

Revised course description for HGO4011 from H21

HGO4011 – Philosophy and methodology of human geography

Course content

This course is a compulsory component of the master's degree in human geography. The purpose is to provide students with an overview of the range of scholarship done across geography's sub-disciplines, and to illustrate similarities and differences in their theoretical foundations. The course starts by introducing the core concepts of space, place, scale and environment that help give coherence to geography, and a brief history of the discipline. The majority of the sessions are dedicated to an exploration of the geographical sub-disciplines and their theoretical and methodological commitments. A common theme of borders ties the lectures together and shows the importance of theory for empirical research, with the aim of facilitating the development of the student's own master's thesis research project. The course finishes by introducing students to the fundamentals of research design: how to connect research questions, theory and methods. Lectures and seminars are given, including a seminar on master thesis topic development.

Learning outcomes

Knowledge

- Understand how the discipline of geography has developed over time.
- Distinguish between current, cutting-edge research in different sub-disciplines.
- Comprehend core theoretical concepts in geography and how they are applied to research across the discipline.

Skills

- Apply core concepts and theoretical frameworks in human geography with a high degree of understanding and reflection.
- Evaluate the relation between different theoretical frameworks, methodological choices and research questions within research across the discipline.
- Develop analytical writing and reading skills at a high academic standard.
- Design a research topic and ask analytical questions about that topic.

General competence

- Critically analyze strategies for acquiring knowledge within human geography.
- Discriminate between theoretical and methodological choices that are relevant for your master's thesis.

Teaching

Course tuition consists of a combination of lectures and seminars, including a seminar on master thesis topic development. For an overview, please refer to the detailed teaching plan on the semester page.

Compulsory instruction and coursework

Participation in at least 80% of the lectures and seminars is mandatory.

Completed and approved compulsory course work is valid as long as the course is offered. Students who have failed to complete the compulsory attendance cannot take the exam.

Examination

The exam is a one-week home exam. The maximum length of the home exam is **3000** words (excluding references).

The exam question will be available from 10.00 am on the day of the exam and must be submitted at 12.00 PM, 7 days later.

[Previous exams and examiner guidelines](#)

Submit assignments in Inspera

You submit your assignment in the digital examination system Inspera. [Read about how to submit your assignment.](#)

Use of sources and citation

You should familiarize yourself with the rules that apply to [the use of sources and citations](#). If you violate the rules, you may be suspected of [cheating/attempted cheating](#).

Language of examination

The examination text is given in English. You may submit your response in **English, Norwegian, Swedish or Danish**.

Grading scale

Grades are awarded on a scale from A to F, where A is the best grade and F is a fail. Read more about [the grading system](#).

Explanations and appeals

- [Explanation of grades and appeals](#)

Resit an examination

If you are sick or have another valid reason for not attending the regular exam, we offer a [postponed exam](#) later in the same semester.

See also our information about [resitting an exam](#).

Withdrawal from an examination

It is possible to take the exam up to 3 times. If you [withdraw from the exam](#) after the deadline or during the exam, this will be counted as an examination attempt.

Special examination arrangements

Application form, deadline and requirements for [special examination arrangements](#).

Evaluation

The course is subject to continuous evaluation. Midterm and end of semester evaluations are to be expected.

Proposed lectures and seminars

Lecture/ Seminar no	Topic
1 & 2	Introduction. Space, place, scale and environment, introduction to core philosophy of science ideas of ontology and epistemology, overview of course and program.
3	History of Geography. Brief overview of the turns, how the discipline is situated within the wider social sciences. Intro to importance of theory and theorizing.
4	Sub-Discipline 1.
S1	Seminar 1. Critical reading. Use sources which draw on the set reading list and help link between the ideas of space, place, scale and environment outlined in L1 and the sub-discipline lectures.
5	Sub-Discipline 2.
6	Sub-Discipline 3.
7	Sub-Discipline 4.
S2	Seminar 2 (4090). MA thesis Topic development. Where to start? How to start formulating research questions
8	Sub-Discipline 5.
9	Sub-Discipline 6
S3	Seminar 2. Exam prep. How to address the exam questions that will appear.
10	Conclusion and Research Design. Bringing it all together. What did we learn about the overall empirical theme? How does this help us to formulate good MA thesis topics? Learning to read theory in the (non-theoretical) literature.

