

A tale of two cities: Symbolic capital and larp community formation in Canada and Sweden

Popular abstract - Larp events are not isolated, but happen in a larger context of a community of larping participants. Like all communities, members will share ideas about good and bad practices and behaviour and develop norms that tie the members together. Organizers can then use language to communicate which practices they emphasize as important, and what they consider good or bad practices for their event. Such norms can be invoked for the purpose of legitimizing the larp in the community and can then be transformed into attributes of symbolic capital with a power of their own. In this way, the events build on, and generate, such symbolic attributes, which take on significance for community homogenization. Larp events can thus be seen as an expression of established community practices.

The purpose of this article is to locate common attributes of symbolic capital in the presentations of eight larps from two cities, Edmonton, Canada, and Stockholm, Sweden. The documents of the larps are analysed using Pierre Bourdieu's theory, which discusses how symbolic capital can structure social space, to identify common denominators and reveal central community values.

The inquiry concludes that different symbols for proper larp have been adopted in the two cities, where the Edmonton community has a strong emphasis on rule-books and mechanics, while the Stockholm community is focusing more on the exploration of dramatic themes and authenticity. This indicates that the two communities can be thought of as different social spaces, distinctly separate from each other. The article also includes a discussion about the potential implications of authoritative symbols and their role as a homogenizing force within a larp community.

Keywords: Larp; Bourdieu; Culture; Symbolic capital; power; Habitus; Stockholm; Edmonton;

Mikael Hellstrom
University of Alberta
Canada
mikaelh@ualberta.ca

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and thesis statement

Several aspects of the social dynamics between actors involved in role-playing activity has received attention over the past decade. This includes the inherent power relations and the roles required to structure the activity (Stenros and Hakkarainen, 2003; Mäkelä, Koistinen, Siukola and

Turunen, 2005), the significance of the invisible rules for the relationships between those roles (Montola, 2007; 2008), as well how the game master's key role of setting the stage for players influences this relationship (Mackay, 2001; Sandberg 2004; Pettersson 2006). For larp specifically, the power relations between organizers and players and how they can be levelled for the

purpose of producing an event collaboratively has been discussed (Svanevik, 2005) and its implementation illustrated in an account for the larp event *The White Road* (Pedersen and Munch, 2008).

However, larp events do not take place in isolation, but rather within a wider context of a community of participants, a social space where authority affects social relations. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu developed a theory showing how such symbols of authority in the form of symbolic capital structure social space (which he called *Habitus*). Individuals invoke status symbols to gain recognition within a community. To have such symbols is to have symbolic capital. Those who create it enjoy a great deal of prestige within the group. Moreover, since these symbols are authoritative, they are invoked by other members of the group who also seek to emulate them in order to gain some of the recognition associated with them. Thus, status symbols can also be normative in the sense that they encourage the types of practices associated with the symbols as socially appropriate, while discouraging other practices as inappropriate. Therefore, symbolic capital also acts as a force of homogenization within the community. This theory can facilitate the understanding of how authoritative symbols are significant for both the formation of a community as well as the creation of power hierarchies within it.

Language serves an interesting function in the establishment of symbolic capital, as it is a vehicle for its communication. In that sense, language can act as a form of social control in the sense that it is used to enforce “norms of appropriateness” (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 9). Language thus has an important role in “shaping reality, creating patterns of understanding, which people then apply in social practices” (Mayr, 2008, p.5). This makes it a powerful tool for identifying symbolic capital.

When larp events are organized, organizers use language to communicate which practices are emphasized as important, and how the larp should normatively be conducted. These norms are invoked for the purpose of legitimizing the larp and can be transformed into attributes of symbolic capital vested with power. Therefore larp events can be seen as an expression of established community practices. In this way, the event builds

on, and generates, authoritative attributes, which can be revealed through the study of the language the organizers use.

When larp events are organized, organizers use language to communicate which practices are emphasized as important, and how the larp should normatively be conducted.

The purpose of this paper is to locate common authoritative symbols in the larp presentations from two cities, and use Bourdieu’s theory to identify central norms in the material and how they can be significant as a homogenizing force within a larp community. After a discussion on methodology below, the paper starts with a presentation of Bourdieu’s theory. It then goes on to analyze written presentation documents from four larps in each of the two chosen communities: Edmonton, Canada, and Stockholm, Sweden¹. The conclusion of this inquiry discusses the potential implications of authoritative symbols for participants in the larp community and areas for future research.

1.2 Methodology

Edmonton is the capital of the province Alberta in Canada. The metropolitan area has about one million inhabitants. The four larps studied are *Eternium*, *Alliance: Alberta*, *Sovereign* and *Ruritania*, all campaign larps. Stockholm is the national capital of Sweden, with about two million residents in the metropolitan area. The chosen larps are *Frizon*, *Frid I Hernedal*, *Stockholm by Night* and the larps organized under the umbrella of *Lajofabriken*. The first was a stand-alone event taking place over a weekend. The second was part of a longer storyline but only one weekend event was organized during the time of study. The third was a campaign larp where each event formed a part of a longer narrative, and last were regularly scheduled events, staged by separate teams of organizers, yet produced on the same organizational platform, which is why they are treated as affiliated in the analysis below.

The communities have been chosen through the author’s familiarity with them and the local channels of communication, having resided in both, which greatly facilitated locating presentation

¹ All translations from Swedish to English are made by the author.

material about upcoming events. The author has participated in the larp *Sovereign*, and has previous experience of other larps in Edmonton as well, but has, for logistical reasons, not been able to participate in larps in Stockholm since moving to Edmonton in 2005.

Even though larps share the common denominators of participants acting out characters in a fictional setting, there can be differences in the structures, frameworks and forms that larp can take even within a given city. To ensure the validity of the empirical material and that the selected larps are representative for the respective community, they have been chosen from both indoor and outdoor larps to capture a wider range of practices.

Material was collected during the summer of 2010, accessed via Internet. The events commonly had some form of website, sometimes specifically designed for the particular event in question and sometimes through social media like Facebook. Moreover, some websites hosted downloadable pdf-files that included more extensive information about the larp and its framework, or structure for play. Information that is provided to only an individual player or a subgroup of players has not been included.

This study only investigates the language and treatment of larp expressed in the texts published for the respective events and accessible to all players. The task was to identify which practices the writer emphasized as particularly important for the larp, relying on a hermeneutic interpretative analytical approach (Prasad, 2002).

While these interpretations to some extent are inferred from the material, they are validated by grounding in personal experiences (see above) as well as by corroborating those using observations from contemporary larp discourse. For instance, interpretations made here correspond roughly to the Gamist, Dramatist and Immersionist styles of the Three Way Model (Böckman, 2002), which categorizes larp styles based on ethos, discussed extensively within the Nordic larp community (Böckman, 2003; Mäkelä, Koistinen, Siukola and Turunen, 2005; Holter, 2007; Care Boss, 2008).

