

Elites in an Egalitarian Society: Recruitment, Reproduction and Circulation.

1.0. Introduction.

Concepts like power, class and elite are usually founded on an assumption that society, the positions an individual occupies herein and the relations between individuals located in these positions, can be analysed as a multidimensional hierarchy. The correlative image of society is also a society that is divided into and structured by divisions between hierarchically ordered positions, between which people are more or less mobile, and where the elites are the ones located at the top of the relevant hierarchies.

Across Europe, the trajectories that lead individuals to given elite positions, and the degree of intersectorial elite circulation, has proven to be subject to strong variation (Hartmann 2007). Modes of capitalist organization, patterns of societal perceptions and of social mobility do the same (Breen ed. 2004). There are therefore good reasons to believe that Mattei Dogan (2003: 2) is correct when he argues that ".elite configurations in large part [reflect] the social, economic, cultural and political structures of society itself."

However, whereas most European countries are perceived in clearly hierarchical terms by a large majority of their respective citizens, a majority of Norwegians do think of their society as one where social inequalities are relatively small. And when compared to other Scandinavians, Norwegians stand out as far more egalitarian in their societal perceptions (Hjellbrekke & Korsnes 2006). Such perceptions are at odds with the existence of distinct elite figurations, with elevated levels of intergenerational reproduction, elite homogamy and a high degree of positional circulation and multipositionality, and suggest that Norway is indeed a 'special case' when it comes to elite configurations. But if so, what exactly is the particularity of the case? Has it something to do with what the historian Francis Sejersted (1993) has coined the Norwegian "Sonderweg", i.e. a compensatory state, extended corporatist pluralism and short distances between the various elite formations? And would it still not include the existence of long-lasting dynasties exerting various forms of power over the state?

Against this background, the purpose of this project is to extend our knowledge about the upper echelons of the social hierarchy in Norway with main emphasis on three key aspects:

- elite recruitment
- elite reproduction and
- elite circulation

This involves addressing empirical questions, as well as theoretically and methodologically based discussions about the understanding of social stratification in the contemporary Norwegian society. And while not aiming at a large-scale comparative analysis, the questions we address and the analyses we plan to undertake will necessarily also be informed by, and compared to the results from recent European elite studies.

These show that despite pushes towards globalisation or europeisation, neither a universal, nor a European model, with a strong transnational elite component, can be found (Suleiman & Mendras, eds. 1997). Instead, Hartmann (op.cit.) identifies three main types of elite formation across Europe:

i) A French model, with homogenous elite recruitment through elite educational institutions (in particular the Grandes Écoles) and strong sectorial

circulation (“pantouflage”, i.e., over their career, the same persons circulate between, and occupy leading positions in multiple sectors).

ii) A British model, with relatively homogenous elite recruitment through elite educational or military institutions (in particular public/boarding schools, Oxbridge and Sandhurst), but with a limited degree of sectorial circulation.

iii) A German model, with heterogeneous elite recruitment and limited sectorial circulation.

Where does an egalitarian society like the Norwegian one place itself with respect to Hartmann’s three models? Trying to answer this question requires a broad analysis of processes of social stratification, class and elite formation, and the main ambition of the project is to contribute to an analysis of these fundamental characteristics of the present Norwegian capitalist society.

As pointed out by Savage & Williams (2008), the sample survey has proven problematic in elite studies. The development of data registers containing information about the total Norwegian population that have become available for researchers, alleviates this problem and opens up new avenues for studying elites. The possibilities to acquire knowledge about elite groups based on this kind of data have thus never been better. Furthermore, the project will combine analysis based on these data with an in-depth cross-national comparative study of top bureaucrats. This represents not only an original, additional approach in studies of elites, but also an opportunity to develop more general methodological and theoretical issues in this field of research.

