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Lenger, Alexander

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# Socialization in the Academic and Professional Field: Revealing the Homo Oeconomicus Academicus

Alexander Lenger\*

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**Abstract:** »*Habitusformation und Feldsozialisation im wirtschaftlichen und wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Feld: Die Entschlüsselung des Homo Oeconomicus Academicus*«. The paper analyses the formation of the habitus of economists in Germany. To reconstruct the economic habitus, a qualitative agency analysis will be conducted, i.e., the agency of professors and the process of professional socialization will be revealed. The project follows up on the substantial literature on the indoctrination vs. self-selection debate in economics. In short, this debate asks why economists are more self-oriented than other groups. While some authors find strong evidence for a learning effect in economic studies, other authors provide evidence that a process of self-selection takes place before entry to the economic profession. Overall, the paper aims at answering how stable a habitus can be, and what forms of habitus modification professionals face when entering new fields. The results show that the widely used distinction between indoctrination and selection is not suitable. Rather, I will demonstrate that a field theory perspective considering the process of professional field socialization as a form of field-specific accumulation of capital is needed to explain the ambiguous results.

**Keywords:** Sociology of economics, economists, academic socialization, professional socialization, professional habitus, economic habitus, habitus-field-theory, Pierre Bourdieu.

I don't know that economists necessarily know, in terms of raw knowledge, anything that noneconomists don't. I think what economists do have is a certain way of solving problems, a certain way of looking at the world, that noneconomists often do not. So it's a different way of approaching a problem, and certainly a different set of criteria for making decisions... And many times that's lost on noneconomists. (Interview with an economist, Reay 2012, 59)

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## 1. Introduction

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To date, the sociology of economics (Fourcade 2005) has produced a great number of relevant insights regarding the nature and character of economists.

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\* Alexander Lenger, Zentrum für ökonomische Bildung, Universität Siegen, Kohlbettstr. 15, 57068 Siegen, Germany; lenger@zlb.uni-siegen.de.

In recent years, the strong performative influence of economic scientists and experts on the structure of societal and especially economic processes has been substantiated (Callon 1998; MacKenzie 2006; MacKenzie, Muniesa and Siu 2007; Reay 2012; Hirschman and Berman 2014), the ‘superiority’ of economists within the social sciences has been identified (Lazear 2000; Colander 2007; Lebaron 2006; Fourcade, Ollion and Algan 2015), and the formation of a global profession of economic scientists has been researched (Fourcade 2006). Of course, even if specific national differences persist within this global profession (Lebaron 2001; Fourcade 2009; Hesse 2010; Hirte 2013; Franklin 2016), scholars agree in one regard: Economics constitute an extraordinary, exceptional profession.

Beyond this, a great number of empirical and experimental studies evince a pattern of behaviour specific to the field of economics. Economists do not merely have their own specific rhetoric (McCloskey 1990; Klamer 2007); their attitudes differ significantly from those of the general population with regard to economic matters (Caplan 2001; Rubin 2003; Klamer 2007; Reay 2012), political positions (Kearl et al. 1979; Klein and Stern 2006; Fuller and Geide-Stevenson 2007) as well as questions of morality (Frey, Pommerehne and Gygi 1993; Frey and Meier 2003). Multiple authors have attempted to defend economists’ perspectives, either by presenting studies in which economists display greater potential for cooperation than comparable groups (Yezer, Golfarb and Poppen 1996; Laband and Beil 1999; Frey and Meier 2003; Hu and Liu 2003; Zsolnai 2003), or by arguing for the greater moral value of self-interested individuals (Lanteri 2008). Nevertheless, the findings leave little doubt that economists are indeed more oriented towards self-interest and profitability, and are less morally oriented, than other population groups.<sup>1</sup>

These findings give rise to the question as to how people actually become economists. To date, no satisfactory answer to this question has been given. Instead, one might assert that the education of economic scientists continues to be something of a “black box” in sociological research (Maesse 2017). There exist, at best, a few isolated findings on the structural role of graduate schools (Colander 2006, 2007; Fourcade 2009; Maesse 2014, 2017), on economic textbooks (Hill 2000; Kalmi 2006; Baer 2012; Zuidhof 2013), or on the curriculum in the teaching of economics (Brue 1996; Parkin 2000; Gärtner 2001; Gärtner, Griesbach and Jung 2013). It is the goal of this article to bring to the discussion a viable theoretical model for a better understanding of the relationship between the biographical career and the professional behaviour of economic scientists. My central argument is that, in order to conceptualize and

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<sup>1</sup> The extent to which this orientation is to be considered positive or negative is discussed with much controversy and critique in the economic sciences (e.g. Davis 2006; Dequech 2007-2008; Fullbrook 2007, 2009; Freeman 2010). The debate regarding the modernization of the economic sciences is, however, of no consequence for this article.

empirically analyse the economists' profession, one must take into account both the substantive and epistemological character of their academic socialization as well as the process of socialization in the professional field of the economic sciences. As biographical competencies – patterns of thought and perception – influence not just everyday behaviour, but also the occupational behaviour of economists, it should be asked, with specific reference to Pierre Bourdieu's habitus-field concept, how the entire habitus and the formation of an "economic style of reason" (Hirschman and Berman 2012, 790) can be examined as a conceptual whole.

