

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana
Kardeljeva ploščad 5
1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija

Doctoral Programme Humanities and Social Sciences 2025/26

THEORIES OF SOCIETY

Course presentation and schedule

Academic year 2025/26

Weekly sessions: Tuesdays, 5 PM- 8 PM

Location: Lecture room 23

Course Requirements and final examination

The course consists of four lectures by four course coordinators, invited guest lectures, four final seminars with the coordinators, and two moderated debates on student reflections on the readings. The course outline lists the required readings for each session. Each class meeting will be a combination of lecture and discussion. All of the readings listed above are required readings and must be read prior to the class meeting. Students may use their own initiative to seek out additional scholarly and non-scholarly resources. Students are expected to attend all lectures and seminars, and each student should respond to the weekly readings by writing a 300-400 word position paper and submitting it to the course coordinator at aleksandra.kanjuo-mrcela@fdv.uni-lj.si no later than Monday of each week. The last two class meetings will be devoted to discussion of the position papers. These discussions will be moderated by the course coordinators.

Grading will be based on participation and a final exam. In the two-hour exam, students will be given four problem questions. Performance evaluation will be based on four short essays responding to four questions related to the assigned readings. We expect students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the required texts, as well as an advanced level of critical analysis. Each of the four essays will be graded separately by four course coordinators. Students must perform satisfactorily on all four essays and receive a minimum grade of 6 on each of the four short essays. If three of the four essays are graded unsatisfactory, the exam should be retaken. If two essays receive a passing grade, the student should retake the failing essays orally.

Lectures and Seminars

28th October, 2025 prof. dr. Aleksandra Kanjua Mrčela, prof. dr. Igor Lukšič, prof. dr. Aleš Črnič, prof. dr. Tanja Kamin

Introduction to the Course (Meeting with four course coordinators).

4th November, 2025 Igor Lukšič (University of Ljubljana)

Igor Lukšič is Professor of Political Science at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. He is head of the Department of Political Theory at the Faculty of Social Sciences. His research includes political theory, political anthropology and history of political ideas.

Apolitical Democracy

Democracy has always been a political project with a great goal to widen emancipation of the individual and of the people. Neoliberalism transformed that project in a-political or even anti-political with making democracy just a formal technique. The lecture will present contradictions of the democratic project in a modern period through ideas of Kant, Hegel and Marx. From the introduction of capitalism, the process of concentration of capital has always required a concentration of political power: at the beginning on the level of nation-state, in some cases in the form of state-capitalism and dictatorship, today more and more in the hands of different institution of the “international community”. Can democracy as emancipatory and political project survive?

Reading:

Charles S. Maier: Democracy since the French Revolution. In: Dunn, John. 1992. (ed.) The Unfinished Journey 508 BC ad 1993. Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, Cape Town. (125-151) (Text is available at Study Materials section of the course at Web Office)

11th November, 2025 Gordon Ross (University of Technology, Sidney) (host T. Kamin)

Ross Gordon is a Professor of Behaviour and Social Change at UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney. Ross is also the Director of Change for Good @ UTS– a Research Centre focused on transdisciplinary behaviour and social change for social good. He researches social issues and behaviour and social change, through a critical, reflexive, and multi-perspective lens. Ross served on the inaugural WHO Technical Advisory Group on Behavioural Insights and Sciences for Health from 2000-2024 and is currently serves as an observer for the group. He works on various behaviour and social change issues including gambling, non-communicable diseases, Covid-19, energy hardship and energy efficiency, climate action and environmental sustainability, alcohol, tobacco control, mental health, childhood obesity, workplace bullying, and power and politics in the neoliberal university. He has published over 120 academic journals, book chapters and conference papers and a leading book: Strategic Social Marketing: For Behaviour and Social Change published by SAGE.

