
**AGENCY & SOCIAL
STRUCTURE:
methodological logic of the
course**

By Vladimir Ilin

GUIDING QUESTION OF THE COURSE

- How free are individuals in the construction of their lifestyles under the pressure of social structure?

STRUCTURALISM (objectivism, positivism, externalism)

- Pierre Bourdieu:

“... Practices are seen as no more than the acting-out of roles, the playing of scores or the implementation of plans”.

SUBJECTIVISM (internalism)

Subjectivist tradition in the study of social structure:

People define themselves their position in class, ethnic structures, social stratification and in the society in general.

Subjectivist theories take reasons and values to be definable in terms of some relation to desires and/or emotions.

Subjectivism

- It stresses the special role of subjectivity in the constructing of social world and ignores social structures.

Berkeley expressed this in his classic statement that the world is as I see it.

- “Subjectivity includes processes denoted by the terms mental, mind, conscious, experience, agency, will, intentionality, thinking, feeling, remembering, interpreting, understanding, learning, and psyche. These subjective processes comprise the activity of subjects”.
- “Subjectivism construes subjectivity as the product of the subject or individual...” (Carl Ratner).

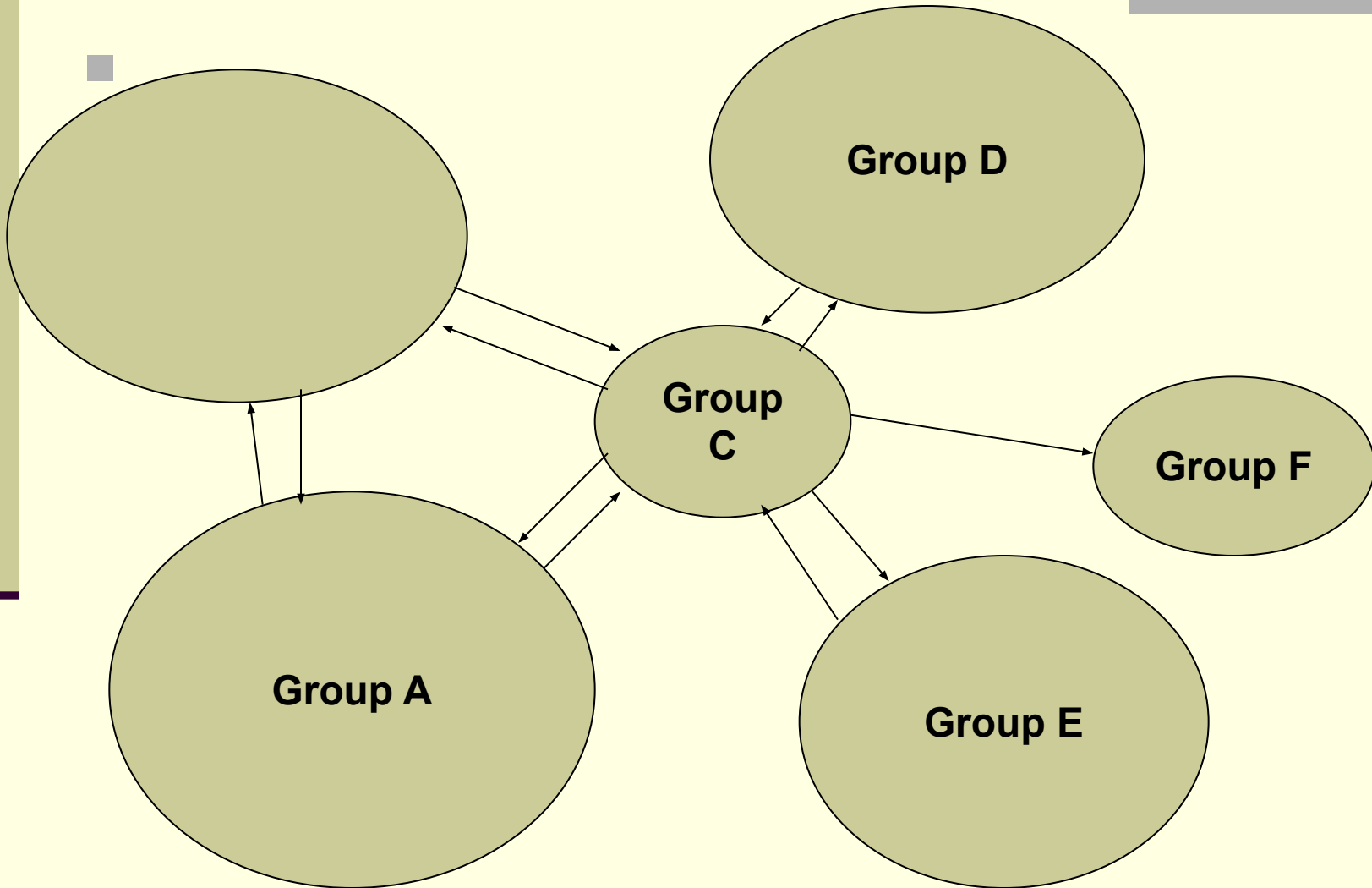
SOCIAL SPACE

- Social space is a multi-dimensional space of positions.
- Many positions can be defined in terms of a multi-dimensional system of co-ordinates.

Pierre Bourdieu

- “The social field can be described as a multi-dimensional space of positions such that each actual position can be defined in terms of a multi-dimensional system of co-ordinates whose values correspond to the values of the different pertinent [applicable] variables. Agents are thus distributed, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of capital they dispossess and, in the second dimension, according to the composition of their capital – in other words, according to the relative weight of the different kinds of capital in the total set of their assets”.

Social space



Multi-dimensional character of the social space

- Space of politics.
- Space of economy.
- Space of education.
- Space of journalism.
- Space of sport.

Etc.

Social group

- A number of individual positions, defined by formal or informal criteria of membership. They are bound together in relatively stable patterns of interaction.

STATISTICAL AND REAL GROUPS

- Statistical groups (or groups on the paper) are products of researcher's classification.
- Real social group is a set of individual positions which are bound together in relatively stable patterns of interaction.
- Real social groups are social fields.

Social relations

- are relations between social groups, positions, roles.

SOCIAL FIELD

- It is a field of forces, a set of objective power relations imposed on all those who enter this field, relations which are not reducible to the intentions of individual agents or even to direct interactions between agents.

(P.Bourdieu)