To this end, I propose a theoretical approach in which research interests are focused equally on the process of the socialization of economic scientists both academically and professionally, taking into account their underlying habitus. In other words: I am of the opinion that socialization first takes place in an academic context, when studying the economic sciences, but that economists first truly become economic *scientists* upon their entry into the field of the economic sciences as a profession. I will demonstrate that, in order to analyse the economic profession, one must take into consideration both the preliminary phase of academic socialization and the later phase of professional socialization into the field of economic sciences.

As such, the following observations correspond directly to findings from research on academic cultures specific to certain disciplines. This form of research assumes that each academic discipline has its own cultural field, and that students will, during their studies, develop an academic habitus specific to that field (Bucher and Strass 1961; Becher and Trowler 2001). This perspective is, however, overly flexible, since the resulting antithesis between academic habitus and everyday principles of assessment is unworkable in practice. An academic habitus cannot simply be interpreted as behaviour in the form of certain roles, and therefore cannot be separated from an actor's personality (Krais and Gebauer 2002).

On a superordinate level, then, this article aims to uncover the main mechanisms driving the habitus formation in economists, and to develop a comprehensive framework for researching these processes. In order to illustrate my argument, I make use of both empirical findings from research on the academic culture of scientists, and of my own material derived from interviews with professors in several different disciplines at German universities. The empirical findings attest to the existence of specific forms of socialization in economics, in both academic studies and the professional field. The implementation of Bourdieu's habitus-field concept shows that a habitus of the economic profession cannot be derived merely from the process of socialization in a professional or academic context, for a perspective of this kind disregards the uniformity of a person's actions, reproducing instead only the occupational or situative forms of behaviour in specific roles. As such, the approach applied here furthers traditional research on academic cultures, which assumes that familial (or bio-

graphical) primary socialization and occupational (or academic) secondary socialization occur in isolation from one another, and represent different stages of the life course.

The chief value of the habitus-field concept for the analysis of the field of economic science is in the way in which it takes into account the intermediate character of the relationship between subject and object, between structure and action, and between position and positioning, thus creating a framework for the analysis of the interaction between the formation of habitus and the structures of a field. According to Bourdieu (1996 [1979], 101), the practice to be explained is composed of the combination of opportunities for action (habitus and capital) within certain structures (field). With his concept of habitus, Bourdieu describes a person's "schemes of perception, thought and action," in which the incorporation of all their prior social experiences is expressed (Bourdieu 1990 [1980], 54). For Bourdieu, the habitus is the underlying structure of behavioural patterns; it can create an infinite number of regulated practices to adapt to new situations, while simultaneously guaranteeing the consistency of an individual's action over multiple contexts and situations (for more details, see Bourdieu 1990 [1980], 1996 [1979]; Jenkins 2001 [1992]; Lenger, Schneickert and Schumacher 2013b). The concept of habitus is complemented by Bourdieu's concept of the field: This addition is founded on the insight that an individual will not, in fact, behave identically in every specific context, but that "depending upon the stimuli and structure of the field, the very same habitus will generate different, even opposite, outcomes" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 135).

This article is structured as follows: First, I will sketch out key research findings on the academic culture of economics. Although there have, to date, been no comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and systematic investigations of young people's career selection motives, the individual findings essentially point to a selection effect by which certain groups of people are significantly more likely than others to choose to study the economic sciences (Section 2). These observations will be further substantiated in the next section, using interviews with professors of economics, in which characteristics specific to the field come to light which reinforce the selection process during the education of economists (Section 3). The insight that the unique nature of economic scientists is a result predominantly of selection effects and subjective perceptions at the start of their studies, reinforced during schooling and socialization processes in the field by adaptive learning outcomes, corresponds directly to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, and his notion of field-specific habitus (Section 4). The article concludes with a brief summary (Section 5).

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## 2. Academic Socialization in the Economic Sciences: Indoctrination and Self-Selection

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Questions regarding the emergence of a specific disciplinary pattern of behaviour and the existence of an academic habitus in the economic sciences can only be answered empirically. It must be established which empirical findings point to the development of a field-specific habitus during the study of the economic sciences, and consequently which conclusions are to be drawn for the education of future economists. In order to establish the existence of an academic habitus in the economic sciences, firstly, the following section will expand upon existing studies on selection and indoctrination effects. Subsequently, these observations will be complemented by additional qualitative surveys, as well as some reflections from occupational sociology. From the perspective of a sociology of economics, it should be noted that economic scientists have contributed a great deal of empirical findings on their own profession, albeit without systematizing these findings; also, they neither critically reflect upon the relevant consequences, nor do they apply them to a discussion of the status quo in economic sciences.