A critical assemblage theory perspective on media’s harmful impacts on consumption and society

This lecture draws upon Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage theory to explore the critical role media plays in promoting harmful consumption behaviours, such as alcohol and gambling. It will highlight how media supports late market capitalism, enabling it to function

as a dynamic, heterogeneous "machine" made up of interconnected human and non-human elements that work together to promote consumption for capital extraction. The lecture will examine the negative impacts of media in driving consumption in contemporary capitalism, focusing on how it shapes individual subjectivity, fosters alienation, and creates dependence on the capitalist system. Finally, it will explore potential ways to challenge these media-driven power structures by identifying opportunities for "lines of flight" that can disrupt and reterritorialise everyday life.

Reading:

Gordon, R., Harada, T., Waite, G., Gurrieri, L. (2023). Reconceptualising risky and harmful consumption through molar and molecular lines: Mobile smartphone sports betting arrangements. *Marketing Theory*, 24(2): 311-337.

18th November, 2025 Aleš Črnič (University of Ljubljana)

Aleš Črnič is Professor of Religious Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. His research focuses on the critical study of contemporary religious developments and the epistemological and methodological challenges of this practice. He initiated the Regional Religious Studies Network in 2019 (which brings together scholars from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia). He served as Secretary General (2006-2008) and Vice President (2008-2013) of the International Association for the Study of Religions in Central and Eastern Europe (ISORECEA). He is also the founding president of the Slovenian Association for the Study of Religions. He has held visiting research positions at the University of Oxford (2000), as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley (2012), and at the Sapienza University of Rome (2024).

Entwined Histories: Islam, Christianity, and the Making of European Culture

Our times appear to be shaped by the perceived threat that an allegedly radically different Muslim immigrants poses to contemporary European culture. However, the roots of European Islamophobia extend far beyond the present, reaching back to the era of the Crusades and even earlier. Following an exploration of these historical roots, this lecture will illuminate the undeniable Christian foundations of European culture, while also highlighting other essential influences without which it could not have developed: notably the antecedent Greco-Roman antiquity, and the subsequent Renaissance, Humanism, and Enlightenment. This trajectory outlines the emergence of modern European and Western culture, characterised primarily by secularity, which serves as the precondition for the religious freedom of non-Christian, alternative, and "non-native" religions alike. It would, however, be misleading to include Islam among these latter categories, as Islam has contributed significantly to the shaping of European culture over the centuries. The enduring antagonism between European and Islamic cultures does not therefore arise from their irreconcilable differences, but rather from their profound similarities. In other words, in the West, we do not fear Muslims because they are radically different; we fear them because they are strikingly similar to us.

Reading:

Debeljak, A. (2009): 'In praise of hybridity: Globalization and the modern western paradigm.' *Eurozine*. (The text is accessible at <https://www.eurozine.com/in-praise-of-hybridity-2/>.)

25th November, 2025 Aleksandra Kanjuo Mrčela (University of Ljubljana)

Aleksandra Kanjuo Mrčela is a professor of the Sociology of Work and Economic Sociology at the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Social Sciences. Her teaching and research activities are in the fields of industrial relations, work and organisation, gender. From 1999-2001 she was a visiting scholar at the London School of Economics and Political Sciences. Since 2003 she is the coordinator of the national center for Eurofound at UL. Since 2004 she is a member of the Network of Experts in the Fields of Employment, Social Inclusion and Gender Equality Issues (European Commission). From 2011 she is an associate editor and from 2015 an editor of *Social politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

The Past and the Future of the Post-socialism

The scope and importance of the economic, political, and social changes that occurred in the countries of former socialist Europe at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century is staggering. Different accounts of these colossal changes are showing how the transition affected economic structures as well as the economic lives of men and women in post-socialist Europe. It shows that the transitions in the region paved the way to and are connected to full-blooded neoliberalism. Likewise, the post socialist pathways in the region profoundly impacted gender arrangements. All these changes have had an impact in other parts of the world. The collapse of the old system has influenced discussions and transitions in Latin America and Africa. There is a need to recognise the lost emancipatory potential of socialist projects, using the transition as a fertile soil for new deliberations and growth of new groups and movements that would support a struggle for a radically democratic vision of society surpassing the neoliberal "übercapitalism".

