Creating and upholding an elite community: ‘Consecrating exclusion’ in Djursholm, Sweden

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Abstract
This article addresses a largely neglected area of study in sociology, namely the consecration of people in elite communities. Through the notion of ‘consecrating exclusion’, I explore how Sweden’s foremost elite community Djursholm was founded in 1889, and how its aura and character as an exclusive neighbourhood are maintained today. Data come from historical material and a five-year ethnographic study consisting of field observations, interviews and archival material. I analyse how Djursholm was created as a sanctuary for the economic elite in Sweden and that its foremost purpose has been to socially elevate its residents, making them appear honourable and morally superior. I report how the community has defended its borders by various practices of exclusion, and how Djursholm aims to present itself as a role-model, a ‘shining city upon a hill’ which is critical to its social standing and status. The study contributes to the sociology of elites in three ways: (a) theoretically through the notion of ‘consecrating exclusion’, by synthesizing ideas on social and moral distinction with ideas on symbolic boundaries and moral hierarchies; (b) empirically by presenting in-depth qualitative data on the construction and maintenance of a peculiar elite community, noting that few studies have reported data from a neighbourhood designated as ‘elite’ from the start; and (c) methodologically by drawing on a mix of methods including historical documents, interviews and participant observation in order to examine both historical and contemporary aspects of ‘consecrating exclusion’.

Keywords
consecration, elites, exclusion, status

Elite communities are the places where elites choose to live and exert their dominion, socialize with other elites and form families and raise their children to be future elites (see Hartmann, 2018; Holmqvist, 2017; Wiesel, 2018). But despite elite communities’
importance for the creation and maintenance of power and wealth in society, sociologists have not been much interested in them. This neglect may have to do with the fact that elite environments are notoriously hard to access, particularly by qualitative and ethnographic methods (see Beaverstock et al., 2004; Cousin et al., 2018).

Still, a few studies of elite communities do exist: Pincon and Pincon-Charlot (1999, 2007) have examined the dominating lifestyle in and around privileged Parisian areas; scholars have studied the living spaces of the wealthy and ‘super-rich’ in London and elsewhere (e.g. Beaverstock et al., 2004; Cunningham & Savage, 2015; Hay, 2016; Pow, 2011), as well as ‘gated communities’ (e.g. Atkinson & Blandy, 2006; Blakely & Snyder, 1997). Rodenstedt (2014) examined a wealthy and exclusive neighbourhood in Sweden’s Malmö, focusing on the wealthy residents’ understanding of themselves and others. A recent study is Wiesel’s (2018) *Power, Glamour and Angst: Inside Australia’s Elite Neighbourhoods*, which, based on the notion of social capital, presents a rich ethnographic examination of the lifestyle of three Australian elite communities.

Studies of elite communities, and that of elite schools (which have long dominated the field; see e.g. Maxwell & Aggleton, 2015; Van Zanten & Ball, 2015), have shown how members of powerful groups come to share distinctive tastes and lifestyles that are defined to a large extent by cultivated, aesthetic dispositions (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977); and how these in turn contribute to producing and reproducing social differences (Andreotti et al., 2015; Richardson et al., 2011); something that Weber (1978) broadly designated as the creation of ‘status groups’.

As I have argued earlier, scholars have primarily focused on the formation of elite character in accordance with ideas on socialization, i.e. the creation and maintenance of social and cultural identities that make elites distinguish themselves from other groups, such as through particular sports, hobbies and other expressions of a unique lifestyle. However, sociologists have not fully appreciated how elite environments may also offer people consecration, i.e. social and moral elevation that is decisive for how they come to maintain their power and uphold their privileges (see Holmqvist, 2017, 2020). Consecration involves socialization in terms of social identity processes and the active construction of moral and social distinction; but is also something different in that it makes its subjects appear socially and morally exemplary in the view of themselves and others, which is critical to their power and influence (see Hartmann, 2000; Pincon & Pincon-Charlot, 1999).

Building on the existing research of the consecration of elites, in this article I aim to further develop the relevance of the concept of consecration for the sociological study of elites. I will do so by examining how an elite community in Sweden named Djursholm not only elevates certain classes and groups, giving them a unique moral and social standing, which has been the dominating focus so far, but also how this community contributes to excluding other classes and groups, upholding social and economic inequality in society. The interplay between consecration and exclusion that I argue to be critical in creating and maintaining elite communities, I name ‘consecrating exclusion’, which is proposed as a novel theoretical framework for the analysis of contemporary elites in general, and the creation and maintenance of elite communities in particular.
Theoretical framework

In his recent examination of the notion of consecration, Accominotti (2018, pp. 2–3) stated the following: ‘Consecration – the operation whereby certain objects or persons are identified as deserving admiration over other ones . . . is a unique social phenomenon with dramatic consequences’, and added that consecration ‘appears as the ultimate process of status formation’ (for a similar argument, see Khan, 2011, pp. 161–162). Indeed, Weber (1946, p. 262) claimed that only if formal authority positions are transformed from objective aspects of power into rights that are ‘sanctified’ can they become socially legitimate and influential. Following this line of reasoning, Bourdieu (1996, pp. 116–117) argued that certain institutions in society have the potential to ‘give value to people’, i.e. to elevate them by fundamentally modifying their behaviour. Hence, largely consecration is about the sanctification of things and people, which makes possible a division of groups and classes (see Durkheim, 1973, p. 175).

