

Elites in the European Field of Power - Reproduction, Transformation and Matters of Content

Jens Arnholtz

The process of European integration is one constantly associated with a concept of ‘elite’. This goes not only for the recurrent debates about ‘democratic deficits’, but also more positive journalistic representations. In the latter, ‘action’ and ‘initiatives’ taken by the EU is represented by images of top politicians, business leaders and commissioners signing deals and shaking hands. And they are backed by history books, honorary prizes and named buildings that all emphasize the visionary ‘founding fathers’ and the ‘big leaders’ engaged in shaping the future of Europe. All of these representations give an image of a small, tightly integrated ‘elite’ with a transnational project often institutionalised without asking the ‘common people’ of Europe.

While sociology will often de-emphasize the ‘big leaders’, studies of the European Union has - from the early neo-functional theories (Haas 1958) to more contemporary studies (Haller 2008) – had a keen eye for the importance of elites. However, sociology has not been a strong discipline in the study of the European Union and its formation. While some of the early studies by Haas and Deutsch had clear sociological tendencies, political science and law has manifested themselves as the most important disciplines for asking and answering questions about the European Union. In recent years, however, a number of scholars have called for more sociological approaches to the EU (Favell and Guiraudon 2009; Georgakakis and Weisbein 2010; Jenson and Merand 2010; Rowell and Manganot 2010; Saurugger and Merand 2010). Such an approach, it is argued, should engage with the study of the EU both ‘from above and from below’ (Georgakakis and Weisbein 2010). To a number of sociologists, starting ‘from below’ would seem the self-evident way to go for sociology. As Norbert Elias

(2009a) have noted, sociology as a discipline springs from a fundamental disbelief in the omnipotent power of the rulers of society. Like economics, argues Elias, sociology emerged through a gradual recognition of the fact that society has its own dynamics that are relatively independent of the will of the ruler and the laws of the land. Thus, issues on class and family structures, social and spatial mobility, welfare regimes and market integration would seem places where sociology could make obvious contributions to the understanding of the social foundation of the European Union. This would often entail a broader focus on ‘Europe’ rather than just the ‘European Union’ (Rumford 2009), or at least “a broader conception of ‘Europeanization’” than that found in implementation studies (Favell and Guiraudon 2011: 12). But while these are sound arguments, one should not forget that sociology has – at least since the time of Pareto (1935) – taken as part of its object the social composition of those groups that formally or de facto possessed great power in society. If Elias was right to emphasize the independent dynamic of ‘society’, he did not shy away from studying the rulers themselves and their ‘court society’ (Elias 1983). Sociologists, the argument goes, should not content with the role of those analysing micro-processes coming from ‘below’, but should also engage in the study of those making decisions of major consequences ‘from above’. In that sense, rather than ignoring the ‘Brussels Bubble’ sociologists should try to ‘bring elites back in’ to the understanding of European Integration (Georgakakis 2009b, 2011). These arguments bring to the fore the question of how to study elites.

The purpose of this article is to argue that the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu provides us with promising answers; that it provides us with tools for studying

elites in the process of European integration process and the construction of the European Union. In the first part, the article follow Savage and Williams (2008) in arguing that Bourdieu's sociology may make a valuable contribution to the sociology of elites in general. Returning to some of the classical debate in elite sociology, an effort is made to show that Bourdieu's sociology overcomes some of the dualities and dilemmas that have pitted researchers against each other. Rather than attempting to make a survey of the entire field of elite sociology, the aim is to draw out some of the issues of awareness that an elite approach to the EU should have in mind and how Bourdieu's sociology assists us with handling these issues (at a theoretical level at least). Emphasis is put on a research program that takes the transformation of the European field of power as its object. Furthermore, some challenges and points of awareness are raised.

In the second part, the article follow Favell and Guiraudon (2009) in arguing that the empirically orientated nature of Bourdieu's sociology is one of the main reasons for its usefulness in relation to the study of the European Union. Thus, two strands of Bourdieu-inspired studies on the European Union is reviewed in an attempt to assess whether the theoretical promises outlined in the first part of the article are actually fulfilled at the empirical level. Both the productive contribution to our understanding of the European Union and the potential problems of these two strands are outlined.

Classical elite studies and the field of power

To begin with, it may seem strange to suggest Bourdieu as an appropriate exponent of advancing elite sociology as he himself was very critical of both elite studies and the term 'elite' itself. First, Bourdieu criticises the classical 'elite' studies for naturalising the elite. By talking of 'law of oligarchy' and inevitability of the existence of elites, these sociologists – from whom Bourdieu actually drew a lot of inspiration – failed to see “that the effectiveness of the historical laws which they naturalize would be suspended, or at least weakened, if the economic and cultural conditions of their operation were to be suspended or weakened” (Bourdieu 1990: 174). Second, Bourdieu criticizes 'elite' sociologists for placing their attention on groups of people and their observable 'connections' rather than the social relations between them (Bourdieu 1996a: 263). “Instead of studying structures of power, which is to say systems of objective relations, they study populations of agents who occupy positions of power” (Wacquant and Bourdieu 1993: 21). Third, while never explicitly made, Bour-

dieu's reflexive approach to sociology would entail questioning the very notion of 'elite' as a pre-constructed term that one would have to break with (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 242-3). However, all of these critics have a common basis that might be a good entry point for understanding Bourdieu's contribution to the study of elites. They all have to do with the lack of attention to the possibility of transformation and change. That is, transformation in the 'laws' governing the production of elites, in the composition of people that make up these elites and the categories used to define and conceptualise these elites. In that way, Bourdieu's seemingly critical stance can be seen as a contribution to the debate about how to define elites.

Who's the elite?

In some ways Bourdieu's field approach has affinities with Pareto's classical definition of an elite as being “a class of the people who have the highest indices in their branch of activity” (Pareto 1935: 1422-4), especially if one notes that Pareto qualified this by arguing that “in the concrete, there are no examinations whereby each person is assigned to his proper place” but only labeling mechanisms that does this “after a fashion” (Pareto 1935: 1422-4). In Bourdieu's sociology, those holding the highest amount of a specific capital might be termed an 'elite' within that field. However, wanting to avoid all functionalist interpretations and underline the centrality of struggle, Bourdieu would call those holding the most capital 'the dominant' rather than an 'elite'. In Bourdieu's sociology a central stake in the struggle of each field is the definition of excellence – or capital – with regard to the specific activities of the field (Bourdieu 1993). Because there is “no examinations whereby each person is assigned to his proper place”, excellence is not just excellence and capital is not definable once and for all. Thus, defining the elite of each field – in Pareto's sense – is part of what is at stake in each field. This is why Bourdieu's sociology has “the distinctive advantage of not (pre-) defining elites in terms of their putative roles or functions but, instead, in terms of their field specific dominance” (Savage and Williams 2008: 16). Seen in relation to classical positions within elite studies, this approach has the merits of integrating a number of their advantages while avoiding some of their flaws.

