



CIHEAM
BARI

MASTER COURSES 2021-22



Master in Sustainable Agroecosystems and Resilience (SARe)



Academic Year 2021 - 2022



DESCRIPTION

The Master of Science in “Sustainable Agroecosystems and Resilience” (referred to as **SARe**) is an innovative two-year course which aims at preparing professionals to tackle the complex challenges of sustaining food production in rural areas.

The Master course is focused on farming and the evolution of food systems, identifying 1) the agroecosystem as a complex system with economic, social, and ecological components; 2) the local community as the main stakeholder relying on the agroecosystem functions and aiming to conserve and improve its ability to resist and respond to changes. Agroecosystems will be studied as farm and landscape systems that deliver important services to societies and evolve in relation to agri-food policies and people’s behaviors. Solutions are proposed for their sustainable management with a focus on biodiversity, water, and soil resources, and in the frame of climate change. Attention is given to how to promote, at local level, stakeholders’ participation and empowerment in agroecosystem planning and management, and establish agri-food networks driven by green and ethical principles and for an agro-ecological transition. The course presents methodologies and tools for the assessment and diagnosis of agroecosystem sustainability and community resilience, and how to design and implement projects for the sustainable development of agri-food sector and communities.

During the Master of Science Programme, students will conduct research related to contents identified among the Master topics, through internships within selected institutions. Priority will be given to research carried out in the participants’ home countries.

At the end of the course, students will master the systems thinking required to understand, assess, and promote agroecosystem resilience, and they will be able to:

- ❖ Use different research methodologies and tools embedding multidisciplinary and intersectoral perspectives; promote multi-stakeholder participation, dialogue and vision building processes proficiently applying an action-oriented approach;
- ❖ Comprehend and analyse the complexity of agroecosystems, their relations with food systems and people’s behaviors, the nature of their development challenges;
- ❖ Design and drive community development processes according to agroecological principles to build up resilience against bio-physical and socio-economic stresses;
- ❖ Identify and fill stakeholders’ knowledge gaps to facilitate transition to resilient agroecosystems;
- ❖ Analyse and promote territorial networks for an integrated land management approach, agroecology knowledge and innovation systems to support green economy processes;
- ❖ Support community farms towards greater competitiveness and socio-economic sustainability in the agri-food system.



The 1st year programme will be organised in 7 Teaching Units and 2 (group and individual) Projects, awarding a total of 60 credits (see table below). Units I & II will be implemented in distance learning.

Units	Credits	Dates
Unit I - Sustainability and Resilience in agriculture and food systems	6	4 Oct – 29 Oct 2021
Unit II – Climate “smart” agroecology	6	1 Nov – 26 Nov 2021
Unit III – Water and land resources	4	6 Dec – 17 Dec 2021
Unit IV – Smart tools for the management of natural resources in agriculture	8	20 Dec – 14 Jan 2022
Unit V – Knowledge and Innovation development	8	31 Jan – 25 Feb 2022
Unit VI – Sustainable Farm Management	6	28 Feb – 18 Mar 2022
Unit VII – Agri-food Network Development	8	21 Mar – 15 Apr 2022
Individual project	8	Oct – Apr 2022
Action Learning Project	6	Apr – Jun 2022

UNIT I: SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE IN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

Food systems encompass all the elements (environment, people, inputs, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities relating to the production (cf. agriculture), processing, distribution and consumption of food. They include the supply side and consumption elements as well as the food environment that shapes food access.

Over the last decades, food systems have been central to the debate on sustainable development (cf. Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs). Indeed, food systems are under an unprecedented confluence of pressures and lie at the centre of a global nexus of environmental, social and economic problems, as humanity faces the challenge of achieving sustainable food security confronted with ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss, resource scarcity, human population growth, and climate change. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the vulnerabilities and highlighted the flaws of the current food systems as well as the need to improve their resilience and sustainability.