At heart, this study uses Mill's Most Different System Design to compare the two cases (Ragin, 1987) where different practices are juxtaposed against each other to identify the common social

process at work (Mill, 1973; Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Sartori, 1994), specifically attributes vested with authoritative symbolic capital.

However, symbolic capital can also be expressed through other means, like conversations and actions. It is therefore recognized that this material is not and cannot be fully representative of any of the discussed events without complementary participant observation studies required for capturing such expressions. However, those methods are outside the scope of this paper and will therefore not be discussed.

2. SYMBOLIC CAPITAL BUILDING COMMUNITIES

2.1 Pierre Bourdieu's theory

Capital has traditionally been discussed in terms of material ownership. This has long been acknowledged as significant for structuring social space on the collective level, for instance in terms of the divisions between upper and lower classes. Pierre Bourdieu argued that such structures within communities can be shaped by more than just this dimension. He expanded the definition of capital to include symbolic capital, which is inherently connected to cultural processes (Bourdieu, 1984; Calhoun, 1993; Crossley, 2001).

The acquisition and generation of symbolic capital is deeply intertwined with the forms it can take, which is often a reflection of the social space where it originated. It can manifest in three forms; objectified, embodied and Habitus. The first are physical, such as museums, textbooks or instruments. The second consists of "principles of consciousness in predispositions and propensities and in physical features such as body language, stances, intonation and lifestyle choices" (Moore, 2008, p.105), for instance through behaviour or manners of speech.

The third relates to dispositions and attitudes that are produced through socialization into a particular social space, or Habitus. Bourdieu frames this concept as social position, expressed as social belonging. All individuals who have lived through the same conditions share the same Habitus, and could be said to form a group or a social class in a sociological sense. The shared conditions lead to shared experiences, which, in turn, leads to the adoption of similar attitudes (Crossley, 2001), "understood as a system of

dispositions common to all products of the same conditionings" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.59).

Structures in social space are thus not just a way to describe relative social position, but also "a system of cognitive and motivating structures...procedures to follow, paths to take" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.53). The individual expresses social position as adopted and internalized social reflexes, sometimes on a subconscious level, or, in lay-man's terms, a form of taken-for-granted 'common sense'.

This common sense shapes social perceptions and generates social actions and common practices, which both reproduce the dispositions of the social position but also lead to new and unique expressions informed by it. Within a particular social group, then, *Habitus* serves to generate practices that are considered by the group as 'correct', or as the socially accepted forms of behaviour, guaranteeing "constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.54). Thus, the homogeneity of the shared experiences makes the *Habitus* itself a homogenizing force. Moreover, this set of dispositions is durable, both in the sense that it forms a part of the social construction of the self, and in the sense that it remains transposable between different social fields.

The *Habitus* form of capital, i.e. dispositions and attitudes, consists of particular forms of expertise, the ability to discriminate between genres and periods, in-depth understanding of the 'rules of the game', and the capacity to discriminate between canonical and non-canonical information (Moore, 2008, p.106). It can also be expressed through particular professional attributes, or specialized jargon. Some examples include having gone through "the traditional English public school..., the priesthood or the military or...craft apprenticeship or...the apprenticeship of the artist or, elsewhere, in the cultivation of elite sporting skills or the vocations of the liberal professions" (Moore, 2008, p.111).

Both *Habitus* and embodied capital can be unconscious in nature, akin to adopted social reflexes, and have a corporeal quality, in the sense that they cannot be separated from the individual who carries them. This quality suggests that this form of capital can only be accumulated over time (Moore, 2008, pp.109-110) by internalizing the *Habitus* and its embodied capital through

socialization as a member of a social group. Thus, after an extended period of time, the individual will start manifesting the key symbolic elements of a particular *Habitus* as they are adopted as manners of speech and body language.

Continuing with the example above, the alumni of the prestigious schools will possess more symbolic capital than those who are not. Their diplomas constitute the objectified form of this capital and their manner of speaking constitutes the embodied form of capital, for instance manifested as Oxford English. Finally, attendance becomes a marker of membership in a certain social elite, inaccessible to those who did not attend notwithstanding the potential access to monetary wealth of these others. They are simply not 'Oxford-men', as it were. This membership also changes how they perceive the world around them, a perspective which they share only with other alumni. As this example illustrates, this cultural capital can be used for boundary work (Lamont, 1992; Lamont and Thévenot, 2000), defining who is a member of a group and who is not.

Moreover, it has even been argued that the accumulation of symbolic capital "is identical to the formation of *Habitus*, an integration of mind and body harmoniously adapted to specialized habitats (fields) and transposable beyond them" (Moore, 2008, p.110). In other words, the formation of symbolic capital itself generates a social space intertwined with the form of the symbolic capital.

Symbolic capital can be unequally distributed among the population within any given community. Such inequalities can reflect a difference in the capacity to acquire capital on behalf of the individual (Moore, 2008, p.109), and also differences in the amount of cultural capital an individual has to start with as a function of how much parents can transfer to their children. Thus, parents can choose more or less prestigious schools, enrol children in extra-curricular activities such as arts or sports training and so on (Calhoun, 1993, p.70).

It can therefore be argued that the forms and attributes symbolic capital takes and are invested with is related to power. That is, the holders of prestigious symbolic capital reproduce the attributes that should be considered prestigious within the given field. Thus, the generation of

symbolic capital on an individual level is intrinsically linked with its generation on a collective level, and, in turn, to the production and reproduction of such capital in a community.

This has significance for agency. For individuals, the accumulation of capital facilitates social action, both in terms of capacity to orient and act within a particular field, but also in terms of gaining legitimacy in the eyes of other actors in the same field. Moreover, the agent that can shape the prestigious symbolic capital of a *Habitus* can influence community practices, which also means that this type of capital can become an instrument of domination. The persons who have such capital, manifested as symbols of authority as discussed above, can use them to maintain power. Authoritative symbols, and the language associated with them, can therefore be a key for understanding power relations.

Simultaneously, the transposability of the symbolic capital between different *Habitus* is sometimes limited. An attribute that is considered a mark of high status in one context can, in another, be considered a mark of low status. For example, in some social settings, jewellery known as *bling* would be considered a symbol of power and recognition, but the same piece of jewellery would in other settings be considered vulgar and gauche.

