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January 16, 2003

The Trace of Social Space
The Theory of Strategies of Reconversions

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Abstract

The concept of social space was addressed in *La distinction* by Pierre Bourdieu published in Paris 1979. The social space is characterised by three dimensions, the sum of capital, the composition of capital and the social trajectory over time. I term/define the social trajectory as the *trace* of the social space. To understand this trace Bourdieu constructed his theory of reconversions, which he termed the strategies of reconversions, in opposition to the existing theories of social mobility. He created the theory in collaboration with Luc Boltanski and Monique de Saint Martin (1973) parallel to the development of the concept of field in 1971. The basic idea was to analyse the acquisition of different kinds of capital and the possible conversions of that capital into investments in the future, into "tickets" to the higher social positions. In the first part of the paper I outline the theory of reconversions as opposed to the concept of social mobility. In the second part I outline some aspects of the use of the concept of reconversions, giving as example the study of conversions related to the field of sports in Denmark.¹

In the book *Life Trajectories through a Field* I used the theory of reconversions analysing conversions of different kinds of capital within the social space, as for example sport capital within and outside the field of sports. Two aspects in relation to possible conversions between the field of sports and the social space turned out to be important. The first aspect was the relatively short period of time, in relation to a life trajectory, which a person could have spent in sport and the second aspect was the objective possibilities in society open to an athlete after the time spent within the field of sport. The small conversion rate of the sport capital into a permanent job in sport in Denmark which resulted after the active period, is closely related to the fact that Denmark's Sports Institutions are private. Consequently there are very few professional positions in the field of sports. Most athletes in Denmark make conversions primarily by way of educational capital, few by sports capital. This means that most of Danish athletes simultaneously completed education in order to obtain positions in the labour market later on. Strategies of reconversion carried out by individuals make it possible for athletes to establish new trajectories after the period of sport.

1. Introduction

The paper bridges theory and empirical research, and discusses the concept of social mobility related to social space in general and specifically in relation to social trajectory over time. The problems identified are numerous. A significant amount of studies identify social mobility as upward mobility even when talking about a shift from smallholder to public service administrator. How would we explain such a

¹Since 1986 I have been using the opus of Pierre Bourdieu in studies and research. I was born on December 29 1964, and studied from 1984-1990 at the University of Copenhagen (mathematics, physics, sociology and education). I accomplished a master thesis in 1989-1990 with acceptance in September 1990. Here I compared the theory of practice (habitus) with a theory of life forms constructed in a context of structuralism (by the European Ethnologist Thomas Hoerjrup). In 1998, I completed a doctoral work in Lund with the title: *Trajectories Through a Field: An Analysis of Top Level Athletes' Social Mobility and Reconversions of Capital in the Social Space*. The work was carried out in Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Paris in the period 1992-1997 (I spent half a year in 1994 and one month in 1995 at CSEC/CSE). The thesis was defended in sociology at Lund University in March 1999.

movement? Through significantly more complicated answers, for example that structures are themselves mobile, or that social space implies at least three types of movement: vertical, horizontal and crossing. Moreover these movements go through different fields of struggle. Arguing along this line leads to outline the theory of reconversions, as the new approach to social mobility.

This suggests that to account for social mobility we have to describe how different kinds of capital are acquired and converted, as investments in the future, as tickets to well paid jobs and positions in general, or as springboards to social transitions. The concept related to the theory of social space, fields and capital, has at least two important related issues: theory of action and the concept of social mobility.

In the first part, I will discuss the concept of social mobility related to the social space in general. In the second part data from Danish Studies are used to show how agents in the field of sports convert and reconvert different kinds of capital into social positions in order to make new pathways in the social space. The intention is to account for how the tracking of the social trajectories through fields can be understood as traces *of* the social space and traces *in* the social space. In the conclusion it is stated, that struggles are always about scarce and attractive resources of a society and that through strategic reconversions people are able to gain and maintain social advantage.

2. Social mobility

A large number of studies of social mobility have taken place over time including substantial empirical studies. This paper asks what we have learned from those studies. It claims that, despite the tremendous effort, there seems to be a gap between the amount of accessible empirical data, and our level of theoretical comprehension of those data. It suggests therefore that the main task in current studies is to analyse relevant empirical material, and by doing so to develop new theoretical concepts to conceive what we find, and especially to redefine concepts of the existing toolbox such as mobility, class and stratification. Many sociologists have seen the study of social mobility as the main concept to demonstrate how social structures work. Some have claimed that processes facilitating social mobility are central in constructing and transmitting social inequalities, as addressed by Savage (1997: 299). There have been intensive studies of mobility in Western society (Blau and Duncan 1967; Featherman and Hauser 1978; Bourdieu 1979/1986; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Olin Wright 1997; Hauser 1998). A study by Merllié (1994) gives an overview regarding the main studies since Benini and Sorokin.

