

## Social Class and Cultural Consumption: The Impact of Modernisation in a Comparative European Perspective

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### Abstract

Pierre Bourdieu's work has argued that there is a homology of social classes on the one hand and cultural consumption on the other. In contrast, theories of individualisation posit that social class plays only a minor role in shaping lifestyle in contemporary societies. In this paper we examine a) how much contemporary highbrow lifestyles in 27 European countries are structured by class membership, b) the extent to which highbrow consumption varies according to the level of modernisation of a society and c) whether the explanatory power of social class in relation to highbrow consumption decreases in more modernised European countries. The findings show that highbrow lifestyles are strongly influenced by social class, and that highbrow consumption is more common in more modernised societies. Moreover, the findings confirm the hypothesis that the formative power of social class on lifestyle decreases in highly modernised societies, albeit without disappearing completely.

### Keywords

cultural consumption, lifestyle, social class, Bourdieu, individualisation

Pierre Bourdieu, in his pioneering work “Distinction – A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste” (1984) postulated a close correlation between affluence and social class, on one hand, and lifestyle, on the other. The strength of this correlation between class and lifestyle orientation remains highly controversial in the available literature. Some authors assume that the relationship between class and cultural lifestyles in increasingly individualising societies is fairly weak. Others suggest a closer relationship. In this paper, we investigate this relationship more closely. We focus on highbrow lifestyles, which, according to Bourdieu, find the highest prestige and approval in most societies. Highbrow consumption is used by the upper classes as a tool of social distinction and for the legitimisation of social inequalities. On the basis of international survey data from 27 European countries, this paper examines the following three hypotheses: (1) To what extent is highbrow consumption tied to class membership? (2) Does the proportion of people who adopt a highbrow lifestyle increase with the degree of modernisation? And (3) does the formative influence of social class on highbrow lifestyle decline with the increasing modernisation of a society? As a first step, we will describe the theoretical framework and outline our hypotheses. We will then explain our methodology, and in a further step, present the empirical findings. We will close the paper with a conclusion.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### *Social Class, Taste and Cultural Lifestyles*

Pierre Bourdieu has argued that cultural consumption is to a large extent determined by social class. Members of the upper classes consume mostly highbrow cultural goods, while members of the lower classes tend to choose products of mass and popular culture. The different class-based lifestyles thus represent a symbolic reproduction of class structure: Highbrow culture provides a degree of prestige and legitimacy, while mass culture is seen to be an expression of an illegitimate taste.

A society's class structure emerges from the unequal distribution of various kinds of capital that people have at their disposal. Bourdieu (1984, 1986) distinguishes between economic capital (income and assets), social capital (social relations) and cultural capital. Cultural capital itself is further divided into three sub-categories. Institutional cultural capital includes

formal education, for instance the degrees and certificates that a person is awarded by a society's educational institutions. Objectified cultural capital is manifested in the possession of books, paintings and other cultural artefacts. In terms of cultural consumption, the third sub-category, embodied cultural capital, is especially important. Embodied cultural capital refers to the ability of people to apply aesthetic criteria for the evaluation of "things". Embodied cultural capital is transmitted above all through the family, and its acquisition requires time, effort and comprehensive early socialisation. Once acquired, it is indelibly etched into the individual. The practical transmission of embodied cultural capital includes, for example, reading books, learning a musical instrument or visiting galleries and museums.

The class structure of a society results from the aggregation of the capital which people possess and the assignment of individuals with the same capital to the same classes. Depending on the composition of capital, Bourdieu distinguishes three social classes and different fractions within each class. The relative composition of cultural and economic capital constitutes a horizontal axis of the two-dimensional space of class positions. In the upper class, he identifies a class fraction with a great deal of cultural capital and a group with relatively less cultural capital. The propertied bourgeoisie, consisting mainly of the self-employed, has a large amount of economic capital, but proportionately less cultural capital. For the intellectual elites and the academic professionals, on the other hand, cultural capital is dominant. The middle class or lower middle class consists of those in mid-level professional positions, especially *middle management*. The lower or working class consists of people who are poorly educated and do manual work.

The allocation of capital and the resulting assignment of people within classes and class fractions have a significant influence on the formation of taste and aesthetic preferences.<sup>1</sup> Taste refers to various objects: the choice

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<sup>1</sup> Aesthetic taste, according to Bourdieu, is neither natural nor innate, but is instead an acquired skill which consists of competence in the aesthetic decoding of symbols, for instance, the interpretation of works of art. Since taste is class-specific, Bourdieu distinguishes different kinds of taste (Bourdieu, 1984). The luxury taste of the upper class is based on an experience of economic security and is characterised by stylisation. Stylisation refers to a rejection of the function of objects in favour of form and an emphasis on quality. The luxury taste of the upper class is also described by Bourdieu as the *legitimate taste*, and it alone enjoys recognition in a society. The *taste for necessity* of the lower classes is, on the other hand, the result of adaptation to economic constraints. It is characterised by a preference for "substance", for quantity rather than quality. The focus is on the satisfaction of physical needs.

of home furnishings, holiday destinations, food, clothing and a person's preferences for certain kinds of art. Artistic preferences, the focus of this analysis, are an important part of taste. Classical concerts, theatre, ballet, fine art etc. require an ability on the part of the receptor to decipher the art pieces offered. This ability to decode a work consists of classifying the characteristics of a work of art within the horizon of stylistic possibilities and making links between a given artwork and other works and styles. This classificatory competence is distributed differently throughout society. The upper class, and especially the fraction that possesses a large amount of cultural capital, is, due to capital resources and the resulting taste orientation, particularly likely to have this competence.