In relation to a classical 'positional' approach – that takes as its starting point the study of people placed in central positions of society, such as ministers, judges, top level business leaders, high ranking military staff, etc. – a field approach would surely

acknowledge the importance of taking account of institutionalized position and the statistical properties of the actors occupy them. In fact Bourdieu underlined the importance of constructing the objective relations and argued that "statistical investigations can grasp the relations of power only in the form of properties, sometimes legally guaranteed by titles of economic property, cultural property (educational qualifications) or social property (titles of nobility)" (Bourdieu 1991: 289, note 2). However, a default assumption about the importance of particular statistical properties is opposed to Bourdieu's conception of fields and an expression of a fundamental problem with the 'positional' approach in elite studies:

These properties only function as capital, that is, as a social power relation, in and through the field that constitutes them as stakes and instruments of struggle, rescuing them thereby from the meaninglessness and uselessness to which they would be just as necessarily doomed in another field or another state of the same field. (Bourdieu 1996a: 264)

Acknowledging the importance of institutionalized position, the field approach would invite us to turn our attention to the institutionalization processes creating and reproducing these institutions, and more importantly, emphasize the co-creation of positions and the actors holding them. Furthermore, noting the relative autonomy and specific content of each field, this approach would constantly pose the question of how institutional positions are used differently in each field to gain recognition as the possessor of the specific form of capital and excellence. In that way, the field approach should help us avoid falling into the trap of being "centered on the detailed description of elite characteristics" (Zuckerman 1977: 325) while losing sight of their relation to more general societal transformations. 'So what?' asked Putnam (1976) of these detailed descriptions as he felt they often failed to show what implications the composition of elites has. But studying these 'elites' in the specific (field) context that makes them into an elite should help us answer this question in a productive way.

Furthermore, the field approach takes serious questions of reputation and recognition. While the so-called 'reputational' approach to the study of elites has mainly been understood as a methodological approach – whether using surveys of common people's perception of how makes up the elites or snowball sampling among these elites themselves – Bourdieu's emphasis on *recognition* would give it theoretical

importance. Clearly, reputation is not the only measure to be used in defining elites, but if elite is to be understood as 'important people' (within their specific sphere of activity), the definition of who is the elite is at play not only in scholarly debates but between the actors themselves. 'Who do we need on our side to win this struggle, who do we need to take account of in relation to this issue?' These are questions elite actors will ask themselves. But because, as Pareto argued, there is no objective 'examination' of excellence within these spheres of activity, the struggle in a field regards the way of evaluating excellence as much as becoming excellent. As Bourdieu argued in relation to the literary field (Bourdieu 1993), its actors consist not only of authors, but also of those commentators, critics and publishers that assesses the value of different literary works and authors. In that sense, literary excellence is the product of a dual process involving both the production of literary texts and the production of evaluations of these texts. While the symbolic power acquired through recognition of observers, commentators or other actors may seem more limited in the political, economic and bureaucratic fields than in the fields of cultural production, they should not be ignored just because positions are formalised. Even for holders of well-institutionalised positions being recognised as an 'important person' is central to the use one can make of this position. And when studying the construction of Europe – where the room for maneuvering is much larger (Madsen 2006) – this becomes even truer. Thus, focusing on recognition or reputation should help us remember that 'position' (as defined in Bourdieu's sociology) refers to the total composition of different forms of capital and not just institutionalised posts.

Differentiation, solidarity and strategies of reproduction

While the field concept can in some ways be applied to almost any activity, elite studies have generally been at pains to discriminate between those simply being at the top of their specific game (elite chess players for instance) and those "in positions to make decisions having major consequences" for society at large (Mills 1977: 4). Whether called 'governing elite', 'power elite', 'the inner circle' or 'strategic elites', elite studies have constantly puzzled the delimitation of this group and how it is held together. While pluralists argue that it is not held together at all and that a number of elites are constantly holding each other in check, most elite theories would argue that some common solidarity binds central elite actors together. However, they would hardly agree on the

mechanisms providing this solidarity. On the one extreme, Marxists would argue that without emphasis on a common class base, elite studies are “unable to provide a convincing explanation, as distinct from description, of the solidarity of the power elite” (Bottomore 1966: 24). On the other extreme, functionalist elite theorists have argued that the relation between ruling class and strategic elites is diminishing with the differentiation of social space (Keller 1968), that “social composition and recruitment are [therefore] not the most important features of elites” (Higley 1984: 146). Rather, they would argue that it is the functional requirements of the positions they hold that shape the actions of elites, and these requirements are themselves shaped by the functional needs of society. Between these two extremes, there are a number of theories emphasising solidarities produced by common trajectories, networks and connections as well as the circulation of elites between sectors and posts. All of these mechanisms can be said to provide part of the explanation for solidarity between elite actors, while none of them seem to be able to provide the full explanation. Seen from this perspective, Bourdieu’s theory of reproduction strategies can be seen as yet another theory adding to the fond of sociological tools and theories without making any claim to excluding the varying relevance of all of these theories across time and space. However, a few notes on his understanding of these reproductive strategies may help show their potential.

First, rather than predefined classes that members of the ‘elite’ are either recruited or detached from, Bourdieu’s focus is on ‘strategies of reproduction’ and their contribution to the transformation of the struggles within the field of power. The object of study is re-configured from focusing on predefined individuals and classes to the processes that conserve and transform their positions. Contrary to the classical criticism of his sociology for being static and unable to grasp processes and change, we see that Bourdieu’s sociology is in fact highly processual. Actually, his way of studying reproductive strategies is attuned to “social universes in which the dominants must constantly change to stay the same” (Bourdieu 1996a: 278). In this way, ‘going international’ – for instance by investing time and energy in the European Union – can be seen as a reproductive strategy in Bourdieu’s sense (Dezalay and Garth 2002, 2010; Munk et al. 2011).