It has already been noted that multiple experimental studies have shown that economists display more egoistical and self-interested behaviour than the general population (illustrative here are the prominent studies by Marwell and Ames 1981; Frey 1986; Carter and Irons 1991; Frank, Gilovich and Regan 1993, 1996; Frey, Pommerehne and Gygi 1993; Rubinstein 2006; a good overview is given in Ruske and Suttner 2012). These studies are evidence of practical behaviour analogue to the heuristic – as taught in mainstream economics study programmes – of a strictly rational, self-interest oriented, profit-maximizing *homo oeconomicus* (Colander 2006). By now, it should be indisputable – the findings can certainly be interpreted in this way – that economists behave with a stronger orientation towards self-interest and profit than the average citizen. The adoption of the heuristic for real processes of decision and action is aptly referred to by Michel Callon (2007) as the performativity of economics. Gerald Marwell and Ruth Ames (1981) were able to show, for example, that students of economics will offer significantly lower group contributions in public good games than students of other subjects.<sup>2</sup> John Carter and Michael Irons found the same effect in ultimatum games (Carter and Irons 1991).

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<sup>2</sup> It is, however, in principle worth noting that – with 49% in the general population, and 24% among students of economics – these individuals all deviate significantly from the dominant strategy of non-participation, which is what the economic behavioural model would theoretically predict.

There are three competing schools of thought in literature explaining these differences (Lenger 2016). The first fraction advances what it calls the *theory of indoctrination* or *learning*, where students' economics degree programme 'indoctrinates' them with certain values (e.g. Frank, Gilovich and Regan 1993; Selten and Ockenfels 1998). Perhaps the most prominent proponent of this theory was Georg Stigler, who argued as long ago as the 1950s that the main reason for the more conservative attitudes among economists was their academic education:

The main reason for the conservatism surely lies in the effect of the scientific training the economist receives. He is drilled in the problems of *all* economic systems and in the methods by which a price system solves these problems. It becomes impossible for the trained economist to believe that a small group of selfish capitalists dictates the main outlines of the allocation of resources and the determination of outputs. (Stigler 1959, 528)

Empirical support for Stigler's theory can be found, for example, in Scott and Rothman (1975). They researched the effect of just a one-semester introductory economics course on student opinions relating to economic issues. Like Stigler, they found that economics students and students with higher TUCE (Test of Understanding of College Economics) scores tend to be more conservative.

A second group, representing a contrary position to the indoctrination school of thought, concludes that, even before beginning their studies, economists already display very different preferences from those of other young students. Steven E. Rhoads pointedly summarizes this perspective as follows:

People who think that the best things in life are free are not likely to become economists. People who think money matters and narrow self-interest makes sense are more likely to become economists. (Rhoads 1985, 162)

The argument is that differences established between economists and non-economists can be ascribed to (*self*) *selection effects*. According to this theory, certain groups of people are more likely to choose to study economic sciences than other groups do (Carter and Irons 1991; Frank, Gilovich and Regan 1993; Frey and Meier 2003, 2005; Lanteri 2008; Ruske and Suttner 2012).

The selection theory is based on empirical findings such as the comparative study by Frey, Pommerehne and Gygi (1993); here, different population groups were asked about their opinion on price mechanisms and other allocation processes. Along with a control group, the sample contained students in introductory economics lectures and more advanced economics students. The results show significant differences between students in their first semester and the general population, but not between first semester students and more advanced students (*ibid.*, 273-7).

In order to test these results, Haucap and Just (2010) replicated the study: As in the original study, their evaluation patterns showed significant differences between the first-year economists and other groups. However, the difference is even greater for the more advanced economists. Their findings suggest that

individuals' values with regard to price mechanisms differ even before entering university, but that they are also influenced (or indeed reinforced) by the study programme itself. It seems that there is a level of interaction between the selection and the learning effect (cf. Cipriani, Lubian and Zago 2009):

Overall, it appears that students in economics classes tend to naturally like the market, but this preference is further nurtured over the course of their study. In addition, students in economics courses apparently become more sceptical regarding local community allocation. (Haucap and Just 2010, 245)

These two approaches, both of which focus on the specific preferences of economists, are complemented by a third faction that does not ascribe specific behaviour of economists to their academic socialization or a process of self-selection. Rather it explains these specific forms of behaviour during experiments as the result of a greater ability to assess subjective restrictions. The argument here is that the differences found between the behaviour of economists and normal citizens cannot necessarily be attributed to internalized preferences specific to economists' divergent moral orientations: Rather, their actions are the result of their greater knowledge of the field. The theory being proposed here is that economists, when participating in economic experiments, achieve better (or more self-serving) game results because they assess both subjective and objective restrictions (that is, the game situations) differently, in a manner better suited to the situation: In other words, they have greater *expertise* with regard to economic distribution experiments (cf. Lenger and Wolf 2018). The underlying social preferences, however, are thought to be the same as those of other population groups.

Proponents of the expertise theory state that the differences manifested between the various groups are merely revealed preferences (Samuelson 1948), and that the underlying intended behaviour is ultimately unobservable. Consequently, no inference can be made as to individuals' actual orders of preference or utility functions (Bruni and Sugden 2007). With reference to findings from empirical research on justice (Miller 1999), the argument from this perspective is that any differences found by experiments are 'merely' framing effects (Tversky and Kahneman 1986; Ellingsen et al. 2012); on an individual level, it is argued, interpretive frameworks function as mental representations and interpretations of the world, which result – in market situations (Lieberman, Samuels and Ross 2004), or in competitive environments like the banking sector (Cohn, Fehr and Götte 2014) – in self-serving behaviour and are interpreted, in these specific contexts, as the social norm (Bicchieri 2006). This perspective is compatible with the psychological explanatory model, which states that the self-serving behaviour we observe in experiments is merely a reflection of "local characteristics," activated exclusively in connection with specific situations (Miller 2003, 368, 382-8). One common explanation for the learning effect is thus that students of economics, when participating in laboratory experiments, categorize their situative decision options differently, and



more in line with the “economic way of thinking” than students of other subjects (Lanteri 2008, 17).