Drawing on Elias’s (1994) study of the established and the outsiders in a working-class area, where a distinction is made between groups of people based on their moral value, as well as Lamont and colleagues’ analyses of social boundaries that suggest how symbolic and social boundaries are tied together (Lamont, 1992; Lamont & Molnár, 2002), it can be argued that the consecration of elites operates through social separation and differentiation on physical, mental and cultural levels, i.e. consecration is maintained by systematically excluding unwanted groups and classes of people (see Friedman & Laurison, 2019; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2015), which can be seen as a central mechanism of elite cohesiveness, resulting in ‘consecrating exclusion’.

Hence, boundaries making elites possible are maintained in practice through the continuous symbolic work that demarcates elites from non-elites (see Pincon & Pincon-Charlot, 2007). As Hylmö (2018, p. 60) stressed: ‘Symbolic boundaries are related to social boundaries, when the boundaries of a social group like a profession are maintained and determined through symbolic boundaries that define belonging and status.’ The consecrating exclusion, as with all expressions of power and authority, requires the tacit or active consent of those excluded (see Simon’s notion of authority as acceptance, 1997, p. 31; see also Barnard, 1938). As Bourdieu (1996, p. 141) said: ‘The chosen also play a role in successful co-optation in choosing their choosers by offering themselves up for the choosing, while others spontaneously exclude themselves from a competition that would exclude most of them anyway.’

Research context

Similarly to such historic sites as, for instance, Victoria Peak in Hong Kong, Grunewald in Berlin and Yonkers in New York, the study object in this article Djursholm in Sweden, was created (in 1889) with the official purpose to offer an exclusive living area for the economically wealthy. Currently consisting of 9000 inhabitants, many of whom are people born and raised elsewhere, Djursholm has attracted generations of influential people in Sweden (and, however, to a much smaller extent, from other countries), especially people active in the business and financial sectors. Its residents hold central positions in companies, government agencies and other organizations and they exert great influence over the country’s development and many people’s everyday lives.
In many ways Djursholm is today a privileged world in terms of material and economic wealth, not least when comparing it to some of Sweden’s relatively deprived neighbourhoods, often populated by non-European immigrants – areas that suffer from relatively high levels of unemployment and criminality. A number of the country’s ‘super-rich’ who figure on Forbes’s ‘The World’s Billionaires list’, reside in Djursholm. Income levels are at the top of official national league tables. Property prices are the highest in the country. The area is situated beautifully by the sea and consists of large villas on park-like plots and winding roads. In Djursholm you see few signs of economic deprivation and criminality. Sports and physical activities are idealized in the community, especially tennis and sailing (e.g. there is a large and lively tennis club). People are slim and well-trained and among the most long-lived in the country. Schools and other public institutions are well-functioning and well-managed and can boast very good results; the community’s high school is a leading provider of students to the prestigious business school The Stockholm School of Economics, which educates people for a future career in finance and business.

Even though there will be significant variations between countries depending on each country’s political, cultural and social history, its security situation, levels of education, GDP, distribution of wealth and incomes, geopolitical factors, and so forth (Europe, for instance, is in many ways different to the United States; Sweden is different to the United Kingdom, and so forth), all in all, Djursholm shares many of the characteristics of other wealthy suburban and urban neighbourhoods that exist all around the world; Djursholm is representative of global mechanisms of privilege and its perpetuation (see e.g. Pincon & Pincon-Charlot, 2007; Pow, 2011; Wiesel, 2018). Indeed, sociologists and cultural geographers have stressed the transnational character of today’s economic elites in terms of shared lifestyles and habits (see Andreotti et al., 2015; Beaverstock et al., 2004; Hay, 2016). For instance, Harrington’s (2016) study, Capital Without Borders, offers a relevant analysis of the lifestyle of today’s economic elites: national borders may no longer be physical, but they are definitively symbolic, and ‘boundary work’ through such practices as elite education remains a critical activity for the reproduction of global ‘status groups’ (see also Lamont & Fournier, 1992).

Typically, elite communities are geographically and socially isolated worlds in which a certain culture and lifestyle can be maintained – co-option into these communities is not easy, particularly for economic reasons – and its inhabitants are strident about defending their community borders (see e.g. Wiesel, 2018). As Pincon and Pincon-Charlot (2007, p. 63) concluded: ‘In all countries, the wealthy live in separate areas, protected from any undesirable social contact.’ To this extent, the findings and analysis presented in this article, based on a single case in a specific country, should not only be of relevance for understanding how elites reproduce themselves through consecrating exclusion in this local context; but also for how elites in other contexts and environments act and behave. Similar to much other qualitative studies, the potential to generalize from a single case to a larger population remains a key assumption in this article.

Methods

This study is based on a combination of historical and contemporary sources. The historical sources consist of various documents such as newspapers, books and brochures
dating back to the late 1800s, all written in Swedish, retrieved from the Royal Library in Stockholm, Djursholm’s Public Library, Djursholm’s Public Archives as well as the archives of Djursholm’s Historical Association. I mainly concentrated on documents describing the creation of Djursholm and the early years (up to 1930, by which time the community was well established). Of particular significance are documents related to the founder Henrik Palme and his company ‘Djursholm Incorporated’ (in Swedish Djursholms Aktiebolag), which produced, amongst others, several marketing brochures with the intent of selling plots or ready-made exclusive homes in the area. Of interest too are Palme’s personal reflections and thoughts on Djursholm as described in a number of texts. Included in my historical material are also how Djursholm was described by journalists, authors and other observers during the early years; for instance a critical essay by acclaimed Swedish author Gösta Gustaf-Janson, who lived there during a period of his life. A unique data source is Djursholm’s Historical Association’s periodical, where residents of Djursholm have written essays (mainly very positive) about their experiences of living in Djursholm, which can be seen as part of the community’s official collective memory. I have also examined a large selection of photographs portraying the creation and early years of Djursholm that give further substance to the historical analysis.