Second, outlining a wide range of *reproductive strategies* – defined not as “the result of rational calculation or even strategic intent” but as the many different practices that “are objectively organized in

such a way that they contribute to the reproduction of the capital at hand” (Bourdieu 1996a: 272) – Bourdieu identifies – on an empirical level, for a specific period in French history – the existence of two opposing *modes of reproduction*: A family mode of reproduction, where the responsibility for managing the “functions of inclusion and exclusion that together maintain the corps at a constant size” was “entrusted to the family” and a school-mediated mode of reproduction where “the family no longer has dominion over choices of succession or the power to designate heirs” (Bourdieu 1996a: 286). It is in relation to these modes of reproduction that one can make sense of the two most apparent shifts in the competition within the French field of power at the time the study was conducted:

On the one hand, the increase in the relative importance of academic titles (whether coupled with property or not) with respect to property titles, even in the economic field; on the other hand, among the bearers of cultural capital, the decline of technical titles to the advantage of titles guaranteeing general bureaucratic training. (Bourdieu 1996a: 272)

It is, however, crucial to note that the modes of reproduction outlined by Bourdieu are not exclusive in nature. It is not a question of either family reproduction or education: both modes of reproduction use both strategies of reproduction, but in different ways and with different reliance on the two. Thus, while the generality of Bourdieu’s empirical findings can be debated and tested empirically (Hartmann 2010), the analytical focus on reproduction strategies and their assemblage in specific modes of reproduction should be usable in most situations and allow for the integration and discovery of other ‘strategies’.

Third, it may be worth spelling out the contribution of Bourdieu’s understanding to the explanation of the establishment of solidarity between elite groups. Bourdieu’s argument is that within increasingly differentiated social spaces it becomes more and more pertinent for the dominant groups to establish a division of labour of domination between holders of different forms of excellence. And under the new school mode of reproduction, the school system helps to establish this ‘organic solidarity’ based on a general homology of habitual dispositions by a process of selection and formation. It thus provides an explanation that relies neither on common class bases (in the Marxist sense) or positional functionality.

As mentioned, other elite theories have provided alternatives to these two opposed positions by focusing on the observable circulation of elites and the networks that tie them together. Following this strategy, a recent attempt to revitalise the interest in elites studies has stressed the growing “importance of individuals or groups who can move between the worlds of business, politics, media and so forth, and through this process act as a means of mediating connections between dispersed social circles” (Savage and Williams 2008: 16). However, the lack of observable circulation and networks in all cases makes these approaches vulnerable to functionalist arguments. If no observable ties exist in *all cases*, it will be easy to argue that functional requirements create the solidarity and tactical coordination between different elite actors while circulation and networks only facilitate them. In contrast, Bourdieu placed a great deal of emphasis on the ‘organic solidarity’, functioning by way of habitus and produced through an elaborate institutional system of differentiation and reproduction, as an important mechanism for upholding the tacit corporation between actors that are inclined to constantly challenge each other. In that sense, observable ties and circulation only helps to strengthen a solidarity based, not on functional requirements but a whole system of reproductive strategies. This emphasis does not mean that Bourdieu did not acknowledge the importance of circulation, networks and other forms of explicit coordination. For instance, he also spoke of ‘neutral places’ where actors from different fields could meet each other and exchange views without challenging each other in a way that would undermine their common interest in upholding their dominant positions. He also paid plenty of attention to the *pantouflage* and the circulation between sectors created by it. Furthermore, when he outlined the consequences of the transformation in the reproductive strategies and the field of power, Bourdieu stressed the importance of networks that crisscrossed the division of labour established by the new school mode of reproduction:

This new form of division of the labor of domination, along with the particular risks it involves, is what makes all the solidarities that transcend the divisions linked to the existence of multiple fields and principles of hierarchization so important – solidarities such as family ties, for example, the foundation of networks of exchanges and alliances that play a crucial role in struggles for power within the field of power. (Bourdieu 1996a: 388)

In that way, Bourdieu’s sociology might be seen as a contribution to the analysis of different forms of mediation and circulation between fields and elite groups, but with a special attention to the uncoordinated coordination provided by homology of habitual dispositions.

Transformations in the European Field of Power

While the production of ‘organic solidarity’ is well worth recalling when studying the construction of the European Union and the ‘integration doxa’ that underlies it (Adler-Nissen 2011), verifying this production in relation to the European level may be a task well out of reach. What Bourdieu and his collaborators did in *The State Nobility* was an attempt to link the changes in the system of reproduction strategies with the transformations of the field of power. And even though this effort was prepared by years of prior research on both reproductive strategies and the field of power, Bourdieu made explicit comments about the “enormity” of the task (Bourdieu 1996a: 263). The task, however, only grows when we shift our attention to the European level. Differences in class structures, school systems and their importance, in the structure of national fields of power and, therefore, in the riskiness and social meaning of investing in ‘Europe’ are just a few of the factors that complicates a task already made gigantic by all the issues gathered under the heading of ‘methodological nationalism’ as well as the changing member state composition and institutional structure of the Union itself. Focusing on reproductive strategies may simply be too big a task, in part because the dissimilarities between different national fields of power and spaces of reproduction leaves a room for maneuvering and bluff that makes the systematic linking of these two processes of change impossible. Or we may need to limit ourselves to talking about the reproduction of certain forms of *habitus* able and willing to invest in the transnational game, rather than trying to link this kind of reproduction to the reproduction of specific families or groups.

This does not, however, prevent us from using Bourdieu’s sociology for studying the processes of transformation in the European field of power as such (Cohen 2011). To make this clear, let us outline some of the analytical elements of the concept of field of power. Bourdieu developed the concept ‘field of power’ to conceptualise and study the on-going struggle between a number of differentiated spheres and the holders of incompatible forms of excellence they revolve around. Bourdieu argued that in studying the transformation in this field of power...:

... it is thus necessary to distinguish between displacements within the space of a single field, related to the accumulation, positive or negative, of the form of capital that constitutes the specific stakes in the competition that defines it in its own right, and displacements between fields, related to the reconversion of a given form of capital into another form, currently in use in another field, with the meaning and value of both classes of displacement being dependent on the objective relations among the different fields, hence on the conversion rates of the different forms of capital and the changes that affect them over time, following struggles among the holders of the different forms of capital. (Bourdieu 1996a: 277)

In this way, the field of power can be seen as a response to Aron's (1950) argument that elite studies must relating differentiation and hierarchy. By acknowledging the existence of different fields, their specific modes of accumulation, their forms of domination and their logic of practices, differentiation is taken seriously. By insisting on analysing the links between these different spheres in terms of competition and division of labour of domination, Bourdieu maintains the issue of domination and hierarchy between these incompatible forms of excellence (which is often lost in functionalist elite studies).