2.2 Bourdieu's theory applied to the field of larp

This theory can be applied to the field of larp. Each larp event can be thought of as a formative event, which creates shared experiences for the participants. As such, they set precedents for how larps can and should be structured when the narrative of those events is told and re-told. When several events employ the same framework of practices, such precedents gradually become entrenched and institutionalized, perhaps even mythologized, as ways to be emulated. Thus, the events, and attributes associated with them, become cultural capital by virtue of their acting as constitutive elements in building the *Habitus* of the larp community. The symbols of successful larps are thus significant forms of cultural capital of the community.

Organizers who want to be perceived as authoritative will be compelled to adopt these symbols to gain legitimacy within the community and attract players. In other words, while some ideas about how to do larp might be implicitly taken for granted by players in general, the

organizer will have to invoke the attributes that are specifically associated with authority and 'good larp' in order to persuade players that they are competent and the experience they offer is worthwhile. In effect, by displaying them and emphasizing them in the presentation material, they show their credentials.

Organizers who want to be perceived as authoritative will be compelled to adopt these symbols to gain legitimacy within the community and attract players.

This illustrates how cultural capital, in the shape of authoritative symbols, constitutes a homogenizing force within the *Habitus*. As they are repeatedly invoked as symbols of authority by new organizers, they become further entrenched, thus, becoming institutionalized required tools for larp.

In the larp community, objectified forms of capital could be props, costuming or books. Embodied capital in the larp community includes the capacity to speak the jargon. *Habitus* forms could be knowledge and distinction between different genres of larp settings, or in-depth knowledge of larp frameworks, like rules or styles.

This has implications for how the role of organizers can be discussed in terms of agenda-setters and authoritative agents within the community. On the one hand, they are constrained by the structures of the *Habitus* in which they operate. Ignoring dominant symbols in their larp presentations could lead to the community discounting the event as illegitimate or 'bad'. Conversely, conforming to, and invoking, the dominant symbols will further entrench them as status symbols in the public consciousness, which might have implications for future organizers.

At the same time, the organizer retains some measure of agency through their prerogative in demonstrating which larp practices participants should adhere to. When acting in this capacity, organizers are agents with the power to exclude players who do not conform to the rules (a power that may or may not be exercised). They also have power to encourage (or even coerce) players into behaving in accordance with them during the individual larp, but also, and more importantly,

with the power to affect the values of the larp community as a whole.

This, in turn, shapes and re-shapes opinions about what type of capital should be considered important by the community, i.e. what the community considers to be the properties of 'good' and 'bad' larps. When a symbol becomes so taken-for-granted that virtually every larp needs to adopt it to come across as legitimate, the effects are arguably particularly salient and potentially constraining. The forms will have a momentum of their own, making it difficult for participants to break with them because of their inherent symbolic value. Players with preferences different from the dominant value system might lack the opportunity to explore alternatives, and organizers can be influenced in terms of what types of larps they can organize and still expect to attract players.

Identifying attributes that organizers emphasize as authoritative, allows a researcher to track such symbols or attributes vested with cultural capital, and when these common denominators are shared by many larps in the same community, an argument can be made that this is an indicator of when they have become a homogenizing force.

Identifying attributes that organizers emphasize as authoritative, allows a researcher to track such symbols or attributes vested with cultural capital, and when these common denominators are shared by many larps in the same community, an argument can be made that this is an indicator of when they have become a homogenizing force.

3. LARP EVENTS IN TWO COMMUNITIES

The following describes the attributes which organizers most commonly have stressed as particularly significant for larps in their presentations in the two cities. The section starts with an account of the Stockholm larps, followed by a description of the Edmonton larps.

3.1 Stockholm larps

The strongest common denominators of the Stockholm larp documents are thematic play and a genre preference for social realist drama, which presentations for all but one larp has stressed, while two larps emphasize an ideal of authenticity.

The former focus on dramatic themes is well illustrated by two events from the *Lajofabriken* platform. One is called *30-års-krisen*, set at a class re-union where all involved are confronted with the issues of increasing age and leaving adolescence behind. Themes include doubts about becoming a parent, deciding on where to settle down or difficult career choices (*30-års-krisen*, 2010). Another is *New Voices in Art*, set at a debutante gallery. This is framed as a humoristic larp where the participants "play version of themselves as promising artists" (*New Voices in Art*). The themes are ambition, falseness and loneliness. Both emphasize a form of kitchen sink realism and the exploration of dramatic themes.

While *Frizon* is not set in everyday life, its presentation material emphasizes the exploration of themes too. The website formulates four concrete thematic questions that the larp revolves around, using the confrontation between love and war, loyalty and fear against the backdrop of a long and exhausting war spanning generations as a dramatic frame (*Frizon*). The organizers turn to the players, saying that they expect "you to...enact the [thematic] questions your role will be confronted with, and actively drive the play of other characters" (*Frizon*). This will be further facilitated through the use of character and story development discussions pre and post-event. Moreover, the character development process is initialized with the organizers providing the players with a "skeletal draft consisting of a number of directional instructions that describe our expectations on the role you will play. It will thus be an assignment to you as a player to build a role that fills a particular function in the dramaturgy of the larp" (*Frizon*).

Even the *Stockholm by Night* Vampire larp discusses the importance of mature themes, including "sex, racism, oppression, dominance/submission and coercion" and that "sensitive subjects in particular will be discussed and vented beforehand" (*Stockholm by Night*), employing the "'cut and 'brake'" (*Stockholm by Night*) safety words, to facilitate the play of scenes that touch

upon sensitive subjects. This is the only larp which clearly deals with the supernatural, and also the only one using an extensive rule-set is, the Mind's Eye Theatre mechanics, which was imported from North America along with the setting. Interestingly enough, the rule-set is not emphasized very much on the website, which is more focused on the above dimensions of dramatic play.

Frid I Hernedal is an exception to the pattern in the absence of discussion on dramatic themes. It is set in a medieval fantasy world and focuses heavily on authenticity, which is continuously stressed by the organizers. They write that their vision is to create the "genuine" simple life in a village, where the organizers are aiming for "quality rather than quantity" (Frid I Hernedal). Examples include the use of steel weapons for the purpose of enhancing atmosphere, and recommendation to bring hand-made leather shoes and medieval looking glasses. Indeed, the website presents a list of costume and prop materials, ranging from excellent to barely acceptable in terms of their appropriateness for the larp. In this context, the behavioural guidelines for how to use steel weapons safely in a combat situation are framed as the rules of the larp.

The *Frizon* larp also makes use of similar framings. For instance, its outdoor setting will have players living in camps and carrying equipment in "military-like exercises that occasionally will be physically and psychologically challenging" (Frizon). This requirement to bring camping equipment for use within the diegesis similarly comes across as aiming to create an authentic setting.



Figure 1: Front cover: Alliance Rulebook

The *Lajvfabriken* website lacks this emphasis on authenticity. Props and costuming are only discussed in terms of how events should not be demanding in this regard so that they can remain easily accessible both new and old participants (Lajvfabriken).

