

Department of Sociology  
Lund University

## **ON CONCEPTS**

7.5 credit PhD course, Fall 2019

### **Instructors and examiners:**

Carl-Göran Heidegren (CGH) and Chares Demetriou (CD).  
Guest lectures by Bo Isenberg, Malin Åkerström, and Olle Frödin

### **Registration/Application:**

By email to [carl-goran.heidegren@soc.lu.se](mailto:carl-goran.heidegren@soc.lu.se) before October 1.

### **Course description:**

The chief aim of the course is to provide a deeper understanding of scientific concepts. Students reach this aim by conducting a detailed investigation of one key concept taken from the dissertation work. This investigation covers multiple dimensions, ranging from etymology and conceptual history, to contemporary theoretical status and empirical application.

Concepts travel through history, and often change their meaning in the course of time. The study of such changes is the focus of the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*). This approach is mainly associated with the German historian Reinhart Koselleck, but has received wide attention in latter decades. Ideas and concepts also often change meaning when they travel in space, i.e. move from one country to another or from one cultural context to another. This is the focus of what may be called the study of conceptual transfer. What happens for example when a concept travels from a cultural centre to a cultural periphery (let's say Sweden)? To answer such a question a transnational perspective is necessary. An ambition to move beyond methodological nationalism characterizes a very recent research trend called *histoire croisée* or entangled histories.

In addition to this, some classical topics (Weberian ideal types, essentially contested concepts) and authors (Quentin Skinner) will be discussed. Among them is the idea of the conceptual ladder of abstraction, developed by Giovanni Sartori. This idea will be demonstrated through not only Sartori's exposition but also a review of concepts developed by Charles Tilly.

Furthermore, three researchers from the Department of Sociology will participate by presenting and discussing their research in relation to a key concept.

The course duration is nine weeks. The first two weeks are organized around a number of meetings covering various problems related to the use and change of concepts. Students introduce their concept of choice at the end of the second week, and then

spend the following six weeks researching this concept. The final week is devoted to paper presentations and discussions.

**Schedule:**

All meetings take place at the Department of Sociology, in Hus G, Paradiset, Lund.

October 28, 1–4 pm (G 335)

CGH – Introduction to the course. Presentation and discussion: On concept formation: ideal types (Weber).

October 30, 1–4 pm (G 335)

CGH – Presentation and discussion: On the history of concepts (Koselleck, Richter) & Entangled histories (Werner & Zimmermann).

November 4, 1–4 pm (G 335)

CD – Presentation and discussion: On the ladder of abstraction and on “radicalization” (Sartori, Demetriou and Alimi, and Demetriou)

November 6, 1–5 pm (G 335)

Researchers from the department. Bo Isenberg on “Contingency”, Malin Åkerström on “Bribes” and Olle Frödin on “Meaning”.

November 8, 1–4 pm (G 335)

CGH – Presentation and discussion: On concepts and words (Williams, Skinner) & Essentially contested concepts (Gallie).

Short presentations of concepts under investigation by participants.

December 12, Noon

Deadline for submitting research paper. STRICT!

January 9, 1–4 pm (G 335)

CGH and CD – Paper seminar with discussants. If needed in two parallel sessions.

**Learning outcome:**

On completion of the course, students shall be able to

- Demonstrate substantial knowledge and understanding of a specific scientific concept.
- Critically investigate multiple dimensions of a scientific concept.
- Discuss historical dimensions of scientific concepts in a systematic manner.
- Write a concise research paper.

**Course requirements:**

- Active participation in the scheduled meetings.
- A research paper, 6-8000 words, submitted in time.

**Admission requirements:**

- Must be accepted into a PhD program. Students from the Department of Sociology at Lund University have priority.

**Grading:**

- Pass or Fail, assessment based on participation and paper.

**Mandatory readings:**

- Max Weber, "Objectivity in Social Science", in *Essays in the Methodology of the Social Sciences*, The Free Press, 1949, pp. 89-105.
- Reinhart Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History", in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Columbia UP, pp. 75-92.
- Melvin Richter, "Appreciating a Contemporary Classic. The Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe and Future Scholarship", in *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought* (Vol 1, 1997), pp. 25-38.
- Michael Werner & Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity", in *History and Theory* 45 (February 2006), pp. 30-50.
- Raymond Williams, "Culture", in *Key Words: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Glasgow: Fontana, 1976, pp. 76-82.
- Quentin Skinner, "Language and Social Change", in *Meaning and Context. Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, ed. James Tully, Polity Press, 1988, pp. 119-132.
- W. B. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (1965-66), pp. 167-198.
- Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Dec, 1970), 1033-1053.
- Chares Demetriou, "Charles Tilly and Relational Sociology", in *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*, ed. Francois Depelteau. Palgrave Handbooks, 2018, pp. 307-24.
- Chares Demetriou and Eitan Alimi, "Relational Radicalization," in in *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*, ed. Francois Depelteau. Palgrave Handbooks, 2018, pp. 558-78.

The texts are available electronically or will be distributed in advance. NB. There may still be minor changes in the mandatory literature.

**Additional readings:**

Readings in relation to the specific concept under investigation are decided by the student and are expected to be in the range 300-500 pages.