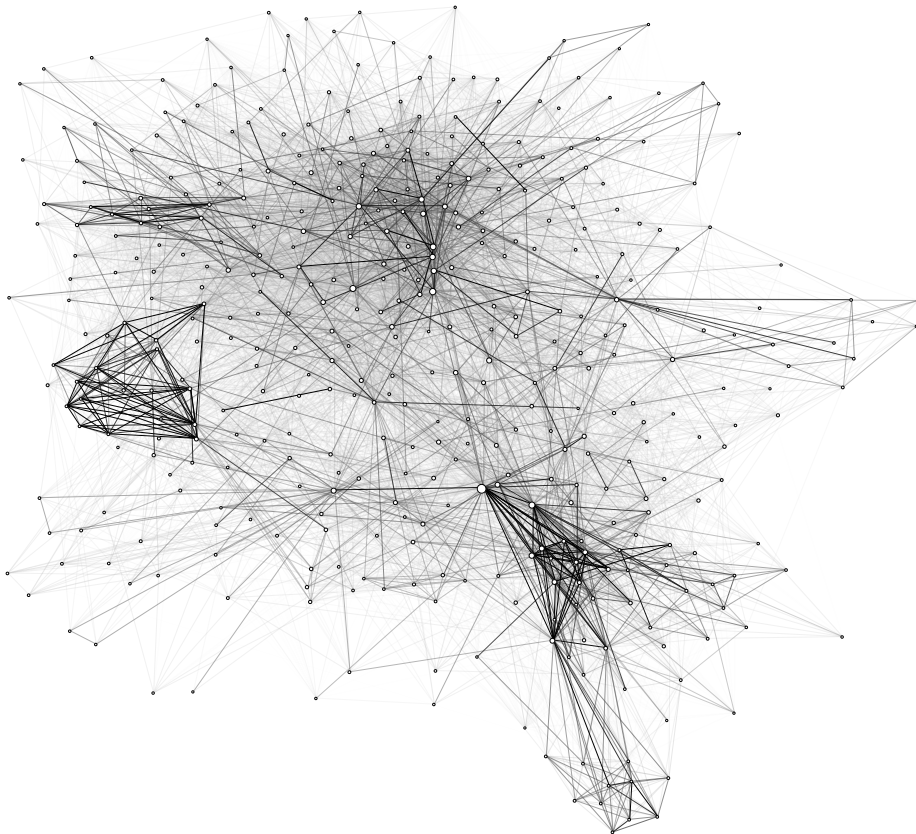


UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES



Elites in Denmark

Power Elites and Ruling Classes in a Welfare State

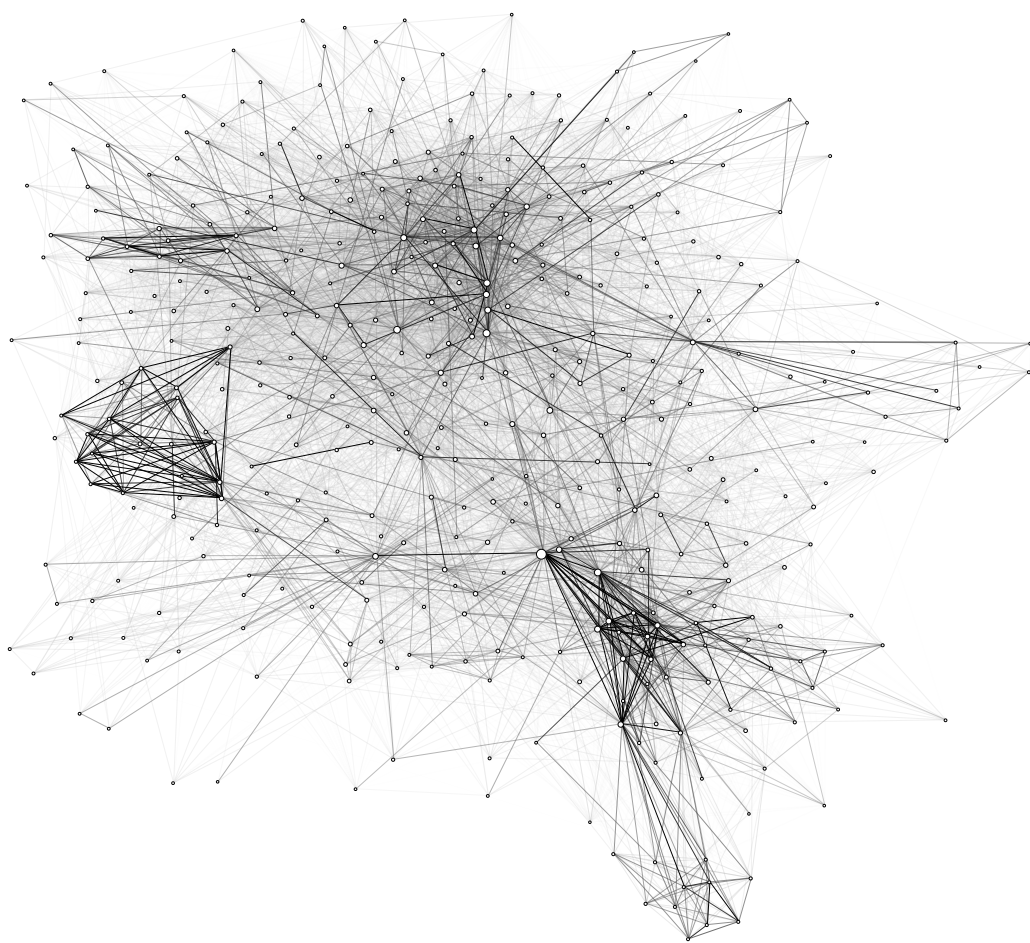


Christoph Houman Ellersgaard
Ph.D. Dissertation

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Copenhagen

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Contents

Acknowledgments	4
English Summary	7
Dansk resume	10
Introduction: Restoring focus on privilege and democratic inequalities	13
The study of elites	16
Chapter 1: From ruling class to power elite – elites and class theory	22
Moving beyond economic capital – accumulation through dominance	23
Owners or managers?	30
The politics of the ruling class – the power elite as a social group	34
Ruling classes as inner circles	38
Transnational capital and national elites	43
Chapter 2: Studying elites across borders - On methodological challenges in our study of elites	46
Big data and the description of elites	46
The elite as a relational class	48
How do we understand power elites?	52
Comparative studies of elites across borders	56
Charting the elite	59
Summary of the papers	61
I. A very economic elite - The case of the Danish CEOs	61
II. Status and Integration in the Field of Power of Danish Chief Executives	62
III. The Inner circle revisited – the case of an egalitarian society	63
IV. The elite in the field of power – cohesion and oppositions within the elite	65
V. The Danish elite network	66
VI. The methodology of identifying power elites	67
VII. The power elite in the welfare state – key institutional orders of the power networks in Denmark	69
Conclusion: Elites in the welfare state	71
Strengths and weaknesses	72
A perspective: Power elite and social movements in the welfare state	76
References:	78
The articles	98
I. A very economic elite - The case of the Danish CEOs	99
II. Status and Integration in the Field of Power of Danish Chief Executives	120
III. The Inner circle revisited – the case of an egalitarian society	157
IV. The elite in the field of power – cohesion and oppositions within the elite	189
V. The Danish elite network	232
VI. The methodology of identifying power elites	240
VII. The power elite in the welfare state – key institutional orders of the power networks in Denmark	274

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Copenhagen, February 2015

Christoph Houman Ellersgaard

English Summary

Who are the members of the most powerful group in the Danish society? To answer this question, we explored the elite through two different methodological approaches. Using correspondence analysis, we charted the oppositions structuring two exclusive groups, the 100 most important Danish CEOs and the 1,527 elite individuals identified in the Danish Power and Democracy Study in 1999. Through social network analysis, we identified and explored the integration of a core of the power network in Denmark – the power elite - and the inner circle of the corporate elite.