3.2 Edmonton Larps

In sharp contrast to the Stockholm material, all the Edmonton larps deal with the supernatural in some form. *Alliance*, *Sovereign*, and *Eternium* are all placed in Fantasy settings and in *Ruritania*, the players take the roles of powerful wizards in an alternate reality version of the 19th century Europe. The genre seems preferred within the community.

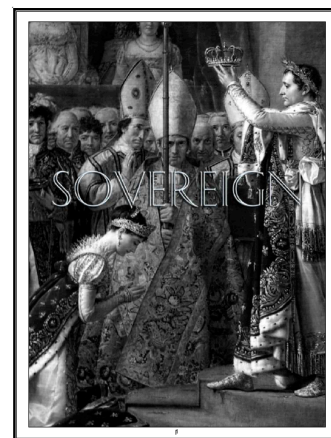


Figure 2 Front cover: Sovereign Rulebook

Another dominant common denominator is the thick rulebook, which is also employed by all larps (see Figures 1-4). This artefact is central in all studied larp presentations, with the *Eternium* (see Figure 4) book being the longest at 292 pages (Darkon Wargaming Club, 2009), and the *Ruritania* rule-set (see Figure 3) being the shortest at 96 pages (Kornelsen and Lam). The elaborate design of the *Alliance* rulebook front cover stands out as an indicator of the artefact's significance (see Figure 1). Indeed, the rule-set can to some extent be considered the vehicle for the larp presentation. That is likely particularly true for *Ruritania* and *Sovereign*, where the organizers also wrote the books (Kornelsen and Lam; *Sovereign*)

The absolute majority of the space in these volumes is devoted to regulatory game mechanics, listing traits, abilities and systems for task resolution that can be used to resolve conflicts between characters. In *Sovereign*, for instance, the rules stipulate that when characters engage in combat with each other,

players take turns to invoke their characters' abilities to determine the outcome. Likewise, special cards are used to invoke traits for social actions, like detecting lies (*Sovereign*). An example of how significant the organizers seem to consider these mechanics is found in the *Alliance* book, where the sneaking skill rule is framed as one of the cardinal principles of the larp, which can only be used with a Marshall present, i.e. a rule-enforcing larp officer (Ventrella, 2008).



Figure 3: Front cover: Ruritania rulebook

All studied Edmonton larps make use of character sheets, experience points, skill checks and other such methods. New players start by generating a character and are given the same starting parameters, though these parameters are given varying labels, for instance packages (Kornelsen and Lam), build points for the first level (Ventrella, 2008), or rank (Darkon Wargaming Club, 2009). *Sovereign* comes across as slightly different, as the organizers design the mechanical aspects of the character, though players are still expected to indicate spheres of character competence for the organizers by ranking these preferences at start (*Sovereign*), suggesting that some form of point system is still in use. These systems ensure that all starting characters have equivalent power levels. Moreover, all these systems of resolution take place outside of the diegesis, i.e. participants need to step out-of-character to implement the rule-set. This use of the term 'rules' differs quite substantially from the game mechanics form employed in the *Frid I Hernedal* material, which regulates activities while keeping the integrity of the diegesis intact.

Again unlike the Stockholm material, authenticity receives very little attention. *Sovereign* stands out as an exception to this rule and comes with a 100 pages long separate setting volume which provides the most extensive information on the history, culture, religion and laws of the setting of any of the studied larps (*Sovereign: Player's Handbook*). It gives players thorough guidance for enacting these and the larp therefore comes across as concerned with authenticity as well as mechanics. However, it is not accompanied with any recommendations on how to embody these cultures through costumes or props. Players are thus left without guidance with regards to how these cultures should be physically brought to life. Indeed, since the cultures are operationalized as quantitative mechanics, it seems more likely that they are primarily thought of as another variable for resolving social actions, like persuasion, by using the rules rather than role-playing.

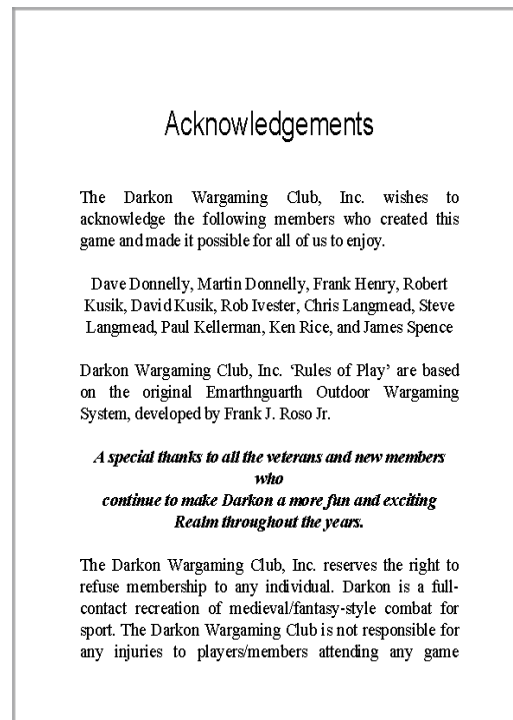


Figure 4 Front cover: Darkon Wargaming Club

Authenticity elements are largely absent in the other larps. The *Alliance* material has five pages of setting information and some passages which emphasize that participants should always stay in character, but this space is still quite limited given the size of the book (Ventrella, 2008). The Darkon rule-book for the *Eternium* larp has only about one page devoted to costuming and the website lacks

notes on this entirely completely (Darkon Wargaming Club, 2009, p.23).

The guidelines for *Ruritania* quite explicitly de-emphasize the importance of costuming and authenticity. For example, it states that an all-black costume will always be accepted, even though the play is set in a fantasy version of 19th century Europe (Kornelsen and Lam), revealing that this is not a primary concern of the organizers.

The material is also quite scarce when it comes to other dimensions of larp, like the exploration of narratives or dramatic themes. *Eternium* and *Sovereign* are devoid of such discussions, and the *Alliance* rule-book even forbids players outright from exploring certain mature themes, like rape, in their character backgrounds (Ventrella, 2008).

Ruritania differs from the others in this regard and contains four pages on techniques for exploring and enhancing drama during role-playing, including cut scenes and dialogue management. The early and prominent position of these techniques in the booklet suggests that the organizers consider drama significant and want to emphasize them (Kornelsen and Lam, pp.5-9).

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Overview

This comparison brings out a number of interesting observations. The two communities have developed quite different preferences. While two of the Stockholm larps do include fantasy elements in the sense of the supernatural, there seems to be a greater fondness for social realism and drama. In contrast, the Edmonton larp community seems to prefer fantasy larps and all events incorporate some element of this. Larp forms are also clearly divergent (see more on this below). This indicates a divergence with regards to community assumptions about what larps are or should be. It seems clear that the larp communities in Stockholm and Edmonton are distinctly different from each other.