Description of lectures

Session 1: Philosophy and the real world: making sense of geographical knowledges (Andrea)

In this session we go through the intellectual and practical fundamentals of the course. An overview of key philosophy of science concepts ontology and epistemology is presented and how they are applied throughout the course. The idea of 'borders' is introduced and how it will be used throughout the course.

Required reading

Blaikie, N. (2007). *Approaches to Social Enquiry: Advancing Knowledge (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge: Polity, chapter 1 (25 pages).

Furlong, Paul and Marsh, David (2010). A Skin Not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science. **Chapter 9** in: Marsh, David & Stoker, Gerry (eds.), *Theory and methods in political science*. 3. ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Session 2: Making territories, scales and places: core concepts in Geography (Andrea)

This session provides an overview of core concepts that are considered central to how geography as a discipline is defined: space, place, scale and environment. The differences between Newtonian and Leibnizian conceptions of space and what they have meant for geographical theory and their application to research problems is considered. From these foundations, we look at place from

regional theories to space-time. Throughout the influence of scale and how it is conceptualized is emphasized. The session concludes with the importance of human-environment interactions for geography. These concepts will also be applied in the sub-disciplinary lectures so here only an introduction to them is provided.

Required reading

Agnew, John 2005. "Space: Place." In *Spaces of Geographical Thought: Deconstructing Human Geography's Binaries*, edited by Paul Cloke and Ron Johnston, pages 81-96. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://sk.sagepub.com/books/spaces-of-geographical-thought/n10.xml>

Brenner, Neil. 2001. "The limits to scale? Methodological reflections on scalar structuration." *Progress in Human Geography* 25 (4):591-614. doi: 10.1191/030913201682688959.

Crang, Mike. 2005. "Time: Space." In *Spaces of Geographical Thought: Deconstructing Human Geography's Binaries*, edited by Paul Cloke and Ron Johnston, pages 199-220. London: SAGE Publications <https://sk.sagepub.com/books/spaces-of-geographical-thought/n10.xml>

Session 3: How did we get here? A history of geographical thought (Sverre)

This session will start with briefly describing the historical origins of geography as a scientific discipline, and introduce the distinction between analytical sciences studying certain aspects of phenomena and chronological/chorological sciences that study associations between diverse phenomena in time (history) and space (geography). It will proceed to reflect on debates and tensions that have been reoccurring in the history of the discipline, concerning, for instance, nature-society relationships, the balance between nomothetic and ideographic approaches, and emphasis on place or space as the object of study. The lecture will then delve into shifting research traditions in the more recent history of human geography: How each tradition evolved in response to internal disciplinary debates and changing external (societal) circumstances, and built on interrelated ontological and epistemological assumptions reflected in methodological choices. A discussion of relevance for research design choices today will conclude the lecture.

Recommended reading

Cresswell, Tim. 2013. *Geographic Thought: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Wiley – Backwell. chapters 4-10.

Session 4: Complexity, quantification and growth (Economic Geographies) (Sverre and Bjørnar)

Economic geography is concerned with describing, analyzing and explaining (uneven) economic development 'in real places'. Inherently, this involves moving beyond the distinction between nomothetic (emphasis on general forces at play) and ideographic (attention to the specific/unique) approaches in geography. This session delves into key ontological, epistemological and methodological aspects of this, including the need to draw on, re-theorize and/or synthesize concepts and perspectives from other social sciences to acknowledge the complexity and multi-scalar nature of socio-economic processes as the play out in different places. The lecture will also reflect specifically on 'boundaries' in economic geography: On the one hand, how the discipline

tends to see (administrative, cognitive, social, institutional) boundaries that effect and are themselves affected by multi-scalar socio-economic processes – for instance, what are the ‘real places’, and how are they constructed? On the other, how boundaries constructed within, or at the intersection between, disciplines (e.g. those delineating economic geography from economics) have influenced on how such processes are studied.