This implies, as discussed in the first chapter, that the power elite is to be seen as a social group able to (1) accumulate resources that are convertible to other forms of power; (2) be placed at the top of formal hierarchies of authority; and (3) enjoy high levels of prestige among their peers in the elite. To do this, the elite must (4) be a central part of a cohesive network. By extending the notion of accumulation to forms of capital other than economic, it is argued that central elements of theories of the ruling classes can be integrated into a framework of the elite as the central individuals in the power network. In this way, Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the field of power is also synthesised with C. Wright Mills' analysis of the power elite.

This means that the elite should be identified in a relational approach. The second chapter discusses the potential of descriptive classifying methods able to use the multitude of data made accessible by the digital revolution to chart the size and composition of the power elite.

The first and second articles map the 100 most important Danish CEOs. In Article I, we show which career trajectories lead to the top managerial positions, compared with Germany, France and the UK. Four typical career paths are identified using cluster analysis: the organisational personnel, the inheritors, the experts and the salespeople. Of these, the last is typical of Danish business; however, all of these pass through many years in the business world. Like their foreign counterparts, Danish CEOs hail mostly from the upper–middle class or the upper class, often from homes in which the father himself was an executive. However, when it comes to types and level of education across countries, the top managers are very different. This suggests that it is more important to fit into the national business culture than to have qualifications and experience useful in management across countries.

The status and prestige of the top CEOs are charted in Article II. High status levels are tied very closely to whether or not the manager is invited into the network, tying them to other parts of the power elite. Such status takes the form of media coverage, royal recognition in the form of decorations and

invitations to royal balls, and leadership prizes. Even among the top 100 CEOs, there are substantial differences in the levels of prestige and the degree of connections to other powerful individuals.

The association between network ties and status highlighted the need to further explore the Danish power network. A large database was constructed from 5,322 affiliations, with 62,841 positions held by 37,750 individuals. The database contains corporate boards, boards and subcommittees in organisations officially recognised by the state, boards of state institutions and commissions, foundations boards, other networks, and events such as royal balls. The database is described in depth in Article V.

Article III describes how, from the positions on the boards of the 1,037 largest Danish corporations, we identified an inner circle of the Danish corporate elite corresponding to Michael Useem's inner-circle concept. We identified 171 individuals sitting not only in the central positions in the Danish corporate world, but also frequently in other prestigious or powerful networks, such as business organisations; state committees; boards of education, research or culture; exclusive networks such as the groups under the Danish Management Society (VL); foundations; and royal events. The inner circle are similar to the top CEOs in having prestigious social backgrounds, the same narrow educational profile, and sharing lifestyles. This leaves this group with every possibility of being the politically active part of the capitalist class.

From looking at the economic elite, the focus of the remainder of the dissertation is placed on the entire elite, with the objective of identifying the most powerful group, the power elite. First, in Article IV, 1,527 individuals are charted as a field of power using the elite study from the Danish Democracy and Power Study. Two main oppositions characterise this group: first, an opposition between cultural and economic capital, or the level of inclusion in the economic order; and second, an opposition between the established and newcomers to the field of power. Newcomers are most often politicians, but even among the more open political elite, a group of Danish natives is found, coming not only from the most privileged groups in society, but from political dynasties. It is primarily the economic and established poles that have positions in other power networks and thus have contact with, and the potential to exchange capital with, other parts of the field of power.

These groups in particular compose the core of the power network and are explored as the power elite in Article VII. First, however, Article VI describes in depth the methodology used to identify this core. The analytical strategy makes it possible to approach the size and composition of the elite empirically. By including all potentially powerful networks and developing weights to handle the heterogeneity of these diverse networks – ranging from the serious atmosphere of the corporate board meeting to the

splendour of the royal ball – the core of the network is decided not by the researchers' preconceptions and assumptions about the nature of power, but by who actually interacts most frequently in the power network. In this way a power elite of 423 individuals are found in the core of the power network.

