

SOS2700 The sociology of religion – religion in contemporary societies

Course content

This course provides a theoretical and empirical introduction to religion as a sociological phenomenon, religious variation, and religious changes in contemporary societies. We will discuss theoretical perspectives from classical and contemporary sociological theory in combination with current debates and research within the sociology of religion.

The course provides knowledge and insight into different concepts of religion and various dimensions of religion, and we will discuss religious variation by focusing on individual religiosity, gender, and ethnicity. The syllabus covers a wide variety of empirical studies of religious variation. We discuss what we mean by the concept of religion, and how religion and spirituality are practiced in people's everyday lives. How exactly is religion gendered? And how do religion and ethnicity interact and differ?

Other important topics in this course are religious changes in contemporary societies. We discuss these topics by taking a look at spirituality and the challenges it poses for traditional religion. We also look at the changes in the religious landscapes with the growth of religious minorities and migrant religious communities, and issues of secularism and fundamentalism. We also look at religious change by posing more fundamental questions about the role of religion in contemporary societies. Is there a return of public religion? Are Western societies post-secular? Or do we witness increasing degrees of secularity? A consistent theoretical debate throughout the course is the relationship between societal «demand-side » explanations of religious variations and change and more individual and organizational «supply-side » explanations.

Learning outcome

Knowledge

The course will provide:

- An overview of major trends in religious variation and change in contemporary societies
- Key sociological concepts and theories used in the study of religion
- Analytical perspectives in explanations of religious variety and change

Skills

You will develop the skills to

- Use relevant concepts, theories and empirical knowledge in analyses of religion
- Provide a critical analysis of different theories in the sociology of religion
- Provide a critical analysis of the empirical studies included in the syllabus
- Discuss and write such analyses, following the basic rules of social scientific inquiry

Competences

- Think analytically about religious phenomena
- The ability to distinguish between academic knowledge based on solid empirical analyses versus perceptions based on personal perceptions
- Respect for ethical considerations involved in scientific work in general and sociological studies of religion in particular