

Global and Transnational Sociology Summer School

University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany

June 16 – July 11, 2025

Block I (June 16 – June 27, 2025)

Transnational Environmental Sociology

Prof. Lauren E. Eastwood (State University of New York Plattsburgh)

As more and more natural science evidence points to the fact that humans are putting pressure and/or exceeding our planetary boundaries, exploring and analyzing the social systems that lead to environmental degradation becomes increasingly important. This course in transnational environmental sociology will address such topics as global economic systems and environmental degradation, and disparities between the global north and global south as we build up a better understanding of how sociologists have addressed the nexus between social systems and environmental degradation.

Sociology of Religion

Prof. Brian Conway (Maynooth University)

This module is an introduction to theoretical debates, empirical work, and methodological approaches in the sociology of religion. In the first week, we consider the distinguishing features of the sociological approach to religion and the major debates within the literature about the impact of modernity on religion, focusing on secularisation theories. Framed by this, the second week focuses on topics such as atheist identities and secularity, religiosity in Germany, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on religion. Throughout, the emphasis will be on developing an international comparative approach to understanding religion and society. This will be achieved through mini-lectures, brief reflection papers on readings, and in-class discussions.

Block II (June 16 – July 11, 2025)

Social Construction and Reality: Alternative Facts and Truth

Dr. Georg Datler (University of Duisburg-Essen)

Four issues

#1 “I’m a truth teller”, says Donald Trump.⁽¹⁾ I am pretty sure you want to object. The course is about how (and how not to) argue with fake, alternative facts, and pseudo-science.

#2 Studies find that homeopathy is an effective treatment for depression.⁽²⁾ I am pretty sure you want to know why this claim is flawed. We will gain some understanding of experimental designs and statistics and see how the hocus-pocus works.

#3 97% of published studies support the position that climate change is real and largely human-made.⁽³⁾ I am pretty sure you approve of the message. The course will show why this statement entails a problem and consequences you may dislike. [Hint: What would 49% support mean?]

#4 Science is descriptive and can’t or shouldn’t comment on normative issues, i.e. suggest what should be. I suppose you have heard of this guideline and maybe you have realised the challenge this imperative poses for scientists who do want to act for change. The course will show that sociology can – and in fact: has to – be in favour of social justice. The demand for social justice – to refer back to statement #1 – relates to facts that are – most likely – true. The course will deliver these facts.

In standard terms the course is about the philosophy of science and the sociology of knowledge. We will see that influential currents within the social sciences and humanities (social constructivism, postmodernism) have said or have been understood as saying: ‘Everything is socially constructed; there is no way to know objective reality; scientific knowledge is no more true than other kinds of knowledge.’ While every good theory has to be constructivist, not every constructivist theory is good theory. I suppose this may sound like non-sense. We will talk about (fashionable) non-sense. And make sense of what ‘social constructs’ really are. Working together, we will discuss philosophy of science not as an end in itself but in order to address the *four issues* (and other issues you may come across!) and every-day examples. The goal is twofold: (1) understand what we can know and do know about the (social) world (2) use this knowledge to have a say in the pressing issues of our times.

Labor in a Globalized World

Prof. Thomas Haiperter (University of Duisburg-Essen)

In this seminar we will discuss the dynamics of economic globalization, the challenges this process poses for labor, and new ways of labour regulation that have developed in Multinational Companies (MNC). We will have a closer look at the dynamics of economic globalisation in terms of global trade patterns, foreign investments and the rise of MNC, including the geostrategic shifts that can be observed in recent years. The challenges these developments bring for labor in national political economies will be analysed from the different perspectives of political economies located in the Global North and the Global South, having a closer look at both organized labor and collective labor standards. Finally, we will discuss the attempts of organised labor to establish labor standards and to strengthen collective labor action within multinational companies in terms of Global Framework Agreements, trade union networks or European Works Councils.