These 423 individuals and their networks are charted in the Article VII. First, we show how, for all of the sectorial networks, central positions in one of the sectorial networks (e.g. central state institutions and committees) leads to central positions in other sectorial networks (e.g. unions). Furthermore, central positions are accumulated by a very small group. When looking at the composition of the power elite, more than half come from either business or business associations. However, also part of the core of the power network are union leaders, senior civil servants, politicians – especially those with leadership positions such ministers or mayors – and scientists, especially university principals and economists. The key actors in the corporatist Danish state are all present. The juridical system, administrators of culture, and media directors are tiny minorities, whereas the clergy, artists and journalists or other celebrities are completely excluded. But not only is affiliation to a certain sector important. By looking at particular individuals it is shown how, to become part of the core of the elite network, one must play the game of the power elite, essentially by accepting the legitimacy of claims to power of all the other members of the power elite. Finally, we explore the social characteristics of the power elite. Almost all of the 423 hold a position of authority at the top of an organisation. Close to half come from just eight university programs. The vast majority cluster in the gilded ghettos, in particular near the sea and parks in Northern Copenhagen. The social closure of the power elite is evident in the gender profile (less than one in five [19%] are women) and the highly selective social background. More than 90 % of those in the power elite for whom we have social background information come from the most privileged 20% of society. Power elite members who have parents mentioned in *Kraks Blå Bog* (the Danish equivalent of *Who's Who*) outnumber the remaining 80% on the social ladder more than two to one. Thus the core of the power network is tied not only by their interwoven network, but also by shared lifestyles and experiences. In spite of internal differences, they compose a cohesive group that concentrates power in Denmark in the hands of very few indeed.

The studies of the Danish top CEOs and the inner circle in Danish business, together with the studies of the field of power and the power elite in Denmark, presented in this dissertation all show that a small group concentrates and accumulates a large volume of resources at the very top of Danish society. This group is densely interlocked in a widespread network. The cohesion of the core of this network is strengthened by the similarities in lifestyle and social background of the top CEOs and in the power elite as a whole.

Dansk resume

Hvem er medlemmerne af den mest magtfulde gruppe i det danske samfund? Det er det centrale spørgsmål i denne afhandling. Gennem to forskellige metodiske strategier undersøges eliten nærmere. Med korrespondanceanalyser af eksklusive grupper, nemlig de 100 vigtigste danske topdirektører og de 1.527 eliteindivider identificeret af Magtudredningen i 1999, undersøges hvilke modsætninger, der former disse grupper. Med netværksanalyser finder og undersøger vi kernen af det danske magtnetværk – magteliten – og erhvervselitens inderkreds.

Det betyder, som der beskrives i første kapitel, at magteliten skal ses som en social gruppe, der både formår 1) at akkumulere ressourcer, der kan veksles til andre former for magt, 2) at være placeret i toppen af formelle autoritetshierarkier og 3) nyder høj prestige blandt deres ligemænd i eliten. Men det gør den ved 4) at udgøre et tæt forbundet netværk. Ved at udvide, hvad der kan akkumuleres til andre former for kapital end økonomisk, argumenteres der for, at de centrale pointer fra teorierne omkring herskende klasser kan tænkes ind i rammen om eliten som de centrale i magtnetværket. På den måde samtænkes Pierre Bourdieus begreb om magtfeltet med C. Wright Mills analyse af magteliten.

Det betyder, at eliten bør identificeres i forhold til relationer. I andet kapitel vises, hvordan beskrivende og klassificerende metoder kan udnytte den myriade af data, der med den digitale revolution er blevet tilgængelig til at kortlægge magtelitens størrelse og sammensætning.