Furthermore, the struggles of the field of power regard not only the relative weight of the different fields and their forms of capital, but also the 'principles of vision and division' for social space at large. The phrase 'principles of vision and division' was often used by Bourdieu but has been miserably neglected by commentators. This is a shame as it puts a more active element into Bourdieu's sociology. Some have argued that Bourdieu's approach only focus on how resources are accumulated and institutionalised, and pays less attention to how resources are mobilized and used (Büger and Villumsen 2007: 428). While it is true that Bourdieu's major analysis of the *State Nobility* was aimed at the "subterranean struggles constantly being played out in the apparent anarchy of reproduction strategies [that] profoundly and durably affects the relations of power within the field of power", he did not deny the relevance of analysing "strictly political struggles whose stakes is power over the state" (Bourdieu 1996a: 388). Talking about 'principles of vision and division' puts emphasis on these political struggles and the exercise of power by elites that they involve, but without overemphasizing specific decisions. Like Gramsci's concept of 'hegemo-

ny', which has often been used for analysing the underlying political agendas of European integration (van Apeldoorn 1998, 2000), and the opposition between 'regulated' and 'liberal' capitalism (Hooghe 1999; Hooghe and Marks 1999), this concept can be used to conceptualise and study the principles guiding every day decisions in the construction of the European Union. In that way, it resolves some of the problems raised by the so-called 'decision making' approach in elite studies (Dahl 1958). Focusing on the elaboration of *principles* for the organisation and perception of society allows for specific decisions to go against the interests of dominant actors once in a while (in the face of massive mobilization by dominated actors for instance), while the functioning of the field might still favour the dominant actors overall.

Challenges and issues of Bourdieu's approach

That said there are some challenges and issues that need to be tackled in the analysis of the field of power. First, while principles of vision and division go beyond any single decision, they do not arise out of thin air. They are elaborated and institutionalised through principle decisions or multiple successive events. Thus, studying transformations in the field of power raises the issue of the relation between specific events and decisions on the one hand and the elaboration of overarching principles on the other. While this relation may be a very complicated one, the pertinent question is whether Bourdieu's sociology is adequate for studying specific events and decisions, while retaining a focus on the field of power. Bourdieu argued that his field concept was meant to transcend the opposition between structural and event history by aiming to "grasp particularity within generality and generality within particularity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 75). A good example of this was found in his study of the 'field of housing policy' (Bourdieu 2005). Here an attempt to understand a particular housing reform led Bourdieu to study the...

... relations of force and struggle between, on the one hand, bureaucratic agents or institutions invested with different (and in many cases competing) powers and having at times antagonistic corporate interests, and, on the other, institutions or agents (pressure groups, lobbies, etc.) which intervene to enforce their interests, or the interests of the people who elected or appointed them. (Bourdieu 2005: 92)

In that way, the study of specific decisions was related to transformations in the field of power because Bourdieu could show that those opting for reform had very rare social properties in common while emphasizing at the same time their active efforts to transform the field (ibid.: 109-10). Furthermore, he emphasized how this particular decision had fundamentally changed French housing policy in direction of supporting more private home ownership, which again had an impact on the struggles within the field of power because home-ownership debt ties people to the established order (Bourdieu 2005: 153). In that way, the relation between the specific field and the field of power is provided not just by studying the social composition of the elite actors, but also by studying their actions in relation to decisions of major importance for the specific field and its relation to the field of power. Thus, the choice of particular event seems to be of crucial importance.

This raises a second issue which regards content. Latour (1993: 5) has argued that when Bourdieu "speaks of fields of power, then (...) the contents of activities disappears". The problem of studying these big structural transformations in the field of power – at the cost of attention to content – is, according to Latour, that it is often in the details of the content that one finds the important controversies. If we want to know whether a specific event or decision is of major importance, we sometimes need 'critical proximity' with the subject matter rather than the 'critical distance' implied by a concept like the field of power (Latour 2010b). This issue raises several questions.

First, if one follows Anna Leander (2011) in looking for potentials in Bourdieu's sociology, it will not be hard to argue that the field approach can take content serious. Actually, the argument presented above claims that we are required to do so when defining elites. For instance, in *Rules of Art* (Bourdieu 1996b) – which Bourdieu considered his most elaborate and thorough field analysis – there is pertinent attention to when Flaubert's particular style of writing is related to his objective position and his efforts to free himself from it (Bourdieu 1996b, especially: 3-36). And it was indeed these efforts that made Flaubert a central figure in the field. Further, Bourdieu's sociology could be used to conceptualise the conditions that makes attention to content more or less important. The more autonomous a field becomes, the more one has to pay attention to the critical details of the content – as derived from the specific history of the field. This might be the reason for the differences in attention to content between for instance *Rules of Art* (Bourdieu 1996b) and *Force of Law* (Bourdieu

1987). The latter analyse a field that, according to Bourdieu, has a very limited autonomy, and, thus, the need for attention to the content is very limited.¹ The question remains, however, how one determines the degree of autonomy without taking content serious.

This raises a second question regarding the demarcation between fields. Starting from the very sound point, that "there is no easy, clear cut, self-evident criteria by which the various fields could be distinguished in terms of the content of the activity that takes place within them", Eyal (2006: 1) criticizes Bourdieu for analysing practices as if they were partitioned into "distinct 'spheres' whose contents are clearly bounded and well distinguished from one another". As an alternative, he argues, we need to study the 'spaces between fields' in which content is associated, purified and translated. It is true that Bourdieu was very interested in the processes that produce spheres with a relative autonomy, and in emphasising these processes and their historical significance he may have phrased himself in ways that seem to regard practices as partitioned into clearly distinct spheres. Once again, however, we may choose to look for potentials and make a more positive reading. Bourdieu always stressed the relativity of the autonomy fields obtained so as to stress the heterogeneous forces 'translating' outside impulses into and messing with the 'purification' of these microcosms. Furthermore, the issue of 'boundary work' is an integral part of the field concept as a way of focusing on the constant struggle over the drawing of lines between the inside and outside of fields – both in terms of actors and practices. In that way, the assignment of content and translation between fields seems an inherent part of Bourdieu's sociology. But equally important, talking about 'spaces between fields' reveals that Eyal is actually the one thinking in clearly distinct spheres. He actually suggested that fields might overlap, but apparently found the idea so alien that it merited no consideration. However, the idea was not so alien to Bourdieu when he argued that "strategies function as *double plays*, which (...) oper-

¹ One can dispute Bourdieu's (empirical) assessment of the degree of autonomy of the legal field, especially because "Bourdieu himself recognized on several occasions that he had not dedicated the time and effort to this subject that its importance warranted" (Villegas 2004: 58), without invalidating the overall argument that autonomy determines the explanatory power of content. The idea that the explanatory force of internal and external explanations could vary can be found in Elias (2009b) as well, but does not seem to appeal to Latour, who argues that "when all's said and done, when faced with the sociology of law or of science, the best is to adopt the internalists' approach" (Latour 2010a: 259).

ate in several fields at once” (Bourdieu 1996a: 271). This suggests that the same content may have multiple meanings, and that elite actors may act – without circulating – in several spheres at once.