On the one hand, food systems are among the main contributors to sustainability challenges such as land degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, etc. On the other hand, they are dramatically affected by these challenges facing humanity. Moreover, the dysfunction of modern food systems is a major cause of several societal issues, such as food insecurity and malnutrition, rural poverty and livelihoods vulnerability, social inequality. This has all culminated in different calls for the transformation of food systems and their transition towards more sustainability and resilience. Transition to sustainable and resilient agri-food systems is the objective of many policies, strategies and initiatives. While some initiatives focus on single stages of the food chain (e.g. sustainable agriculture, sustainable diets), others are more systemic and holistic (e.g. short food supply chains,



alternative food networks). Food-related challenges are particularly pressing in the Mediterranean, where there is an urgent need for action.

Aims

- ❖ Explain the concepts of sustainability, sustainable development and resilience, and the way of applying them to agriculture and food systems (cf. sustainable agriculture, sustainable diets, sustainable food systems);
- ❖ Explore environmental, social, economic, and health-nutritional challenges affecting the sustainability of agriculture and food in the Mediterranean area and worldwide;
- ❖ Introduce examples of sustainability assessment approaches and show how they have been used in agriculture and food systems;
- ❖ Present policies, strategies and initiatives to foster transition towards sustainability in agriculture and food systems in the Mediterranean, European Union and worldwide.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the teaching unit, students will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the concepts of sustainability, sustainable development and resilience, and apply them to agriculture and food systems;
- ✓ Explain sustainability challenges regarding agriculture and food in the Mediterranean area and worldwide;
- ✓ Know how sustainability assessment approaches are used in agriculture and food systems with practical examples;
- ✓ Understand strategies, pathways and actions for transition towards sustainability in agriculture and food systems.

UNIT II: CLIMATE SMART AGROECOLOGY

Agroecology is a relatively new discipline that studies the ecological complexity and functioning of the agroecosystem. It is one of the key disciplines to drive the transition of agriculture towards sustainable paths, facing challenges posed by climate change, but also the negative externalities from current intensive production systems. It focuses on biological processes and on how they interact and influence the functioning of agroecosystems and farming systems, to propose sustainable agricultural practices and solutions.

Biodiversity conservation and enhancement, sustainable management of natural capital and the provision of ecosystem services are of core interest for agroecology. Students will have the opportunity to explore how the agroecosystems are interlinked with the use of natural resources, the health of soil, plant, and the environment and how they cope with abiotic and biotic threats under a changing climate.

Nowadays, the conceptual development of agroecology goes beyond the aspects related to scientific discipline and discusses factors concerning economy, sociology, culture, and in general wellbeing of the sector actors. Smallholder farmers are considered as promoters of sustainable practices, agroecology strives for their autonomy, supports the community-self organization and co-learning,



and bottom-up/place-based actions. While promoting its core values, agroecology is not immune to modern technologies and innovation. Synergies are developed between new technologies and nature-based solutions thereby resulting in 'smart' agroecology, whose approach to agri-food systems and to mitigation strategies helps face climate change and other global and local challenges.

All the topics listed above are discussed along the unit, taking into consideration basic principles and practices of agroecology, agroecosystem stability and resilience, predictions related to different climate change scenarios, the carbon footprint of agricultural production, including some assessment methods as well such as life cycle assessment of greenhouse gas emissions.

Aims

The present teaching unit aims to provide a widely applicable knowledge base to increase agroecosystems' resilience and production in a changing climate scenario while having the following objectives:

- ❖ Understanding the value of the agroecological approach for improving rural livelihoods and promote social equity;
- ❖ Explaining agroecosystem functioning;
- ❖ Examining the agroecosystems' complexities and challenges;
- ❖ Reviewing agroecological practices that enable a more sustainable production;
- ❖ Understanding how climate change affects the functioning of agroecosystems;
- ❖ Identifying sustainable management solutions to mitigate and adapt to climate change and other global drivers of change.