Reading:

Kanjuo Mrčela, A. 2025. The Re-organisation of Economy, Politics and Gender Equality in Post-socialist Europe. In Hassim, S. and Korteweg, A. (2025, Ed.): *Handbook on Politics and Society*. London: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd (Text is available at Study Materials section of the course at Web Office)

2nd December, 2025 Tanja Kamin (University of Ljubljana)

Tanja Kamin is a professor of communication studies and head of the Social Psychology Research Centre at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. Her research focuses on critical analyses of everyday life as an intersection of micro- and macro-level politics, with special attention to health, food culture, and sustainable energy transitions. She specializes in developing strategies for behavioural and social change, grounded in interdisciplinary approaches. Kamin has led or coordinated numerous national and international research

projects and collaborated extensively with the National Institute of Public Health. She has held visiting fellowships at the University of Sydney, Griffith University, Auckland University of Technology, and the Venice International University, and received several academic and professional awards. She is the founder of the Slovenian Social Marketing Association and national representative in the European Social Marketing Association and an active science communicator across academic, policy, and public platforms.

Health Communication in Contemporary Society

This lecture critically examines health communication as a dynamic field shaped by shifting societal norms, policy priorities, and media environments. We will explore how meanings of health are constructed and contested across interpersonal, institutional, and technological contexts, with attention to how communication strategies influence public understanding, behaviour, and identity. The lecture will address core themes such as risk communication, social marketing, and the role of media in framing health issues. Special focus will be given to the rise of digital health technologies and the Quantified Self movement as examples of how individuals are increasingly positioned as responsible health citizens through self-monitoring, data sharing, and algorithmic feedback. Drawing on critical and interdisciplinary perspectives, the lecture invites reflection on the tensions between empowerment and surveillance, individual agency and structural constraint, as well as commercial and public interests in health communication.

Reading:

Kamin, T., and Vezovnik, A. (2022). Quantified Self: From citizen science to commodified subjects. In Kubacki, K., Parker, L., Domegan, C., and Brennan, L. (Eds.): *The Routledge companion to marketing and society* (pp. 55-68). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003028079>

9th December 10, 2025 Andrew Penner (University of California, Irvine) (host A. Kanjuo Mrčela)

Andrew Penner is Professor of Sociology and the founding director of the Center on Administrative Data Analysis at the University of California, Irvine. Penner's work examines how society creates categories, sorts people into these categories, and the implications of categorization processes for peoples' lives. This work has been funded by a range of foundations and federal agencies; appeared in top general science (Science, PNAS), interdisciplinary (Nature Human Behavior), and disciplinary journals (the American Journal of Sociology); and been cited over 5,000 times. Much of Penner's recent work occurs in research practice partnerships and focuses on building unique administrative data infrastructure to answer pressing questions for educators and policymakers.

Building Better Categories

Debates in the sociology of education often center around the question of whether education is fundamentally an egalitarian or inegalitarian institution. Some educational

categories have broadly egalitarian consequences: When societies enroll young people in school, making them students, they mark them as individuals who are worthy of rights. But other educational categories reinforce powerful social categories – including race, gender, and class – and ultimately reproduce social and economic inequality in society. Elite universities and tracking in primary and secondary schools provide not only different educational experiences, but also create merit and inequality by sorting students into categories that are defined by the students who are excluded.

In this lecture, we will seek to reframe these debates by arguing that education should be understood as fundamentally an institution that creates not equality or inequality, but rather as an institution that creates categories. Categories and categorization are unavoidable in contemporary life, and because categories are defined by their boundaries, all categories are necessarily exclusionary and create inequality. Yet not all categories are equally inegalitarian, making it possible to create more egalitarian educational category systems. We will discuss the three competing logics that inform educational categorization – self-actualization, solidarity, and efficiency – and how we might create better educational categories.

