Preface

In his famous poem from 1915, “The Tuft of Flowers,” Robert Frost points to the universal kinship between people, transcending both time and space. In the poem, he tells the story of a man who goes, in the early morning, to a field to turn the grass that had just been mowed a couple of hours earlier. The man feels lonely: “As all must be, I said within my heart, Whether they work together or apart.” Suddenly his eyes turn in amazement to a tuft of flowers that the unknown mower has left standing beside a brook. This evokes in him a sense of kinship with this person, who has stood at exactly the same spot just a few hours earlier. And all of a sudden his loneliness vanishes. In the last verse, he sends his warm regards to this sympathetic stranger, who has left to him these beautiful flowers and freed him from sad loneliness, telling him in the most beautiful way that people always are interconnected and work together.

The poem echoes the theme of this book, which, in its most philosophical expression, is: By which visible and invisible bonds are human beings connected, enabling them to work together? This is to say: How are highly valued human resources, *wealth* in the broadest sense of the word, transmitted from person to person through time and space? Within economic terminology, such resources have for long been termed “capital.” Our main motivation in writing this book is exactly this simple, everyday feeling Frost describes so brilliantly in his poem, namely that a stream of “tufts of flowers,” or capital, is continuously being transmitted from one person to another, from parent to child, from one generation to the other.

In line with a previous book by the authors,¹ this book is an advocacy for cross-disciplinary studies of a range of visible and tangible as well as invisible and intangible forms of wealth-generating capital. We aim to further develop and apply Bourdieu’s seminal idea of “A general science of the economy of practices,”² where material and immaterial forms of capital are analyzed together and at the same level. We will pay particular attention to *social capital*, because we

see social capital as a master capital in the creation of human wealth, in the form of cooperative and hence productive social networks that are lubricated by trust at all levels of society. Indeed, we aim to go off the deep end and actually introduce such a socio-economic science, which we have baptized *Bourdieuconomics*, in honor of the great French sociologist, and then try to find out how various forms of capital are actually being built, converted and used by ordinary people *in practice*. In doing so we wish to grasp the “mysterious formula” of the economic success of a universal welfare state like Denmark.

According to economic theory, this welfare state “bumblebee” should in fact not be able to fly because of big government and generous public transfers where social benefits reduce incentives to contribute to society. However, this “bumblebee” *does* fly and is in rather good shape. Why? We argue that it is the daily, active use of a high stock of social capital in Denmark, and probably also in the other Scandinavian countries, that reduces free-riding, increases productivity and, overall, makes those countries prosper. Thus, social capital is the *motor* in a Scandinavian universal welfare state (that is, the heavy “bumblebee”), whereas trust is the *oil* in that motor. This is because specific and social trust clearly lubricates social interaction and cooperation in everyday, micro-level situations. Here, effective informal social sanctions secure that the “bumblebee” is not killed by free-riding citizens.

This we try to demonstrate by applying the Bourdieuconomics approach to diverse cases which show how ordinary Danish citizens actually engage in trust-based cooperation and provision of collective goods on a daily basis within the voluntary, public and private sectors.

We wish first and foremost to thank Jens Fyhn Lykke Sørensen, Urs Steiner Brandt, Chris Kjeldsen and Egon Noe, as well as the editors/publishers in the six publications cited below, for permission to use parts of the following articles in this book: (1) Svendsen, G.T. and G.L.H. Svendsen (2010), “Social capital and the welfare state,” in M. Böss (ed.), *The Nation-State in Transformation*, pp. 315–39, Aarhus, Denmark, published by Aarhus University Press; (2) Brandt, U.S. and G.T. Svendsen (2010), “The survival of the Nordic welfare state and social trust,” *Nordic Journal of Political Economy*, 36, 1–15, published by the University of Oslo;

(3) Svendsen, G.L.H. (2010), "Socio-spatial planning in the creation of bridging social capital: The importance of multifunctional centers for intergroup networks and integration," *International Journal of Social Inquiry*, 3(2), 45–74, published by Uludag University, Turkey, in collaboration with James Cook University, Queensland, Australia; (4) Svendsen, G.L.H. (2013), "Public libraries as breeding grounds for bonding, bridging and institutional social capital: The case of branch libraries in Denmark," *Sociologia Ruralis*, 53(1), 52–73, published by Wiley-Blackwell; (5) Svendsen, G.L.H., C. Kjeldsen and E. Noe (2010), "How do private entrepreneurs transform local social capital into economic capital? Four case studies from rural Denmark," *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 39(6), 631–44, published by Elsevier; (6) Svendsen, G.L.H. and J.F.L. Sørensen (2006), "There's more to the picture than meets the eye: Measuring tangible and intangible capital in two marginal communities in rural Denmark," *Journal of Rural Studies*, 23(4), 453–71, published by Elsevier.

Also, thanks to our colleagues for their inspiration and fruitful comments, especially Elinor Ostrom, Peter Nannestad, Martin Paldam, Christian Bjørnskov, Karin Hilmer Pedersen, Michael Böss, Robert D. Putnam, Mette Frisk Jensen, Carsten Jensen, Christoffer Green-Pedersen, Francisco Herreros, Ric Uslander, Peter Graeff, Niels Grüne, Odile Poulsen, Thora Margareta Bertilsson, Christian Hjorth-Andersen, Anders Poulsen, Bo Rothstein, Søren Serritzlew, Kim M. Sønderskov, secretary Annette Bruun Andersen and student assistant Line Møgelvang Villadsen. Finally, we wish to thank all the interviewees, as well as consultant Flemming Jensen, Vestviden, Lemvig municipality, who helped one of the authors by suggesting and making appointments with interviewees from voluntary associations and small enterprises in the municipality. Needless to say, any remaining errors or shortcomings are due to the authors.

NOTES

1. Svendsen, G.L.H. and Svendsen, G.T. (2004).
2. Bourdieu (1986).