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Methodological Issues in National-Comparative Research on Cultural Tastes: The Case of Cultural Capital in the UK and Finland

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Abstract

Drawing on two projects which develop the methodological model of Bourdieu's *Distinction* in the UK and Finland, this paper explores the issues raised by the use of multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) and mixed methods in comparative work on cultural tastes. By identifying the problems in the construction of two comparable yet nationally relevant research instruments, the paper considers the importance of the similarities and differences in the meaning of items in different national spaces for Bourdieu-inspired comparative analysis. The paper also reports on

the evident similarities between the two constructed spaces and draws on the dialogue between quantitative and qualitative methods enabled by MCA in examining what different positions in social space appear to mean in these countries country. It concludes by suggesting that, whilst Bourdieu's model provides a robust set of methods for exploring relations between taste and class *within* nations, used appropriately, it can also provide particular insight to the comparison between national fields.

Keywords

Bourdieu, comparative research, cultural capital, multiple correspondence analysis, national fields

Introduction

A recurrent criticism of Bourdieu's (1984) account of the relationships between cultural tastes and the objective structure of social positions in *Distinction* is that it is as much about the relationship between taste and class in the Paris of the 1960s as it is about general transferable patterns of taste in contemporary societies. The question of how far Bourdieu's picture of strictly hierarchically-ordered and mutually-competing tastes holds in other countries or in other historical times can be regarded in the light of broader methodological problems with studying societies and their conflation with nations (Breen and Rottman, 1998; Chernilo, 2006; Wimmer and Schiller, 2002). Drawing on Savage and Silva's (2013) outline of the manifold ways in

which the metaphor of the field has been utilised in Bourdieu's work (see the Introduction to this issue), the borders of social space investigated by Bourdieu can here be imagined as the borders of the field of the French nation-state. Nations might not be the same as fields - but there is a clear relationship between the ways in which fields and the movements and struggles within them are theorised and the methodological construction of *national* social spaces in *Distinction* and subsequent studies. One way to explore the issue of the transferability of Bourdieu's model is through comparative analysis across national social spaces. Such an approach also brings into stark relief the ways in which such spaces are constructed *methodologically*. This paper explores these issues by comparing work on tastes in the UK and Finland, drawing explicitly from Bourdieu's methodological templates.

Approaches to comparative analysis, according to Daloz's (2010) account, fall into two camps. One seeks to discover an underlying grammar to social life which is applicable to all cases. The second is suspicious of claims to universality and pays attention to the detail of cross case differences – not simply to catalogue and describe them 'zoologically' but to preserve the complexity they reveal in relation to established or dominant forms of theorising and hypothesising. Daloz clearly places Bourdieu in the former camp – a position Bourdieu would no doubt welcome (see Bourdieu, 1984: xi-xiv). In his own attempt to outline the applicability of the approach in *Distinction* beyond France, Bourdieu (1998) articulates a suspicion of the notion of empirically identifiable national characteristics. He distinguishes between the 'exoticists' concern with identifying superficial or picturesque differences between nations and a more rigorous analytic concern with a quest for a 'universal validity' enabled through the kinds of deep structural patterns revealed by the approach in *Distinction*. Nevertheless, the broader

question of what a Bourdieu-like *comparative* account of tastes might reveal remains, broadly, unanswered.

Different nationally based research teams have discovered that relationships between taste and social class – albeit of a different manner and meaning to that which Bourdieu envisages– persist in a range of national contexts (e.g. Bennett et al., 2009; Prieur et al., 2008; Purhonen et al., 2011). Some comparison has been attempted, including Peterson’s (2005) sketch of the global spread of the notion of the omnivore and Lamont’s (1992) exploration of the different forms of moral boundary drawing in the US and France. Accompanying these are studies which draw on similar empirical materials –large scale surveys of cultural participation– but interpret them from different theoretical perspectives (Chan, 2010) or with specific policy/political narratives in mind (Katz-Gerro, 2002; Schuster, 2008). None of these comparative studies use Bourdieu’s methodological approach. They do not take on the mix of methods central to *Distinction*, depending either on the analysis of survey data or, in the case of Lamont, on qualitative methods alone. Specifically these comparative studies have not engaged with multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), a significant method in the light of the universality of the claims that Bourdieu makes (see Rouanet et al., 2000; Lebaron, 2009). MCA is a descriptive and inductive method for exploring relationships of categorical variables and representing them graphically in a low-dimensional Euclidean space in which closeness of locations indicate similarity of categories and individuals (Le Roux and Rouanet, 2010). It was important for Bourdieu, who describes how its ‘philosophy corresponds exactly to what, in my view, the reality of the social world is. It is a technique which “thinks” in terms of relation, as I try to do precisely with the notion of field’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 96). We argue here that MCA has a distinctive role in