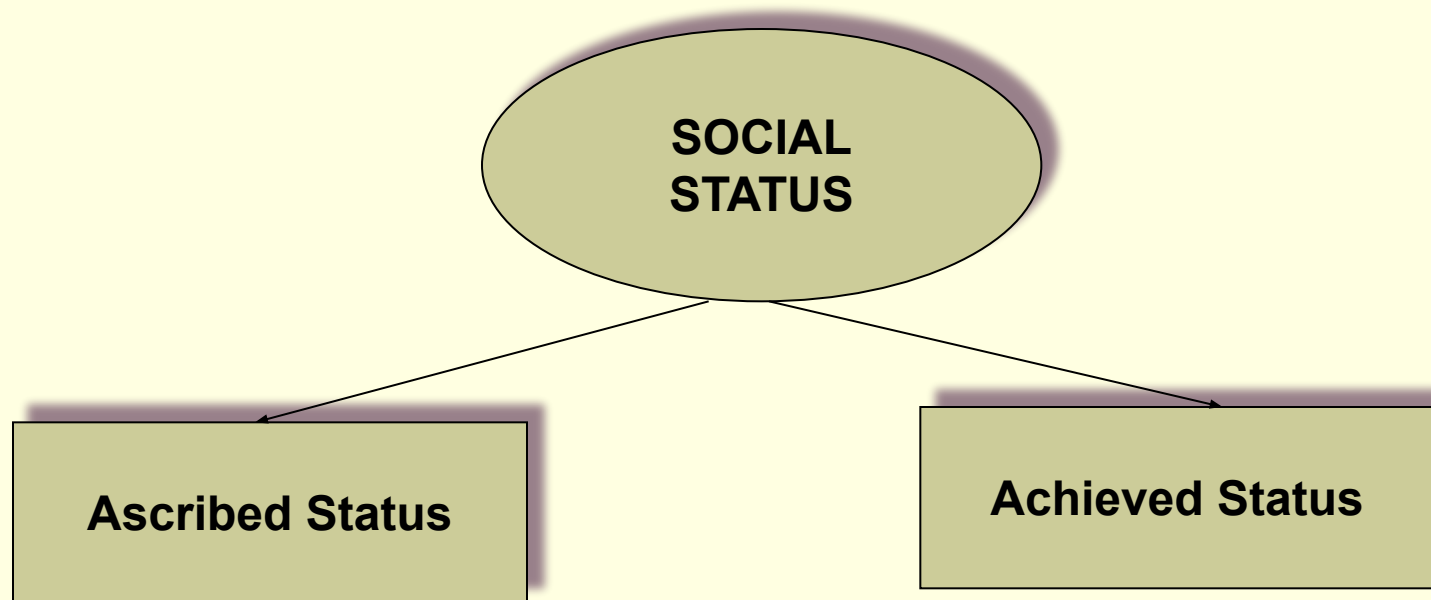
STATUS POSITION

- It is a position in the social space
(teacher, doctor, president, wife, woman, etc.)

Structure of social status

- Duties.
- Rights.
- Social expectations.

Types of social status



Ascribed Status

- It refers to those social positions to which a person is allocated either by birth or by family background and which cannot be altered according to individual accomplishments.

Ascribed Status

- The status ascribed on the basis of
 - race,
 - ethnicity,
 - gender.

Achieved Status

- Any social position held by an individual as a result of his or her personal accomplishments in open formal or market competition with other.

The distinction between achievement and ascription

- An individual's social class standing might be an achieved status through occupational attainment or ascribed through family background. Some apparently achievement-based outcomes (including examination performance and occupational attainment), can at least in part reflect ascriptive mechanisms – such as gender, discrimination or race prejudice.

Social institutions

- Changing patterns of behavior based on relatively more stable value systems.
- They constrain and determine the behavior of specific social groups.

Social Institutions

Church.

Ownership.

Family.

Law.