Reading:

Domina, Thurston, Andrew M. Penner, and Emily K. Penner. *Schooled and Sorted: How Educational Categories Create Inequality*. 2023. Russell Sage Foundation Press. (Book is available at Study Materials section of the course at Web Office; students should read selected chapters)

16th December, 2025 Johan Lindell (Uppsala University) (host T.Kamin)

Johan Lindell is an Associate Professor of Media and Communication Studies at Uppsala University, Sweden. Lindell specializes in field theory and the works of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He has published his research in a wide range of international journals including *European Journal of Communication*, *Cultural Sociology*, *Communication Theory*, *Poetics*, *New Media & Society* and *Digital Journalism*. His most recent book is *Bourdieuian Media Studies* (Routledge, 2024).

Bourdieuian media studies

This lecture focuses on applying the research program of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in media and communication studies. Focus is put on understanding social inequality and media use, fields of cultural production and on interactions on social media. Particular attention is turned to the method of multiple correspondence analysis, which was Bourdieu's preferred method for studying the social world.

Reading:

Benson, R. (1999). Field theory in comparative context: A new paradigm for media studies. *Theory and society*, 28(3), 463-498.

6th January, 2026 Jason Wittenberg (University of California, Berkeley) (host I. Lukšič)

Jason Wittenberg is a professor of political science at the University of California, Berkeley. A former Academy Scholar at Harvard University, he has been a Fulbright scholar at the Central European University in Budapest, a visiting professor at the University of Tokyo, and a Fernand Braudel Senior Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence. Professor Wittenberg's broad area of focus is the politics and history of Eastern Europe. He has published widely on topics including electoral behavior, ethnic and religious violence, historical legacies, and empirical research methods. His first book, *Crucibles of Political Loyalty: Church Institutions and Electoral Continuity in Hungary* (Cambridge, 2006), won the 2009 Hubert Morken award for the best political science book published on religion and politics. He is the co-author, more recently, of *Intimate Violence: Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Cornell, 2018), winner of the 2019 Bronislaw Malinowski Award in the Social Sciences. He received his Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His current projects explore liberal democratic erosion and the logic of historical persistence.

Logic(s) of Historical Persistence

While persistence and change have long been central in the study of politics, we do not yet fully understand the criteria by which claims of persistence can be made. What is the dividing line between continuity with the past and change from the past? This project addresses that question through an examination of how social scientists discuss and assert persistence of organizations and institutions in the presence of change. It argues that common scholarly justifications for persistence are conceptually and empirically flawed, and offers a superior alternative.

Reading:

13th January, 2026 Maria Todorova (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) (host A. Črnič)

Maria Todorova is a prominent historian and professor of history, best known for her groundbreaking work on Balkan historiography and identity. Born in Bulgaria, she earned her PhD from Sofia University and later established an international academic presence, holding positions at leading universities including the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Todorova's most influential work, *Imagining the Balkans* (1997), critically examines Western perceptions of the Balkans and has become a foundational text in postcolonial and Southeast European studies. Her research explores nationalism, historical memory, and the politics of representation in the region, contributing significantly to interdisciplinary debates on identity and cultural history. Todorova has received numerous academic honours and fellowships, reflecting her international impact. In addition to her scholarly work, she actively mentors young researchers and promotes cross-cultural dialogue. Her contributions continue to shape global understandings of Southeast Europe's past and its place in the modern world.

Do the Balkans need their own epistemology?

One of the most prominent methodological issues is the conceptual apparatus we use. Balkan scholars are informed and borrow highly influential discourses and categories from adjacent areas and disciplines. Some of these categories are, in my opinion, appropriate, like empire and imperialism, marginalization and peripherality, scale, power, dependence, entanglement, and so on. Others I deem less appropriate or not at all, and in this lecture I want to address two problematic trends that have been influential lately in Balkan studies. First, I seek to contextualize the different approaches around “empire” and “colonialism” and the usages of their derivatives, like postcolonial, postcoloniality, neocolonial, quasi-colonial, decolonization, transcoloniality, as well as imperialism, imperialism, inter-imperiality, etc. Special attention will be paid to the ubiquitousness and functions of the concept of decoloniality. Secondly, I will focus on the employment of the category “race” and race theory to the Balkans, and the controversies this has generated. I will argue for the felicitous deployment of “racialization”, as theorized in a different context by Loïc Wacquant. Finally, going back to the question posed in the title, I address the antinomy of distinctiveness/uniqueness versus universalism and whether to approach the Balkans as part of a universal, if not entirely homogenizing and singular modernity, or in terms of alternative or multiple modernities.