De 100 vigtigste danske topdirektører kortlægges i den første og anden artikel. I den første artikel vises hvilke karriereveje, der leder til toppen af erhvervslivet sammenlignet med Tyskland, Frankrig og Storbritannien. Med klyngeanalyse findes 4 typiske karriereveje for danske direktører, der dog alle går gennem mange år i erhvervslivet: firmaets mand, arvingen, eksperten og sælgeren, hvor den sidste er særegen for dansk erhvervsliv. Danske topdirektører stammer ligesom deres udenlandske kolleger i høj grad fra den øvre middelklasse eller overklassen, ofte fra direktørhjem. Men topdirektørerne er meget forskellige, når det kommer til uddannelsestyper og længde på tværs af lande. Det tyder på, at det er mere afgørende at passe ind i den nationale erhvervskultur end at have kvalifikationer og erfaringer, der passer til ledelse på tværs af lande.

Topdirektørernes nuværende status og netværk kortlægges i den anden artikel. Det viser sig at høj status i form af omtale, royale anerkendelser som ordner og invitationer til bal og ledelsesspriser hænger endog meget tæt sammen med, om direktøren inviteres ind i de netværk, der forbinder dem med andre dele af

magteliten. Selv blandt de 100 vigtigste direktører er der store forskelle i, hvor stor prestige, man har og hvor godt man er integreret med de øvrige magtmennesker.

Sammenhængen mellem netværk og status gjorde det oplagt at se endnu nærmere på det danske magtnetværk. Vi indsamlede en stor database bestående af 5.233 netværk med 62.841 poster besat af 37.750 mennesker. Databasen indeholder virksomhedsbestyrelser, bestyrelser og underudvalg i organisationer med høringsret, ledende organer i statslige institutioner, kommissioner, udvalg, råd og nævn, fondsbestyrelser, andre netværk og begivenheder som kongelige baller. Indsamlingen er udførligt beskrevet i den femte artikel.

Bestyrelsesposterne i de 1.037 største danske virksomheder bruges til – med udgangspunkt i Michaels Useems teori - at finde en inderkreds i den danske erhvervselite i artikel 3. Her findes 171 mennesker, der ikke bare sidder på de centrale poster i dansk erhvervsliv, men også langt hyppigere end de øvrige bestyrelsesmedlemmer har poster i andre prestigefyldte eller magtfulde magtnetværk så som erhvervsorganisationer, statslige råd og nævn, universitets- og kulturbestyrelser, eksklusive netværk som VL-grupper, fonde og royale begivenheder. Inderkredsen ligner desuden direktørerne i kraft at have eksklusiv social baggrund, samme smalle uddannelsesbaggrund og dele livsstil med hinanden. Det giver denne gruppe alle muligheder for at være den politisk aktive del af den økonomiske elite eller kapitalistklassen om man vil.

Fra den økonomiske elite lægges fokus herefter på hele eliten med henblik på at identificere den mest magtfulde gruppe, magteliten. Først kortlægges 1.527 personer fra magtudredningens eliteundersøgelse i 1999 som et magtfelt i den fjerde artikel. To modsætninger karakteriserer denne gruppe. For det første en modsætning mellem dem med kulturel kapital og dem med økonomisk kapital - de inkluderede i den økonomiske orden. For det andet en modsætning mellem indfødte i magteliten og nytilkomne. De nytilkomne er oftest politikere, men selv blandt den mere åbne politiske elite er der en gruppe indfødte, der ikke bare kommer fra samfundets mest privilegerede grupper, men fra politikerfamilier. Når man ser på, hvem der typisk får poster i andre magtnetværk og dermed har kontakt til – og kan udveksle kapital med – andre dele af magtfeltet er det primært i den etablerede og økonomiske pol på magtfeltet.