2.0. Main research questions.

Since C. Wright Mills’ (1956) “The Power Elite”, questions about the composition and cohesion of the top level of the stratification hierarchy, and also about the mechanisms behind recruitment to this level, have been central. This is also the case in this project. More specifically, three main sets of research questions are raised:

Firstly, what are the patterns of elite recruitment; does this level consist of separate elites or a common class? Do the different elite groupings vary with respect to degree of openness, i.e. what is the degree of elite mobility? In other words, to what extent does the probability of attaining elite positions depend on social origins, and more specifically, on elite origins? How important are economic, cultural and political resources for elite recruitment? Is there a development towards more openness or do we find trends pointing in the opposite direction? Where does Norway place itself when compared to other European countries on these dimensions?

Secondly, in what parts of the elites is the reproduction, i.e. the inter-generational elite circulation, at its strongest? How are these patterns related to patterns of intra-generational elite circulation? Where are the barriers towards intragenerational elite circulation, and what are the typical trajectories of circulation? Have these patterns changed over time, and if so, in what direction and for what positions? Has the elite-internal positional circulation increased or decreased from one generation to the next? Or from one birth-cohort to the next? Can clear tendencies towards elite homogamy be found, and if so: in what parts of the elites are these patterns at their strongest, and where are they at their weakest? Does Norway differ from other European countries on these issues; i.e. do the results support Sejersted’s Sonderweg-thesis?

Thirdly, and because of the centrality of the state and the state apparatus in a social democratic society like Norway, particular attention will be given to the recruitment to the top bureaucratic positions in the central public administration. These positions will therefore also be the object of an in-depth, comparative analysis.

How are these elites selected in Norway, France and Britain? What are the principal recruitment mechanisms, and what are the formative, educational tracks leading to top civil service positions in each of the three countries? On what knowledge or competence bases are the top civil servants in each country defined? What are they supposed to be good at? And what are the mechanisms used to pick the suited candidates and ensure that the top civil service is “professional”?

Addressing these three main research questions will also open up the possibility of analysing more in depth the circulation between elite sectors, e.g. whether bureaucratic elites are mobile from or to other elite sectors. Is the French “pantouflage”, i.e. top civil servants taking positions in the private sector, a phenomenon equally, more or less common in Norway? And what are the relationships, if any, between the educational tracks, selection mechanisms and the profession’s competence base on the one hand, and the patterns of intersectorial elite circulation in each country on the other?

In all of the above outlined sets of questions, the gender dimension will necessarily be highly important. Several studies (e.g. Payne & Abbott 1990, Ringdal 1990; Hansen 1995) have found clear differences between men and women’s mobility patterns, and the Norwegian elites are also strongly divided along gender lines (Gulbrandsen 2002; Hjellbrekke & Korsnes 2003).

3.0. Previous research and recent findings.

Although some important exceptions can be found (Rogoff Ramsøy 1977, Colbjørnsen, Hernes & Knudsen 1983, Birkelund, Colbjørnsen, Hernes & Knudsen 1987, Birkelund 1992), analyses of social stratification or class analysis have traditionally not been at centre stage in Norwegian social sciences. And whereas the first Power and Democracy Survey resulted in a project analysing class relations in Norway in the late 1970s/early 1980s, this has not been the case in the aftermath of the last Power and Democracy Survey (1998-2003), even though this survey included a project on the elites (Gulbrandsen & al 2002).

The overall tendency in the most recent decades has not been that different. Although some scattered studies have employed a class approach, there has not been a systematic large scale class study of the Norwegian society. One reason may be that the concept has been considered dated in the modern Scandinavian welfare state, characterised by a high level of equality and social security. Another may be that class analytical approaches have come under increasing attack, for instance from the supporters of Daniel Bell’s work on de-industrialisation and its diverse consequences in the field of culture (Bell 1973, 1979). Bell (1979: 38) claimed that “[m]ore and more individuals want to be identified not by their occupational base (in the Marxist sense), but by their cultural tastes and lifestyles”. The development of contemporary society has subsequently been described as one of “individualisation” (Beck 1992, Giddens 1991) where antagonisms between classes have vanished and conceptions of social structures in terms of ordered social strata (income, education, prestige, etc.) do not work anymore.