Required Reading

Asheim, B. T. (2020). Economic geography as regional contexts’ reconsidered – implications for disciplinary division of labour, research focus and societal relevance. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 74(1), 25-34

Gong, H., & Hassink, R. (2020). Context sensitivity and economic-geographic (re)theorising. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 13(3), 475-490

Martin, R. (2021). Putting the case for a pluralistic economic geography. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 21(1), 1-28.

Recommended reading

Boschma, R. (2005). Proximity and Innovation: A Critical Assessment. *Regional Studies*, 39(1), 61-74.

Session 5: Geography, authoritarianism and the fault-lines of truth (Political Geographies) (Michael)

This lecture will focus on the authoritarian (re)turn in Europe from a geographical perspective, with a particular focus on its association with disinformation and conspiracy theories. I will start by discussing some of the literature on the rise of authoritarian populism, focusing on demographic, cultural and economic grievance explanations of the phenomenon. I will then turn to the strategies deployed by authoritarians to delegitimize opponents and to create the impression that they alone are viable leaders of their respective countries. Finally, I will discuss how authoritarian (strategic) narratives reproduce the conditions for conflict by focusing on the frontline cities in Ukraine, where these narratives (and the disinformation associated with them) are brought to the extreme.

Required reading

Freelon, D. & C. Wells (2020). Disinformation as political communication. *Political Communication* 37:2, 145-156, DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2020.1723755. [This is an introduction to a theme issue on disinformation – feel free to read the rest of the theme issue if the topics interests you]

Kragh, M., Andermo, E., & Makashova, L. (2020). Conspiracy theories in Russian security thinking. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 1-35 (online first), DOI:[10.1080/01402390.2020.1717954](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2020.1717954)

[+ hopefully a manuscript by Kragh and Gentile on the impact of critical juncture events (the Belarusian protest movement) on belief in conspiracy theories (that George Soros and Bill Gates secretly run Ukraine); this is ongoing research and the findings are very interesting]

Recommended reading

Douglas, K. M., Uscinski, J. E., Sutton, R. M., Cichocka, A., Nefes, T., Ang, C. S., & Deravi, F. (2019). Understanding conspiracy theories. *Political Psychology*, 40, 3-35, DOI: [10.1111/pops.12568](https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12568).

Gentile, M. (2020). Diabolical Suggestions: Disinformation and the Curious Scale of Nationalism in Ukrainian Geopolitical Fault-line Cities. *Geopolitics*, 1-29, (online first), DOI: [10.1080/14650045.2020.1830766](https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2020.1830766).

Khaldarova, I., & Pantti, M. (2016). Fake news: The narrative battle over the Ukrainian conflict. *Journalism Practice*, 10(7), 891-901, DOI:[10.1080/17512786.2016.1163237](https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2016.1163237).

Tandoc Jr, E. C., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2018). Defining “fake news” A typology of scholarly definitions. *Digital Journalism*, 6(2), 137-153, DOI:[10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143](https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143).

Session 6: Border crossings, workplace attachments and labour agency (Labour geography) (David and Hege)

Strauss (2020) argues that it is time for labour geographers to become more explicit about their ontological and epistemological foundations and the intellectual/theoretical and political implications of such. We will discuss our own research in light of her concern, shedding light on what different conceptions of borders mean to the agency of temporary agency workers. As in labour geography, a relational and spatial ontology is called for in a new paradigm of global development in development geography. The empirical point of departure is that the world is woven more tightly together through chains and networks. Hence, we will also discuss what trans border networks mean for the agency of the temporary agency workers.

Required reading

Jordhus-Lier, D., Underthun, A., & Zampoukos, K. (2019). Changing workplace geographies: Restructuring warehouse employment in the Oslo region. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 51(1), 69-90.

Kiil, M. B., & Knutsen, H. M. (2016). Agency by exit: Swedish nurses and the “Not below 24,000” movement. *Geoforum*, 70, 105-114.

