

A PODCAST ON PIERRE BOURDIEU'S LIFE AND WORK

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On September 24, 2025, an hour-long episode entitled *Pierre Bourdieu* was published in the Swedish-language podcast *Bildningspodden*, connected to the *Bildung* magazine *Anekdot* produced at the Faculty of Humanities at Stockholm University and funded by The Royal

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The main idea of the podcast episode being to introduce the academically interested public to Bourdieu, the invited guests were asked to imagine an average listener comparable to the *folk high school teacher*. The conversation covered a range of areas related to Bourdieu's life and work, as well as some professional and personal experiences of the two guests, relevant to understanding their initial and long-standing interest in Pierre Bourdieu's multifaceted contribution to the social sciences.

Ruhi Tyson, the host, started off: *Hello and welcome to Bildningspodden, which today will focus on the French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu.*

Pierre Bourdieu is one of the true giants of 20th-century sociology. He was a researcher and philosopher whose ideas had an enormous impact on both the social sciences and the humanities, but also on public debate in general. So, if you have read the culture pages or listened to a discussion about economics, it is not unlikely that you have heard his name and concepts such as cultural capital or habitus.

My name is Rui Tyson, and with me are Raoul Galli, PhD in social anthropology from Stockholm University, and Mikael Palme, associate professor in sociology of education at Uppsala University. With

*Donald Broady, Mikael played an important role in the introduction of Bourdieu's work in Sweden in the 1980's, not least through the publication of translated original texts in the anthology *Kultursociologiska texter* (1991/1986).*

Welcome both of you to Bildningspodden! Could you start by saying a few words about what it was about Bourdieu that caught your interest back then?

Raoul Galli: *Yes, for me it started before I came to the university. For some reason, I came across a book by journalist Annette Kullenberg, who had written several books on the *Swedish upper class*, which became of interest to me based on both my social origin and trajectory. I had experienced a *klassresa* (a common Swedish term for social mobility), both upwards and downwards, through my family, and I had developed a somewhat dual cultural perspective on things as a descendant of Italian immigrants in Sweden. These experiences, I think, contributed to the attraction of the work on "the French elite" by a certain "Pierre Bourdieu," whom Anette [Kullenberg] wrote about. Thinking about it, I recall that Mikael was also interviewed in the same book. If I remember correctly, it was called *Urp! sa överklassen* (1995) and was the sequel to Kullenberg's first book about the Swedish aristocracy and upper class, which was written in the 1970's. So that was my first encounter and what sparked*

my interest. Then I began studying sociology and anthropology, where we read a little Bourdieu. That was my introduction.

Mikael Palme: *In a way, it was a coincidence, because I had studied philosophy, both practical and theoretical, in Uppsala and was going to do a PhD in literary studies. It was a difficult time because I never really got around to doing anything that really interested me. Then I came across the book *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*, the first of three mainly theoretical works that Bourdieu wrote as he developed his sociological conceptual world. The second was *Le Sens pratique*, and the third *Méditations pascaliennes*. In them, he addresses similar fundamental questions, and the texts are partly similar, with his social field concept being maturely explored in the last one. *Esquisse* was a kind of revelation for me, even though I only understood a fraction of it, and it prompted me to apply for a scholarship to study in Paris in 1977. At that point, I actually had contact with Bourdieu, because I wrote a seven-page confession about my situation. Then, one line came back: "You are welcome as an *auditeur libre*," that is, as a non-regular student. At that time, I was more familiar with Marxist and similar traditions, where external factors, ultimately the movement of capital, accounted for social structure and also for the acting human being. I met with a sociology that*

brought in real people and their history, experiences, assets, and, also, their tastes.

The conversation then continued in a rather intense and winding manner, which the editorial team nevertheless managed to edit into a structure that works for the listener. Thematically, it can be divided into the following blocks, even though connections between them were repeatedly made:

- The guests' encounter with Bourdieu's work
- Bourdieu's scientific significance
- Bourdieu's trajectory from a small village in the Pyrenees to elite institutions in Paris and its significance for his sociology
- The evolution of key concepts in Bourdieu's work (habitus, symbolic capital, symbolic violence, misrecognition, cultural capital, social field)
- From honor to distinction to field-specific capital
- The guests' takeaways and reading tips for the listener

While international readers already well-familiar with Bourdieu will find no new information about Pierre Bourdieu's life and work, the podcast comprises discussions that relate his concepts to Swedish society, as well as some references to research on Swedish ground. Sweden – with its unique modern history marked by a previous, long social democratic hegemony promoting egalitarian

beliefs, followed by a decades-long shift to neo-liberal market policies – offers fertile ground for social research in a Bourdieusian tradition.