All along the course, practical sessions will be promoted to provide and improve the skills, knowledge and abilities of students to use specific tools and technologies that enable a proper analysis of agroecosystems and biodiversity at different scales and support rational management of natural resources.

Learning outcomes

At the end of the unit, students will:

- ✓ Become familiar with social and cultural values promoted by agroecology;
- ✓ Become knowledgeable about ecosystem functioning, principles of agroecology and related practices;
- ✓ Acquire practical skills in integrated, multiscale agroecosystem analysis;
- ✓ Achieve basic knowledge on nature-based solutions for biodiversity and ecosystem service provision;
- ✓ Understand how climate change affects agroecosystems and sustainable management of natural resources.



UNIT III: LAND AND WATER RESOURCES: BASIC PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT

The unit will deepen the main challenges of land and water resources in Mediterranean environments and beyond, including climate change impacts. Nevertheless, the focus will be on land and water use in agriculture. In more detail, the key concepts of soil genesis, pedologic features, soil resources classification and survey will be debated and integrated with hands-on practices of soil profile studies. The interaction between soil moisture and temperatures regimes and how they influence soil properties, land degradation, desertification, drought, and land use planning will be discussed. The most prominent practices for sustainable land and water management to reverse and mitigate land degradation in various Mediterranean ecosystems will be illustrated.

Aims

The main objective of the Unit is to increase the knowledge base of students on:

- Soil, land, and water resources and their primary role in biomass production including food and ecosystem services;
- Land degradation and desertification processes and the best management practices to mitigate their negative impacts.

The Unit will provide basic knowledge on the following:

- ❖ Soil genesis
- ❖ Soil survey
- ❖ Soil classification systems
- ❖ Geo-referenced soil information systems
- ❖ WOCAT¹ methodology for sustainable land and water management
- ❖ Out-scaling and up-scaling the best management practices.

Learning outcomes

At the end of the Unit, students will acquire:

- ✓ Comprehensive knowledge of characteristics and diversity of soil, land, and water resources with major focus on the Mediterranean region;
- ✓ Basic concepts of integrated natural resources management including both bio-physical and socio-economic indicators;
- ✓ Overwhelming experience to assess land degradation process in a landscape context;
- ✓ Principles for implementing sustainable land and water management and its out-scaling;
- ✓ Knowledge of factors that govern land and water management in an ecosystem-based approach and with multi-stakeholder involvement.

UNIT IV: SMART TOOLS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN AGRICULTURE

Nowadays the study of territories and agroecosystems makes large use of Informatic/geo-spatial technologies and Geographic Information Systems (GISs). Applications regard the analysis of natural

¹ *World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT)* is a network of Sustainable Land Management (SLM) specialists from all over the world.



resources, climate change effects, pests' surveillance, agroecosystem resilience assessment, among others.

Geo-spatial technologies allow for space-time and spectral measurements for monitoring phenomena at different spatial scale levels. Low-cost smart devices and apps facilitate the acquisition of geo-localised information from surveys. GISs enable the management of a huge amount of data, both quantitative and qualitative, paving the way to multi-criteria analysis and planning.

The use of these technologies is based on the integration of different skills and teamwork, requiring that informatics or engineers work together with agronomists, biologists and socio-economists to adjust software, create apps, integrate technologies, and interpret data.

Aims

The main aim of the Unit is to present how SMART tools may help support decisions in agriculture towards a sustainable management of natural resources. In particular, the Unit will present:

- ❖ Basic concepts, principles, methods, and practical applications of the Geographic Information System (GIS);
- ❖ Fundamental concepts in remote sensing for the management and sustainability of the territory, the agricultural system, and the water resources;
- ❖ The principles of Cartography and Geographic Positioning System (GPS).