comparative work – not just in identifying and constructing comparable social spaces which might support or critique the notion of an underlying structure but also because the dialogue between methods allowed in its contemporary iteration, reveals and preserves the complexity and relationality of social life in different spaces. Mixing methods has been controversial in sociological research in challenging abiding epistemological assumptions about the nature of the social world (Bryman, 1992; Devine and Heath, 1999). In the context of a field analysis of tastes, there is a particular urgency in mixing methods in capturing both the structural and experiential elements of tastes (see also Silva et al., 2009) – and we argue that doing so is important if comparative work is to contribute to debates about the transferability of Bourdieu’s framework.

In this paper, we address some of these characteristics of mixing methods and MCA in the context of comparative work on tastes. Utilising MCA for national-comparative work of this kind has not been done in previous literature to our knowledge. Because of this novelty and our focus on reflecting methodological issues, we do not conduct entirely new MCA but elaborate on existing national analyses. We take advantage of an unusually similar pair of data sets that emerge from two Bourdieu-inspired studies undertaken at the turn of the twenty-first century in Finland and the UK. We draw on wide-ranging survey research and follow-up household interviews collected by previous British and Finnish research projects. *The British* survey (N=1,564) was administered between 2003 and 2004 (see Bennett et al., 2009). *The Finnish* survey (N=1,388) was collected by Statistics Finland in 2007-2008 (see Purhonen et al., 2011). The Finnish questionnaire was constructed following the British example, but with a number of national or cultural modifications. In the preparation of the questionnaires in both settings, the aim was to identify a range of items, which represented elements of ‘legitimate’, ‘popular’ and

‘mainstream’ tastes. Shared cultural fields included television, films, reading, music, the visual arts, eating, cultural attitudes, sport and other leisure time activities. In Britain, 44 interviews in 28 households selected from survey respondents were conducted in 2004-2005 (see Silva, 2005; Bennett et al., 2009). In Finland, a total of 28 follow-up interviews were collected in 2008-2009. In both countries, the selection of these interviews was based on the level of respondents’ education, age, gender and socio-economic status, household type and geographic location.

These details confirm that we have unusually good circumstances to consider the possibilities and challenges of comparison. Because of the advantages of our data sets – that they have been designed precisely for the needs of sociological research on this subject as well as to allow comparisons as far as possible – we can focus on the methodological problems at the heart of the endeavour of national-comparative work, and it is to outlining some of these problems we now turn.

Problems and Solutions in Comparative Research on Taste

The first set of problems encountered relates to the survey methodology that has been the cornerstone of studies of cultural taste. We have identified three of these kinds of problems – though there is some considerable overlap between them (for a discussion on related problems, see Jowell, 1998; Peterson, 2005; Schuster, 2008). Firstly, there is the problem of *measurement*, i.e. the technical goal of making the measures as similar as possible in the different empirical contexts in order to facilitate comparative statistical analysis. This includes issues such as the choices of items and activities to ask about, the identical wording of questions, and the provision

of similar response alternatives. In the comparative study of cultural tastes and practices the problem of measurement is not only a technical issue but also a specific version of a more general problem of *translation*. Solving this problem requires attention to the extent to which both the meaning of concepts and words used in questions are similar and that any indicators have similar resonance and meaning in all the empirical settings under study. The problem of translation, however, is in turn part of a more general problem of *knowing* what a respondent means when answering a question. This problem of knowing is a universal one in research applying survey methodology: we cannot really be sure what the respondent means because often we cannot be certain how he/she has interpreted the question asked. Silva and Wright (2008) lay out examples of these difficulties in the context of the British study. If, as in this comparative case, two different languages are involved, this has the potential to be an even more telling issue. Items and activities with specific meanings in one country might be entirely absent or meaningless in another. Such activities, for example cricket in the UK, or Nordic walking in Finland might have distinctive roles in shaping social relations in a particular national context. Of equal interest though are those activities that are in some sense shared but have distinct histories which mean their status in each national context can be profoundly different.