Much mobility research has focused on the investigation of the rise and fall of upward mobility in different kinds of modern societies (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992). The claims that the rate of social mobility throughout industrialisation has risen, however,

have been questioned by social historians, showing that eras and phases with both rising and falling rates of social mobility exist, see for example Kaelbe (1985). On the one hand there is a research on mobility mainly consisting of an American status-attainment approach, and a European class approach, and on the other hand we find life-biographical research, which mostly analyses agents' daily life and subjectivity. Finally there are different positions between the two, which partly examine collective life-stories (Dex 1991; Strauss 1971), and partly connect to an understanding of social trajectories, as defined here: examining the dynamic in and within different fields in society, defining the operating forces, as for example Bourdieu (1989/1996).

Social mobility and other related concepts like class and status have been criticised¹ (Blackburn and Prandy 1997; Savage and Egerton 1997; Prandy 1998; Munk 1998). Social mobility is not conceptualised in a fruitful way within them. The concept is loose and used inconsistently, furthermore empirical investigations of social structures indicate and support the point of view that social mobility essentially results from changing structures and not from moving individuals who break with social boundaries. Several studies of social mobility show that the mobility which has taken place must be ascribed to changing social structures, especially to the occupation distributions (e.g. more civil servants and fewer farmers). Some researchers have pointed out that mobility studies do not contribute to the expansion and recognition of sociological knowledge (e.g. Mach and Wesolowski 1986: 7ff.; Breiger 1990: 11-12; Kelley 1990; Blackburn and Prandy 1997). The principal issue is that mobility is not recognised as a process going on within a social space consisting of distances, as claimed by Mach and Wesolowski (1986: 21) and Blackburn and Prandy (1997: 497). The focus on social mobility of individuals together with a poor understanding of mobility as part of general societal processes, is what is problematic about the traditional understanding of social mobility. Existing sociological theory concerning social structures and the link between mobility and structures does not conceive the complexity of the field. Even the difference between the 'status-attainment-tradition' and the 'pure-mobility-tradition' does not provide an adequate approach, as stressed in Munk (1996) and Wright (1997: 178-182). The difference is formulated as follows:

Goldthorpes perspective sees the amount of aggregate mobility to or from given social classes as the main issue, which need to be explained. This is very different from the approach championed in an older body of work within the "status attainment" tradition (Blau and Duncan 1967). This approach is not concerned with the aggregate mobility properties of social groups and instead examines what factors allow *individuals* to move up or down the social ladder. The focus here is on the correlates of individual success and failure, rather than the properties of particular social classes to hold on to or transmit their offspring to other social classes (Savage and Egerton 1997: 647).

The problem in current social mobility studies is that the standard table of mobility is seriously wrong because it does not reveal when and where the movements begin and end, as stressed by Sørensen 1986: 77-79), which to some extent is discussed in

Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992: 281). The tables provide aggregations of processes, which have happened in different historical periods of time. Sørensen notes that social mobility not always means mobility and that movements to new positions demand vacant positions.

In the theory of vacancy Sørensen sees two possibilities. Open-positions imply that individuals with the same qualifications or resources will at any moment be in the same positions in the structure of inequality. Where closed-position structures emerge, meaning vacancy competition, identical people will end up in different positions reflecting specific historical and organisational circumstances (Sørensen 1986: 79). The vacancy competition model is a critic of Human Capital Theory (Becker 1964), which lacks the dimension of demand mechanisms and the structure of the labour market. In particular, since the 1980s researchers have emphasised a *work-life-perspective* when studying mobility (Sørensen 1986; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992: chap. 8; Rosenfeld 1992). This type of theory is to some degree parallel to the theory of strategies of reconversions, formulated by Bourdieu. However, Sørensen is relying upon a rational choice theory (Coleman 1988) whereas Bourdieu is using the theory of habitus (Bourdieu 1977: 72). The common perspective in the two approaches is the attention to *intragenerationality*, which means mobility from one occupation to another occupation, also called *horizontal* mobility (Merllié 1994: 62-64).

3. The Social Space

Some of Bourdieu's central concepts rise as reactions to theories of social stratification and mobility. The first step in this action was to lance the theory of social and cultural reproduction, explaining the link between family background, transmission of cultural capital, the school system and the distribution of power (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970/1977). Some years later this theory was enlarged by the concept of *strategies of reconversions* (Bourdieu *et al.* 1973; 1978), defined as practices by which every social position is defended by converting different forms of capital. The theory was formalised through the introduction of the concept of social space (Bourdieu, 1979/1986). The social space is constituted by three dimensions: '.....the volume of capital, composition of capital, and change in these two properties over time, manifested by past and potential trajectory in the social space' (Bourdieu 1979/1986: 114). Capital is a kind of resource.

The volume of capital is defined as how much capital a group or an individual totally possess. The composition of capital is defined as the combination of different forms of specific capital, i.e. social capital, cultural capital, economic capital and other forms of capital, like sports capital. Cultural and economic capital are most important in the constitution of the social space, which Bourdieu (1994/1998) formulated as the *two principles of differentiation*. The third dimension in the social space is equivalent with

the theoretical space of habitus. The idea of the social space is to be in a situation where it is possible to study the *trace of habitus*. This will allow studies of reconversions in the social space. By focusing on habitus, instead of a narrow concept of class, typically indicated by social position, means that position in a social space (a current state of habitus), is not solely defined through criteria like occupation, income, educational level and so forth.² But also through secondary properties such as gender distribution, geographical distribution, ethnic belonging etc. Eventually social position is captured by the structure of relations between all relevant properties.