Regarding contemporary data, this article draws on an ethnographic study of Djursholm that I did between 2010 and 2015, and that was based on interviews with more than 200 people (including both residents and workers in Djursholm, of various age and gender), hundreds of hours of observations and a substantial body of contemporary archival material such as books, newspaper articles and social media blogs. I made contact with people through telephone and email, presenting the study’s object. My ambition was to include various aspects of the community: family life including neighbour relations; clubs and unions; community socialization (at restaurants, shops, etc.); kindergarten and schools; nurseries and homes for the elderly; social problems including domestic abuse and crime, etc.

I did not experience any important restrictions or problems in gaining access, which may have to do with my habitus (I was born and raised in a similar area, which probably has affected the way I talk and interact with people, also the way I dress and present myself – one resident even told me ‘you could have grown up here!’); and the fact that I am a professor at a prestigious Swedish university (for an interesting discussion on studying elites, see Cousin et al., 2018). I did not, however, establish any relations to people in Djursholm; typically I met people only once for formal interviewing; and the roles were always clear: I was there to do a study as a researcher; residents were part of my study object.

After an initial pilot study of a couple of weeks, I decided to brand the study ‘leader community’, which seemed to resonate well with the residents’ self-understanding of being ‘leaders’, i.e. social and moral role-models (see Jackall, 1988; Kanter, 1977). The term also, I soon found out, facilitated further access; in contrast when I asked them about how to best describe Djursholm, residents did not like the term ‘upper-class community’, and they were hesitant about the term ‘elite community’. Maybe this has to do with ‘upper-class’ being commonly associated with complacent and conservative behaviour, something that Veblen (1899/1994, pp. 25–26) called ‘non-productive consumption of time’; and that the term ‘elite’ evokes differences between classes, something which
is typically not well regarded in Sweden and the other Nordic countries (see Gulbrandsen, 2019). Of course, there is an ethical element involved in the way you choose to brand your study; in my case residents, and service staff, in Djursholm, were told early on that my intention was to study Djursholm as a ‘leader community’, and this was also the way the project was presented on my university’s webpage. The mixed reactions to the various terms used when interacting with residents also manifest the complexity of consecrating exclusion, something that I will discuss in more detail below.

The study was first reported in a book in Swedish in 2015; and then in English in 2017 in a substantially shortened version (see Holmqvist, 2015, 2017) – this article uses material from both those publications, but frames it in a unique way through the notion ‘consecrating exclusion’. When the Swedish book was published, it got a huge amount of attention and was subject to a large number of reviews and articles in newspapers and Swedish social science journals. In Djursholm, the book generated somewhat mixed reactions: most of the residents, e.g. members in one of the community’s gentlemen’s clubs, seemed to think that the book, although based on a standard sociological (critical) analysis, confirmed the community’s importance and status (one even claimed, jokingly, ‘the book will raise the property prices here!’), and pupils in the area’s high school invited me to come and talk in class as they thought my analysis of teenagers’ lifestyle was relevant; a few persons, particularly women, reacted negatively, e.g. by criticizing my analysis of teacher–parent interactions at school (see Holmqvist, 2017, 2020).

Although I worked in a highly explorative manner initially for the larger study, without being attached to any specific theoretical ideas (e.g. the notion of consecration was something I found relevant at the very end of the study), some general principles were used. After having identified some categories to be examined, e.g. family life, within each category sampling was largely based on a ‘snow-ball’ principle, ending the requests for further interviews when I felt a saturation in impressions and observations had been reached. For instance, in understanding how the community protects its borders today, I ended the data gathering when I felt a number of people talked about similar things, and that could be verified by stories in books, journals or by statistical data. Hence, at the beginning of the study, I pursued an exploratory approach, asking very broad questions, largely letting the informants steer the interviews; later, when I was more clear about certain themes – for instance how Djursholm tries to maintain its privileged status (the empirical focus of this article) – I asked much more specific questions. To a certain extent, then, the sample was formed in relation to those I had already met. Several individuals came back spontaneously after their interviews to suggest other people whom they felt I should meet. In other cases I took the initiative myself, especially when interviewing well-known residents. Some of the interviews were conducted one-on-one, in other cases I met, for instance, husbands/wives or cohabiting couples at the same time, with or without their children.

Almost all interviews took place in Djursholm, in private homes, at restaurants, at schools, at the tennis club, etc. This was intentional, as it also helped me pursue ‘informal participant observation’ (in contrast to ‘formal participant observations’, i.e. scheduled sessions in schools, sports clubs, unions, etc.). When interviewing at a restaurant, for example, I tried to understand the location, other clients, how the person I met interacted with me and other persons, and so on. Overall, participant observation was an important
method of the study; I experienced, for instance, how a group of residents successfully demanded from local politicians the creation of a natural reserve to stop any future densification of a particular area in the neighbourhood, a critical practice of ‘consecrating exclusion’. Such data were corroborated with, for example, documents from the municipality archive, such as letters of protests by residents, complaints by neighbours, etc.

