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Pathways to the Power Elite: The Organizational Landscape of Elite Careers

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Introduction

What unifies a pluralist elite socially? Recent research points to the gravitational forces of heterogenous networks in providing a space for interaction for interest groups to fend off differences. A normative elite consensus can emerge from seemingly opposing interest groups, if and when these spheres are embedded in a dense network space, where inter-personal interaction is frequent, where information diffuses easily and where norms can be enforced strongly so as to result in actual social and normative group integration (Larsen & Ellersgaard 2018). This argument mirrors extensive work on how interlocking directorates glues together corporate elites politically (Useem 1984, Burris 2005, Benton 2018), but broadens the argument about elite integration and political action beyond the corporate sphere to also take into account consensus formation between broader interest groups. Existing studies have mainly located consensus formation of interest groups in cross-sectional inter-personal networks, but less is known about the extent to which elite social integration also takes places along the careers pathways to the elite. To address this shortcoming in the literature, we ask the following research question: What are the differentiating and unifying characteristics of organizational experiences in shaping elite careers?

How organizational experiences of the elite may impact on elite social integration is not well accounted for in the literature. For good reasons, the role of cultural 'capital' has received much focus in explaining how elite social classes re-affirm their power and develop shared understandings (Bourdieu 1996). While Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital has inspired important research about how elite schools are a key institutional space for elites social integration, and for how they re-affirm their power, there is also evidence that suggest that elite social integration takes place in different institutional spaces depending on the national context (Hartmann 2010). In this paper we zero in on the structure

of elite careers and on how elite's organizational experiences might very well reveal key mechanisms of elite social integration. We argue that the concept of organizational capital is promising for thinking about these mechanisms and that in some context organizational capital constitutes the structural equivalent to cultural capital as the core resource that elite prospects must accumulate to maximize their chances of sorting into, and successfully integrating with, a nationally overarching elite.

We develop this argument through a case study of the Danish elite, mapping the career trajectories and the organisational networks that emerge from their pathways to the elite. Our analysis demonstrates that while career pathways of elite actors reflect the plurality of institutions and interests that make up the Danish political economy, a small set of prestigious organizations tie together the elites' organizational experience. Much like the small subset of French elite schools that contribute to maximize selection chances and successful social integration into the elite via its prestigious diplomas, habitual training and network formation; a small subset of organisations and organisational experiences tie together the Danish elite.

We study the careers of this small decision-making national elite consisting of 423 individuals identified from cross-sectional network data in an earlier study (Larsen & Ellersgaard 2017). Applying Social Network Analysis, more specifically K-core decomposition, on a large sample of heterogeneous affiliations in Denmark, including the largest companies, and the most prominent policy networks and foundations, a dense core referred to as the "power elite" (cf. also Mills 1956) was identified (Larsen & Ellersgaard 2017). The study contributes empirically to work on elite careers, first, by expanding existing field-specific analyses to map out the careers of a supra-field elite, and secondly, by providing very rich data on multiple dimensions of the career. Further, we draw on recent innovations in

sequence analytic techniques to develop a multi-channel framework to identify distinct elite trajectories. Finally, our paper provides suggestive evidence for organizational capital being a mechanism of elite selection and integration on par with cultural capital, although we expect to find significant national and regional variance here.

Our aim with the case study is agenda-setting and exploratory; drawing rich empirical lessons about an understudied mechanism (post-educational careers and mechanisms of elite integration) by studying a context in which the mechanism is likely to be prominent. Although we draw on the two central Bourdieusian concepts, capital and habitus, we approach our career analysis in a rather inductive manner. Therefore, the ambition of our study is more descriptive than inferential: We are not able to causally identify the mechanisms of selection into the elite, nor are we able to compare the careers of the elite with the career of comparable non-elite individuals, those that almost but did not make it. Instead, we are able to present a rich, visually interpretable, empirical analysis of the pathways to the elite; to draw conclusions on prominent characteristics about the structure of these careers (thus contributing with what Savage (2009) terms 'descriptive assemblages'); and to provide plausible interpretations for why these characteristics would be associated with processes of elite integration in a context where this integration is encumbered by weak institutions of early-life elite socialization and integration; and strong institutions of upward mobility.

The paper proceeds in four sections. The first section provides a brief review of the emerging literature on post-educational careers and their importance for elite selection and integration. The second section gives an overview of the data and methodology used in the empirical analysis. The third section present the results in two subsections. First, we present the results of an inductive multi-channel

sequence analysis of the 423 career trajectories. Through a cluster analysis of the optimal matching distances between the trajectories, we identify ten distinct pathways to the power elite -- each distinguishable by their remarkable commonalities in several aspects of the career trajectory (sectorial, occupational, geographical, and organizational). Second, we present an analysis of the organizational landscape that our elite population has traversed -- moving from an analysis of categorical data to an analysis of the organizations most active in hatching the decision-making elite. The fourth section concludes and discusses the implications of our results.

