**THEORY CONSTRUCTION**

**INSTRUCTIONS ASSIGNMENT 1**

LEARNING GOALS

In Part I of Theory Construction, we discuss a number of central elements in the first phase of

sociological inquiry: what Richard Swedberg describes as the preliminary study of early

theorizing or the “context of discovery.” In the first and second lectures illustrated various heuristics that may aid you in thinking creatively. This assignment deals with how to apply these different heuristics to a particular social phenomenon.

INSTRUCTIONS

a. Start with choosing a social phenomenon, introduce it briefly and reflect on why it

interests you (drawing on Swedberg, chapter 2). You can draw on personal experiences,

stories, media reports, …

b. Imagine you were to conduct research on that phenomenon. Explain how you would engage in early “social observation,” as described by Swedberg (chapter 2). What sort of

preliminary data do you try to find? Where do you look or listen?

c. Theorize. Try to assemble relevant ideas, statistics, background, descriptions, related

phenomena, explanations, etc. through free association. Theorize wildly! Present the results

of this theorization in two parts:

* Give a summary of this free association process. Diagrams, drawings, etc. of this

brainstorm session may be included at the end of your paper, as an appendix.

* Apply at least three of the demonstrated heuristics (e.g. framing by case/aspect,

analysing latent functions, etc.) during your process of free association. Explain the

heuristics, how you apply these, and to which insights they lead. The more alternative

approaches, explanations, etc. you can generate in relation to your phenomenon, the

better.

There are no right or wrong answers, and this step will not be graded as such. We will,

however, take into account whether the heuristics were applied correctly and how well you

explain what you are doing.

d. Further reflect on your social phenomenon and address the following topics:

* Explain what is specifically sociological about your theorizations and the future

research you suggest (see texts by Swedberg & Mills).

* Explain why future research might demonstrate that it is a socially significant

phenomenon (as described by Ragin & Amoroso).

Important: don’t look for conclusive answers, so try to ‘open up’ the phenomenon by theorizing and applying heuristics. Look for interesting (and not always obvious) questions and approaches to the phenomenon at hand.

EXAMPLES OF PHENOMENA

These are illustrative examples. Please choose your own phenomenon.1 You will learn the

most if you consider your own examples to apply the questions.

– The increasing number of unpaid internships after graduating.

– Wearing entrance bracelets after certain music festivals.

– The impact of the financial crisis on inequality in Belgium.

– Rise of popularity of handicrafts, like knitting & sewing.

– Increasing use of anti-depressants.

SUBMISSION

Submit your assignment on the deadline (30 October 2019) in electronic format, via email 73198435@fsv.cuni.cz

The intended length of the assignment is 1800 to 2300 words.

But, as always: quality above quantity. You are advised to write in Dutch, unless you feel sufficiently proficient in English.

Make sure your name, course title and the title of the assignment are clearly visible on the first page.

If you do not succeed in submitting the assignment before the deadline, give me a heads up by email and try to submit as soon as possible.

EVALUATION

While grading this assignment, I take into consideration the following criteria:

– The degree to which the different heuristics are used creatively and correctly.

– The degree of originality of the chosen research interest and the elements that you

eventually select from the first, creative step.

– How well you link your approach to the texts in the reader.

– Formal requirements (e.g. length & structure of the paper, use of scientific language,

clarity of reasoning, etc.).

FEEDBACK

I will provide individual feedback for each one of you and send it back by email. If you have any questions to clarify the assignment, you can contact me through email. After you receive your assignment, if you have any comments or questions you can ask me either after lecture or by email.