

ITAL 300 Cultural Ecologies and Sustainable Development in the Italian Context.

Instructor: Bruno Grazioli

Subject Area(s): Italian Studies, counts for sustainability requirement?

Language of Instruction: Italian

Description:

Cultural ecology is a methodological approach that investigates the relationship between humans and environments, which considers culture as a key to understanding the evolutionary process.¹ These processes are inherently sustainable, as they continually adjust to changing conditions to survive. Culture is, therefore, indispensable for sustainability. Culture is what “enables sustainability – as a source of strength, of values and social cohesion, self-esteem and participation. Culture is our most powerful force for creativity and renewal.”²

Yet culture is still not fully integrated into sustainable development strategies for social growth and development worldwide.³ As part of this, the disciplines known as “Humanities”⁴ play a crucial role to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) through insights, knowledge and comparative perspectives typical of these disciplines. The “Humanities” are naturally oriented to cross-disciplinary work and welcome students with diverse academic interests and paths (like you in this Italian Studies class!). In turn, the SDGs look at the future, but they are far from new. The SDGs are new only in name and scale: ideas about sustainability, collective responsibility and reciprocity among individuals and with the natural world have existed for millennia. Investigating the cultural dimension of sustainability means understanding why and how human communities live and survive.

In this course, we will combine these three concepts/frameworks (culture, sustainability, UN SDGs) to analyze and understand human-environment relationships in the context of Italy. Via an experiential and thematic approach (we will “access” Italian culture through its excellence: food, fashion, cars and we will meet the people involved in those sectors), we will uncover and explore topics such as human needs and inter-dependencies of beings; how people meet their needs and what are the environmental and social consequences; the economic, socio-cultural and political norms that shape the ways people meet their needs.



As the study of the adaptation of a culture to an environment, cultural ecology focuses on how natural resources, climate, technology, population density etc. affect cultures and how traditional systems of beliefs and behaviors (= *values*) allow people to adapt to their surroundings (natural or not). So, *what are the shared values that sustain Italian culture? What do people believe in that sustains their work ethics and life goals? And how are those different from the values you share with people in your own culture? Ultimately, what is the contribution that the Humanities (Italian Studies in this case) bring to the conversation on sustainability?* The UN SDGs framework will be applied to better contextualize the case of Italy in the broader international situation and fully appreciate differences and similarities between local/global manifestations of cultural sustainable development.

¹ https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-319-95963-4_26

² <https://en.unesco.org/news/hangzhou-declaration-heralding-next-era-human-development-1>

³ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/institute-of-advanced-studies/un-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs-contributions-humanities>

⁴ Fields of knowledge that study human culture, past, present and future, using primarily qualitative methods, from single disciplines such as History, Philosophy or English; to the interdisciplinary domains of Classics, Comparative Literature, Modern Languages and Critical Area Studies, plus Cultural/Feminist/Postcolonial/Queer Studies; Health/Medical/Environmental/Digital Humanities

These are the questions that will guide our course and that we will attempt to answer by gathering information, observing, discussing, and reflecting on the experience provided during the semester. The following section outlines the methodology we will employ to reach the goals indicated above.

Instructional Format: Class will meet twice a week for 75 minutes each time and it will incorporate:

- Week 1 to Week 3: INTRODUCTION – time dedicated to familiarizing with course content, methods and expectations + building a course community + reflecting on what is “culture”
- Week 4 to Week 13: we will meet with various local organizations (see list below) working in economic sectors representative of Italian culture, the so-called “Italian excellence” (food, fashion, car industry, hospitality). The goal of these meetings will be to hear their stories, visit places of work, ask questions and gather information which we will analyze (together in class or as individual assignments) to find themes and patterns that will help us answer the questions outlined in the course description. We will prepare for these meetings (before) or reflect on them (after) by reading about and discussing other similar examples (present or past) of sustainable approaches and practices.
- Week 14 and Week 15: CONCLUSION – preparation and presentation of final project

List of local organizations we will meet with:

- **Salus Space** <https://saluspace.eu/> - <https://saluspace.eu/old/the-project.html?lang=en>
Center dedicated to hospitality and co-working as well as intercultural welfare and wellness.
- **Eticló** <https://eticlo.com/> - Italian clothing brand that develops sophisticated and long-lasting apparel collections made from sustainable certified fabrics.
- **Lamborghini** <https://www.lamborghini.com/en-en/museum#val-tab> - Italian manufacturer of luxury sports cars and SUVs.
- **Forno Brisa** <https://www.fornobrisa.it/en/> - A bakery/project that cultivates biodiversity both as products farmed/used and in human relationships: 49% of the bread baked comes from organically produced flours on the owned farm in Abruzzo and from fields in their supply chain.
- **Last Minute Market** <https://www.lastminutemarket.it/english> - Organization founded within the University of Bologna working at national level to develop local projects aimed at the prevention of food waste.