Organizational capital and elite careers

How organizations affect elite personae has long been of interest to sociological scholars, seeing as they 'imprint their stamps upon the individual, modifying his external conduct as well as his inner life' (Gerth & Mills, 1953, p. 173ff). Following a Bourdiesian approach, the organizations elites pass through can be seen as having a dual effect on future members of elites. First of all, they select and socialize potential candidates. Organizational cultures and hierarchies shape the habitus of the candidates, as it were. Secondly, the work experience and titles earned in these organizations function as indicators of capital that in turn can be invested for further accumulation. In short, organisations are key in shaping the personality and future of elite candidates, as well as adding to the composition of the elite individuals' capital composition. We borrow from Bourdieu the notion capital accumulation – in seeing the career as a labour process in which different forms of capital can be accumulated and later leveraged strategically in order to maximize the chances on elite selection. We also borrow the notion that elite individuals' habitus – to a larger degree than normally recognized – is shaped by the characteristics of their organizational and occupational careers, and that this habitus is key to secure successful social integration into the elite.

In 'State Nobility' Bourdieu (1996) described the role of elite schools in the French field of power. In Denmark no such field of elite schools exist. We argue, however, that organizational landscape of elite career trajectories play a homologue role to that of elite schools in the formation of the dominant classes in Denmark. While passage through the educational institutions endows future elite members with what Bourdieu (1986) calls 'institutionalized cultural capital', a consecration of their legitimacy as potential elite members, based on the symbolical status of their alma mater, we argue that careers in specific organizations, within specific social fields, endow elites with what we call 'organizational capital'.

We thus suggest here to supplement the analysis of institutionalized – and embodied – cultural capital with a notion of 'organisational capital' that Bourdieu himself mentions *en passant*, as something that includes accumulating knowledge of a field (2005, p. 194), but never unfolds. Donald Broady (1991) suggests that organizational capital can be a key asset in recruitment to the field of power inn countries with relatively weak elite educational institutions. Broady's emphasis is on the organizational capital accumulated in the political field, the making 'a name of oneself' and learning the 'rules of the game' within, for instance, political youth organisations, unions and voluntary associations. However, as we argue below, this framework can and should be extended to entire organizational fields.

Following that idea, spending time in dominant positions, for example in managerial positions in the key organisations in a field, can be seen as a way to accumulate field-specific capital associated with that organization. In Savage, Warde, and Devine's (2005: 43-4) approach capital, assets and resources tied to particular occupations has the potential to 'accumulate, store, and retain advantages' and that

this 'accumulatory potential' can be realised not only within a single field, but also 'unlock advantages in other fields'. Mapping elite career trajectories may tell us if and how capital accumulated in different fields can be translated into other fields: 'Central to understanding the accumulatory power of a class asset is the extent to which a given advantage in a specific field is transferable into other fields in a cumulative and reinforcing process', argues Savage, Warde and Devine (2005: 44).

An empirical mapping of elite careers thus provides insight into value of different organizational experiences and how elites handle the tradeoff between organisational and occupational status (Borkenhagen and Martin, 2018). The notion of organizational capital thus offers a framework to understand how certain organisations endow their current or former employees with an aura of excellence, whether through positions in the grand corps in France (Bourdieu, 1996), in the academies of famed corporations in the US (Cappelli & Hamori, 2005), or in globally acclaimed talent incubators such as the consulting giant McKinsey & Company. Curiously, despite the theoretical interest in the careers of elites, only few studies have pursued systematic empirical analysis of the occupational and organizational trajectories of decision-making elites.

Existing approaches to elite careers

A small but growing literature addresses how differences in the organizations you move through before reaching elite positions (often in combination with the role played by elite universities and professions) can be seen as a key indicator of national elite configurations, and has served to underscore differences between business elites across countries (Bauer & Bertin-Mourot, 1999; Maclean, Harvey, & Press, 2006). Swiss CEO's, for instance, that served in the armed forces tend to have close ties to the rest of the national Swiss elite (Bühlmann, David, & Mach, 2012). Central bankers

with former career positions at universities instead of banks are seen to have higher levels of academic versus financial capital (Lebaron 2008; Lebaron & Dogan 2016). Furthermore, the number of organizations in a career has served as an indicator of the strength of network ties within or bridging across organizations (Bühlmann, Davoine, & Ravasi, 2018). This literature mostly focus on sector-specific elites, in particular the economic sector, with the notable exception of Hartmann's (2010) analysis of careers and schooling of political, bureaucratic and economic elites. Our study contributes to this literature by inductively mapping the careers and organizational experience of a nationally overarching "power elite", following Mills' (1956) original study.

Methodologically, sequence analysis (relying on optimal matching or other edit-distance measures) has been widely used in the study of career paths of, for example, elite groups or professionals such as musicians (Abbott & Hrycak, 1990), bankers (Stovel, Savage, & Bearman, 1996), financial regulators (Seabrooke & Nilsson 2015), sustainability standard-setters (Henriksen & Seabrooke 2016) female executives in finance (Blair-Loy, 1999), business economists and engineers (Bühlmann, 2008), top CEOs (Koch, Forgues, & Monties 2017), politicians (Ohmura, Bailer, Meißner, & Selb 2018), national and international Swiss bankers (Araujo 2018), geographically segregated classes (Toft 2018a) and mobility in and out of upper class fractions (Toft 2018b). All these studies provide sector-specific accounts of elite careers, and we are the first to present a career analysis of a cross-sectorial elite group.