<Table 1 about here>

Table 1 outlines a selected range of cultural practices and tastes from across seven cultural domains in the two data sets: television, films, reading, music, visual art, eating and sport. Many striking differences are evident at this level of individual variables, both with respect to taste and practices. In the context of problems of measurement and translation we might identify the major

differences between the UK and Finnish populations' relative predilection for sport and exercise (nearly 42% of Brits practice no sport or exercise, compared to less than 20% of Finns). These kinds of differences should raise questions about how these categories of activity are meaningful and understood in the different national contexts, before they can necessarily be interpreted as evidence of either a more engaged or inactive population in either nation. It is in principle of course possible that Finns do more sport than Brits (see Kahma, 2012), but it seems plausible to think that at least part of the difference in favour of Finns is due to different ways of interpreting what is actually counted as 'sport' or 'exercise'. Equally, differences which seem intuitively plausible as 'real' differences between these two national cultural landscapes cannot be taken at face value. Kahma and Toikkä (2012) use the example of soccer, which appears on both surveys as a possible preference in the UK and Finland, but has different associations and meanings in each culture. In the UK, it exists as a significant feature of national cultural life. In Finland it is more marginal as both a sporting and national past-time when compared with other Nordic outdoor pursuits. Here, the knowledge of a national space requires the shaping of survey instruments which take account of nationally specific meanings for tastes or activities. This means that any statistical comparison is problematic – even when the labels of genres or activities are the same.

The major problems regarding measurement, translation and knowing apply most directly to the descriptive information about cultural consumption and taste (in an ultimate case, to a single distribution of one variable, as seen in Table 1). Those problems are, however, perhaps not so striking when there is some kind of relational aspect involved. When we 'increase' the level of relationality, that is, when we examine more sophisticated and complex networks of inter-

relationships of whole sets of variables/modalities – through MCA – we can distance ourselves from the most simplified level of problems of measurement and translation. Here it becomes the shape of the constructed space that is actually under comparison and we arrive at Bourdieu's ideas about the possibility of 'objectivity' created by emphasis on relationality and the 'structural invariants' (Bourdieu, 1984: xii) that may be found –and be reasonably comparable – between national contexts. Next, we shall discuss the problems of comparative research on cultural tastes between the UK and Finland on this more elaborate and encompassing level utilising MCA.

The Cultural Maps of UK and Finland: Similar But Still Different?

Detailed technical descriptions of how the MCA was conducted in each country can be found elsewhere (Bennett et al., 2009; Le Roux et. al., 2008 for the UK; Kahma and Toikka, 2012 for Finland). We summarise the approach briefly here. In general, both the make-up of the MCA in terms of the cultural items (modalities) chosen as well as the results in terms of the axes the MCA produces, are very similar. The number of active modalities included in the MCA was 198 in Britain and 216 in Finland. Explained variances (Benzécri modified rates) of the first and second axes were 48.2% and 22.6%, in Britain, and 41.9% and 32.3%, in Finland. In both countries, the formation of the space of lifestyles (or cultural map) was achieved using a combination of questions on cultural participation and taste, with taste contributing the bulk of the number of modalities. In both settings the modalities were drawn from seven domains of cultural activity – the very same seven domains of which Table 1 above provided comparative information at the level of distributions of individual variables: television, films, reading, music, visual arts, eating and sport. Some differences in weighting between the two countries can be

identified in the field of music, reading and sport. This is significant in reminding us that, with MCA, the shape of the space is an artefact of the modalities used in its construction. As shown below, however, it becomes evident that, at least in this case, the spaces are very similar even though they are constructed using slightly different items. This is not to say that interpretation of the spaces, especially in a comparative context, does not need to be attuned to the items and activities which underpin it.

Figure 1 displays the space of lifestyles according to the most powerfully differentiating axis. Both projects have interpreted this axis as being representative of relative cultural engagement/disengagement. We can see that, in both cases, taste and participation are divisive, with the right side being broadly characterised by liking and doing and the left hand side being broadly characterised by disliking and non-participation. Importantly, this first axis does not clearly differentiate between traditional highbrow and popular culture – the distinction of salient importance for Bourdieu’s (1984) original study. On the contrary, those located on the ‘engaged’ side generally participate in and express likings for both highbrow and popular culture – allowing both projects to critically engage with debates about ‘omnivorousness’.

