

Place Exploration

Mary Benson

Everything that we study is emplaced. Place is not merely a stage on which we produce our lives, place itself has effects on social life. Place is, at once, the buildings, streets, monuments, and open spaces assembled at a certain geographic spot and actors' interpretations, representations, and identifications (Gyeryn, 2000). Place also exists in different layers of time and meanings. This special topic group is an exploration of place/space; place identity and identification. Students will be encouraged to carry out explorations of different places with a view to developing a sociological awareness of place as a theoretical concept and as lived experience. The aim is to develop an understanding of the complex interplay of identity and place. There are a multitude of potential sites which will be discussed in class in order to help students identify specific places that they can research and which fit in with their own areas of interest.

This type of research lends itself to fieldwork methods and visual methods and we will focus on this in class. The emphasis will be placed on interviewing and visual representation

Exploring Childhood in Irish Society, using Quantitative Research Methods

Dr Delma Byrne

Experiences in childhood and young adulthood are viewed to be the expression of the social, economic, political and cultural forces that structure societies. A key role of the sociologist is to explain how these processes influence and shape the lives and experiences of children and young adults in Irish society and to understand how inequalities among children and young adults come about or how structural conditions shape children and young people's lives.

In this special topic research group, Irish society will be examined through the lens of childhood and youth, and students will have the freedom to decide which aspect to explore. Key institutions such as the family, the education system, the economy, the health system, the welfare state and their influences will be explored. We will examine how childhood and young adulthood in contemporary Irish society is structured along the lines of sex/gender, social class, poverty, household income, disability/special educational need, ethnicity or recent migrant history and their intersections. This special topic research group will also be of interest to students interested in policy areas such as education, housing and welfare, health and well-being and digital society.

It is important to note that in this special topic research group, over two semesters students will engage in quantitative analyses of an existing large scale, nationally representative, longitudinal study of childhood: The Growing Up in Ireland study. Guided by the craft and logic of social inquiry, we will use sociological theory to frame interesting and innovative research questions and hypotheses about Irish society and test these through analyses of the Growing Up in Ireland Study data which follows the same children and families over several waves of data collection.

Religion and Society

Dr Brian Conway

Are we more or less religious now than before? Why do women tend to be more religious than men? Why are strict churches strong? Why are some societies more religious than others? These are some of the core questions taken up by sociologists concerned with the relationship between religion and society. In the first semester students learn about the major theoretical, methodological and empirical debates in the sociology of religion literature. This provides a foundation for the second semester, in which the focus turns to carrying out a research project about a research question derived from the literature examined in the first semester, as well as becoming acquainted with literature about data collection, data analysis and social scientific writing. The module closes out with a learning community celebration, where students present their ongoing research project. This module supports most research methods, except the analysis of online data.

The Future (Where Did It Go?)

Prof. Colin Coulter

Central to the project of modernity from the outset was a belief in the possibility of progress. Given a fair wind, things could only get better. That faith in the future has been challenged in many historical moments. And it often feels like we're living through one of them. The list of our contemporary woes seems to lengthen all the time. An escalating ecological catastrophe, the surge in right wing populism, the cost of living crisis, multiple wars that threaten to draw in the global superpowers, fake news, the proliferation of ever more agile viruses...all this seems very far removed from the reason and progress that modernity appeared to promise us. So how then are we to feel about what lies ahead? Is another (better) world still possible, or are we living through what Franco Berardi has termed the 'slow cancellation' of the future? In this group, we will discuss those questions among many others.

Lived experience of social inequality

Prof. Laurence Cox

This special topic invites you to use family history, life history or autoethnographic methods to explore your own or your family's experience of inequality (social class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, dis/ability etc.) You will look at one or more dimension of inequality on the basis of interviews with your family members or others or systematic reflection on your own life experience. This can be from the point of view of being disadvantaged, exploited, oppressed, stigmatised etc. or being powerful, privileged etc. – or in contradictory situations. In your dissertation you will analyse this data and relate your (or your family's) experience to more general understandings of the inequality in question (e.g. statistics; studying how corporations, families, states etc. work; theories of structure etc.) This may lead you to critique existing ideas of the inequality or to see your experience differently, or both. The small-group setting will provide a safe space for discussing difficult experiences.