Data and methods

Our study is based on a small, select population of elite individuals from Denmark. For the purposes of identifying societal elite members, we follow Mills (1956, p. 18) definition of a power elite as 'those

political, economic and military circles which as an intricate set of overlapping cliques share decisions having at least national consequences'. In a social network analytic operationalization of Mills' concept, we identify 423 elite individuals belonging to the core of the Danish elite networks in 2012.[1]

To map the career trajectories, we collected the CVs of the 423 members of the Danish power elite. To the extent possible, all recorded career sequences range from the start of secondary education, usually around age 16, until 2013. Data was gathered from a range of sources, primarily descriptions in *Kraks Blå Bog* – the Danish equivalent of *Who's Who* – portrait articles, LinkedIn profiles and organisations' websites. Records were made on a year-to-year basis of the name and location of the employer organization and descriptions of the job function.

First, from this information create a time-variant data set of six categorical variables: 1) the sector of the employer's organization, 2) the subsector of the employer's organization, 3) the career level of the job, 4) organizational shifts, 5) the size of the employer's organisation and 6) its geographical location (a more detailed description of the coding is described in Lunding et al. [2019]). This gives us a year-by-year categorical description of what we term career channels, describing the most prominent organizational occupational traits of the careers. Analytically, the sector and subsector of the organization occupied in serve as proxies for the field at which a future elite individual have been accumulation capital. The job position and number of career changes between organizations is used as indicators of being in a position to tap into the accumulatory potentiality of the organisation. The size and the geographical location the organization can serve crude measures of the status of the organisation.

[1] The power elite was found by applying k-core decomposition to a large relational database of 5079 boards, networks, committees and councils consisting of 37,750 individuals and 56,536 positions. For a more detailed description of the methodology, see Larsen and Ellersgaard 2017.

Second, we create a time-variant data set of the organizational career with year-by-year identifier of the employer's organization. In order to secure an initial uniformity in data, seven individuals were excluded from the analysis, either because of too much missing data or because the individuals were too young (under 40 years old) and therefore difficult to compare with the rest of the population. This left us with a sample of 416 careers. Further, we restrict our window of observation to the part of the career that takes place from age 20 to 70.

Our analysis then proceeds in two methodological steps. We first analyse the categorical career sequences using optimal matching and cluster analysis in order to identify the common pathways to power and to describe the characteristics of these pathways in terms of the six career channels outlined above. The optimal matching algorithm performs pairwise transformations of sequences, producing a similarity measure that reflects how much effort is required to transform the sequence A into the sequence B. The algorithm counts the amount of changes, or edits, i.e. insertions, deletions or substitutions needed in order to make the transformation.

This paper expands traditional sequence analysis techniques to take into account multiple dimensions of the career trajectories being analysed. With the recent development of multidimensional or *multichannel sequence analysis* (Pollock 2007; Gauthier et al. 2010; for a recent application see Bühlmann 2008) it is possible to take into account simultaneously six aspects of career. *career level, career rhythm*, *organization size, geographic location, sector* and *subsector* in the measure career resemblances.

To take into account that the different states in each channel are not equally interchangeable, substitution costs are generated by the observable transition rates in data (Lesnard 2014), while insertion and deletion costs are set at 1.1, i.e. slightly higher than half the maximum substitution cost. Furthermore, since the distances differ in length (min. = 20 years, median = 38, max. = 51 years), and the distance between two long sequences are likely to be greater than between two shorter, the

calculated pairwise distances are normalized by dividing it with the length of the longest of the two sequences. (a more detailed description of this methodology can be found in Lunding et al (2019).

Results

Ten pathways to the power elite

To identify how the members Danish power elite are differentiated by their career characteristics, we use hierarchical agglomerative cluster analysis on the optimal matching distances to identify and describe a tree of clusters each nested within one another. Based on both heuristic criterions and the ratio of between- and within-variance of clusters, we identify ten cluster partition, what we refer to as pathways to power (the criterion for selection of clusers and plots of states of the six different channels along the ten clusters can be found in Lunding et al 2019). Inspecting the structure of the tree, we find a fundamental distinction between private and public pathways to power (see Figure 1). The first branch is tied to careers in the private sector (n= 212). From this branch a twig of 'the landed gentry', and then of 'bankers' grow out, before the remainder of the branch is split into an 'industrial inner circle' and 'corporate ambassadors'. The second main branch is tied to public careers located mainly in the public sector or in interest organisations (n = 204). This branch has six twigs. First, the 'education and local politics' twig as well as the 'scientists' are separated from the rest. Then, 'unionists' are singled out as a group, followed by the 'state nobility'. 'Education and local politics' are then separated from the 'scientists' when 'professional politicians' are finally separated from the 'lobbyists'. In addition, Figure 2 shows the career level, organizational shifts, the organization size and the geographic location of the five most representative sequences for each cluster, together indicating different strategies of capital accumulation by elite individuals. Table 1 describes the turbulence - a

measure of how many distinct states and how many changes a career trajectory involves (Elzinga and Liefbroer, 2007) – of each cluster within each channel. In the section below, each cluster is described in detail.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Private

