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Title: Introduction : Researching local life in a Bourdieusian frame

Year: 2011

Version: Published version

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Please cite the original version:

Siisiäinen, M., & Alanen, L. (2011). Introduction : Researching local life in a Bourdieusian frame. In L. Alanen, & M. Siisiäinen (Eds.), *Fields and capitals : constructing local life* (pp. 11-28). University of Jyväskylä, Finnish Institute for Educational Research. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-39-6097-1>



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Introduction: Researching local life in a Bourdieusian frame

The volume at hand presents the final results of the *“Resources, Locality and Life Course”* research project (funded by the Academy of Finland, 2005–2009). Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu’s work, our interdisciplinary team of researchers took up the challenge of studying one specific locality by applying Bourdieu’s research programme and taking into use, in an empirical research, a range of conceptual ‘tools’ that his sociology provides. The site chosen for the research is Lievestuore, a smallish locality within the municipality of Laukaa and one of its centres, in Central Finland. (See the information box on page 14).

The results of the research team have been published in two earlier books. These publications also prepared the ground for the analyses presented in the chapters that follow, in both a theoretical and a methodological sense.

In the first published book, *“Sosiaalinen pääoma ja paikalliset kentät”* [Social capital and local fields] (Alanen, Salminen & Siisiäinen 2007), the main themes of the project were presented and the approach developed

for the empirical part of the research that would follow. *Social capital* was the concept connecting the various chapters of the book, and some of the pertinent methodological and methodical issues in social capital research, flourishing at the time of the research, were discussed across these chapters. Social capital is, of course, one of the concepts created by Bourdieu in the course of developing his research programme. Since the 1990s, social capital has been given a wide range of interpretations in social science research. In relation to these, Bourdieu's understanding of social (or any) capital is quite distinct. The discussions in the first book were thus orientated towards elaborating his understanding of social capital and its implications for empirical research.

The first book also set out to discuss the possibilities that Bourdieu's concept of social capital opens up for empirical research. In particular, the idea that Bourdieu's concepts are *relational* was underlined in this book. The relational mode of thought,

“by breaking with the substantialist mode of thought, leads one to characterize each element by the relationships which unite it with all the others in a system and from which it derives its meaning and function.” (Bourdieu 1990b, 4)

Such thinking implies that, for instance, economic, cultural and social – and symbolic – forms of capital are interconnected both among themselves, and also with what Bourdieu designates as *field* and *habitus* – concepts that are put into use particularly in the chapters of the present book. Relationality, moreover, applies to all of Bourdieu's concepts, such as *interest*, *trajectory*, *hexis* and *doxa*; also they have to be understood as notions working best when supported by the whole ensemble of Bourdieu's conceptualization. This first book also took up some of the methodical and methodological problems that have troubled empirical studies on social capital, and developed some possible solutions to them.

The research team's second book “*Erot ja eriarvoisuudet: Paikallisen elämän rakentuminen*” [Differences and inequalities: Constructing local life] (Siisiäinen & Alanen 2009) presented the results of the questionnaire-based studies conducted in 2006 across five “life stage groups”, all

living in Lievestuore. The chosen groups were: young children (5–6 years of age), young people at the school-leaving stage (14–15 years of age), men and women in their thirties, men and women in their fifties and, finally, older people. The special focus in the individual chapters of the book was on the volumes and structures of different forms of capital as they were found for each of these groups, and the within-group differences in the composition of capitals. By illuminating the differentiation of the ownership of capital across the five groups, we hoped to be able to proceed towards identifying some of the ‘mechanisms’ of differentiation and (class) distinction at work in the locality; these were to be studied at the next stage of the project. The book chapters also discussed the implications of the observed differentiation for a number of other local issues, such as schooling, family and associational life.

The individual studies presented in the project’s third and final book also make use of the data provided by the joint questionnaire and the insights gained in the research. In addition, some new data were collected, by various methods ranging from observation and interviewing to a further survey questionnaire addressing local voluntary associations, and articles in a local newspaper.¹

The issues examined in the chapters of the present book include the kinds of capital that are considered valued in selected local fields (day care, family), the trajectories and habituses that are generated in living locally, schooling as the producer of differences in the students’ achievements, the networks and associations functioning as social capital in local fields.

