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EDITORIAL

Knowledge, skills and dispositions: the socialisation and ‘training’ of elites

The economist Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014) has done much to stimulate debates about inequality across the social science disciplines (see also Savage et al. 2013 recent work in the UK). Such analyses have highlighted how financial inequalities are increasing in many developed economies, and that this is largely due to the rising incomes of a small group of top earners when compared to the rest of the population. Piketty's work, among others, shines a spotlight on the existence and persistence of elites (that is, status groups occupying positions of power) across societies, and calls on us to continue examining how economic processes have shaped and continue to embed and/or alter elite group formation today.

Meanwhile, the recent American presidential election confirms a larger trend of protest votes in countries with both small as well as larger inequalities in income distribution. This electoral trend appears to be less focused on the economic elites than on seeking to challenge the dominance of educational, social and political elites in Europe and the United States (Inglehart and Norris 2016; Ivarsson 2008). Views in relation to gender equality, multi-culturalism, and ways to promote social mobility that have for some time been actively supported through government policy, are now being directly challenged through the democratic process. Such positions are now being re-defined as only representing the views of particular elite (or perhaps elitist) groups.

Given these current developments, it is crucial we continue to explore in greater depth how elite groups and elite identities are formed. Do processes of socialisation and more formal education (schooling, university and professional training) promote detachment from others or seek to integrate various elite fractions? Perhaps more critically, to what extent do future elite group members spend time alongside ‘others’ and how does this shape social relations? Relevant to these current political trends are therefore recent sociological debates about the relationships between elite fractions (Bühlmann, David, and Mach 2012; Ellersgaard, Larsen, and Munk 2013; Jarness 2015; Ljunggren 2015) and their differential access to resources facilitating power and privilege, or the acquisition and activation of different types of capital (if we draw on Bourdieu's framework) (Bourdieu 1979, 1986). Thus, in this special issue we consider differences and similarities between the education and training experiences of various elite fractions and how this might shape their relative position in a broader field of power (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1993). We hope that such an examination will enable a deeper understanding of the kinds of knowledge, skills, pedagogical approaches and orientations to success that different groups have access to through their trajectories into elite professions, allowing us to consider what this could mean for the ways elites manage, sustain and reproduce such positions.

In investigating this overarching question, there are five specific aspects relevant to the field of elites and elite education which must be taken into consideration. First, although there has often been a lack of dialogue between sociologists and political scientists studying elites, in this special issue we position the important contributions made by both groups of scholars as critical to extending our understandings of elites. Sociologists have tended to focus on understanding processes that lead to recruitment into elite groups and what mechanisms support and ensure such a transition – the study of institutional and social forms of closure (van Zanten 2010, 329). Political scientists, meanwhile, have focused on exploring the ways in which elites exercise power (Genieys 2011). Yet, the conditions which

facilitate various forms of closure and promote particular modes of identity formation are critical to making sense of how relations of power are maintained and exerted by elite groups. Scott (1990) argues that people who hold positions of power cannot automatically be thought to have an 'elite identity'. Scott calls for empirical work to examine what might characterise such an identity and how common it may or may not be across various groups. This is a question specifically being taken up by Adam Howard in his work with young people who might be considered elite or at least be expected to take up elite positions in the future (Howard 2008; Howard et al. 2014, see also Mangset 2015a, 2016; Rivera 2016). As previously argued by Mills (1956), Scott suggests a group of elite individuals with a tangible or relatively similarly articulated elite identity will be more powerful than one that does not have a sense of shared orientations and form of social consciousness that facilitates a commonality of action (Scott 2008).

Second, we must situate the contemporary study of elite formation in the context of one of the most crucial changes in the past decades – the massification of higher education. With the emergence of 'schooled societies' (Baker 2014) and the expansion of higher education, the latter can no longer be automatically considered a form of elite provision (Trow 1970). Massification has, according to Collins (1979), led to the inflation and devaluation of higher education diplomas, and in part changed the nature and purpose of education from a good intended to accrue and produce knowledge to one that is strategically employed by the middle or upper classes to ensure their distinction from others. In a credentialised society, therefore, education acts as a signal of talent (Brown et al. 2016). How have these developments affected the formation and provision of elite education? While upper-class groups tend to get Master and Ph.D.-degrees and other social groups are more likely to hold lower level degrees, it is the accumulation of degrees and a concentration on certain types of degrees which are more likely to lead to prestigious positions that are important in the reproduction of privilege. We need to therefore study more carefully the strategies used by professions, education institutions, dominant groups and the state (van Zanten and Maxwell 2015) to ensure access to the elites remains exclusive. Strømme and Hansen, in this special issue, specifically explore this question in relation to the legal and medical profession in Norway over a 26-year period.

