UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

SYLLABUS DEL CORSO

Mutamento Sociale e Nuovi Rischi

2627-1-F8702N006

Learning objectives

Knowledge and Understanding (D1)
The course aims to provide the theoretical, methodological, and analytical tools to recognize and interpret social transformations and the resulting social risks that affect specific population groups.

Applying Knowledge and Understanding (D2)
Students will acquire analytical skills related to the phenomena addressed. In particular, they will be able to analytically reconstruct the complex and multidimensional nature of social risks (e.g., poverty, working poor, job insecurity, health, etc.), including from a dynamic perspective (social change). They will also gain analytical skills concerning the instruments for social protection and the mitigation of these risks.

Making Judgements (D3)
The course encourages active student participation through classroom discussions based on scientific articles and individual and group work on concrete cases. The goal is to stimulate students' individual ability to independently identify and interpret the processes of social change that generate new social risks.

Communication Skills (D4)
All attending students will be invited to participate in classroom discussions and to present individual and group assignments, with the aim of refining their argumentation and public speaking skills.

Learning Skills (D5)
Students will be able to independently and reflectively engage with the study and analysis of the phenomena covered in the course, as well as to critically examine policies and services aimed at addressing new social risks.

Contents

The course provides students with the conceptual and theoretical tools to critically analyze:

- Social change in contemporary societies, that is, the transformation of structural social arrangements (such as family models, demographic balances, economic structures, generational expectations and preferences) and institutional settings (such as labor regulation systems, welfare policies, and services);
- The consequences that such change generates at both individual and collective levels, and how new social risks emerge, affecting specific social groups;
- How these processes of change and the emergence of new social risks challenge institutional frameworks; to what extent the social protection system is capable of fulfilling its role; and how institutional adaptation to new social protection demands can be fostered;
- Methodological aspects related to the measurement and empirical analysis of the course topics are also presented and discussed.

Detailed program

The course aims to explore, both from a theoretical and empirical perspective, the social and economic processes that, over the past 30 years, have made the area of social vulnerability more complex and heterogeneous. New social risks have emerged—or have become more pressing—such as the working poor or single-parent families, which struggle to be adequately protected by traditional social protection tools developed in an earlier historical phase.
The course will outline the main lines of social transformation, drawing on some particularly influential interpretative frameworks (including Raymond Boudon, Robert Castel, Enzo Mingione, Richard Sennett, and Chiara Saraceno), in order to understand the structural nature of new forms of social vulnerability.
The second part of the course will focus on the analysis of new social risks, particularly on poverty as the ultimate condition of vulnerability. Its structural nature will be highlighted, in contrast with individualistic and blame-based interpretations. Reference will be made to the international literature, also to show the differences in the underlying processes of impoverishment across various social and institutional contexts.
Finally, these processes will be related to the social protection schemes implemented in different contexts, in order to assess their effectiveness and adaptability in addressing the new forms of fragility generated by social change.

Prerequisites

None

Teaching methods

The course adopts a variety of teaching approaches aimed at fostering active learning, critical reflection, and engaged participation from students. The following teaching activities are planned:

Lecture-based teaching (28 hours)
Traditional lectures delivered throughout the course, aimed at conveying the theories and concepts used in the relevant scientific literature, as well as methodological approaches and key analytical techniques.

Interactive teaching (28 hours)
Students will be actively involved in a range of individual and group activities, including: viewing and discussing videos, preparing group presentations on topics covered in class, methodological exercises on the analysis of social risks, weekly written responses to questions on the e-learning platform, use of major online databases (e.g., OECD, Eurostat)

Delivery mode
The course will be delivered in person, unless unforeseen circumstances require that some sessions be held remotely.

Assessment methods

The exam consists of a written and an oral component.

For students who attend the course, the evaluation will take into account the activities carried out during the semester (group presentations, responses to weekly questions, participation in class discussions and exercises). These students will take a written test consisting of two open-ended questions based on the required course readings, followed by an oral exam to certify the final grade.

For all other students, the assessment will consist of a written exam with two/three open-ended questions based on the required readings, and an oral discussion of the written test.

Erasmus students: written exam based on a program agreed upon with the instructor.

The purpose of the exam is to evaluate the students' ability to correctly apply the theories and concepts covered in class, as well as their capacity to independently develop analyses of specific cases. The final grade will reflect the level of acquired competences and the degree of analytical autonomy.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

D. Brady (2019) Theories of the causes of poverty, Annual Review of Sociology, 45:155-175, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073018-
022550
M. Desmond (2026) Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City, Crown Publishing
D. Benassi, A. Ciarini and E. Mingione (2021) Inequalities and the city. Gender, Ethnicity, and Class, in A.M. Orum, J. Ruiz-Tagle and S. Vicari (eds) Companion to Urban and Regional Studies, pp. 373-397
C. Saraceno, D. Benassi e E. Morlicchio, La povertà in Italia, Il Mulino, 2022

Sustainable Development Goals

NO POVERTY | REDUCED INEQUALITIES