While taste refers to internalised patterns of perception and appreciation, lifestyles pertain to the characteristic patterns of actual human actions. Lifestyle is therefore a category of praxis, of practised aesthetics, and manifests itself in the purchase of certain goods or in attendance at certain events. Like taste, lifestyles are also class-specific: Bourdieu (1984) differentiates a distinguished upper class lifestyle, a pretentious middle class lifestyle and a proletarian lifestyle that is typical of the working class.

In summary, taste and the space of lifestyles are constructed in a spatial analogue with class structure. Bourdieu (1984) describes this as a *homology of spaces*. This means that class structure and the underlying forms of capital shape tastes and the resulting lifestyles. Simultaneously, the class-specific lifestyles cement class structures: These structures only become socially visible when differences are translated into symbols and manifest themselves in observable lifestyles. The upper classes in particular distinguish themselves from the middle and lower classes by their lifestyle, claiming legitimate taste for themselves alone and expressing this through their leisure activities.

### *The De-Structuring and Individualisation of Lifestyles*

The notion of the homology of social classes with cultural consumption has been criticised by many authors. This criticism has tended to be directed at the limited scope of homology theory, rather than at its underlying basis. Individualisation theorists claim that while membership of social classes through lifestyle activity was common in the past, this has become less common in the post-industrial world (Atkinson, 2010; Bauman, 2001; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Hörning and Michailow, 1990; Lüdtke, 1989; Schulze,

1992). In the literature, the following reasons are given for the decoupling of lifestyles from social class.

- (1) Industrialised societies over the last 60 years have experienced an enormous increase in prosperity, leading to an increase in leisure time, in the purchasing power of citizens and in the amount of products and services available. This leads, as Ulrich Beck (1992) argues, to the melting away of class boundaries: “Class will pale into insignificance beside an individualised society of employees” (Beck, 1992: 100). The practise of lifestyles is influenced not only by taste, but also by the resources available to the individual. Expensive consumption lifestyles have become available to more people, and the number of people who can afford highbrow lifestyles has increased.
- (2) The development of societies has also led to an *increase in the level of education*, to an expansion of institutional cultural capital. Since, according to Bourdieu, education is an important precondition of a competence in legitimate taste, this in turn has an effect on the level of highbrow consumption. Therefore, expansion of education will increase the practise of highbrow lifestyles.
- (3) The increased spread of highbrow lifestyles does not automatically imply the dissolution of the influence of social class. Rather, such a de-structuring is mainly caused by the *dissolution of class-specific milieus*. These class-specific social environments have traditionally structured the lifestyles of class members in various aspects: from memberships in associations to voting behaviour, leisure activities and family roles. According to Beck, processes of individualisation are characterised by the loss of significance and the dissolution of class-specific environments. As the bonds of class-specific environments dissolve, individuals are freed from the constraints of collective definitions of meaning (Beck, 1992).<sup>2</sup>
- (4) Last but not least, a change in values has taken place in modern societies. A materialist orientation has in part been displaced by post-materialist values and values of self-expression and individual liberty (Inglehart, 1990, 2008; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Klages, 1984). Thus, not only more options are available to individuals in material terms,

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<sup>2</sup> Empirically, this weakening influence of social class was demonstrated in such different social fields as voting behaviour, religious participation, membership in trade unions (Schnell and Kohler, 1998), or name giving patterns.

but also in terms of lifestyle, as individuals are freed from normative constraints and class-specific traditions.

Increasing wealth, the expansion of education and a change in values thus lead to the emergence of a more individualised social structure and a de-structuring of cultural lifestyles. This raises the question of the extent to which highbrow consumption remains linked to class membership.

Two additional assumptions arise, less as an alternative than a further specification of the homology thesis: We suspect that increasing societal wealth leads to an increase in the spread of highbrow lifestyles. We further assume that the influence of social class on highbrow consumption decreases with the growing affluence of a society.