4.2 The authoritative symbolic capital of the Stockholm larp community

The centrality of dramatic themes and authenticity on the Stockholm larp scene suggest that these two attributes are authoritative in that community. Most of the studied larps have some measure of emphasis on the former, and the second is strongly focused *Frid I Hernedal* larp, which relies almost

exclusively on this ideal and also exists to some extent in *Frizon*, with its focus on the authentic refugee experience, but is even more pronounced in the. These two roughly correspond to the Dramatist and Immersionist larp styles of the Three Way Model (Bøckman, 2002).

As symbolic capital, dramatic themes are very much expressed in the Habitus and embodied forms. Knowledge, the capacity for distinction and the embodiment of the role seem to be afforded more authority than objectified forms of capital, like rulebooks or props. As a homogenizing force, it is particularly interesting to discuss in terms of the power relations between the organizers and players.

These two are always involved in a complex power relationship within the role-playing activity. Both actors participate in the definition of the game world, and a range of different ways of managing power between the actors exists between games and even within games (Montola, 2003). As Montola has described, players often have a “decisive power to define the decisions made by a free-willed character construct” (Montola, 2003, p. 24).

However, when the focus lies on exploring the dramatic elements of the narrative defined by a set of themes, there is arguably a shift of power towards the organizers on at least one level. A very explicit example of this was the larp *En Stilla Middag Med Familjen*, where the organizers both reserved the power to define dominant themes for the larp, but also retained the privilege of limiting endogenic player choice during the larp event itself. For instance, when a player chose to leave the scene, an organizer could intervene, almost like a director, and compel the player to return to the scene for purpose of bringing it to its maximum dramatic potential if the exit was judged premature (Hultman, Westerling, and Wrigstad, 2008).

In the Stockholm material, few larps exhibit language indicating that organizers intend to intervene as much as in the above example. Only in the *Frizon* material is there evidence of this type of director style positioning for the organizers. Here, they assume the right to give players the acting cues they judge to be appropriate for illustrating the central themes of the narrative. Even so, the act of defining the central theme for the larp arguably constitutes an exercise of power by the organizers

over the players, since the latter a priori attend an event and act within a framework already established by the former. The act itself could limit the scope of available player actions to at least some extent.

It could be argued that presenting a central theme in the presentation material is significant for the artistic integrity of the larp. As Sandberg writes, "The larp piece only exists in the shared fantasy, which means that the larp is both a mental and physical form of human expression that can only be realised in unity" (Sandberg, 2004, p.275). Thus there are consequences if the vision is not shared on some level, including, in extreme situations, a breakdown of the diegesis itself.

Even so, some players might find avenues for dramatic exploration that the organizers could not anticipate equally fascinating, if not more. They might remain unexplored if the organizers are too interventionist with regards to which themes that should be explored and how.

Organizer fiat can thus constrain the space for the player to explore other themes that a player might find appropriate for the setting and/or the role. In other words, the framework assigns some amount of centralized artistic control to the organizer. In principle, this larp form thus seems to legitimize a measure of the top-down form of organization that can be found in the rule-book framework, albeit without the subtext of mistrust (see below).

The second interesting symbol of authority is authenticity. This form of symbolic capital quite clearly takes the embodied and objectified forms of props, costuming and the ability to appear authentic. As such, it is primarily expressed through visual cues emphasized in the *Frid I Hernedal* presentation, where the organizer's vision was to create the "genuine" simple life in a village (Frid I Hernedal). That language corresponds well to Bøckman's description of the Immersionist style, which is focused on experience the life of the role (Bøckman, 2002). Invoking these practices in larps has been referred to as creating the 360° illusion, which is common in Sweden (Koljonen, 2007).

As a homogenizing force, it has several important implications. First of all, the amount of resources in terms of time and/or money required for preparation can be prohibitive. Second, framing good looking costumes and props as prestigious could favour participants who are talented

craftsmen over those focused on other aspects of larp, like role-playing.

Third, the relations between players and organizers might be different, too. Unlike the director position of the Dramatist organizer, the Immersionist seems to be more like a watchmaker, winding up the larp and then intervening in the actual play as little as possible. This implies a situation where players are given a great deal of freedom in terms of how to act, which suggests an egalitarian ethos.

Fourthly, the focus on visual cues can in itself become a basis for inclusion or, more significantly, exclusion. For instance, *Frid I Hernedal* encourages players with poor eye-sight to either get authentic looking eye-wear or consider playing a role with poor eye-sight if such a prop cannot be acquired (Frid I Hernedal).

It might be interesting for players with disabilities like poor eye-sight to explore what life would be like in a different social and technological setting on occasion. However, if a rigorous interpretation of this type of symbolic capital becomes institutionalized as a community wide minimum standard for larp, these players might either find themselves structurally confined to such roles or even excluded if they lack the capacity to procure the required equipment.

Exclusion, inclusion and discrimination in larps have been discussed in the past within the Swedish larp community. For instance, on one Internet forum, posters discussed how dwarven or elven roles could be made accessible for a diversity of players if organizers observed discretion in how physical traits are used to described these roles. Even so, one poster in that discussion thread argued that "15 year old captains and blond Arabs destroys the illusion" (Svarta Katten), revealing how important these visual cues can be for the role-playing experience of some players.

As it stands, the material for this study does not allow any conclusions about how these issues have been addressed in *Frid I Hernedal* or the community in general, but the presentation texts for this larp certainly seem to make much more rigorous demands for equipment than is the case in any of the Edmonton larps, indicating at least some difference in attitude with regards to how equipment is treated in the two communities.

4.3 The authoritative symbolic capital of the Edmonton larp community

The Edmonton material comes across as more homogenous than the Stockholm material does. The fact that game mechanics have been so ubiquitously adopted suggests that this attribute is authoritative and treated as symbolic capital in its own right for this larp community and even a quite dominant attribute; all larps in this sample, without exception, use it as the basic framework of practice. It corresponds closely to philosophy of the style Bøckman has labelled as Gamist which focuses on scoring points and overcoming challenges (Bøckman, 2002), and has been observed as very common in American larps (Stark, 2012a). Although Canada is a different country, some isomorphism across the border might not be entirely surprising.

This artefact takes all three forms of capital. It is objectified in the sense that it exists, physically, in the form of a rulebook. It has a Habitus form in the sense that knowledge about the rules, or perhaps even more significantly, the capacity to design them, becomes a marker of distinction by virtue of the centrality of the rulebook object itself. Finally, it takes an embodied form in the sense that command of the jargon also is tied to the rule-book.