The empirical data available on academic socialization must thus be considered highly ambivalent, and a conclusive assessment is not possible now. It should be noted that in empirical analyses of this phenomenon, the selection theory is inferred from the fact that the differences found between economists and non-economists can already be observed in first year students (Frey and Meier 2003, 452), and it is in this context that Alessandro Lanteri rightly points out two key problems with the studies currently available: On the one hand, there is still a lack of relevant studies on the indoctrination effect in schools (Lanteri 2008, 12), and on the other, economists as a group are compared with the highly heterogeneous group of non-economists, which might disguise the similar forms of behaviour in other academic fields (*ibid.*, 15). Furthermore, it should be made clear that the empirical findings provide evidence for all three interpretations. Together, the studies indicate the presence of a selection effect, or a significantly stronger selection effect compared to the learning effect or the perceived restrictions effect (Ruske and Suttner 2012, 181; Lanteri 2008, 3). The key difference between the three explanatory approaches is, in my opinion, that while the indoctrination faction consider preferences to be variable and mutable, the selection and restriction factions present arguments for fundamental preferences in the sense of stable behavioural dispositions – that is, of a *habitus* operating in the background. In this case, the findings would be indicative of the effect of a formative, underlying *habitus*, making this argument the point of departure for the theoretical observations in Section 4. Nevertheless, it seems important to point out again that a definite empirical documentation of individuals’ economic preferences is yet to be made, and that this undertaking cannot be accomplished with methods of experimental economics (Lenger and Goldschmidt 2014). However, before we further discuss the empirical findings on academic socialization, I would like to point to the specific conditions under which professional socialization in the field of economics takes place.

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### 3. Professional Socialization in the Field of Economic Sciences

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In order to become an economic scientist, students – having studied economics and undergone an academic socialization – must enter the field of economic sciences. It is at this point that research focuses on questions of professional field socialization. I argue that students are not part of the economic field since they do not compete for positions in the field and do not hold own positions in scientific form and content. However, studying economics and adopting an economic *habitus* must be seen as some kind of field socialisation enabling students in the first place to enter the field of economics as a professional. I

will approach these questions drawing on insights gathered by interviewing 32 professors in various subjects at German universities.<sup>3</sup> To get a better understanding of the following findings, it should be noted beforehand that the field of economics has undergone a transformation, beginning in the 1950s, so that it now resembles a quasi-scientific discipline. Today, Modern Economics – in the sense of a mathematized and supposed value-free approach to microeconomics, macroeconomics, and econometrics – is taught universally in practice (Blinder 1999; Colander 2007; Lenger and Taaffe 2014). As such, it can be said that there exists little variance with regard to the economic content taught at different venues of higher education.

In order to analyse social fields, the interaction between the field and the actors participating in that field must be defined. Fields, here, consist of a complex relationship of dependency between dispositions, positions, and positionings (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 104-5). The explicit and implicit epistemic knowledge-base which professors acquire dispositively are dependent on their position in the field, and manifest in the corresponding substantive positionings (cf. Maesse 2018; Schmidt-Wellenburg 2018). Disposition is the term for the habitual preconditions with which a professor is equipped, and which he or she uses in the competition for social positions in the field. Of crucial importance here, are social background, academic education, and professional socialization; someone who has grown up in an upper middle-class setting has different attitudes to the academic world and scientific research than someone whose background is less characterized by intellectual pursuits. As with all social fields, a habitus attuned to the specific field of the economic sciences represents a competitive advantage for improved opportunities in this field.

The logic and structure of social fields are nonetheless not identical with the structure of the social space. Rather, it should be noted that fields which are in some way involved with symbolic production implement their own specific logic and field-internal rules, thus creating a sort of refractory effect: This logic can be best visualized with reference to the process of positioning in the academic field (for example in Bourdieu's work, positioning is an academic's scientific output). The academic field is thus a productive space, one in which scientific contribution is ordered hierarchically. Scientific works are only

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<sup>3</sup> In the context of a research project on the working and living circumstances of professors at the University of Freiburg, a total of 32 guided, problem-oriented interviews were carried out at German universities with professors of various subjects (for more information see Lenger 2015, 2017; Lenger et al. 2016). For the purposes of this paper the three economists from the corpus as a whole were compared to the professors from other subjects. The interviews all lasted between one and two hours, and were structured according to six question complexes, although efforts were made to preserve a general sense of conversation, in the spirit of a process-oriented form of interviews. In order to reconstruct the process of professional field socialization, both the agency analysis and the qualitative content analysis method were used.

noteworthy through their relevance to other scientific contributions and discourses, by way of connections to existing scientific papers and so on. Decisive here is that scientific papers, especially an individual's doctorate and habilitation, are assigned a distinct value which functions as a unique distinguishing feature, and thus may be perceived as a specific positioning in the field. Citing established work is, in this context, both a strategy of dissociation from and of participation in the scientific discourse.