1. **Corporate ambassadors** (N=85) have careers almost exclusively in the business world but also include lawyers and leaders from culture. They are significantly younger than average (t-value = 3.1; on the calculation of test values, see Lunding et al (2019). Their careers are typically outside the very large organisations (t-value = 4.1), and they tend to have experience from consultancy and accounting, commerce and services, as well as transportation and infrastructure (t-values = 7.6, 7.1 and 6.1, respectively). In terms of sector and sub sector, the careers in this cluster are more turbulent, i.e. less stable than the other private twigs. In terms of advancement, the ambassadors are less turbulent though, and more often fail to reach or have not yet reached the highest career levels. Unlike their neighbour cluster of the industrial inner circle, the careers in this cluster are mainly spent outside the very large corporations (t-value = -4.1), and in the less prestigious subfields within the economic field, e.g. consultancy, commerce or transportation.
2. **Industrial inner circle** (N=50) are the highest-ranked corporate executives in Denmark. They often have careers in the very large (t-value = 5.4) industrial and technological corporations (t-value = 12.0) and can be seen as a Danish equivalent to the 'Inner Circle'

described by Michael Useem (1984). Most of these individuals advanced very rapidly in their career, reaching the first management position at an average age of 30.8 years, which is 2.3 years before the average of the power elite as a whole (t-value = -2.8). Since only four members of this cluster are women (t-value = 2.1), the industrial inner circle are very much an old boys' network. Even among the clusters tied to the private sector, the careers of the industrial inner circle are remarkably stable when it comes to career turbulence in sector and organisational size (see table 1). The members of the industrial inner circle often originates from elite circles, as 44 per cert have a background in the upper class (t-value = 2.7).

3. **Bankers** (N=48) are tied to the financial part of the corporate sector with 90 per cent of their careers in economy and finance, compared to ten per cent of the entire power elite (t-value = 16.9). They tend to be older than average, and have had long careers at the senior executives levels of their organisations (test value = 2.5). Their education is also closely tied to the financial domain, with degrees in economics or vocational training within banks (t-values = 5.7 and 2.9). Bankers are also often recruited from the upper classes, were 41 per cent originate from (t-value = 2.2).
4. **Landed gentry** (N=29) consists mainly of three distinct groups: large landowners, key lobbyists from the agricultural industry, and heirs and owner-managers of both large and medium-sized corporations. This group has long lasting ties to the elites: 41 percent the landed gentry have grandparents in the upper classes (t-value = 2.7). However, this group has not relied on institutionalized cultural capital to achieve their positions as only 31 percent have an academic degree (t-value = 3.3). Besides being strongly tied to the agricultural industry (t-value = 11.2), 83 per cent of their careers have taken place outside Copenhagen, compared to the average of 19 per cent (t-value = 11.1), and they are thus able to maintain ties to the elite despite being removed from the 'alpha territories' (Burrows, Webber & Atkinson, 2017). This

group thus combines the old, aristocratic elite of noble landowners with the new provincial industrial nobility, including the heads some of the richest Danish families, owners of LEGO, Danfoss and Grundfos. The members of this cluster also form the core of the social elite around the royal court with the heirs of the provincial industrial nobility among the very few non-nobles serving as chamberlains (t-value = 3.9).

Public

5. **Education and local politics** (N=20) combine leaders of unions tied to the locally or regionally administered part of the public sector, leaders of vocational educational institutions and mayors at the municipal and regional levels. Of the members of this cluster, 45 per cent have an educational background as teachers (t-value = 10.5) and 57 per cent have worked in education compared to three per cent of the power elite as a whole (t-value = 16.0). This group is disproportionately recruited from the lower middle classes (t-value = 2.5). The group is also characterized by a higher prevalence of careers outside the large organisations (t-value = 6.7) with high levels of sector turbulence and entropy. Thus, this cluster highlights the ties between working as welfare professionals and then progressing into careers as elected representatives in either unions or politics working in the decentralized 'left-hand' part of the welfare state (cf. Bourdieu, 1998).
6. **Scientists** (N=38) are the only cluster of public careers with high sector stability seen below average levels of turbulence, entropy and complexity. This cluster is almost exclusively professors, university presidents and deans. On average, 93 per cent of their careers have been in the scientific sector, compared to 14 per cent in the elite as a whole (t-value = 16.8), with scholarly careers in economics particularly prominent (t-value = 11.3). The average number of commission members is twice the number in the power elite in general (t-value = 3.5). This

group is less tied to Copenhagen, as the average proportion of a career spent outside Copenhagen is higher in this cluster (t-value = 3.5).

7. **State nobility** (N=60) identifies a set of careers typical of senior civil servants, officers in the military and the police, and members of the royal family, unions and research centres tied to the state. Thus, 73 per cent of their careers were in state administration, compared to 15 per cent in the entire power elite (t-value = 16.5). This group has the closest tie to the Copenhagen area; on average, 85 per cent of their careers were spent here (t-value = 2.5). The entire state nobility do not remain servants of the state, though. Many individuals from the state nobility change sector, usually near the end of their career, primarily to business and business associations. One in three within this cluster have performed *pantouflage* – moving from a senior executive position in one sector to a top position in another – compared to an average of 14 per cent (t-value = 3.3).
8. **Lobbyists** (N=27) consist almost exclusively of individuals currently serving in executive roles in business associations with 60 per cent of all business association executives in the power elite found in this cluster (t-value = 9.7). They usually spend a substantial part of their career – 26 per cent compared to an average of 16 per cent (t-value = 3.4) – in lower level managerial positions (career level 4). However, their careers are firmly tied to the power networks around the capital, evidenced by the fact that 95 per cent of their careers are took place in Copenhagen (t-value = 3.2). Ironically, they have little experience from the business sector itself; on average, only ten per cent of their careers were in the corporate sector (t-value = -4.9).
9. **Professional politicians** (N=19) all have a current or former position in parliament with 66 per cent of their careers in national politics (t-value = 18.7). They are the leading Danish politicians, for example former and current prime ministers, the rest of the cabinet and leaders of the major, established opposition parties (all former cabinet members). Members of this

group, however, also extend their careers outside of politics: 42 per cent have performed *pantouflage* (t-value = 2.8) and their careers are the most turbulent of all.