Learning outcomes

Students will learn:

- ✓ The range of applications of remote sensing, the source of data and its extraction;
- ✓ How to elaborate end read cartographic maps;
- ✓ To collect, process and create geo-socio-economic data using a positional geo-location unit (GPS or smartphone/tablet);
- ✓ To use GIS to analyse spatial data, manage geodatabases and create thematic maps to explore problems and evaluate situations in a geographical and spatio-temporal context;
- ✓ How to design projects based on the use and integration of SMART technologies and the coordination of different areas of expertise.

UNIT V: KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION DEVELOPMENT

The concept of knowledge and innovations in agriculture is complex and context specific. It is about creating in local farmers and other agri-food actors the ability to be active in adapting, improving, innovating their productive processes and/or creating new linkages and alliances to pursue specific needs and strategies, without of course affecting the quality of agroecosystems. Many actors and partnerships may play key and different roles in a territory, being part of complex Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS). These can include research education and/or extension



services, but also grassroots and non-governmental organizations, market actors and farmers as well. In the last decades AKIS promote participatory approaches for developing knowledge and innovation tailored to the capacities of local farmers, especially smallholders, through mechanisms that include farmers' research groups, farmers' field schools, among others. These need the figure of the facilitator who is a professional able to guide a multi-actor activity towards transformative process bringing to concrete outcomes. In this regard the figure of the Innovation Broker is an emerging one who supports agri-food companies' innovation processes, linking these to local and global actors, through the provision of new products and services able to meet even social needs and create new relationships and collaborations, and ensuring the company competitiveness and market positioning.

Aims

The unit will present:

- ❖ Ways on how knowledge and innovation may be generated and promoted in rural areas and in different agroecosystems;
- ❖ The concept of AKIS and multistakeholder approaches to knowledge and innovation development that may facilitate the shift to more sustainable agroecosystems;
- ❖ Forms of innovative local partnerships (social innovations) that can enable people, local communities, enterprises, and social actors to activate and manage innovation processes;
- ❖ Participatory approaches based on farmers' research group and Farmer-to-Farmer extension, to increase capacities of farmers, in particular of smallholders;
- ❖ The role of facilitators and innovation brokers to design new products/services and models to tackle contemporary societal challenges to create social impact.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the unit, students will be able to:

- ✓ Identify and map key actors for knowledge and innovation development within a territory;
- ✓ Read the innovation needs of farms and agri-food companies;
- ✓ Set up a program based on participatory approaches;
- ✓ Facilitate the management of participatory approaches for technical and social innovation development;
- ✓ Measure impacts of knowledge and innovation development.

UNIT VI: SUSTAINABLE FARM MANAGEMENT

The unit presents the sustainable farm management as the process of making decisions about the allocation of scarce resources for agricultural production, matching up with multiple management goals. The farm is viewed as part of agroecosystems and placed in the wider agri-food system; methods for its performance analysis are described as tools to drive farmers towards competitiveness and business, respecting the environmental and social context. The issues are addressed through the examination of theoretical models, monitoring methodologies, application cases, and the development of strategies and possible future scenarios. As practical part, students will be challenged in the analysis of organic and conventional farms to assess sustainability levels.



Aims

The Unit will deepen:

- ❖ The principles of farm economics, with an agri-environmental perspective, particularly farm management, accounting and budgeting, economic analysis, business planning;
- ❖ The assessment of environmental, economic and social sustainability of an eco-friendly enterprise according to analytic methods, and schemes for calculation and analysis;
- ❖ The tools to organize and manage an enterprise inside the sustainable supply chain.

Learning outcomes

Students will learn:

- ✓ The decision-making process for the improvement of the competitiveness and profitability of the producers in the sustainable supply chain, as the organic sector;
- ✓ The business planning;
- ✓ The use of indicators for the assessment of environmental, economic and social sustainability;
- ✓ How to manage an eco-friendly farm according to the principles of sustainability.