3.1 The principle of convertibility

Studies of social mobility have not recognised that the social space provides at least three types of movements. Firstly, there are vertical movements, within the *same* field³, for example from a teacher to a professor in the educational field, secondly there are horizontal movements between *different* fields, for example from a teacher to a shopkeeper. Thirdly there are crossing movements, for example from artisanal petite-bourgeoisie to a writer. This means that vertical movements require only an increase in capital already valid and dominating in the structure of profit in a specific field, as formulated in both *The State Nobility* and *The Rules of Art* (Bourdieu 1989/1996; Bourdieu 1992/1995). The process of mobility is not isolated to movements between fathers and sons, they go on in different fields which historically will be transformed, such as the field of education, and thereby contribute to the reproduction of the social space (Bourdieu 1989/1996: 136-139). Furthermore, it can be concluded that when intragenerationality is examined, it is not sufficient to study job shifts. One has to investigate shifts of fields and conversions of different kinds of capital. To be able to analyse *transitions* of groups and individuals it is important to analyse general laws of converting within the social space and life trajectories. What does converting mean? The word converting is sometimes used in connection with religious conversions, as from Protestant to Catholic. Though here the concept is directly linked to strategies related to reconversions:

reconversions correspond to movements in a social space which has nothing in common with the unreal and yet naively realistic space of so-called “social mobility” studies. The same positivistic naivety which sees “upward mobility” in the morphological transformations of different classes or fractions is also unaware that the reproduction of the social structure may, in certain conditions, demand very little “occupational heredity”. This is true whenever agents can only maintain their position in the social structure by means of a shift into a new condition (e.g., the shift from small landowner to junior civil servant, or from craftsman to office worker or commercial employee) (Bourdieu 1979/1986: 131).

By the concept of reconversions it is possible to determine central societal processes according to transformations and reproductions of the social world. One can claim that social life is about converting recognised and legitimated capital, which means that people without this kind of capital are disadvantaged in the social space (unless they

have self supplied homes). Strategies of reconversions are often defined as practices by which every individual (represented by a social position) endeavours maintenance or even change of their position in society, by way of converting different forms of capital. Here, the relative significance of capital is a matter of struggles between positions. There is simply a fight about the conversion rate for different kinds of capital:

By obliging one to formulate the principle of the convertibility of different kinds of capital, which is the precondition for reducing the space to one dimension, the construction of a two-dimensional (really three) space makes it clear that the exchange rate is a stake in the struggle over the dominant principle of domination (economic capital, cultural capital or social capital), which goes on at all times between the different fractions of the dominant class (Bourdieu 1979/1986: 125).

The above quotation should be seen in connection with the ambition to relate the social space and power-relations in a sociologically acceptable way. The quotation alone could be misunderstood. From a power-sociological point of view it is clear that the exchange-rate is an object for struggles between the dominating classes, but hardly so empirically clear, unless one can put forward a very close study on conversions between different kinds of capital. *The principle of convertibility* is crucial to implicate attempts to study social mobility. The principle is equivalent to the principle of Energy=Constant=The Sum of all Energy, as also shown in the discipline of mechanics. It means that profits achieved in one area implies costs in another area, because it is assumed in a general science of the economy of practices there is no waste. These areas' universal equivalent is labour-time in the broadest sense (Bourdieu 1986: 253-254). The conservation of social energy takes place through many conversions and is verified if one takes into account both the labour-time accumulated by way of different kinds of capital and the labour-time necessary to transform capital from one area to another.

The convertibility of different forms of capital is the basis for the strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital and the position in the social space, which is carried out through the smallest number of conversions. The decisive moment is how easy the different forms of capital are converted and transmitted, and the incommensurability between different capitals gives cause to great uncertainty for all holders of capital because everyone wants to lose as little as possible. That is for example observed in the system of education. To secure the smallest loss by transmission of cultural capital, it is necessary to conceal this transmission as well as possible. However there is also a risk, since the system of education prefers to reward 'natural performances', which is the logic of the labour market, meaning that primarily qualifications guaranteed and recognised by the system of education are accepted. This is also why the system of education plays a major role in present time. More and more people attend the educational system, particularly that of higher education, to obtain legitimised credentials, to be consecrated. Exams and titles become increasingly

conclusive. In this respect conversions in relation to the field of education will take a significant position. Why?

3.2 Conversions, Fields and Structural Homology

The social space is a place for struggles towards reproduction of families. Strategies of reproduction depend on the composition and volume of capital and different kinds of means like inheritance, customs, labour market, systems of education etc. mediated through agents' orientation toward the future. If conditions of capital-relations or means are changed it will be necessary to adapt the strategies of reproduction through reconversions of capital to other forms of capital, for example from economic capital to cultural capital (educational capital), which in fact happened after World War II, for example for sons and daughters of firm owners, as Bourdieu (1979/1986: 136-137) found. The point is that the system of education and labour market changed, leading to an *inflation* of diplomas. It used to be the case that children of firm owners would to a high degree inherit economic capital. More and more of these agents changed their strategies towards the expanding system of education.

