UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

# SYLLABUS DEL CORSO

## Spazi Urbani e Polarizzazione Sociale

**2627-1-F8805N007**

### Learning objectives

The course aims to:

- Develop analytical skills to recognise and interpret territorial inequalities and social polarisation;
- Explore everyday urban contexts and mechanisms that challenge and counteract social polarisation;
- Provide tools for the critical analysis of territorial policies and interventions;
- Foster argumentation skills, critical thinking, and the ability to engage in constructive dialogue and debate.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:
DD1 – Knowledge and Understanding
Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of key theories on territorial segregation, social polarisation, and urban stigmatisation;
Understand the complexity of social and spatial processes related to urban marginalisation and the dynamics between city centres and peripheral areas.
DD2 – Applying Knowledge and Understanding
Apply theoretical models to the analysis of real-world cases, with particular attention to spatial concentration and the stigmatisation of minority groups.
DD3 – Making Judgments
Critically evaluate public policies and media discourses concerning urban peripheries and marginalised populations;
Assess how spatial, economic, social, and cultural factors interact in processes of exclusion.
DD4 – Communication Skills
Clearly and effectively articulate complex concepts and arguments, using appropriate disciplinary language.
DD5 – Learning Skills
Develop independent learning and research capabilities;
Integrate theoretical, empirical, and policy-related dimensions in the analysis of urban segregation and marginality.

## Contents

The course examines the concepts of concentration, polarisation, and territorial segregation, with particular attention to spatial inequalities in contemporary urban settings. It explores theoretical models and definitions of the ghetto, hyperghetto, and anti-ghetto, as well as the multiple scales at which segregation occurs. Structural factors—such as housing, labour markets, and welfare systems—are analysed alongside racialisation processes. Special focus is given to mechanisms of territorial stigmatisation and to forms of symbolic and cultural resistance, including trap music and the construction of Islamic identity. The course also critically addresses urban policies targeting peripheral areas. All theoretical content will be linked to the analysis of concrete case studies.

## Detailed program

The course examines the political, social, and economic factors that fragment contemporary cities and generate territorial polarization. Through a multiscale approach, the program enables students to distinguish simple spatial concentration from exclusionary segregation, focusing on the relational nature of peripheralization. The specific topics covered will include:

- Definitions of concentration, polarisation, and territorial segregation;
- Concepts of ghetto, hyper-ghetto, and anti-ghetto;
- The different spatial scales of territorial polarisation;
- The significance and evolving nature of the centre–periphery axis;
- Residential concentration and spatial violence;
- Comparative models of segregation: North American, Northern European, and Southern European;
- Main drivers of (de)segregation: housing (e.g. housing policies, informal occupations), labour (e.g. agricultural ghettos), welfare (e.g. healthcare, education), and racialisation processes;
- The relationship between segregation and migrant background;
- Territorial stigmatisation: origins, symbolic agencies, and main socio-political effects;
- Structural violence and cultural responses: forms of resistance, opposition, and radicalisation (e.g. trap music, the ‘bad guy’ persona, Islamic identity);
- Public space and social exclusion: urban struggles, the rhetoric of decorum, and penal populism;
- Urban policies for marginalised areas: social mix, urban regeneration, and politique de la ville—with a focus on the limitations of sectoral interventions and the need for multidimensional, integrated approaches.

Theoretical concepts will be critically applied through the analysis of real-world case studies involving the spatial concentration and stigmatisation of minority communities.

## Prerequisites

A good capacity for independent learning and critical analysis, along with a strong interest in urban dynamics and social inequalities.

## Teaching methods

The course (total: 56 hours) combines:

- Lectures (33.5 hours): supported by slides, empirical case studies, and theoretical references;

- Workshops and interactive activities (22.5 hours): including dialogic discussions, small-group exercises, guest speaker presentations, and guided debates.

Specifically, the course will be structured as follows:

- 3 sessions of 3 hours, 1 session of 2 hours, and 15 sessions of 1.5 hours delivered as traditional lectures (total: 33.5 hours);
- 15 workshop/interactive sessions of 1.5 hours each (total: 22.5 hours).

## Assessment methods

The exam offers a choice between two formats:
Option 1: An oral exam based on the study materials presented and provided by the instructor.
Option 2: Writing and defending a short thesis (thematic essay). This involves analyzing academic literature on a topic agreed upon with the instructor, using a structured template shared during class. The assessment concludes with an oral defense of the paper.

In both cases, assessment criteria include critical analysis skills, the ability to connect the main themes of the course, mastery of the discipline's conceptual vocabulary, and the ability to provide concrete, relevant examples. In addition, specific criteria apply to each format. For Option 1: knowledge of the course materials, the ability to synthesize them critically, and clarity of expression. For Option 2: clarity of the topic and research question, full application of the provided template, quality of the analysis, and the ability to illustrate and justify design/methodological choices during the oral defense, in alignment with the key concepts developed throughout the course.

## Textbooks and Reading Materials

The professor will collect all the materials covered in the course into a handout that will be made available to students.

## Sustainable Development Goals

NO POVERTY | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES