

First Term, Academic Year 2024-2025

## Field Seminar: Sociology: Main questions and building blocks

**Tuesday 15:00-17:00, Seminar Room 2**

Juho Härkönen  
Herman van de Werfhorst

### **Seminar description and objectives**

This seminar addresses key questions, theoretical approaches and readings in sociology as a core social science discipline. Sociology is a very disparate discipline but this course approaches it by focusing on key theoretical approaches and questions that cut through much of good sociological research. The focus of the course is on asking theoretical questions, developing theoretical arguments, and thinking sociologically. The course comes in two parts: a ten week seminar series and an exam of a reading list of some key texts in sociology. The seminar and the readings are structured under five themes: Core principles and sociological theory building, Social structure and agency, Social integration and social cohesion, Differentiation and inequality, and Social change and continuity. By the end of the course, the participants are expected to have developed an understanding of sociological thinking and some key sociological fields and central works therein.

At the end of the course, the participants should be aware of and master key questions in sociology and theoretical approaches to them. They should be able to critically assess these theories and use them to formulate further research questions and hypotheses.

### **Teaching**

This seminar is essentially about reading and discussing sociological literature, with a focus on core questions and theoretical approaches to address them. Each week, you are assigned a set of readings that you are expected to do and be prepared to discuss.

- Core readings that are read by everyone
- Additional readings, which address a more specific question related to the topic. Each week, you should select one of these readings and prepare to present the main argument of the paper and relate it to the broader questions addressed each week.
- Response papers. Each week, we will assign questions about the readings that you should respond to in writing (max 1 page). You should submit your response paper by noon on the day before class on Brightspace.
- Take-home exam (only those participants who take this as the compulsory field course).

## **Week 1. Core principles and sociological theory building**

1 October 2024, 15-17, **Sala del Capitolo**

*Core readings (please read all)*

Goldthorpe, J. H. (2016). *Sociology as a Population Science (chapter 3: the individualistic paradigm)*. Cambridge University Press. (available online at the EUI library)

Ultee, W. 2015. "Problem Selection in the Social Sciences: Methodology." Pp. 49–55 in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition)*, edited by J. D. Wright. Oxford: Elsevier.

Watts, D. J. (2014). Common sense and sociological explanations. *American Journal of Sociology*, 120(2), 313-351.

Elster, J. (2007). *Explaining Social Behavior. More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2: Mechanisms.

## **BLOCK I Social structure and agency**

### **Week 2. Culture and social norms**

8 October 2024, 15-17, Seminar Room 2

*Core readings*

Di Maggio, P. 1997. Culture and cognition. *Annual Review of Sociology* 23: 263-87.

Horne, C., & Mollborn, S. 2020. Norms: An Integrated Framework. *Annual Review of Sociology* 46(1):467–87.

Patterson, O. 2014. Making sense of culture. *Annual Review of Sociology* 40: 1-30.

*Additional readings*

Jerolmack, C. & Khan, S. 2014. Talk is cheap: Ethnography and the attitudinal fallacy. *Sociological Methods and Research* 43(2): <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124114523396>

Small, M. L., Harding, D. J., & Lamont, M. 2010. Reconsidering culture and poverty. *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 629 (1): <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716210362077>

Robbins, B. G., Dechter, A., & Kornrich, A. (2022). Assessing the deinstitutionalization of marriage thesis: An experimental test. *American Sociological Review* 87(2): <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224221080960>

### **Week 3. Social structure and networks**

15 October 2024, 15-17, Seminar Room 2

*Core readings*

Blau, P. M. (1977). A macrosociological theory of social structure. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(1), 26-54.

Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American journal of sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380.

Watts, D. J. (1999). Networks, dynamics, and the small-world phenomenon. *American Journal of sociology*, 105(2), 493-527.

#### *Additional readings*

Burt, R. S. (2004). Structural holes and good ideas. *American Journal of Sociology*, 110(2), 349-399.

Dunbar, R. I. M. (2008). Cognitive constraints on the structure and dynamics of social networks. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* 12 (1): 7-16.

McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J. M. (2001). Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27(1), 415-444.

