

First term seminar 2025-2026

FIELD SEMINAR

SOCIOLOGY: Main questions and building blocks

First term, mostly on Tuesdays 15:00-17:00

Seminar Room 2, Badia Fiesolana

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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 consists of a ten week seminar series and, for those who follow this as their field seminar, an exam. The seminar and the readings are structured under five themes: Core principles and sociological theory building, Social structure, agency and social change, Social integration and social cohesion, and Differentiation and inequality.

Learning outcomes

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 + pick one from the additional readings and prepare to discuss its contributions to the general topic of the week.
- Each week one or two participants are engaged in managing the group discussion. Their task is to read at least two papers from the additional reading list of that week (and possibly outside the list), and bring the acquired insights into the discussion.
- 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.
- Oral exam (only those participants who take this as the compulsory field course).

BLOCK I Social structure, agency, and social change

Week 1. Culture

30 September 2025, 15-17 (Seminar room 2)

Core readings

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

Lizardo, O. 2017. Improving cultural analysis: Considering personal culture in declarative and non-declarative forms. *American Sociological Review* 82 (1): 88-115.

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>

Additional readings

Ingelhart, R. & Baker, W. 2000. Modernization, cultural change and the persistence of traditional values. *American Sociological Review* 65 (1): 19-51.

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>

Kiley, K., & Vaisey, S. (2020). Measuring Stability and Change in Personal Culture Using Panel Data. *American Sociological Review*, 85(3), 477–506. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420921538>

Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies. *American Sociological Review*, 51(2), 273–286. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095521>

van der Waal, J., de Koster, W., van Meurs, T., Noordzij, K., Groeniger, J. O., & Schaap, J. (2024). Advancing stratification research by measuring non-declarative cultural capital: A national population-based study combining IAT and survey data. *American Sociological Review*, 89 (4): 735-60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224241261603>

Week 2. Social structure and networks

7 October 2025, 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.

Baldassarri, D., & Bearman, P. (2007). Dynamics of Political Polarization. *American Sociological Review*, 72(5), 784–811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240707200507>

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.

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

Week 3. Social institutions and social organizations

14 October 2025, 15-17 (Seminar room 2)

Core readings

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

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)

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.

Additional readings

Cherlin, A.J. 2020. Degrees of change: An assessment of the deinstitutionalization of marriage thesis. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 82 (1): 62-80.

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>

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 4. Models of agency

21 October 2025, 15-17 (Seminar room 2)

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.

Hitlin, S. & Elder, G.H. (2007). Time, self, and the curiously abstract concept of agency. *Sociological Theory* 25(2): 170-91.

This week, instead of additional readings, we ask you to formulate hypotheses (preferably related to your own research) that based on theoretical approaches covered in the readings.

Week 5. Agency, structure and social change

28 October 2025, 15-17 (Seminar room 2)

Core readings

Coleman, J. S. 1986. Social Theory, Social Research, and a Theory of Action. *American Journal of Sociology* 91(6):1309–35.

Ryder, N.B. 1965. The cohort as a concept in the study of social change. *American Sociological Review* 30 (6): 843-61.

Sewell, W. H., Jr. 1992. A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 98(1), 1–29.

Additional readings

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

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

Ermakoff, I. (2015). The structure of contingency. *American Journal of Sociology* 121(1): 64-125.

Frese, J., Härkönen, J. & Hix, S. 2025. Brextinction? How cohort replacement has transformed support for Brexit. *European Journal of Political Research* 64 (3): 1519-32.

Granovetter, M. (1978). Threshold models of collective behavior. *American journal of sociology*, 83(6), 1420-1443.

Kirk, D. (1996). Demographic transition theory. *Population Studies* 50(3): 361-87.

Stolz, J., de Graaf, N. D., Hackett, C., & Antonietti, J.-P. (2025). The three stages of religious decline around the world. *Nature Communications*, 16(1), 7202.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-025-62452-z>

BLOCK II Social cohesion, differentiation and change

Week 6. Interaction, trust and social order

4 November 2025, 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.

Collins, R. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Ch 1. Princeton University Press.

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

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>

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

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

11 November 2025, 15-17 (Seminar room 2)

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

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>

Brady, D. (2023). Poverty, not the poor. *Science Advances*, 9(34), eadg1469. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adg1469>

Hout, M. & DiPrete, T. A. (2006). What we have learned: RC28s contributions to knowledge about social stratification. *Research on Social Stratification and Mobility* 24(1): 1-20.

Hung, H-f. 2021. Recent trends in global economic inequality. *Annual Review of Sociology* 47: 349-67.

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>

Sørensen, A. 1994. Women, family and class. *Annual Review of Sociology* 20:27-45.

Tilly, C. 1999. *Durable Inequality*. Chs 1 & 2.

Weber, Max. "Class, status, party", "Status groups and classes" and "Open and closed relationships". Pp. 114-32 in Grusky, D. (Ed.) *Social Stratification: Class, Race and Gender in Sociological Perspective*. Third Edition. Westview Press.

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->

Week 8. Differentiation and inequality II: Gender

18 November 2025, **9-11 (Seminar room 4)**

Core readings

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

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

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

Additional 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.

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>

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

Gërxhani, 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>

Mandel, H. & Semyonov, M. 2008. A welfare state paradox: State interventions and women's employment opportunities in 22 countries. *American Journal of Sociology* 111(6):
<https://doi.org/10.1086/499912>

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

25 November 2025, 15-17 (Seminar room 2)

Core readings

Brown, T. H., Homan, P., & Ray, V. (2025). Advancing the Scientific Study of Structural Racism: Concepts, Measures, and Methods. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 51, 43–65.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090924-021305>

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.

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>

Dixon, A. R. & Telles, E. E. 2017. Skin color and colorism: Global research, concepts and measurement. *Annual Review of Sociology* 43: 405-27.

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

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. Core principles and sociological theory building

2 December 2025, 15-17 (Seminar room 2)

Core readings

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.

Desmond, M., & Clevenstine, V. (2025). We Need More Data. *American Journal of Sociology*, 131(1), 246–258. <https://doi.org/10.1086/736223>

Additional readings

Araújo, A. C., & Ochoa, N. R. (2025). How to Make a Functionalist Argument. *Sociological Science*, 12, 456–485. <https://doi.org/10.15195/v12.a20>

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

Healy, K. (2017). Fuck nuance. *Sociological Theory*, 35(2), 118-127.

Jasso, G. (1988). Principles of Theoretical Analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 6(1), 1-20.

Liebersohn, S., & Lynn, F. B. (2002). Barking up the wrong branch: Scientific alternatives to the current model of sociological science. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28(1), 1-19.

Mills, M. & Tropf, F. 2020. Sociology, genetics, and the coming age of sociogenomics. *Annual Review of Sociology* 46: 553-81.