<Figure 1 about here>

For both countries the broad pattern is the same but some of the items that make up the left and right side of this axis are different. These include items which weren’t asked about in the UK survey (such as liking Finnish folk music or doing cross country skiing both of which appear on the right side) but also other exceptions. Positive expressions of ‘likes’, which, against the main

tendency, appear on the left side in Finland, include liking heavy-metal (a right sided preference in the UK), liking action films, and eating in pizza restaurants. In addition, dislikes which appear on the right side in Finland include reality television, horror films and boxing as a spectator sport. Besides heavy-metal, dislikes on the right hand-side in the UK include eating in fish and chip restaurants. There is a high culture cluster in both countries, located in the top right corner in Finland and in the bottom right for the UK. Here we can identify, for instance, high levels of participation in art galleries, opera, museums, modern literature and classical literature. This is a fundamental contribution of MCA in a comparative context – it reminds us that the underlying structural division in social space is not causal or determined by particular genres or activities. Rather division can be identified only in relational terms, between the genres and activities active as modalities in a specific national space.

Here, we do not explore in detail how the space of lifestyles in both countries is related to socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents – nor do we report the figure of the second most divisive axes, which both projects have interpreted as dividing traditional established forms of culture from emergent commercial forms of culture. It is worth re-iterating, however, that the main two axes are generally very similar also in these regards (see Bennett et al., 2009; Kahma and Toikka, 2012): in both Britain and in Finland, axis 1 is accordant with the hierarchy of social positions (e.g. with regard educational level and occupational class), high social position being associated with engagement and low position with disengagement. Axis 2, on the other hand, is chiefly age-related, the higher ‘emergent-commercial’ part of the space being associated with younger age-groups and the ‘traditional established’ part with older age-groups.

To sum up, despite the fact that there were differences in the distributions of the individual variables covering the same cultural fields in the MCA, the similarities between the two national spaces of lifestyles are striking, if we concentrate on the main dimensions alone and view the MCA ‘from afar’. On this level of relationality, it does appear that the underlying structures of the social spaces are similar. It is when we go against Bourdieu’s (1998: 1) suggestion and do a ‘particularising reading’ of MCA, concentrating on individual items and their locations, we can see differences. This is precisely because we are, then, back at the level of measurement, translation and knowing problems which lurk behind each question used in the *construction* of the MCA but which are absent from its interpretation. The next section will outline one strategy for exploring these different meanings, drawing on the qualitative data of the respective projects.

Locating Individuals in the Two National Spaces: Different but the Same?

One innovation that these projects share, enabled by advances in analytic software and facilitated by the combination of quantitative and qualitative work with the same respondents, is the possibility of focussing on those survey respondents who were re-contacted via the household interview phase. MCA allows us to plot graphically the locations of every individual survey respondent on the same co-ordinates of the space of lifestyles, constructed in Figure 1. With this ‘cloud of individuals’ as our starting point, we can qualitatively compare the tastes of selected individuals from both countries in a way that takes account of their position in the space of lifestyles. This strategy was not open to Bourdieu – but might well be a logical extension of the dialogue he envisages between the structure of capitals across the social space and the *habitus* of individuals with varying degrees of capital distributed across that social space. Indeed, we might

interpret this process as a methodological strategy that explicitly interrogates the extent to which the position in a field or social space is actually embedded in individual dispositions.

In both projects reported here, the logic of the qualitative phase was to allow participants to elaborate on the meanings for their tastes and practices. There are dangers in this approach too – of over particularising individuals (as combinations of variables within a relational structure) but, integrated into an MCA study in this way these elaborations are, somewhat by default, accounts of the experience of positions in the field. Even as we cannot claim that any one individual is typical or representative of their position, nor can we dismiss the meaningfulness of their account of that position as some sort of empirical reality. With that proviso, we now look to the qualitative data from each study to examine what light they might shed on our interpretations of similarity and difference. Here we consider four individuals from each country located in different positions, one per each ‘corner’, in the spaces of lifestyles to try to analyse whether those relations between individual positions are similar or different between the two national spaces.

<Figure 2 about here>

We introduce our four cross-national ‘pairings’ occupying ‘similar’ locations in the different spaces using Figure 2, which shows the clouds of individuals for both countries displayed according to the two most divisive axes. The spaces will be explored using, in the UK from top-left clockwise: *Joe* (number 902 in the UK part of the Figure 2), *Caroline* (1097), *Cherie* (288) and *Cecilia* (1094). Joe is a 30 years old building site foreman, with a post-16 technical

qualification. He lives in a house he owns with a mortgage in the village in Oxfordshire with his wife and son. Caroline, 25, is a recent English graduate who works as a trainee local government officer in South Wales and lives with her fiancé in a house they have recently bought. Cherie, 48, is a freelance heritage industry worker from a northern English city, where she lives with her chef husband in a city centre flat which they own. Cecilia, 56, is a grandmother who lives in social housing, supported by sickness and disability benefits on an estate near a South Wales city. We might characterise these individuals as representing an aspirational working-class man (Joe), a traditional older working-class woman (Cecilia), a young professional woman (Caroline) and a more established cultural professional woman (Cherie) – though these socio-demographic characteristics cannot correlate in any precise way with the space itself.

