Department of Sociology
Lund University

"ON CONCEPTS"

7.5 credit PhD course

Registration/Application:
By email to carl-goran.heidegren@soc.lu.se

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 (ideal types, essentially contested concepts) and authors (Quentin Skinner) will be discussed.

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

The course duration is ten 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.

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:
- Reinhart Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History", in Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time, Columbia UP, pp. 75–92.
- Raymond Williams, “Culture”, in Key Words: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, Glasgow: Fontana, 1976, pp. 76–82.

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.

Instructors and examiner*:
Carl-Göran Heidegren*, Bo Isenberg, Chares Demetriou, Olle Frödin, Malin Åkerström.