Reading:

Wacquant, L. (2022). Resolving the trouble with “race”. *New Left Review*, (133/134), 69–88.
(The text is available in the Study Materials section of the course on the FDV Web Office.)

20th January, 2026 SEMINAR Aleš Črnič

Reading:

Ulrich Beck (2010): *A God of One's Own: Religion's Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence*. Polity Press. (The book is available in the Study Materials section of the course on the FDV Web Office.)

27th January, 2026 SEMINAR Igor Lukšič

Reading:

Pierre Rosanvallon (2008): *Counter-Democracy. Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Book is available in our library of online through COBISS+ portal)

3rd February, 2026 Kevin Schilbrack (Appalachian University) (host A. Črnič)

Kevin Schilbrack is a distinguished philosopher of religion and professor at Appalachian State University in North Carolina. With a PhD from the University of Chicago, he is known for his influential contributions to the philosophy and theory of religion, particularly in reconceptualizing the nature of religious belief and practice. His work bridges analytic and continental traditions, with a strong focus on embodied cognition, ritual theory, and the role of materiality in religious life. Schilbrack's acclaimed book *Philosophy and the Study of Religions: A Manifesto* (2014) challenges conventional boundaries in the discipline and advocates for a more philosophically rigorous and interdisciplinary approach. He is also recognized for his efforts to integrate global and non-Western perspectives into philosophical

discourse. An engaging teacher and public intellectual, Schilbrack continues to inspire critical reflection on how religion is understood, studied, and lived in contemporary contexts.

What is the Philosophy of Religious Studies?

The academic study of religion is not a single discipline but instead a multidisciplinary field united by a shared object of study. However, this field is divided by deep and persistent disagreements about what our proper task is and how to pursue it. I think that some of these disagreements arise because scholars approach their work with different assumptions that are, in the end, philosophical. That is, scholars have different views about what is and is not real, about what can and cannot be known, and about why the study of religion is worth doing. To examine these assumptions, we would be well served by developing a new area: philosophy of religious studies. In this talk, I aim to describe the goals of this new area and illustrate them with a discussion of three topics: (1) how best to define “religion,” (2) whether scholars should accept methodological naturalism, and (3) which value commitments, if any, are appropriate for scholars of religion.

Reading:

Schilbrack, K. (2018). A better methodological naturalism. In J. N. Blum (Ed.), *The question of methodological naturalism* (pp. 251–275). Brill.

(The text is available in the Study Materials section of the course on the FDV Web Office.)

10th February, 2026 SEMINAR T. Kamin

Reading:

Lindell, J. (2024). *Bourdieuian media studies*. London: Routledge.

17th February, 2026 SEMINAR A. Kanjuo Mrčela

Reading:

Jones, Pip in Bradbury, Liz (2018): *Introducing social theory. Third Edition*. Cambridge: Polity Press. (Book is available in our library of online through COBISS+ portal)

Moderated debates on students' reading reflections

24th February MODERATED DEBATE I. Lukšič and A. Kanjuo Mrčela

3rd March MODERATED DEBATE T. Kamin and A. Črnič

EXAM

Dates:

17.03.2026 5 PM

9.06.2026 5 PM

1.09.2026 5 PM

Exam Readings:

1. Jones, Pip; Bradbury, Liz (2018): *Introducing social theory*. Third Edition. Cambridge: Polity Press. (Book is available in our library of online through COBISS+ portal).
2. Pierre Rosanvallon (2008): *Counter-Democracy. Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Book is available in our library of online through COBISS+ portal)
3. Lindell, J. (2024). *Bourdieuian media studies*. London: Routledge.
4. Ulrich Beck. 2010. *A God of One's Own: Religion's Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence*. Polity Press.