

National Research University Higher School of Economics

University of London Parallel Degree Program

Undergraduate Program in International Relations

Syllabus

Introduction to Sociology (Spring 2020)

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1. Course Description

Prerequisites

The course has no prerequisites.

Abstract

The course is aimed at giving theoretical and methodological resources to reflect on various social and economic phenomena which bind traditional, modern and (post)modern society. The emergence of the 'sociology of modern society' was recognized as a break with tradition. At the same time, there is a strong debate on whether this break was intellectually fruitful especially after the turn to a (post)modern state. For example, the growing interest in the artifacts of traditional society, such as gift giving, bazaars, and communities, realizes the need towards the resocialization of economy and society based on new technologies. Social sciences have accumulated rich theoretical and empirical resources which could be applied to conceptualize and objectify present-day challenges of human coexistence. During the course, we will rely on these resources to discuss the agenda of contemporary society.

This introductory course exposes the structure of social sciences and the relationships between subfields to provide the polemics between several disciplines – sociology, demography, anthropology, and economic science. It is divided into several sessions which represent main spheres of sociological investigation: gift exchange, market exchange, capitalism, family, religion, social networks, organizations, and state. Lectures in each session rely on the theoretical debates, local cases, and comparative data which represent various countries.

2. Learning Objectives

Students are expected to acquire a fair understanding of the relationships between social and economic sciences and their role in contemporary world. Social-scientific knowledge is organized in texts which require specific techniques of reading. Students will learn to read and decipher the social-scientific texts, but also to develop their own judgments and express them in written academic texts.

3. Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, students are expected to acquire following competences:

- Familiarity with the main concepts and schools in social theory, with context of development of modern social thought
- Ability to apply basic conceptual tools of sociology, anthropology and demography for studying basic problems of contemporary social life
- Skills of discussion, critical analysis and evaluation of texts in social sciences

4. Course Plan

Lecture 1. Introduction to Sociology. Course overview.

Lectures 2 & 3. Pre-modern (traditional), modern and post-modern society; Western and Non-Western Societies. The transition to a modern society as a sociological problem. Classics in Sociology. On the nature of social relations. Individual and collective consciousness; natural law

and the division of labor; mechanical and organic solidarity; Community and Society. How is Society possible?

Seminar 2. Individual and Collective Consciousness

Seminar 3. Community and Society

Lectures 4 & 5. Capital and Capitalism, The origins of modern capitalism, Historical materialism, Private Property, Relations of production and forces of production, Estranged Labour and Class struggle; The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Calling, Capitalism and rationalization of life, types of rationality, disenchantment of the world, Types of capitalisms: ‘adventure capitalism’, ‘speculative capitalism’ and ‘rational capitalism’.

Seminar 4. Capitalism | Marx

Seminar 5. Capitalism | Weber

Lecture 6. Expansion of capitalism and the rise of social inequality, Social class and market, Status groups, Life Style, Social honor, Class struggle, Bourgeoisie and proletariat; Forms of capital and social structure; human capital, rate of return on investment in human capital, wage inequality; social capital, trust and social engagement; embodied cultural capital, habitus and taste differences; the conversion of capitals.

Seminar 6. Stratification & Inequality

Lecture 7. Why economics draws on market as basic economic institution? Homo oeconomicus and the issue of rationality of human behavior; boundaries of economic knowledge; Robbins’ critique of material definitions of economics and his own scarcity definition; anthropological criticism of Robbins; Polanyi’s two meaning of the ‘economical’; multiple form of integration of economy; the concept of ‘embeddedness’ and autonomy of the economic.

Seminar 7. Market and Alternative Forms of Integration

Lecture 8. In search of the “pure sociality”. The promise of the gift. The gift / commodity distinction; Discovery of the Kula ring; Big Man and Capitalist, Rules of gift exchange, spheres of exchange, community, self-interest and debt, discovering new forms of gift giving: sharing economy, pay what you want, open software and etc.

Seminar 8. The Gift

Religion and (de)Secularization of Society.

Lecture 9. Religion and faith, religion and magic, exclusive and inclusive definitions of religion; the difference between church and sect, sacred and profane, functions of religion, ritual and symbol in religious life, charisma; theories of secularization,

Seminar 9. Elementary forms of religious life

Lecture 10. Religion and measures of religiosity, religious identity and confessions, belonging, believing and practicing, religious conversion and values; religion and economic development; social dimensions and social effects of religiosity, network effects of religion, civic religion; the difference between natural and forced secularization, private and public religion.

Seminar 10. *Public and private religion*

Sociology of family and childbirth

Lecture 11. Family and ‘Individualistic’ society, theories of marriage and family formation, family patterns in Europe, types of kinship, extended family relations, nuclear family and social interaction, family relations, relational reflexivity and relational goods, types of family policy in Europe.

