

SYLLABUS

course description

The course belongs to the class “caratterizzante” (alternativa) in the MA in Eco-Social Design (LM-12). This course is a compulsory optional subject in the area “**Observe, analyse & apply**”

Course title	Social Studies of Design Area: Observe, analyse & apply
Course code	96112
Scientific sector	SPS/08
Degree	Master in Eco-Social Design (LM-12)
Semester	II
Year	1st and 2nd
Credits	6
Modular	No
Lecturer	Ingrid Kofler office F4.05, e-mail: Ingrid.Kofler2@unibz.it , Webpage https://www.unibz.it/en/faculties/design-art/academic-staff/person/18815-ingrid-kofler
Scientific sector of the lecturer	SPS/08
Teaching language	English
Teaching assistant (if any)	-
Office hours	Previous appointment
Teaching language	English
Total lecturing hours	30
Total hours of self-study and/or other individual educational activities	about 120
Attendance	recommended
Prerequisites	-

Course description

This course introduces students to the dynamic interplay between social sciences and design. It aims to provide a foundational understanding of sociology, while exploring how design engages with, challenges, and intersects with this discipline. The course examines inter- and transdisciplinary approaches in the social sciences, emphasizing qualitative research methods and their relevance to design. The course questions the concept of "the social imagination" as defined in sociology and its application in design, incorporating the annual theme as a framework for discussion. Subsequent sessions explore a range of theories, approaches, and practical applications, addressing topics such as: the nature of social relations and networks, social network analysis, and actor-network theory; the role of social sciences in providing concepts, frameworks, and methodological tools for analyzing artifacts and their relationships to the social; the connections between future studies, anticipation, and design practice and research. Through these topics, students will engage with sociological concepts and categories, as well as research methods, techniques, and tools, applying them to analyze and address real-world issues. Each year, there will be one specific real-world issue on which the course will give a specific focus. The course integrates collaboration with Design Research, Media Studies and Interaction Design, offering an adaptive program that supports students' design projects.

Educational objectives

Students will be able to:

- *collaborate with other designers and experts in order to develop and implement an integrated project;*
- *take into account the social relevance of their interventions occurring within the tension between global and local dimensions;*
- *take into account the social aspects that characterize a territory, a community and a group of people;*
- *integrate social aspects in project design while considering the tension, which occurs between the local and the global dimensions;*
- *develop an individual and critical way of thinking, leading to critical judgements and self-assessments;*
- *communicate, multilingually in a convincing way, through a variety of modalities (written, oral, visual);*
- *talk to experts about the project;*
- *read experts' and academic articles, studies and reports related to one's own project issues and integrate those analyses with one's own project design;*
- *organize a research project while identifying relevant studies and researches, experts to collaborate with, methods and instruments to adopt;*
- *outline the cultural and social territorial framework where the students will intervene;*
- *set up a field work or an inquiry in order to define the socioeconomic framework, by exchanging ideas with researchers and experts' students will collaborate with;*
- *understand specialist literature so as to integrate it within their own research project;*

Knowledge will be acquired in the following fields:

- the relations between social sciences and design and the main methods, techniques and tools through which such relations can be carried out, developed and transformed.

List of topics covered

- Action
- Social change
- Artifacts
- Social Networks
- Micro/Macro
- Practice
- Social Capital
- Structure
- Future studies

Teaching format

Most of the classes will consist in frontal lectures and discussions. In few cases, the discussion will be based on class exercises, most of the times on home assignments, usually readings and experiments. Some classes will be tackled through an interdisciplinary co-presence with other teachers.

Learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding

Students will learn how social sciences and design can productively dialogue.

At the end of the course students should be able to understand their interventions in relation to the broader coordinates of the social sciences' debates and to position their intervention in relation to such debates, also in order to choose the most appropriate research methods and collaborators.

Applying knowledge and understanding

At the end of the course students should be able to find, understand and integrate social research into their design projects, as ground for their project's choices and features.

At the end of the course students should be able to dialogue with social scientists in order to discuss the sociological aspects of their projects.

At the end of the project students should be able to discuss and choose the appropriate method to gather data about their design projects.

Making judgments

At the end of the course students should be able to assess the relevance and value of a social sciences and their methods for design and vice-versa.

Communication skills

At the end of the course students should be able to communicate with social scientists about their design projects.

Learning skills

At the end of the course students should be able to get deeper into the social sciences' debates and to learn about specific social research related to the specificities of their design projects.

Assessment

Written and oral.

Students will be assessed considering:

- the results of the assignments assigned during the course
- participation in class activities and exercises
- the ability to integrate course topics and issues into the final presentation and essay of the applied project

Guidelines for Non-Attending Students

Students who do not regularly attend classes or fail to submit all required assignments during the course period will be considered non-attending. To complete the course, they must independently study a selection of essential readings provided by the instructor. Their final grade will be determined based on a comprehensive written examination. Non-attending students are responsible for managing their studies effectively to ensure thorough preparation for the final exam.

Assessment language: English

Evaluation criteria and criteria for awarding marks

Evaluation criteria will consider the ability to compare theories among them or with empirical findings and/or observations and/or critical reflections about social phenomena. More in general evaluation criteria consider not only how the assignment brief has been fulfilled but also the capacity to take into account other parts of the course and to make connections among them, as well as with possible personal experiences as design student.

Required readings

- Berger, P. L. (1999). *Invitation to sociology*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Gidley, J. M. (2017). *The future: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Kofler, I. (2023). Beyond Disciplinary Constraints: Designing Transdisciplinary Research and Collaboration in Real-World Laboratories. *Societies*, 13(9), 205.
- Lupton, D. (2018). Towards design sociology. *Sociology Compass*, 12(1).
- Mills, C. Wright (1959). *The sociological imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brambilla, C. (2014). Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes
Concept. *Geopolitics*, 20(1), 14–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2014.884561>

Further readings for the annual theme will be communicated during the course.