GRADING GUIDE – HUMAN GEOGRAPHY (bachelor SGO and master HGO)

Course code and semester-year: SGO2250 spring 2025
Type of examination: *[underline the option that applies]*
Written school exam / take-home exam / term paper given topic / term paper self-chosen topic

About exams at SGO/HGO: A good examination paper contains solid knowledge, logical and coherent reasoning and a systematic structure. The answer to a discussion question/task must examine, analyze, and connect different parts of the curriculum.

1. The answer responds to the question/task given in a precise and exhaustive way.
2. The answer demonstrates knowledge.
3. The answer must be well-written: coherent and using good academic language.
4. Key concepts – those at the core of the answer – must be defined.
5. The answer demonstrates analytical capacity and reflection.

About this exam
Six-hour school exam. The students are to answer three out of four questions. The three answers weigh equally in the final grade.

Question 1

Describe Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT) and discuss its relevance in light of current environmental sustainability challenges.

Guidelines:

Ecological modernization theory (EMT) emerged in the 1980 and 1990s as an attempt to tackle environmental problems in industrialized western societies (cf. Mol and Spaargaren, 2007). EMT seeks solutions from within these societies based on innovation and reforms and is concerned foremost with (either radical or ongoing and gradual) processes of change. Ability to distinguish between weak and strong versions of the theory draw in the direction of a higher marking, as does distinctions between functional and socio-economic accounts. Warner (2010) discusses whether accelerating climate change and many other complex environmental problems challenge the central argument of EMT that industrial societies can be made sustainable with technological fixes and modest adjustments and raise critical questions concerning how power and social conflicts are dealt with.

Question 2

Define what is meant by innovation. Proceed to critically assess how innovations can contribute to speed up sustainability transitions, and what possible roles that government policies can have in this respect. Feel free to illustrate with examples.

This is a broad assignment, and it is expected that students find their way to discuss the questions. Many of the readings on the reading list can be mobilized here. Fagerberg (2005) present Schumpeter and introduces the literature on innovation. Fagerberg (2018) directly relates to the role of innovations in sustainability transitions. Sustainable innovation systems are discussed by Altenburg & Pegels

(2012), while Coenen et al (2012) discusses the geography of innovation. Langhelle et al (2019) is also relevant in this context. These references mostly discuss market-based innovations. In the lectures we have been talking about social innovations based on Jessop et al (2013), Olsson et al (2017) and More and Riddel (2015). Social innovation as part of neo-liberalism or, the alternatively critical perspectives on social innovation as policies, processes, programs, and practices that will, over time, transform the defining routines, resources and authority flows, or beliefs, of broader social systems have been discussed in the lecture.

Question 3

What is a circular economy according to the Ellen McArthur Foundation model? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this model from the perspective of environmental sustainability?

Guidelines:

Students should start with describing the "Butterfly model" of the circular economy as presented by the Ellen McArthur foundation. The main principle here is to preserve and enhance natural capital by controlling finite stocks and balancing renewable resource flows. For a good marking to be rewarded, a distinction should be made between technical cycles (finite/non-renewable resources) and biological cycles (renewable resources), and the nature of cycles (short/long) along each dimension. A main point is that the cycles should be closed and as short as possible. The model should then be discussed with emphasis on how realistic it is to achieve short and closed cycles, and whether CE actually will reduce use of virgin materials/resources or simply create new markets and new consumption opportunities that add to existing ones (cf. the paper by Hobson 2020 and the discussion of rebound effects also more generally in the course). Candidates who extend their discussion to critically assess also the functional and geographical configuration of CE 'cycles' (resources flows/networks) should be awarded with a high marking. The paper by Fevrier (2022) on the role of Accra/Ghana in circulating electronics can be used for this purpose.

Question 4

Describe the multilevel perspective (MLP) on sociotechnical continuity and change. Proceed to discuss what is meant by niches, and how niches can break through and change sociotechnical systems/regimes. Feel free to illustrate with examples.

Guidelines:

To be clear: candidates are not expected to distinguish conceptually between sociotechnical systems and regimes, as the literature is ambiguous on what the difference is. A good marking require that the candidate describes the different levels of the MLP and how they relate to one another. Candidates who recognize how (regular, incremental) adjustments are facilitated by the internal logics of established regimes/systems should be awarded for recognizing the 'continuity' dimension of the question. Niches are in the MLP seen as incubator spaces that protect novel sociotechnical configurations from the forces of market selection during the stages of development when they are unstable and characterized by low performance and high (technological, commercial) risks. They are often promoted by networks of dedicated actors operating outside established sociotechnical systems. Niches can 'grow' into and transform regimes/systems when the latter are destabilized by pressures induced by changes at the landscape level and niche innovations build up internal momentum through

learning, price/performance improvements and support for powerful groups. Candidates who introduce the notion of ‘niche-regimes’ in their discussions should be awarded with a high marking, as should students who are able to introduce discussions of power more generally.