10. **Unionists** (N=40) – with three exceptions, two of which have former careers in unions – are all union leaders or secretaries. Of the 48 current union leaders in the power elite, 37 (77 per cent) are part of this cluster (t-value = 8.6). These careers are the most heterodox ways to gain access to the core of the elite networks. One in three has vocational training as educational background and 15 per cent have no professional education (t-value = 9.6 and 5.8, respectively). Furthermore, 28 per cent of this group have a parental background in the working class compared to nine per cent in the rest of the power elite (t-value = 3.2). On average, almost half of the careers of 'unionists' – 45 per cent – were in non-career-level positions (lower than level 3), compared to 21 per cent in the power elite as a whole (t-value = 8.7). While only moderately turbulent, the sectorial careers of unionists are highly entropic.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

The social background of the members of the ten clusters, seen in Table 2, suggest that certain paths into the power elite are more obvious if you have social background native to that sector. Among the four clusters of primarily private careers, 23 per cent are children of the privately employed upper class. This is only the case for six per cent of the members of the six clusters with predominately public careers. On the other hand, 16 per cent with public careers have a social background in the publicly employed upper class opposed to only ten per cent of those with private careers. However, this relationship between parental sector and personal career almost vanishes when we look at those who are not children of the upper class.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The ten clusters show fairly sector specific pathways to power. Among the private career clusters, these pathways were differentiated by type of industry, corporation size and location, whereas sectorial experience were showed little variation and were overwhelmingly bound to the private sector. Within public pathways, careers were tied to the different functions of the state. In three pathways – the state nobility, lobbyists and professional politicians – changes to the private sector near career end were common. Furthermore, clusters dominated by elected positions – the unionists, professional politicians and education & local politics – showed more career heterogeneity, in particular with regard to sector mobility. However, in total only 43 of the 416 individuals have held senior executive positions in more than one sector, showing that careers were rather compartmentalized.

Stepping-stones to the Power Elite: The Hub of Career Organizations

Despite the patterns of variation in the pathways to power identified above, there are also strikingly unifying organizational characteristics in the careers of the Danish power elite.

TABLE 3 HERE

First, it seems like long-term experiences in a large organisation is close to a necessary condition for entering the core of the Danish elite network. As seen in Table 3, more than half of the members of the power elite have never – in their entire career – set foot in a small or medium-sized organisation with fewer than 500 employees, and more than seven out of ten have spent at least three-quarters of their career in large or very large organisations. Less than five per cent have no prior experience in a large or very large organisation. Another striking feature is how the organisational experience of the Danish power elite is tied to the geographical power centre of Copenhagen. Almost two-thirds of all careers have been stationed exclusively in the Copenhagen area and less than ten per cent entered the power elite with a career entirely outside the Copenhagen area. Experience from abroad is apparently

no admission criterion, as seven out of ten have not worked abroad. Less than 2.5 per cent enter the core of the elite network with a career with more than half of their time spend working away from Denmark.

The members of the power elite also progress very quickly to high-ranked job positions. Half of the members of the power elite held a position with management responsibility by the age of 32 and had ascended to an elite position – level six of career level – before their 44th birthday. It seems clear that the labour market for the power elite is vastly different from that of the general population.

The members of the Danish power elite also exhibit high levels of loyalty towards a few prestigious organisations. On average, we only see 2.6 (median = 2; maximum = 8) job shifts between organisations during the entire career of power elite members. Almost two-thirds have been in one organisation for more than half of their career and 25 per cent for more than four-fifths of their career. On average, elite individuals stay 12.5 years (median = 10.5 years) in an organisation, with 19.8 years (median = 18 years) the average longest stay in each career. The average stay for all individuals in the Danish labour market in an organisation is 4.8 years.

The power elite members are not only loyal to their organizations, they also spend their career in a small subset of high-status organizations. In total, members of the elite moved to a new organisation 1,390 times during their career. These changes took place within only 766 unique organisations. From looking at Figure 3, it is clear that even fewer organisations are important stepping-stones to elite power. Half the population has traversed just 17 organisations. Further, 90% have been employed in 142 organizations. In terms of career years, almost a quarter of all years have been spend in the top 17 organisations, and two-thirds of all career years in the 141 most frequent organisations.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

These prevalent organisations are among the most prestigious and largest Danish organisations within their respective fields. In business, the by far largest Danish corporation A.P. Møller-Mærsk and the two major banks Danske Bank and Nordea all have a tradition of promoting their trainees all the way to the top. The three political parties in the top 17, the Liberal Party [Venstre], the Conservatives and the Social Democrats have been alternating as primary governing party since 1901. Many members of the power elite have also held positions (including PhD positions) at Copenhagen University or Aarhus University. Both are the oldest and most established Danish universities and are frequently the educative alma mater for the elite. Finally, the unique role of the Ministry of Finance and as the key academy for the future leaders of the public sector Danish society is evident.

FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

Not only do elite careers pass through the same organisations, there is also a substantial overlap of organisational experience among elite individuals. As shown in Figure 4, almost all power elite careers are part of the same component in the network of organisations tied together by the organisational overlap of individual careers. Only 26 of the 416 have not worked in an organisation which at some other point in time employed another member of the power elite, and two share organisational experience with only one other power elite member. The remaining 388 are in some way linked to each other – often, of course, through several intermediaries – in the same web of organisational career trajectories. A clustering of the organizations, which recruits the alumni of other organizations, is also observable from Figure 4. On the bottom right, we find unions and the Social Democratic party. To the left, big business is located. At the centre, we find ministries and universities, and moving slightly above to the left, the major financial institutions and the Conservative party are located.