The Finns will be represented by *Jukka* (number 3327 in the Finnish part of the Figure 2), *Jere* (1389), *Johanna* (2458) and *Alli* (1444). Jukka, 33, lives in a one bedroom apartment, which he rents with his girlfriend. He works as a metal worker in a city in southern, central Finland. Jere, 29, works as a journalist in Helsinki. He lives in a three room flat with his wife and daughter. Johanna is in her sixties and works as an office secretary of a library. She is divorced and lives alone in a detached house in south-eastern Finland. Finally Alli, 68, is also retired and lives with her husband, for whom she cares due to a chronic health condition. They might similarly be characterised as a mix of classes – with Jere and Jukka representing white collar and blue collar young adult men and Johanna and Alli older middle-class and working-class women respectively.

Table 2 represents a starting point for a comparison of these eight. It outlines their survey answers – to the same questions used in Table 1 – and pairs them together according to their position in their respective national space. This is a kind of ultimate contrast to the complex multi-relational general picture produced by MCA. If the MCA revealed a structure that is stable across the national boundaries, here we are really ‘particularising the particular’, i.e. focusing on the individual level responses to individual items and questions. Linking these answers together in cross-national pairs in this way, allows some immediate comparison. We would not necessarily expect there to be similarities in these answers themselves as they refer to differently constructed spaces of lifestyles. Rather we should expect there to be some evidence of why each participant is located where he/she is within their respective space. Their interviews allow us to explore and interpret how these positions might be experienced.

<Table 2 about here>

To begin with the example of Joe and Jukka on the top-left corner, characterised by relative disengagement and preference for commercial emergent culture. Joe’s position on the left hand side of the British space is due to, in terms of the answers revealed in Table 2, his strong dislikes for modern literature and classical music. These preferences are further elaborated on in the interview where, in response to an attitude question about art and classical music he suggests, *‘I don’t enjoy them because I don’t know nothing about them. But as for finding out, to know more about them I probably wouldn’t because I like all the other stuff’*. Jukka’s position on the Finnish space can be understood through his liking of heavy-metal and not having read modern literature. He articulates his dislikes and disinterestedness with similarly brief descriptions – *‘not*

especially, *'not much'*, *'I'm not interested'*. Joe and Jukka share some interests – principally in sport where both are subscribers to and consumers of specialist TV channels to receive the English Premier League. Jukka supports and attends matches of his local ice-hockey team. To the question *'have you ever had something linked to culture as a hobby?'* he ironically (or defensively) answers: *'Yes, of course, ice hockey. Isn't that culture?'* Joe plays football for his local village team.

In television, film and literature there are also commonalities. Joe chooses *Saving Private Ryan* as his favourite film. His preference for the 'realism' of this text is perhaps in contrast with Jukka's preference for the action films of Sylvester Stallone and Clint Eastwood – but there is a more general shared preference for popular, action-oriented narrative. As for culinary tastes, Joe prefers *'pub-food'* – likely to be typically British cuisine. Jukka more pointedly rejects ethnic foods, largely on the basis of perception rather than experience of them. Here we see a shared, largely masculine, culture characterised by disconnection from legitimate culture but also engagement with sporting cultures. We might suggest a lack of curiosity about culture typifies both these respondents (Joe says, in relation to a question on his dislike of world music, *'I've never listened to it, and I probably never will'*).