The process of scientific positioning thus stands in direct correlation to a scientist's disposition, at least to the extent that their habitus forms the foundation of their aesthetic perception. Here, Bourdieu proposes a homology between dispositions and scientific positioning: The social opportunities for the production of scientific work and their actual substantive production are, for Bourdieu, the two elements that determine one's position in the social field. When applied to the scientific field, scientific positioning is thus representative of the efforts that individuals expend in competing for reputation in their academic occupations. The implementation of certain themes, spheres of research, or methods is thus the result of a process of reflection or categorization with regard to the intrinsic value of specific approaches in the scientific field.

A field analysis has to take all three tiers into account: the tier of habitual disposition, characterized by the social setting during primary and secondary socialization; the tier of positioning in the scientific field, characterized by rites of initiation and tertiary socialization in the field itself; and the tier of the current position in the field, characterized by an individual's academic career and their available reserves of field-specific capital. As such, a Bourdieusian field analysis runs counter to both a purely epistemological perspective on scientific production and to a purely social perspective on forms of scientific organization (Lenger and Rhein 2018). According to Bourdieu, neither the scientists themselves nor their scientific research can be taken as the sole starting point in the analysis of an academic field; rather, it is the underlying structures – incorporated in the habitus of the participating actors, and expressed in terms of field-specific forms of capital, opinions, and disputes – which reveal the structure of the scientific field.

In the following, I present the representational patterns of the interviewed economists. The first key finding is, as is the case for other disciplines, that a great deal of influence on an individual's personality and career is ascribed to their study programme and place of education: "Your studies shape you, no question at all." The venue of higher education is emphasized as being particularly formative: "In that sense, [Place] had a very strong influence on me, and even today, I still say that I studied under [Person]." As in other disciplines, economists underline the formative effect of *where* they studied, although tellingly they do not impute a connection between the venue and the actual content or focus of their studies, emphasizing instead the personal relationship with a mentor. One professor, for example, stated:

Where I studied? Not all that important. [...] I mean, it was a town I liked living in, and a faculty where I had lots of friends and acquaintances, but it wasn't as important to me as perhaps for other people, I think, where the actual work took place.

As in all other disciplines, the role of the supervisor in a PhD student's socialization was felt by economists to be particularly important ("played a really major role"). Admittance into the scientific field (again, as in other disciplines) occurred as the result of being directly approached by the prospective doctoral supervisor: "And so my supervisor invited me to come and speak to him." This phase is referred to explicitly as a rite of initiation

it was this big name in research, [Name], who first got me involved. Firstly, it was the impression [he/she] made on me, but then also the way [he/she] included me from the very start... That was kind of my initiation.

In doing so, participants emphasized the fact that both their mentor's personality and their own involvement in the institution were necessary to enable their first steps in the scientific field. "And [he/she] also gave me a proper grounding in econometrics and theory." The authority of these traditional initiation circles flows from established professors, described by the novices as "personalities" with "a great deal of influence," who prepare their protégés for a scientific career: "[Name] more or less was my initiation, and [he/she] said to me, at the last conference we visited together, 'I can definitely see you continuing with this.'" As a whole, the economists analysed here, as professors in other disciplines, demonstrate the typical process of field socialization via initiation and acceptance on the part of established personalities (cf. Engler 2001; Beaufays 2003; Schneickert 2013). It is important to note that the place of education and doctoral supervisor structure not only the dispositions, but also the economists' positions, in the form of symbolic capital, throughout their career. However, the professors surveyed here are categorically not reaffirming the power of agency over their own careers; they describe a passive form of field socialization which can be widely observed in the academic field in general (cf. Lenger et al. 2016):

and then I got a nice position with a good starting wage, secure for the whole time I was there [...] and I was able to finish my habilitation quite comfortably, and it was all pretty great.

On the other hand, significant differences compared to other disciplines in the social sciences can be observed with regard to, firstly, the above-average assessment of the value of graduate schools; secondly, the strong emphasis on time spent abroad; and thirdly, the importance of the working group for the research process and for the scientific working method itself.

Particularly noteworthy is the economists' consistently positive assessment of structured PhD programmes, which impart the "methodological equipment" and academic "refinement" necessary for "successful research in the future," for example "how to write a good article." One becomes, to a certain extent, "empowered" to work in the sciences; "you take a lot with you," the "focus

becomes stronger than ever,” “really going into depth.” The programmes’ function in providing a service is always emphasized here:

If you have decided as a postgrad to focus, say, on a quantitative approach, whatever the orientation, it’s always helpful to have been somewhere like that and not to have to have taught it all to yourself.

On this level of socialization, the process of personal development towards becoming a researcher is also foregrounded: “There was a strong research orientation, which was introduced there by way of a deeper focus on methodology.” The sense of still being educated is particularly underlined: “Well, you really have to think about whether you really want to go through that again, continue with your education.” The doctorate is conceptualized as the third step in one’s education, after school and the first university degree, which – unlike in other disciplines – does not end with a master’s degree itself. Participation in a graduate programme is also equated with positive future career outcomes:

Basically, when you do the graduate programme, you put off earning money for two years, or maybe three years, and you have to make sure you’re making ends meet. Gets pretty stressful, over time, and you have to work hard, but then again, at the end of the process it has a pretty good return.