Findings

Consecrating exclusion in creating Djursholm

The leading figure in creating Djursholm was the Swedish banker Henrik Palme (1841–1932), an ancestor to Swedish social-democratic Prime Minister Olof Palme (1927–1986), who, by the way, was the target of much critique by people living in Djursholm and other wealthy areas in Sweden during the 1970s and 1980s for pursuing, according to them, a ‘socialist’ agenda including high taxes on income and capital.

Henrik Palme had made a large fortune through credits to real estate builders in Stockholm, but he was not alone in having earned much money in a relatively short period of time during early Swedish industrialism: a new economic elite had seen the light of day in the late 1800s. Although satisfied with their economic wealth, they suffered from a social inferiority complex in relation to the established classes of priests, civil servants and not least the Swedish nobility and the royal family; in general, business people were not considered a status group (see Weber, 1978, pp. 926–939). In order to raise their social standing, some of them, in Sweden and other countries, created elite schools and elite universities (see Khurana, 2007; Röbken, 2004); others engaged in extensive philanthropy in arts and museums, which generated praise and recognition by the established classes (see Baltzell, 1958; Ostrower, 1995) – these can be seen as deliberate actions to make wealthy people seem more honourable; to sanctify them in Durkheim’s (1973) meaning of consecration.

Following this logic, in 1889 Palme, together with three wealthy companions, bought the old estate Djursholm 10 kilometres north of Stockholm in order to establish a community that would not only offer its citizens a social refuge from the increasingly dirty and over-populated neighbouring Stockholm, but also an environment that would ‘add value’ to them by distinguishing their taste and manners (see Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Palme found inspiration for Djursholm from travels in the UK and the US, where he visited a number of ‘garden cities’. Djursholm was selected carefully: the area, which largely consisted of unbroken land, had for centuries been owned by one of Sweden’s most famous noble families, the Banérs, and thus had significant provenance in terms of objectified cultural capital. Also, the Banér family’s impressive castle was included in the sale, illustrating well the material aspect of consecration in terms of buildings, etc. (see Khan, 2011; Wiesel, 2018).

According to documents from the late 1800s and early 1900s that I retrieved from Djursholm’s Historic Association’s archive (for a full specification, see Holmqvist, 2015), and which describe Palme’s intentions, including written statements by Palme himself, Palme was insistent that Djursholm should not only become a lucrative business project, where plots and houses were sold to wealthy people; his intent was, according to
these documents, also to create an ideal community for the economic elite, where culture, wit and good manners were to define the atmosphere. This, he thought, would contribute to raise the social standing of businessmen and offer them the position in society that they, according to him and his fellows, rightly deserved. Thus, Djursholm, from its very beginning, did not only aim to offer a peculiar environment for elite socialization, but of social promotion as well.

Besides erecting impressive mansions, often designed by leading Swedish and international architects, not only a sense of exclusivity and grandness was achieved early on, but also a feeling of cultivation and good taste; hence demarcating Djursholm from the rest of the Stockholm area (Sweden was one of Europe’s poorest countries at that time, and signs of great poverty and deprivation were plentiful particularly in the city centre of Stockholm). But this was not enough. A number of measures were taken to give Djursholm a certain (cultural) aura and appeal: for instance, streets were named after gods in Nordic mythology, appealing to some deep-seated ideas in Nordic national romanticism at that time (e.g. ‘Lidskjalfsvägen’ and ‘Modgunnvägen’), and, of course, demarcating them from any ‘ordinary’ street names in the proximity.

The marketing effect on the wealthy was swift: Djursholm soon became a very popular neighbourhood – but it also earned a reputation of being an exclusive world in the eyes of others, thus establishing a certain image in ‘ordinary’ people’s consciousness. These sentiments were effectively described in a novel by Gösta Gustaf-Janson called The Town with Closed Gates (in its original Swedish: De stängda grindarnas stad), which criticized the way Djursholm early on shut its gates to anyone other than the very rich. However, most importantly in Djursholm’s early history was the invitation to a number of famous Swedish artists and writers by Palme to come and live there, the most significant of them was the national poet Viktor Rydberg (who also died in Djursholm in 1895). Such a person was extremely important to Djursholm’s early reputation not only as an exclusive living area for those who like Palme had earned a lot of money, but also for the community’s reputation as a haven of supreme cultivation; the artists’ cultural capital would certainly enrich the economically wealthy too.

Not everybody in the business elite was attracted to Djursholm, however. In an article from 1940 in Djursholm’s Historic Association’s periodical, one resident described the reaction by one of his friends, a senior company executive, when he encouraged him to move to Djursholm: ‘Are you crazy?’, implying that a move to Djursholm would give him a label as a cultural snob, which he thought would not help his economic activities. Thus increased cultural capital does not necessarily contribute to increased economic capital – it is a well-known observation that business people have a complicated relationship to higher education and similar expressions of cultural distinctions (see Khurana, 2007; Röbken, 2004); something which has been largely neglected in the Bourdieusian theories of elite reproduction (cf. Hartmann, 2000).

