Version 27 November

STOCKHOLMS UNIVERSITET
Sociologiska institutionen

Modern sociological theory, 7,5 hp
Course plan, spring 2025

Decision
The Syllabus is approved by the board of the Department of Sociology at Stockholm University 2013-12-19.
General information
The course consists of 7,5 ECTS credits and is at the advanced level.
Course code
SO7021
Entrance qualification
A Bachelor's degree.

Content
The aim of this course is to give an overview of modern sociological theory and a deeper understanding of some modern sociological perspectives. "Modern sociological theory" refers to the period after the decline of functionalism around 1960 and until today. This course covers some of the important fields and perspectives in recent sociology, including e.g. cultural theory, rational choice, structural analysis and organizational theory.

Learning outcomes
After accomplishing this course, participants are expected to:

In terms of knowledge and understanding:
• Have knowledge about the principal lines in the development of modern sociological theory.
• Understand the meaning of central concepts and theories in modern sociological theory.
• Be able to identify important similarities and differences between modern sociological theories.
• Know how modern sociology has been shaped by classical sociology.

In terms of accomplishment and competence:
• Be able to account for, and to analyze, the content of central texts by modern sociologists in a clear, well put and well-argued manner.
• Be able to use relevant parts of modern sociological theory to analyze social phenomena.

In terms of values and evaluation:
• To be able to critically assess modern sociological theories in terms of their merits and limitations.

Instruction
The course is provided at half-time basis over 10 weeks, from January 20 to March 21 2025. Participants meet about once a week during 9 weeks.

The instructor will give a lecture the first class, but the remaining classes will primarily center on student presentations and discussions. During these classes, there will be presentations of the course readings by a group of students, discussion of the course readings based on questions, and presentations of answers to discussion questions.

The classes depend on **active student participation** and all students are therefore expected to have read the required literature before each class and actively engage in discussion. Keep required literature for each class close at hand during classes.

The organization of groups and tasks will be assigned by the instructor during the first class. In order to arrange this, **attendance at the first class is crucial**. If a student plans to take the course, but is unable to attend the first class, an e-mail **must** be sent to the head instructor before 8 am on Monday 20 January in order to be included in one of the groups.

Attendance is required for all classes. Absence must be compensated by assignments. If the first class is missed, the student must provide a short summary (2-300 words) of Abend's article. If any of the later classes (2-9) is missed, the student must submit short summaries (200-300 words) of each of the articles/chapters for the missed class. **No form of AI-assistance is allowed for generating the content of these summaries**. All supplementary assignments should be submitted together with the course paper by March 21 18:00. A student who misses more than three classes will not be graded.

If the paper and supplementary assignments are not handed in on time, there is an opportunity to hand in by 15 October or at the deadline for the paper when the course is given next time.

Examination
To pass, students are required to participate actively during discussions and present a theoretical application for one class together with their group. Examination is in the form of two assignments: an individual course paper and an oral presentation (group).

Course paper
The student is expected to write a short paper. The length should be 3000-4000 words and formatting should be 1,5 spaced, Times New Roman 12 point. Deadline for the course paper is Friday 21 March 18:00.

The topic of the paper is free, as long as the paper discusses questions in *close* relation to the course contents. It is possible to address a theoretical question related to the topic of the student's master's thesis, or to start from a question discussed during a class. For example, the paper could use different theories or a few concepts to critically examine how they contribute to further understanding of a specific social phenomenon of interest, and/or compare which theory that is most suitable to address the phenomenon at hand. The paper could also take some area from one of the classes and analyze it from the perspective of another.
To pass, the paper must include discussion of at least three pieces from the required literature from at least two of the classes and of at least two of the books, in the list of suggested readings. Make explicit page references, especially for the books. The selection of books must add up to at least 600 pages, i.e. choosing to read some of the shorter books means having to

read more than two. The paper must also include some kind of comparison of the literature. If the paper builds on what was presented during the group lecture or group discussion, it must be substantially developed, including a deeper analysis and argumentation. If there is a considerable overlap with the lecture, the paper will be considered as self-plagiarism. **No form of AI-assistance is allowed for generating the content of the course paper. Using any form of AI to generate the text will be considered plagiarism**.

Voluntary assignment to assist the decision on topic
To assist in the process of figuring out a topic for the course paper, there is an assignment about half way through the course. The deadline is Monday 24 February 18:00. This assignment should include information about the preliminary questions of the course paper, a few sentences describing the topic and the selection of readings that (books and pieces from required literature) will be discussed. Please note that this is the principal opportunity to discuss the topic of the paper with the instructor.