It is true that the field of power by definition entails competition between incompatible forms of excellence (Wacquant and Bourdieu 1993) and thus makes it difficult to identify the exact content of this field. This is a real challenge in studying any field of power, but one that originates in the complexity of social reality and not in the conceptualisation made by Bourdieu. Rather one can argue that Bourdieu encourages us to engage with this complex issue, rather than to side step it by making simplifications or analytical reductions. Where many studies focusing on elites’ exercise of power have an explicit or implicit focus on political decisions, the concept of ‘field of power’ serve to remind us that studying the transformations in societal power structures amounts to more than analysing political processes. Politics is not by necessity the privileged language of power. If the enormous concentration of capital associated with the formation of the bureaucratic state (Tilly 1975, 1990; Mann 1993; Bourdieu 1994, 1998, 2004) has long provided a basis for this analytical focus on political decisions, state power was never so absolute that political decisions were the only source of power (see for instance Mintz and Schwartz 1986). Furthermore, the structural transformation in the European field of power both caused and manifested in the developments of the European Union clearly involves a displacement of power from state institutions under strictly political control to a number of other spheres such as the legal and economic ones (Cohen et al. 2007). Thus, talking of field of power allows one to avoid the constant search for the political influence of business leaders by acknowledging that their economic power alone makes them central actors in the field of power. And it allows us to study the construction of the European Union not just as a displacement of power from ‘national’ to ‘supranational’ institutions and actors, but just as much as displacement and re-configuration between different spheres. In that way, it helps us bring elites and the questions of elite sociology back into the study of European integration (Georgakakis 2009b).

Empirical sociology of the European Union

If the above discussions have had a purely theoretical character, Favell and Guiraudon (2009) have argued that EU scholars inspired by the sociology of Bourdieu distinguish themselves by their inherently empirical approach to sociology. In the following we will

look at some of these empirical efforts, in which scholars attempt to overcome the problems related to ‘methodological nationalism’ and to operationalize sociological concepts in empirical investigations. That said, a clear distinction should be made to ‘abstracted empiricism’ (Mills 1959), as constant reflection on the categories used by both actors and researchers is another trademark of this sociology. In that sense, the Bourdieu inspired sociology of the EU contributes to the huge literature on the European Union by breaking with the EU institutions and national self-representations that often sneak into research as notions of institutional interests and social agents as institutional representatives. As Kauppi (2003) points out, Bourdieu’s sociology entails a tension between the delegated capital that agents possess by virtue of their institutional position, and a more personalized capital, which is either inherited or accumulated over a specific trajectory (see also Bourdieu 1991). Typically, the institutional position of social agents will explain their positioning in the struggle surrounding the construction of Europe. But in some – often decisive – cases properties signifying the personalized capital of social agents can tell us more about their role in processes of change. Therefore, it will only be possible to explain institutional change by focusing on the social agents as more than just institutional representatives. In a discussion of different approaches to EU studies, Morten Rasmussen (2009) thus emphasized that Bourdieu’s sociology overcomes the institutional theories’ inability to explain change, by making it possible to consider the struggle for the construction of Europe, “not primarily as a battle between nation states and EU institutions, but rather as continuing battles between competing political, social, economic and judicial elites operating both at the national and European level” (ibid.: 41). It is made possible by the reflexive sociology focus on the social agents involved in the fighting. It is precisely such a focus on agents and their social characteristics that lie as the foundation of Bourdieu-inspired studies of the various EU institutions. In the following I now turn my attention to two slightly different examples of how to adopt this approach.

Institutionalized positions and European capital

Focusing on the actors without succumbing to voluntarism has made a number of Bourdieu-inspired scholars engage in prosopographic studies of EU actors. Prosopography is a research method often used by historians, but Bourdieu often used it in relation to his studies of fields. The method simply im-

plies “defining a population on the basis of one or several criteria and designing a relevant biographical questionnaire containing a range of variables or criteria which serve to describe it in terms of social, private, public and or cultural, ideological or political dynamics, depending on the population under scrutiny and the questionnaire that is being used” (Charle 2001: 12236). Despite the simple definition, the method often involves enormous amounts of time in a national context. When turning to an international context, the job becomes almost impossible. Not only do gathering the data often entail doing research in several languages and countries, but giving such information a variable-format implies numerous comparative problems. How should different educational attainment be compared across borders without losing the fine details that mark important distinctions at a national level? How should trajectories be compared between countries with very different political, bureaucratic and economic systems, and countries that are at the same time of vastly different size and economic and political influence? More generally, how can we understand the social properties of actors when studying them outside the social context that gave these properties their meaning in the first place, and thereby explain the ‘choice of Europe’ made by these actors?

Despite all of these problems, a number of scholars have tried to follow this approach in their studies of Europe. One of their main proponents – Didier Georgakakis – has made an excellent overview of these studies, but acknowledged at the same time that these studies have “been very time-consuming, and as of now the results in terms of analysis of the social strategies of agents are not as conclusive as in other fields” (Georgakakis 2009a: 441). That said, Georgakakis has tried to summarise a huge body of research by outlining four oppositions structuring the European institutional field: 1) agents who hold general political positions in contrast to agents who hold sectoral and/or technical positions, 2) agents in respectively public and private positions, 3) permanent agents (the European public sector being their ideal type) and part-timers (including not only the interventions of some lobbies, but also ‘multi-level’ actors or multi-positional actors), and 4) agents with resources formed in member states and agents with resources deriving from international trajectories (Georgakakis 2010b: 114). At the same time, he tried to elaborate some fundamental assumptions of this kind of research and their clearly Bourdieu-inspired relation to elite theory:

Unlike studies that use given positions to define elites, these studies emphasise the social processes of construction of elites as elites. If they highlight the sociological anchoring of these elites, it is not so much in terms of the social class they originally belong to as of the middle-term social strategies they develop to achieve positions in different social and political fields and the type of sociological capital they own or not: for instance, the resources, skills, networks or credibility that they have accumulated during their national or European careers. (Georgakakis 2010a: 118)