In several chapters that follow, *field* is the foundational “thinking tool” in an explicit way. The two other Bourdieusian concepts of key importance in the present studies are *habitus* and *capital*. In what follows, we describe how the project group has used this conceptual triad for exploring a number of issues embedded in the locality.

¹ For the methods and data collected for the project’s research, see Appendix.

Lievestuore is a fairly small community with a population around 2600, located in Central Finland. It is one of the four population centres of the municipality of Laukaa. The distance to the municipality centre is 30 kilometres. The functioning road and railway connections to the provincial capital Jyväskylä (distance 26 km) situate Lievestuore logistically well, but also make it more isolated in relation to the municipal centre.

The development of Lievestuore into a prosperous community began in the 1920s, when a pulp factory was established. As the most important employer in the community, the factory made Lievestuore the most industrialized centre in Laukaa, also best equipped with services at the time. The closedown of the pulp factory in 1985 caused a local crisis, which the locality suffered from severely for many years. Various development projects were launched to rehabilitate the economic life of the locality. Lievestuore has recovered fairly well from the loss and its ramifications. The problems it faces nowadays are mainly similar to those of other small communities in Finland: the ageing of the population, the migration of the young and well-educated labour force, and the cutting down of municipal welfare services, the local high school and health-care centre as the latest examples of this.

The largest age group of the population in Lievestuore is that of those aged 65 years and above. The middle-aged (45 to 54 years) are also well represented, whereas the young adults (18 to 24 years) are a marginal group in Lievestuore. However, small children constitute a remarkable age group as well, and altogether one fourth of the households in Lievestuore have children under the age of 18. The skewed age structure is reflected in the socio-economic structure of the locality: pensioners make slightly more than one third of the population. Labourers (29%) and lower-level employees (14%) are well represented socio-economic groups, whereas entrepreneurs (4%) are not. Agriculture is not of great importance in Lievestuore, and only three per cent of the population earn their living from it. (Statistics Finland 2008b.)

In the Finnish “rural scale” Lievestuore can be regarded as a relatively well-functioning locality. It has succeeded in attracting new firms and new residents to its territory, especially families with small children. The majority of the locals seem to enjoy their life in Lievestuore. There are some factors that the locality has to thank for its relative success. There is, first, the general economic-social development and a few supportive development programs that have managed to repair, for example, most of the environmental damages brought about by the local industry. The positive forces also include the active local civil society and a relatively well-supplied municipal service structure – which, however, has been cut down in many ways during the last few years.



Field

By focusing on one locality (Lievestuore), our study is, by implication, an examination of *space*. In his work Bourdieu uses the term 'space' in two interconnected senses. The first meaning is literal: activities occur and actors act in physical spaces that also have both practical and symbolic significance in relation to each other. The second Bourdieusian meaning of space is metaphorical, as he speaks of space as being always also *social*. In this latter sense, actors are conceived of as occupants of multiple places within multiple relatively autonomous domains – *fields* – that together constitute the total social space. These multiple fields in turn constitute the status, class and social positions of the actors, their place in society. Thus, one is always placed, or located, which means that Bourdieu's social topology is also always an embodied sociology, bringing forth *habitus* as another key concept in the Bourdieusian frame.

Especially in his later works Bourdieu repeatedly underlined the centrality of thinking of society and social life in terms of *fields*:

"The notion of field reminds us that the true object of social science is not the individual, even though one cannot construct a field if not through individuals, [...]. *It is the field that is primary and must be the focus of the research operations.* This does not imply that individuals are mere "illusions", that they do not exist: they exist as agents – and not as biological individuals, actors, or subjects – who are socially constituted as active and acting in the field under consideration by the fact that they possess the necessary properties to be effective, to produce effects, in this field. And it is knowledge of the field itself in which they evolve that allows us best to grasp the roots of their singularity, their point of view or position (in a field) from which their particular vision of the world (and of the field itself) is constructed." (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 107; emphasis by MS&LA)

The notion of *field* gained this analytical weight and methodological significance for Bourdieu's sociological thinking as soon as he moved towards analysing the contemporary French society and its structuredness into fields and as fields (Swartz 1997, 117). In "archaic" societies, such as Kabylia that he studied in the 1960s in Algeria, there is only one field, but in modern differentiated societies their number grows: fields exist parallel to each other, they intersect, and there may be subfields within larger fields.