### *The State of Current Research*

Cultural lifestyles have been explored in a series of recent works. It is very controversial whether the explanatory power of concepts like class and social stratification really decreases. Some authors assume that lifestyles and consumption are only loosely linked to class structure, or that there has at least been a detectable weakening of the correlations over the last decades (Clark and Lipset, 1991; Hradil, 1987; Müller-Schneider, 2000; Pahl, 1989; Schulze, 1992; Toivonen, 1992). This seems to apply to at least some areas of leisure culture, such as participation in sports, media consumption, the consumption of pop music, or social activities such as going out to restaurants and bars. However, it does not seem to be the case for highbrow cultural activities (Isengard, 2005; Otte, 2004; Rössel, 2005; Uttitz, 1985). A highbrow lifestyle, which usually manifests itself in visits to the opera or theatre, attending classical concerts, art exhibitions and museums, remains closely associated with an individual's economic resources and education. This is supported by studies in many Western societies: Participants in highbrow cultural scenes have more economic and cultural capital and belong primarily to the upper and upper-middle classes (DiMaggio 1987, 1992; Bihagen and Katz-Gerro, 2000; Katz-Gerro, 2002; Kraaykamp and Nieuwbeerta, 2000; Lamprecht and Stamm, 1994; Roose and van der Stichele, 2010; Toivonen, 2006; Van Eijck and Bargemann, 2004; Yaish and Katz-Gerro, 2012).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Discussions of cultural lifestyles have in recent years been dominated by the so-called "omnivore thesis" (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005, 2007; Peterson and Simkus, 1992; Peterson

These findings, however, say little about the changes in the relationship between social class and lifestyle over time, about whether, in the context of modernisation and individualisation processes, a de-structuring has taken place. One study from the U.S. by DiMaggio and Mukhtar (2004) analyses participation in highbrow cultural activities, e.g. attendance in classical music concerts, opera, and ballet at different points in time. For the period from 1982 until 2002 they conclude that “there is no support for the expectation that the distribution of participation has become more equal over time” (DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004: 183). In another paper, Isengard (2005) finds similar patterns for Germany: Her analyses even suggest that the correlation between economic capital and cultural participation has increased from 1990 to 2003. The “meltdown scenario” (DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004), which assumes that the distinctiveness of highbrow activities has decreased over time, receives only very limited support (Purhonen, Gronow & Rahkonen, 2011).

For an investigation of the impact of modernisation and individualisation on cultural lifestyles the simultaneous comparative analysis of countries at

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and Kern, 1996; Peterson, 2005). Proponents of this thesis argue that social class still characterises a person’s cultural consumption, but that this does not result in differences between elite highbrow and popular mass culture. Instead, members of the upper classes are “cultural omnivores” who consume both highbrow and popular culture in large quantities. According to Chan and Goldthorpe (2005, 2007), these findings contradict the notion of a distinct highbrow lifestyle. We find, however, these conclusions not entirely convincing. First, the members of the upper classes keep ‘the company of their equals’ by visits to opera, ballet and classical concerts, and these activities therefore retain a highly relevant distinguishing value. Second, popular culture itself is highly differentiated. Rössel and Bromberger (2009) show for example that people with higher educational levels tend to go to arthouse films and smaller (programme) cinemas and avoid going to more commercially-oriented cinemas and action and entertainment films. Qualitative studies come to similar conclusions: People with higher education levels and members of the upper classes consume popular culture very selectively, picking out specific products that they deem to be of higher quality (Atkinson, 2011; Ollivier, 2008; Warde et al., 2007). Third, lifestyle analyses are based on the assumption that those behaviours constitute a distinct lifestyle with a high empirical correlation. For opera, theatre and concert attendance, this is almost always true. Cinema attendance is not negatively correlated with a highbrow lifestyle, but is only very weakly correlated. Cinema visits often go together with attendance at sports, restaurants and bars, in a distinct, entertainment-oriented lifestyle (Isengard, 2005; Lamprecht and Stamm, 1994; Georg, 1998; Yaish and Katz-Gerro, 2012). Such an entertainment-oriented lifestyle is less socially exclusive and does not possess the same distinguishing value as a “highbrow” lifestyle.

different stages of modernisation may be another suitable approach. However, there are relatively few comparative studies (with the exception of Lamont, 1992; de Graaf, 1991; Katz-Gerro, 2002, 2006, 2011; Virtanen, 2007; Lizardo and Skiles, 2009). Moreover, most of these studies present no systematic explanation of the differences between countries. Virtanen (2007) carried out a comprehensive study on cultural lifestyles in 15 EU countries which shows first that the proportion of people who adopt a highbrow lifestyle varies between the countries considered. Moreover, there is a correlation in many of the countries between education, age and socio-economic status with the practise of highbrow lifestyles, but the extent of the correlation varies across countries. Katz-Gerro (2002: 223) also found, in a comparative study of five countries, differences in the relationship between class positions and cultural lifestyle. She stated that, “in the U.S., Israel, and Sweden, highbrow cultural consumption patterns distinguish the white-collar from the other classes, while in Italy and West Germany those consumption patterns distinguish the working class from the other classes.” Finally de Graaf (1991), in a comparison of the Czech Republic, Hungary and the Netherlands, showed that cultural consumption is structured to varying degrees in terms of the education of the individual as well as that of their partner.