This attribute could very well be connected to the preference for creating larps involving supernatural elements in the diegesis. Rules might be perceived as an effective intuitive way of managing narrative elements that are possible to generate with special effects in movies but are otherwise challenging to incorporate within a larp narrative.

However, closer scrutiny of how the mechanics are conceptualized within the material shows that they fill a prominent function that go beyond such needs. For instance, there are many rules that exist regardless of the involvement of supernatural elements in the diegesis, like the sneaking rule in *Alliance*. This is given cardinal significance, indicating that it is always implemented, regardless of whether any supernatural ability is involved in the resolution or not. Likewise, in both *Sovereign* and *Alliance*, players are required to use character sheets irrespective of their characters' ability to use supernatural powers, and *Sovereign* employs rules for solving common social interactions, like persuasion (Sovereign).

The *Alliance* rule-book states that Alliance larps are "all about role-playing" (Ventrella, 2008, p.13), suggesting that rules might be a question of simulation. However, the rule-set also stipulates that all characters, even older and arguably more experienced ones, are given the same starting conditions. This indicates that it actually acts as symbols of fair play.

Indeed, the player is explicitly asked to provide a rationale for why an aged character starts on level one in the background write-up:

"If your character is older, you may have to think of a reason why your character is only first level. Perhaps you have been a farmer or a trapper for many years and now you have been kicked out of the family / mistreated by an evil bad guy / stirred into action by some injustice and have decided to become an adventurer. Or maybe you just never liked to study" (Ventrella, 2008, p 14).

The character backgrounds are thus confined by the mechanics, where some character choices are treated as a priori unacceptable, rather than using the mechanics to become an expression of the character. In the text, the mechanics take precedence over role-playing freedom, a strong indication that the rules are primarily a tool for fairness. In her discussion on American larp culture, Stark similarly concludes that quantitative mechanics reflect an ideal of equal opportunity (Stark, L., 2012a).

However, rule-books and game mechanics transformed into a homogenizing form of cultural capital in the community could have interesting implications for practices within the Habitus.

First of all, the rules rely heavily on quantitative mechanics to regulate player behaviour, implying a need to do so. The suggestion is that organizers should expect that players will actively try to cheat or otherwise act to gain an unfair advantage in a manner that is detrimental to the event in some respect. The rule-set then constitutes a way to discourage such behaviour, empowering organizers with control over player activities to ascertain that their actions do not violate the rules, for instance by requiring a Marshall for resolution of certain tasks, as done in *Alliance*. The organizer

is thus positioned to act as a referee, adjudicating the implementation of the mechanics, but also being omnipresent during the actual play in order to police the larp to ensure compliance with the rules. This sends a strong signal that players cannot be depended upon to act without supervision. The rationale for using rules is thus that players cannot be trusted. Consequently, the rule-book represents a philosophy of mistrust in the players.

Secondly, while the mechanics ostensibly symbolize fair play, it is far from clear that their implementation will actually result in fairness. The quantitative nature of these mechanics in itself encourages certain types of players while discouraging others. Those who are interested in such quantitative exercises and those who have concentrated on gaining a good grasp of the quantitative rule-set will tend to be advantaged when it comes to task resolution over those who do not care about rules or those who simply do not have an affinity for mathematics. The framework will therefore favour players who act in a manner that optimizes the outcomes enforced by the rules in order to win the challenge, a behaviour colloquially known as “min-maxing”. Thus, since the quantitative nature of the framework favours one type of player over others, the fairness ideal itself ultimately becomes something of an illusion.

Thirdly, organizers seem expected to be able to produce, or at least adopt, an encompassing rule-book to be perceived as legitimate. This means that a good deal of time will be directed towards either creating the rule-set and writing it, which, with a book of hundreds of pages, like the ones used in Edmonton, constitutes a considerable effort on the part of the organizers, but likely results in a great deal of prestige within the community. Even if the organizers adopt a pre-written rule-set, like in *Alliance*, there is still the time and effort that players and organizers need to devote to assign mechanics to their characters and policing player behaviour to make sure that it complies with the rules.

Fourthly, implementing the mechanics always take place outside the diegesis. As such, the rules as an authority constitute a significant institutionalized driver requiring the participants to engage in exogenic practices to engage with them. In other words, if players are faced with a conflict between characters, they have to stop roleplaying and step out of character, maybe to check character sheets or

calling on an organizer to mediate, to be able to implement the game mechanics for the purpose of resolving that conflict. Only by ignoring the rules can they solve such situations within the diegesis, without stepping out of character. The mechanics themselves thus compel players to shift their focus from building the diegetic continuum to regulating it. This could impede creative player cooperation within the diegesis, even as the ideal of fairness invoked by the symbol is not actually achieved.

Finally, in organizational theory, rule-boundedness and mistrust are integral to strong top-down organizational power structures (Hood, 2000). In terms of larp, this could manifest through players feeling compelled to act within the confines of the rule-set, or being encouraged to act in certain way to satisfy the rule-set, as in the case of character generation in *Alliance* discussed above. Together, these basic principles are inherently disempowering and obstruct bottoms-up impulses.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This text has discussed the significance of symbolic capital for larp events and larp communities.

The two communities emphasize different forms and manifestations of symbolic capital. Indeed, it can be argued that the Edmonton and Stockholm larp communities form different Habiti. As such, participants introduced to larp in these two different locales are likely to be socialized into different ways of doing larps, emphasizing different symbols or attributes as necessary, or important, for doing larp. In Edmonton, the rulebook would probably be seen as a necessity for a ‘good’ larp, and the more all-inclusive the mechanics, the better. In Stockholm, this symbol is largely absent and it is more likely that a player would focus on authentic props or the exploration dramatic themes as a key symbol of larp.

Indeed, it can be argued that the Edmonton and Stockholm larp communities form different Habiti.

Even so, as can be seen in the material organizers in the two communities have been exposed to similar ideas about larp forms to at least some extent. Thus, presentations in both communities reflect over how to frame rules, the exploration of narratives, or how to address costuming and

props, which ultimately concerns issues of authenticity.

However, as Bourdieu notes, an attribute can be vested with symbolic capital in one context but considered a sign of the lack of distinction in another. The material in this study indicates that game mechanics are an authoritative symbol in Edmonton, much less so in Stockholm.

The symbolic capital invoked through language can act as a labelling mechanism, allowing players to easily identify which events they would enjoy participating in. However, this argument is only valid if the community has a variety of events to choose from. In a community where the same playing styles, genre or themes are dominant, the choice remains limited.

Some interesting questions arise from these observations. First of all, the dominance of the mechanics symbol in the Edmonton community leaves the question of how this affects players who do not care much for it. Its pervasiveness suggests that they lack the opportunity to explore alternative forms of larp. Are players even aware that alternatives exist at all?