Student lectures – guidelines and requirements
During the student lecture, the members of the group should present the course literature for the class during about 30 min.

The presentation could be structured according to the readings (e.g. one student presents some aspects of one text, another student presents aspects of another text etc.) or thematically (e.g. one student presents one or several core themes of the readings each). Present **some specific theme and/or a few key concepts and/or specific comparisons** across the readings. Give a substantial account of core ideas. It is also good to say something about basic questions such as assumptions, level and scope of the theory.

Please **avoid** reading aloud from the presented pieces and/or to summarize the content as a whole of each text.

The presentation should be approximately equally divided between all the students of the group so that each group member presents one part. It is necessary for the group to discuss together how to set up the presentation and to use PowerPoint when presenting their material.

If a student is scheduled to give a part of a lecture, but cannot attend the class in the last minute, the student should provide fellow group members with sufficient material for them to fill in the gap. The student must also provide a manuscript of his/her part of the lecture, about 700-900 words, to the course instructor. This assignment should be submitted together with the course paper by March 21 18:00.

Evaluation
The course work is graded on a scale including seven grades, A, B, C, D, E, Fx and F. The course grade will be determined by the course paper (75%) and lecture (25 %).

The course paper is evaluated on three dimensions, on a scale from insufficient to good. The lecture is evaluated on one dimension, on a scale from insufficient to good.

	Lecture and presentation	**Course paper: Extent**	**Course paper: Argumentation**	**Course paper: Comparison**
Good	Analytical review of the literature Relevant examples	Extensive and deep account of the course literature	Critical and convincing interpretation and argumentation	Clear discussion of important differences and similarities of the theories/concepts
Pass	Clear, sufficiently extensive review of relevant aspects	Clear account of the course literature	Reasonable interpretations and argumentation	Identification of important differences and similarities in the theories/concepts
Insuffi-cient	Irrelevant, inaccurate or unclear review Reading from the course literature	Unclear account of or insufficient use of the course literature	Unreasonable interpretations Lack of arguments	Unclear comparison of concept or theories

Everything that is required for ”Good” presupposes what is mentioned for ”Pass”. Please note that ”Good” on one or more dimensions cannot compensate for ”Insufficient” on one or more aspects. All aspects must be least ”Pass” for not failing the course. For A, both graded assignments must be evaluated as “good” on all dimensions. For B no more than one dimension of the graded assignments must be evaluated as “pass”. For C no more than two dimensions of the paper or the other assignments must be evaluated as “pass”. For D one dimensions of the paper or one of the other assignments must be evaluated as “good”
For E all assignments must be evaluated as “pass” on all dimensions.

For Fx no more than one dimension of the paper or of the other assignments must be evaluated as “insufficient”. For F two or more dimensions of either the paper or the other assignments must be evaluated as “insufficient”

If something is missing in a submitted assignment, it must be supplemented and resubmitted within 14 days of the result becoming available to the student.

If a student receives F or Fx, or is unable to hand in assignments on time, next time to submit the assignments is 15 October.

Schedule: Classes and reading requirements
Attendance is compulsory for all classes and all students must read the required readings before each class. The schedule is available here
https://cloud.timeedit.net/su/web/stud1/s.html?i=qZ56050gyZ62QZ05n61ZYQu9wg6QQY69769X0Q67c00Y0535Q667ZxhynQacxv

Important: If a student plans to take the course, but is unable to attend the first class, an e-mail **must** be sent to the main instructor **before 8 am on Monday 20 January** in order to be included in one of the groups who will work together on the group assignments.

Introduction, Monday 20 January
Required reading
Abend 2008, Merton 1945.

Microsociology, Monday 27 January
Required reading
Blumer 1966; Goffman 1961; Collins 1981.
Suggested reading
Collins, R. (2004) *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 438 p.
Goffman, E. (1974) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Penguin Press. 257 p.

Rationality and Action, Friday 31 January
Required reading
Boudon 2003; Coleman 1986; Elster 1982.
Suggested reading
Coleman, J. (1998) *Foundations of Social Theory*. Harvard University Press. 993 p.

Structural Analysis, Friday 7 February
Required reading
Blau 1977; Feld 1981; Merton 1938; Giddens 1984.

Power, Friday 14 February
Required reading
Emerson 1962; Foucault 1982; Lukes 2007; Smith 1990.
Suggested readings
Lukes, S. (2005) *Power. A Radical View*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2nd edition. 190 p.
Smith, D. (1990) *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*. Boston: Northeastern University press. 235 p.

