

Topics in Twentieth-Century Social History / Emner i 1900-tallets sosialhistorie

A “meget god” master thesis contributes to a scholarly debate (“historiografi”) by formulating a research question (“problemstilling”) that is relevant to other participants of that discussion. It answers this question in a theoretically reflected way and with an adequate method (“teori og metode”), drawing on evidence from well-selected and skillfully interpreted primary sources (“kilder”) and presenting their findings in accordance with the standards of our discipline (“presentasjon”). (See also the IAKH’s “fagspesifikke karakterbeskrivelser” here: <https://www.uio.no/studier/eksamen/karakterskala/fagspesifikk-karakterbeskrivelse/hf-iakh-historie-master.html>.)

I would like to help students to write “meget gode” (or, even better, “fremragende”!) theses on topics in twentieth-century social history in Norway, Germany, and Britain. As the master thesis should be an independent piece of research, I do not provide candidates with already defined topics, a research question, a list of readings or a set of primary sources. I expect students to have an idea of a topic they might be interested in. I also expect them to begin their project by identifying relevant historiographical literature on that topic, and to engage with that literature. On that basis, they will be able to formulate a convincing research question, define a promising and viable empirical case, and locate primary sources. I will help to find research literature and look very much forward to discuss ideas on how to design the project, find potentially fruitful primary sources, and – ultimately – make sense of them. I will comment, but not rewrite draft chapters. I offer students the possibility to discuss each other’s texts in a “veiledningsseminar”, which is great training in how they make their work matter to other historians, some of whom will form the committee that is going to evaluate their thesis.

Youth: its classification, governance and experience since the 1950s

In the course of the 20th century, youth came to be regarded as a generational cohort of people that share a particular lifestyle, command consumer power and harbour a political potential. Social scientists played a major role in the “invention” of youth particularly after the Second World War. Their knowledge was (and still is) used by both state authorities to educate, support or police adolescents and by the young themselves, who learned to conduct themselves as members of one generation. A master project in this field of research may focus on youth policy

since the 1950s in view to the changing perception of young people, or it may concentrate on youth milieus, subcultures or lifestyle tribes with the question how scholarly or public knowledge about youth shaped their experience. In other words, how did the young develop a generational consciousness? Sources will have been generated at national level by state or charitable bodies and at local level by city councils, for instance in the course of the administration of youth centres. Youth media (magazines, broadcasting, movies) provide another possible opening for a study, as does the social scientific literature on youth. Recent historiography on the topic allows to define a feasible case study and to develop fruitful research questions. For an introduction to the topic see the textbook of Melanie Tebbutt, *Making Youth: A History of Youth in Modern Britain*, Basingstoke: Palgrave 2016, and Bart van der Steen, Knud Andresen, eds., *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protests and Social Movements in the 1980s*, Basingstoke: Palgrave 2016.

Theses may be written in English or Norwegian, and local projects making use of Norwegian sources are strongly encouraged.

Treating, slumming, courting: social interaction in public entertainment venues

Throughout the 20th century, Western cities provided a range of entertainment venues that were governed by distinct conventions. Pubs accommodated male sociability, while late 20th century wine bars set the scene for a more genteel night out. Mid-century dance halls encouraged heterosexual courtship, whereas discotheques furthered displays of “coolness”. Established entertainment spaces like the cinema or variety theatres lost parts of their audiences to television, which altered their character; new formats like rock festivals established their own codes of conduct. A thesis in this area of research could focus on one particular type of venue, trace its change over time and explore the effects on behavioural conventions and social relations among its patrons. How did, for instance, the rise and decline of dance halls affect gender relations? Where did homosexuals meet and how did they socialize in the mid-20th century? Valuable sources for such a study include newspaper articles, guidebooks, reports by the police, welfare institutions and other official bodies, social-scientific surveys or interventions by the churches and civic organisations. For the case of Oslo, sources are available at the “Byarkivet”. (For an introduction to the topic, see Elizabeth Clement’s “Love for Sale” (2006), Chad Heap’s “Slumming” (2009) or Matt Houlbrook’s “Queer London” (2005). You may also want to look

at the review article Klaus Nathaus, *Why “Pop” Changed and How It Mattered*, Parts I and II, 2018.)

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Norway’s participation in the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC)

Norwegians pride themselves of being among the happiest, generous and most peaceful countries in the world, as testified by international rankings such as OECD statistics. One could interpret Norway’s engagement as a form of participation in “international prestige competitions” (for the concept, see Tobias Werron, *On Public Forms of Competition*, in: *Cultural Studies – Critical Methodologies* 14, 1 (2014), 62-76) and study the country’s appearance in the European Song Contest as a case in point. A project could ask how a country like Norway is drawn into prestige competitions and how and with what social consequences a nation’s performance is organised. For a recent study on the ESC, see Dean Vuletic, *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*, London: Bloomsbury 2018; for primary sources, the historical archive of NRK should be contacted.