None of these studies, however, tried to explain these national differences systematically. One attempt to explain national differences can be found in Lizardo and Skiles (2009). They suggest that a more distinctive highbrow lifestyle can be found especially in countries in which popular culture is subject to strong processes of commercialisation. Commercialisation leads, as Lizardo and Skiles (2009: 12) argue, using the example of television, to a homogenisation and trivialisation of programme formats, with the result that: “highbrow consumers [...] react to television programming styles produced in commercialised, profit-oriented media regimes with snobbish consumption patterns.” These assumptions are empirically supported. However, there are no studies which attempt to explain the cross-national differences in participation in highbrow activities in terms of the degree of modernisation and individualisation of the society.

## **Data and Variables**

The thesis that the influence of class structure on lifestyle is waning can be tested by analyses over time or cohorts, as well as by country comparisons (Kohler, 2005). A key prerequisite for a country comparison is that the



countries considered differ in economic prosperity and education. If this is the case, then one can first check whether there is a positive correlation between the level of modernisation and the extent of practise of highbrow lifestyles. One can then examine whether the influence of social class on the choice of lifestyles is smaller in more modernised societies than it is in less modernised ones.

Our analysis is based on *Eurobarometer* (EB) 67.1 data from 2007, on the theme of “European Cultural Values”. For the EB surveys, face-to-face interviews with about 1.000 adults aged 15 and over were conducted in each of the current 27 EU member countries (with the exception of Malta, Cyprus and Luxembourg, where the sample size was 500). By means of the application of appropriate weights, results based on the EB survey are representative for the population in each country and EU as a whole.

Below we present the indicators for our analysis. As with any secondary analysis, there is the problem that our theoretical constructs for key questions were not considered in the design of the survey. Therefore, some of the indicators are rather simple measures of theoretical constructs. Detailed information on the operationalisation of each variable can be found in the appendix.

### *Highbrow Lifestyles*

The interviewees of the Eurobarometer were asked whether and how often they have taken part in ten different cultural activities in the last twelve months. The following four activities correlate highly with one another: attendance at (1) ballet and opera, (2) concerts (3) theatres and (4) museums and galleries. A high correlation suggests the existence of a coherent lifestyle. Above, we had defined lifestyles as a bundle of leisure activities that form a uniform behavioural syndrome, directed by a specific taste orientation which is located inside the subject and therefore cannot be measured directly. From these four activities, we created an additive scale, which we refer to as “*highbrow lifestyle*” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .72$ ). This new scale has a range of values from 0 to 12. Respondents who are assigned a value of 0 had no highbrow activity in the last year, while respondents who are assigned a value of 12 have participated in each of the four activities more than five times.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu’s description of highbrow lifestyles is more finely differentiated than the questions that we evaluate in this secondary analysis. While Bourdieu refers to very specific

### *Social Classes and Capital*

a) *Institutionalised cultural capital*: Institutionalised cultural capital covers education or educational certificates awarded to individuals by a society's educational institutions. The Eurobarometer contains variables which allow a comparison of respondents' educational levels in spite of the varying national education systems: Respondents were asked how old they were when they finished their training. The higher a respondent's age at the end of their education, and the more time spent in the educational system, the higher their level of education and thus the higher the institutionalised cultural capital.

b) *Embodied cultural capital*: Bourdieu understands this as the ability to apply aesthetic criteria to the evaluation of art objects, acquired above all by early and enduring familial socialisation. The practices which instil embodied cultural capital include learning a musical instrument and participation in other artistic practises. Such practices, which contribute to the development of aesthetic judgement, were probed in the Eurobarometer survey: Interviewees were asked about different artistic activities. Based on the frequency with which respondents played music and participated in theatre and writing, a new variable was created. We use this variable as an approximate measurement of respondents' embodied cultural capital, since a direct measurement of competences in aesthetic evaluation is not available.

c) *Economic capital*: The Eurobarometer dataset does not include questions about income, but it does contain information on the ownership of items such as computers, cars, and a house. An additive scale of eight such items was calculated and adjusted for the mean level of ownership in each country. Therefore, the values represent a respondent's relative position in terms of economic capital within a country. This measure of economic capital also correlates highly with the professional positions of the respondents (which by Bourdieu are used to differentiate the classes and class fractions).

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symphonies, composers, paintings and plays, the indicators used here measure only participation in highbrow institutions, without providing details about the actual pieces. In this respect, the analyses provide a cruder description of the highbrow cultural orientations of citizens.

### *Economic Prosperity and the Expansion of Education*

We test the thesis of the waning influence of class on highbrow lifestyles by a cross-national analysis. As we have discussed in the theoretical section of this paper individualisation theorists argue that there is a causal relationship between the level of modernisation of a country and the decoupling of cultural lifestyles from class membership. It is assumed that this relationship is mediated through different factors like education, value change, dissolution of class-specific milieus and individualisation processes. Unfortunately, our data set does not allow us to test the impact of these mediating factors on cultural consumption. Instead, we can analyze only whether the broader context factor “level of modernisation” which stands at the beginning of the causal chain influences highbrow lifestyles and whether this influence is weaker in highly modernized countries compared to less modernized countries. In order to measure the level of modernization, we use the *Human Development Index* (HDI). The HDI can assign values between 0 and 1, and combines various indicators of economic development, life expectancy and education. Due to the limited number of countries on the macro level and due to the high correlation of the indicators that make up the HDI index, it is not reasonable to test the influence of each of the single macro-level factors (GDP, level of education etc.) separately.