Moreover, to what extent do larps become socially constructed as 'good' or 'bad' based on the authoritative symbols invoked by the organizers and/or players? To what extent should these symbols be guiding for either actor within a larp? Is it even possible to decouple these authoritative attributes, as forms of symbolic capital, from the aesthetic requirements of different larp forms? For instance, in Edmonton, all the larps use character sheets, which seem like an insignificant tool in Stockholm. Does this affect how characters or roles are described by organizers and players? Does it affect acting practices?

In an interesting study of social interactions in MMORPGs, Myers argued that breaking entrenched social rules can have serious consequences for the maintenance of social relationships. He had his character, Twixt, behave strictly according to coded rules, regardless of the prevailing social norms that players had created beyond those embedded in the computer games' programming. This provoked severe reactions from other players in the community, and eventually to Myers' exclusion from it (Myers, 2008). The study gives reason to ask if ostracism could become a problem within larp communities, too, when a

particular form of symbolic capital is so dominant as to be considered a necessary attribute for the larp event.

For example, how would a community react to an organizer coming from a larp Habitus which emphasizes radically different forms of symbolic capital organizing a larp invoking that of the place of origin? How would the Stockholm community react to an Edmonton organizer trying to set up an event where the game mechanics take centre stage, or how would the Edmonton community react to a Stockholm larper trying to organize a larp that invokes the attributes of dramatic exploration and authenticity, or decides to ignore the aforementioned characters sheet as a larp tool? Would the organizer be able to attract players or would they experience a fate similar to that of Twixt?

This text has only ventured to explore the presentation material of the studied events, which leaves a rather large realm outside the scope of the inquiry. For instance, how significant are other forms of symbolic capital, like venues, colloquialisms and body language, for building cultural capital within the community?

Likewise, to what extent do players actually behave according to the vision or style set out by the organizers? For instance, do players actively try to explore the themes an organizer wants to focus on? Will demands on authenticity result in players acting realistically for the setting? Do players actually take out the character sheets and use social traits to resolve a conversation between characters as stipulated by the rule-book? Other methodologies, such as participant observation, would be especially useful for answering these kinds of questions.

This paper has the city as the chosen field of study, but since only written presentations have been studied, little can be said about to what extent the two communities are internally homogenous. It is possible that a single city could contain more than one community of larpers, depending on how social networking functions among larpers. The question of how wide a larp community can become remains unanswered here.

Finally, how do particular manifestations of symbolic capital, like the rule-set, spread across time and space and between communities? More to the point, why did practices evolve so differently in

Edmonton and Stockholm? The significance of cultural capital as a homogenizing force in terms of how it compels key actors to reproduce its key attributes has already been noted. The material suggests that at some point after having adopted larp as a practice, Stockholm organizers started to emphasize dramatic narrative and authenticity as symbols of good larps, which never seems to have been the case in Edmonton. Finding explanations for this could be the subject of historical studies of the development of the different larp communities.

Though speculative at best, if this author were to conduct such a study, it could start with the hypothesis that prime gatekeepers in the Stockholm community might have had educational backgrounds in the arts or humanities, which could explain why the quantitative form of larp practice might have had less salience there. Stark's account for the Knudepunkt, the yearly Nordic larp convention hints at this. She underscores how the participants were different from their North American counterparts: "They were still geeks, but geeks of a different breed – art geeks" (Stark, 2012b, p.211) and then goes on to describe their fashions and jargon, i.e. their embodied cultural capital, in some detail, including a note on the potential difference in average educational level. To some extent, her observations seem to corroborate the Bourdieuan analysis made here, in terms of how communities adopt different cultural attributes as symbols of prestige.

It is entirely possible that the different Habiti, once established, encourage different types of people to step into the role of gatekeeper and steward of the larp culture. In the North American context, writing elaborate game mechanics is prestigious. This would attract persons with an affinity for quantification, such as those who are adept with math, physics or engineering. The Nordic avant-garde scene, on the other hand, would be more likely attract people with a background in the Arts.

A reason that the impulses from the Nordic countries have not travelled back across the Atlantic may be related to larps being embodied storytelling in the sense that all participants have to be physically present in the setting where the narrative is created. Once practices in the Nordic countries started diverging from those of North America into what is today known as the avant-garde Nordic larp scene, the distance involved

would be an obstruction to the travel of ideas and practices across the Atlantic Ocean.

These questions suggest some avenues for future research. Such efforts can draw upon Bourdieu's framework and explore these hypotheses to explore several potential causes (Griswold, 1987) to find answers as to how practices have developed in the larp communities.

6. REFERENCES

- (1) 30-års-krisen. Available at: <<http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=133482126677751>> [Accessed August 30, 2010]
- (2) Bourdieu, P., 1977. *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press.
- (3) Bourdieu, P., 1984. *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- (4) Bourdieu, P., 1990. *The logic of practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- (5) Bøckman, P., 2002. *The three way model: revision of the threefold model for scandinavian LARP*. Available at: <http://www.darkshire.net/jhkim/rpg/theory/threefold/faq_larp.html> [Accessed June 29, 2012].
- (6) Bøckman, P., 2003. Dictionary. In: M. Gade, L. Thorup, and M. Sander, eds. *As larp grows up: The Book from Knudepunkt 2003*. Fredriksberg: Projektgruppen KP03.
- (7) Calhoun, C., 1993. Habitus, Field, and Capital: The Question of Historical Specificity. In: C. Calhoun, E. LiPuma and M. Postone eds. *Bourdieu: Critical perspectives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (8) Care Boss, E., 2008. Key concepts in forge theory. In: M. Montola, and J. Steenros, eds. *Playground worlds: Creating and evaluating experiences of role-playing games*, Helsinki: Ropecon, ry.
- (9) Crossley, N., 2001. The phenomenological habitus and its construction, *Theory and Society*, 30 (1), pp.81-120.
- (10) Darkon Wargaming Club, n.d. *Darkon Camp Site Policy* [online], Available at: <<http://www.darkon.org/campout.html>> [Accessed July 30 2010].