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Experiences of parenting after 1945

In the course of the twentieth century, the role of parents and their relationship with their children have changed enormously in reaction to economic trends, the rise of the welfare state, major political incisions such as two world wars and new gender ideals. A master thesis could start from Paula Fass’s recent history of parenting (*The End of American Childhood: A History of Parenting From Life on the Frontier to the Managed Child*, Princeton: PUP 2016) and see how the American experience compares to the Norwegian case. A wide range of primary sources from pedagogical guide books to playground architecture and private photo albums could be made fruitful for such a project.

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Visions of the city: the rise and fall of social housing, 1930s-1980s/gentrification since the 1960s/the making of the ‘creative city’ in the 1990s

Social historians have often focused on cities to study up-close the impact of larger social processes like (de-)industrialisation or the establishment of the welfare state on “ordinary” people’s social relations. Social housing, which after relatively modest beginnings in the early twentieth century was in Western countries expanded considerably after 1945 before the initial enthusiasm and state investment declined in the 1970/80s, is one possible topic to study in detail the making and experience of society, gentrification as well as the more recent gospel of the ‘creative city’ (and the accompanying privatisation of housing) are others.

- Focusing on town planning and housing policy, a master project could study the visions of society such planning entailed and assess their consequences for people’s lives. There is a rich historiography on social housing in particular which should make it relative easy to define a feasible and fruitful project. Students may start from the introduction by Shane Ewen, *What is urban history?*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2016, and/or the older book by Alison Ravetz, *Council housing and culture: the history of a social experiment*, London: Routledge 2001.
- Aspects of gentrification have been usefully explored in an article by Joe Moran (Early cultures of gentrification, 1955-1980, in: *Journal of Urban History* 34, 1 (2007), 101-21) with the focus on London. A research project could take Moran’s paper as guidance to explore the topic for Oslo, working with local archives.
- A polemical article by Jamie Peck (*Struggling with the creative class*, in: *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29, 4 (2005), 740-770) provides perspectives on the “creative city”. Annual bibliographies published in the leading journal ‘Urban History’ offer an overview of research in the field of urban history.

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Lost in translation? Transfers of popular culture (to Norway)

Popular culture crossed national borders and was adapted to local contexts of production and consumption. One example is association football, which by the time of its global export in the late 19th century had become a working-class sport in Britain, its country of origin, while it was often adopted abroad first by middle-class cosmopolitans. Another case in point is movies that were dubbed and edited and subsequently acquired new meanings. Students who embark on a project in this field are encouraged to explore the transfer of culture in depth by trying to reconstruct the perspective of decision makers who select foreign content and adapt it in view to local audiences. A great number of studies on “cultural Americanisation”, among them Victoria de Grazia’s “Irresistible Empire” (2006) and Karl Miller’s “Segregating Sound” (2010), would offer inspiration for a viable research project. The “Norsk Jazzarkiv”, now hosted by Nasjonalbiblioteket in Oslo, may offer relevant and readily accessible sources for a project that studies the import of jazz to Norway, for example. Extensive records of Oslo’s communal cinema administration, held at Oslo Byarkivet, could be used for an “oppgave” on foreign films in Norway’s capital.

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Creative Labour: work in twentieth-century cultural industries

Popular content from pop music to television shows is created by people who, in some form or other, get paid for their efforts. While they may seek creative autonomy, they share with “ordinary” workers a dependency on means of production, the competition on labour markets and risks such as unemployment and poor health. Cultural workers from musicians to Hollywood screen writers have formed professional bodies and trade unions to cope with risks collectively, and they are said to have developed a particular ethos of self-actualisation and entrepreneurialism that is regarded to be heralding the future of post-industrial work more generally. Work in the cultural industries is widely debated in the social sciences by authors like Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, Richard Florida, David Hesmondhalgh and Matt Stahl. (For an introduction to the topic, I recommend Stahl’s book “Unfree Masters” (2012), Robert Faulkner’s “Hollywood Studio Musicians” (1985) and James Kraft’s “From Stage to Studio” (1996).) Deposita of the Norwegian musicians’ union (Norsk Musikerforbund) held at

Arbeiderbevegelsens Arkiv in Oslo offer valuable and easily accessible sources for a project on musicians' work.

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