The sociology of civil society, civility, and the third sector: syllabus

Faculty of Sociology – National Research University, Higher School of Economics, Moscow.

Module Convener: Dr. Ruben Flores

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Time: Fridays, 18.00-21.00.

Venue: 3 Kochnovsky Proezd., Room 301

Office hours: 3 Kochnovsky Proezd, Office 308A. By appointment.

Credits: TBC.

Teaching period: 4th module (April-June 2012).

Level: MA course.

Module summary / course description

The objective of this course is to provide students with tools to undertake sociological research on areas related to the notions of civil society, civility, and the third sector. The course will begin by reflecting upon the meaning of and relationship between these notions, and then go on to explore their history and sociological significance. In so doing, it will examine their relevance for issues such as social solidarity, the public sphere, the state, the market, and democracy. It will also provide an overview of topics such as philanthropy, volunteering, and the sociological study of morality. Two sessions will be devoted to examining civil society, civility, and the third sector in the Russian context.

The course presupposes some familiarity with classical and contemporary social theory.

The working language will be English.
II. Thematic plan for the course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Total hours in theme</th>
<th>Seminars</th>
<th>Independent work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>General Introduction</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>What do we mean by civil society and the third sector, and why it matters to think about these concepts?</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>On the history of the idea of ‘civil society’</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>The Third Sector in comparative perspective</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>The idea of civility</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Explaining civil society, civility, and the third sector</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Philanthropy, volunteering, and the study of morality and social solidarity</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Trust, social capital, democracy, and the public sphere</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Civil Society in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Civil Society in Post-Soviet Russia.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>176</td>
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III. Learning outcomes

I expect that, by the end of the course, students will be better equipped to:

Undertake sociological research into civil society, civility, and the third sector.
Critically engage with sociological theories of civil society, civility, and the third sector.

Link theories of civil society, civility, and the third sector with wider debates about social solidarity, democracy, welfare, the public sphere, the common good, and individual and social flourishing.

Link sociological debates about civil society, civility, and the third sector with the social realities of Russian society.

Be able to provide constructive criticism to fellow students.

Constructively deal with criticisms to their own work, and incorporate such criticisms in revising their own work.

IV. Programme Author / Course Instructor

Ruben Flores (PhD in Sociology, University of Kent) is assistant professor at the Faculty of Sociology, and research fellow at the Centre for Advanced Studies, Higher School of Economics. His PhD explored the motivations of charity shop volunteers in the UK from the perspective of the sociology of compassion, morality, and social solidarity. He is interested in the sociological study of humane forms of feeling, thinking, and acting.

V. Course Assessment

Students' final mark will depend on two components: a) seminar participation; and b) a course paper. Each of these components is sub-divided as follows:

a) Seminar participation:

Weekly assignments = 10%
Weekly reports = 10%
Individual presentation = 10%
Seminar participation = 20%

b) Paper:

Part one: Description of topic and case study = 10%
Part two: Part one (revised) + Theory, research question, and sources of data = 10%
Part three: Part one (revised) + Part two (revised) + data analysis and discussion = 30%

Each of these parts should take into account the theoretical and methodological principles discussed during seminar time, as well as the feedback provided by the module convener. This latter point is particularly important for parts two and three.

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1 I have taken the idea of a research paper in three parts from Benjamin Lind’s course on the History of Social Movements (p.7). I would like to thank Benjamin for letting me borrow this idea.
The deadlines for handing in your papers are the following:

a) Part one: end of week four (27 April);

b) Part two: end of week seven (25 May);

c) Part three: end of week ten (15 June).

**Seminar participation.** I will mark seminar participation using a four point scale:

Unjustified absence: minus one point.
Justified absence: zero points.
Attendance: one point.
Attendance and active participation: 2 points.
Attendance and active participation which demonstrates a critical engagement with the texts under discussion: 3 points.

**Attendance**

Attendance to the seminars is mandatory. Only two absences will be allowed during the course. Students with more than two unjustified absences will lose the right to receive a mark for the course.

**Weekly reports**

Each week students are to prepare a brief analysis of – or, rather, a reaction to – the texts to be discussed that week. This report, of between 100 and 300 words, should focus on the paper's argument. This report is not meant to be a polished piece of work, but only a springboard for seminar discussion. The only requirement is that the student uses her/his own words to analyse the texts under consideration. Tasks will not be marked, but their production will count towards the final mark.

**Weekly assignments and presentations**

Students will be asked to hand in an assignment every week. They will also make a short presentation about their research at least once during the course.

**How to do well on this course?**

Read as widely as possible, and be ready to discuss the texts under review during seminar time. Do ask questions. Cultivate doubt, and an inquisitive attitude towards the social world. Start working early on your assignments!

