

## **Community-Driven Sustainability on Mediterranean Islands** IDST-3250 (3 credits)

### **Italy: Environmental Studies & Marine Ecosystems**

*This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.*

#### **Course Description**

Island communities face distinct environmental challenges: increasing water scarcity, changing rainfall patterns, soil degradation, and coastal erosion. Yet these island communities also hold centuries of local knowledge about living sustainably in Mediterranean landscapes. Through engagement with farmers maintaining ancient groves, and communities managing shared water resources, students learn how local practices maintain environmental balance in fragile island ecosystems. Through direct participation in community initiatives, we examine how local knowledge can inform approaches to current environmental challenges.

#### **Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyze how Mediterranean island communities maintain environmental balance through traditional practices
- Illustrate how drivers of community action and activism create positive change for sustainability in Sicily and Sardinia
- Document specific ways that local ecological knowledge contributes to island sustainability
- Explain how community approaches to environmental challenges vary across different island contexts and how local knowledge can create and inform broader environmental solutions

#### **Language of Instruction**

This course is taught in English, and where Italian is used, translation to English will be provided.

#### **Instructional Methods**

SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; "knowledge is created through the transformation

of experience” (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a *concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation* embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

## **Required Texts**

See the course schedule for a full list of reading assignments.

### Attendance and Participation

Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

### Late Assignments

SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.

Example: Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If the reason for the request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an ‘F’ for the assignment.

## **Assignments and Evaluation**

### Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

**Participation (10%)** Active participation is essential for learning in this course. Students are expected to engage meaningfully in field activities, contribute to group discussions, and demonstrate respectful conduct when working with local communities. The participation grade reflects both the quantity and quality of student engagement throughout the course.

**Conservation Strategy Proposal Digital Poster (35%)** In groups of two or three, students will design a conservation strategy proposal that addresses a current environmental challenge in Sicily or Sardinia. The poster should include a thorough description of the environmental issue including the drivers of the issue and their root causes as well as the consequences of the situation, both for humans and the environment, present and future. The proposal should address how the strategy will be applied and who and/or what would be involved in the strategy. The poster should also include a detailed justification section that explains why the proposed strategy was chosen. Students will present their posters to the class and detail the genesis of the strategy and why they believe it could be effective.

**Mapping Environmental Knowledge (35%)** Create a visual representation (map, infographic, poster, or digital story) that illustrates the relationship between a local ecological practice and environmental health in Mediterranean islands. Use case studies from the course and your own observations to showcase key sustainability practices. Post your work on the Canvas discussion board. All students should review each other's maps.

**Community Influencer Profile (20%)** For the context of this assignment, an "influencer" is an individual or an organization that plays or has played an important role in a community sustainability campaign. With the support of program staff, students will prepare a series of interview questions that seek to understand the influencer's experiences and elucidate the challenges, strategies, and achievements of their participation in sustainability campaigns. Students will post their findings to the Canvas discussion board for their peers to review.

#### Grading Scale

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64	F

#### **Program Expectations**

- **Show up prepared.** For an interactive course to succeed, you must be present, on time, and have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Being prepared with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone. Moreover, the content of this course is learned collaboratively, meaning that when a student is not here, they take away from everyone's opportunity to learn. The only way to maximize our collective learning potential is if we are all here contributing. Valid reasons for absence –

such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program

- **Submit assignments on time:** SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field- based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.
- **Bring your curiosity:** Ask questions in class. Engage the guest lecturers, as these are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak. Remember, there are no foolish questions, and your inquiries might help others in class who have similar ideas/thoughts. By actively participating and showing curiosity, you demonstrate respect for our guests and contribute to creating a dynamic learning environment for everyone.
- **Maintain academic Integrity:** As members of a learning community, we all want to submit work that reflects our own ideas and efforts. Even if it is unintentional, plagiarism can have serious consequences. Before you submit each assignment, ask yourself these questions:
  - Did I reference ideas, quotes, phrases, or facts I read about in a book, article, or website, without citing the author and year of the source where I read about them?
  - Did I paraphrase by changing only a word or two or moving the words around?
  - Did you answer “yes” to any of the above questions? If so, you are committing plagiarism and need to give credit to appropriate sources before you submit your assignment
- **Principled Disagreement:** Learning often involves discomfort. Some discomfort can facilitate personal and collective growth. You, your peers, guest lecturers, instructors, and local constituents, have diverse experiences, values, beliefs, affiliations, and identities. Reflecting on these differences can be emotionally challenging, even when it deepens self-awareness and mutual understanding. In this course, we aim to encourage brave spaces where principled disagreement is encouraged rather than avoiding difficult conversations. *This is challenging work, and we will inevitably make mistakes.* Our goal is to thoughtfully critique ideas rather than attacking individuals. We aim to embrace productive discomfort and minimize unproductive discomfort, striving for principled disagreement.
- **Content Considerations:** Some texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a brave space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counselling services.
- **Our social identities** – Our social identities - race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual identity, religion, mental and physical ability, size, national origin, citizenship status, and