The project went on during the late 1800s and early 1900s: a chapel, independent from the Swedish state church with its orthodox liturgy, was founded and built in an architecturally innovative style that would further enrich the community’s cultural atmosphere; and the first pastor, Natanael Beskow, was a famous Swedish academic. A majestic school building was also erected for the community’s children’s schooling; teachers were leading Swedish artists and intellectuals who would offer them not only
excellent academic skills, but also cultivated manners, thus making them able to act on an equal footing with children of the established and cultivated classes – all in all illustrating the importance of a certain ‘social and physical infrastructure’ for making consecration possible. Thus, the early branding of Djursholm was very much about portraying the area as not only an economically exclusive place, but a morally and socially superior neighbourhood as well – by linking Djursholm to people with a high academic and cultural standing in society (see Fitzgerald, 1981). This was how a woman described her feelings when moving to Djursholm in 1894 with her family, as documented in Djursholm’s Historic Association’s periodical: ‘This was the ideal for a human dwelling, the most worthy place for civilized individuals!’

The early consecration of the community, and its residents, would not have been complete, however, without measures being taken to differentiate the area from other social classes that would otherwise risk devaluing Djursholm’s growing cultural capital, i.e. measures were taken to counter any potential for desecration. Much in line with Lamont’s (1992) analysis of boundary-making among French and American upper middle-classes, Djursholm’s symbolic boundaries were made possible through the practical enforcement of social boundaries, all in all resulting in consecrating exclusion in the sense that consecration thrives on exclusion, and vice versa. Hence, boundaries of classes were maintained in practice through an ongoing symbolic work of demarcating residents of Djursholm from ‘others’.

For instance, when Palme, together with his companions, started the practical planning of Djursholm, it was determined that the plots should be very generous (up to 5000 square metres), arguing that this would promote the general good, offering residents a sense of independence and freedom; but of course also guaranteeing that only wealthy people could afford to move there. Hence, in order to accomplish not only a socially elevated character but social exclusivity as well, the area needed to clearly differentiate itself from ‘common’ living neighbourhoods in the Stockholm region; but also internally by having workers and other ‘service staff’ live in a separate and peripheral area in the community.

Secondly, it was decided that severe restrictions should be applied with regard to the construction of public parks in Djursholm, as the founders feared that these could otherwise attract ‘pleasure seekers’ from the nearby capital– that is to say, all kinds of ‘proletarian elements’ that lacked the desired manners and behaviours that otherwise could challenge the reproduction of the dominant lifestyle. In a document from 1925 published by Djursholm’s Historic Association, Palme wrote that he firmly believed that Djursholm ‘should attract and influence first and foremost just such individuals and families, who were particularly desirable as members of the new society’.

Thirdly, regulations were put in place that aimed to prevent any future chopping up of plots, which, according to my analysis, aimed at securing the original idea of privacy and anonymity – and, of course, social exclusivity. And finally, it was determined that no industry would be given access to Djursholm, meaning no form whatsoever of noise disturbance, dirt and bad odours or great crowds of workers and their families, who might interfere with the culturally elevated lifestyle aspired to.

Thus social exclusivity and supremacy were secured by establishing a number of symbolic borders, i.e. conceptual distinctions that centre on the idea of being a resident
in Djursholm (cf. Lamont & Molnár, 2002), as well as geographical borders to the outside world, particularly the working classes. In all, such boundaries were critical to the ‘consecration potential’ of the neighbourhood; as Pincon and Pincon-Charlot (2007) have noted, elite residents are generally militant in upholding community borders in order to protect their social exclusivity and unique aura. Geographical borders are therefore critical to symbolic borders, and vice versa, and interplay in the creation of social distinctions between classes (see Hylmö, 2018, p. 60).

Clearly, there was an ambition to distance oneself from the rest of society by Palme and his fellows in order to uphold Djursholm’s (and their own) status; on the other hand, the presence of workers was not only important for the construction of buildings, etc., but also as they implicitly reproduced the residents’ status, by accepting the classic divide masters–servants, leaders–workers: a sense of social elevation by some classes requires the active participation of other, ‘lower’ classes (i.e. workers) who accept their subordinate status; this is a critical idea in theories of authority (see e.g. Barnard, 1938; Simon, 1997; Weber, 1978). Essentially, the ‘making of the rich’ requires the ‘making of the poor’, by people accepting their subordinate status, economically, culturally and socially (see Cousin et al., 2018; Gulbrandsen, 2019). To paraphrase Willis (1977), in Djursholm it is all about ‘learning to lead’, where the community’s ‘service staff’ should ‘learn to obey’.

In Djursholm workers were also important by acting as ‘anti-role models’, particularly to the youngsters of Djursholm. This was well illustrated in a cartoon published in a satirical journal in Sweden in 1916, where a group of Djursholm youngsters, all well dressed and with tennis rackets in their hands, are looking at a poorly dressed man who lifts his hat. The text states: ‘During his visit to Djursholm, Archbishop Söderblom regretted that the children in this community never met any poor people. That is why the residents in Djursholm have now hired a vagabond that comes to the community once a week and serves as a study object for the rich children for an hour.’ Indeed, the first prospectus published by Palme’s company was very much focused on the well-heeled. ‘Domestic servants and workers only ended up living there as a consequence of their jobs: the community was not intended for them’, one writer commented in an article in the Historic Association’s periodical on the place in the early 1900s.

Enforcing social borders according to beliefs about morality is critical to the ability of dominant groups to consider themselves ‘better’ than others, with the implicit acceptance by those who are the subject of their disrespect (cf. Elias, 1994). Early on Palme and his companions understood that social identity is defined by contrasting lifestyles, not necessarily in terms of excellence in professional skills or technical knowledge, but definitively in terms of manners, by which not only the behaviour of a human being is vital, but also his or her body’s physical appearance (see Lamont, 1992).