**How to do badly in this course? (A note on plagiarism)**

One of the best ways to do badly in this course is through committing plagiarism – a plagiarised work will be marked zero and required to be resubmitted. Recurrent plagiarism will be reported to the dean and lead to a zero mark for the whole course. The module convener reserves the right to refuse to give a mark for the course to any student committing plagiarism. So, please make sure to familiarise yourself with what counts as plagiarism and make sure to avoid this practice. The following are some useful websites in this regard:

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2 I thank Rafael Mrowczynski for this idea.
“Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It” (Indiana University)
http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml

“How to avoid plagiarism” (The writer's center @ The University of Wisconsin – Madison).
http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html

**IV. Seminars**

At the beginning of each seminar, the module convener will introduce the nominated topic. After this, students will discuss a particular piece of scholarly work – normally one or more journal article(s) or book chapter(s). There will be time to discuss theoretical and methodological questions related to the students’ research papers.

Questions to discuss during seminar time include the following:

What is the argument of the text under review?
What are its premises, and what its conclusions?
What theoretical, epistemological, and normative presuppositions underlie the text's argument?
What is the methodology employed?
What are its data sources?
How can this text be useful for your own and your colleagues’ research?

**V. Course outline**

**Week 1: General Introduction**

This session is intended to provide students with a general introduction to the course contents.

**Week 2: What do we mean by civil society and the third sector, and why it matters to think about these concepts?**

During this first session we shall begin discussing the nature and sociological relevance of civil society, and the third sector. That is, we shall review some of the ways in which these concepts have been defined in the literature, and reflect upon why these notions matter sociologically. Reflecting upon the multi-faceted nature of the social phenomena normally associated with the ideas of civil society and the third sector will be a principal focus of this session.

Required reading:


Further reading:


**Week 3: On the history of the idea of ‘civil society’**

Drawing on papers from social theory, political philosophy, the history of ideas, and anthropology, during this session we shall reflect upon the history of the notion of civil society.

Required reading:


Further reading:
**Week 4: The Third Sector in comparative perspective**

In this session we shall discuss the ‘associational’ component of civil society. How to define, classify, and measure the so-called third sector? Questions to be explored include the relationship between associational life and civil society, trust, social capital, and democracy.


**Week 5: The idea of civility**

During this session will examine the relationship between civil society, the third sector, and the idea of civility. We will do so drawing on historical and theoretical debates about the place of civility within modern societies, and about the role of the third sector in building, or eroding, ‘societies that are civil’ (Edwards 2009: 58). We shall discuss whether civility can be fostered, and whether this is desirable.

Required reading:


Week 6: Explaining civil society, civility, and the third sector

In this session we shall examine one of the most thorough theories that account for the existence of the third sector in different national contexts, viz. social origins theory. In order to reflect on the origins of civility, we shall also review Norbert Elias’s writings on the process of civilization, and Steven Pinker’s work on ‘the decline of violence in history’ (Pinker 2011).


doi: 10.3817/1282054134

Further reading:


**Week 7: Philanthropy, volunteering, and the study of morality, solidarity and pro-social behaviour**

During this session we shall focus on a number of social practices that are commonly identified with civil society and the third sector, viz. philanthropy and volunteering. We shall also reflect on the relevance of research into morality and social solidarity for our understanding of the topics of this course.

Required reading:


doi: 10.1177/089976408901800306

Further reading:


Available at: [http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm](http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm)

Week 8: Trust, social capital, civic engagement, democracy, and the public sphere

A vibrant civil society is often portrayed as an essential ingredient of a healthy democracy. In this session we shall examine some of the historical and sociological evidence that can be advanced to support or criticize this proposition.

Required reading:


Available at: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/789610234](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/789610234)

Available at: [http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/108361/session7k.pdf](http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/108361/session7k.pdf)

Further reading:


DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2010.493784
URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2010.493784](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2010.493784)

Week 9: Civil Society in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

Russia has long been inferred to be distinct from “the West” as far as civil society is concerned. Questions to be discussed during this thematic session include the following: What is the history, and what the current state, of civil society, civility, and the third sector in Russia?

Required reading:


Further reading:


Week 10: Civil Society, civility, and the third sector in post-Soviet Russia.

Required reading:


Further reading:


**VI. Some books on methodology**


**Acknowledgements**

Jeremy Kendall’s syllabus on “The third sector: Non profit associations, charities, NGOs & social enterprise in modern society” (University of Kent 2010/2011) served as a starting point for this outline. In elaborating this programme I benefited from conversations with Benjamin Lind, Rafael Mrowczynski, Aleh Ivanou, and Professor Leonid Kosals.