The situation in general, described and analysed by Bourdieu (1979/1986), is something which consciously and unconsciously accentuates the problems of education and labour market further on. It is relevant to stress what the dynamics of supply/demand is really about. The traditional formulation of this relation is inadequate in attempts to explain processes of mobility: The question of scarcity is essentially more important:

It is the symbolic scarcity of the title in the space of the names of professions that tends to govern the rewards of the occupation (and not the relationship between the supply of and demand for a particular form of labour) .. it is not the relative value of the work that determines the value of the name, but the institutionalized value of the title that can be used as a means of defending or maintaining the value of the work (Bourdieu 1985: 733).

The relation between supply and demand, which conversions are related to, is mediated through what he terms a structural homology, simply because some fields are strongly associated. Bourdieu (1989/1996) shows a clear structural homology between the field of established schools, and the field of power, because there is a causal interdependence between them. This implies that different types of capital are effective *in relation to* a particular field, and therefore within the limits of that field. Capital is only convertible to another kind of capital on certain conditions. Within the field of art there has been several attempts to reconvert capital, not always successful, even today (the example of Mozart is not the only case, as described by Norbert Elias). As mentioned above, this is also the case when families under certain circumstances reconvert inherited cultural capital to educational capital (Bourdieu 1979/1986: 80-81, 125ff.).

4.0 Social Trajectories and the Field of sports

The theory of reconversions can provide a more comprehensive understanding of 'social mobility' in and out of a field. The idea is to link the field in which the reconversions are studied and the social space. Then the reconversions of capital are analysed by studying social trajectories. In one of Bourdieu's latest theoretical works, he defined social trajectory as the series of positions successively occupied by the same agent or group of agents in successive spaces. All trajectories must be understood as travels through the social space, and the many individual histories are equivalent with families of intragenerational trajectories (see Bourdieu 1992/1996: 258). However, the intergenerational trajectories inside and between fields must be accounted. Hereby, it is stressed that conversions of different kinds of capital must be considered. It means that if one has achieved capital in the field of sports. Reconversion is not certain that sports capital can be reconverted to another field. It depends on the type of field and where the field is 'placed' or 'displaced' (change of sector) in the social space, and in which *sector* of the field the accumulation has occurred.⁴ Some sport disciplines have very much relative autonomy, others less, and are positioned according to a state of distribution of the specific capital, accumulated as a result of previous struggles.

A shift from one trajectory to another trajectory depends on different collective events, such as wars or big crises, or by individual events like 'random' meetings and business. These events are often described as fortunate or unfortunate situations, even if they statistically depend on present positions and dispositions, making people capable of extending and keeping different kinds of contacts and connections. This means that appointments to jobs are closely linked to the social trajectory, and to the institutions one attends etc. In fact, there are *specific effects of social trajectories*. We will now turn to the study of sport.

The study of sport trajectories shows that athletes from various social positions and sport disciplines have different strategies. The situation for the athlete is of course different from the relation between education and positions in the labour market, but the general principles can be used, as stressed by Munk (1998). In other studies (e.g. Dubois 1980; Haerle 1975; Loy 1972) it has been shown that 'successfulness' in the sport can have a great influence on the first occupational position, and an education (which is also influenced by fathers education/position), however this successfulness does not play any important role in the long term. Education acquired by the athletes is what counts. However this is very generally stated. Contrary to countries like United States⁵ and France⁶, athletes from Denmark do not have the same opportunities for jobs in the field of sports. Considering the sport disciplines altogether gives the result that about half of the former athletes are socially reproduced, meaning that they obtain almost the same positions as their fathers. About 25 percent lose ground and about 20 percent gain ground.⁷ Very few athletes get a permanent job in the field of

sports. Only fifteen percent have this chance, which is explained by the fact that the state does not provide official job structures, which is contrary to the conditions in the United States and to some degree France. Moreover, these jobs are primarily the reserve of young athletes from the 'upper' and 'middle' classes (academics, teachers and directors). Agents of working class origin do not convert to positions in the sport (as managers etc.).

Among athletes from self-employed origins there is a strong tendency to move to working class conditions and to positions like teachers. The trajectories between the social space and the field of sports, and thereby conversions of capital are mediated through the agents' habitus. But what seems to be very important is the structural homology between the general social space and the way in which athletes find their pathways from the local space (the field of sports) to other places. The considered amount of movement by sons and daughters of self-employed reflects a general tendency in society. Athletes with social origin as self-employed or directors become clerical staff or junior leaders in public administration and institutions, not so much because of time in sport, but rather because their possibilities to work as self-employed are diminished after World War II. It is stressed that an athlete both moves through the field of sports, and from the field where the father had his position/profession, to the field where the athlete finds his own profession (position).⁸

Those who actually find permanent positions in sport have traditionally been agents recruited among teachers and academics, so eventually it is not surprising to see this pattern. Furthermore, agents with a large volume of sports capital gain positions in the field of sports. This is however a rough picture of reconversions of capital related to the field of sports.