### *Control Variables*

Other studies have shown that additional factors influence the practice of highbrow lifestyles. Some of these factors have been shown to be of particular importance, and we therefore use them as control variables. First, highbrow activity depends on the age and sex of an individual (Katz-Gerro, 2002; van Eijck and Bargeman, 2005; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005). Second, the opportunity structure is crucial in determining whether people participate in certain highbrow activities (Rössel, 2004, 2005). For instance, if an individual has a preference for classical music or opera, but does not live near a concert hall or opera house, this preference is difficult to put into practise. Highbrow cultural infrastructure is notably better in large cities than it is in rural areas. We therefore consider the place of residence of respondents and differentiate rural areas, small towns and large cities. Moreover, we assume that parents of young children have less time and thus fewer opportunities to participate in highbrow activities. For this

reason, a variable is considered that distinguishes between respondents who have no children in their household and respondents who live with at least one child

## **Empirical Results**

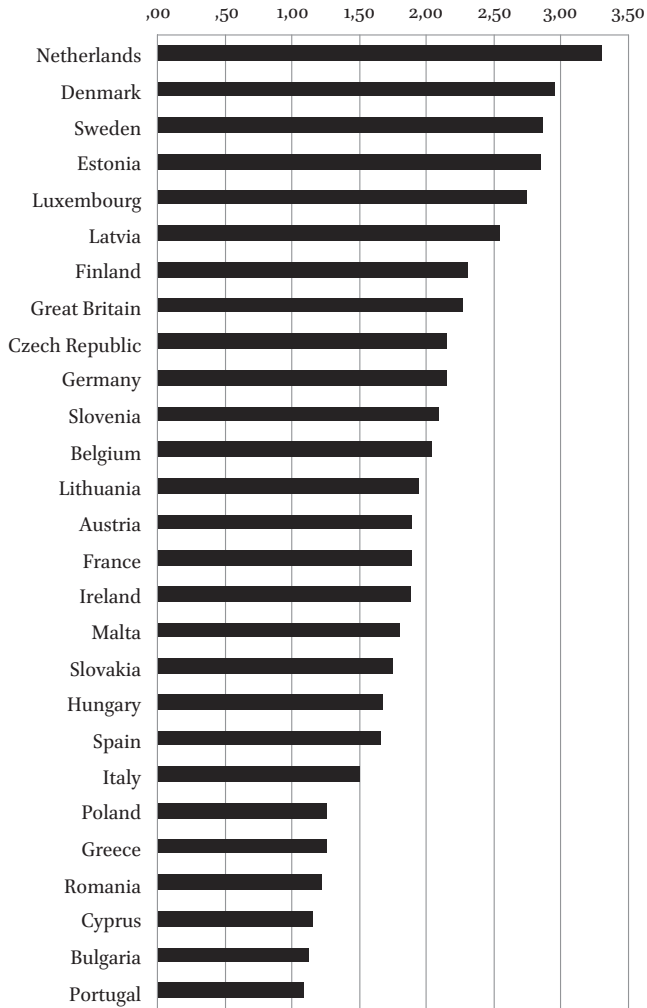
To what extent are highbrow lifestyles spread throughout the analysed countries? Figure 1 shows the mean values for the established scale for highbrow lifestyles in the 27 EU countries. Although the scale used here to describe highbrow consumption ranges from 0 to 12, the mean value for all 27 countries is 1.88. 39.4% of the respondents attended none of the cultural events (theatre, ballet, concert, dance performance, opera, museum, and gallery) in the last 12 months. This indicates that highbrow lifestyles are not widespread throughout the 27 countries.<sup>5</sup> One of the characteristics of elites and elite lifestyles is that they are not practised by large parts of the population, and this seems to be true for all the countries examined here. The distinction of a unique lifestyle which is opposed to popular tastes is a constitutive feature of the elites in all 27 countries.

We attempt to explain the incidence of highbrow lifestyles using multivariate linear regression analysis. Since our explanatory variables are located both on the individual and on the macro-level, and since we are interested in the interaction of both (i.e. we expect the effect of class and education to vary according to the level of modernisation), we estimate multilevel models. In this way, we can test the assumptions made above: First, the influence of class membership and the possession of various forms of cultural capital on highbrow consumption is examined. We then proceed to evaluate the influence of modernisation. Finally, we will see whether the explanatory power of class groups and cultural capital for highbrow activities differs according to the level of modernisation. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 1. Models 1 through 4 in this table are so-called random intercept models, in which the constant (the level of highbrow

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<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the frequency of highbrow cultural activities is often overestimated in surveys. Reuband (2007) compared a representative population survey with a survey of an opera audience. He concludes that compared to the number of opera tickets sold, the frequency of opera visits is overestimated in population surveys. This is probably due to effects of social desirability.