Især grupperne herfra udgør den kerne i magtnetværket der ses som magteliten, kortlagt i artikel syv. Inden da bruges artikel seks dog til i dybden at beskrive, hvordan man med en nyudviklet metode kan gøre elitens størrelse og sammensætning til et empirisk spørgsmål. Ved at tage alle potentielt magtfulde netværk med og herefter udvikle teknikker til at vægte de meget forskellige typer af netværk – lige fra virksomhedsbestyrelsens alvorlige atmosfære til pragten ved det kongelige bal – bliver kernen af

netværket ikke bestemt af forskerens fornemmelse for magt, men af hvem der faktisk interagerer mest i magtnetværket. På den måde findes en magtelite på 423 personer.

Disse 423 mennesker og deres netværk kortlægges så i den sidste artikel. Først vises, hvordan det for alle sektornetværk gælder at det at have centrale poster i et sektornetværk, fx statslige institutioner, råd og nævn, betyder at man også oftere har centrale poster indenfor et andet sektornetværk, fx fagforeninger. Desuden bliver det klart, at de centrale poster i netværket akkumuleres blandt meget få personer. Herefter ser vi nærmere på magtelitens sammensætning. Over halvdelen er enten fra det private erhvervsliv eller fra erhvervsorganisationer. Men både fagforeningsledere, topembedsmænd, politikere – især med ledelsesposter, altså ministre og borgmestre – og videnskabsfolk, særligt universitetsrektorer og økonomer er med i kernen af magtnetværket. Kerneaktørerne i den danske model er alle tilstede. Retsvæsen, kulturadministratorer og mediechefer udgør meget små minoriteter, mens de gejstlige, kunstnere samt journalister og andre mediepersonligheder er helt udenfor. Men ikke kun sektortilknytning betyder noget. Ved at se på enkeltpersoner forklares det, at for at blive en del af kernen, så må man spille på dennes præmisser, hvilket grundlæggende betyder at acceptere sine med- og modspilleres ret til at være der. Endelig ses der nærmere på magtelitens kendetegn. Næsten alle de 423 er ledere, tæt på halvdelen kommer fra kun 8 universitetsuddannelser og det store flertal klumper sig sammen i helt bestemte områder. Magteliten foretrækker særligt at bo nord for København tæt på skov eller vand. Magtelitens lukkethed vises ved, at færre end en ud af fem – 19 % - er kvinder og at den sociale rekruttering er meget skæv. 94 % af de fra magteliten, vi kender den sociale baggrund på, kommer fra samfundets mest privilegerede 20 %. Og mere end dobbelt så mange har forældre nævnt i Blå bog, som der kommer fra de resterende 80 % af den sociale rangstige. Med andre ord bindes kernen af magtnetværket ikke blot sammen af deres tætte netværk, men af at dele livsstil og erfaringer. De udgør, trods de interne modsætninger, en sammentømret gruppe, der koncentrerer magten indenfor kongeriget på få hænder.

Studierne af de danske topdirektører, inderkredsen i dansk erhvervsliv samt magtfeltet og magteliten viser altså samstemmende at en meget lille gruppe koncentrerer og akkumulerer en voldsom mængde ressourcer helt i toppen af det danske samfund. Denne gruppe er på kryds og tværs bundet tæt sammen i et vidtforgrenet netværk. Kernen i dette netværks sammenhængskraft øges af den store lighed – både hvad angår livsstil og social baggrund – der findes både blandt topdirektører og i hele magteliten.

Introduction: Restoring focus on privilege and democratic inequalities

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

Marcellus to Horatio, *Hamlet* (1.4), by William Shakespeare

Identifying the most privileged individuals in a society is always controversial. Whereas media and popular culture turn the discussion of power and privilege into entertainment, the social sciences, particularly in Denmark, have refrained from engaging in discussion on the distribution of power and privilege in society, or have at least kept this discussion out of harm's way by retaining it in a strictly theoretical universe. By not invoking a public imagery of the powerful, the social sciences leave the floor open for conspiracy theorists, political populism and general disenchantment to explain how privilege and power remains in the hands of the same men.