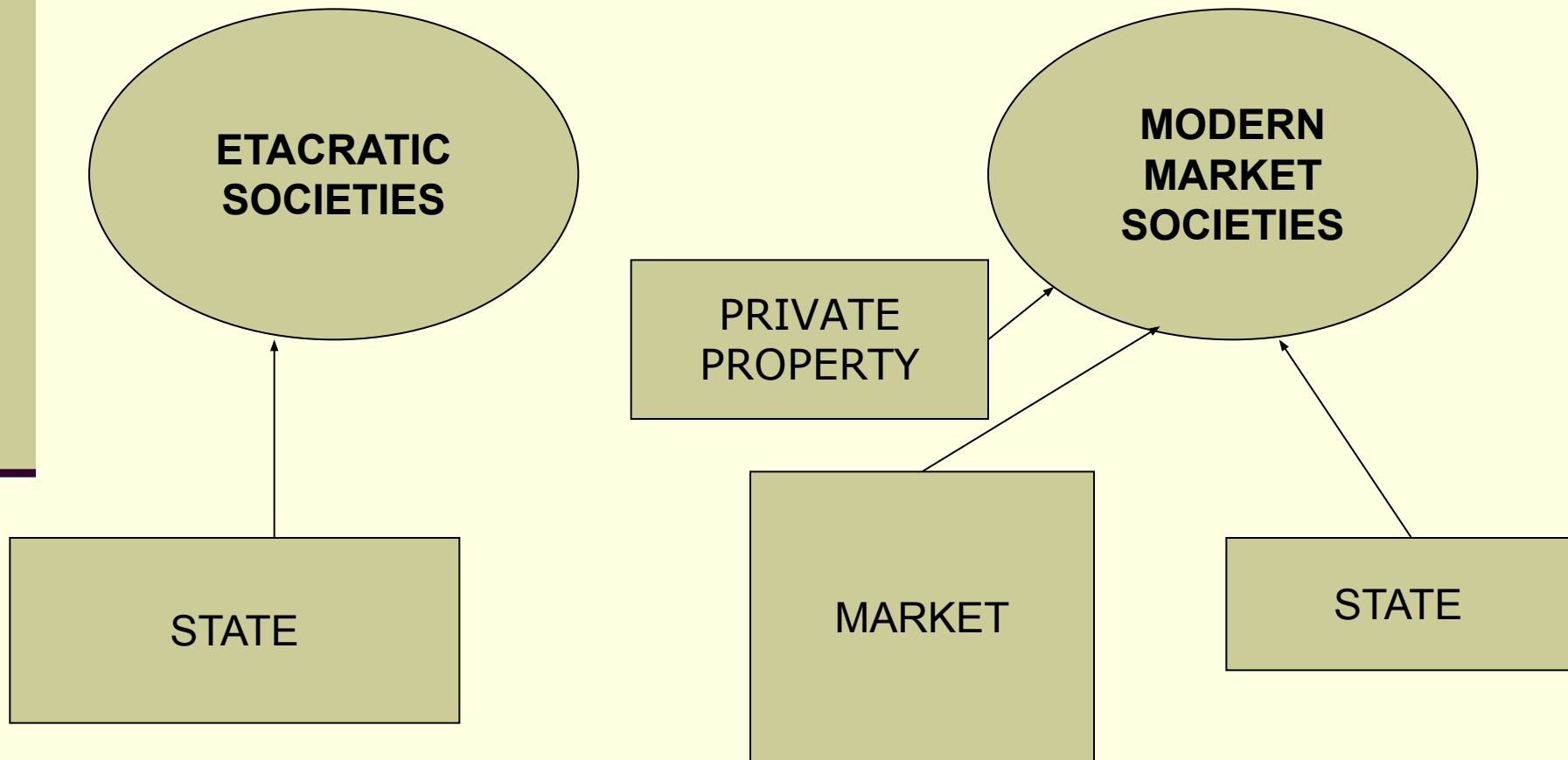
Marriage.

What is common?

