

Sociological reasoning: the philosophy, history, sociology and practice of social research

National Research University - Higher School of Economics

Faculty of Sociology

Instructors: Dr Ruben Flores and Dr John Round

Winter and spring 2014 (Modules 3 and 4)

Office hours: by appointment

Credits: 6.

BA Course, Honours Programme

Course objectives

The course is comprised of two parts. The **first part** is largely theoretical. It aims to provide students with an overview of reasoning styles within sociology through the discussion of both classic and contemporary pieces. Questions to be discussed during this part include the following: How do sociologists reason? How does their way of reasoning, qua social scientists, differ from other ways of reasoning, like those of journalists, politicians or novelists? What is the place of ethics within sociological reasoning? How do patterns of institutionalization influence styles of reasoning? Is sociology a science?

The **second part** of the course is more practically based as we look at how sociological practices are produced, performed and recorded in practice. To enable this there will be three blocks to this section looking at the production of urban space, the nature of informal economies and the sociologies of globalisation. Within this there will be guided readings, lectures, in the field teaching and student presentations. The aim is to demonstrate that sociology is intrinsic to the everyday and indeed everything that we do. Students will learn how sociological approaches can be applied outside of academia/universities. It will also explore how sociology as a discipline differs between countries and how this impacts on how societies are seen.

Drawing upon the course's first section we will use a wide variety of sources - for each blocks we will examine how different outputs such as newspapers, magazines, websites as well as academic journals - this will enable us to see how different approaches produce different outputs and views of the world. Positionality will be a key consideration within this and it will also provide students with invaluable experience in using different sources. Students will be asked in their presentations to take different theoretical viewpoints when producing their presentations (for example, from a feminist post-structuralist viewpoint or employing positivist or qualitative approaches, environmental concern etc). Therefore, the presentations will not only provide students with deeper knowledge about social processes but also with a wide variety of views on the studied subjects.

Key to this part of the course is to develop students' understandings of sociology's vitality and relevance to everyday life. It is a call for sociologists to think about how they can impact upon key issues and to broaden their horizons about the career choices that they can make while still taking a sociological viewpoint.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course students should be able to ask meaningful questions about the following topics:

Varieties of sociological reasoning, as well as their historical origins and their philosophical, historical and sociological underpinnings;

The role of journals, books, and other publications within the sociological field;

How research is produced, analysed and turned into outputs;

How research is turned, or indeed not turned, into policy and practice;

How positionality impacts upon the production of knowledge;

How scholarly communities work;

At the same time, students will also be able to:

Find and evaluate scholarly literature;

Consider how sociology can influence their careers and how they can influence society as public sociologists;

Consider the sociological nature of everyday events and practices.

Thematic plan: Part 1

Week	Theme	Total hours in theme	Seminars	Independent work
1	Introduction: Why reasoning?	20	4	16
2	Reasoning styles	20	4	16
3	On the history of the social sciences	20	4	16
4	The sociological field	20	4	16
5	The role of ethics	20	4	16
6	Reading week	20	4	16
7	Presentations	20	4	16
8	Mid-course evaluation	20	4	16
9	Review session	20	4	16

Thematic plan: Part 2

Week	Theme	Total hours in theme	Seminars	Independent work
1	'Sociology is all around'	20	4	16
2	Guided reading and discussion on urban spaces	20	4	16
3	Field trip	20	4	16
4	Guided reading on informal economies	20	4	16
5	Field trip	20	4	16
6	Guided reading on critical	20	4	16

	globalisation			
7	Student presentations	20	4	16
8	Overview and evaluation	20	4	16

Part I. An overview of reasoning styles within sociology

Week 1. Introduction: Why reasoning?

This introductory session will provide an overview of the course's structure and contents, as well as an explanation of the evaluation process. We will reflect on the idea of arguments, traditions, and research as a form of social practice.

Week 2: Reasoning styles

In this session we shall discuss C. W. Mills notion of "The sociological imagination", and Andrew Abbott's four-fold classification of sociological methods. We shall also seek to identify different traditions within social research (e.g. interpretative sociology, positivism, functionalism, process sociology, formal sociology, critical theory).

Required reading:

Andrew, A. (2004). *Methods of Discovery. Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. New York/London: WW Norton. Chapter 1.

Mills, C. W. (2000). *The sociological imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Further reading:

Davis, M. S. (1971). "That's interesting." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1(2): 309-344.

Bauman, Z., & May, T. (1990). *Thinking sociologically* (Vol. 7, No. 2). Oxford: Blackwell.

Crow, Graham. 2005. *The Art of Sociological Argument*. Palgrave.

Elias, N. (1978). *What is sociology*. Columbia University Press.

Lemert, C. (2011). *Social things: An introduction to the sociological life*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Week 3: On the history of the social sciences

As other forms of social practice, social research has a history. In this session we shall reflect upon this history focusing on the role of communities, traditions, and means to communicate knowledge, notably books and journals. One of your tasks for this session will be to identify professional associations and their flagship publications (journals, newsletters) as well as their histories and activities (workshops, conferences).

Required reading

Andrew, A. (2004). *Methods of Discovery. Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. New York/London: WW Norton. Chapter 2.

Burke, P. (2000). *A social history of knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Vol. 1). Cambridge: Polity. Chapter 1.

Further reading

Abbott, Andrew. (2001). *Chaos of disciplines*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wallerstein, I. M. (1991). *Unthinking social science: The limits of nineteenth-century paradigms*. Temple University Press.

Wallerstein, I. (1997). Eurocentrism and its avatars: the dilemmas of social science. *New Left Review*, 93-108.

