

Principles of Sociology

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

ATHENS UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

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Lecturer: Dimitris Lallas

- **Contact information:**

- lallasd@aueb.gr

- lallasdimitris@gmail.com

- **Office hours:**

- 80 Patission Street - 2nd floor

- Friday, 12:00-14:00

● Course Contents

- **Session 1.** Introduction to Sociology
- **Session 2.** Founders of Sociology: The development of French, German, British and Italian Sociology
- **Session 3.** Modern Sociological Theories: Functionalism, Conflict Theory, Symbolic Interactionism
- **Session 4.** Sociological Research Methods: Quantitative and qualitative research methods
- **Session 5.** Culture, Social Structure and Socialization
- **Session 6.** Stratification, Social Class and Inequalities
- **Session 7.** Gender, Race and Ethnicity: Social discrimination, exclusion and inequalities
- **Session 8.** Political Sociology: Forms of Government and Social Movements
- **Session 9.** Sociology of Work: The social organization of work and the experience of employment and unemployment
- **Session 10.** Media, Popular Culture and Consumption
- **Session 11.** Urban Sociology: Forms of urbanization in contemporary social world
- **Session 12.** Sociology in a globalized world: Social, Cultural, Political, Ecological, Labour Changes
- **Session 13.** Oral presentations of group assignments.

● Textbook and Reading

● *Main textbook:*

- A. Giddens & P.W. Sutton, *Sociology*, 7th edition, Polity Press, Cambridge: 2013.

● *Recommended books for further reading:*

- • M. Hughes-C. J. Kroehler, *Sociology: The core*, 7th edition, The McGraw-Hill Companies, 2005
- • S. Hall-B. Gieben, *Formations of Modernity*, Polity Press/Blackwell Publ., Oxford 1992
- • G. Ritzer, *Modern Sociological Theory*, 7th Edition, The McGraw-Hill Companies, 2008.



● Assessment methods and criteria

- Final written exam (80%)
- Written assignment and Oral presentation of assignment (20%)

- **Subject of Assignment**

- “Find out and discuss the representations of refugees in press discourse. Analyze how the subjectivities of refugees are constructed and compare the various images of refugees, that are drawn from different political, social and cultural views”.

Principles of Sociology

1st Session

Introduction to Sociology

The subject matter of Sociology – The conditions of birth of the new science of society – The early “positivist” orientation of Sociology – The “anti-positivist” critique – The art of thinking sociologically

**The subject matter of
Sociology**

- Sociology refers to the scientific study of social life, social groups and human societies.
- By utilizing the tool of research (systematic and organized collection and analysis of data), Sociology investigates social interaction and collective behavior in the context of social organization.
- The object of sociological study is (individual/collective) action/behavior in the context of social relations/institutions and wider social structure.

- ***Social relations***

- The organization of society consists of the articulation of social relations.
- The arrangement of social relations is achieved by social norms (formal and informal, legal and traditional).
- The social relations are maintained and reproduced by repeated performance of anticipated social roles.

- ***Social institutions***

- Social institutions are the “crystallized” social relations.
- The reproduction of social relations and institutions presupposes the solidification of beliefs and patterns of behavior.

- **Social Structure**

- The relations between social institutions articulate the social structure (*relations between established relations*).

- **Social position and action**

- Individuals possess concrete positions in their social relationships, in social institutions (family, state, profession, education, religion etc).
- Individual and collective action is unfolded every time in the context of social relations/institutions where people belong and live.

- The dialectic relation between *Social Structure* and *Social behavior/action*
- The institutionalized social relations (social frames) affect, define and shape subjects' behavior, for they dictate roles, ascribe social identities, promote and “teach” norms, values, ideas and ways of thinking and acting.
- Subjects' action (re-)shapes the social relations, as, they can reproduce these relations [*social reproduction*], or they may dispute, transform and overthrow these, by pursuing to create, establish and institutionalize different and new social relations [*social transformation*].

The conditions of birth of the new science of society

- The systematic and scientific approach of social reality, that is based on specific research methods, tools and theoretical principles, emerged in early 19th century.
- The historical context, that is marked by critical and radical changes and alteration of intellectual, cultural, financial, technological, political and social dimensions, fostered the historical appearance of sociological science.
- This concrete context defined the early positivist orientation of sociology.

- **Dimensions of the new historical context**

- **1) Scientific development (16th-17th century)**
- **2) Enlightenment, an intellectual movement (17th-18th century)**
- **3) Technological (industrial) development and mechanization of production**
- **4) Urbanization: Life conditions in industrial cities**
- **5) Revolutions (British-1688-, American-1776-, French-1789-)**

● **Period of social transition**

- The changes in modes and relations of production, state, space and time of daily life of urban population, social values, signified a period of crisis of system of value, and law, political, economic and social relations.
- In this period of transition, radical transformations of worldviews, social and political institutions, material terms of living, the new science of society (*Sociology*) emerged.