"In analytical terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. [...] In highly differentiated societies, the social cosmos is made up of a number of such relatively autonomous social microcosms, i.e., spaces of objective relations that are the site of a logic and a necessity that are specific and irreducible to those that regulate other fields. For instance, the artistic field, or the religious field, or the economic field all follow specific logics: while the artistic field has constituted itself by rejecting or reversing the law of material profit [...], the economic field has emerged, historically, through the creation of a universe within which, as we commonly say, "business is business", where the enchanted relations of friendship and love are in principle excluded." (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 97–98.)

In Bourdieu's conceptualization, modern societies are composed of multiple domains of action – *fields* – that are distinct from each other. A field is a relational historical formation, "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions". Accordingly, action (practice) taking place in a field is understood and explained only by locating the agents – individuals and institutions – in their current social fields, the structure of relations that differentiate (and connect) the actors, and the "game" that is taking place among the actors – the "game" being struggles over the control of the *capital* that is valued and held as legitimate in the field.

Each field has, moreover, its own rules, or logic, so the game and the rules of one field are different from the games and the rules in other fields. What the fields do share is a homologous structure: all fields are structured by relations of dominance. Finally, fields are dynamic formations: they have their birth (genesis) and developmental history; the "game" played in a field may remain even after the field disappears.²

In her study on young children in pre-school Mari Vuorisalo (in chapter 2) imagines the preschool as an entity constituting a social field in the Bourdieu's sense – a social space of interaction in which both children and adults are actors. Clearly, preschool has to be understood as a field with very limited autonomy, perhaps a minor subfield at the other end

² On the logic and characteristics of fields in Bourdieu's thinking, see especially Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992, 94–115).

of a large, hierarchically organized social space in which the state and its educational agencies, and even global structures (e.g. OECD) impose on national educational institutions, down to their municipal and local structures. On basis of the observational data collected in a preschool group Mari Vuorisalo is able to conclude that the group is a field-like space, where children utilize a range of resources available to them, managing to transform them into valued capital that makes a difference to the relationships in the preschool group. Her findings suggest that the preschool social space may have a degree of autonomy in that the capitals that are valued and legitimate “currency” among the children frequently emerge within the “game” played in the preschool itself, and not merely carry over from the capital composition of the children’s families.

Matti Vesa Volanen’s study (chapter 3) moves in a social space that has been close to some of Bourdieu’s research interests – educational institutions. Not unexpectedly, also the focus is the same: schooling as an element of class and a reproducer of class inequalities. The chapter approaches this issue through a paradox: while schooling reproduces social inequalities, its contents nevertheless also have the potential to emancipate, through the reasoning processes underlying the social and natural sciences. A case in point is the Finnish comprehensive school and its local manifestation in Lievestuore. In the course of the study the field-like characteristics of school and its subfields (such as students’ peer groups) come to the fore, as well as the relations between the school ‘community’ and the local community. Both of these, conceivable as interrelated social fields, are shown to be involved in directing the educational trajectories of school-aged children. The results of the study, which also utilizes some of the data from international PISA studies, strongly suggest that the comprehensive school in Finland now has an active role in the production of difference in educational achievements.

Family as a field that may generate capital of different kinds, besides forming the habitus of its members, is the focus of Leena Alanen’s study (chapter 4). Although Bourdieu, in several of his texts, underlines the social and political significance of family, and explicitly writes about the family as a field (e.g. Bourdieu 1997, 164–167; Bourdieu 1998, 64–71), there are few explorations of the emergence of family as a social field and

on family functioning as a field. This chapter works on the complexities of the family field, explicating its structural and dynamic elements (the positions, forms of capital, habitus, symbolic power etc.) appropriate to the family as a social field. The empirical study that follows explores how particularly women (in the age range of 30–40 years) are affected by the local manifestations of the family field, move in the (local) family field, accumulating and taking into use the forms of capitals that are valued in the field, thereby embodying a family habitus. Based on empirical data this chapter then discusses family habitus as a mechanism of generating local belonging, particularly for women.