Strauss, K. (2020). Labour geography II: Being, knowledge and agency. *Progress in Human Geography*, 44(1), 150-159.

Recommended readings

Coe, N. M. (2013). Geographies of production III: Making space for labour. *Progress in Human Geography*, 37(2), 271-284.

Gotthaus, A. (in review). Agency in deskilling: Filipino nurses’ experiences in the Norwegian health care sector. *Geoforum*.

Knutsen, H.M., Fangen, K., Zabko, O. (2020) Integration and exclusion at work: Latvian and Swedish agency workers in Norway. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 21:413–429 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-019-00660-5>

Session 7: The formation of imaginative and factual borders, bounded places in the city and its region (Urban Geographies) (Per Gunnar)

Urban studies is an important field for human geographers, because of the importance of urban processes for humans and environments in an increasingly urbanized world, and because geographers make important contributions to the understanding the complexity of cities. Within urban policy and planning there is a growing interest for issues that urban geographers traditionally have been working with, like segregation, gentrification, place-making and social exclusion. New policy agendas focusing on urban sustainability have also stirred an intellectual debate about the social implications of climate mitigation strategies and the green shift, where geographers make important contributions. In this session we explore the conceptualization, production and implications of *borders* within urban geography. We will use *borders* as a lens to take a closer look at spatial, representational and social structures in the city. We will especially focus on the formation of bounded and exclusionary elite enclaves in cities like Sao Paulo, Johannesburg, London and Oslo, and how imaginative and political borders and boundaries, for example between the city, its suburbs and peri-urban hinterland, limit urban sustainability policies. The compact city model and policy will be used as a case.

The formation of places within the city, where we could focus on elite enclaves and spaces:

Required reading

Burrows, R., Webber, R. & Atkinson, R.G. (2016) Welcome to Pikettyville? Mapping London's alpha territories, *The Sociological Review*, <https://doi.org/10.1111%2F1467-954X.12375>

Graham, S. (2015) Luxified skies. How vertical urban housing became an elite preserve, *City*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2015.1071113>

Recommended reading

Rogers, D. & Koh, S. Y. (2017) The Globalisation of Real Estate: The Politics and Practice of Foreign Real Estate Investment. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2016.1270618>

Pow, C-P. (2011) Living it up: Super-rich enclave and transnational elite urbanism in Singapore, *Geoforum*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2011.01.009>

Urban sustainability planning, where we will focus on the administrative, conceptual and imagined borders and boundaries, that may be in conflict, create tensions or decontextualize planning:

Required reading

Keil, R. (2019) The spatialized political ecology of the city: Situated peripheries and the capitalocentric limits of urban affairs, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2020.178530>

Wachsmuth, D. & Angelo, H. (2017) Green and Gray: New Ideologies of Nature in Urban Sustainability Policy, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2017.1417819>

Recommended reading

Angelo, H. & Wachsmuth, D. (2014) Urbanizing Urban Political Ecology: A Critique of Methodological Cityism, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12105>

Rauws, W. S. & DeRoo, G. (2011) Exploring Transitions in the Peri-Urban Area. *Planning Theory and Practice*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2011.581025>

Session 8: Power, inequalities and identities: making sense of difference (Feminist and Decolonial Geographies) (Andrea)

This session covers a range of scholarship in the constructivist tradition that deals with questions of social exclusion. Feminist and post colonial geographers pioneered a number of research topics and insisted on the importance of social exclusion and the everyday to understanding large scale processes like capitalism, colonialism and neo-liberalism. Now, a wide range of scholarship building from feminist, queer theory, race and indigenous studies, and decolonial thinking is significantly challenging other kinds of critical theory. Here, the way that social borders are created and reinforced is central to the operation of power. This session is intended to provide a foundation and an overview so students can peruse in more depth those debates most intriguing. We will talk about how this literature can help conceptually to make sense of social exclusions and social borders.

