Teaching methods

Lessons will be held 50% with traditional lectures and 50% with interactive methods, i.e. in laboratory form, with group work, analysis of written and audiovisual documents, testimonies and visits with public, third sector and trade union operators.

The course also includes seminars devoted to the presentation and discussion of new books with their authors, focusing on issues related to welfare and social innovation.

Up to 20% of lessons may be delivered remotely.

Lessons will be held in Italian.

Assessment methods

The examination consists of two compulsory components: a written paper on a case study, which will account for 50% of the final grade, and an oral examination, which will account for the remaining 50%.

For students who attend at least 75% of the classes, the written paper may be divided into two or three stages, to be developed during the course and assessed separately. Students who choose this option may nevertheless submit the written paper as a single final assignment, should they prefer to do so.

The written paper will consist of an original essay of 5–10 pages, corresponding to approximately 15,000–40,000

characters, on a topic or real case concerning local welfare, analysed through the categories presented in the required readings. The purpose of the paper is to assess the knowledge and competences acquired through the readings and participation in the course.

Students attending the classes will have the opportunity to present their case study during the final class. Even if the empirical material has not yet been fully collected and/or the overall interpretation has not yet been completed, students may — and are encouraged to — present the work in progress. This presentation will not be assessed, but will have an exclusively educational purpose. It will therefore not contribute to the final grade, but will allow participants to discuss the work carried out and improve it.

The oral examination will assess students' knowledge of the specific contents of the readings, their ability to connect them with one another and with real-world examples, and their relevance to the written paper.

The final assessment will take into account students' command of the themes addressed in the readings and of the authors' arguments; their ability to synthesise the social, cultural, and political processes discussed in the readings; their ability to distinguish between analytical and evaluative dimensions; and their ability to connect these dimensions with examples from the course and from current social policy contexts.

Students will receive further instructions on the course website and will agree on the topic of the written paper with the instructor. The oral examination will consist partly of an assessment of knowledge of the required readings and partly of a discussion of the written paper.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

**Readings: *To be confirmed at the beginning of the course
**
De Leonardis O. (2001), Le istituzioni. Come e perché parlarne, Carocci, cap1. e cap4.
**
Bifulco L. (2015) Il welfare locale. Processi e prospettive (cap 1. Questioni e strumenti)pp.15-40. Carocci.

Busacca, M., & Pasian, P. (2025). Welfare locale: teorie, attori, transizioni (cap1,2,3).Egea.

Polizzi, E., Tajani, C., Vitale T. (2013) Programmare i territori del welfare. Attori, meccanismi ed effetti (cap.1,7) Carocci. 107pp.

Fazzi, L. (2023) "Siamo sicuri ne valga veramente la pena?" Amministrazione condivisa e terzo settore in Italia. Impresa Sociale, 3, 7-13.

Polizzi, E. (2023). Una politica per l'amministrazione condivisa. Gli usi possibili degli strumenti della riforma. Impresa Sociale, 4(4), 36-45.

Saruis T., Kazepov, Y. Boczy, T. Consolidare l'innovazione sociale in contesti diversi di welfare: tra dinamiche trasformative e adattamento, in "Autonomie locali e servizi sociali" 3/2021, pp. 579-592

Polizzi, E. (2021) L'innovazione sociale mimetica. La diffusione dei modelli filantropici di welfare Autonomie locali e servizi sociali, 44(3), 477-492

Ingrosso M. (2023) La prospettiva di welfare community nella progettazione e sperimentazione delle Case della Comunita, Autonomie locali e servizi sociali, (1) 19-40

De Leonardis O., De Vidovich L. (2017) Innovazioni per l'apprendimento istituzionale. Il Programma Microaree della Regione Friuli Venezia Giulia, *Working papers. Rivista online di Urban@it* - 1/2017.

Gori, C. (2020) Più servizi e meno regolazione. Il welfare lombardo nella longue durée. Social Policies, 7(3), 375-396.

Sustainable Development Goals

REDUCED INEQUALITIES | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES