

Pierre Bourdieu on European identity: Theories of habitus & cultural capital

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This essay will argue that Pierre Bourdieu's theories of habitus and cultural capital explain not only how but why there has been a move towards a European identity. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital can help us gain a greater understanding of both why this identity is desirable and how one should attempt to construct it. This essay will begin by exploring the primary site of the creation of identity, the school, and its value in the history of EU policy-making. Thereafter, I will discuss Bourdieu's theory of habitus itself, and how it may be applied in policy-making, particularly in the areas of cross-national exchange trips and teacher-training. Thirdly, I will move on to a second relevant element of Bourdieu's thinking, that is, the different forms of capital which he describes. His theories are certainly not mutually exclusive, and are somewhat circular in their relationship to each other, as will be seen throughout the essay. Finally, I will argue that the creation of this cross-

national identity is important both for the continued success of the European Union project and for the economy. Throughout the essay I will be taking a broadly constructivist view of identity, which considers identity to be rather fluid; not so much fixed as changeable. It is also difficult to construct an exact definition of Bourdieu's theories and they are better understood as fairly flexible concepts, which is how I use them in this essay.

EUROPEAN UNION EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND THE SCHOOL AS THE POINT OF IDENTITY FORMATION

Bourdieu's theory of habitus allows us to see people's attachment to nation as learned and habituated; being open to modification and reconstruction through reflexive agency and educational practices. (Pollmann, 2009) Habitus should be seen as the product of social conditionings, it can be endlessly transformed. (Bourdieu, 1990a) For generations the school has been seen as the site of these social conditionings. In this sense education is used as the field to habituate a European identity.

In the 19th century, the school was the point at which a sense of national consciousness was instilled through the teaching of national history, literature or civics. (Walkenhorst, 2006) It follows that today while the European Union is focusing on creating a sense of cross-national identity, the school would be an important site for this endeavour. There have been numerous policies that encourage schools to include a European dimension in their curricula. The Tindeman report in the 1970s suggested that education should be used as a means to create a 'Europe of the people.' (Hussen, 1993) Following on from this report, in 1976 further guidance was given as to how to achieve this goal. In the Resolution of Council and of the Ministers of Education it was suggested that in order to introduce a European dimension to education it was important that the Member states promote and organise short study trips and exchanges for teachers with special emphasis on those teachers teaching European languages. A change was also required within the national information and advisory services in order to promote the mobility and interchange of pupils and teachers within the European community. Greater contact between the authorities of establishments concerned with teacher training as well as the addition of European content in educational activities was also introduced. (Hussen, 1993) It is in changing the institution with initiatives such as the European dimension in learning that the habitus of the students within the schools changes.

HABITUS AND THE FORMATION OF EUROPEAN IDENTITY: STUDENT INTERACTIONS AND THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS

Although they are relatively stable, habituated forms of national identity should not be considered as quasi-natural or given. By changing the habitus of the younger citizens of the European Union, a vague term describing their individual subjective experience of changing social structure, we can alter their way of being, seeing, acting and thinking. (Pollmann, 2009) Social identity usually refers to the processes of interaction by which one identifies 'others' and is also identified by them; these processes then become the basis of self-identification as well. (Kohl, 2000) This notion of 'other' often plays an important role in people's understanding of nationalism. (Pollmann, 2009) Consequently, teaching a sense of European identity can be very difficult, and it is only in encouraging greater interaction with other citizens, for example on exchange trips, that their forms of habitus can be altered and such an identity fostered. Through exchange trips the students gain the ability to relate to their fellow citizens of the EU and form a multicultural sense of membership.

The more people have to do with each other in everyday life, the more likely they will be to identify with each other as fellow individuals rather than primarily by reference to their collective identifications.

(Jenkins, quoted in Pollmann, 2009, p. 537)

This kind of interaction is important in overcoming an exclusively national identity and allowing students to relate to the citizens of the other Member states. In this way, a multicultural sense of membership is fostered, thereby making the cross-national identity more attainable. It is through changing the students' habitus with the introduction of greater cross-border learning, whether it be through exchange trips or the teaching of European languages, that a sense of European identity is learned. It is through this acquired system of generative schemes that the habitus makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the conditions of its production. (Bourdieu, 1990b) It is through this that the European identity can be further perpetuated.

However, it is at this point that socio-economics becomes a concern. Not all schools have the budgets to allow their students to take part in exchange visits or employ more foreign language teachers, and in these cases there is certainly a marked difference in the sense of European identity felt by the

students. (Faas, 2007) Bourdieu also suggests that those born into a higher socio-economic background will be more likely to accumulate more cultural capital, as it is linked with the amount of time needed for acquisition (years of schooling) of this capital. The length of time a person spends in school (time of cultural acquisition) depends on the length of time for which one's family can provide one with time free from economic necessity. (Bourdieu, 2001)

It is important for this issue to be redressed. This may be possible if we take a look at the role of teachers in creating this new habitus. The experience of teachers as well as their attitude towards the European project can have a major influence on the views of future generations. Their individual experiences are likely to have an impact on how they interpret and address certain topics. (Pollmann, 2009) European topics very rarely form a part of teachers' training, however. There is only one German university, the University of Oldenburg, which has provided a special scheme called the 'European dimension in teaching training' to instruct future secondary teachers on European integration issues. (*Ibid.*) For those students for whom travel with school is a financial impossibility it is important to supplement their learning with teachers who are committed to the European agenda and have intercultural experience.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HABITUS AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

There is a clear relationship between cultural capital and habitus within education. It is only through changing the students' habitus that the cultural capital required to make an effective workforce on the European level can be created. The habitus created within the institution of the school has a great impact on the cultural capital that can be accumulated throughout a lifetime. Bourdieu argues that the dominant habitus is transformed into a form of cultural capital that the schools take for granted and which acts as a filter in the reproductive process of hierarchical society. (Harker, 1984)

The theory of habitus is premised on the theory of a 'gift' (or cultural capital). This 'gift' is the feel for the game socially constituted by early immersion in the game. (Bourdieu, 1990a) I argue that it is this gift in the form of cultural capital that is being passed down by the dominant cultural group. This is done not only to perpetuate the European project by imbuing it with a sense of legitimacy through participation, but also because changing the habitus created in the school system is essential to creating a workforce capable of competing in the global economy. (de Beus, 2001)

THE FORMS OF CAPITAL

The discussion of cultural capital may seem redundant when discussing economic topics, however, Bourdieu argues that the class of practices whose explicit purpose is to maximize monetary profit cannot be defined as such without producing the purposeless finality of cultural or artistic practices and their products:

Capital is accumulated labour (in its materialised form or its incorporated embodied form) that, when appropriated on a private, that is exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour.

(Bourdieu 2001, p. 96)

As suggested in the above definition, capital is not merely economic. Although this is one of the forms Bourdieu mentions, he also discusses cultural capital as well as social capital, both of which are transferable into economic capital. Cultural capital, in particular, is convertible on occasion into economic capital and can be institutionalised through the education system as previously discussed. However, when talking about Europe, it is more appropriate to discuss the inter-cultural capital being institutionalised in the education system. (Pollmann, 2009) Cultural capital itself can be further categorised into three types; the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalised state.

The embodied state is the work one does for oneself; an effort that presupposes personal cost and an investment of time. This form of capital cannot be transmitted instantaneously. In fact, the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital. It therefore functions as symbolic capital, unrecognised as capital and seen rather as a legitimate competence. A cultural competence (such as being able to navigate working and living abroad) derives a scarcity value and yields profits of distinction for its owner. (Bourdieu, 2001) In the case of the European Union, encouraging this kind of capital through inter-cultural exchange among the member states creates a workforce with marketable skills. This, in turn, encourages employers to relocate to the area.

The objectified state as discussed by Bourdieu (2001) is a type of capital that is transferable by legal ownership but does not constitute the precondition for specific appropriation, for example, having possession of a physical painting but not of the means of 'consuming' a painting. The owners of the

means of production must therefore find a way of appropriating either the embodied capital that is the presupposition for the “consumption,” or else the services of the holders of this capital. Initiatives such as the Erasmus scheme go some way to institutionalising the objectified state of cultural capital, as they indicate to employers that certain conditions will be met by a future employee if they have partaken in a certain scheme. This aspect will be discussed in greater detail further on in the essay.

The final type of cultural capital described by Bourdieu (2001) is the institutionalised state, that which is seen in the form of academic qualifications. With an academic qualification comes a certificate of cultural competence. This certificate confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture. Social alchemy produces a form of cultural capital that has relative autonomy *vis à vis* its bearer and even *vis à vis* the cultural capital one effectively possesses at a given moment in time. By conferring institutional recognition on the cultural capital possessed by any given agent, the academic qualification also makes it possible to compare qualification holders and even to exchange them.

The concept of “social capital” is also relevant to identity-formation. One’s social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources that are linked to a durable network of somewhat institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition. The association with this group provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital. The volume of the social capital held by a person depends on the size of the network of connections one can use effectively. The network of connections is the product of investment aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the long or short term. It is aimed at transforming contingent relationships into ones that are both necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt or institutionally guaranteed. I would argue that the Erasmus scheme is yet again the field through which this kind of capital could easily flourish.

EVIDENCE FOR THE IMPORTANCE OF A EUROPEAN IDENTITY IN ACADEMIA AND BUSINESS

The attributes conferred upon those with academic qualifications who take part in schemes such as Erasmus or other exchange programmes, whether it be in the field of social or cultural capital, can be seen when we analyse the way these students are assessed after their exchange. By analysing the assessment, we can see what kind of qualities one is expected to attain

while taking part in an exchange programme. The academic institutions used in Deardorff's study (2006) had a range of ways of testing students who had returned from exchanges. These ranged from 'before and after' testing, interviews and presentations. In the case of using before and after testing in order to assess cultural competence, there was agreement on the other methods as well as what these tests should be aiming to assess. In fact, 80% or more of the inter-cultural experts and administrators were able to reach consensus on essential elements of inter-cultural competence. These key competences were primarily in the areas of communication and behaviour in intercultural contexts. The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in inter-cultural situations is believed to be based on one's own inter-cultural knowledge and skill. (*Ibid.*) The analysis of returning students should study their ability to analyse, interpret and relate as well as to listen and observe. Of those tested in the study, cognitive skills emerged, including comparative thinking skills and cognitive flexibility. The general findings of the study were that study-abroad students were found to be armed with skills related to behaving and communicating appropriately and effectively in inter-cultural situations, where effectiveness is seen as the achievement of a valued object and appropriateness is the avoidance of violating valued rules. (*Ibid.*)

By looking at industries involved in a great deal of cross-border commerce, we can see how useful the accumulation of capital, whether it be cultural or social, is, and how this creates a stronger attraction among firms to the European job market. Kennedy's study on transnational friendships among professionals in the building design industry gives us a great insight into how these forms of capital affect working relationships. (2004)

It is apparent throughout the study that the experience of living abroad was highly prized. In one example, a global company was described as needing 'global champions.' These 'champions' were to ensure that tasks were accomplished. To do this they needed to demonstrate not only adaptability but also a capacity for cooperation. These attributes can certainly be by-products of living or studying abroad. Examples are given throughout the study of how respondents felt that those who had previously worked abroad were generally more adaptable to new work environments. The ability to adapt and work with new people from different backgrounds is invaluable in the work environment. Examples of the importance of the type of cultural capital that is acquired through exchange programmes, or the experience of living abroad, were given by respondents in Kennedy's study. One stated that 'cross cultural teams working and overcoming obstacles have become necessary to business....increasingly our work is about collaboration with people cross cultur-

ally,' while another noted that 'you work as a team...problems are "our" problems...and involve sharing, so work is pleasant.' (*Ibid.* p. 10)

Not only is cultural capital important in cross-border working relationships, but social capital is also important in developing economic capital. The investment used to create the social capital in a network of colleagues that is built up through work abroad can prove invaluable. These networks create advantages through practical help and learning opportunities. They also offer access to information and business contacts with respect to other employment prospects at later points in their career. (Kennedy, 2004) On a more international scale, transnational or post-national professional friendship networks, such as those within the European Union, also supply a framework of sociality and meaningful interaction that make the global economy run more smoothly by allowing it to operate more effectively. (*Ibid.*)

CONCLUSION

This essay's reading of Bourdieu's forms of capital and theory of habitus has sought to develop a deeper understanding of how education can be used to foster a sense of European identity. It has also sought to demonstrate the importance of the formation of this communal identity for economic purposes. I have discussed Bourdieu's theory of habitus by using the education system as an example of how changing social surroundings can have an effect on the creation of identity. By including European content in the curriculum taught in schools, the habitus of the students can be changed in order to foster a European identity. Thereafter, I discussed the different forms of capital and how they can also influence the creation of a European identity. I argued that these forms of capital are closely connected with the habitus of a society and that they explain why the creation of a European identity is important, in particular through their effect on the increasingly integrated labour market.

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