From its very beginnings Djursholm was corporeal, i.e. it manifests a distinct way of talking, walking, eating, socializing, laughing that is associated with business people – quite simply habitus, however, with a peculiar cultural and academic twist (see Bourdieu, 1984; Pincon & Pincon-Charlot, 2007). Much of this was the result of mimicry. For instance, when I visited Djursholm’s archives, I could observe a number of photographs from the early 1900s where business people appeared in their homes against a background of musical instruments, books, paintings and sculptures, thus copying the established and intellectual classes of priests, academics and the nobility’s tastes and habits.
To this extent one can say that the creation of Djursholm was about consecrating very rich people by making them appear creditable and honourable in both a social and moral sense in relation to already existing elites. Thus ‘consecrating exclusion’ in the creation of Djursholm operated both in relation to the ‘lower classes’ and to the ‘higher classes’; but it was not a process without complications in terms of the relative importance of economic and cultural capital for profit-making activities.

**Consecrating exclusion in upholding today’s Djursholm**

As Lamont and Molnár (2002) suggested, social and physical borders are critical to the reproduction of symbolic borders and over the years, there are plenty of examples of how the residents of Djursholm have tried to prevent any forms of exploitation in terms of new residential areas, out of fear that the area’s unique social character and particularity would change, which would ultimately not only threaten economic values, but residents’ social status as well.

For instance, building permits in Djursholm have often been appealed against. An emotional event was the transformation of the business district in Djursholm in the late 1980s that raised fears among the residents that Djursholm would turn into an ‘ordinary society’, potentially losing its unique character and status. In a collective letter by a group of residents to the municipality board that I collected from the community’s archives, it was stated: ‘Djursholm’s centre should be designed with solid quality, magnificent but still charming, all according to good Djursholm tradition’.

The standard argument of the residents has been that Djursholm is a unique ‘cultural-historical’ environment, and ‘it must be protected’, as one of them put it to me. This is partly true given most of the houses’ architectural qualities and the area’s heritage as Sweden’s first exclusive villa town, in addition to its ‘academic and cultural history’, as one resident explained. But it is just as much about the fact that Djursholm is regarded as a unique social environment that offers exclusive accommodation for an economically very strong group; a group that seems to know that its elevated status and legitimacy in society is largely contingent upon its image of social and intellectual supremacy that is constructed through such a place as Djursholm. Hence, maintaining a distance to the rest of Sweden is vital to the reproduction of Djursholm’s aura and its reputation as ‘elite community’. The potential for consecration thus thrives on the enforcement of community borders that makes possible a certain ‘geography of cultural capital’, stressing its spatially fixed character (see Wiesel, 2018).

But the biggest threat to Djursholm’s ‘consecrating potential’ through social exclusion is not generally densification, but the behaviour of the residents, no matter how many they are. The aura of an elite community is constantly produced and reproduced by its members. Residents are expected by themselves and others to act as role-models in terms of how they behave, which ultimately is about ‘proper morals’ (cf. Elias, 1994). For instance, as witnessed by teachers, parents and students that I interviewed, students in Djursholm’s schools are expected to get very high grades, reproducing the idea of schools there being ‘elite schools’.

‘Social excellence’ is not only what is expected by residents themselves, but by the community’s outsiders as well, which, for instance, can explain the consternation among
Swedes at large when a well-known Swedish colonel and diplomat living in Djursholm was arrested in 1963 for being a master spy for the Soviet Union (he was detected by his housekeeper in his fashionable house). Reactions in newspapers from that time were on the theme, ‘who could believe this about someone living in Djursholm?’

In this context, new residents are commonly stigmatized as ‘nouveau riche’, making them appear less honourable and worthy of little respect. Of course, stigmatization is a critical expression of power in contemporary society that is not limited to elite communities (cf. Goffman, 1963; Tyler, 2020). Allegedly lacking the established group’s manners and morals, the new residents of Djursholm remain a threat to the community’s dominant culture, thus implying that there is a moral hierarchy in the consecration of the residents, where some are seen as more worthy than others. Indeed, there is a view today in Djursholm, especially among older residents, that Djursholm is a society characterized by good taste, culture and manners, but that this is changing as a result of a financial elite moving in. Being wealthy is critical in order to buy a home in Djursholm; but as the notion of cultural capital suggests, wealth does not necessarily imply that you are a ‘civilized person’. A woman living in Djursholm emailed me: ‘I talked to a couple of good friends and said, someone should do research on what happens when the cultural society becomes the new-rich society’ (emphasis in original).

Responding to newcomers, a strategy of stigmatization is therefore commonly practised, which aims to preserve the community’s consecrating potential for the established groups. As one resident said: ‘The new IT people and the finance people who move to Djursholm lack this “Djursholm spirit”. They chuck out everything in the house and build new, nothing of the old may remain. They lack cultivation.’ Historically, there is also a firm distinction between ‘Old Djursholmers’ and ‘New Djursholmers’; one of the oldest clubs in Djursholm is even called ‘Old Djursholmers’ – open only for those who have grown up there; thus newcomers, mainly financiers and bankers, historically representing a profession that is seen as vulgar or corrupt, are not welcome. The derogatory term denoting such people – krämåre in Swedish – originally comes from the Greek word for money, chrema. Krämåre were considered not to do anything productive, apart from simply ‘making money’. Such formalized stigmatization, which even operates ‘inside’ the community, is a central aspect of the community’s consecrating potential, and thus an important aspect of how such an elite community contributes to maintain its power in society based on a construction of morality of not only expressions of manners, but of money as well (see Lamont, 1992).