TABLE 4 HERE

What is the relationship between these career hubs and the career clusters? Table 4 combines the most central hubs in the organizational landscape with the ten clusters showing the variation in the pathways of people with experience from a central hub. The central hubs have a substantial part of their elite members within a single cluster and have members of at most seven of ten clusters. The difference between three of largest and most influential corporations Danske Bank and A.P. Møller – Mærsk, having their former employees dispersed across seven and six clusters, and Novo Nordisk, whose former employees are almost only found in the industrial inner circle cluster, shows how some hubs offer a wider array of future pathways. While some of the 17 key hubs are closely tied to particular pathways, such as the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions or Novo Nordisk, most actually span across more than of the ten career clusters, while also spanning the overall public-private divide. . This analysis alone cannot show whether the number of clusters an organization feeds to is an indicator of the transferable symbolic value of the work experience from that organization. Either an organization that does not have a broad profile across the career pathways, is an end station, where their employees do not leave, or is an indicator of the low combined transferable value of employee and organization.

FIGURE 5 HERE

As seen in Figure 5, members of some clusters – the bankers, scientists and lobbyists – largely have careers in the most central organisations, while members of other clusters – in particular corporate ambassadors and the landed gentry – draw their experiences from a more dispersed set of organisations. It thus seems that some forms of organisational experience are part of a more wide ecology of intertwined careers whereas others a primarily prevalent in particular pathways.

Concluding discussion

In this article, we explored *what the differentiating and unifying characteristics of organizational experiences in shaping elite careers are* in the egalitarian Scandinavian welfare state of Denmark by analysing the organisational landscape shaped by the career patterns of 416 individuals in the core of the Danish elite networks, the power elite. Applying sequence analysis to six different aspects of the history of organisational affiliations – position, career rhythm, location, size, sector and subsector – identified ten clusters of career pathways. Of these, 212 careers were tied to the four twigs tied to the private sector branch, whereas 204 took place in the six twigs on the branch associated with the public sector and interest groups. While there is certainly variation in the organisational experiences of power elite members, experiences in the fields of large corporations, state administration, local and national politics, economics and technical sciences, business associations or unions appear to be almost obligatory.

Furthermore, we see a remarkable similarity in how this group is moulded by a particular subset of organisations. The careers leading to a position in the power elite had few organisational shifts and almost exclusively took place in large, Copenhagen-based organisations. Half of the members of the power elite passed through just 17 organisations at some point of their career. All of these organisations were well connected by the shared occupational history of the power elite. Looking at how elites are connected through their shared organizational past, using employment at particular organizations as empirical unit of analysis, offers a promising avenue to explore how elites are shaped by shared occupational trajectories.

In particular, the different ways in which elites accumulate capital across fields potentially offer a way to understand the relations between these fields within the national elite structure. The ten clusters show how different forms of organizational and sectorial capital are accumulated in different settings. In some sequences, mostly those tied to business and science, the accumulated experiences primarily lead to ascend within the same field or organisation. In other clusters – the state nobility, the lobbyists and the professional politicians – capital accumulated in one field open doors to top positions in other fields. The members of these clusters later serve as the voice of business in the power elite ending their careers in the sectors of business and business associations. Furthermore, the professional politicians, together with the local politicians and the unionists, at first glance deviate from the logic of stable, constantly ascending careers in similar organisations. However, entry positions in the organisations typical of these clusters requires accumulating capital outside of one's current occupation and through voluntary work in political parties or local unions advancing in a field in which one is not employed, in which the election processes are sometimes *dei ex machine*, and thus require a huge investment of time outside one's formal career. This explains the fact that their careers appear more abrupt than they would have, had it been possible to include activities in these political fields that were not associated with full-time employment.

Thus, credentials in an organisation remain crucial even for those who apparently stray from the trodden path. Analysing careers through multiple channels of possible capital accumulation of 1) the individual, such as career position and number of career changes, 2) the organizational, such as organizational size and location, 3) and the field as seen by the sector and subsector of the organization, offer a promising way to account for the types of resources underpinning different elite constellations.

Organisational credentials, what we call organization capital, thus appear to play a pivotal role in the moulding of character in the Danish power elite. This challenges recent accounts noting that organizational affiliations are losing importance for elites (cf. Wedel, 2017), at least in the context of egalitarian welfare states. It seems that the capital structure of parents – indicated by their class position – relate to the career trajectory of future elite members, but only if their parents held dominant positions within the sector and are thus able to provide their children with contacts and habitual dispositions to ease their way to the top. This suggests that we need to understand how organisations outside the educational system function as vehicles for the reproduction of elites.

For the Danish power elite, accumulating organisational capital appear as *sine qua non* if one wishes to enter the power elite. A possible mechanism of this social reproduction could be the cultural matching of those with the correct 'class specific habitus' (cf. Hartmann 2000: 254) in recruitment to and promotion within elite firms (Rivera, 2012) and professions (Friedman, Laurison, & Miles, 2015). Furthermore, direct use of parental social or economic capital could help place children of elites in the right organizations as seen by sharp increase in the likelihood for sons to be employed in the same organisations as their fathers for the children of one per cent (Bingley, Corak, & Westergard-Nielsen, 2011). A fraction within the career cluster of the landed gentry appears to be an exception to the need for educational and organizational credentials. Having the right name and being among the wealthiest, most established families seem to make the career within the leading Danish organisations superfluous, providing a short cut to the power elite.