Status and Stratification, Friday 21 February (Siddartha Aradhya)
Required reading
Breen & Goldthorpe 1997; Sorensen 2000, Weeden 2002 (focus reading on p. 55-72 and p. 90-95, not necessary to read methods and results).

Organizations and institutions, Monday 3 March
Required reading
Acker 1990; Ahrne 2017; Meyer & Rowan 1977.
Suggested readings
March, J. & Simon, H. (1993 [1958]) *Organizations*. Blackwell publishers. 2nd edition. 300 p.

Culture, Friday 7 March (Anna Lund)
Required reading
Bourdieu 1989; Swidler 1986; Zerubavel 1996.
Suggested readings
Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London: Routledge. 606 p.
Pugh, A.J. (2009) *Longing and Belonging: Parents, Children and Consumer Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 301 p.

Modernity and Globalization, Friday 14 March
Required reading
Beck 2002; Go 2013; Sassen 2000, Habermas 1981.
Suggested reading

Habermas, J. (1981) *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston: Beacon Press. 457 p.

Literature (required)

Abend, G. (2008) The Meaning of 'Theory'. *Sociological Theory* 26(2):173-199.

Acker, J. (1990) Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender and society* 4(2): 139-158.

Ahrne, A. (2017) "The Organization of Action" in Leiulfsrud, H. and Sohlberg, P. *Concepts in Action. Conceptual Constructionism*. Leiden: Brill.

Beck, U. (2002) The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies. *Theory, Culture & Society* 19(1–2): 17–44.

Blau, P. (1977) A Macrosociological Theory of Social Structure. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83: 26-54.

Blumer, H. (1966) Sociological Implications of the Thought of George Herbert Mead. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 71: 535-544.

Boudon, R. (2003) Beyond Rational Choice Theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29: 1-21.

Bourdieu, P. (1989) Social Space and Symbolic Power. *Sociological Theory*, 7: 14-25.

Breen, R. and J. H. Goldthorpe (1997) Explaining Educational Differentials: Towards a Formal Rational Action Theory. *Rationality and Society*, 9: 275-305.

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

Collins, R. (1981) On the Microfoundations of Macrosociology. *American Journal of Sociology* 86(5): 984-1014.

Elster, J. (1982) The Case for Methodological Individualism. *Theory and Society* 11 (4): 453-482.

Emerson, R.M. (1962) Power-Dependence Relations. *American Sociological Review* 27(1): 31-41.

Feld, S. (1981) The Focused Organization of Social Ties. *American Journal of Sociology* 86 (5): 1015-1035.

Foucault, M. (1982) The Subject and Power. *Critical Inquiry* 8(4): 777-795.

Go, J. (2013) For a postcolonial sociology. *Theory and Society* 42(1): 25-55.

Giddens, A. (1984) "Elements of a Theory of Structuration" in The Constitution of Society. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 1-40.

Goffman, E. (1961) "Role Distance" in *Encounters*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, pp. 82-152.

Habermas, J. (1981) "The Rationalization of the Life World." Pp. 119-26, 136-45, 147-8, 150-2 from Habermas, J. The *Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Lukes, S. (2007) Power. *Context* 6: 59-61.

Merton, R. (1938) Social Structure and Anomie. *American Sociological Review,* 3(5): 672-682.

Merton, R.K. (1945) Sociological Theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, 50 (6):462-473.

Meyer, J. W. & Rowan, B. (1977) Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83, 340-363.

Sassen, S. (2000) Women's Burden: Counter-geographies of Globalization and the Feminization of Survival. *Journal of International Affairs* 53(2): 503-524.

Smith, D. E. (1990) The Conceptual Practices of Power. From Smith, D. (1990) The *Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*. Boston: Northeastern University press.

Sorensen, A. B (2000) Toward a Sounder Basis for Class Analysis. *American Journal of Sociology* 105:1523-1558.

Swidler, A. (1986) Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies. *American Sociological Review*, 51: 273-286.

Weeden, K. A. (2002) Why Do Some Occupations Pay More Than Others? Social Closure and Earnings Inequality in the United States. *The American Journal of Sociology* 108:55-101.

Zerubavel, E. (1996) Lumping and Splitting: Notes on Social Classification. *Sociological Forum*, 11: 421-433.

The journal articles and Ahrne's chapter can be downloaded from the internet. The pieces by Giddens, Goffman, Habermas and Smith will be provided in a compilation sold at Akademibokhandeln. The piece by Goffman will also be provided through Athena.

Teachers

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