SUSTAINABILITY, FOOD AND LANDSCAPES
IN THE ITALIAN ALPS

Trentino, Italy, Summer 2018

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“En montagna l’è tüt bon.”
“In the mountains everything tastes good.”
(Trentino saying)

Course description

A journey across time and space, from the traces of prehistoric peoples to the challenges of our globalized world. Food is the key to explore the complex interaction between humans and their environments, and its impact on culture, economy, identity, and landscapes. Issues of global concern such as sustainable practices, climate change and resource management are tackled from the unique perspective of the Italian Alps, a place renowned for its distinctive environment, rich agriculture and traditional food productions.

Course structure

The course is organized into:

- Twelve class sessions (24 contact hours)
- Five guided visits (10 contact hours)
- A residential lab (12 contact hours)

The course totals forty-six contact hours, corresponding to three semester credit hours.
Evaluation

10% Attendance and active participation
30% Midterm exam
10% Residential lab
10% Presentation
40% Final paper

Week 1 – Introduction to the European and local social, environmental and historical context; definition of the course’s key concepts; introduction to social sciences methodologies and research goals.

Class session #1 – Introduction to Italy, in the European context and with a focus on Trentino and its surroundings.

Class session #2 – Course presentation; definitions of sustainability, environment, food, landscape, and discussion on how they intersect.


Class session #3 – Introduction to social sciences research methods, techniques and goals; differences between natural and social sciences in their approaches and methods; focus on qualitative and ethnographic methods.

✓ Battacherjee, A. (2012). Introduction to research. In *Social science research: principles, methods, and practices*, (pp. 1-24), University of South Florida Scholar Commons.
Visit #1 – Guided visit to the “Mount Brione Biotope and Heritage Trail” in Riva del Garda.

Week 2 – Anthropological and archeological overview of consumption and production systems; history of food production; globalization, food chains and food ethics.

Class session #4 – Introduction to human evolution; passage from foraging to agriculture and its impact on human history.


Visit #2 – Guided visit and tastings at an olive oil mill and a coffee roasting factory in Riva del Garda.

Class session #5 – Overview of food production and consumption systems across time and space, and their impact on human adaptation.


Visit #3 – Guided visit to the ethnographic museum “Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina” and meeting with experts at the 19th-century agrarian school and research institution “Fondazione Edmund Mach” in San Michele all’Adige.
Class session #6 – Comparative analysis of different agricultural systems and food industries in the contemporary era, and their impact in shaping landscapes and ways of life.


Week 3 – Food, identity and heritage; how food production and consumption shape the Italian landscape; “Slow Food”, the organic food movements, and the politics behind labeling and certifications; the specificities of the human and environmental context of the Alpine region.

Class session #7 – Food, identity and the role of agriculture in shaping Italian regional cultures and landscapes.


Visit #4 – Guided visit to the science museum “MuSe” in Trento.

Class session #8 – Food and the economy; the “Slow Food” movement and short food supply chains; food and tourism; systems of food and agriculture certifications.

Visit #5 – Guided visit to the “South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology” (home of Ötzi “the Iceman”) in Bolzano.

Class session #9 – Human-environment historical interactions and the shaping of the Alps.

**Week 4 – Residential Alpine study lab in the Giudicarie Valley; guided fieldwork and data collection on mountain agriculture, natural resource management, and the future of the highlands.**

The four-day residential lab will take place in the Giudicarie Valley, in Trentino, an alpine rural area that has obtained the UNESCO acknowledgment in the “Man and the Biosphere Program” because of the exceptional relationship that its people were able to develop with their environment.

This is an ideal context to interact with local producers, observe food production and processing, and reflect on the impact of certain practices on the environment.

The goal of the lab is to help students to put into practice what they have learned over the first three weeks of the course and to collect the data that will be the basis of their final paper.

The first day will be devoted to an introduction to the area and to the discussion of the following readings:
Each student will be assigned a specific theme, chosen from a selected list, including: alpine pastoralism; farm holidays; zero-km food production and consumption systems; local cuisine and diet habits. The following days will be devoted to carrying out the fieldwork, with the continuing assistance of the instructor and local tutors. At the end of each day, the group will meet to reflect on the ongoing research experience and plan further steps.

**Week 5 – Final project seminar, outline of the paper, group presentation and feedback; present and future challenges and opportunities in the field.**

Class session #10 – Final project seminar: this seminar aims at helping students to interpret the collected data, select the literature, and write their final paper.

Class session #11 – Presentations: each student will prepare a presentation on the preliminary results of the research carried out during the residential lab and an outline of the paper; every participant is expected to ask questions and give feedback to the presenter.

Class session #12 – Future of agriculture in the Alps; impact of climate change on the environments and peoples of the Alps; conclusions.