more – shape how we are perceived, represented, and treated. They also influence what knowledge and learning is deemed valuable and legitimate. To challenge hegemonic paradigms and perspectives, this course intentionally includes readings, topics, videos, and assignments from authors and perspectives of diverse backgrounds. However, there may be gaps we have overlooked. Your constructive feedback is always welcome on how to make this course more inclusive and transformative.

- **Storing Your Work:** Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.
- **Personal Technology Use:** Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- **Course Communication:** Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- **Classroom recording policy:** To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

### **SIT Policies and Resources**

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Accessibility Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

### **Course Schedule**

*\*Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.*

## **Module 1: Living with Nature—Local Knowledge and the Environment**

Mediterranean island communities have long adapted to environmental challenges via deep-rooted, intergenerational knowledge. This module explores how island peoples have thrived within fragile ecosystems for centuries. Students will engage with local practitioners to understand how local ecological knowledge shapes sustainable practices today.

Sessions may include:

- The history of communal ecosystem synergies in Mediterranean islands
- Traditional agricultural practices and their ecological benefits
- Ancient water management systems and community stewardship
- Traditional pastoralism and its regenerative impact
- Intergenerational knowledge transfer and conservation

### **Required Readings:**

Baldacchino, G. (2020). How far can one go? How distance matters in island development. *Island Studies Journal*, 15(1), 25–42.

Farese, M., Soncin, S., Robb, J., & Tafuri, M. A. (2024). Prehistoric Italian foodways: Meta-analysis of stable isotope data from the Neolithic to the Iron Age. *Quaternary Science Reviews*, 345, 109056.

Ferrara, V. (2024). *Historical Olive Agroecosystems of Sicily: Operationalising Biocultural Heritage for Sustainable Futures* (Doctoral dissertation, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis).

Furia, E., Clò, E., Florenzano, A., & Mercuri, A. M. (2024). Human-induced fires and land use driven changes in tree biodiversity on the northern Tyrrhenian coast. *Quaternary International*, 705, 37-52.

Leppard, T. P., Cochrane, E. E., Gaffney, D., Hofman, C. L., Laffoon, J. E., Bunbury, M. M., & Broodbank, C. (2022). Global patterns in island colonization during the Holocene. *Journal of World Prehistory*, 35(2), 163-232.

Plieninger, T., Abunnasr, Y., D'Ambrosio, U., Guo, T., Kizos, T., Kmoch, L., ... & Varela, E. (2023). Biocultural conservation systems in the Mediterranean region: the role of values, rules, and knowledge. *Sustainability Science*, 18(2), 823-838.

Rick, T., Ontiveros, M. Á. C., Jerardino, A., Mariotti, A., Méndez, C., & Williams, A. N. (2020). Human-environmental interactions in Mediterranean climate regions from the Pleistocene to the Anthropocene. *Anthropocene*, 31, 100253.

Vogiatzakis, I. N., Pungetti, G., & Mannion, A. M. (Eds.). (2007). Mediterranean Island Landscapes: Natural and Cultural Approaches. Chapters 7 and 8.

## **Module 2: Water as a Shared Resource—Collective Solutions to Scarcity**

Water scarcity has long shaped Mediterranean island life, but communities have developed sophisticated ways to manage and share this vital resource. This module examines cooperative water systems, communal irrigation, and local governance strategies that ensure fair access while protecting fragile ecosystems.

Sessions may include:

- Community water-sharing systems: Wells, cisterns, and cooperative irrigation
- The role of local governance in water management and conflict resolution
- Adapting traditional water practices in a changing climate
- Rituals, beliefs, and cultural meanings attached to water stewardship
- Community-led conservation efforts: Reviving old systems for modern challenges

### **Required Readings**

Barbarossa, L., & Pappalardo, V. (2021, May). Finding the resilient city: A proposal for implementing “Adaptigation” in spatial planning. Case studies from Sicily. In *International Conference on Innovation in Urban and Regional Planning* (pp. 351-360). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Ferrara, V., & Lindberg, J. (2023). Climate and environmental change perceptions: A case from rural Sicily, Italy. In *Routledge Handbook of Climate Change Impacts on Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities* (pp. 109-123). Routledge.