**Figure 1**  
 Highbrow cultural consumption in 27 EU countries



cultural consumption) is allowed to differ between countries. In model 5, a random slope model, the effects of economic capital, education and cultural activities are allowed to differ between countries as well.

*Class Membership and Highbrow Consumption*

With respect to class structure, we first assume that the more capital respondents own, the more likely they are to belong to the upper class and therefore, the more likely they are to engage in a highbrow lifestyle.

The results in table 1 confirm these hypotheses (model 1). About 7 percent of the variance in the highbrow activities on the individual level – i.e. of the differences between respondents in the same country – can be attributed to economic capital and therefore ultimately to class group membership.

**Table 1**  
 Explanation of Highbrow Cultural Consumption:  
 Multilevel Regression Models

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<b>FIXED EFFECTS</b>					
Economic Capital	0.60*** (0.02)			0.41*** (0.02)	0.40*** (0.02)
Institutionalised Cultural Capital – Education		0.76*** (0.04)		0.64*** (0.04)	0.68*** (0.04)
Embodied Cultural Capital – Activities		0.47*** (0.03)		0.45*** (0.03)	0.47*** (0.02)
Level of Modernisation – HDI			0.40*** (0.09)	0.24** (0.07)	0.24*** (0.07)
Residence in Urban Environment				0.23*** (0.02)	0.23*** (0.02)
Children in Household				-0.17*** (0.02)	-0.16*** (0.02)
Age				0.13** (0.04)	0.13** (0.03)
Sex: Female				0.17*** (0.02)	0.17*** (0.02)
Interaction Economic Capital * HDI					-0.05** (0.02)
Interaction Education * HDI					0.06 (0.03)
Interaction Cultural Activities * HDI					-0.08*** (0.02)
Constant	-2.16*** (0.12)	-2.15*** (0.08)	-2.11*** (0.10)	-2.11*** (0.07)	-2.10*** (0.08)

**Table 1** (cont.)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<b>VARIANCE</b>					
Constant	0,391 (0.10)	0,176 (0.05)	0,247 (0.06)	0,134 (0.04)	0,139 (0.04)
Economic Capital					0,004 (0.004)
Education					0,030 (0.01)
Cultural Activities					0,008 (0.003)
Residual	4,651 (0.26)	4,172 (0.23)	5,003 (0.25)	3,949 (0.22)	3,902 (0.22)
<b>MODEL FIT</b>					
Observations	23,194	23,194	23,194	23,194	23,194
Log-Likelihood	-49318	-48085	-50132	-47464	-47374
R <sup>2</sup> Level 1 (Individual Level)	7.0%	16.6%	0.0%	21.1%	22.0%
R <sup>2</sup> Level 2 (Country Level)	3.3%	56.5%	38.8%	66.9%	65.5%
Intercept					
R <sup>2</sup> Level 2 (Country Level)					40.2%
Economic Capital					
R <sup>2</sup> Level 2 (Country Level)					21.9%
Education					
R <sup>2</sup> Level 2 (Country Level)					51.3%
Cultural Activities					

Hierarchical linear regression models. Level 2: Country. Explanatory variables were standardised before estimation. Standard Errors in Parentheses. Random-intercept-only (RIO) model for reference: var(const) = 0.404; var(res) = 5.003; LL=-50139. Calculation of Pseudo-R<sup>2</sup> based on the method suggested by Bryk and Raudenbush 1992: 70, but with the RIO-model as reference model both for both levels. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05.

Since our indicator for economic capital captures an individuals' relative position within a country, this measure can hardly explain any of the level 2, between-country variance.

We assume that institutionalised cultural capital should have a positive impact on highbrow lifestyle because school curricula tend to reflect the aesthetic preferences of the educated middle class and are thus oriented towards highbrow culture. Moreover, we assume that embodied cultural capital has a positive impact on highbrow lifestyle, and that this influence

is particularly strong. As the results show, both institutional and embodied cultural capital have a strong positive effect on the pursuit of highbrow activities (model 2). More than 16 percent of the variance on the individual level can be explained by both variables. Cultural capital is thus of greater importance for highbrow activities than economic capital. Since the average level of cultural capital is quite different across countries, a large amount of the variance between countries is explained as well. The results of the first two models clearly indicate that highbrow lifestyle is found mainly among people in the upper class groups who possess considerable economic and cultural capital, a result which supports Bourdieu's thesis.

### *The Degree of Modernisation and Highbrow Cultural Consumption*

In the next step, the role of the level of modernisation of societies in the prevalence of highbrow lifestyles is investigated. Due to an increase in general material prosperity and a greater availability of cultural capital, in more modernised societies, more people should pursue a highbrow lifestyle than in less modernised countries. As model 3 indicates the level of modernisation has a positive and statistically significant effect on participation in highbrow activities.

