



Bourdieu's categories for "field"-construction

by

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The following list of categories is meant as a convenient research tool to facilitate the linkage of current research projects to the theoretical vocabulary surrounding the concept of “fields”.¹

The categories – like *dimensions, capital, illusio, resources* etc. – have been “distilled” by the above mentioned team out of a great variety of texts on “fields” by Pierre Bourdieu. We examined the use of the terms specifically closely in relation to the economic field, the field of art, the political field and the religious field.

Nomos means the central, objective principle of praxis of a certain field. In the capitalist economic field this would be “profit”, “l’art pour l’art” in the field of arts, and “domination” in politics.

Doxa corresponds to *nomos* on the side of the actors as its subjective aspect. Thus it refers to a habitus that corresponds to the given field. In the field of arts it would be “beauty”, in politics the self ascribed “right to dominate”, in economy it would be the right to “make profit”. In relation to the doxa of a field, actors can position themselves in different ways. They can be orthodox and maintain a position of power in the field (the “priest”), codifying and enforcing a certain, generally conservative interpretation of doxa; they also can be heterodox and in opposition (the “prophet”), generally mobilizing against orthodoxy; and finally they can be allodox (the “sorcerer”) and exert in a subordinate position some doxa-like practices on the margin of the field and without an explicit interest in dominating the field.

Actors in a field are those groups and individuals whose action exerts an effect on the field according to its nomos. Actors are specialists in the respective mode of production and

¹ Our examination is based on the literature listed in the bibliography. Bourdieu, *Homo academicus*, chapter 3, shows how Bourdieu works very freely and interchangeably with the notions of “field” and “space” as well as that both terms always are understood according to power relations. We did not include this chapter into our analysis, but take it as a warning not to “sclerotify” Bourdieu’s tools into something like an orthodoxy. However, we would like to critically note the following: A term like “sub-field” already suggests that a field is a given entity in reality, a part of which (the “sub-field”) can be conceived of as a second, subordinated entity. Bourdieu himself, with a constructivist impetus, argues very strongly against reification of models; but he himself triggers this misunderstanding by using terms like “sub-field”. The positioning of the field of art within the “field of power” (cf. Bourdieu “The field of cultural production...”, 1983: 319) is also prone to be misunderstood in an essentialist way.

compete with other specialist in the field for favourable positions within the field.

Bystanders are not actors; but public can be mobilized and enter the field with short (a revolt) or with lasting (the French revolution) effects. In economy, actors are investors (even small ones), in politics any kind of spokespersons, in religion the priest, the prophet and the sorcerer. They act according to their sense of the game.

Sense of the game is the ability to understand and feel what the game is about and how it works, based on habitus and, thus, experience in the field. This dispositional calibration of actor and field can be called, in economy, the sense of business, the aesthetical sense in arts, the sense (or feeling) for power in politics, and the sense for the holy or sacred in religion.

Resources are mobilized according to the sense of the game and the states of fluctuations (*conjuncture*) of the field. Resources are material, cognitive, bodily or whatever goods at the disposition of given actors that can be mobilized for the struggles in the field. In economy this is money, in arts it can be originality (“genius”, according to Kant), and in politics political knowledge and free time.

Stakes are actually used resources, invested goods put at risk of losing them in the game. They are, at the same time, subjective and objective. In economy an idea for investment or, simply, money can be a stake. In politics it is mostly an “*idée force*”, a basic distinction with the power to mobilize masses: the rich against the poor, the French against the Africans etc. If it does not work, it is lost. Subjectively the actor is affected since he ties to his stakes his own *illusion*, the emotional and cognitive involvement in the game.

Means of production are whatever the actors can use in a specific field to produce its product. In economy they are skills and investment goods, in politics it can be competence, mandate and broadcast.

The **product** is the result of the processes of production and exchange in a field. In economy it's commodities, in arts the work of art, and in politics it is statements.

Capital is that product of field specific production which is best suited to be reinvested in further accumulation. In economy this is, simply, money; in arts it seems to be the recognition that stems from a successful work of art; in politics most probably it is prestige. Capital circulates in the processes of production and exchange within a given field.

Exchange in a field converts the specific products of the field in relative values according to the distinct worth of the products for varied actors in the field (thus, generating exchangeable value). The processes of exchange in the diverse fields of praxis, of course, are not limited to economic modes of exchange, but comprehend ritualized (gifts) and symbolic (honour) modes, too. In economics, exchange takes place as trade and acquisition; in arts as exposition and recognition; in politics as representation and delegation within the framework of political institutions and of institutionalized public (voters).

Profit is the surplus value produced by any kind of investment (work, investment goods etc.),² put at stake in the production and exchange of a specific field. In the economic field this is money; in arts it is recognition; and in politics it is mobilisation of approval and thus, on the long run, a more settled domination of the field.

Dimensions of a field – as we have seen above – can be constructed according to the two abstract terms of achievement and autonomy. *Achievement* refers to the establishment of actors in the field and of the field itself. In economy, we understand achievement as wealth; in arts, Bourdieu identifies it as consecration (subjective) and as the academies as institutions (objective); in politics, achievement equals office (“investiture”). *Autonomy* refers to the degree an actor is free of compromise from outside a given field and acts according to the fields premises (its nomos). For the field of arts, Bourdieu defines autonomy as being guided by the principle of “l’art pour l’art” and compromise as being guided by economic interests and the public. For politics we define autonomy as integrity of a political actor in correspondence with recognition by the public.

The **state of fluctuation (“conjuncture”)** of a field is a conditioning factor for almost all processes in the field. It influences the chances of production and exchange and is defined as

² As far as we can see, the concept of „profit“ in Bourdieu is not as specific as the one in Marx, who relates profit only with the surplus generated by human labour in distinction to investment goods.

the state of power relations between the different actors of the field in a given situation in time. The *conjuncture* depends on internal as well as on external factors. For economy we identify it as the conditions for investments; for arts it is fashion; for the political field we define it as the current debates and elections (when they are near).

Compromise means external influences on the field contrary to its *nomos*, distorting its internal relations of power and its dynamics of reproduction. In economy this is morals and politics, regulating the logic of the free market forces; in arts, Bourdieu defines it as commerce; and in politics compromise mostly takes place by scandals and corruption.

External relations of a field relate the specialists (who make up the field), first, to the relevant “lay people” and, second, to other fields relevant for the reproduction of the field in question. The external relation to lay people is important for politics and religion, since these specialists depend very much on their capacity to mobilize people. This is especially the case under conditions of democracy and a relatively free “religious market” – while dictatorship involves military into politics, and official religions involve politics into religion. In economy, typical external relations are law and professional education; in the field of arts it is relations like taste, patronage and political change; in politics it seems to be primarily elections, journalistic coverage and polls.

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