Alternatively, a graduate programme might be seen as a way of reducing the chances of failure, saving a lot of “time” and “risk”: “It can free you from a lot of things – and it wasn’t an option before, which is why a lot of people did fail, because they just weren’t able to acquire the formal apparatus on their own.”

The structure of the graduate programme is considered to be a positive development for the discipline:

On the doctoral level, we have a lot more graduate programmes than before, which means, firstly, that people are getting a better education; secondly, they also have more freedom now, with more grants allowing people to write their dissertations without having to teach as part of the faculty.

“That means the opportunities for taking part in a graduate programme are better than they once were. It really offers a lot of opportunities.” Correspondingly, this kind of structured programme is widely seen as a positive: “Well, to pretty much complete an entire doctoral programme on that level, to really tackle these things in depth, methodologically [...] I would say that’s quite tempting.”

The high relevance of these structured PhD programmes corresponds directly to the great value ascribed to time spent abroad during one’s education. The “decision to travel abroad lead, ultimately, to a really profound, fundamental development.” As in other disciplines, time overseas was described as “very productive,” bringing with it “lots of input” and a way to “break out of the relatively uninteresting world at your own university.” Additionally, even during the doctorate itself, time abroad also takes on the function, in the economic sciences, of network building and international cooperation:

And then I went overseas: First I was in [Country A], and then [Country B], and I finished my dissertation at that time, already beginning my work with my colleagues there too.

It is significant that contacts such as these do not come about by chance, but are planned strategically: “That is, I really did plan it like that, essentially.” Time spent abroad, in particular, is seen as a key requirement for progress in the scientific field, and the strategic side of this is noted: “Then, I also went to [Country C], with the basic plan to continue there, and I mentioned this straight away to [Name] when he made me the offer.” These contacts are maintained and implemented in the transition into the post-doc phase: “On the post-doctoral level, in particular, in [Country D] then, there was a good group of people, who I could really work with. And this led to further projects.” This cooperation is itself dominated by strategic career planning:

We had [...] better chances of being accepted by the top journals if we were working with Americans, or with researchers from American universities, compared to European ones. And you have to use that. These are the network effects that are important, and it's no good being naïve, you know [...] they're not just waiting for you.

However, this context does not merely assume international cooperation; time spent abroad “is also a kind of signal on your résumé.” In cases where no time has been spent abroad, the assessment is clear: “Basically, if you haven't, until then, up to your doctorate, left Germany, you have to leave right after doing your thesis, you have to spend the first year of the post-doc period overseas.” This position is reinforced by a professor who “emphatically recommend[s]” a stay overseas, calling it “a big mistake not to.”

Explicit reference is made here to the positive effects of a guest residence in the USA, or participation in conferences there (“you can go to America, too”). The perception is that “international interdependence has increased,” and that “increasingly, the scientific community internationally is converging.” As such, “it seems to make sense to go abroad.” Time spent in the USA is seen as an explicit competitive advantage in Germany. Symptomatic here is the systematic relationship between structured doctoral programmes and time spent overseas: “Well, if you want to go through the doctoral programme, and you get a chance to do your PhD at a top college in the States, why not? It's a great opportunity, you have to take it.” The findings sketched out here corroborate directly those on the United States' global dominance in the economic sciences (Blinder 1999; Lebaron 2006; Reay 2012; Fourcade, Ollion and Yann 2015).

A specific segment of the economics profession, generally US or UK educated, thus establishes its international power on the very basis of the contestability of national economics markets. (Fourcade 2006, 152)

Recently, preliminary studies give evidence for the positive effect between time spent in the US and being offered a professorship in Germany and France (Beyer and Massih-Tehrani 2017).

There is a third factor, in which economics differ from other social sciences and humanities considerably: in their emphasis on scientific networks and collaboration in research groups.

The appointments committee are looking for people who will be a real asset for their faculty, who are independent, who have personality, but who are still collaborative – not a narcissist, but someone who can work with colleagues but think independently.

Networks are “very important” or even “extremely important”; this is something all the economists surveyed agreed upon, so that “you’re not alone in your scientific niche.” It is notable that, in their emphasis on networks and working groups, the economic sciences resemble a natural science, even explicitly discussing this structural affinity:

Cooperation has become immensely important. Of course, this has been common practice in the natural sciences for years now. Almost always just having groups of researchers working together. But it’s become much more common in the economic sciences too.

This structural change in the field of economics underscores the significance of the qualitative shift the discipline has undergone. Where intellectual personalities used to dominate the field – as in the other humanities and arts – (and they are still thought of as responsible for initiation into the field), the surveyed professors’ perception of the modes of operation in the economic sciences is one of a transition to a more strictly scientific working practice (cf. Knorr Cetina 1981, 1999). In this description of the field’s logic, groups of authors and researchers take the place originally occupied by individuals: “I am absolutely convinced [...] that the average number of authors in the Top Five has gone up in the last thirty years.” Interestingly, the professor quoted here explains this increase with the emergence of experimental economics (cf. Jatteau 2018), a decidedly scientific, laboratory-based research approach:

Well, the mere fact that, in experimental economic research, you often have, or need, teams of author, because carrying out experiments takes a fair amount of time, and you need an appropriate division of labour. That all points to the proliferation of networking and working in teams of authors.