**The early “positivist”
orientation of Sociology**

- The successful example of natural sciences set the frame and criteria for acquisition of scientific, well-documented, proven knowledge.
- *Basic principles of positivist methodology:*
- **a) systematic observation**
- **b) experiment**
- **c) determinism**
- **d) causality**
- **e) generalization of research findings**

- **The positivist orientation** of new science of society consists of:
 - a) **systematic observation of social phenomena**
 - b) **search for causal relations between phenomena**
 - c) **discover of regularity of phenomenon's manifestations**
 - d) **generalization of findings on the base of positivist claim about representativity and objectivity.**
 - e) **prediction of phenomena**

The “anti-positivist” critique

- **Anti-positivism criticizes :**

- a) the adaption of natural sciences' methods to sociological research**

- b) the modeling of human behaviour**

- c) the objectivity of scientist-observer (concerning both social and natural sciences)**

- **A)** The causal and deterministic logic of positivism has been challenged by Heisenberg's "principle of indeterminacy" (in physics) and Chaos Theory (in mathematics).
- One phenomenon can have various and different causes and the physical subsistence of research's object can be altered by researcher's tools.
- **B)** The formulation of general laws and causal interrelations is largely risky and inadequate, as this approach disregards the *intricacy of social phenomena*, *polysemy of social practices*, the *openness of history*.
- Social phenomena have many dependencies, which have to do with human subjects and social context.
- A social phenomenon cannot be interpreted on the base of a stable, consistent causal relation, for humans can behave in extremely various ways under the same social conditions.

- The explanation and interpretation of social behavior cannot be achieved through a deterministic model, for mankind's history is not developed according to rigid historical laws and does not pass through always the same stages.
- Human history involves a plurality of different social types, relations, institutions and systems of belief and values.
- Human history is always at stake and open to various social types in passage of time.
- **C)** The claim about objective study of social phenomena is undermined by the fact that human behavior is not a passive, given, transparent to observation, subject of research.
- The relation between researcher and researched affects both of them.
- Researcher cannot be a “cold”, neutral observer, as his/her subjectivity, his/her modes of acting, thinking and feeling are integrated into categories/schemes of his/her cultural system.

The Art of Thinking

Sociologically

- **The offering of Sociology and sociological perspective**

- **a) Acquisition of valid scientifically knowledge about social reality**
- **b) Broadening of individual and collective freedom**
- **c) Sharpening of our social and moral sensibility**
- **d) Overcoming of stereotypical opinions for the other people**
- **e) Fostering the future of a peaceful, free and democratic co-existence of people in all over the world.**

- **The dialectic relation between *sociological knowledge* and *common sense***

- The particularity of Sociology and its distinctiveness from natural sciences refer to its adjacency with common sense.
- Sociological Knowledge and common sense/knowledge share the same ground, the human experience.
- On the one hand, the development of sociological knowledge is related with the already existing ideas and concepts of individuals.
- On the other hand, concepts and knowledge, that Sociology develops, are re-introduced in daily lives of people and affect their ways of perception, thinking and acting.

● Sociological knowledge's differentiation from common sense

● 1) Quality of Knowledge

- *Sociological knowledge* is scientific responsible, and not undocumented and probabilistic.
- *Common sense*, common knowledge are not based on substantiation, but on belief.

● 2) Knowledge scale

- The *common knowledge* of our quotidian lives emanates from a quite confined field, that of spaces in which we work, encounter our friends, dispose our free time, satisfy our (sentimental, material) needs/desires.
- *Sociological Knowledge* can give prominence to:
 - a) a variety of different conditions of social life, variant views, values and social practices
 - b) social frames of our ordinary life (wider social powers) that shape conditions of life, our experience and behavior
 - c) net of interdependencies between personal biography and wider social procedures (“Sociological imagination”, C.W. Mills)

● **The benefits of the art of thinking sociologically**

- 1) Challenge of “personalized” way of perception and interpretation of social phenomena, way that is typical for common sense.
- 2) Challenge of plausibility, obviousness, objectiveness of our modes of thought and behavior.
- 3) Recognition of various modes of understanding, thought and action, of different systems of value and ideas, other forms of social organization and social life.
- 4) Broadening of our view on our life-world and designation of networks of interdependencies that define the conditions of our social existence and living.

- **5)** Challenge of stereotypical representations of other –culturally, socially, sexually different– people.
- **6)** Development of relationships that are based on mutual respect, understanding and solidarity.
- **7)** Strengthening of individual and collective emancipation from arrangements, representations and opinions that enforce the already existing relations of power, and experimentation towards a different than the present social world.

- **The necessity of sociologist's self-awareness**

- Sociologists have to be aware of the fact that their analyses and interpretations concerning social life-worlds are open and questionable, and not closed and final.
- Sociological perspective must “focus on plurality of experiences and forms of life”, and keep in mind that sociology “is part of the problem, not the solution” (Z. Bauman).

● Bibliography

- Z. Bauman-T. May, *Thinking sociologically*, Blackwell, Oxford 2001.
- A. Giddens & P.W. Sutton, *Sociology*, 7th edition, Polity Press, Cambridge 2013.
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