The effect of modernisation remains significant in the overall model, in which all variables are included and the effects of age, sex and opportunity structure are controlled for (model 4). Compared to the previous models there is little change. Although the regression coefficients of all variables have become slightly smaller, the substantive interpretation remains the same when we control for the other factors. In particular the two indicators of cultural capital remain the strongest influences, followed by economic capital and the degree of modernisation, which has a significantly lower impact than the variables derived from Bourdieu's thesis. Possibly, the relatively weak influence of modernisation can be attributed to the countries included in the Eurobarometer survey, which vary only moderately in this regard with Bulgaria having the lowest (0.758) and Ireland the highest value (0.909). Place of residence, children, age and sex all have a small, but significant influence on the practise of highbrow activities. Overall, our independent variables explain more than 20 percent of the variation within countries and more than two thirds of the variation between countries.



*On the De-Structuring of Highbrow Consumption*

In a final step of the empirical analysis, both points – the effects of class membership and modernisation – are linked. Following the individualisation thesis, we assume that there is a decoupling of social structure and lifestyles with increasing modernisation. For this reason, the explanatory power of economic and cultural capital for highbrow activities should be lower in countries with a high degree of modernisation than in less modernised countries.

To verify this assumption, we calculated a model in which the effects of economic capital, education and cultural activities were allowed to vary across countries. Moreover, this model includes cross-level interaction effects of these three individual-level variables with the degree of modernisation (HDI). The results are reported in model 5. First of all, the variance components of the model show that there is indeed some cross-country-variation in the effect of economic and cultural capital. Since a normal distribution of the effects is assumed across countries, a variance of 0.03 in the effect of education (equal to a standard deviation of 0.17) means that the effect varies between 0.51 and 0.85 for two thirds of the countries analysed, whereas the values are even more extreme for the rest. Likewise, the effect of cultural activities varies between 0.38 and 0.56 for two thirds of the countries. As expected, parts of these differences result from the level of modernisation in a country. The negative coefficients of the interaction variables for economic capital and HDI and cultural activities and HDI indicate that the higher the level of modernisation, the smaller is the effect of economic capital and cultural activities on highbrow cultural consumption. No significant interaction was found for the education variable, which means that when other factors are controlled for, the effect of education does not depend on the level of modernisation. Again, this might be due to the fact that the countries analysed here vary in their level of modernisation only moderately. Overall, however, model 5 supports our hypothesis that the effect of class membership on cultural consumption declines as countries become more modernised.

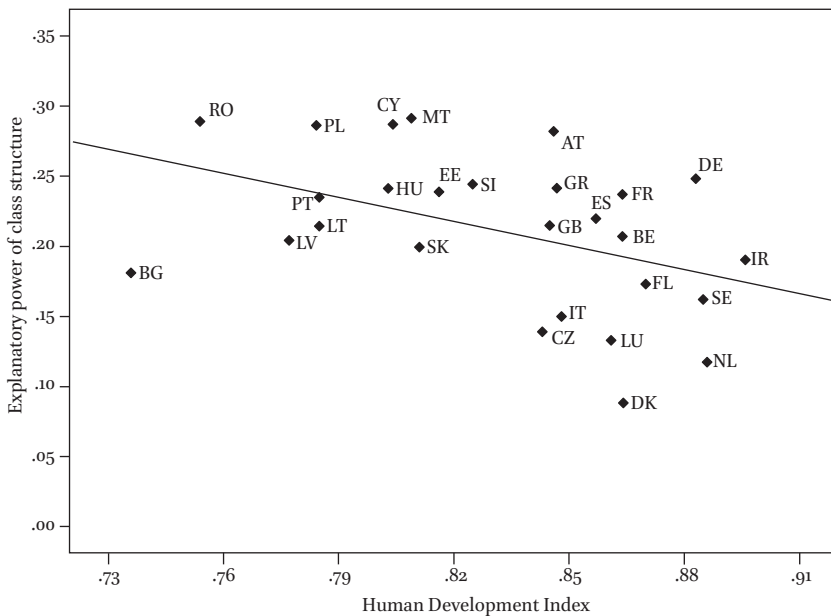
Figure 2 additionally illustrates this relationship: While the x-axis reflects the level of modernisation of the EU countries, the y-axis shows the explanatory power of economic and cultural capital for highbrow lifestyles in the respective country. For this figure, regression models of highbrow cultural

consumption on economic capital, education and cultural activities were calculated for each country separately.

Clearly, there is a relationship between rising prosperity and increasing education on the one hand, and a diminishing structuring of lifestyle by social class on the other. However, one cannot go so far as to speak of a full decoupling. In highly modernised countries, the practise of a highbrow lifestyle remains related to class positions, although to a lesser extent.

Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to systematically analyse the specific causal mechanisms behind this relationship, i.e. to control for other macro level factors at the same time. Our analyses on the individual level suggest that education and economic wealth are major factors at work. For a limited number of countries additional information on cultural policies (e.g. subsidies for cultural institutions) is available. These data suggest that more modernised countries spend more on culture, decreasing costs and

**Figure 2**  
 Explanatory power of class structure for highbrow cultural consumption by HDI – Eurobarometer 67.1 data ( $r = -0.44$ )



enhancing the opportunities to attend cultural events for those who could not afford to do so otherwise.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have examined the extent to which highbrow cultural lifestyles are subject to a structuring by class membership. This was guided by two theories which at first sight appear contradictory: According to Bourdieu's class theory, the overlapping class and capital structures shape the lifestyle of an individual. Because highbrow consumption requires economic and above all embodied cultural capital, the relevant activities of the upper classes remain exclusive. Such a tight coupling of social class and lifestyle is denied by individualisation theories, which propose instead a de-structuring in affluent and highly individualised societies. Our findings show that the two theoretical approaches are not in conflict. In all of the countries considered, highbrow consumption is affected by class position. Highbrow activities are typical among the upper social classes and form an essential part of a distinguished lifestyle. Growing societal prosperity and increasing education, however, have two consequences: First, they enable a larger proportion of the population to participate in highbrow consumption. Second, these factors decrease the shaping influence of social class on highbrow lifestyles.

In another study we have analysed a second survey from the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) on the theme of "Leisure and Sport" using a similar research design as in this article. Since the ISSP also includes non-European countries, the study offers the opportunity to test our hypotheses against other cultural contexts. The results are very similar to the Eurobarometer data of the study at hand. Both analyses confirm our thesis that the higher the degree of modernization of a country, the less highbrow consumption is linked to the class status of an individual.

In closing, two limitations of this analysis should be mentioned: (1) Our data does not allow any conclusions about the specific content, or artefacts, consumed by those who are highbrow-oriented because only the frequency of participation in highbrow activities was requested. Initial information on the content available in various cultural institutions can be obtained from another study, in which we collected the programmes of opera houses from around the world. 50 percent of the operas performed in European

opera houses belonged to only a few composers: Verdi, Mozart, Puccini, Rossini, Wagner and Bizet. Operas by these composers are shown permanently on the stages of many opera houses throughout Europe. The cultural elites in the various European countries seem to have not only a similar social structural basis, they also consume quite similar cultural products. The standardisation and uniformity usually attributed to popular culture is therefore also a feature of the highbrow culture by which the cultural elite distinguishes itself. (2) We are aware of the fact that our analysis has not taken into account the specific historical developments of individual countries and their culture industries by simply classifying countries in terms of their degree of modernisation. Aside from the level of modernisation, for example the cultural infrastructure in the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland, is more developed than, for instance, in France or Italy. Comparative sociologists have pointed out the importance of historical path dependent developments of individual countries, and guard against simplified quantitative analyses which may not fully account for the specific characteristics of individual countries. We agree in principle with this criticism, but believe the two approaches are compatible. Systematic analyses can help to uncover the rough structure and the striking differences between countries. This does not mean that we should not also work out the historically-specific arrangements, which may help to explain the dispersion around the regression line. Despite limitations in the depth of our analysis, we can nevertheless make two claims using the simple feature of the level of modernisation of a country: First, the level of modernisation affects highbrow cultural orientation, and secondly, the effect of social class on highbrow consumption declines with increasing modernisation.

**Appendix: Variables used in the Analyses**

Variable	Eurobarometer 67.1
Highbrow cultural consumption	<p>How many times in the last 12 months did have you a) been to the theatre, b) seen a ballet, dance performance or opera, c) visited museums or galleries, d) been to a concert?</p> <p>0 (never)            1 (1–2 times)            2 (3–5 times)            3 (more than 5 times)</p> <p>additive scale for all 4 activities, values range from 0 to 12;            mean: 2.12, standard deviation (sd): 2.33</p>
Economic capital, class fractions	<p>Ownership of the following: television set, dvd player, cd player, computer, internet access, car, house (still paying for it), house (paid for)</p> <p>additive scale for all items, adjusted by the mean level of ownership in a country; mean: 4.91, sd: 1.87</p>
Institutionalised cultural capital	<p>How old were you when you stopped full-time education? (max. 25 years);            mean: 17.8 years, sd: 3.7 years</p>
Embodied cultural capital	<p>In the last 12 months, have you either on your own or as part of an organised group: a) played a musical instrument, b) acted, c) written something (a text, a poem)?</p> <p>0 (no activity mentioned): 79.6%            1 (at least one activity mentioned): 20.4%</p>
Degree of modernisation	<p>Human Development Index (HDI),            range: 0 to 1; mean: 0.86, sd: 0.04</p>
Children in household	<p>Children under 10 years in household</p> <p>0 (none): 78.6%            1 (at least one): 21.4%</p>

## Appendix (cont.)

Variable	Eurobarometer 67.1
Residence in urban environment	Type of community 1 (rural village, village): 32.4% 2 (small or middle size town): 42.4% 3 (large town): 25.3%
Gender	0 (male): 48.2%, 1 (female): 51.8%
Age	in years; mean: 45.8 years; sd: 18.5 years

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