The construct of the research group is defined, in turn, by a form of socialization specific to the field, albeit now in a different context. Initiation into the field still occurs by way of personalities:

When I was writing my first papers with [Name], we sat together at a round table. [He/she] chain-smoked, and we drank pots and pots of coffee, going over wordings together. Like, we really wrote the text together. Very few people do that. Of course, that’s more or less a kind of club good that [he/she] was providing for [his/her] colleagues there. [He/she] basically taught us like that.

This collaborative intercession has its roots equally in the field-specific socialization discussed above and in the dominant status of individual personalities, though now with a focus on establishing a network-based *polis* and social capital

(Boltanski and Chiapello 2006 [1999]; Lenger 2015). Working groups are constructed here, as in the physical sciences, in a quasi-familial context (Beaufays 2003), understood as “scientific friendship networks.” In this respect, it should be noted that economics constitute a social science when considering their object, but that the methods of operation, compared to other social sciences, clearly display characteristics of research practices from the natural sciences.

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#### 4. Academic Habitus and Field-Specific Socialization in Economics

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In this closing section, I will show how the empirical findings on academic and professional socialization in the field of economics sketched out before can be theoretically localized. Here Pierre Bourdieu’s habitus-field theory systematically links individual dispositions (preferences) and field structures (positions and positionings). It allows us to focus on economic scientists’ consistent and coherent everyday behaviour, even if they are following no formal rules and do not have access to complete information regarding the field of economics itself.

I have already pointed out that the theoretical concept of a professional habitus, as often assumed in research on academic cultures, is way too static: The resulting opposition between an academic habitus and everyday principles of evaluation is not, in practice, valid; an academic habitus cannot be interpreted as role-based behaviour, being instead inseparably intertwined with the habitus as a whole (Krais and Gebauer 2002). Whereas the supposed analytical potential of the term “role” comes from the way it enables an explanation of varying social behaviour in specific situations, it must be noted that – from the perspective of habitus-field theory – such divisions into multiple social roles is not representative of reality, and there is no analytical validity to the idea of a mere “performer of roles who, as if using a coat rack, can switch between various roles” (Krais 2004, 94; own translation). The underlying evaluative patterns of the habitus, learned during primary socialization, cannot simply be ignored – on the contrary, they form the basis of every professional habitus.

The question remains as to the mutability of habitual personality characteristics over an individual’s life course. If one adheres to Bourdieu with regard to the adaptability of the habitus, there exists little margin for freely chosen behaviour or radical breaks with one’s previous biography (Bourdieu 1996 [1979], 109, 142; 1990 [1980], 63). A habitus, once it is incorporated, possesses a considerable degree of persistence, and its effects can be felt throughout the life course in spite of changing social circumstances; while doing so, however, it remains in the background as an influence on the personality, and can be conceived of in the field as essentially open:

Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experi-



ences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 133)

Based on Bourdieu's construct, it seems highly implausible that a person's habitus might be completely subsumed under a professional or academic habitus.

At this point, the benefits of the habitus-field concept for the analysis of the economic habitus and for a sociology of economics become clear: In practice, social actors act in accordance with their fundamental habitus, and do not simply adjust their behaviour to conform to professional demands and discipline-specific role expectations. The habitus forms a stable and practically immutable basic structure, from which patterns of behaviour may diverge occasionally, but not permanently. The conformity conflicts arising from the disparity between habitus and field structure are mirrored, illustratively, in the dissatisfaction felt by many students of economics with their degree programmes, and may also partially explain the protests voiced against the one-sided dominance of mainstream economics (Komlos 2015; Lenger 2016; cf. also the discussions on this topic in the *Journal of Real-World Economics Review*). Attempted explanations fall short in the sense that they ascribe self-interested behaviour to individually framed game situations and stereotypical role behaviour:

It seems plausible that freshmen play the way they believe an economist should behave. Such a belief, moreover, probably follows some stereotypical idea of economists. (Lanteri 2008, 18)

The relationship between primary and secondary socialization is, however, yet to be fully established within Bourdieu's habitus-field concept (Lenger, Schneickert and Schumacher 2013a, 23, 30). It is Bourdieu's fundamental insight that habitual dispositions remain stable over time, and continue to define praxis even when they are no longer suitable for the structures of a changing environment (Bohn and Hahn 2007, 260). The assumption of hysteresis, or inertia (cf. Bourdieu 1996 [1979], 109; 1990 [1980], 59) implies the presence of a certain "prevalence of primary conditioning in the socialization process, which leads to a theory of the endurance of the conditions of acquisition in the forms of practice" (Bohn and Hahn 2007, 260; own translation).

It is indisputable that there is a need for a conceptual distinction between primary socialization at a developmental age and secondary socialization as an adult (Cicourel 1993). Jefferey Everett, for example, locates the habitus between private, primary socialization and occupational, secondary socialization: "Habitus is a combination of the social actor's deeply ingrained identity and his or her less fixed, occupational identity" (Everett 2002). Cornelia Bohn and Alois Hahn (2007, 260-1) also propose a distinction between the "primary habitus," originating in the family, and a multitude of "secondary habitus," acquired and practised in the relevant social fields at later stages in a person's biography. In doing so, they consolidate Bourdieu's somewhat generalized observation that individuals, in addition to their original habitus, are required to

acquire additional capital relevant to each respective field, and thus create opportunities for action.