Sometimes reactions to ‘deviant behaviours’ may be harsh: despite extensive problems with alcohol abuse in Djursholm both among youngsters and adults that have been reported in a number of official surveys and reports, when there was an initiative to start up a local Alcoholics Anonymous association, its information posters were quickly torn down over night, and when new posters were put up, they disappeared as well, according to one person I talked to. Further, a local municipality officer, dealing with social security issues, told me that a few refugee families had been given short-term contracts in one of Djursholm’s few apartment blocks, but there were constant complaints about these families’ children, who were playing outside in the garden. Neighbours thought they made too much noise.

Obviously, Djursholm’s elevated character as reproduced by its citizens, and the outside world, was seen as threatened by the new groups; even by such a simple and natural
act as children playing in a garden. Although there are several people from various parts of the world, such as entrepreneurs from other countries, ex-pats and ambassadors and their families, who live in Djursholm and who seem well integrated (contrary to the few refugee families from the Middle East who are temporarily living there), this can be seen as an expression of structural racism as they need to manifest that they share the dominant group’s worldview, which essentially are the values of a white middle-/upper-class, thus reproducing a moral economy of whiteness.

The expectation to reproduce Djursholm’s unique character and manifest its cultural heritage through ‘excellent behaviour’ can be quite demanding – even among the established groups of residents, which further illustrates the complex nature of consecration. Interestingly, few of the many people I talked to or interviewed during my five years of intense field studies answered an unequivocal ‘yes’ to my question of whether they looked upon themselves as ‘Djursholmers’, which testifies to the difficulty people in Djursholm seem to experience when it comes to being able to live up to the norms that permeate the lifestyle there – norms that stipulate that they should live in a socially and morally exemplary way. Reiterating the observation that residents did not like to be labelled ‘upper-class’ or ‘elite’, obviously, these contrasting desires and feelings of the residents complicate the feeling of ‘being elite’, leading to a form of self-exclusion or self-stigmatization. An 83-year-old man told me the following self-deprecating story:

If you come from Djursholm there are no excuses for not being a success. This is obviously quite a pressure to be under. I never became a boss, and although I am now 83 years old I still regard myself as a little boy who is fairly questioning and maybe also insecure about life. In that sense I am a bit of a failure.

But even so, not fully being able to meet the community’s historically grounded expectations may perhaps save today’s residents from an even worse stigma in a society known for its egalitarian ideals and policies (Sweden): that of appearing snobbish and out of touch with reality, which would reduce Djursholm to some kind of sect dominated by indoctrination. In Sweden and Scandinavia at large, expressing wealth or in other ways appearing as an elite person challenges a norm that says one should be part of the collective and honour all people’s equal value (see Gulbrandsen, 2019); even among residents in Djursholm, there is a moral norm saying that you ‘shouldn’t show off’, as one person put it, i.e. you shouldn’t excessively manifest your economic or professional successes; remaining ‘low key’ is what defines the culture. The dominating sense of not fully being able to live up to expectations is what makes a place such as Djursholm so influential in a social and moral sense; despite its reputation of excellence, there is a significant aspect of ‘commonness’ about its residents, which contributes to their self-image as role-models.

Hence, all residents are constantly threatening Djursholm’s aura, while at the same time being central to its maintenance. In such a world, there is little tolerance for disease and personal and social failure (with the exception of certain diagnoses such as dyslexia, which is seen as a ‘gift’ rather than a problem; see Holmqvist, 2020). These people are seen as threats to the character of the community and cultivated esprit by being wholly or partly unable to reproduce the norms and values that dominate – and thus
must be excluded. In an elite community, being sick, or just not being able to fully reproduce the dominant lifestyle, is probably more stigmatizing than in other places, since there is little acceptance of the ‘sick role’ (see Parsons, 1951): Failure at work in Djursholm or in various ways not being able to live up to the norms and ideals that characterize this society, or even only suffering from illness, underlines the personal responsibility for living well and exemplarily, as a moral paragon, thus contributing to Djursholm’s ‘supreme lifestyle’.

In Djursholm, with its originally utopian and cultural character, you are not ‘struck’ by anything that cannot be ultimately derived from yourself. For example, there are no closed factories to blame for your unemployment. An employee at a healthcare facility commented: ‘The person is in focus in such a society, where everything is about the person’s performance. If you feel bad or you become unemployed, it is very difficult to blame anything in your environment.’ For this reason, it is essential to develop abilities to hide various problems and failures, which is about safeguarding the elevated image of the place in the eyes of the outside world, simply to ‘keep up the appearance’. Indeed, the few unemployed persons I met did not say they were ‘unemployed’, but ‘in between jobs’. A woman who grew up in Djursholm talked about her childhood and adolescence there, and how parents neglected children’s welfare. She said: ‘The most important thing seems to be that the image is preserved.’ If family members have psychiatric problems, suffer from alcohol abuse or just ‘feel bad’, denial appears to be a reasonable reaction. An employee at the municipality claimed that ‘in Djursholm things do not happen publicly. Therefore, there are large numbers of unreported cases of ill-treatment, abuse and the like. In addition, the desire to report a husband or parent to the authorities is probably quite low here. If the problems are discovered, the whole family is stigmatized, one can hardly stay [living there].’