Wallerstein, I. (1999). The Heritage of Sociology, the Promise of Social Science Presidential Address, XIVth World Congress of Sociology, Montreal, 26 July 1998. *Current Sociology*, 47(1), 1-37.

Week 4: The sociological field

In this session, devoted to the sociology of social research, we shall deploy the notion of "field" in order to think about social research as a form of social practice. Central to this session will be to think about the "journal article" as an object from which we can read social practices associated with scholarly fields.

Required reading

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1999). On the cunning of imperialist reason. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16(1), 41-58.

Further reading

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *In other words: Essays towards a reflexive sociology*. Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. (Eds.). (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. University of Chicago Press.

Wacquant, L. J. (1993). From ruling class to field of power: An interview with Pierre Bourdieu on La Noblesse d'Etat. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 10, 19-19.

Wacquant, L. J. (1989). For a Socio-Analysis of Intellectuals: On "Homo Academicus". *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 34, 1-29.

Week 5: The role of ethics

In this session we shall reflect upon the place of ethics within social research, and approach a number of traditions from the perspective of their normative aspirations or (alleged) lack thereof.

Required reading

Bellah, R. (1983). "The Ethical Aims of Social Inquiry." In Robert Bellah and Steven M. Tipton (eds.) *The Robert Bellah Reader*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006, p.123-149.

Further reading:

Flyvbjerg, B. (2002). *Making social science matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hegel, G. W. (1966). Who Thinks Abstractly?. *Hegel: Reinterpretation, Texts, and Commentary*.

Gaiman, Neil (2013). Why our future depends on libraries, reading and daydreaming.

The Guardian. Tuesday 15 October 2013.

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/oct/15/neil-gaiman-future-libraries-reading-daydreaming>

Week 6 Reading week & drop-in sessions

Week 7 Mid-course exam.

Week 8 Review session in preparation for the second part of the course

Part II. Sociology in everyday practice (module 4)

Week 1. 'Sociology is all around'

This opening session will introduce ideas of how sociology is part of almost every aspect of our everyday lives. This will be achieved by guided group work and student led discussions. During this session we will also talk about our positionality and how this influences how we see (or do not see) the world and the practices that take place within it.

Required reading: Cook, I. (2004) Follow the Thing: Papaya, Antipode, 642-664

Burawoy, M. (2011) Public sociology in review. In Pokrovsky, N. (ed.) (2011) THE VIRTUALIZATION OF INTER-UNIVERSITY AND ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION available at

http://soc.hse.ru/data/2011/11/10/1268995698/VIRTUALIZATION_2011.pdf#page=121

Becker, Howard S. "Whose side are we on." *Soc. Probs.* 14 (1966): 239.

Further reading to be directed.

It will also look at how sociological knowledge is created within academia through the guided reading of articles which will then be explored further through the module's field trips.

Weeks 2 & 3. 'Creating urban spaces'

This block will look at the sociology of everyday life and how spaces are created and reproduced by various groups. This will include the creation of Moscow as a political/economic space, spaces of protest and the creation of new economic spaces. By using various materials in the popular press, magazine/internet sources and academic journals we will look at how these spaces are considered and conceptualized at different levels and from differing viewpoints. This block will also involve field trips to various points in Moscow to explore how we position ourselves in these spaces and the relation to the written texts. This block will be assessed by student presentations on a location of their choosing.

Required reading: Florida, R. (2001) The Rise of the Creative Class: Why cities without gays and rock bands are losing the economic development race. Available at
<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2001/0205.florida.html>

Peck, J. (2005) Struggling with the Creative Class. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 740 – 770.

A dropbox file will be created for the popular press articles

Weeks 4 & 5: 'Informal economic spaces'

This section of the module considers the spaces of alternative economic activity from the household to the offshore economy. There will be an introductory lecture on the topic and then we will go into the field to view informal economic spaces in action. Again presentations will be made by the student groups as the form of assessment.

Required reading; Gibson-Graham, J.K. (2008) Diverse economies: performative practices for 'other worlds'. *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 32, No. 5, pp. 613 – 632.

Additional readings; Round, J. and Williams, C. (2010) Coping with the social costs of 'transition': everyday life in post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine. *European Urban and Regional Studies*. Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 183 –196.

Weeks 6 & 7. 'spaces of globalisation'

This block will look at discourses of globalisation and how they are played out in Moscow. Student groups will undertake small research projects in Moscow which will form the basis of the final stage of the assessment. This will be developed with the guidance of the course leader and will be presented during the last session. We are constantly bombard with discourses suggesting that we live in an era of globalisation where the world is shrinking, communications are instantaneous and that borders and states are of decreasing importance. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union notions such as we are in an era where history and geography are 'dead' as the neo-liberal model of economic development has won and that the globe is borderless. The aim of this block is to challenge these assumptions and to demonstrate the importance of 'place' and 'culture' within globalisation debates.

Required reading: Peck, J. and Tickell, A. (2002) Neoliberalizing space. *Antipode*, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 380 – 404.

Further reading dependent on group project - to be directed by course leader.

Week 8 Final student presentations, overview discussions.

Methods of evaluation

Seminar participation: 20%

Presentations: 20%

Written mid-course exam: 20%

Book Review: 10%

Final research project: 30%

Attendance

Attendance to the lectures and seminars is mandatory. Students with three or more unjustified absences will lose the right to receive a mark for the course.

Course instructors

Ruben Flores (PhD, University of Kent) is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Sociology, and research fellow at the Centre for Advanced Studies, Higher School of Economics.

John Round (PhD, University of Birmingham) is an associate professor at the Faculty of Sociology, and research fellow at the Centre for Advanced Studies, Higher School of Economics.