4.1 Reconversions in the social trajectories

By way of correspondence analysis it is possible to separate *differences within* self-employed, farmers, skilled workers, unskilled workers, service jobs, control- and care-work, academics and many others, and to capture *shifts* between fields. We are able not only to distinguish between those athletes who *convert* and *reconvert* according to the field of sports. It is also possible among athletes to distinguish between different fields. The ambition is to discover the nuances between different trajectories and groups and *to analyse objective relational oppositions*.⁹ The analysis consists of analyses of domains such as the social¹⁰, sporting and the cultural, and to integrate these domains into *one* analysis of the domains.

There are different groups of trajectories containing individuals who have passed the social space through the field of sports (see graph 1). At the top one finds a kind of cultural pole, and at the bottom there is an economic pole. However, the most important differentiation is between vocational and academic education, social origin,

trajectories and not least economical capital. To the right one finds the pole with largest volume of capital, which means academic capital, social origin among directors, most economic capital, disposed to an early shift/turn, finished education, obtained job just after the sport, stable movements in 'class 3'¹¹, *crossing* intergenerational movements between 'class 1' and 'class 3', and between 'class 2' and 'class 3'. These are opposed to former athletes which is near the left pole with less volume of capital, including agents who did not study during the period with sport, unemployment, and movements from 'class 1' to 'class 2'.

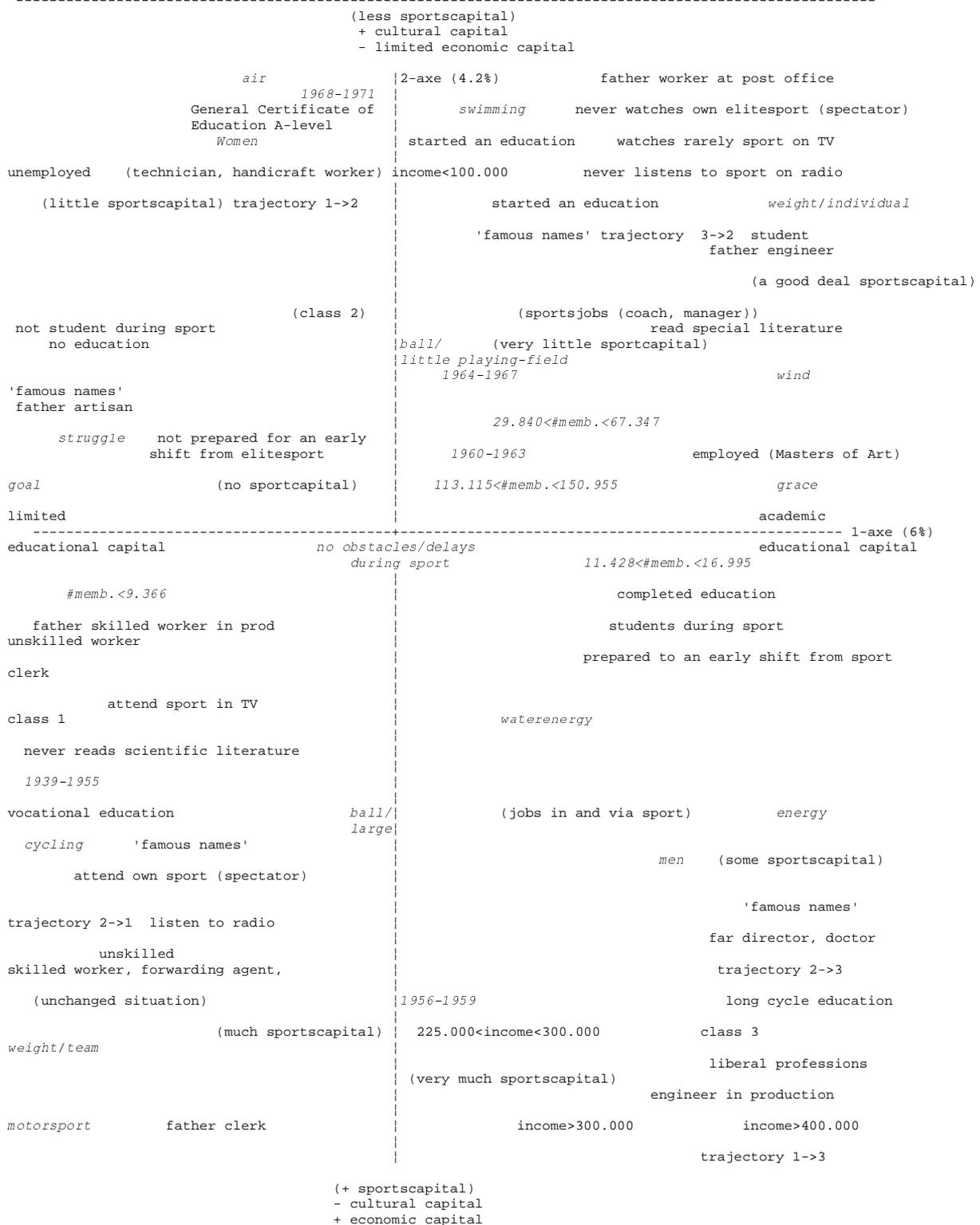
Students and agents who started an education is clearly shown to the right with distinctive stances about cultural practices and lifestyles, as opposed to former athletes, who mostly attend sport through media. The positions of students are opposed in relation to clerks, and different kinds of workers with and without vocational skills nearby the position of vocational educational capital. Furthermore, there seems to be an opposition between younger and older former athletes. These are age groups 1964-1971 in the top and age group 1939-1959 (esp. 1956-1959) in the bottom, and age group 1960-1963 is close to the centre.