Some elites, as Paul du Gay (2008) has described, are Keyser Sütze elites, pulling off the trick – maybe even fooling themselves – that they do not exist. Especially in a country like Denmark, an egalitarian welfare state recently made *the* best practice of state building by Francis Fukuyama (2011), who set the challenge of 'getting to Denmark', power elites or ruling classes seem to be an image from the past. However, this dissertation will show that in both the offices of the business elite and at the core of the elite network in Denmark, resides a very privileged and powerful group. Recently, the work of Thomas Piketty (2014) and others has inspired a renewed focus on privilege and power in general and the ultra-rich in particular. The British NGO Oxfam made headlines showing how the richest 80 individuals own more than the poorest half of the world's inhabitants do, while the richest one per cent will soon have more wealth than the rest of the world combined. In this context the egalitarian nature of Denmark provides an interesting least likely case for a study of the power elite. If we find a strong elite concentrating wealth and power in Denmark, elites are likely to achieve the same in less equal and democratic countries.

The central question of this dissertation is: Who are the most influential and powerful people in Denmark? And how do different parts of this group stand relative to one another? These are questions of enormous public interest, and yet they are almost neglected in the social sciences. They are also relevant to social movements, civil society at large and public debate, which until the social sciences address these questions is necessarily an uninformed debate. Thus one objective of this dissertation is

to make a public sociological intervention (cf. Burawoy 2005) in the debate about the distribution of power across society. Without a narrative of the ones who reap the profit even in the aftermath of the financial crisis and the mechanisms which ensure that elite prerogatives are untouchable, without a language to describe the accumulation of resources by elites, neither the general public nor the social movements are able to defy the power of elites. Of course, this grand question cannot be answered adequately within the work of a dissertation. However, if the social sciences shy away from providing answers to how power is distributed across society as a whole, we also lose the ability to relate and understand the influence of the actors within our more specific area of study. How do we understand the position of a business leader relative to an academic on a governmental advisory board if we do not understand the relative strength of their power resources?

At the turn of the millennium Denmark was the most equal society in the world with regard to the distribution of income measured by Gini coefficient. Inequality has increased, and yet 10 years later Denmark is still in the top five of the world's equal countries on most measures. Therefore it seems reasonable that the perception of an elite-structured social hierarchy is quite rare within Danish society, as in Norway, but is opposed to views in Britain and France in particular (Hjellbrekke and Korsnes 2012:20)¹. In a society where the class narrative is fading, it is paramount that the social sciences provide a narrative for understanding both inequality and the sense of injustice felt by the population at large. Although inequality levels are low, so that Danish society enjoys the profits of fewer status differences as described by Therborn (2014) and Wilkinson and Pickett (2010), so-called ordinary Danes have experienced the threats of job outsourcing, wage pressure from migrant workers, cuts to employment insurance, and the sale of state-owned infrastructure along with the general repercussions of the financial crisis. With the turn from welfare to workfare (cf. Jessop 1993), political decisions are made in an environment of external pressure in which all legislation is evaluated for whether or not it puts the competitiveness of Danish enterprises at risk. When the economy is affected by dropping oil prices or the mortgage and housing market changes because of rent policies in the European Central Bank, a feeling of disempowerment is likely. To paraphrase C. Wright Mills, if a major decision is made by someone, it is not made by the public. This misrecognition could risk a turn towards conspiracy theorists or populist politics.

¹ The higher levels of income distribution and mobility rates may partly explain these disparate views of social hierarchy. However, even in Sweden, more than 30% identify some sort of elite when describing society, whereas less than 13% of Danes do so in the ISSP 2009 questionnaire.