In the face of this kind of programmatic statements, Georgakakis’ own research may well serve as a good example of what has been accomplished by this kind of research. Drawing on a database containing information on Commission top officials, Commissioners and EU parliamentarians in pivotal positions, one study focused on the Director Generals of the European Commission. In this study (Georgakakis and de Lassalle 2007) it was shown how the content of these institutionalized positions is undergoing a morphological transformation due to the changing social properties of the actors holding these positions. First, actors with experience from national central administrations and sector specific skills are gradually losing ground to actors with longer and more trans-sectoral careers within the Commission itself. While national affiliation still plays a role in the selection of Directors Generals, EU (and Commission specific) experience is increasingly needed to become a viable candidate. At the same time, these European top officials’ educational background and self-representation progressively become more and more internationalized; they more and more often possess educational credentials from educational institutions outside their country of origin and ties to national associations, which previously would have been beneficial for obtaining a spot in the top of the Commission, are now increasingly made invisible in the self-presentations of these officials (Georgakakis and de Lassalle 2007: 10). Furthermore, the analysis shows how the otherwise so dominant lawyers are slowly losing ground to economists, not just by a gradual displacement from central Directorates, but also because lawyers increasingly recognize the need for additional economic expertise to succeed in the Commission (Georgakakis and de Lassalle 2008: 5-6). In this way, the prosopographic data on top officials opens a window into the tactical battle regarding the definition of legitimate properties of these EU top officials and thus the ongoing struggle for the construction of a ‘European institution

capital' (Georgakakis and de Lassalle 2008). Another interesting example of this kind of research is the studies of the social characteristics of MEP's. Using data on the members of the European Parliament from 1979 onwards Beauvallet and Michon (2009, 2010) have shown that in spite of the immediately heterogeneity of MEP's, a small group of political agents have used their experience and skills to acquire huge influence on the overall functioning of and distribution of resources within the EU-parliament. Transcending party political cleavages, these actors have developed distinctive European careers and share a common vision of a 'political Europe' that is crucial for the formation of a 'European political space'. These kind of prosopographic studies give a better understanding of the functioning of European institutions criss-crossed by party lines, national interests, diverse carrier patterns and different professional trajectories.

While clearly interesting, some issues can be raised with regard to these studies. First, the problems of doing translational prosopography can be found in these studies. The number of people investigated is so small (compared to the time-span) that it is not clear whether the changes shown in the composition of the top officials are expressions of systematic tendencies or coincidences. If the study of top officials and EU parliamentarians would suggest that the central players in these EU institutions are increasingly 'Europeanised', studies of political processes indicate that "political power belongs more than ever to temporary agents within the EU's institutional field, instead of to more permanent and Europeanised agents" (Georgakakis 2010a: 118). Thus, the prosopographic data contradicts observations of political processes in the EU. This might, of course, be a case of contradiction between apparent and real use and possession of power, but it might also have to do with measuring the wrong variables. Georgakakis himself suggests that properties other than educational background and national careers might be of importance. In that way, "long-lasting European recognition, based on European experience, resources (languages, social networks) or their accomplishments of (small) miracles (a satisfying negotiation or compromise for what is deemed as European common interest or progress) that give them a local charisma of sorts through their 'European credibility'" (Georgakakis and Weisbein 2010: 99). Especially the category of 'miracles' introduces the issue of recognition of field specific properties, as recognising a miracle entails a frame of reference distinguishing the ordinary from the extra-ordinary (Kalyvas 2008). Thus, it may be important for understanding why some people get to the top and what

kind of power they can exercise from there, but unfortunately it may be very hard to grasp such 'miracles' without studying the processes that make them so.

Secondly, despite the proclamation that "institutional categories are, at least ideally, not perceived as a given, but rather as part of a longer process of construction" (Georgakakis 2009a: 444), the research nonetheless takes its starting point in such institutional categories. Doing so without relating it to the institutional development is in itself problematic. The changing composition of the Directors Generals may tell us something about underlying transformations in the institutionalization of EU capital, but it may also be an effect of changes in the institutional power and function of the Commission or the overall history of the EU (as functional elites theories would surely argue). Moreover, taking institutional positions as a starting point raises the same problems as those face by classical elite studies using the positional method. If the institutionalization of EU capital is changing, then 'so what?' as Putnam (1976) famously asked. Georgakakis argues that these prosopographic studies are "not so much concerned with finding out 'who is in charge' (although they do shed some light on this), but rather attempt to make out different types of careers and oppositions between the (social, if possible, national or international, educational, professional) dispositions of the agents who follow these careers" (Georgakakis 2009a: 442). But still, he is not choosing janitors, cleaners or even mid-level bureaucrats of the Commission as his target population.² These are clearly elite actors, and studying them – because they are so – without researching why they are so and what that entails is somewhat problematic. What is missing is a focus on the practices of these actors and how they produce them as elite actors.

Third, and in continuation, this leads to the question of content and implications. Does a shift from lawyers to economists amongst the top EU bureaucrats have any consequences for policy formulation or the Commissions actions in specific fields? Do the increasingly internationalised trajectories of the top officials entail an increasing democratic deficit or a more 'European' EU? And if so, how does that affect

² If it is indeed the careers that are the centre of attention, one can wonder why only top officials (Directors Generals and Vice-Directors Generals) are taken into account, and not the ordinary Commission bureaucrat, who invests a large amount of energy in settling abroad and working his or her way up through an alien system without the clear economic and symbolic benefits awarded a Director General. Such a much broader approach – and much harder to pursue as the data are far more difficult to obtain – would give a much better ground for analyzing the selection mechanisms and reproduction strategies that lie behind the social production of top officials.

ordinary people's lives or the regulation of different spheres of action? Such questions might be interesting to consider, but often the social significance of the patterns studied are absent in these studies. Because it is only the objective properties, and not the practices, of these actors that are studied, the importance of shifting social characteristics is hard to show. Beauvallet (2010) actually made an interesting study of the political process surrounding the rejection of the Port Packet, showing how numerous actors and resources were mobilised, but this study was never related to the prosopographic data or the conclusions drawn from them. It seems that no attempt is made to articulate the relation between meso-level transformations in the composition of Parliamentarians to the everyday political processes that these parliamentarians are engaged in. And because these groups are studied without constantly relating them to an overall understanding of the transformation of the Europe field of power, it becomes difficult to hold on to the overall picture as well. To Bourdieu, the construction of the state and the state nobility was part of a process of capital concentration and unification of a number of national markets for economic, cultural and symbolic goods (Bourdieu 1991, 1998; Arnholtz Hansen and Hammerslev 2010). Similarly, the construction of a European field of power can be seen as a process that is changing the exchange rate between different forms of capital by bringing them in relation to one another in a series of transnational fields. But without emphasizing that this process is still on-going and open, and that concrete measures can make a difference, studying the elite actors soon appear as studies of elite groups' internal fight without any bearing on how Europe is constructed. Georgakakis (2010a) actually goes into the effect of the growing sociological opposition between the EU bureaucrats and the Commissioners they are meant to serve. Here, the construction and institutionalisation of the EU is seen as a part of a broader set of reproductive strategies that elite groups use. This might seem to put these studies into relation with themes related to a broader understanding of the field of power, but at the same time it makes Latour's criticism for lacking content very true. The conflicts and struggles observed regarding institutionalisation, internal struggles of the bureaucracy and reproductive strategies much more than the active engagement in fields and the processes that distinguish those actors that can perform 'miracles' by 'make the impossible possible' from those that essentially just fill a function at a very high level (functional elite).