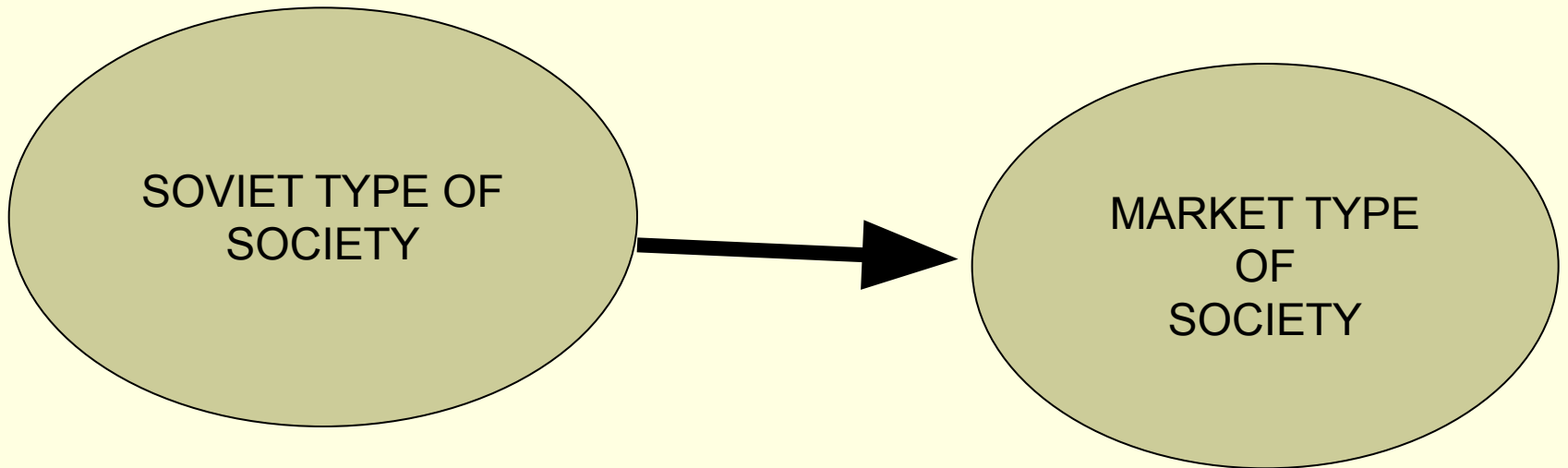
TYPES OF SOCIETIES

- Etacratic societies.
- (a) ‘Asian modes of production’ (Marx).
- (b) State socialism.
- Western civilization.
- (a) Antic societies.
- (b) Medieval European societies.
- (c) Modern market societies.

SOCIAL SPACE & DOMINANT SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS



SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN MODERN WORLD



SOCIAL STRUCTURE

- Available resources.
- Rules of distribution.
- Practices defined by resources and rules.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY OF THE SOCIAL SPACE

- Inequality in distribution of social resources among parts (fields) of the space.

Social Field's Structure

- 1. Resources.
- 2. Cultural program (rules, norms, values).
- 3. Communicative system (language).

Social structure: individual perspective

It is a structure of life-chances (opportunities and limitations).

Key question:

How can people live?

MAIN TYPES OF STRUCTURES

- Class structure (distribution of economic power).
- Social stratification (in narrow sense): upper – middle – low strata (rich – middle – poor).
- Gender structure.
- Age structure.
- Citizenship.
- Ethnic structure.

AGENCY (ACTION)

- This category emphasizes implicitly the undetermined nature of human action, as opposed to the alleged determination of structural theories*.

SPACE OF DESIRES

Key question:

- How do people want to live?

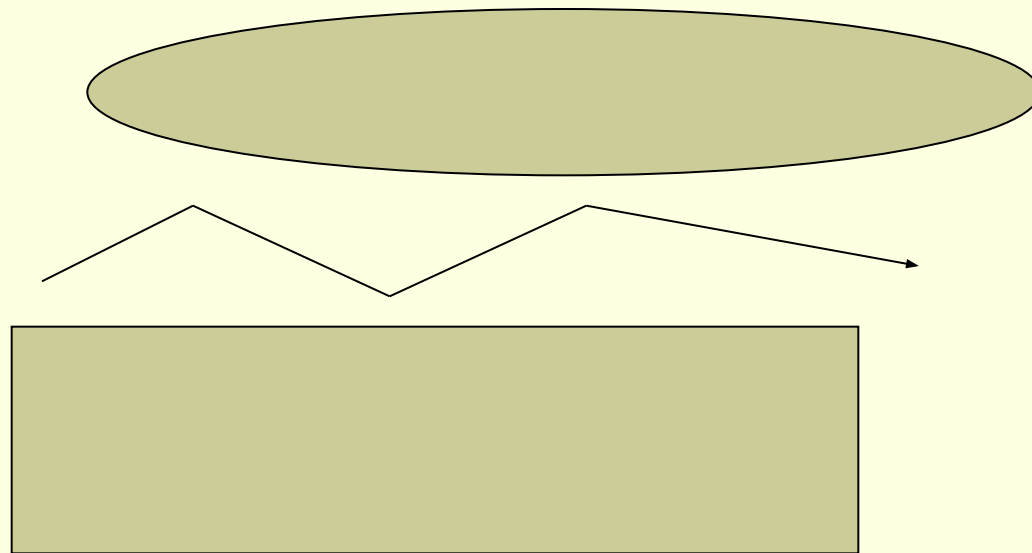
Group of secondary questions:

What kind of factors defines desires?