Required reading

de Leeuw, Sarah, and Sarah Hunt. 2018. "Unsettling decolonizing geographies." *Geography Compass* 12 (7):e12376. doi: 10.1111/gec3.12376

Mollett, Sharlene & Caroline Faria (2018) The spatialities of intersectional thinking: fashioning feminist geographic futures, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25(4): 565-577, DOI: [10.1080/0966369X.2018.1454404](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2018.1454404)

Wright, Melissa (2010) Gender and geography II: bridging the gap – feminist, queer, and the geographical imaginary, *Progress in Human Geography*, 34(1): 56-66. DOI: [10.1177/0309132509105008](https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132509105008)

Recommended reading

Lahiri-Dutt, Kuntala (2017) Thinking 'differently' about a feminist critical geography of development, *Geographical Research*, 55: 326-331. DOI: [10.1111/1745-5871.12211](https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12211)

Nightingale, Andrea J. 2011. "Bounding difference: Intersectionality and the material production of gender, caste, class and environment in Nepal." *Geoforum* 42 (2):153-162.

Radcliffe, Sara & Radhuber, Isabella (2020) The political geographies of D/decolonization: Variegation and decolonial challenges of /in geography, *Political Geography*, 78. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102128>

Sidaway, James (2000) Postcolonial geographies: an exploratory essay. *Progress in Human Geography*, 24(4): 591-612. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1191/030913200100189120>

Session 9: Environment, sustainability and socio-natures (Environmental Geographies) (Andrea or Guest)

Human-environment relations lie at the core of geography and today encompass a wide range of scholarship. Here we confront straight on the intellectual border between 'society' and 'nature'. From work on climate change and resilience to more than human ethnographies and affect, it contributes to intellectual debates that span the entire theoretical spectrum within the discipline. In this session we briefly review some of this diversity and then focus in on political ecology. Political ecology emerged in conversation with development and feminist studies and today has split into two main camps. One which is concerned with showing the social politics of environmental issues, the other which is concerned with how socionatural entanglements occur and change. We will explore these literatures and think about society-nature borders relate to core sustainability challenges.

Required reading

Collard, Rosemary-Claire, Leila M. Harris, Nik Heynen, and Lyla Mehta. 2018. "The antinomies of nature and space." *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1 (1-2):3-24. doi: 10.1177/2514848618777162

Nightingale, Andrea J. 2014. "Society-Nature " In *Sage Handbook of Human Geography*, edited by Noel Castree Roger Lee, Rob Kitchin, Victoria Lawson, Anssi Paasi, Chris Philo, Sarah Radcliffe, Susan M Roberts and Charles W J Withers 120-147. London: Sage

Tzaninis, Yannis, Tait Mandler, Maria Kaika, and Roger Keil. 2020. "Moving urban political ecology beyond the 'urbanization of nature' ." *Progress in Human Geography* 45 (2):229-252. doi: 10.1177/0309132520903350

Recommended reading

Braun, Bruce. 2008. "Environmental issues: inventive life." *Progress in Human Geography* 32 (5):667-679. doi: 10.1177/0309132507088030

Di Chiro, Giovanna. 2008. "Living environmentalisms: coalition politics, social reproduction, and environmental justice." *Environmental Politics* 17 (2):276-298. doi: 10.1080/09644010801936230

Session 10: Putting theory into practice: from philosophy to methodology

In this final session we will revisit core philosophy of science and geographical concepts and think about how they have been applied to research within the sub-disciplinary sessions. An introduction to research design will be provided to show how to connect abstract ideas to help formulate good research questions about an empirical topic.

Required reading

Yin, Robert. 2017. *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. sixth ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Chapter 1 & 2.

(strongly) Recommended reading

Popke, Jeff. 2009. "Geography and ethics: non-representational encounters, collective responsibility and economic difference." *Progress in Human Geography* 33 (1):81-90. doi: 10.1177/0309132508090441.

Sultana, F. (2007) Reflexivity, Positionality and Participatory Ethics: Negotiating Fieldwork Dilemmas in International Research. *ACME*, 6, 374-385. <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/786>