Päivi Kivelä's study (chapter 5) explores how daughters of agrarian working class families, now in their fifties, have orientated themselves between two field-like spheres with different prevailing dynamics and rules (paid work, family). Each of these fields requires and legitimates partly dissimilar resources and value dispositions (habitus). This chapter studies the divergent ways in which middle-aged mothers – having moved through varying labour market positions provided by the local labour market – have acquired their present capital and habitus.

Bourdieu's field analysis has found its central place in sociological research of social networks, but it has very seldom been adapted to concrete studies of voluntary organizations. Martti Siisiäinen, Tomi Kankainen and Veli-Matti Salminen (chapter 6) examine how, for distinct agents, the inequality of capital ownership creates different probabilities of participating in the local field-like domains. In addition, they examine local associations as networking field actors and are able to show that local field-like domains should be understood as parts of larger national or international fields. Their analysis also suggests that it is reasonable, from the local associations' point of view, to concentrate on specific local targets in the sphere of their influence, and to reduce investing their minor resources in the national political field.

Habitus

It is the embodied, dispositional (habitus) character of the Bourdieusian conceptual frame that also provides a major starting point for studying the significance of place, location and territoriality for the social ties that bind people to their localities and their 'social circles', as Georg Simmel (1890), another figure within sociology who developed his sociology in relational terms, wrote.³

Bourdieu developed his concepts of the forms of capital and habitus from his ethnographic studies in Kabylia and Béarn in the 1950s and 1960 and from the analyses of the educational system of France in the early 1970s (Bourdieu 2005, 1977). The concept of habitus is part of Bourdieu's comprehensive theoretical effort to overcome the mechanical opposition between objectivism and subjectivism and to develop his solution to the problem of social change:

"The result of my anthropological work in Algeria in the 1950s did not fit into this structuralist framework (of Louis Althusser/MS&LA). Of course people are structured by society. They are not, as free market theory holds, isolated individuals each deciding their course of action by making individual economic calculations. I developed the concept of 'habitus' to incorporate the objective structures of society and the subjective role of agents within it. Habitus is a set of dispositions, reflexes and forms of behaviour people acquire through acting in society. It reflects the different positions people have in society, for example, whether they are brought up in a middle class environment or in a working class suburb. It is part of how society reproduces itself. But there is also change. Conflict is built into society. People can find that their expectations and ways of living are suddenly out of step with the new social positions they find themselves. ... Then the question of social agency and political intervention becomes very important" (Bourdieu 2000b, 19).

Habitus is produced through the internalization of the material, cultural and intellectual structures constitutive of a particular type of envi-

³ See also Elder-Vass (2010, 122). Today relational sociologies are many; on the "long march of relational sociology", see Vautier (2008), also Mützel & Fuhse (2010), and the special issue on relational sociologies in *Nouvelles perspectives en sciences sociales: revue internationale de systématique complexe et d'études relationnelles* (2009).

ronment. Habitus is a “system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu 1977, 72). The primary habitus, created in early childhood, is the basis for the development of the secondary habitus by various agents of secondary socialization (schools, peer groups, the media etc.). The nature of various habituses can be detected and tested in the practices of distinct social fields.

The characteristics of habitus can be studied only indirectly by analyzing how habitus is revealed in various practices. Mari Vuorisalo utilizes ethnographic observation in the analysis of the manifestations of 5–7-year-old pre-school children’s (primary) habitus during their day-care interactions. This gives her the opportunity to interpret distinct children’s various strategic and tactical choices in their games in the field-like pre-school group (Chapter 2). Matti-Vesa Volanen’s study analyses national PISA-data, which allows only indirect uses of Bourdieu’s theoretical arsenal. However, on basis of his results Volanen discusses the possibilities of developing pupils’ secondary habitus with the assistance of ‘universal pedagogy’, thereby breaking the generative vicious circle of the structure/disposition/practice -chain of primary habitus (Chapter 3).