The expansion of higher education and elites' almost unchallenged and continued access to positions of power and privilege has been a central concern which sociologists (of education) (Bourdieu 1989; Bourdieu and Passeron 1970). Linked to this, scholars have examined how these groups have so successfully laid claim to the merited entitlement of their status (Gaztambide-Fernández and Howard 2010; Khan 2016; van Zanten 2015). How do educational institutions shape these processes of legitimation which elite men and women come to embody and discursively as well as affectively reproduce (Maxwell and Aggleton 2014a)? Increasingly, scholarly work is examining a wider range of cultural, political and institutional contexts in relation to this question (see Maxwell and Aggleton 2015) – and in this special issue the concern is specifically engaged with by Ziegler (in the Argentine context) and by Strømme and Hansen (who consider the Norwegian situation). Importantly, Mangset develops an entirely new line of thought in when she argues that 'meritocracy' is in fact understood and takes different forms based on the types of knowledge and skills that are valued differently across countries (see also Mangset 2015b).

We also need to address how globalisation affects the processes by which elite secure and legitimise elite positions. What impact has, for instance, the global competition for jobs had on the kinds of knowledge and skills that are valued and transmitted in formal educational settings? Are curricula areas traditionally associated with elite culture becoming devalued, in favour of new kinds of 'soft' skills, that are believed to be critical for access to the competitive jobs markets (Brown et al. 2004)? Has there been a shift towards nurturing the type of 'talent' and personal skills (ambition, initiative, flexibility, social confidence) associated with global 'top performers' in multinational companies and other organisations central to knowledge capitalism (Lauder and Brown 2011; Spring 2015)? Thus, we need to examine whether elite educational institutions, the labour market, and the political systems are contributing to the restoration of charismatic authority as legitimate power (Weber [1921] 1992).

Moreover, in this massified educational context, it is critical to study the ways in which certain 'tracks' are formed and embedded through the system (Nespor's 'institutional wormholes' – 2014), and the

roles of elite groups, institutions and professions in shaping these. In some countries, elite fractions are educated quite separately (see Argentina as discussed in Ziegler's paper in this issue), while in other contexts there is increasingly an overlap and intersection between various groups during their educational journey (as outlined by Israel and Vanneuville in relation to France). It is in following the journeys from family, to school, to higher education provision and into professional training that we can begin to understand better how particular kinds of values and dispositions are shaped and promoted, but also critically, how specific forms of knowledge and types of skills are valorised and therefore nurtured in and across these spaces.

The expansion of higher education can also be understood as part of a broader process of modernisation, which traditional sociological enquiry has argued has led to greater differentiation, professionalisation and autonomy within each field or sector (Durkheim [1893] 1996; Weber [1921] 1992). Our third key point shaping this special issue is therefore that this differentiation thesis is in fact directly questioned by elite studies (Bühlmann, David, and Mach 2012; Mills 1956). Mills' analysis of a common and integrated power elite argued that shared social and educational backgrounds of elite groups in the United States in the 1950s provided an explanation for why those in powerful positions across the different domains of industry/corporations, politics and the military were able to work so seamlessly together. Meanwhile Dahl's contribution suggested a theory of multiple, distinct and competing elites (Dahl 1958, 1961). What can elite group interrelations tell us about how differentiated and autonomous the public and private sectors are, or the political, administrative, economic and academic fields are – in different countries today? Considering further the various elite fractions found in different parts of the world today, how might they be working in concert and is this facilitated by them having had similar educational experiences?

In particular, through this special issue we argue that a more nuanced understanding of cultural capital and its relative convertibility and value in different contexts is central to understanding relations within and across the spheres of power. Bertron and Kolopp's study of Swiss boarding schools and of French administrative elites published in this special issue examines the ways cultural capital, developed here to be understood as academic capital, has very limited value as a resource for power among economic and political elites. Meanwhile, Israel and Vanneuville's article argues that the economic fractions of the legal elite seem to have gained ground relative to the administrative fractions of the legal elites in France, through establishing new educational institutions, curricula and forms of teaching. Such careful analysis will, in turn, offer ways of understanding how different forms of capital (economic, cultural, social, political) represent and become most convertible into resources for power in different contexts.

