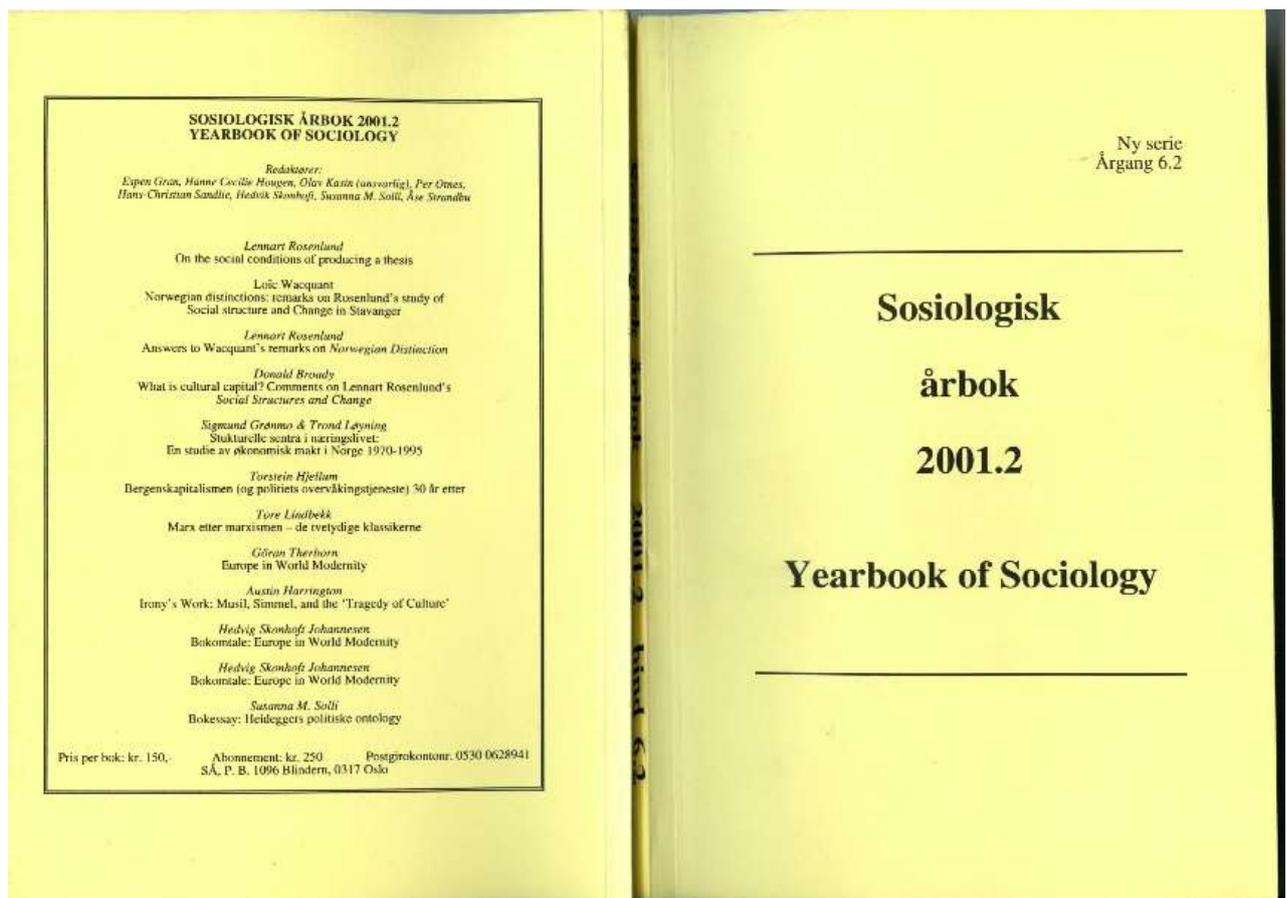


## Faksimil

Donald Broady, "What Is Cultural Capital? Comments on  
Lennart Rosenlund's Social Structures and Change",  
*Sosiologisk Årbok/Yearbook of Sociology 2001.2*, Oslo 2002, pp. 45-59.