Much sports capital seems to play a certain role for agents, who moved from 'class 1' to 'class 3' often together with educational capital. The trajectory to 'class 3' has not proceeded without educational capital. In fact, differentiation caused by sports capital is in the first graph subjugated by social and cultural aspects.

The correspondence analysis points also at a *sports-pole* including sports positions (jobs in sport). In Graph 2 we also find a number of conversions describing the transition from an active period in sport to positions in the field of sports or to positions outside the field of sports, via the sport. To the right there is a pole with much capital, originated among engineers, and *career-oriented*, opposed to the left pole with less capital, originated among skilled workers in industrial production and unskilled workers, and *not-career-oriented*.

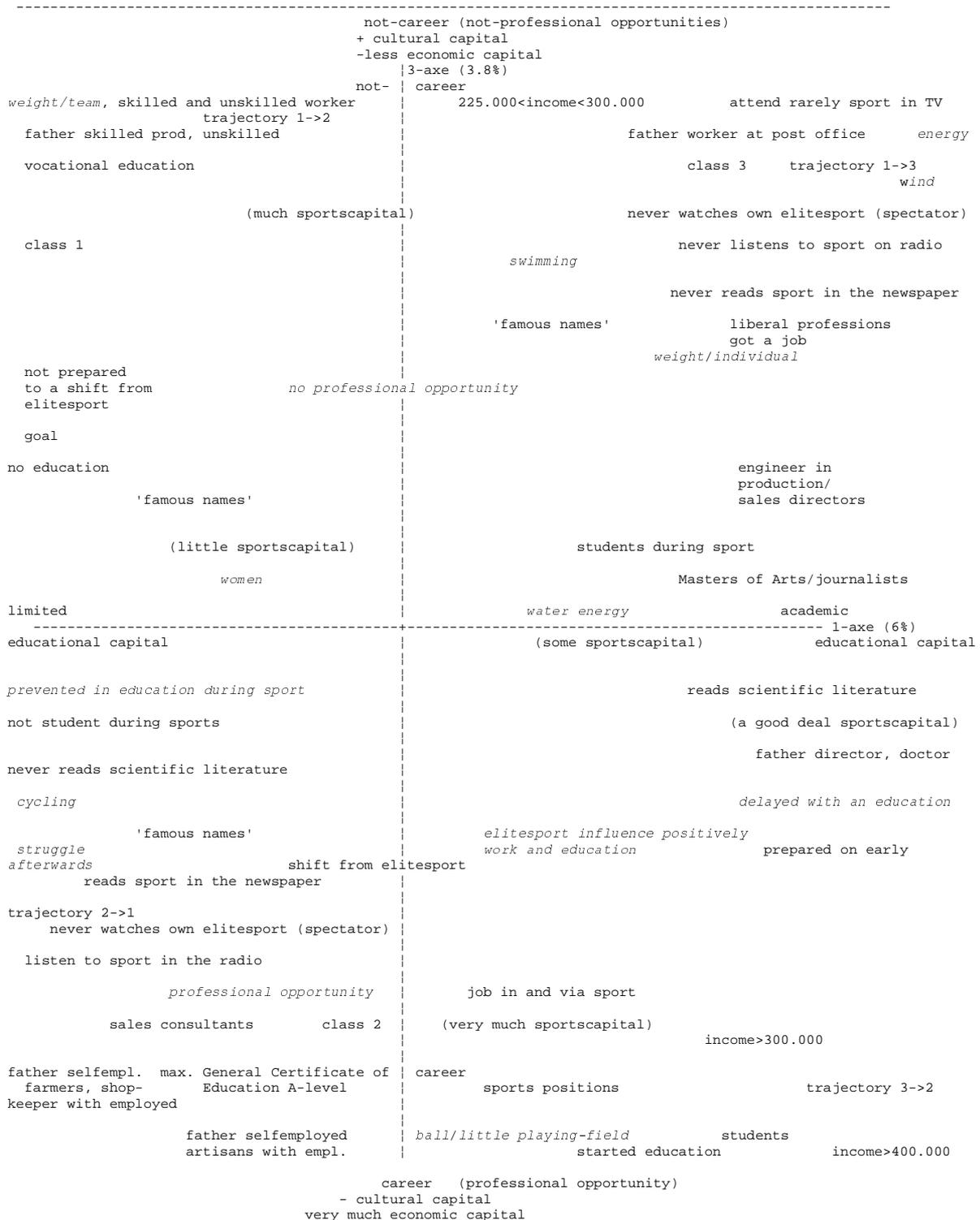
Former athletes who gained lots of sports capital, and at the same time perceive the trajectory in sport as a career, seem to aim at converting and reconverting sports capital as well as they can, which to a higher extent enables them to defend positions obtained in the trajectory. On the other hand it seems that groups who do not perceive sport as a career, apply other means in their efforts in the reproduction, as academic and vocational educational capital. This reflects a *dichotomy* between a pole representing no objective opportunities for professional careers, and a pole representing objective possibilities for a professional trajectory with income. *The analyses show very clearly, that there is not always a direct connection between social origin and present positions in the social space.* The lines of trajectories between families and the present destinations cannot be reduced to pure mechanics. It is rather