This inquiry into the organisational landscape of the power elite in Denmark calls for an increased focus on the role played by a small subset of organizations in the recruitment and formation of elites. The similarities in career trajectories play an integrative role in the formation of the power elite in Denmark, a function carried out, elsewhere, by elite universities. These similarities could lead to

groupthink and blind trust in these prestigious organizational hubs. When some of these organisations are scandalized, it thus questions the broader legitimacy of elites and the ability of elites to audit and govern the very organisations that moulded them. Identifying these organisational hubs, both in different countries and on the transnational level, and studying the ethos endowed in future elites by these organisations, will be a key task in future studies of elites and power.

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Table 1: Normalized turbulence, entropy and complexity for members of each cluster in the power elite

		Sector			**Subsector**			**Level**			**Size**			**Region**		
	N	T	E	C	T	E	C	T	E	C	T	E	C	T	E	C
Private																
Corporate ambassadors	85	0.08	**0.11**	0.14	0.10	0.18	**0.16**	**0.14**	**0.49**	0.27	0.12	0.36	**0.22**	0.10	0.22	0.19
Industrial inner circle	50	**0.05**	**0.05**	**0.10**	**0.08**	0.12	**0.12**	**0.16**	**0.61**	**0.30**	**0.09**	0.31	0.18	**0.11**	**0.33**	**0.21**
Bankers	48	0.07	0.16	0.13	**0.08**	**0.10**	**0.11**	0.16	**0.59**	0.29	0.11	0.34	0.20	0.08	0.22	0.16
Landed gentry	29	**0.06**	**0.09**	**0.11**	**0.07**	0.11	**0.11**	**0.12**	**0.41**	**0.23**	0.09	0.32	0.19	0.09	**0.33**	0.19
Total private	212	**0.07**	**0.10**	**0.12**	**0.09**	**0.14**	**0.14**	0.15	0.53	0.27	0.10	0.34	0.20	0.09	**0.26**	**0.19**
Public																
Education & local politics	20	**0.10**	**0.29**	0.16	0.09	0.12	0.11	0.14	0.47	**0.22**	0.10	0.32	0.17	0.09	0.27	0.15
Scientists	38	**0.07**	**0.07**	**0.12**	0.09	0.13	0.13	0.16	0.56	0.28	0.09	**0.23**	0.18	0.09	0.17	0.16
State nobility	60	**0.09**	**0.23**	**0.17**	**0.11**	**0.22**	**0.18**	0.15	0.54	0.28	**0.12**	0.39	**0.23**	0.09	0.19	0.17
Lobbyists	27	**0.11**	**0.27**	**0.20**	**0.12**	**0.21**	**0.18**	0.15	0.50	0.27	0.11	0.32	0.22	0.08	**0.08**	0.15
Professional politicians	19	**0.12**	**0.38**	**0.25**	**0.13**	**0.24**	**0.21**	**0.19**	**0.62**	**0.35**	0.12	0.32	0.22	**0.12**	**0.37**	**0.23**
Unionists	40	0.09	**0.33**	0.16	**0.08**	0.13	**0.12**	0.14	0.53	**0.25**	0.11	**0.43**	0.20	**0.07**	0.18	**0.13**
Total public	204	**0.09**	**0.24**	**0.17**	**0.10**	**0.18**	**0.16**	0.15	0.54	0.27	0.11	0.35	0.21	0.09	**0.19**	**0.16**
Total	416	0.08	0.17	0.14	0.09	0.16	0.15	0.15	0.53	0.27	0.11	0.34	0.20	0.09	0.23	0.17

T = Turbulence, E = Internal Entropy, C = Complexity. **Bold** values are significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from total mean

Table 2: Social background* and career cluster

Class (and sector)	Corporate ambassadors	Industrial inner circle	Bankers	Landed gentry	*All private*	Education and local politics	Scientists	State nobility	Lobbyists	Professional politicians	Unionists	*All public*	Total
Upper class[1] (private)	22% (19)	32% (16)	8% (4)	34% (10)	*23% (49)*	0% (0)	13% (5)	8% (5)	7% (2)	0% (0)	3% (1)	*6% (13)*	15% (62)
Upper class[1] (public)	7% (6)	12% (6)	17% (8)	7% (2)	*10% (22)*	20% (4)	16% (6)	23% (14)	15% (4)	16% (3)	3% (1)	*16% (32)*	13% (54)
Upper middle class[2] (private)	19% (16)	12% (6)	10% (5)	0% (0)	*13% (27)*	10% (2)	21% (8)	18% (11)	11% (3)	21% (4)	5% (2)	*15% (30)*	14% (57)
Upper middle class[2] (public)	11% (9)	10% (5)	10% (5)	3% (1)	*9% (20)*	5% (1)	5% (2)	10% (6)	26% (7)	16% (3)	5% (2)	*10% (21)*	10% (41)
Lower middle class[3] (private)	18% (15)	16% (8)	23% (11)	31% (9)	*20% (43)*	30% (6)	29% (11)	15% (9)	19% (5)	21% (4)	20% (8)	*21% (43)*	21% (86)
Lower middle class[3] (public)	4% (3)	4% (2)	6% (3)	0% (0)	*4% (8)*	15% (3)	0% (0)	7% (4)	15% (4)	11% (2)	3% (1)	*7% (14)*	5% (22)
Working class[4]	7% (6)	8% (4)	15% (7)	14% (4)	*10% (21)*	20% (4)	11% (4)	10% (6)	0% (0)	16% (3)	28% (11)	*14% (28)*	12% (49)
Missing	13% (11)	6% (3)	10% (5)	10% (3)	*10% (22)*	0% (0)	5% (2)	8% (5)	7% (2)	0% (0)	35% (14)	*11% (23)*	11% (45)
Total	100% (85)	100% (50)	100% (48)	100% (29)	*100% (212)*	100% (20)	100% (38)	100% (60)	100% (27)	100% (19)	100% (40)	*100% (204)*	100% (416)