Nguyen, T. P. L., Mula, L., Cortignani, R., Seddaiu, G., Dono, G., Viridis, S. G., ... & Roggero, P. P. (2016). Perceptions of present and future climate change impacts on water availability for agricultural systems in the western Mediterranean region. *Water*, 8(11), 523.

Sannitu, S. (2006). The integrated water cycle in the context of water management systems: The Sardinian experience. *Water Resources for the Future*, 153-162.

Timpanaro, G., Pecorino, B., Chinnici, G., Bellia, C., Cammarata, M., Cascone, G., & Scuderi, A. (2023). Exploring innovation adoption behavior for sustainable development of Mediterranean tree crops. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 7, 1092942.

## **Module 3: Sustaining Coastal Communities—Local Responses to Environmental Change**

As coastal erosion, rising seas, and tourism development threaten island shorelines, communities are developing their own responses. This module explores local efforts to protect coastal ecosystems, adapt livelihoods, and strengthen environmental decision-making. Students examine how fishermen, activists, growers, and policymakers navigate the balance among conservation, community wellness, climate change, and economic well-being.

**Possible sessions may include:**

- The impact of tourism development on traditional coastal livelihoods
- Fishing cooperatives and sustainable marine resource management
- The role of local ecological knowledge in coastal adaptation
- Legal frameworks and local resistance to environmentally harmful policies

**Required Readings**

Bastari, A., Mascarell, Y., Ortega, M. and Coll, M., (2022). Local fishers experience can contribute to better knowledge of marine resources in the Western Mediterranean Sea. *Fisheries Research*, 248, p.106222

Beuret, N., Bettini, G., & Turhan, E. (2021). On the frontlines of fear migration and climate change in the local context of Sardinia, Italy. *Acme: an international e-journal for critical geographies*, 20(3), 322-340.

Boubekri, I., Mazurek, H., Djebar, A. B., & Amara, R. (2023). Harnessing fishers' local knowledge and their perceptions: Opportunities to improve management of coastal fishing in Mediterranean marine protected areas. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 344, 118456.

Corbau, C., Lazarou, A., Gazale, V., Nardin, W., Simeoni, U., & Carboni, D. (2022). What can beach litter tell about local management: A comparison of five pocket beaches of the North Sardinia island (Italy). *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 174, 113170.

Leon, C. J., Lam González, Y. E., Ruggieri, G., & Calò, P. (2022). Assessing climate change adaptation and risk management programmes: Stakeholder participation processes and policy implications for transport, energy and tourism sectors on the island of Sicily. *Land*, 11(8), 1206.

**Module 4: Community Action and the Future of Community-led Sustainability**

How do small island communities mobilize to protect their land and resources? This final module explores grassroots movements, cooperative models, and environmental activism. Students will reflect on lessons learned throughout the course and apply them to their final projects, examining how local solutions can inspire broader sustainability strategies.

Sessions may include:

- Environmental activism and community organizing in Mediterranean islands

- Local cooperatives as models for sustainable ecosystem management
- The role of storytelling and media in environmental advocacy
- Ethical engagement and partnerships in sustainability efforts

## Required Readings

Concu, G. B., Detotto, C., & Vannini, M. (2023). *Drivers of intentions and drivers of actions: willingness to participate versus actual participation in fire management in Sardinia, Italy*. Arkadia.

Constantino, S. M., Sparkman, G., Kraft-Todd, G. T., Bicchieri, C., Centola, D., Shell-Duncan, B., ... & Weber, E. U. (2022). Scaling up change: A critical review and practical guide to harnessing social norms for climate action. *Psychological science in the public interest*, 23(2), 50-97.

Crouteix, O. (2024). Small islands and islets: Laboratories or key sensors for environmental policies in the Mediterranean basin? *Island Studies Journal*, 19(2), 191–213.

Giannone, M. (2021). Tourism planning and resilience strategies in inner areas: Communities in action in the Madonie area. In Grasso, F. & Sergi, B.S. (eds.). *Tourism in the Mediterranean Sea*. Emerald Publishing Limited. 279-289 p.

Lombardo, L. (2023, September). Energy Communities and Smart Villages in the Madonie Sicilian Inner Rural Area. In *Mediterranean Architecture and the Green-Digital Transition: Selected Papers from the World Renewable Energy Congress Med Green Forum 2022* (pp. 31-42). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Nanni, P., Peres, D. J., Musumeci, R. E., & Cancelliere, A. (2021). Worry about climate change and urban flooding risk preparedness in Southern Italy: A survey in the Simeto River Valley (Sicily, Italy). *Resources*, 10(3), 25.