## What Is Cultural Capital?<sup>1</sup> Comments on Lennart Rosenlund's Social Structures and Change

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*Donald Broady*

Lennart Rosenlund's DPhil thesis, *Social Structures and Change: Applying Pierre Bourdieu's Approach and Analytic Framework*, is a major achievement. A pioneering work in many respects, and by far the most rigorous, thorough and comprehensive attempt in Scandinavia to apply the methods developed by Pierre Bourdieu for the study of the social space and the space of lifestyles. It is a significant contribution to the examination and development of sociological methods. The detailed presentation of the correspondence analysis techniques and the demonstration of potential uses of those techniques will no doubt have an impact on sociological research in Scandinavian countries, where French statistical traditions are still rather marginal. Furthermore, in addition to the eminent treatment of French research traditions, the thesis constitutes a vital empirical work in its own right. There have

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<sup>1</sup> The text presents some parts of my intervention as second opponent at the University of Bergen, May 26th, 2001, when Lennart Rosenlund defended his ~~dr. philo.~~ thesis *Social Structures and Change: Applying Pierre Bourdieu's Approach and Analytic Framework* (Høgskolen i Stavanger, 2000).

H dr. philos

been many attempts in different countries to explore the social space on a national level within the Bourdieu tradition. Studies on local social spaces have been more rare. Rosenlund's study of the development of a local social space – that of the city of Stavanger from the 1970s to the 1990s – is a seminal work, that will pave the way for further research in similar veins.

The thesis begins with a presentation of the principal research tools used by Pierre Bourdieu in *La distinction* (1979). Followed by an accurate introduction to the multiple correspondence analysis, a statistical technique developed by French mathematician Jean-Paul Benzécri, which has formed part of Bourdieu's and his collaborators' toolbox since the 1970s.

In the third part of the thesis, these tools are utilized in an extensive study of the local social space in Stavanger and its relation to the space of lifestyles. The main empirical basis is a survey undertaken in 1994 among a representative sample (n=905) of Stavanger inhabitants who answered questions on their habits and preferences regarding radio and television programmes, magazines and literature, music, art, film, theatre, home decoration, sports, food, restaurants, politics, etc, in other words, indicators of opinions, lifestyles and tastes similar to those utilized by Bourdieu in *La distinction*. Unlike the data used in *La distinction*, the Stavanger survey included questions on rather specific local conditions, as well as a more extensive set of questions on ethic values. Although, not an exact replication of the investigation in *La distinction*, the aim is the same: on the one hand to construct a social space (a system of relations between the positions of different social groups) and on the other hand a space of lifestyles or tastes. An important methodological aspect is that the social space and the space of lifestyles are constructed independently of each other, after which homologies between them are explored. Rosenlund systematically demonstrates how this task is accomplished in the Stavanger case. The reader is invited to follow the actual course of action in the sociological

research workshop, which is rather unusual when it comes to presentations of research à la Bourdieu.

The fourth part of Rosenlund's thesis is devoted to the social transformations and the lifestyle changes in the Stavanger area from the 1970s to the 1990s – parallel to the city's rise to the position as the "oil capital" of Norway. Besides the above-mentioned 1994 survey, Rosenlund draws on various available sources such as the 1970, 1980 and 1990 national census, and a survey from 1974 on cultural and leisure activities. In the fifth and last part, he summarises his findings. His conclusions contradict the popular views of today's post-modern condition. We have not, Rosenlund argues, achieved a classless society where individuals escape the social determinations in their search for identities and values of their own choice. As ever, individuals are still equipped with certain socially determined assets and dispositions that guide their choices. They form part of social groups and develop lifestyles that are similar to those of their neighbours in the social space.

This social space has, however, undergone significant changes during the last decades.

