Objective: Providing a general overview of Sociology in a 12-seminar, 5 ETCS course is impossible, given the vastness of the subject matter covered by the discipline. The goal is to introduce PhD students to central questions in sociology, discuss the key concepts involved in answering these questions, and link questions and concepts to public policy. At the end of the course, students will be able to (a) use central sociological concepts in analysing social issues, (b) critically evaluate empirical research on sociologically relevant concepts and (c) reflect on the social consequences of public policy solutions.

The course is structured around three central sociological questions. The first one is how social order is possible. Attention will be paid to different models of men that are used in the social sciences and their consequences for the answer to the question of social order. Attention will also be paid to socialization as families are often thought to be the key institution initiating humans to society. The second question is how social inequality comes about. The question how inequality can be eradicated is often directly linked to this question. Attention will be paid to both inter- and intra-generational (class) mobility, and to gender as key dimension of inequality. Whereas the first two questions could be viewed as ‘static’ the third question focusses on how social change comes about and how differences between societies can be explained, and is explicitly dynamic and comparative in nature. Attention will be paid to the role of cultural, economic and institutional factors in explaining change within societies and diversity across societies.

This course is targeted to PhD students in Public Policy and Administration. To emphasize the relevance of sociology for PhD programme, the question ‘What has social policy got to do with it?’ is discussed in each seminar.

Outline: The format of this course is a seminar. In each seminar, two (sometimes three) papers, one theoretical and one (sometimes two) empirical, will be discussed. The focus is on important recent theoretical and empirical contributions, with attention to both European and US contributions.

Each seminar (with the exception of the first one) has the same format. One student will introduce the selected theoretical reading for the lecture (in the form of a powerpoint presentation taking up 5 minutes) and provide a set of discussion questions (a minimum of 5 questions). This student will also lead the discussion about the formulated questions. Next, the second student will summarize the empirical paper and prepare a set of substantive and/or theoretical questions about the paper. Again, this student will lead the discussion about the questions. The course teacher will provide additional input to situate the topic within the broader framework of sociological thought.

It is expected that all participants will have studied the literature in advance of the lecture.
Course content

Seminar 1 (13/02/2019): Introduction: What is sociology?

This seminar discusses what sociology is about. Sociology is a highly heterogeneous enterprise. We discuss two quite different (but not necessarily competing) approaches and discuss their implications for public policy.

Literature:

An interesting additional read is:

Seminar 2 (15/02/2019): Social order I: Rational choice and exchange models

One of the key questions in sociology is how social order is possible. Traditionally, sociologist often stress the role of social norms. At the same time, an important strand in sociology emphasizes that social order can also result from more ‘rational’ types of behaviour, in which exchanges that are (at least partially) based on self-interest are central. In this seminar, we will discuss such rational choice approaches.

Literature:

Seminar 3 (20/02/2019): Social order II: Social norms

A key sociological approach to social order is to stress the role of social norms. We will discuss a theoretical paper on the topic (that partially stems from a rational choice background), an empirical paper showing that people think that norms for demographic behaviour operate, and another empirical paper that tries to establish to what extent norms play a role in the behaviour of adolescents.

Literature:


**Seminar 4 (22/02/2019): Social order III: Cooperation and pro-social behaviour**

Social order implies that people are able to cooperate in various settings. Under which conditions is cooperation and pro-social behaviour likely? We discuss a recent paper that provides an overview about the issue and an empirical paper examining under which conditions norms of cooperation emerge.

Literature:


**Seminar 5 (06/03/2019): Social order IV: Socialization**

Socialization is the main process by which individuals are integrated into society and is thus often viewed as a central process creating order. We discuss a theoretical paper describing the key socialization processes as well as an empirical paper discussing how social class influences the socialization process and leads to different life chances for young adults with different class backgrounds.

Literature:


**Seminar 6 (08/03/2019): Social inequality I: Intergenerational class mobility**

How social inequality comes about, and under which conditions social equality can be achieved is another key question in sociology. Inequality has many dimensions, and not all of them can be touched upon. In this first lecture, we will focus on intergenerational continuities (or
discontinuities) in poverty and class positions. We will read texts by two of the most prominent European scholars on intergenerational mobility. A text on poverty by US scholars, as well as an example of empirical research in the ‘European’ tradition.

Literature:


**Seminar 7 (13/03/2019): Social inequality II: Intragenerational class mobility**

Disadvantages and inequality do not only result from differences in initial positions (what you ‘inherit’ from your parents), but also from developments in one’s own life course. We read a theoretical piece on how disadvantage may increase (or decrease) across the life course, and an empirical paper discussing the role of non-standard work arrangements on labour market careers.

Literature:


**Seminar 8 (15/03/2019): Social inequality III: Gender inequality**

Next to class, gender is another major dimension of inequality. We discuss a theoretical text on how gender roles within households and within society at large are changing, with a hint of where gender relationship might be going to. The empirical text examines differences in gender ideologies that can be distinguished across Europe.

Literature:

Seminar 9 (02/04/2019): Social change I: Cultural change

A third key issue in sociology is how social change comes about (and how differences between countries can be explained). One strand of research focuses on the importance of cultural factors in explaining change within countries and diversity between countries.

Literature:

Seminar 10(05/04/2019): Social change II: Economic change

Many societal changes are related to economic developments in society. One text discusses the general relationship between economic change and fertility, whereas a second paper is about the consequences of the globalization process for life courses in Western societies.

Literature:


Institutions are of major importance of the direction societies take. Differences between societies in life chances of their citizens are often linked to differences in the way welfare is arranged. In this and the following seminar, theoretical and empirical papers on welfare states are discussed.

Literature:

Lecture 12 (12/04/2019): Social change IV: Institutional change continued
Literature:


**Evaluation:** Evaluation for the course includes three components:
1. Seminar leadership – 30 points
2. Seminar participation – 20 points
3. Final exam – 50 points

Details about the structure of the final exam will be made available during the course.

**Norms and expectations:** Students are expected to arrive on time, not miss class (without a valid explanation) and communicate in a respectful manner. Absences must be communicated to the course teacher in advance and excessive absences will seriously impact upon participation points.