Heat Waves: Exploring the discourse on climate change

Dr Anne Fitzgerald

Climate change has become a major political issue on all continents as warming temperatures, frequent extreme weather events and melting of ice caps bring the predictions of climate science closer to home. Citizens have formed social movements to lobby their governments to stop activities which contribute to global warming. Youth movements such as Fridays for Future strikes have turned the focus onto the official response to climate change and have galvanised support for recognition of the urgent need for action. At the same time, a growing backlash towards 'green policies' has been developing as corporations involved in fossil fuel industries kick against calls for their demise and farmers protest against the drastic changes expected from their sector. In this special topic we will explore the official discourse on climate change at international and national level and the unofficial one from those who deny climate change exists. A sociological perspective can throw light on the factors affecting society's diverging response to the climate change, the framing of the narrative and the intersection of power and privilege, gender, race and class.

Outsourcing Care

Dr Anne Fitzgerald

Economic development and the processes of globalisation have created new forms of informal work for 'mainly' but not exclusively female workers in the 'care industry'. As the rate of women working rises in higher income countries, services which were usually provided for free by females in the family are now provided through paid employment. The demand for care workers has rapidly increased and migrant women are a captive market for positions as nannies, child minders, cleaners and care staff in elderly care facilities. At the same time working women generally perform the majority of domestic tasks in the home, despite the changes in gender roles in the last decades. The first semester will introduce the major debates and theoretical positions on gender and care, including questions such as why has care work remained so stubbornly gendered? How does race and ethnicity intersect with gender in the delivery of care? What effect has the precarity of their situation on the givers of care in private domestic and congregated settings? The first semester will also cover methodologies used to collect and analyse data. The second semester will focus on the research process, choosing a research question and methodology and completing the thesis.

Digital Social Media and Social Movements

Dr Izzy Fox

This group will explore the impact of social media on social inequalities and on social movements, with a particular focus on feminist movements. While we will organise our discussion around the experiences of feminist movements, thesis research can be undertaken on other movements.

From the international online movement against rape culture known as #MeToo to the Repeal the 8th campaign to remove Ireland's constitutional ban on abortion, digital social media platforms have played a pivotal role in feminist activism in recent years. For instance, social media platforms provide a space for activist communities to form, for consciousness-raising to occur, as well as for mobilising off-line action, including street protests. The digital affordances of social media, such as the hashtag, allow topics to trend, thus facilitating the spread of ideas

and campaigns, often instantaneously. In this sense, digital platforms such as X/Twitter, have become a key tool for the contemporary feminist activist. Conversely, intersectional feminist and decolonial scholars have also drawn attention to the negative impact of digital technologies and social media platforms, including how biases and inequalities are often baked into their design and re-enforced through their use.

Semester One will highlight both the benefits and harms of social media for social movements, particularly feminism, by focusing on literature emerging from both within and outside of Ireland. We will also work on formulating a research question and developing a methodology. During the second semester we will attend to analysing data and the practical aspects of writing a thesis, as well as to exploring the topics of our theses in more depth.

Digital Society and App Studies: Sociological Perspectives and Research Methods

Yuening Li

This module is designed for third-year sociology students to bridge their everyday experiences with mobile apps and their academic studies in sociology. Students will be guided to identify research ideas inspired by their daily app usage and conceptualise them into researchable questions for their thesis. The module extends classical and contemporary social theories to the digital realm, exploring how mobile apps shape and reflect social issues such as identity, inequality, solidarity, consumption, gender, and other key sociological concerns in today's evolving digital landscape.

Migration and Societies

Dr. Elena Zambelli

In higher income countries, over the past decade, international migration has become an increasingly contentious domain. Migration laws have become more restrictive; borders have proliferated from within and from without states' boundaries, and there has been a distinctive surge of populist anti-immigration political parties and movements. European Union citizens' exercise of freedom of movement and enjoyment of related rights are also being restricted through various administrative measures. Far from concerning people on the move only, the impact of these processes implicates citizens in various ways and capacities. These may be migrants' family members, racialized citizens with a migration heritage or background, service providers, and more.

In this special topic group, we will explore how states' regulation of cross-border movements affects the everyday lives of migrants and citizens, and how they themselves navigate such effects.

Our focus will be on states members of the European Union, which they will be considered in their double stance as independent nation-states, with their own migration regime, and members of the European Union participating in both its freedom of movement regime and the fortification and externalisation of its borders.

Research questions may address people's contemporary perceptions and experiences of borders (physical, emotional, bureaucratic, etc.), their ways of making 'home' away from

home, and whether and how these changed over time. You will explore these questions by using qualitative research methods and narrative analysis. You may generate data yourself by doing research with human participants (i.e., interviews; ethnography), or you may choose to reuse publicly available research data. Throughout, you will be encouraged to think in intersectional ways, paying attention to the interplay of legal status with gender, race/ethnicity and other axis of identity and difference.