Transformative Sustainability Project + Collaboration with AUS, American University of Sharjah, UAE

This course will participate in the [Transformative Sustainability Project](#) and will collaborate with the course “Introduction to Arabic Digital Humanities” taught by [Prof. Mai Zaki](#).

Students will develop an appreciation for the variety and complexity of human behavior within the context of Italian culture from the vantage point of their abroad location (Italy), in analytical comparison with their own culture (USA or other) and in dialogue with students from AUS.

Students in this course will engage in cross-cultural and interdisciplinary reflection through the lens of the UN SDG framework and of the Humanities approach to counter the siloing of both the SDGs themselves and of our individual culture-centered convictions and beliefs, to expand our individual capacity to tolerate differences and think about connectedness and relatedness on areas such as:

- Cultural diversity: languages, creative practices and ways of life;
- Ethics: values, systems of thought, religions, beliefs, political commitments and solidarities;
- Structural inequality: capitalism, patriarchy, neo-colonialism, racism and hetero-normativity;
- Subjectivities: emotions, embodiment, imaginings and empathy

As part of this project and collaboration, the course will include:

- 2 synchronous meetings (beginning and end of semester) between Dickinson students in Bologna and AUS students (time difference: 2 hours)
- 25% of graded work based on virtual exchange activities (group work, projects etc.)
- A few asynchronous meetings among students within the same group

Language/Culture Learning Outcomes:

After 4 semesters/2 years (maybe more) studying mostly the Italian language, what do you know about Italy, its people and culture beyond the façade manufactured by tourist agents, social media, even family connections, etc.? How can you best make use of what you have learned in the last few years, build on and solidify your competences in a foreign language?

1. Achieve a higher level of oral communication and expression that is measurable (“I can’t say...” at the beginning of the semester vs. “I can say...” at the end of the semester)
2. Develop a sophisticated and nuanced appreciation for Italian culture, its products, people and environment.
3. [write your own Language/Culture Outcomes here] _____

Sustainability Outcomes:

1. Articulate connections between the field of Italian Studies/Humanities and sustainability
2. Consider sustainability principles while developing personal and professional values
3. Connect and describe local examples of sustainable approach with global ones

COIL (Collaborative On-line international Learning) Learning Outcomes

1. Perspective Taking: identify similarities/differences in cultural/social perspectives on sustainability
2. Intercultural Communication: evaluate intercultural communication styles to achieve a shared outcome
3. Cultural Self-Awareness: Articulate new insights into your own identity

Attendance Policy: Every student is expected to attend all scheduled class sessions on time and be thoroughly prepared for the day’s class activities. Dickinson-in-Bologna instructors compile regular attendance records for every course and take these records into account when evaluating student participation and overall course performance. Dickinson-in-Bologna faculty tolerate reasonable, but limited absences not to exceed more than one week’s worth of classes (1 class session) of accumulated absences in any given course due to personal travels, transport delay, and other related impediments. No documentation is required for such absences. The consequence of missing class beyond an accumulated week’s worth of class is a reduction of your final grade by one grade increment per absence. For example:

- Your final course grade will drop (e.g. A to A-) for missing one class session beyond a week’s worth of class.
- Your final course grade will drop (e.g. A to B+) for missing two class sessions beyond a week’s worth of class.
- Your final course grade will drop (e.g. A to B) for missing three class sessions beyond a week’s worth of class. Etc.

Absences due to sickness or medical emergencies may be excused separately only if properly documented. Late arrivals or early departures from class, sleeping or causing disruptions in class or during class activities can result in being marked absent from class.