Our next pairing, Caroline and Jere, is located at top-right corner. They share the interest in commercial emergent culture with Joe and Jukka, but are more involved and engaged in 'legitimate' cultural activities. Despite the obvious gender difference, Caroline and Jere share significant similarities: both are young graduates in arts/humanities subjects and both are aspirational young professionals at a similar stage of the life-course. Caroline's location on the

right hand side of the British space can be accounted for through her lack of television watching, her relatively high level of book reading and her preferences for modern literature. Her preference for cookery/home decoration programmes feeds through into her concern, expressed in her interview, with ‘*stylish*’ and ‘*classy*’ home decoration in her newly-bought home. Her actual preferences elicit little further elaboration, though they do reveal recognition that certain preferences (for reading, for example) are the ‘right’ ones to hold. When asked by the interviewer to explain her preference for biographies she says, with some embarrassment that, ‘*I don’t know why I said that! I can’t think of one biography I’ve actually read!*’ A similar reticence surrounds her description of other literary preferences where she seems to anxiously revisit her university English studies as a justification for her preferences for Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy. Jere shares a preference for modern literature – but is more confident in asserting its basis. ‘*There are so many books that have touched me deeply*’ he says when asked to talk about his extensive collection of novels. He also likes modern visual art and classical music, accounting for his position on the right hand side of the Finnish space. Both might be identified as ‘omnivores’ given the range and composition of their preferences but it is Jere whose interview reveals a more coherently omnivorous orientation: ‘*I like so many kinds of music that I can’t mention one band or even one genre*’. Though the precise make up of these profiles are different, both participants reveal a degree of adventurousness in their tastes and a belief – even if it is tacit rather than realised in the case of Caroline – that there is some value in a variety of tastes and practices.

Our third pairing, Cherie and Johanna, is located at the bottom-right corner of the space, hence sharing the characteristic of cultural engagement with Caroline and Jere, but with more emphasis

on traditional, established culture. Cherie, a heritage guide, reads a lot. Her survey response, according to which she had read 150 books in the last year, might sound somewhat unrealistic, but actually might hold true, given the testimony of Cherie's partner Ian, who describes how Cherie likes to *'go to the library and come back with half a dozen new books and eight hours later have read three of them cover to cover'*. Johanna, in her turn, represents a combination only possible for older women in Finland: she is clearly an enthusiast for classical highbrow culture and has lots of cultural goodwill even if she does not have much education and is from a modest background. Johanna likes poetry, Impressionism and Almodóvar, Bergman and other European film directors. Above all, she listens to classical music (e.g. Schubert, Bach and Stravinsky). She also hates heavy-metal music and action movies.

Other features that justify Cherie's position on the right-bottom side of the British space include, for instance, preferences for French restaurants and renaissance art. In sum, Cherie is fairly active and consumes clearly more established culture in comparison with Caroline, which can be mainly interpreted as a signal of age-related or even generational difference. The same is true with Johanna's more exclusive taste for classical music, compared to Jere's combination of pop, jazz and classical in an omnivorous fashion.

Our last couple occupying the bottom-right – the disengaged and traditional – corner of the space of lifestyles, Cecilia and Alli, have their own similarities and differences. On the basis of her survey answers, it is not directly evident why Cecilia is located where she is: she visits cinema and restaurants monthly, reads a lot, likes a lot of science-fiction and also classical music. On the other hand, she likes to watch darts as her favourite spectator sports, considers 'musicals' the

best film genre and portraits the best visual art type, does not like modern literature, never visits opera or art galleries and practices no sport. Cecilia is a low-income, working-class widow from a poor neighbourhood who lives with an extended family including several generations for whom she has caring responsibilities. These factors mean that her cultural activities outside the home are very restricted. In Finland, Alli is a low-income senior citizen with low education and modest, agrarian background. She watches 5 hours of television daily, likes art movies the least, has not heard of the names of the most well-known Finnish cinema directors, has read only one book in the last 12 months and doesn't attend almost any cultural events. Like Cecilia, Alli's few cultural activities can be explained by very concrete circumstances and obstacles: she has to take constant care of her chronically ill husband, and television is the only media she uses regularly.

All of the four pairs discussed, seem to broadly confirm – or at least do not refute – the interpretation of the meaning of the cultural maps produced by the MCA. The individual cases, however, also hint at some differences between the spaces, as well. They demonstrate the variability of closer meanings and ways of inhabiting social space than the more general patterns of dispositions and tastes produced by MCA alone.