### **The Growing Force of the Capital Composition Principle**

In the 1970s, the social differentiation in Stavanger still followed the well known vertical scale: the working class together with small farmers and fishermen at the bottom, the intermediate class in between and the dominant class at the top. In the data from the 1980s, in addition to this traditional social hierarchy, Rosenlund discerns some traces of an emerging horizontal polarity between on the one hand groups whose main assets are cultural capital (education etc) and on the other hand groups whose social standing are more dependant on economic capital. In the 1990s, this horizontal polarity – that is the axes cultural capital/economic capital – very efficiently structures the social space,

the lifestyles and even the spatial traits of Stavanger. Groups who possess more cultural than economic capital, such as teachers or librarians, appreciate the residential area *Storhaug* and prefer to dine at *Sjenkestuen* or *Café Sting*. While the economic elite favours *Madla*, and frequents *Jans mat og vinhus*. This structural change, labelled by Rosenlund “the growing force of the capital composition principle,” is the main finding in his study.

It is an astonishing finding. By itself, it is not unexpected that the social space and the space of lifestyles are structured by two polarities, one vertical representing the total capital volume and one horizontal polarity stretching from a cultural capital pole to an economic capital pole. The same structure has been revealed by many Bourdieu-inspired studies in different countries, although Rosenlund digs deeper into the local peculiarities than most. Thus, the horizontal polarity is not in itself remarkable, but that its emergence is such a recent phenomenon in the Stavanger case. Despite serious and laborious efforts, Rosenlund has been unable to find any traces of it in the existing sets of data from the 1970s, and only weak tendencies in the data sets from the 1980s. According to Rosenlund, full-fledged and efficient polarity – cultural capital/economic capital – is lacking until the 1990s. This is indeed surprising. In France, this polarity was clearly evident in the data stemming mainly from the late 1960s, which Bourdieu utilized in *La distinction*.

Rosenlund's own explanation is that the social development of Stavanger has been extraordinarily rapid. Within a few decades, the area has grown from a traditional community inhabited by a large number of workers, farmers and a small and fairly homogenous local elite, into an advanced and highly differentiated social world. The rapid growth in economic and cultural resources – the influx of money from the oil industry, the general raise in educational level, the expansion of cultural institutions and the increase in the supply of consumer goods and restaurants, etc – has transformed the traditional one-dimensional social hierarchy into a two-dimensional social space, where one

dimension is the old social division between the rich and the poor and the other is a new divide between a cultural domain and an economic domain. Thus, since the 1970s, Stavanger has described a trajectory that might have taken other cities half a century or more.

Rosenlund's results and arguments will no doubt give rise to vivid discussions among sociologists in search of methods for the exploration of different social spaces. I am sure that he has found something important. It is, however, not quite obvious what he has found. I am not totally convinced that Rosenlund's interpretations of the results are the only available or the best possible. Following his arguments one could conclude that it would be worthwhile to ask when the cultural/economic polarity emerges in different regional settings, and to suppose that this genesis in many cases is more recent than might be expected. Personally, I find it more fruitful to treat cultural capital as an umbrella concept that covers diverse species of assets, and I believe that it should be possible to trace the “capital composition principle” further back in time.

In the following I will argue for this position, however with no intent to diminish the value of Rosenlund's thesis. It is a Herculean feat, the outcome of twenty years of work. Among the many themes elaborated by Rosenlund I have chosen only one, his argument of the growing importance of the capital composition principle, which I regard as his main finding and which is questionable in a literate sense. It raises vital questions.

### What is Cultural Capital?

Let us start with a very simple operational definition. In advanced societies, cultural capital is the counterpart of economic capital.

Economic capital is not only shares and bonds and material goods. It is also know-how on how to handle monetary assets and how to behave

in the world of corporations and finance. There are obviously groups – civil servants, university professors, medical doctors, renowned writers and artists and others – whose possessions of such economic capital is comparably limited and who none the less occupy positions in the higher echelon of the social hierarchy. The assets on which their positions are founded may be labelled as cultural capital. Such an operational definition is an easy way out since you do not have to procure a substantial definition of cultural capital. Instead, you can manage with a relational definition. If you find a “horizontal” dimension in the social space, the pole that opposes the economic pole might be regarded as the pole of cultural capital.