Grading rubric: The instructor will use numerous and differentiated forms of assessment to calculate the final grade you receive for this course. These are listed and weighted below. Questions about requirements should be discussed with your faculty well in advance of the due date for each assignment.

| GRADING RUBRIC | VALUE |
|---|-------|
| Participation in class/during site visits | 20% |
| Participation in discussion on Padlet | 20% |
| Midterm | 15% |
| Collab with AUS | 25% |
| Final Project | 20% |

Weekly assignments: Readings of various kinds (excerpts from works of literature, newspaper articles, blog posts, etc.) will be assigned each week through Moodle. You will be expected to complete all readings and participate in class discussions actively. Active, spontaneous and voluntary class participation is expected of you, as well as professional attitude towards instructors and other students.

| Week Date | Topic | Activity | Related info + Collab with AUS |
|-----------------|---|--|--|
| 1 / 28-30 Aug. | Intro | Cultural Ecologies: a definition What does <i>sustainability</i> mean to you? Identity maps. | 2-3 Sept: 1 st group trip |
| 2 / 4-6 Sept. | Intro | Reflections on Lago d'Iseo / Brescia trip Intro to UN SDGs | 6 Sept: 1 st AUS meeting |
| 3 / 11-13 Sept. | Culture and sustainability | What is culture? Working definition of sustainability | |
| 4 / 18-20 Sept. | Human-based business and work ethics | The revolutionary example of Adriano Olivetti in the 1950s | Watch the documentary " In me non c'è che futuro " |
| 5 / 25-27 Sept. | Car industry | 27 Sept.: visit to Lamborghini factory | Meet at station @ 8:45 Tour begins @ 10:30 |
| 6 / 2-4 Oct. | Food production | 2 Oct.: visit to Forno Brisa | 2:30-4:30pm via Galliera |
| 7 / 9-11 Oct. | Italian Cuisine: good, clean and fair food | Pellegrino Artusi (1 st Italian cookbook) + The Slow Food movement | |
| 8 / 18 Oct. | Humanistic capitalism, human sustainability | Brunello Cucinelli's company and Solomeo (a town built by beauty) | Midterm pause |
| 9 / 23-25 Oct. | Ethical fashion | Global and local approaches: visit to Patagonia + Eticlò | |
| 10 / 30 Oct. | Sustainable tourism | Reflections on Marche/Umbria trip and visit to Perugia plant | 28-29 Oct: 2 nd group trip Nov 1: national holiday |

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|-----------------------|-------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 11 / 6-8 Nov. | Sustainable living | 6 Nov: visit to Salus Space | |
| 12 / 13-15 Nov. | Circular economy | Pioneering waste reduction: Andrea Segrè (Uni. of Bologna) 15 Nov.: visit to Last Minute Market | |
| 13 / 20 Nov. | Hope for sustainability | Class canceled? Dinner at Antoniano? | Thanksgiving break |
| 14 / 27-29 Nov. | CONCLUSION | Work on Final Project | 29 Dec: 2 nd class meeting |
| 15 / 4-6 Dic. | CONCLUSION | Final Project presentations | |

Workload Expectations: For this course, students are expected to spend at least 5 hours outside of, and in addition to, each class meeting. That is twice as much time of independent work as you spend in class (class: 35 hrs + indep. work: 70 hrs = about 100 hrs. Community engagement: 30 hrs, is included).

Special Accommodations: If you require special accommodations or have special learning needs, please inform the instructor. Requests for special accommodations will not be accepted after week 2.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Academic integrity is a core value in this course (as in others). You are expected to work independently in the pursuit of knowledge, conduct yourself in an honest and ethical manner and respect the intellectual work of your peers and faculty. You may review Dickinson College's Honor Code [HERE](#). Violations may result in serious consequences.

CIVIC DISPOSITIONS AND SKILLS

Dickinson College's education mission is "to prepare young people, by means of a useful education in the liberal arts and sciences, for engaged lives of citizenship and leadership in the service of society." The core work of this liberal arts education cultivates dispositions and skills that are essential to an educated and engaged citizenry, specifically the abilities to:

- Think critically
- Communicate effectively, orally and in writing
- Apply analytical skills
- Solve problems
- See a complex issue through multiple perspectives
- Be creative
- Work effectively with others
- Seek and use evidence as the basis for inquiry