Graph 1. The graph shows relational located positions and positiontakings. Precise coordinates are listed elsewhere. NI=266, NI2=3, NJ=88. Here are chosen some illustrative modalities (in italics), NJ2=156. Parenthesis around sportscapital merely indicates that this variable does not have so high value of contribution as the average value of CTR, but almost, especially very much sportscapital.



concrete historical structurations which are active in the multidimensional social space mediated by the field of sports and other significant fields. There are thus different kinds of strategies of reproductions through positional trajectories, implying conversions of accumulated capital and reinvestments in positions mainly outside the field of sports.

Graph 2. The graph shows the relationship between combinations of factor 1 and factor 3.



A supplementary analysis shows a corresponding dipole between elite and non-elite which partly concerns an opposition between professional and non-professional. This is also observed in the differentiation between *very much sports capital* and *little/no sports-capital*. A group consists of people who perceived their life as divided between education and sport, and the transition to a life without elite sport was 'a relief' or simply 'a new situation'. Around positions including job and education, there are individuals who at the beginning of the sport trajectory were prepared to stay only for a short period

of time without maximum of sport. Other individuals include positions with lost status, and who got a job in sport, and took the attitude that the possibilities of getting a job after ending sport are 'bad'. These trajectories include positions with *problematic transitions*, for example that sport prevented work because of many hours of training. These positions are opposed to positions as *unproblematic transitions*. There are also positions with a double oriented strategy, including sport, job and completing education.

Positions gained through sport seem especially to be salesmen and consultants, who find work through the milieu of sport. Some of those individuals move from 'class 3' to 'class 1', but in fact they have a much larger income (more than 350.000 DKR) than for example a number of intermediary positions as teachers and nurses, who have more moderate economic capital (up to 300.000 DKR). Near these positions there are crossing movements from 'class 1 to class 2' and to some degree movements from 'class 2' to 'class 3'.

It can be concluded, that strategies of reconversions contribute to different social trajectories with various combinations of educational capital, mobility, social origin, plus sports capital and career. It appears that the social origin (life-conditions) does not effect movements and destinations as pure mechanics. There are several crossing movements.

4.2 Future research in reconversions

The study of movements throughout social structures calls for very good data and I think that one could draw the lesson that social trajectories and reconversions of any kind of capital are best grasped and analysed in a longitudinal/panel perspective, and if data obtained from registers (or surveys) can be limited, one should just be aware of the pitfalls in the empirical work. I believe that sociology should pursue studies of reconversions. I am not saying that the grand social theories cannot provide help, but I would address more attention to concrete studies of the social world. If social mobility really is an expression of habitus, then one has to interrelate the social world, where habitus is generated, (social origin and educational processes), and the social world where habitus is operating.¹² The struggles going on within the field are about the monopoly of the legitimate violence which is characteristic of the field in question defined as the conservation or subversion of the structure of the distribution of the specific capital.

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Notes

¹Another important problem is that many agents cannot be categorised, because their characteristics actually overlap regarding social classes and social groups. It is obvious that social mobility is heavily dependent of the choice of social categories, shown by Merllié (1994) and others. Merllié points out that enquêtes and statistical operations in connection with social surveys are not just a collection of data, but are in fact a social construction. The point is that surveys concerning social mobility are constructed in certain societies within institutions by social scientists. It means that studies of social mobility with aid of surveys are only possible within a specific ideological universe which includes/implies perceptions of societies as democratic, having equal possibilities for attending all sorts of schools and education. This problem was early treated by Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss in *Primitive Classification*. They indicated that classifying is a product of society, and they tried to establish a formal correspondence between the social and the symbolic classification and concluded that the mode of classification is determined by the form of society; and the notions of space, time, hierarchy, number, class and other such cognitive categories are products of society.