UNIT VII: AGRI-FOOD NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

The world is changing and is becoming more unpredictable and uncontrollable. Agri-food actors around the world are increasingly exposed to extreme weather events, economic crises, food crises, disease epidemics, social instability and political conflicts. The resulting insecurity not only affects the global social and economic systems, but also (local) agri-food systems and their farmers who stand at the basis of food production. With these increasing uncertainties and future challenges and prospects, there is the need to develop resilient and sustainable agri-food systems and networks that can cope with unexpected shocks and ensure a food secure future.

From one side, stakeholders' networks are key tools for engaging communities in processes for agroecological transition. These can be of different nature, such as food value chain actors, farmers' cooperatives, environmental or social associations. From another side, the value chain is a key concept in the development of more sustainable, resilient and diverse agri-food systems. Nowadays agri-food value chains' function is an increasingly complex and dynamic environment characterised by new consumer demands, new technologies and solutions, changing structures and cooperation modes.

The Unit presents the kind of agri-food networks, their implications and linkage with the social capital, and the food value chains' functions that are important for the sustainability of agroecosystems and resilience of communities, and it provides guidance on ways for their analysis and promotion. Furthermore, communities of small holders/farmers, their political and organisational structures in local food systems are illustrated. Through a series of webinars, the Unit wraps up with agri-food networks' case studies and examples from South and East Mediterranean contexts.

Aims



The main aims of the unit are:

- ❖ To explain the importance of social capital in agri-food, rural development, and their interlinkage and present network configurations and their implications for local development;
- ❖ To provide knowledge about the value chain concept and functioning, its components and phases, actors and services and introduce a range of approaches in developing new sustainable food value chains (focus on organic standard);
- ❖ To present the role of small farmer communities in sustainable food systems, and of their networks in food security and sovereignty;
- ❖ To introduce a range of approaches in developing new sustainable community-led localised sustainable food systems (focus on Bio-district approach) and Mediterranean case studies.

Learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the concepts of bonding, linking, bridging social capital and its analysis in agri-food network contexts;
- ✓ Design strategies, pathways and actions for network building in agri-food contexts;
- ✓ Apply value chain development concepts and perform its analysis;
- ✓ Enable multi-actor processes and empowering Communities of Small holders/farmers on more inclusive, equitable and sustainable localised sustainable food systems.

INDIVIDUAL PROJECT

The individual project consists of an essay written by the student based on literature review and aimed at discussing a specific issue relevant to agroecosystem's sustainability and resilience. During the 1st quarter of the course, he/she will choose a relevant topic of interest, collecting and reading key references and, at the end, presenting the essay's specific focus and objective. In the following 4 months the student will finalise the essay by delivering the report. The student will present and discuss the research results to an evaluation board, as final step of the 1st year course.

Students may choose within a list of topics provided by CIHEAM Bari staff.

Aims and learning outcomes

Through the individual project the student will gain important knowledge and insights on key topics and issues, learning about the main trends and challenges in research and development related issues. In addition, he/she will develop skills on how to set up and develop a research project based on literature review.



ACTION LEARNING PROJECT

Agroecosystems are social-economic systems characterised by complex processes driven by different factors and determinants. Their understanding requires different investigation tools based on direct observations, interaction with agroecosystems actors, teamwork activities. Thus, during the Action Learning project, students, divided in groups, will be challenged with investigation of real agroecosystems to understand their features and the nature of the processes towards sustainability and resilience. Through the Action Learning approach, they will identify the research questions to be answered and use qualitative and participatory approach to data collection and analysis. At the end of the project, each team will prepare a short report on the research results to be presented to an evaluation board. As support to their activities, students will attend specific labs on topics such as “Qualitative and participatory research”, “Theory of Change and Project development”, “Agroecological transitional analysis”.

Aims and learning outcomes

Through the AL project, students will learn to work as part of teams and to analyse agroecosystems with multidisciplinary and intersectoral views; to understand the scope that agroecosystems studies may have and to identify researchable questions; to use and choose among a number of tools for qualitative and participatory data collection.