Conclusion

This paper has drawn on an unusually similar pair of national data sets to contribute to the debate about the value of MCA and mixed methods in the national-comparative study of cultural taste and field analysis across national boundaries. The specific engagement with and development of the methods that Bourdieu used has allowed for the relationality inherent in his approach to

offset some of the variable centred ‘exotic’ differences between the UK and Finland and indicate the presence of the kinds of underlying structural invariance that Bourdieu predicts. We should not be surprised that two Western European countries, albeit with distinct collective histories, are not too dissimilar. At the level of individual variables, though, cultural tastes and practices in the UK and Finland do show some differences. The main difficulty here is to decide in which cases these differences reflect ‘real’ between-country differences and in which cases they are due to the measurement, translation and knowing problems related to survey methodology. In many cases, the result is a combination of both of these two. Despite the differences in individual variables, the main result of the MCA – that the most powerful division in the space of lifestyles is the one between engagement and disengagement – are strikingly similar in both countries. This similarity can be called into question if the locations of single cultural items or individual respondents in the MCA clouds are inspected more closely. We argue this is actually necessary if we want to avoid the danger of superficiality and want to know as precisely as possible what we are actually comparing. The MCA method in its enhanced contemporary mode also allows for the revealing dialogue between the general and particular provided by the dialogue between quantitative and qualitative data. Whilst generally we think that a comparative analysis of this kind resolves some of the methodological problems of comparison, others remain and might well be intensified by an MCA approach of this kind. We conclude with two points which summarise these problems.

Firstly the problems of measurement, translation and knowing remain with an MCA approach. Here, we cannot see any *logical* difference between MCA and other techniques of data analysis. If there is a difference, it is in the degree to which a given technique can cope with complexity

and relationality: other methods, regression analysis for instance, are arguably more vulnerable to these problems if they are used to analyse only very limited number of variables. The depth of the problems of measurement, translation and knowing should, however, always be assessed empirically, case by case. Although these problems in MCA are mitigated by the fact that positions in the space of lifestyles are determined internally and so the structure of dispositions upon which analysis of the space is based are not themselves ‘compared’, the question remains whether a genre or activity that is present in one place is understood and experienced in the same way in another. Even relational comparison of national patterns of taste is compromised without an attempt – perhaps through an a priori qualitative comparison – to highlight and establish the subtle distinctions in meaning that specific bundles of genres or practices have ‘on the ground’. Jukka and Joe, in our study, might both watch the English Premier League – but does this activity in itself have the same meaning and resonance and the same divisive potential in each national context? An alternative comparative MCA approach to the one developed here might produce a single shared social space containing all the shared modalities of both national spaces being compared. This could be technically possible, but the problems of knowing, translation and measurement suggest it would be limited analytically.

Secondly, whilst we believe the dialogue between quantitative and qualitative work is useful there is a need for caution in the claims we make in relation to the qualitative work, the positions in the cloud and the labels (such as engagement/disengagement) which the different projects have given to the different positions in their spaces. This is because the spaces have been constructed using different modalities and the relations between practices are always internal to a specific space. Individuals cannot stand simplistically for the kinds of characteristic which we

ascribe to a particular bit of the spaces – and in fact the individual idiosyncrasies of individual taste profiles might reveal that the interpretations of the axes themselves do not explain all the kinds of divisions. This is accentuated by a comparative analysis where searching out the meaning and experience of inhabiting similar parts of different spaces is the point of the analysis. It seems plausible that Caroline and Jere can be used to interpret the right hand side of the space as being characterised – in both nations – by a more adventurous engagement with culture and by the recognition of the value of a variety of forms of culture. It also seems plausible that the bases of Cecilia’s or Alli’s lack of engagement (age, income, the restrictions of the body or of the bodies of others through the duties of care) are similar. These similarities are striking but do they – somewhat paradoxically, given the logic of the Bourdieusian approach which brings us to the level of the individual – represent a new form of surface superficiality or curiosity in this analysis?

The result of comparison is not only dependent on characteristics of two social worlds as such but also on the processes and extent of observation. Even given the potential, clearly demonstrated in these two projects, of the Bourdieusian relational approach to reveal the underlying structures to the superficial or ‘exotic’ differences between nations, it is still only through the knowledge of the specific, local, regional or national that we can construct and interpret the research instruments to facilitate that approach. There is still a need to balance ‘universalising’ and ‘particularising’ readings of the research objects.

