

Written Exam Economics Summer 2021

**Economic Sociology**

Take-home exam

Date

This exam question consists of 1 page in total

Answers only in English.

**A take-home exam paper cannot exceed 10 pages – and one page is defined as 2400 keystrokes**

***The paper must be uploaded as one PDF document. The PDF document must be named with exam number only (e.g. '1234.pdf') and uploaded to Digital Exam.***

**Be careful not to cheat at exams!**

Exam cheating is for example if you:

- Copy other people's texts without making use of quotation marks and source referencing, so that it may appear to be your own text
- Use the ideas or thoughts of others without making use of source referencing, so it may appear to be your own idea or your thoughts
- Reuse parts of a written paper that you have previously submitted and for which you have received a pass grade without making use of quotation marks or source references (self-plagiarism)
- Receive help from others in contrary to the rules laid down in part 4.12 of the Faculty of Social Science's common part of the curriculum on cooperation/sparring

You can read more about the rules on exam cheating on your Study Site and in part 4.12 of the Faculty of Social Science's common part of the curriculum.

Exam cheating is always sanctioned by a written warning and expulsion from the exam in question. In most cases, the student will also be expelled from the University for one semester.

## Exam questions

According to Portes, power is the third general assumption grounding economic sociology, while social capital, social classes and social institutions are the three explanatory mechanisms.

Explain the role of power in economic sociology as presented by Portes – and extend the explanation by drawing on insights from Marx, Weber and Durkheim of how power plays a role in the functioning of capitalism and the modern society.

Explain how the concept of power is materialized in the more modern sociological theory of Bourdieu about different forms of capital including social capital, which is one of Portes' explanatory mechanisms. Compare the role of social capital as an explanatory mechanism in Bourdieu's theory to the role of social classes from Marx and Weber as an explanatory mechanism of societal differentiation.

Finally, use the understandings of power to discuss how one achieves market power according to Aspers. To what degree is Aspers' concept of 'economic identities' (which is Aspers' substitute for 'economic man') in the market based on power, and to what degree on social interaction between agents in the market?

### Guidelines for answering the questions:

According to Portes, power represents an omnipresent factor in economic transaction and organization. This should be clarified and explained by the student. Weber defines power as the ability of individuals, or associations of individuals, to impose their will on others 'despite resistance'.

Among the classics, Durkheim emphasized the external and coercive character of social phenomena that compel actors to follow certain paths of action and not others, despite their own wishes or inclinations. Durkheim located the source of this power in a diffuse 'collective will'. Marx located the possession of power in the capitalist bourgeoisie and its source of effective control of the means of production. For Marx 'collective will' and similar 'laws' of society claimed as scientific discoveries by many of his nineteenth-century contemporaries were just fantasies. They simply masked the reality underneath – the 'hidden abode' – where holders of wealth compelled not only the workers but also the rest of society to their bidding. Weber essentially accepted Marx's definition of power, but extended its source beyond the means of production to the possession of scarce skills that confer differential levels of market power. The 'good answer' to the first question should reflect this.

In modern sociology, Bourdieu has arguably been the most prominent follower of this tradition by distinguishing sources of power attached to various forms of 'capital'. These forms of capital 'social', 'cultural' should be explained and the concept of 'symbolic violence' as a tool of power should be explained.

The simple answer to the last question is that Aspers concept of 'economic identities' is not based on power. The notion of identity acknowledges the social constitution of one identity by other identities. Identities are foundations for what has been called relational sociology. According to Aspers, actors have different identities in different markets. The identities are generated in different

ways, depending on the type of market they operate in – and a main point is that the actor has to take into account what she wants to be in the market or the situation in the market including her own identity – when acting. This should be reflected in the student's answer.