Chapter 4, by Leena Alanen, explores some of the social processes or ‘mechanisms’ that tie people to their locality, making them ‘belong’ to the local community and helping them to “feel at home” there; for other local residents the very same processes generate a sense of being “out of place”. The analysis focuses on men and women in their thirties, most of whom are “family people”, that is: currently living through the child-bearing and child-rearing stage of a nuclear family. For this reason, the special concern in this chapter is with family and its significance in shaping the habitus of the local residents. As already suggested above, in Bourdieu’s sociology family has several senses, one of them being its field-like character. By first developing the notion of family as a social field, this chapter explores the habitus corresponding to the local family field and shows its force in making people belong (or not) to the locality.

Päivi Kivelä analyzes how societal change may generate a mismatch, or a lack of compatibility between the habitus (the ‘feel for the game’) of women around 50 years of age with agrarian or working class background

and the field (the game itself), and how this problem has been solved during their life courses. The analysis shows the interpretive capacity of both the primary and the secondary habitus, and the critical reflexivity of their habituses over formerly taken-for-granted social conditions (Chapter 5). Both in Kivelä's chapter and Martti Siisiäinen, Tomi Kankainen and Veli-Matti Salminen's analysis of social capital networks and associations (Chapter 6) Bourdieu's notion of the 'causality of the probable' is utilized as a mediating concept between the agents' habitus and their choices in distinct social fields. Siisiäinen, Kankainen and Salminen show how both individual agents and voluntary associations tend to choose alternatives (association or network memberships or associational strategies) that would seem to be leading to a positive – or at least tolerable – outcome against the background of the past experiences inscribed in their habitus or in the associations' collective memory.

Capital

The impact of social resources on different agents' activities, social trajectories and participation is one of the central research problems addressed in the book at hand. The project team approached this topic empirically with the assistance of a specific resource generator measuring various kinds of economic, cultural and social resources available to individual agents via their networks. The project shares Bourdieu's idea that various resources must be valued symbolically in various social fields for them to be transformed into capital. Since the launching of Robert D. Putnam's idea of social capital in the 1990s (see Putnam 1993) tens of various types of "capital" have been introduced in social and human sciences. Therefore, it is good to bear in mind that capital – economic, cultural and social – is "a field concept (objective), valued and operational in the field which is its medium of operation" (Grenfell 2010, 24). Moreover, capital is "accumulated labour... which, when appropriated on a private, i.e. inclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour" (Bourdieu 1986, 241).

The main idea of *economic capital* comes from Marx, but in a Bourdieusian frame the concept covers all types of economic ownerships that can be capitalized in distinct fields.

Cultural capital can “exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e. in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the forms of cultural goods ...; and in the institutionalized state”, guaranteed by institutional recognition, such as academic qualifications and exam titles (op.cit.).

Social capital, in turn, is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (op. cit., 243–248).

It is important to notice that the precondition for the transformation of a resource into capital is its (re)valuation in the social field in which it is expected to be capitalized. It is also only in specific social fields that the process of transformation of different forms of capital into each other (for example cultural to economic) is regulated and controlled (op. cit.; Bourdieu 1984; Siisiäinen 2005b).

The forms of capital are made meaningful through *symbolic capital*, which for its part is connected with symbolic power and symbolic struggles over the value of various kinds of capitals. Through symbolic struggles and processes the values of various agents’ capital possessions are constantly valued and re-valued in their target fields. Therefore, also minor activities and efforts to change the balance of social fields matter.

The weight of the forms of capital in distinct chapters of the book varies according to the analysed social fields. Mari Vuorisalo (Chapter 2) investigates both the distribution of the economic, social and cultural resources of families with preschool children and the utilization, by the children, of cultural and social capital in their interactions at the day-care centre under scrutiny. She is also able to find out how cultural capital, in the form of toys (including also an economic component), can be transformed into social capital in children’s games.

In Matti Vesa Volanen’s study (Chapter 3) the significance of the parents’ economic and cultural capital to their children’s educational trajectories is evaluated by comparing the social compositions of different schools.