### **Week 4. Social institutions and social organizations**

22 October 2024, 15-17, Seminar Room 2

Esping-Andersen, G. 1990. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Introduction & Ch. 1. Polity Press.

Jepperson, R., & Meyer, J. W. (2011). Multiple Levels of Analysis and the Limitations of Methodological Individualisms. *Sociological Theory*, 29(1), 54–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2010.01387.x>

Nee, V. (2005). The New Institutionalisms in Economics and Sociology. In N. J. Smelser & R. Swedberg (Eds.), *The Handbook of Economic Sociology: Second Edition*. Princeton University Press. (e-book in EUI library)

#### *Additional readings*

DiMaggio, P. J. & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review* 48(2): 147-160.

Mahoney, J., & Thelen, K. (2010). A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change. In J. Mahoney & K. Thelen (Eds.), *Explaining Institutional Change. Ambiguity, Agency, and Power* (pp. 1–37). Cambridge University Press.

Müller, W., & Shavit, Y. (1998). *The Institutional Embeddedness of the Stratification Process* (Y. Shavit & W. Müller, Eds.; pp. 1–48). Clarendon Press.

### **Week 5. Models of agency**

29 October 2024, 15-17, Seminar Room 2

A central tension in sociological theories of agency is between rational, purposeful and goal-oriented action on the one hand and habitual and non-conscious on the other. In this session, we discuss cases of both variants as well as “dual process” models that have emerged to theorize situations in which the former or the latter are dominant.

#### *Core readings*

Boudon, R. 2008. Rational choice theory. Pp. 179-195 in Turner, B.S. (ed.) *The New Blackwell*

*Companion to Social Theory*. Blackwell.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Pp. 52-65.

Vaisey, S. (2009). Motivation and justification: A dual-process model of culture in action. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114(6), 1675-1715.

*This week, instead of additional readings, we ask you to formulate testable hypotheses preferably on your research topic, submit them before and prepare to present them in class.*

## **BLOCK II Social cohesion, differentiation and change**

### **Week 6. Interaction, trust and social order**

5 November 2024, 15-17, Seminar Room 2

#### *Core readings*

Fehr, E. & Gintis, H. 2007. Human motivations and social cooperation: Experimental and analytical foundations. *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:43-64.

Rawls, A. W. 1987. The interaction order sui generis: Goffman's contribution to social theory. *Sociological Theory* 5(2): 136-49.

Schilke, O., Reimann, M., & Cook, K. 2021. Trust in social relations. *Annual Review of Sociology* 47: 239-59.

#### *Additional readings*

Anderson, E. 1990. *Streetwise: Race, Class and Change in an Urban Community*. Chs. 1, 8. University of Chicago Press.

Delhey, J., & Newton, K. (2003). Who trusts?: The origins of social trust in seven societies. *European Societies*, 5(2), 93–137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461669032000072256>

Campana, P. & Varese, F. 2013. Cooperation in criminal organizations: Kinship and violence as credible commitments. *Rationality and Society*, 25(3), 263-89.

Kas, J., Delnoij, J., Corten, R., & Parigi, P. (2022). Trust spillovers in the sharing economy: Does international Airbnb experience foster cross-national trust? *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 21(3), 509–522. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.2014>

### **Week 7. Differentiation and inequality I: principles of social class and stratification**

12 November 2024, 15-17, Seminar Room 2

Who gets what and why is a central question in sociology. This session covers two topics: the principles of stratification and social class. How do sociologists approach the question of social stratification? Social class has been considered one of the most important stratifiers in industrial society. How has class been theorized in sociology?

### Core readings

Grusky, D. 2001. *Social Stratification: Class, Race and Gender in Sociological Perspective*. 2nd Edition. Westview Press. Pp. 3-54.

Wright, E.O. (2005). *Approaches to Class Analysis*. Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1-50, 180-92.

### Additional readings

Weeden, K. A., & Grusky, D. B. (2005). The Case for a New Class Map. *American Journal of Sociology*, 111(1), 141–212. <https://doi.org/10.1086/ajs.2005.111.issue-1>

Bukodi, E., Paskov, M., & Nolan, B. (2020). Intergenerational Class Mobility in Europe: A New Account. *Social Forces*, 98(3), 941–972. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soz026>

Savage, M., Warde, A., & Devine, F. (2005). Capitals, assets, and resources: Some critical issues. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 56(1), 31–47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2005.00045.x>

## Week 8. Differentiation and inequality II: Gender

19 November 2024, 15-17, Seminar Room 2

Sex/gender is a pervasive social category that structures everyday life and divisions of labour and produces inequalities between individuals located in these gendered categories. How pervasive are these divisions, which forms do they take and where do they come from?