²Occupation is generally a good and economical indicator of position in social space and, in addition, provides valuable information on occupational effects, i.e., effects of the nature of work, of the occupational milieu, with its cultural and organizational specificities, etc. But this is where things get complicated: it is in effect quite likely that the product of the relational mode of thinking (like the three-dimensional diagram in factor analysis) will be interpreted in a realist and “substantialist” way: “classes” as logical classes-analytical constructs obtained by theoretically dividing a theoretical space-are then seen as real, objectively constituted groups. Ironically, the more accurate the theoretical construction of theoretical classes, the greater chance that they will be seen as real groups. Indeed, these classes are based on the principles of differentiation, which are actually the most effective in reality, i.e., the most capable of providing the fullest explanation of the largest number of differences observed between agents. The construction of the space is the basis of a division into classes which are only analytical constructs, but constructs well-founded in reality’ (Bourdieu 1987: 4-5).

³A field defines itself by defining specific stakes and interest, which are irreducible to the stakes and interests to other fields (Bourdieu 1993: 72), in order for a field to function, there have to be stakes and people prepared to **play the game**, endowed with the *habitus* that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the fields, the status and so on. Field is understood both as a field of forces and as a field of struggles aimed at transforming the relation of forces which confers on this field its structure at any given moment (Bourdieu 1991: 171).

⁴Furthermore it is relevant to notice, that agents sometimes operate in different kinds of fields at the *same time*, for example a firm owner who at the same time owns a newspaper in the field of culture.

⁵A representative study in the United States shows a first group, which is characterised by having a lower social background and by a large investment in sport. They participate in lower ranking divisions before they reach the best division, where they seek to stay as long as possible, before they slowly are going back to lower divisions. The occupations they hold when they leave their sport have often to do with sport. The other group is characterised by the low investment in sport compared to educational investments. They are the athletes with the highest social positions, they generally enter sport later and often by entering directly to the best division. This group is separated into two subgroups. The first consists of scholars with relative lower social background, who obtain their scholarships through sports results. However they are less capable to ‘capitalize’ their sports capital and educational merits compared to the other sub-group, which contains those who do not receive scholarships: they maximize to a higher degree by their sports capital and educational capital, and gain higher social positions compared to social origin (Haerle 1975a; 1975b).

⁶The different socio-sports trajectories turned out to be firstly represented in two extreme groups: 1. A group characterized by taking education and sport side by side and the sports end around the time when education is accomplished (middle class). There is not reconversion here. 2. A group who stops either because of studies; otherwise they enter a professional carrier of sport, where they potentially have opportunities to maximize acquisition of sports capital and ‘social successfulness’. It is possible that the last group has the greatest chance for ‘capitalisation’. However a wrong step can lead to failure and less conversion of sports capital. There is further on problems with combining two careers (education and sport) at least with respect to the second group (Fink and Pociello 1985: 53). They point out that especially athletes recruited from lower social classes (‘classes populaires’), are social mobile. This happens particularly by obtaining jobs within the sport through sports capital, technical capital and social capital. But there can be great differences within a single sport. Athletes from the middle class generally carry through higher education compared with their parents. They often practice highly distinguished disciplines compared with lower classes. Athletes from higher classes are to a greater extent, social downward mobile compared to social origin, especially those from groups with high educational capital.

However there are athletes from higher groups (sons of Directeurs de Sociétés) who get similarly occupations as their fathers.

⁷If the disciplines are considered separately, ups and downs are distributed equally, which implies that a single sport has a total flow of zero. Though for example Athletics, Badminton, Tennis, Parachute Jump, Shooting and Bowling have a weak tendency to decline. Canoe/Kayak, Orienteering and Swimming have weak tendency to increase. These results are obtained under certain assumptions regarding social classifications. If more nuanced classifications are used the result will be: 1/3 stabile, 1/3 ups, 1/3 downs for social mobility. It means that 'smaller' shifts are considered. It could express the fact that social structures change, but more slowly than normally expected. As noted in parenthesis before, one should still be aware that a shift from one profession to another profession does not imply a real increased level, because the occupational/positional structures change. Sons of agricultuers become perhaps hired as junior civil servants in the public service, which immediately seems to be social mobility, however when one consider the new social structures, other conclusions will be made.

⁸Remember the concept of counter-mobility (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992: 287).

⁹Pierre Bourdieu og Monique de Saint Martin 'Le patronat', in: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol.4, no. 20/21, 1978: 3-8.

¹⁰The first eigenvalue is 0.2682, which corresponds to 6 pct. of the total inertia whereas the second value of 0.1881 is equivalent to 4.2 pct. of the total inertia. The third eigenvalue of 0.1700 is equivalent to 3.8 pct. (in principle 15 axes can be studied).

¹¹ Class 1= 'Working class', Class 2= 'Middle class', Class 3= 'Upper class'

¹²It follows that practices cannot be directly deduced either from the objective conditions (present conditions) which may seem to have provoked them or from the past conditions which have produced the habitus, the durable principle of their production. They can therefore only be *accounted for by relating the social conditions in which the habitus that generated them was constituted, to the social conditions in which it is implemented*, that is, through the scientific work of performing the interrelationship of these two states of the social world that the habitus performs, while concealing it, in and through practices' (Bourdieu 1990:56, for italics: MM).