A more historical way to grasp the notion cultural capital is the following, outlined by Bourdieu in several contexts: Cultural capital is the dominating form of symbolic capital in societies where a centralised school system and the art of writing are developed. In such societies, symbolic capital acquires a persistent character and is objectified in for example books, and institutionalised in titles, such as DPhil. From this perspective, cultural capital has, at least in urban areas, been efficient for a couple of hundreds of years, whether the dominant groups be clerks, representatives of the state apparatus, or intellectuals. Its means of reproduction (prestigious schools etc) are controlled by the social elites, though widely acknowledged and respected by everyone, even by those who are excluded.

Whether you prefer the simple operational definition or the historical perspective, it appears puzzling that Rosenlund did not find any horizontal polarity in his data from Stavanger in the 1970s. Is it true that cultural capital had no significant part in structuring the Stavanger social space thirty years ago? Of course, it more depends on what you mean precisely by cultural capital.

It is both a strength and a weakness that Rosenlund is so headstrong in keeping to a specific conception of the social space, defined as two-dimensional and made up of one vertical axes (the sum of all species of

capital) and one crossing horizontal axes (the capital composition, namely the proportions between cultural and economic capital). Strength because this focused question forces him to return to the problems concerning the significance of the polarity economic/cultural capital over and over again and after various excursions. The efficiency of which can be traced into the distributions of occupations, the gender divisions, the spatial order of Stavanger, and even the mental habits.

However, this same stubbornness is also a weakness, since Rosenlund disregards other possibilities to explore the social space and the space of lifestyles. He states: “The *social space* is neither more nor less than the resulting map of the first and second principal axis of an MCA [Multiple Correspondence Analysis] of a carefully chosen selection of background variables (indices of economic and cultural capital)” (p. 90). I find this operational definition too limited, for several reasons.

It is arbitrary to regard the social space as two-dimensional. I totally agree with Rosenlund in that the common one-dimensional interpretation of the social space is unsatisfactory, to say the least. Still heavily utilised, with disastrous results, socio-professional classifications such as social group one, two and three, place the professor in Classical Greek and the owner of a used car company into the same category. It is obviously not a good idea to collapse the social space into a single-dimensional hierarchy. However, a two-dimensional representation, the plane, is almost as arbitrary as the one-dimensional representation, the line. That the correspondence analysis software packages produce two-dimensional maps (there are many of those in Rosenlund’s thesis) is due to the limitation of the output devices, i.e. the representations on the computer screen or on paper. If it were possible to integrate better three-dimensional output devices into the packages, you would receive three-dimensional outputs including the third axes. But even then, you would only get partial views on a multi-dimensional space.

More importantly – besides this technical aspect – a limited focus on the one-dimensional polarity cultural/economic capital might hide the

heterogeneity of the cultural pole. For my part, I find it fruitful to treat cultural capital as an umbrella concept. As a composite notion, it appears from a bird's-eye view as the counter-part of economic capital, but on closer examination, it covers a variety of different species of capital. In Bourdieu's French studies, educational capital is by far the most important ingredient in the cultural capital. In Sweden, on the other hand, studies reveal that educational capital, although very important, does not reign supreme to the same extent as in France. Therefore, within a Scandinavian context it would seem worthwhile to explore the significance of other subspecies of cultural capital.

In France, the trajectory through renowned schools is almost compulsory for the acquisition of a top position among the social elites. There are more alternatives in Scandinavia. Take for example what might be labelled "organizational capital," that is symbolic assets accumulated within different associations, the blue- or white-collar unions, the student unions, the temperance movements, etc. Among many interesting observations in Rosenlund's thesis is that there is a high portion of Stavanger natives among the shopkeepers, politicians and administrators. Rosenlund himself (e.g. p. 334) interprets this mainly as an indicator of the possession of personal contacts and relations (social capital, in Bourdieu's terms). An alternative explanation is that the social intercourse and the local associations are sites for the accumulation of "organizational capital."