### Core readings

Becker, G.S. 1986. Human capital, effort, and the sexual division of labor. *Journal of Labor Economics* 3(1): S33-S58.

West, C. & Zimmerman, D. H. 1987. Doing Gender. *Gender and Society* 1(2): 125-51.

Risman, B. J. & Davis, G. 2013. From sex roles to gender structure. *Current Sociology Review* 61(5-6): 733-55.

### Specific readings

Bittman, M., England, P., Sayer, L., & Matheson, G. 2003. When does gender trump money? Bargaining and time in household work. *American Journal of Sociology*, 109(1), 186-214.

Connell, R. W. & Messerschmidt, J. W. 2005. Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society* 19 (6): <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>

Gërkhani, K., Brandts, J. & Schram, A. (2023). Competition and gender inequality: A comprehensive analysis of effects and mechanisms. *American Journal of Sociology* 129(3). <https://doi.org/10.1086/727822>

Charles, M., & Bradley, K. (2009). Indulging Our Gendered Selves? Sex Segregation by Field of Study in 44 Countries. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114(4), 924–976. <https://doi.org/10.1086/595942>

## Week 9. Differentiation and inequality III: Race, ethnicity, migration

26 November 2024, 15-17, Sala del Capitolo

### Core readings

Drouhot, L. G., & Nee, V. 2019. Assimilation and the second generation in Europe and America: Blending and segregating social dynamics between migrants and natives. *Annual Review of Sociology* 45: 177-199.

Roth, W. D. et al. 2023. Conceptualizations of race: Essentialism and constructivism. *Annual Review of Sociology* 49:39-58.

Wimmer, A. 2008. Elementary strategies of ethnic boundary making. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31(6): 1025-55.

### Additional readings

Chan, T. W., & Kawalerowicz, J. (2024). Social diversity and social cohesion in Britain. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 75(4), 452–470. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13094>

Feliciano, C., & Lanuza, Y. R. (2017). An Immigrant Paradox? Contextual Attainment and Intergenerational Educational Mobility. *American Sociological Review*, 82(1), 211–241. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416684777>

Rawls, A. W. & Duck, W. 2020. *Tacit Racism*. Ch. 1,2. University of Chicago Press.

Spencer, S. J., Logel, C., & Davies, P. G. (2016). Stereotype threat. *Annual Review of Psychology* 67:415-37. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-073115-103235>

## Week 10. Social change

3 December 2024, 15-17, Seminar Room 2

### Core readings

Alwin, D. F. & McCammon, R. J. 2004. Generations, cohorts, and social change. Pp. 23-49 in Mortimer, J. T. & Shanahan, M. J. (eds.) *Handbook of the Life Course*. Springer.

Elder, G.H., & Shanahan, M. 2006. The life course and human development. Pp. 665-715 in Lerner, R.M. (Ed.) *Handbook of Child Psychology, Volume I: Theoretical Models of Human Development*. Wiley.

Erikson, E. & Occhiuto, N. 2017. Social networks and macrosocial change. *Annual Review of Sociology* 43:229-43.

### Additional literature

Barclay, K. & Myrskylä, M. 2016. Advancing maternal age and offspring outcomes: Reproductive aging and counterbalancing period trends. *Population and Development Review* 42(1): 69-94.

Centola, D., Becker, J., Brackbill, D., & Baronchelli, A. (2018). Experimental evidence for tipping points in social convention. *Science*, 360(6393), 1116-1119.

Kristal, T. (2013). The Capitalist Machine: Computerization, Workers' Power, and the Decline in Labor's Share within U.S. Industries. *American Sociological Review*, 78(3), 361–389. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122413481351>

Kiley, K. & Vaisey, S. 2020. Measuring stability and change in personal culture using panel data. *American Sociological Review* 85(3): 477-506.