If individual people cause a scandal, there is a social pressure on them to move out in order not to contaminate the community’s aura, status and prestige; without such exclusion there is a risk of community desecration; hence the relevance of understanding stigmatization as power is a key aspect of the exclusionary processes of consecration. One example relates to a Swedish minister living in Djursholm who had to resign due to economic misbehaviour; she swiftly decided to move. A real estate broker in Djursholm said in a newspaper: ‘We don’t want to sell it [the minister’s house] since we don’t want to be associated with the kind of activities she has been involved in.’ To this extent, the community protects itself from becoming ‘an ordinary place’ in moral terms, and thereby safeguards its consecrating potential. Even if individuals fail morally or socially, Djursholm must remain ‘a shining city upon a hill’. But even obviously immoral acts such as drug abuse, incest, or the like risk being concealed, with the consequence that personal suffering is downplayed: it is not in anyone’s interest that the problems that might exist in Djursholm are subject to public discussion, inside or outside the society. An elderly citizen put it this way:

The residents are aware that they are scrutinized by outsiders, that they live in a society that stands out in terms of status. They are also aware that Djursholm is a strong brand and that it is in their interest to protect this brand. Many have invested a lot both financially and socially in this environment, and then you are very concerned that the reputation is not challenged in any way.
Conclusions

Instead of being broadly concerned with social reproduction, which is the dominating focus in elite studies, in this article I try to provide an analysis of the way in which elite communities such as Djursholm are constructed and upheld and the processes involved in the ‘consecrating exclusion’ of elites within these communities. The notion of ‘consecrating exclusion’, which is based on a synthesis of ideas on social and moral distinction with ideas on symbolic boundaries and moral hierarchies, highlights how elite distinction does not come solely or primarily through regular socialization-processes and identity-making activities, but also through particular activities of social and moral elevation (see Holmqvist, 2017; Khan, 2011).

The notion suggests a framework by which one can theorize on how consecration thrives on exclusion, and vice versa, and how both consecration and exclusion reproduce inequality between groups of people in society. Although this article primarily analyses elites (as a particular class) in reproducing social hierarchies, my framework should also have the potential to describe how, for example, race, gender and sexuality are played out in (elite) communities and their social and moral consequences for societies at large, noting that not all groups in Djursholm and similar elite neighbourhoods are likely to reap equally the fruits of consecration as offered there, for instance, non-European immigrants, and workers.

Accominotti (2018, p. 3) argued for the need among sociologists to analyse consecration as a ‘population-level phenomenon’, which is exactly what the notion of ‘consecrating exclusion’ offers: namely to examine how elite communities, as unique social organizations, are being consecrated and how they at the same time offer their members exclusivity, effectively ‘dividing a population of candidates into two clearly demarcated groups: the chosen and the rest’, as Accominotti put it. The cultivated character of Djursholm, as experienced by both the community’s insiders and its outsiders, is essential in expressing social distinction, hence the importance of all, young and old, to be carefully groomed, physically fit, well dressed, active, socially competent – and most importantly appear civilized, bearing in mind the community’s unique status in Swedish society at large (cf. Lamont, 1992; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Not upholding these qualities poses a risk for deconsecration; and as my observations indicate, consecration can be a very demanding process.

As my study further suggests, elite distinction comes about by conforming to the values, customs and manners of the community, making it possible for it to enact a position as a role-model community (see Fitzgerald, 1981; Pincon & Pincon-Charlot, 2007); but it also requires the active stigmatization of any actors that risk desecrating the community aura; hence the importance of considering how stigma acts to maintain certain groups’ and classes’ status and privileges. Similarly to Tyler’s (2020, p. 18) argument that stigma is a ‘strategy of government, in ways that often deliberately seek to foment and accentuate inequalities and injustices’, consecration can be seen as a strategy for elites to maintain their power and dominance through social and cultural distinction. To this extent, this study suggests how an elite community’s particular character is essential in expressing and enacting moral authority; the ways elites assert superior moral character are critical in understanding how elite status is created and maintained (see e.g. Hartmann, 2000; Lamont, 1992).
Even though this article does not present a comparison between one single elite community and similar places in other countries, the extant literature suggests that in many ways elite communities represent a global, rather than a local phenomenon; indeed, elites may be strongly attached to a local context, but their culture is commonly transnational and global (see Andreotti et al., 2015; Hay, 2016). The phenomenon of elite communities’ consecrating exclusion can thus be seen as a critical part of a global elite reproduction and the increased segregation that is the hallmark of most countries today, including Sweden and the other welfare countries that are commonly described as ‘egalitarian’ (Gulbrandsen, 2019). Still, in order to present a more detailed understanding of the peculiarities of different elite communities, it would be relevant to, for example, compare suburban to urban elite enclaves, or to compare elite areas in highly egalitarian countries such as Sweden with similar areas in countries with significant income gaps. Also, it could be productive to compare old elite communities (the case of Djursholm) to new elite communities (the case of, e.g., Sentosa Cove; see Pow, 2011).

Finally, the concept of ‘consecrating exclusion’ should not only be of relevance for the study of the places where elites reside, but should also be useful when analysing other elite institutions such as schools and universities. ‘Elite schools’, which have been the dominating study object among students of contemporary elites, also socially and morally promote their members, while at the same time exclude ‘unwanted’ and ‘undesired’ people, all in all maintaining privilege for a select few.

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