In Scandinavian countries, another very visible feature of the cultural capital pole is its ties to the public sector. Social groups close to the cultural pole tend to be employed by the state or the municipality and/or to be more sympathetic towards the public sector as opposed to the private sector. This phenomenon is observed by Rosenlund who gives the following interpretation: "In the Norwegian case the opposition between the two forms of capital [...] manifests itself and is disguised by the private-public division" (p. 212). I would disagree. I find it hard to imagine cultural capital as some kind of essence that manifests itself. The polarity economic/cultural capital is not disguised

by the division private/public. Rather the division private/public is a part of the economic/cultural capital opposition – probably a more crucial element in Scandinavian countries than in France. A medical doctor at a university hospital and an employee in a private company might have the same salary and educational level, but their strategies and lifestyles might be rather diverse.

In our Swedish studies, this opposition public/private is not only visible among the elites. It reoccurs on all levels. In virtually every social category, people employed in the public sector possess on average more educational capital and less economic capital than those employed in the private sector. The same is to some extent the case when it comes to gender. In every social group, men earn more and are more often in fulltime employment than women. However, in some groups the women have higher level of education (which bears witness to the dominance of economic capital over cultural capital).

In the same vein, I am tempted to question Rosenlund's assumption that social structure comes first and that spatial organisation of the city is a translation of this social structure (see for example p. 325). Thus, in my opinion the "horizontal" polarities of the social space should not be reduced to an opposition between educational and economic capital. There are other oppositions the logic of which should be taken into account: public/private, men/women, urban/rural, young/old, Norwegians/immigrants, and so on. On closer observation, the cultural capital pole represents a conglomerate of different kinds of assets lumped together due to the technical peculiarities of the correspondence analysis, that is the projection on a two-dimensional plane. I would imagine that distances such as those between the clientele of Café Sting and of Skjenkestuen (p. 319) might be explained not only by the fact that the former possess more and the latter less cultural capital. There may be a different composition of their cultural capital assets.

Provided that relevant data were available, you might even construct a more synoptic local *champ de pouvoir*, to use Bourdieu's terminology, which means a system of relations between all the significant species of capital, thereby surpassing the duality economic/cultural capital. In mapping such a local "field of power" in Stavanger, you would perhaps locate for example academic, literary and artistic capital to one extreme, the economic capital to the other extreme, and political, medical, juridical and administrative capital in between.

Rosenlund provides solid evidence for his case that there is a "horizontal" axis that strongly contributes to the structure of the social space in Stavanger in the 1990s. Although I have suggested some alternative interpretations of its significance, I do not doubt that he has revealed such an axis. I am however somewhat hesitant to accept that the horizontal divides are of such recent occurrence.

### **Is the Capital Composition Principle such a recent Phenomenon?**

According to Rosenlund, the emergence of "the capital composition principle" in the Stavanger social space is surprisingly recent. In his own words: during the period he is investigating, from the 1970s to the 1990s, "we actually are witnessing the birth of this principle of social differentiation," while "the old hierarchical principle of differentiation seems to have lost some of its former strength. The analysed occupational groups are less differentiated according to their average volume of capital in 1990 than they were in 1970" (p. 249f). "In contemporary Stavanger, the 'old' division of class, which sorts its population into a working class, an intermediate class and a dominant class, has been supplemented by a 'new' principle of social division: the capital composition" (p. 347).

In some respects, it is reasonable to state that the traditional "vertical" hierarchy between the upper classes and the lower classes is of decreasing importance when it comes to structuring the social space. This does not mean that the gulf between the classes has been narrowed, but significant changes have occurred. The working class has shrunk in number, as well as large parts of the traditional economic petty bourgeoisie, while intermediate and elite groups have grown.

It is also obvious that new "horizontal" divides have developed, that is new kinds of distances between the positions occupied by groups on similar levels, for example distances between the economic and the cultural elite, or between the economic and the cultural intermediate groups. I doubt, however, that the emergence of such a horizontal axis is as recent as Rosenlund suggests.

My assumption is that had Rosenlund been able to find and use more indicators – no easy task – he would have detected some "horizontal" polarities in Stavanger even twenty or thirty years ago, perhaps between, say journalists or schoolteachers on the one hand and manufacturers or shopkeepers on the other. To some extent, his results are due to the indicators that were available. Rosenlund uses educational level as the main indicator for cultural capital. I suppose that type of education for example would be an important distinguishing variable. Rosenlund confines himself to level of education. But cultural capital is not only about education. It contains other components, other subspecies of capital that might function as antipodes to the economic capital. One reason why Rosenlund was not able to discern the "capital composition principle" in his data from the 1970s and only found weak tendencies in his data from the 1980s might be that he puts such a great emphasis on the level of education as the prime indicator of cultural capital. If so, what Rosenlund has found is perhaps not the birth of the capital composition principle as such – the emergence of horizontal polarities within the social space – but rather the rapidly growing importance of educational capital as a component of the cultural capital.