Leena Alanen's (Chapter 4) study on the significance of family in local daily life focuses on the way the economic, cultural and social resources of local residents, and especially women, become salient for them, allowing them to enter various local fields of practice and to participate in their 'games', this participation being conducive to the generation of a residential or local habitus (and identity), and a strong sense of belonging.

Päivi Kivelä (Chapter 5) is able to show how various kinds of economic, cultural and social capital have influenced the life courses of her female informants in the target groups, especially at the turning points of their lives (transitional periods; childhood; interval between secondary schools and gymnasium; or after gymnasium; marriage). Her study also sheds light on how the local symbolic structures value (and devalue) women's cultural and social capital, creating a mismatch which can lead agents to change their practices and lives.

Martti Siisiäinen, Tomi Kankainen and Veli-Matti Salminen (Chapter 6) develop a typology of individual social capital and investigate its connections with the economic and cultural capital. They also examine the role of social capital as networked by voluntary associations, and make conclusions about the importance of local and national factors in the historical development and functioning of social fields.

The authors have avoided extending the concept of capital to whatever forms of actual or potential resources.⁴ When expressions such as associational capital or day-care capital are used, they refer to resources as the sub-types of the basic forms of capital (e.g. associational capital as a sub-type of social capital with cultural and economic components in Chapter 6) or to combinations of the three forms of capital as they appear in the social space studied (as is the case with day-care capital in Chapter 2). The extension of the capital concept can also originate from Bourdieu, as is the case "initial capital" (Kivelä in chapter 5), which Bourdieu introduced in the *Distinction* (1984), when he discussed the importance of the home's social capital to the agents' future trajectories.

⁴ For a recent critique of such overextension in social research, see Atkinson (2011).

Studying local fields: some concluding remarks

Although our empirical research focuses on one single locality and its residents, the research group was fully cognizant of the fact that their study would not follow the tradition of Community Studies: we would approach Lievestuore, our research site, as neither a place-based 'community' where one expects to find groups with territorial interests or associations, nor a 'community' based on formal local government boundaries.⁵ For an attempt such as ours, to apply Bourdieu's thinking and approach to the study of local life, we did not find well-trodden paths to follow.⁶ Our solution was a flexible adoption of field analysis to a study of the locality of Lievestuore. Relational analysis and the concepts of capital, habitus and field made it possible for us, on the one hand, to explore different kinds of action domains as specific objects of study from the perspectives of three disciplines – sociology, psychology and early childhood education – and, on the other hand, to run a common theme throughout the combined study.

All in all, the field approach that we developed in this study consists of three distinct analytical levels. First, there are the "large" social fields, such as politics and the state, culture, economy, educational and family policy, constituting the preconditions for what goes on in localities, how they develop etc. Second, there are local field-like domains, such as day-care centres (and preschool groups within them), schools, voluntary associations and churches which can be approached as dynamic field-like formations. Institutions and organizations functioning on these system levels have constellations of valued capitals of their own and specific interests guiding the participation in interaction within the spheres of influence of each. These structural formations also condition the actions of individual agents (the third analytical level) and create possibilities for their trajectories. The three interrelated field levels and the concepts of habitus and capital have made it possible to create a systematic picture of the social

⁵ On the concept of community in sociology, see e.g. Stråth (2001) and Jacobs (2001); on the state of community studies today, see e.g. the special issue on community studies of *International Journal of Social Science Methodology* (2008).

⁶ But see Bourdieu (2008), Rosenlund (1996, 2009).

life, in our case the lives of people belonging to five different age cohorts in one Finnish locality.

However, many important problems have been left to future studies. Social fields overlap and cross-cut and their mutual relations of “over-determination” are under a continuous process of struggle and negotiation. The problem of dispositional explanation also requires new solutions that enable the exploration of the development and impact of different kinds of habituses in concrete terms. And last but not least, the development of various adaptations of Bourdieu’s theoretical conceptions to locality or community studies and to most of the research fields represented in the chapters of this study requires further research.



Traffic connections to Lievestuore are excellent



Distance from Brussels is 1855 kilometres (a funny signpost)



Settlement in Lievestuore



View from Lievestuore centre