In sum, this vein of studies has a great deal of potential but unfolding it seems to require either a much broader focus on strategies of reproduction in which 'Europe' is only one possible route, or a more content-orientated focus linking elite composition with the elaboration of principles of vision and division for the European Union.

The European legal field and lawyers as 'middlemen'

Although suffering from some of the same problems, a slightly different approach comes closer to engaging with them. This approach has a focus on the gradual construction of a 'European legal field' and the lawyers partaking in this construction process. While the scholars behind this research do use something that looks like prosopographic data, their engagement is much broader. First of all, the concept of field is taken much more serious than in the research done by Georgakakis and others. While the latter do talk of a 'European institutional field' this is seldom more than a framework concept without much content. For scholars studying the European legal field, the concept has a real function of tying together studies of very diverse actors (judges, bureaucrats, politicians, business consultants, activists, etc.) who are united in their diversity by "the contest for control over the specific symbolic resources of Euro-law" (Vauchez 2008a: 131). Furthermore, the concept is taken serious as these scholars study the transformation in the European field of power to understand the historical conditions that made the formation of a transnational European legal field possible. Rather than following the categories dictated by institutional perspectives on the European Union, they argue that:

The European field of power does not stop at the edge of the EU, but reaches beyond into a transnational space that include academic institutions such as the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, political organizations such as the European Movement International (EMI) and its national equivalents, non-EU European institutions such as the parliamentary assemblies of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) international organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as think tanks, law firms, corporations and so on. (Cohen 2008a: 113)

Thus, analysing the formation of the European legal field entails both a focus on the geopolitical situation and the constellation in the European field of power that made the creation of a relatively independent and effective EU law possible (Cohen 2007, 2010), as well as detailed studies of the diverse investments and strategies used by the actors now considered ‘founding fathers’ of European legal institutions (Vauchez 2008a) and the gradual de-politicization of ECJ (Cohen 2008b). From this perspective they challenge the assumption – often made tacitly by legal scholars and legal actors alike – that the legitimacy of EU law is to be found in the universal validity of a ‘rule of law’. Rather they argue that “the legitimacy of European law is the product of a variety of interdependent although relatively autonomous social universes that, albeit external to EU central institutions, are critical in producing the dominant representations and expert knowledge that *make* Europe and in which most of today’s European politics and economics are embedded” (Cohen and Vauchez 2007: 77).

Taking the field serious entails a greater sensitivity to the substantive debate both in the scholarly literature regarding European law and the transformations of European institutions (such as the European Court of Justice), but also regarding the content of the transformations in EU law as such. In this way, these scholars have engaged with the debates on integration-through-law and constitutional tendencies of a European Court of Justice that has no constitution to found its legitimacy on. They thus analyse the multiple agents involved in the constant efforts to uphold the Constitutionalism without constitution (Cohen 2007). One example of this is to be found in Cohen’s (2008a) study of the composition of the agents participating in the European Convention, which drafted the proposal for a European constitution. Starting from the assumption that “each treaty reform (...) is an opportunity for a specific category of agents to promote their specific ‘expertise’ and shape the institutions and rules that make the complex architecture of the EU” (Cohen 2008a: 111), this study focused on the actors that took part in shaping the representations of what *Europe* is. By studying their trajectories and positions, Cohen could for instance show that...

... the much commented consensus method at the Convention may have had, as an unspoken prerequisite, a coalition of pre-existing social dispositions most appropriate in this institutional space (...); a set of dispositions that was not limited to their prior socialization in the transnational institu-

tions where they could have held positions, but was much more profoundly rooted in pre-accorded academic, or even professional backgrounds. (ibid.: 125-6)

While this might be seen as a small detail, had the Constitution been adopted as such, its legitimacy might have rested (amongst other things) on the fact that it was elaborated via principles of consensus by learned men and women. Showing that such consensus is the product of recruitment of the actors involved in the debate more than of the validity of the text they agreed upon is a way of showing the social conditions of the kind of constitutionalism produced.

Another excellent example regards the classical *Van Gend en Loos* (Case 26/62) and *Costa v. ENEL* (Case 6/64) decisions in which the ECJ announced its own supremacy and the direct effect of its rulings. Trying to break with the “dense mythology” of the European-integration-through-law literature, Vauchez (2010: 5) stresses “the sense of uncertainty and fuzziness that prevailed among lawyers when it came to define what this new body of law actually was”. Where the “foundational myth” of the integration-through-law theory is based on a “selective reading of history” he tries to “unveil the complex *interpretative process* through which both decisions have been prophesied, associated, contested, stylised and progressively polished and codified into *one* judicial theory of Europe” (ibid.: 5-6). In doing so, it is stressed that “the judgement of the European Court is far from being as clear-cut and unambiguous as it is presented today” (Vauchez 2008b: 10). Rather, all ambiguities of the cases have gradually faded away due to a process in which multiple actors engaged to underline the significance and meaning of the decisions. This study is simply excellent. First, because it goes to the heart of core elements in the establishment of a European legal field and its relation to the European and national fields of power. Second, because it shows how these core elements were established, not through singular decisions, but by a highly social process linking law, politics and institutional positions. Thus, it establishes a model that can be used in investigating the political construction of legal cases within the European field of power. While a fabulous analysis in itself, the power of prosopographic data is illustrated when Cohen illustrates the “dense network of family ties that linked the ‘revolutionary’ Court of 1963-1964 (...) to prominent political and juridical figures of the time” (Cohen 2008b: 10). In that way, data on the individual actors and their different forms of capital can help explain why these actors had the