* Based on the occupation of the most privileged parent (usually the father) as described in sources such as *Kraks Blå Bog*, Church books and portrait articles. These sources only capture self-reported occupations at one point in time and as such have only limited reliability.

[1]The upper classes correspond roughly to the most privileged % in the Danish class structure such as the CEOs and noble landowners (both private sector) and university professors, senior civil servants, politicians and high-ranking military officers (all public sector).

[2]The upper middle classes correspond roughly to the next 5 to 10% of the Danish class structure such as junior managers, engineers (typically private sector) and other academics, other civil servants and lower-ranking military officers (typically public sector).

[3]The lower middle classes correspond roughly to the next 20 to 30% of the Danish class structure such as small businessmen or self-employed, farmers and white-collar workers (typically private sector) and teachers and other welfare professionals (typically public sector).

[4]The working class corresponds roughly to the last 60 to 75% of the Danish class structure and consists of manual and non-manual workers (both public and private).

Table 3: Career characteristics of the Danish power elite

Proportion of career	Abroad		In the Copenhagen area		In small or medium-sized organisations		In large or very large organisations	
0%	291	70.0%	38	9.1%	214	51.4%	18	4.3%
0–25%	90	21.6%	18	4.3%	91	21.9%	17	4.1%
26–50 %	25	6.0%	40	9.6%	51	12.3%	29	7.0%
51–75 %	4	1.0%	46	11.1%	27	6.5%	49	11.8%
76–100 %	6	1.4%	274	65.9%	33	7.9%	303	72.8%
Total	416	100%	416	100%	416	100%	416	100%

Table 4: Number of elite individuals per cluster by career hub organisation, total number of elite career years in parenthesis

Organisation	Corporate ambassadors	Industrial inner circle	Bankers	Landed gentry	Education and local politics	Scientists	State nobility	Lobbyists	Professional politicians	Unionists	Total
University of Copenhagen	6 (30)	1 (15)	3 (29)			14 (260)	39 (3)			1 (2)	28 (375)
Ministry of Finance*	3 (9)		4 (49)	1 (2)			15 (153)	3 (21)	1 (4)		27 (238)
A.P. Møller – Mærsk	6 (40)	11 (211)	1 (9)	3 (37)			1 (8)	2 (7)			24 (312)
Danske Bank	1 (3)	1 (2)	14 (251)	4 (21)			1 (6)	2 (8)	1 (2)		24 (293)
University of Aarhus	1 (3)		3 (8)		1 (1)	12 (217)	2 (2)			1 (1)	20 (232)
Confederation of Industry	1 (1)					1 (3)	2 (8)	13 (156)	1 (5)		18 (173)
Ministry of Industry and Business*	1 (2)		3 (15)			2 (6)	7 (69)	3 (11)			16 (103)
Nordea Bank	1 (2)		12 (229)					1 (2)		1 (6)	15 (239)
Technical University of Denmark	5 (29)	4 (12)				3 (70)		3 (9)			15 (120)
Venstre - The Liberal Party				1 (21)	4 (64)	1 (4)	1 (16)	2 (10)	5 (132)		14 (247)
The Social Democratic Party	1 (4)		1 (6)		4 (64)		1 (21)		7 (116)		14 (211)
TDC Group	5 (33)	4 (33)					1 (13)	2 (5)			12 (84)
The Danish Royal Court							10 (216)				10 (216)
Novo Nordisk	1 (1)	9 (167)									10 (168)
Confederation of Trade Unions							1 (3)		2 (16)	7 (113)	10 (132)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs*	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (3)	1 (2)			5 (68)	1 (1)			10 (76)
The Conservative Party	1 (7)	1 (12)		1 (11)			1 (28)	2 (9)	2 (43)	1 (14)	9 (124)
Sub-total	27 (165)	24 (453)	30 (599)	10 (94)	8 (129)	29 (560)	37 (650)	18 (239)	15 (318)	11 (136)	209 (3,343)
Total	85 (2,620)	50 (1,789)	48 (1,857)	29 (1,110)	20 (672)	38 (1,263)	60 (2,079)	27 (794)	19 (580)	40 (1,581)	416 (14,345)

* Looking at the career in this way ministers are coded to be 'employed' in their party, not the specific ministry. To get the actual number of people that went through the Ministry of Finance we need to include the 5 in the total (removing 1, 1, 3 from Det Konservative Folkeparti, Socialdemokratiet, Venstre repectively). For the Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs we must include 3, and for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the number is