Consequently, the habitus cannot be conceived as open, or at least easily changeable, as it cannot be equated with one specific action or a set of ways of acting; instead, in the background, primary socialization is acting as a significant influence on one's personality. Following on from the empirical findings on the selection and learning effect in the economic field, it is my opinion that the emergence of a professional economic habitus must be seen as an accumulation of field-specific capital during the process of field socialization. All these processes of development, learning, construction, and crisis response are to be thought of as a life-long process, which economists undergo, because the continuous adaptation to their professional environment, a continual modification of their habitus. As such, economists carry with them upon entry into the field of economic sciences certain habitual dispositions deriving from individual class-specific, ethnic, cultural, and similar influences; they are also influenced by an additional, specifically academic effect by way of their educational and occupational career (Jenkins 2001 [1992], 90).

As both of these aspects are taken into consideration, Bourdieu's theory is suitable to provide a comprehensive framework to explain the formation of economists' habitus. Despite the hysteresis effect and the lasting influence of the primary habitus (the selection and restriction effect), it is reasonable to argue that the habitus in the field of the economic sciences is essentially subject to adaptation and continual development (or learning effects). Bourdieu sums this up aptly when discussing the phenomenon of admittance into a field:

In reality, what the new entrant must bring into the game is not the habitus that is tacitly or explicitly demanded there, but a habitus that is practically compatible, or sufficient close, and above all malleable and capable of being converted into the required habitus, in short, congruent and docile, amenable to restructuring. (Bourdieu 2000 [1997], 100)

This leads to the development of a theoretical perspective which makes provisions for the fact each individual discipline in tertiary education is characterized by specific academic cultures (Becher and Trowler 2001) and epistemological regimes (Knorr Cetina 1999); the question arises to what extent academic cultures contribute to the constitution of modes of behaviour specific to certain disciplines by way of their specific mechanisms of admittance and exclusion, as well as via their (often concealed) dynamics of transmission and reproduction. From this perspective, a field-specific habitus is a set of dispositions and field-specific forms of capital, which an actor acquires over a period in familiar surroundings. Practical behaviour nevertheless continues to be decisively influenced by the original habitus. This reading corresponds directly with the findings sketched out here, on academic and on professional socialization in the field of economics, and provides a consistent theoretical explanation for the observability in practice of a selection effect and subsequent learning effect.

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## 5. Conclusion

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The empirical findings in this article can only serve to indicate the potential for further research, although they point to far-reaching consequences for the future of occupational sociological research on the sociology of economics. Firstly, the findings demonstrate the durability of habitus dispositions throughout the process of academic and professional socialization. The findings sketched out here show clearly the specific modes of thought and behaviour displayed by economists, and corroborate the existence of a strong self-selection effect when students choose a degree programme, and of a mild learning effect of studying itself. The processes of field-specific education and capital accumulation on the doctoral and post-doc tiers strengthen this effect again. Individuals who are more oriented towards self-interest are significantly more likely to study economics than other population groups. Furthermore, the results show the presence, during the education of economists in the academic field, of features unique to this field. Especially noteworthy here, compared to other social sciences, are the positive estimation of structured PhD programmes, time abroad, and group work as part of the research process.

Secondly, the findings raise the issue of the consequences of the appropriation of working methods from the natural sciences in the field of economics and support the hypotheses that economics has not only turned into a quasi-natural science on a solely epistemological level, but that the substantive transformation resulting from the move towards experimental methods in economics has also been accompanied by a transformation of field-specific modes of work and career strategies. This, in turn, has manifested itself in a significant increase in the emphasis on the relevance of working groups in the research process, of time spent in the US, and of third party funding, journal articles, and the like throughout one's career. Of course, there will certainly be further consequences of these transformations in the academic field. Consequently, further research must ask which unintended effects will result, globally, from the orientation towards American economics, what effects academic acceleration (new public management, rankings, ratings) will have on the production of knowledge in the economic sciences, and how the self-selection of future generations into economics will influence the discipline in its substance.

Thirdly, the findings prove the analytical benefits of the habitus-field concept for a sociology of economics and for the analysis of economic thinking in general. If the preceding discussion of the concept of habitus is taken as a basis, it quickly becomes clear that all three 'economic' attempts to explain education in economics ignore central aspects and consequences of both academic and professional socialization. Socialization in the field of economic sciences is neither solely a structural selection effect, nor wholly an act of free will with a subsequent learning effect. Rather, the observations made here corroborate the necessity, from the perspective of a sociology of economics, to create an inte-

grative concept of both academic *and* professional socialization, and to analyse the working properties of economics as a science using the concept of field. Only if epistemological academic content and the structures specific to the field are examined in their interdependent interaction will we be sufficiently able to empirically grasp the characteristics of economics and understand these by comparing them to other disciplines and professions. This is a task which – considering both economic knowledge high levels of performativity and its creative, constructive power – would seem to be an urgent necessity.

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