Methodologically, the articles in this dissertation do not attempt to define who are and what actually form the elite *a priori*, but instead make this the central empirical question. This gives a much greater level of transparency to the methods and analytical decisions. Furthermore, it enables the reproduction of our results historically or across nation-states and, most importantly, the definition of groups on the basis of their relational characteristics, thus providing the opportunity to break away from our theoretical assumptions. Moreover, the strength of various sub-elites vis-à-vis each other (the classical theoretical question of state power versus economic power) will throughout this dissertation be seen in the light of relations within elite groups. As such, the analysis offers new visual and descriptive assemblages (cf. Savage 2009) of the elites – assemblages that hopefully be much more likely to invoke the sociological imagination of the public.

Of course, this focus on empirically defining the elites does not mean that theoretical questions are obsolete. Quite the contrary. In order to understand the positions of power elites in society as whole, it is necessary to understand how elites are at the same time shaped by the relationship between classes, status groups and social groups. The relationship between national and transnational or global classes or professions and elites can further clarify why the notion of power elites offers distinct analytical advantages. These issues will be elaborated further in Chapter 1. The above-mentioned methodological strategies of handling the unique position of elites in the matrix of class, status and group are the main focus of Chapter 2.

This dissertation combines the frameworks of Pierre Bourdieu and Mills and attempts to explore the role of business elites and the power elite as a whole in Denmark. Drawing on the theoretical and empirical developments following the renewed interest in elite studies, a less romantic image of welfare state elites is offered. The relative positions of elites and factions of elites is explored by analysing either the economic field or the field of power as whole. The focus on the formation of elite character or habitus by family upbringing, education or during career trajectories makes these characteristics a central empirical question for understanding the workings of the elite. In a new methodological strategy, elite networks are used to identify the core of the elite at the point where the most important institutional orders meet.

The first two articles are based on a prosopographical (cf. Broady 2002) database constructed for the top 100 CEOs of the largest Danish corporations, focusing on their recruitment and integration in the field of power and thus shedding light on economic elites in Denmark. The inner circle in the network of the Danish corporate elite and its inclusion in other power networks is explored in Article III. Article IV presents an overall image of the structure of the Danish field of power and the position of

the political elite within the field of power constructed from data on 1,500 leaders in 1999, sourced from the Danish Power and Democracy study. The fields analysed in Articles I, II and IV are all analysed through geometric data analysis (Le Roux and Rouanet 2004). The problems of constructing a field of power in a specific national setting then leads to the elaborate collection of network data used in Articles III, VI and VII and presented in Article V. Finally, Articles VI and VII present an analysis of the methods of identifying the power elite through social network analysis and the composition of institutional orders in the power elite in a welfare state like Denmark. The overall contribution of the thesis, to both the studies of elites and the role the elite play in Danish society, is discussed in the concluding remarks. First, the work of the dissertation will be placed within the literature of elites in general.

The study of elites

The two main sources of inspiration for the studies in this dissertation are C. Wright Mills' study in the USA in the 1950s, described in his book *The Power Elite* (1956), and the work on the notion of the field of power within the general theory of fields developed by Pierre Bourdieu in *The State Nobility* (1996a). Contemporary elite definitions often use one of the following four criteria to conceptualise elites:

1. Elites as holders of dominant positions within fields controlling disproportionate amount of resources or capital
2. Elites as holders of top positions in organisational hierarchies
3. Elites as the honourable and most prestigious members of society
4. Elites as the key players in elite networks².

I will use Mills and Bourdieu to argue, with emphasis on intra-elite relations, that each definition provides a necessary but not sufficient, criteria for being part of the power elite. By using the fourth definition in elite networks, the logic of inclusion, it becomes possible to define the elite as a distinct *social group* fitting all four criteria at once. This is the definition of the power elite used in Articles VI and VII. However, it was only possible for us to identify the feature of the network by, in Articles I, II, III

² A fifth criteria used by political scientists such as Robert Dahl (1958, 1958, 1961) is the involvement in decision-making processes. However, according to Mills (1956: 3-4), the leaders of the key institutional orders are also composed of 'men whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in the positions to make decisions having major importance' (Mills 1956:3-4).