Seminar 11. Marriage and the construction of reality

Lecture 12. First and second demographic transitions, low and lowest-low fertility in Europe; various patterns of fertility transition - strong families with low fertility and weak families with strong fertility; economic and sociological theories of fertility decline: risk aversion, gender equity; ideal family size, ideational theory, childbirth motivation, transition to parenthood, networks effects in fertility decisions.

Seminar 12. Childbirth and Demographic transition

Sociology of markets and money

Lecture 13. Social history of markets, markets as public places, agora, European fair, bazaar economy, stock exchange and credit, the great transformation, fictitious goods, Economics and sociology of markets, perfectly competitive market, economic exchange and uncertainty, social construction of markets, markets as calculative devices, performing markets.

Seminar 13. The social construction of a perfect market

Lecture 14. Commodity and commoditization, economic exchange and uncertainty, search goods, credence goods, social status and trust, economy of qualities, information asymmetry and institutions, clientalization, bazaar governance, cultural goods, social construction of quality, status-based and standard based markets.

Seminar 14. Knowledge and valuation in markets

Organizations and institutions

Lecture 15. Where do organizations come from? Sociology and management, the rise of formal organization, types of domination, theory of bureaucracy, bureaucratic organization, bureaucratic-professional conflict, rational and functional approaches to organizational analysis, formal and informal organization, efficiency and effectiveness in organizational analysis, non-profit and non-governmental organizations.

Seminar 15. The analysis of bureaucratic-professional conflict

Lecture 16. What makes organizations so similar? Institutions and organizations, organizational efficiency vs. organizational legitimacy, institutional environment and organizational change, technical and institutionalized organizations, public and private organizations, loose coupling and tight coupling, institutional isomorphism and organizational fields.

Seminar 16. Collective rationality and institutional isomorphism in organizational fields

Lecture 17. Theories of state formation, monopoly on violence, sovereign and imperium, autonomy of state, the relationship between state and economy, the invisible hand and the grabbing hand, welfare state, typology of states, political order and economic growth, seeing like state, political culture, corruption and mafia.

Seminar 17. The autonomous power of the state

Lecture 18. The state vision, the origins of informal economy, state and informal economy, types and paradoxes of Informal economy, corruption, contemporary criticisms of the state, the future of the state.

Seminar 18. State Simplifications.

5. Reading List

a) Required

1. Aptekar, S. (2016). Gifts Among Strangers: The Social Organization of Freecycle Giving. *Social Problems*, 63(2), 266-283.
2. Beckert, J., Rössel, J., & Schenk, P. (2017). Wine as a cultural product: Symbolic capital and price formation in the wine field. *Sociological Perspectives*, 60(1), 206-222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121416629994>
3. Bernardi, L., & Klärner, A. (2014). Social networks and fertility. *Demographic research*, 30, 641.
4. Daniele, G., & Geys, B. (2016). Family Ties and Socio-Economic Outcomes in High vs Low Income Countries. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 52(6), 813-823.
5. Schor, J. (2016). Debating the sharing economy. *Journal of Self-Governance & Management Economics*, 4(3).
6. Storm, I. (2017). Does economic insecurity predict religiosity? Evidence from the European social survey 2002–2014. *Sociology of Religion*, 78(2), 146-172. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srw055>
7. Yudin, G. (2016). Sociology as a naïve science: Alfred Schütz and the phenomenological theory of attitudes. *Human Studies*, 39(4), 547-568.
8. Zaidi B., Morgan P.S. (2017). The Second Demographic Transition Theory: A Review and Appraisal. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 43: 4.1–4.20. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053442>

b) Optional

1. Lois, D. (2016). Types of social networks and the transition to parenthood. *Demographic Research*, 34, 657.
2. Pew Research Center, May 10, 2017, “Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe” URL: <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>
3. Ramirez, F. O., & Christensen, T. (2013). The formalization of the university: Rules, roots, and routes. *Higher Education*, 65(6), 695-708.
4. Yudin, G., & Pavlyutkin, I. (2015). Recording the ambiguity: The moral economy of debt books in a Russian small town. *Cultural Studies*, 29(5-6), 807-826.
5. Zabaev, I., Mikhaylova, Y., & Oreshina, D. (2018). Neither public nor private religion: the Russian Orthodox Church in the public sphere of contemporary Russia. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 33(1), 17-38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2018.1408260>

6. Grading System

Grades will be based on the following assignments:

1. Short quizzes on one of the assigned readings. Quizzes are held at the beginning of every class and address the abilities to: (1) identify and address key issue discussed in the

readings; (2) identify basic conceptual distinctions used by the author to solve the identified problem; (3) identify the solution to the issue provided by the author, and (4) evaluate it by drawing on the knowledge in stock.