Rosenlund's focus on the polarity cultural/economic capital is mainly inspired by Bourdieu's work *La distinction* from 1979. The core of it was published already a few years earlier in an article (P. Bourdieu and Monique de Saint Martin, 1976) that contained the first published results from correspondence analyses of the social space and the space of lifestyles. To me it is obvious that the article and the book marked the end of a period. *La distinction* was a balance sheet, a synthesis of results and conclusions from the studies undertaken by Bourdieu and his first generation of collaborators in the sixties and early seventies. Thus, it presented a bird's-eye view on the distribution of symbolic and economic assets within the French society. The aim was to draw the broad lines, which explains why social classes and the principal class fractions often were treated as rather non-differentiated units. For example, it was more important to pay attention to the opposition between cultural and economic elites or between the cultural and economic middle classes than to enter deeply into the internal divides within each of those categories.

At the same time, Bourdieu and his collaborators turned to another endeavour, the investigation of different social fields. After some theoretical preludes (Bourdieu 1968, 1971a, 1971b, 1971c), the first empirical studies were published in 1975. Followed by a myriad of studies of social fields. Here the focus is no longer on cultural capital as such but on specific species of capital: academic and scientific capital within academia, political capital within the political field, artistic capital within the fields of art and literature, etc. Rosenlund's thesis is similar to *La distinction* in that its prime aim is to give the general view. There remains the investigation of different specific species of capital, as well as studies of the development and structure of the corresponding fields – studies that no doubt would make the cultural capital pole (and probably also the economic capital pole) appear less homogenous. In future research, it will be unavoidable to raise the question of the relations between local fields in Stavanger and other cities on the one hand and Norwegian (or <sup>transnational</sup>) fields on the other. It might be that the investments and stakes of certain elite groups in Stavanger are

in fact directed towards national or <sup>transnational</sup> fields. Another possible direction of future research would, as Rosenlund himself suggests, be to explore the field of competition between Norwegian cities.

My remarks should not be taken as negative criticism. I do not suggest that Rosenlund should have done otherwise. The thesis is comprehensive enough as it is. If some of his interpretations are questionable, they are questionable in a literate sense. They give rise to fruitful questions. The thesis is a good example of the fact that it is often advantageous to use certain research tools tenaciously rather than to compromise.

### The Classes Are not Dead Yet

In the concluding part of his thesis, Rosenlund criticises the popular notion in recent years that we are witnessing the transformation into a new post-modern phase, in which solitary individuals in search of their own personal values and self-created identity have liberated themselves from their social origin and class and other social bonds and loyalties. Not at all, Rosenlund asserts. The social determinations do change but they are as effective as ever. I totally agree. Those who today compose funeral orations for the class society ought to be reminded that it has been declared dead before. In fact, the targets for Bourdieu's very first polemic intervention into the sociological debate (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1963) was "the massmediologues" – i.a. Gilbert Cohen-Séat & Pierre Fougeyrollas, *L'action sur l'homme : Cinéma et Télévision* (Denoël, 1961) and Edgar Morin, *L'Esprit du temps* (Grasset, 1962) – who in the early 1960s declared that since everybody watched the same television program, the new mass media had brought an end to the class society. It was not true forty years ago, as demonstrated by Bourdieu and his collaborators in their studies from the 1960s and 1970s, summarized in *La distinction*. And it is not true today. It is not

true that lifestyle changes and identity construction is located in a brand new sphere beyond the social space.

It seems as if there will always be a need for sociologists to present rigorous empirically based counter-arguments against the reoccurring prophecies about the arrival of the classless society. Lennart Rosenlund's work is a significant contribution to this mission.

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