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Table 1 Selected cultural practices and tastes from seven cultural fields in Britain and Finland (%)

	Total		Women		Least educated ^a		Most educated ^b	
	Britain	Finland	Britain	Finland	Britain	Finland	Britain	Finland
TV: watch at least 5 hours per weekday	21.3	7.1	22.0	6.4	41.7	17.7	7.4	3.0
TV: like news/current affairs the best	14.6	39.3	12.2	35.8	10.4	45.6	22.6	27.6
Films: like action/adventure films the best	27.8	30.5	21.0	18.9	28.7	24.0	25.9	24.6
Films: like alternative/art films the least	4.2	25.4	3.9	21.0	3.8	33.3	5.4	14.6
Reading: read at least 10 books last year	33.4	26.3	40.8	32.1	22.6	13.2	46.7	41.8
Reading: like modern literature ^c	24.9	28.6	27.3	39.0	10.5	12.5	45.5	51.5
Music: like classical music ^c	39.5	45.6	39.3	55.5	34.8	26.7	56.1	64.9
Music: like heavy metal ^c	17.9	37.3	12.2	32.1	8.4	26.6	22.7	41.1
Visual art: never go to art galleries	53.8	44.5	54.4	38.0	77.4	63.4	26.1	25.2
Visual art: like modern art the least	38.4	21.4	37.6	20.7	47.2	25.1	33.5	15.1
Eating out: go to pub monthly or more	54.0	23.3	44.7	19.3	45.1	17.9	55.9	29.5
Eating out: like French restaurants the best	7.2	4.0	6.7	4.3	2.7	2.0	16.4	8.9
Sport: practice no sport or exercise	41.9	18.9	45.1	14.3	67.6	28.2	25.5	9.4
Sport: like to watch soccer the best	26.9	7.7	16.4	4.8	26.6	5.6	23.1	11.8

Note: Respondents over 75 years of age are excluded from the British data in order to make the age ranges of both samples equal. For the British data, N = 1,432; for the Finnish data, N = 1,388. Both data are weighted.

a = Least educated refer to those with no educational qualifications apart from compulsory education.

b = Most educated refer to those with completed university degree (BA or higher).

c = The likings of different genres of literature and music were asked using seven point scale in the British questionnaire and five point scale in the Finnish questionnaire; the percentages here are calculated from the score of 1–3 in the British case, and 1–2 in the Finnish case.

Table 2 Selected follow-up interviewees' responses to questions on cultural practices and tastes from seven cultural fields

	Top-left corner		Top-right corner		Bottom-right corner		Bottom-left corner	
	Joe (GB)	Jukka (FIN)	Caroline (GB)	Jere (FIN)	Cherie (GB)	Johanna (FIN)	Cecilia (GB)	Alli (FIN)
TV: how many hours per weekday ^{a-1}	3	4	1	1	3	2	3	5
TV: type of programme like the best ^{a-1, a-2, b-2}	sport	drama	cookery	sport	news	news	drama	news
Films: type of films like the best ^{a-1, a-2, b-1, b-2}	war	war	costume d [†]	historic d [†]	costume d [†]	old Finnish	musical	comedies
Films: type of films like the least ^{a-2}	horror	musicals	cartoon	horror	war	action	comedy	alternative
Reading: how many books read last year ^{a-1, b-1, b-2}	0	1	12	6	150	10	100	1
Reading: like modern literature ^{a-1, b-1, b-2}	dislike!	not read	like	like!	neutral	like	dislike	neutral
Music: like classical music ^{a-1, a-2, b-1}	dislike!	like	neutral	like	neutral	like!	like	neutral
Music: like heavy metal ^{a-1, a-2, b-2}	neutral	like!	like!	neutral	neutral	dislike!	like	neutral
Visual art: how often go to art galleries ^{a-1, a-2, b-1}	never	rarely	rarely	rarely	yearly	never	never	never
Visual art: type of art like the best ^{a-1, a-2, b-1, b-2}	landscapes	landscapes	landscapes	modern	renaissance	impression.	portraits	landscapes
Eating out: how often go to the pub ^{a-1, a-2, b-2}	monthly	monthly	monthly	monthly	monthly	rarely	yearly	never
Eating out: place to eat out like most ^{a-1, a-2, b-1, b-2}	pub	Italian	Indian	steakhouse	French	steakhouse	steakhouse	café
Sport: practice some sport or exercise	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Sport: type of sport like to watch most ^{a-2, b-1, b-2}	soccer	ice hockey	gymnastics	soccer	horse races	figure skat.	darts	athletics

a-1 = Modality (or, in case of question including several modalities, at least some of those) contributing above average to the variation of the first axis in Britain.

a-2 = Modality contributing above average to the variation of the second axis in Britain.

b-1 = Modality contributing above average to the variation of the first axis in Finland.

b-2 = Modality contributing above average to the variation of the second axis in Finland.

[†] = In the British questionnaire, this film genre was called as “costume drama or literary adaptations”. As there is no customary direct translation for it in Finnish, the corresponding film genre was called in the Finnish questionnaire more generally as “historical drama”.