All quizzes are graded from 0 (fail) to 4 (excellent). The maximum grade for all the 18 quizzes is 72. All grades above 60 equal 10, 55-60=9, 49-54=8, 43-48=7, 37-42=6, 31-36=5, 25-30=4, 19-24=3, 13-18=2, 7-12=1, 1-6=0. Quizzes cannot be retaken. **25% of the final grade.**

Sample quiz question

Tönnies famously distinguishes between community (Gemeinschaft) and society (Gesellschaft). Choose all statements representing correctly Tönnies' view of the relationship between them. There can be 1 or 2 correct answers, and you only earn 1 point if you tick all correct answers and omit all incorrect answers. Otherwise you earn no points.

- a) Community develops into society due to the modern state
- b) Community is based on communication between free rational individuals
- c) In the society, the personality of the contractor matters less than the commodity exchange
- d) In the community, high status is gained by accumulation of capital

2. Presentation of the readings delivered in class and participation in class discussions. Each seminar focuses on the suggested readings (30-40 pages every week). Students are required to deliver a presentation of the text by one presenter and a reaction by one opponent. Students can choose to participate either 1) by delivering a presentation or 2) by serving as opponent for one of the presentations. Every student will be given one opportunity for presenting or acting as opponent. Second opportunity will only be provided after all other students have either participated or forfeited their chance to participate.

Presentation must present an analysis of the readings and avoid repeating and summarizing them. Each presentation should cover: 1) main question/problem that the text addresses; 2) key concepts; 3) most important distinctions suggested in the text; 4) main argument and logic; 5) useful classifications (if any); 6) conclusions of the text; 7) critical evaluation of the text. All presentations are required to use slides in Power Point or alternative format, following the structure suggested above. The presentation should take approximately 15 minutes.

Opponent's task is to prepare her own account of the text and evaluate the presenter's ability to analyze the text and cover all key points. Opponent has 7-10 minutes to discuss all strong and weak sides of the presenter, whether the presenter had succeeded in identifying correctly the problem, the context, the argument, and the conclusions. Opponent will be evaluated according to her ability to analyze the presentation according to the aforementioned criteria. Opponent should be able to indicate if the presenter had succeeded in identifying correctly the problem, the context, the argument, and the conclusions.

Presenting, acting as opponent, and participating in discussion amounts to **25% of the final grade.**

3. Take-home short essay (papers should be more than 1500 words but must not exceed 2000 words). The essay evaluates students' ability to use concepts and approaches discussed in class for the analysis of social phenomena. Topics for the essay will be distributed after week 3. If the topic is suggested by the student individually, then it should be discussed and approved by the instructor. Papers are graded based on proper problem statement, depth of understanding of the relevant literature, consistency of the argument, clear structure of the text, referencing. Essays are due on the first week of June. If the essay is submitted 2 days

after the deadline the mark is reduced by 2 points. After the second day essay is not accepted. **25% of the final grade.**

4. Final test in class. Final test includes multiple choice questions and short essays and lasts 120 minutes. **25% of the final grade.**

Final Grade Formula: Quiz*0,25 + Seminar presentations & Discussion *0,25 + Essay*0,25 + Final test *0,25.

7. Examination Type

Final test in class. Final test includes multiple choice questions and short essays and lasts 120 minutes.

Multiple-choice question

There are multiple ways to think of the market. Select the statements attributing the ideas correctly

- a. For Samuelson, perfect market is only possible when agents have perfect knowledge of prices
- b. For Polanyi, self-regulating market is the basic form of social integration
- c. For Tönnies, market dissolves the communal life
- d. For Garcia-Parpet, perfect market is a natural phenomenon
- e. For Marx, markets should be regulated by the state
- f. For Aspers, market is only possible with the standardized goods

Short Essay

One of the critical points about organizational homogeneity in the field of public services (education, healthcare) lies in the assumption about the inability of “good fit organizations” to sense changes of the external environment and become agents of ongoing innovations in order to benefit society. Explain the logic of this assumption relying on the new institutional approach to organizational analysis introduced by Powell & DiMaggio (1983).

8. Methods of Instruction

Combined methods: lectures are followed by quick quizzes meant to develop the ability to find the core arguments in literature. In-class presentations develop ability to summarize and present the main arguments, and opponents contribute to critical evaluation of both authors and presenters. Research essays provide an opportunity to improve academic writing skills, while final exam evaluates simultaneously multiple skills developed within the course.

9. Special Equipment and Software Support

None