However, the Norwegian studies that have focused on the impact of social origin in education and social mobility give evidence of the enduring importance of class structures: Large inequalities are found, and the studies that focus on change indicates that there is a large extent of stability in the level of inequality (Hansen 1997, 1999, Ringdal 2004). Evidence from the other Scandinavian countries also indicate that the development towards increasing equality have come to a halt

(Jonsson 2004, Breen & Jonsson 2007, Benjaminsen 2006, Pekkala & Lucas 2007, Björklund & al. 2007). Some recent studies even point to increasing inequalities. Estimates of income inequality in a long-term perspective indicate that inequalities decreased in the first decades of the twentieth century for then to increase from the mid 1980's. The proportion of income obtained by the richest five percent of the population in 2000 was on the same level as in the 1940's (Savage & Williams 2008). The development in Norway thus displays a similar U-shaped pattern as in UK and US (Atkinson 2003). This means that economic redistribution has occurred in favour of the wealthiest part of the population. This redistribution is also likely to influence patterns of inequality across generations. A study of the development of economic resources on educational attainment in Norway displays a U-shaped pattern with increasing inequality among 16 year olds approximately from the mid 1980's (Hansen 2008). Not the least these developments indicate that class and stratification should receive more attention than has been the case hitherto.

Based on survey data to a positional selected sample, Gulbrandsen & al. (2002) study the recruitment to top positions in 10 different sectors. 85% of the occupants are men. The occupational reproduction is at its strongest among the CEOs in private companies, and the educational level is higher than in the Norwegian population. Most leaders have work experience from more than one sector, and the income level is more than 3 times higher than in the population. A more recent study also finds extensive internal recruitment in the Norwegian economic upper class, meaning that its members predominantly have been born into it (Flemmen 2008). Following Erikson and Goldthorpe (1991), this can be seen as an indicator of what they call "class formation", the tendency for members of similar objective positions to form a social group.

Based on analyses of the same data as Gulbrandsen (op.cit.), Hjellbrekke & al (Hjellbrekke & Korsnes 2003, 2005, 2006, Hjellbrekke & al. 2007) conclude that the Norwegian field of power has a tri-polar structure. The three most important principal dimensions in the field are an economic capital axis, then an educational and social capital axis, and then an axis separating the judicial positions from positions in culture, organizations and politics. Secondly, the political positions are the most accessible. Thirdly, the public judicial group is the most homogeneous. Internally in this field, a latent class analysis identifies 4 main groups on the basis of personal and inherited indicators on social capital; one group of outsiders, of up-movers, of down-movers and of inheritors.

4.0. Theoretical and methodological issues

An important idea behind this project is that mobility patterns delineate boundaries between classes and elites. Moreover, classes or elites are likely to be more cohesive the more the members are linked by similar social origins, education, or through intermarriage. This is a common idea within stratification research, for example in the large and influential body of research based on the Erikson/Goldthorpe class scheme. A basic idea behind this scheme is that the top level groups can be treated as a common class, which is denominated the "service class." This category consists of professionals, public and private top level administrators, as well as large business owners. Erikson and Goldthorpe have emphasised the pragmatic motives behind this classification, and that it primarily should be considered a heuristic device. Goldthorpe has defended the use of an encompassing service class on the ground that mobility across generations does not suggest that there are important boundaries between groups within this category, such as professional and managerial groups.

Moreover, the practice of grouping together the business owners in the other is defended by pointing to that the owners in their surveys typically tend to be small shop owners, or owners of hotels, restaurants or other small businesses (Erikson & Goldthorpe 1991).

We believe that differentiating between different top level groups is necessary, especially if one wants to explain mobility patterns and their variations. The mechanisms behind the reproduction of positions differ – e.g. they are not the same for a professor's son who himself becomes a professor, and the son of an industrialist who follows in his father's footsteps.