- (11) Darkon Wargaming Club, 2009. *Darkon Rulebook*. [pdf] s.l. Available at: <<http://www.darkon.org/rules.html>> [Accessed July 30 2010].
- (12) van Dijk, T. A., 2008. *Discourse and power*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- (13) Edwards, R. 2001. *GNS and other matters of role-playing theory*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.indie-rpgs.com/articles/1/>> [Accessed: September 26 2010].
- (14) Frid I Hernedal, [online] Available at: <<http://tulajv.se/hernedal/2010/07/14/valkommen-till-frid-i-hernedal/>> [Accessed Aug 2 2010].
- (15) Frizon, [online] Available at: <<http://frizon.armyr.se/wordpress/till-dig-som-deltagare>> [Accessed: Aug 24 2010].
- (16) Griswold, W., 1987. A methodological framework for the sociology of culture. *Sociological methodology*, 17 pp.1-35.
- (17) Hood, C., 2000. *The Art of the state*. Oxford: Clarendon
- (18) Holter, M., 2007. Stop saying immersion. In: J. Donnis, M. Gade, and L. Thorup, eds. *Lifelike*, Copenhagen: Arco Grafisk.
- (19) Hultman, A., Westerling, A. and Wrigstad, T., 2008. Behind the façade of A nice evening with the family. In: M. Montola, and J. Steenros, eds. *Playground worlds: Creating and evaluating experiences of role-playing games*, Helsinki: Ropecon, ry.
- (20) Koljonen, J., 2007. Eye-witness to the illusion: An essay on the impossibility of 360° role-playing. In: J. Donnis, M. Gade, and L. Thorup, eds. *Lifelike*, Copenhagen: Projektgruppen KP07,
- (21) Kornelsen, L and Lam, K, n.d., *Ruritania*, [pdf] Available at: <https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=vandpid=explorerandchrome=trueandsrcid=0B3iG4NliyX7JZDE0NzE5MjEtNDY4MC00NmU2LWIxMDMtZTk2YmI3NzdINDVlandhl=en_US> [Accessed: July 19 2010].
- (22) Lajvfabriken, [online] Available at: <<http://lajvfabriken.se/vadarlajvfabriken>> [Accessed August 30 2010].
- (23) Lamont, M., 1992. *Money, morals and manners: The culture of the French and the American upper middle class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (24) Lamont, M., and Thévenot, L., eds., 2000. *Rethinking comparative cultural sociology. Repertoires of evaluation in France and the United States*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- (25) Mackay, D. 2001. *The fantasy role-playing game: A new performing art*. Jefferson: McFarland and Co.
- (26) Mayr, A., 2008. *Language and power: An introduction to institutional discourse*. London: Continuum.
- (27) Mill, J. S., 1973. *A system of logic*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- (28) Montola, M., 2003. Role-playing as interactive construction of subjective diegesis. In: M. Gade, L. Thorup, and M. Sander, eds. *As larp grows up: The book from Knudepunkt 2003*, Fredriksberg: Projektgruppen KP03.
- (29) Montola, M., 2007. Breaking the invisible rules: Borderline role-playing. In: J. Donnis, M. Gade, and L. Thorup, eds. *Lifelike*, Copenhagen: Projektgruppen KP07.
- (30) Montola, M., 2008 The invisible rules of role-playing: The social framework of the role-playing process. *International Journal of Role-Playing*, (1).
- (31) Moore, R. 2008. Capital. In: M. Grenfell ed. *Pierre Bourdieu: Key concepts*, Stocksfield: Acumen.
- (32) Myers, D. 2008. Play and punishment: The sad and curious case of Twixt. In: *Proceeding of the [player] conference*. August 2008: s.l., IT University of Copenhagen.
- (33) Mäkelä, E, Koistinen, Siukola, and Turunen, 2005. The process model of role-playing. In: P. Bøckman, and R. Hutchinson, eds. *Dissecting larp: Collected papers for Knutepunkt 2005*, Oslo: Norsk Kulturråd.
- (34) New Voices in Art [online], Available at: <<https://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?formkey=dENOV1NoTHZjc3JEbDRyMUROOVIIU1E6MQ>> [Accessed August 30 2010].
- (35) Pedersen, B, and Munch, L, 2008. Walking the white road: A trip into the hobo dream. In: M. Montola, and J. Steenros, eds. *Playground worlds: Creating and evaluating experiences of role-playing games*, Helsinki: Ropecon, ry.

- (36) Pettersson, J., 2006, The Art of Experience. In: T. Fritzson, and T. Wrigstad, eds. *Role, play, art: Collected experiences of role-playing*, Stockholm: Föreningen Knutpunkt.
- (37) Prasad, A., 2002. The Contest over meaning: Hermeneutics as an interpretive methodology for understanding texts. *Organizational Research Methods*, 5 (1) pp.12-33
- (38) Przeworski, A., and Teune, H., 1970. *The logic of comparative social inquiry*. New York: Wiley-Interscience.
- (39) Ragin, C. C., 1987. *The comparative method: Moving beyond qualitative and quantitative strategies*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.
- (40) Sandberg, C., 2004. Genesi: Larp Art, Basic Theories. In: M. Montola, and J. Stenroos, eds. *Beyond role and play: Tools, toys and theory for harnessing the imagination*, Helsinki: Ropecon, ry.
- (41) Sartori, G., 1994. Compare why and how: Comparing, miscomparing and the comparative method. In: M. Dogan, and A. Kazangil, eds., *Comparing nations*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- (42) s.n., n.d, *Sovereign*. [pdf] s.l.
- (43) s.n., n.d., *Sovereign: Player Handbook* [pdf]. s.l.
- (44) Stark, L., 2012a. We hold these rules to be self-evident: Larp as a metaphor for American identity. In: J. Petterson, ed. *States of play: Nordic larp around the world*, s.l.: Pohjoismaisen roolipelaamisen seura
- (45) Stark, L., 2012b. *Leaving Mundania: Inside the transformative world of live action-roleplaying games*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.
- (46) Stenroos, J., and Hakkarainen, H., 2003. The Meilahti school: Thoughts on role-playing. In: M. Gade, L. Thorup, and M. Sander, eds. *As larp grows up: The book from Knutepunkt 2003*, Fredriksberg: Projektgruppen KP03
- (47) Stockholm by Night [online], Available at: <<http://camarilla.se/>> [Accessed Aug 27 2010].
- (48) Svanevik, M. 2005. The collective's little red book. In: P. Bøckman, and R. Hutchinson, eds. *Dissecting larp: Collected papers for Knutepunkt 2005*, Oslo: Norsk Kulturråd.
- (49) Svarta Katten [online] Available at: <<http://www.svartakatten.com/forum/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=1531&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=60>> [Accessed December 18 2011].
- (50) Ventrella, M. A., 2008. *Alliance: Live action role playing*. Markham: Double Dragon.

Mikael Hellstrom is born and raised in Stockholm, Sweden, where he started larping in 1992. Currently, he is a Ph.D. Candidate at the department of political science of the University of Alberta, in Edmonton, Alberta, where he moved in 2005. His research focuses on ethnic relations and multiculturalism, investigating the intersection between civil society and public administration. The forthcoming thesis compares immigrant community mobilization on labour market issues in Canada and Sweden, drawing heavily on the theories of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.