SYNTESIS of AGENCY AND STRUCTURE

PRACTICES

- Trajectories structured by spaces of opportunities and desires.



DUALITY OF STRUCTURE

- A. Giddens;

“... The structural properties of social system are both medium and outcome of the practice they recursively [repeated] organize. Structure is not ‘external’ to individuals: as memory traces, and as instantiated in social practices, it is in a certain sense more ‘internal’ than exterior to their activities...”

DUALITY OF STRUCTURE

- A. Giddens:
- “ Structure is not to be equated with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling”.

MODE OF LIFE

- Ways of life directly shaped by the social structure.

HABITUS

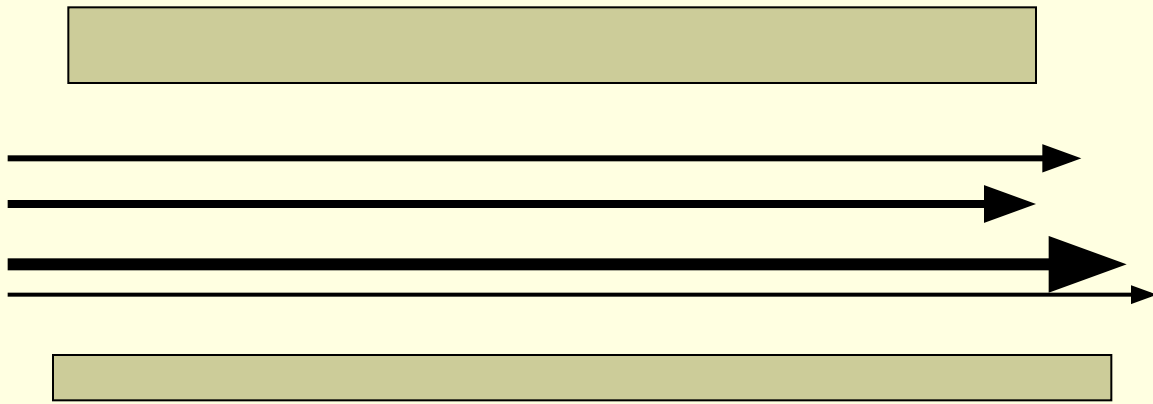
- It is the result of the objectification of social structure at the level of individual subjectivity.
- It is a bridge between social structure and structure of mind.

STRUCTURE OF HABITUS

- A set of acquired patterns of thought, behavior, and taste.
- Free habits.
- It is a link between social structures and social action.

LIFESTYLES

- Alternative ways of life within the space of opportunities.
- Freely selected modes of behavior.
- Style of consumption is a core of the lifestyle.



INDIVIDUALISATION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES

- Individual as a unique actor construct its lifestyle within social limits and opportunities of available social space.
- Social patterns of life are shaped by individual peculiarities. Social status appears in individual forms.

CLASS STRUCTURE

- Space of economic life-chances on the labor market (opportunities & limitations).
- Class practices are free styles of behavior within limits of class space.
- Class practices are defines by class habitus.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

(in narrow sense)

- Space of opportunities limited by available consuming resources (income, wealth).
- Practices within this space are resulted from free choice of available alternatives.
- Free choice is shaped by habitus.

GENDER STRUCTURE

- Space of opportunities and limitations shaped by gender norms and values.
- Practices within this space resulted from the free choice of available styles of being male or female.
- Free choice is shaped by gender habitus.

AGE STRUCTURE

- Structure of opportunities and limitations shaped by age and age norms.
- Practices in this space resulted from free choice of lifestyles within limited set of available patterns of behavior.
- The choice of lifestyle is determined by age habitus.