For these reasons, we find that a multidimensional approach and research strategy is needed. As an alternative to the above outlined approaches, the research group will therefore draw inspiration from the recent studies undertaken by Savage & al. (in particular Savage 2000, Savage & Williams 2008), from the works of the late Pierre Bourdieu (1979, 1986, 1989), and from the critiques raised by Crompton & Scott (2000) in their renewed call for a multi-dimensional, spatial approach to studies of class and stratification.

5.0. Data

The possibilities to acquire knowledge about Norwegian elite groups have never been better, due to the development of data registers containing information about the total population that have become available for researchers. The availability of population register data opens up possibilities of studying small groups at the top level of society that disappear in ordinary surveys. These registers contain detailed data about educational careers, earnings, income and wealth, as well as employment information. Information about occupations has become available quite recently, something that has opened up new avenues with respect to the possibilities of studying elites. Researchers from the sociology departments of the universities of Oslo and Bergen wish to join efforts and utilize these data in a large-scale project aimed at providing new knowledge about elite groups.

The PhD-project will deal with questions regarding the recruitment, reproduction and circulation patterns in the elites, focusing on one particular elite group, and will be based on the population data. The postdoc-project on top bureaucrats in three countries represents a complementary intake to the study of elites by its qualitative and systematically cross-country comparative approach (Page & Wright, [eds.] 1999, Bezes 2000). The two main sources of data in this project will be documents and semi-structured interviews. Primarily there must be a mapping of the legal regulations and other written norms for recruitment in each country. Further, two government departments will be chosen as case units in each country, and semi-structured interviews will be conducted with approximately eight civil servants in each department from the level of Principal Officers (byråsjef) and upwards. The interviews will span these persons' educational and professional career tracks, recruitment processes and their conceptions of the knowledge and skills they employ in their everyday work. In addition, interviews will be conducted with specific representatives of human resources sections in the selected departments and other persons responsible for employment about recruitment processes and selection criteria.

6.0. Research strategies and design

Internal recruitment in classes means that the class is likely to develop what one may call "demographic maturity". To further assess the extent of social cohesion in the

Norwegian upper classes, one should therefore study processes of circulation and integration. In order to do so, the project will be based on a combination of research strategies. Investigations of research questions 1 and 2 will be based on analyses of quantitative data, and three main statistical techniques will be used complementary to address these questions:

- a) Regression models will be the main tool in the analysis of recruitment patterns
- b) Questions regarding elite circulation and reproduction will primarily be addressed by using loglinear and logmultiplicative models for turnover-tables, with particular emphasis on the UNIDIFF-model.
- c) Internal differentiation and questions regarding multi-dimensionality and spatial oppositions will be analysed by way of multiple correspondence analysis (Le Roux & Rouanet 2004).

Class and elite integration can be grasped through a study of marriage and kinship structures, while circulation can be studied through an analysis of individuals' social trajectory within the upper classes. Marriage structures can be studied through an analysis of homogamy (the extent to which people marry people who are similar to themselves) and endogamy (marriage between people from similar social backgrounds) (Hansen 1995).

In societies characterized by restricted social mobility, these phenomena will tend to overlap. If there is extensive homogamy and endogamy in the upper classes, this can be seen as an indicator of social integration. Marriage is both facilitated by, and facilitates further, access to social circles. These marriage patterns can be seen as caused by, and to cause further, class barriers. Taking the married couple as unit of analysis, one can next study their kinship ties, both in blood and in law. Especially in cases of endogamy, one can expect the person's family to also be of privileged social standing. One's kinship relations will then represent a durable social network, functioning as a capacity for social energy, or power (Bourdieu 1986).

A different approach to the study of social capital and social cohesion is to study circulation in the upper classes. To what extent do persons move between different positions in these classes? If there is widespread circulation, this can be interpreted in at least two ways. First, it is a good indicator of social capital, as circulation is facilitated by networks, but will also mean that the person will gain further networks through his or her trajectory. Secondly, following from this, widespread circulation will indicate social cohesion in the upper classes, as people will become acquainted through their trajectories, and may then develop sentiments of commonality and feelings of shared identity. The study of structures of marriage, kinship and circulation in the upper classes will then provide a perspective to the understanding of social capital and social cohesion in society's most privileged and powerful strata.