possibility to make big institutional changes (Cohen and Vauchez 2011). The prosopographic data gathered for this analysis was not as systematic and did not fit as well into a variable-format as those used by Georgakakis and his colleagues, just as Marchand and Vauchez (2010) analysis of the early lawyer appearing before the ECJ is not as in-depth on their social characteristics as those used by Beauvallet and Michon. But because the data are related to issues of content they become both more alive and more relevant. The actors seem as just that (actors), and not as positional representatives defined by a number of intersecting variables. The constant interplay between law and politics is one of the fundamental themes in this research approach, and issues of translation and purification seem to be there all the time (although not conceptualized as such). The construction of the European legal field is to a high degree a process in which political entrepreneurs try to transform their social, cultural and political capital into more or less institutionalized legal capital. Furthermore, Cohen and Vauchez (2007: 78) argue that “the blurriness and fuzziness of borders between law and politics (...) tend to offer unprecedented margins of manoeuvre for lawyers in the definition of a polity governed by law”. This, in turn, makes for a study of lawyers as Europe’s ‘middlemen’ (Marchand and Vauchez 2010: 69), possessing “specific social skill, particularly useful in crossing borders, social and national” (Cohen and Vauchez 2007: 78). In this way, these studies seem to show that Bourdieu’s sociology can indeed grasp processes of translation between spheres that are less clearly distinct. They actually show that a fundamental interest for “what lies in between these lines, i.e. the cross-sector activities” (Marchand and Vauchez 2010: 68-9) seem to be a trademark of this sociological approach (as opposed to more institutionalist approaches working with clear institutional categories). In his analysis of the actors engaged in the creation of the proposal for a European Constitution, Cohen (2010) points to a group of actors...

...defying the usual categorizations of the national and the supranational, the institutional and the informal, and also the interests and the ideals (...). The individual agents constituting these networks precisely define themselves by their social ability to cross the borders between the various segments of the European field of power. (Cohen 2010: 108)

All this said there are still a few problems with this approach. First, in focusing on the omnipresent ‘lawyers’ and their role as ‘middlemen’ this approach can

travel fare in the European field of power without testing the limits of its starting point. However, focusing on lawyers seems like substituting categories of institutional positions for professional ones. Georgakakis and de Lassalle’s studies would indicate that other professions are making their way into the European field of power, as the omnipresent middlemen whose language everyone must speak to be taken serious. While retaining a clear focus on the content of legal disputes and their contribution to the production of a European legal profession, focusing on the European legal field might make one miss the competition between legal and economic forms of expertise (and the different forms of capital they represent). Thus, the fundamental competition between incompatible forms of excellence in the European field of power may be missed.

A second issue regards the selection of cases in this approach. Cohen is very explicit about the principle for selecting the European Convention as a case study:

In the competitions that constantly opposed the different kinds of state nobilities (economic, bureaucratic, political and legal) since the very beginnings of European integration to impose a legitimizing principle on which to build this transnational order (the market, technical competence, parliamentary representation, law), the treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe could well have been a window of opportunity to formalize a new power settlement in which legal professionals could have found a new source of power over the State, in its national and transnational forms. (Cohen 2008a: 126)

It is the potential significance of this process, not just for the legal field but for the European Union and the European field of power that makes the Convention such an interesting case. Here, the principles of vision and division are elaborated in text for all to see by elite actors. This selection strategy is echoed more discreetly by Vauchez, when he defines his study of *Van Gend en Loos* not as a general model for studying cases of the European Court of Justice, but as part of an effort to “outline critical junctures that shaped” (Vauchez 2008c: 135) the *nomos* of the European legal. Engaging with events pre-consecrated – by scholars or practitioners – as being of major importance, these studies clearly makes the ‘so what?’ question of elite theory completely redundant. Showing the involvement of elites in these crucial processes makes studying the formation and characteristics of

these elites relevant. While this selection strategy is both sound and powerful, it does entail a problem. A central point to these studies was to show how the social significance of these cases was produced in part by all the actors explicitly or implicitly acknowledging their importance. But if their argument is, that it is by “continuously revisiting” these ‘founding’ cases of European law that “the elite of the Court constructed a collective narrative that became the vehicle of a powerful, yet implicit Credo” (Cohen and Vauchez 2011: 428-9), then does their own returns to these cases not contribute to the mythology of them being founding statements of the court? And more generally, by studying ‘critical junctures’ do they not in themselves contribute to the consecration of these events as being important, or, more importantly perhaps, does their neglect of events that never became ‘big’ issues not risk missing the enormous importance of countless small events that uphold and reproduce the principles apparently instituted by big events.³

Conclusion

Bringing elite theory back into studies of the European Union is of great relevance for improving our understanding of the processes reshaping the European field of power. As concepts such as ‘Europeanization’ and ‘governance’ make invisible the actors that promote both transformation and non-transformation (Offe 2009), the study of these processes is in dire need of concepts that can vindicate an interest in these actors and their practices. In that respect, elite theories have much to tell us and we can learn a lot from the debates between different elite theories. This article has attempted to do just that by showing a number of ways that Bourdieu’s sociology can help us overcome issues that have pitted classical elite studies against each other. To argue that Bourdieu’s sociology answers every question and resolves all problems would surely be foolish, but it entails a way of thinking that can help us integrate productive insights and overcome false oppositions.

Still, there is a matter of emphasis in empirical studies. While fears that the integrative approach of Bourdieu’s sociology involves a risk that different theoretical positions become indistinguishable (Parsons 2010) seem unfounded, priorities have to be made when using an analytical framework as broad

³ Criticizing EU studies for promoting EU integration by relegating to oblivion the “failures” of integration, making predictions of integration function as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Cohen, et al. 2007), it is interesting that Cohen made little efforts to understand the ‘failure’ of the European constitution.

ranging as Bourdieu’s. This does not entail finding the ‘right’ Bourdieu, but putting adequate emphasis on different parts of his sociology and reading him productively (Leander 2011). Whereas prosopography has become a hall mark of sociology *a la Bourdieu*, the review of empirical studies indicate that emphasizing practices and content is necessary to avoid the pitfalls of classical elite studies. □

Jens Arnholtz

Ph. D. scholar at Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to contribute to ‘bringing elites back in’ to the study of the European Union by drawing inspiration from the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. It does so in two steps. First it outlines Bourdieu’s sociology and its relation to classical elite studies, arguing that his approach has a lot to offer. It is argued that the field approach contributes to bridging the gap between ‘positional’ approaches, studying the social properties of people in positions of power, and the ‘decision making’ approach, studying the engagement of elites in the exercise of power. Secondly, the article reviews two strands of empirical research on the European Union that both draw inspiration from Bourdieu’s sociology. The merits and problems of these two approaches are assessed and discussed.

Keywords

Elite theory, Bourdieu, European Union

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