Linked to the above, there is a fourth issue we wish to highlight, and one that is perhaps most innovative about this special issue – the dialogue that has been generated by bringing together scholars who work within various strands of the 'sociology' discipline. The sociology of the professions (represented here by Mangset, Israel and Vanneuville, Strømme and Hansen) has a tradition of focusing on both education and worklife, and how certain forms of knowledge, and particular ways of organising access to these – through education and training – ensures that professional groups, such as lawyers and doctors, retain strong control over who is able to become a member (Abbott 1988; Freidson [1973] 1994; Larson [1977] 2012). However, much of this research often takes for granted that knowledge, which is such a vital resource for maintaining the status of an elite profession, is understood largely as formalised, esoteric, and scientifically-based. In this special issue we argue that more attention should be paid to the central role played by more diffuse and softer forms of knowledge and dispositions which have been found to be so crucial in facilitating the affective processes of a sense of 'belonging' to a particular professional group and elite fraction of society, and in turn become so important for enacting forms of social closure (Parkin 1974; van Zanten 2009). Not only do our sociologists of the professions engage with these ideas in their papers (particularly Mangset), but this is further examined by colleagues mainly working as sociologists of education (Bertron, Kolopp, and Ziegler) from whom such an approach is more common (Gaztambide-Fernández, Cairns, and Desai 2013; Maxwell and Aggleton 2014b; van Zanten 2015). In our view, closer study is needed of the ways in which formal and

informal training processes, which begin in the family, intersect both with the content and skills being developed by educational institutions and those then learnt once 'on the job' when people have joined an elite professional group (an argument developed by Strømme and Hansen when seeking to explain the successful self-recruitment within the legal profession in Norway).

In order to address these various concerns and questions, we argue that a combination of different methodologies and perspectives are needed. Therefore, our fifth and final focusing principle for this special issue has been that the papers included should represent a multitude of methodological approaches. We therefore have papers spanning quantitative and qualitative studies, longitudinal as well as inter-institutional research, and inter-professional and international comparisons. Quantitative studies have, for instance, examined the distribution of social backgrounds of those in elite educational institutions, offered network analyses of CEOs and board positions, or mapped alliances made possibly via matrimony, and are therefore critical in understanding the scope and determinants of elite dominance. Meanwhile, qualitative studies are necessary to understand the stability of these mechanisms of (re-)production within the institutional and affective structures of our educational and employment sectors. However, we suggest that there is still insufficient understanding of how elites' frames of reference that shape values and actions are structured and inculcated across the spaces of families, education and professions (van Zanten 2016). Alongside such a focus of research is the need to acknowledge and grapple with the realities of how capitalism drives societal changes and (re-)configures our elites (Savage and Williams 2008), and the role processes of internationalisation play in altering national educational systems and prompting the increasing privatisation of education and training provision (Mangset 2015b; van Zanten, Ball, and Darchy-Koechlin 2015).

Furthermore, it is crucial to investigate how educational and training processes, and institutional arrangements shape the creation of elites, but also how and why these might vary in space and in time, across different contexts. We have therefore invited some contributions that offer either a more longitudinal analysis or a comparative perspective, to allow us to reflect on this further. In this issue, Strømme and Hansen examine changes over time in the access to, and provision of higher education programmes for lawyers and medical doctors in Norway (between 1985 and 2011), while Mangset investigates the way in which different types of knowledge and skills, and institutionalisations of that knowledge, in Britain, France and Norway may facilitate elite circulation and integration across sectors to varying degrees.

Yet, future research should do more to consider how – within a context of global 'social congestion' for elite jobs – upper and middle-class families interpret and seek to provide access to processes that activate the kinds of 'personal capital' now arguably rewarded by multinational companies (Brown 2013). As Israel and Vanneuville so cogently show in their analysis of the changing context of French legal training – processes of internationalisation (strongly challenged in many parts of the French higher education system – van Zanten and Maxwell 2015) are drawn on to ensure that the future economic and administrative elites cultivate a much more 'modern' engagement with the law, that will not only allow them to interact more seamlessly across elite fractions, but also in the global contexts necessary for business and the practice of power.

The proposed special issue therefore engages with all of these five central questions for the field of elite studies and elite education. We have sought to combine insights from the sociology of professions with those from the sociology of education to examine processes of transmission of knowledge, dispositions and the constructions of identities within education and the training of elites. This facilitates a deeper understanding of processes of elite formation and reproduction across the life-course. The collection of papers found here also seek to bring into conversation scholars examining how different institutions variously play a role in defining the content, structure and access to training through which people enter elite professions and other kinds of dominant positions. Furthermore, we feature studies conducted in different countries and/or use international comparative approaches to explore the factors that influence processes of elite formation and, more generally, the various ways in which elites are constructed and legitimised in different contexts.

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