Research question 3 – the recruitment to top bureaucratic positions in the state apparatus – will be based on a qualitative and comparative research strategy, and will also be the subject of the postdoc-project. Through a combination of a cross-national comparative and a historical-sociological perspective with analytical tools from the sociology of knowledge, this section of the project seeks to reach a better understanding of the kind of knowledge and competence that defines the top-level of the bureaucratic profession in Norway, Britain and France. The cross-country comparison will be used actively methodologically to question the taken-for-granted and institutionalised practices and values within each of the three countries' top-

bureaucracies. However, the national frameworks will not have the status as explanatory variables. They are empirical-analytical constructed frameworks whose appropriateness for understanding must be investigated throughout the project.

Whereas the focus is on the types of knowledge and skills that are valued in the selection mechanisms, as opposed to the background characteristics of the persons selected, it will be interesting to see the former in relation to the latter. Therefore, situating this postdoc-project within the wider project that combines several quantitative approaches to the study of selection to and circulation between elites is particularly valuable. It makes it possible to investigate more in depth the link between the types of knowledge valued in the three countries' top bureaucracies and the educational tracks leading thereto in perspective of the typologies constructed by Hartmann regarding educational tracks and elite selection in Europe. The outcomes of the postdoc-project will thus bring complementary elements into the wider project in order better to understand the circulation – or lack of such – between elite sectors in Norway.

7.0. The Research Group, Personnel Recruitment and International Collaboration.

The senior members of the research group are prof. Marianne Nordli Hansen, Univ. of Oslo, assoc. professor Johs. Hjellbrekke, Univ. of Bergen and prof. Olav Korsnes, Univ. of Bergen. All three are specialists on social stratification, and have published extensively on elites, classes and social mobility the last years. Members of the group are also specialists on the relevant statistical techniques for analysing metric and categorical data, i.e. regression models for metric and categorical variables, geometric data analysis (GDA), loglinear and logmultiplicative models for mobility tables, and also latent class analysis (Hagenaars 1990, Hagenaars & McCutcheon 2002, Le Roux & Rouanet 2004).

Through already established international collaborations, three affiliated **foreign** members will be included in the group as the principal active participants. These are prof. Christine Musselin, CSO, Institut de Sciences Politiques and CNRS, Paris, France, Prof. Mike Savage, Department of Sociology and CRESC, Univ. of Manchester, England, and prof. Annick Prieur, Univ. of Aalborg, Denmark. All three count among the leading European sociologists in their respective fields. Throughout the whole project period, the research group will be assembled for workshops in Bergen and Oslo, so that problems and research strategies can be discussed, specific tasks distributed and also to work collectively on the drafts for publications. The international collaborators will be invited to take part in these sessions, and at least two workshops will be organized abroad.

Starting in 2009, the PhD-student and the postdoc-student will be recruited to the program this year. As part of the project, the senior members will organize master degree and PhD-courses in class, stratification and elite formation, and also specialist courses in relevant statistical methods. As part of their formation, the students will be expected to follow these courses. The PhD-student is also expected to stay at least 1 semester at collaborating institutions either in the UK or in France. In this way, the international collaboration can be integrated at all levels. In order to further enhance

their competence, candidates are expected to participate at relevant international summer schools.

8. Concluding comments.

Given the centrality of research on social mobility in international sociology, it is of vital importance for Norwegian sociology to develop and maintain a strong position within this field of research. At the same time, elite studies have been the object of renewed international attention. The outlined project proposal will make it possible both to establish a more permanent and internationally leading Norwegian research group in this field, to further develop international collaboration, and to thus recruit a new generation of researchers to this highly important research area within the social sciences. Furthermore, the questions raised in this project will not only provide further insight into social stratification in general, and knowledge about society's most privileged and powerful strata in particular. Also, the project will improve the understanding of the workings of social power, and in consequence also the basis for a democratic societal organisation.

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