Essays on Elite Networks in Sweden

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‘An alliance with the powerful
is never to be relied upon’

Phaedrus, Roman fabulist
(c. 15 BC – c. AD 50)
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List of Studies

1. Farkas, M. G., Edling, R. C., and Rydgren, J. (2012) “Integration of the Swedish Local Elite – The Role of Professional and Friendship Networks” (Submitted manuscript)

2. Edling, R. C., Farkas, M. G., and Rydgren, J. (2012) “Women in Power: Sex Differences in Swedish Local Elite Networks” (Submitted manuscript)


Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to present work on a number of salient characteristics of elite relations in Sweden, studied from a social network analytic perspective. Elite integration, the distribution of elite power, and the significance of elites’ informal relations represent the three main themes explored in the original studies that comprise the dissertation. A non-comprehensive selection of the most central and concrete research questions posed includes the following:

Are local elites in Sweden well integrated into one cohesive social unit, or are they fragmented into several disjoint elite factions?

Are women not only underrepresented in elite positions, but are they also structurally disadvantaged due to their sex?

Do the elites’ active involvement in semi-exclusive social clubs contribute to the formation of within-elite friendship ties, and to what extent do such informal relations contribute to the overall integration of local elite structures?

And finally, can parliamentary social integration form part of the explanation of why some Swedish political opposition parties have fared better than others in the national political arena?

The dissertation’s general interest in elites must, however, not only be seen in reference to the study’s specificities, but also be understood in light of the general interest encapsulated by the immense power these small minorities enjoy over questions of broad societal relevance. According to one particularly pertinent characterization, society’s elites are “…persons with the organized capacity to make real political trouble without being promptly repressed” (Higley, 2010). If just for a moment we disregard the somewhat limited operational value of such a definition, we can still find that it firmly draws our attention to what ought to be regarded as the elites’ ultimate privilege in contemporary societies: their disproportional influence over political processes of broad common interest. Ultimately, this means that the actions of fairly small political, economic, and bureaucratic elite minorities regularly influence decisions with potentially far-reaching significance for the majority’s lives, and for the further development of their societies.

The elites’ disproportionate influence over matters of collective interest ought to be enough incentive to spur substantial academic interest, and that
has also been the case historically. It has most notably been so during phases of rapid and thorough historical change, since widespread social turmoil tends to generate openings for both peaceful renegotiation and violence

transformation of elite relations. For instance, it is most probably not a coincidence that the classic Italian elite theoretical period (Pareto, 1968 [1991]; Mosca, 1939; and Michels, 1911 [1968]) mainly took place during the turbulent times following the unification of Italy and the birth of *Regno d’Italia* in 1861, or that empirical elite research experienced a remarkable swing in transitional countries after the fall of state communism (e.g. Higley and Lengyel, 2000; Higley and Pakulski, 1992; Konrád and Szélényi, 1991; Szélényi and Szélényi, 1995; Higley, Kullberg, and Pakulski, 1996).

Lately, however, academic interest in elites has declined in the social sciences (Savage and Williams, 2008), perhaps most notably so in stable democracies where elite relations are seemingly well established and more or less institutionalized. In the work presented here I do, however, firmly bring into the foreground some of the complexities of elite relations in contemporary Sweden, a stable democracy by any standard. Furthermore, it is a country where elite relations have long been stabilized by a characteristically polarized separation of economic and political power (Glete, 1991; Thernborn, 1989), and the corporatist arrangements that has been put in place partially to mitigate the conflict potential inherent in such a divided and strongly polarized elite structure (Rothstein, 1992).

Broad societal and political changes have, however, transpired in Sweden over the past several decades, and some of them have been of a magnitude that brings the basic premises of elite relations into question. Most notably we may bring up the general weakening of corporatism (e.g., Lewin, 1994; Lindvall and Sebring, 2005; Rydgren, 2004), the substantial influx of women into all levels of politics and public administration (e.g., Freidenvall, 2006; Wängnerud, 2000; Statistics Sweden, 2010), a prominent decline in the long-standing political dominance of the Social Democratic party (e.g., Mahon, 2009; Clement, 2009), and a general shift away from public solutions and toward market-oriented welfare functions (e.g., Bergmark, 2008; Bunar, 2010; Dahlgren, 2008). These changes may on the surface seem subtler than political turmoil or social upheaval in less stable democracies, but in reality they have left characteristic facets of Swedish society transformed or currently under profound change. The form and magnitude of these changes are such that they may affect fundamental pillars of Swedish public life. Consequently, they may also have very concrete consequences and implications for the country’s elites; potentially having an impact on the basic structure of elite relations, over time influencing the elites’ social composition, altering long-standing and well-established elite configurations, and ultimately
changing the very conditions under which different segments of Swedish elites operate.

Given these deep-reaching social and political changes, the aim of the work presented here is to study a number of particularly important aspects of elite structures. As already mentioned, the analytical focus of the dissertation is on questions of intra-elite relations and three main aspects of such relations are concretely explored: (i) elite integration; (ii) the distribution of elite power; and (iii) the significance of informal personal relations among elites. To some extent, each of these themes or dimensions of elite relations is touched upon in all four of the original studies that constitute the dissertation, but each theme is also dealt with more specifically and extensively in one or two of the studies.

In addition, the dissertation is also motivated by a lack of detailed knowledge about elites’ social networks in the Scandinavian countries. Social network analysis, that is, the formalized study of actors’ systems of personal relations (Marin and Wellman, 2010), has over the past decades developed into a distinct paradigm of relational theories and structural methods (Ibid.). As such, it has had a sizeable impact upon the social sciences in general, and development within the sociological subfield of social network analysis has surged (Borgatti and Foster, 2003; Borgatti et al., 2009). Our understanding of the characteristics and functioning of elite social structures at both the national (e.g. Moore, 1979) and sub-national (e.g. Laumann et al., 1977) levels of decision-making, among other areas, have been profoundly and positively affected by social network analytic perspectives. Despite this, very few Scandinavian, let alone Swedish, attempts have been made to put social network analytic concepts and methodological tools to work in the study of elites. When Swedish elites’ personal relations have been studied in terms of networks, this has mostly been done in the concept’s metaphorical sense (Wellman, 1988). This is unfortunate, given that the structural underpinnings of the social network analytic framework can shed light on core questions concerning the significance of elite actors’ interconnectedness, how their personal connections aggregate into macro-level elite structures, and what implications these interpersonal relations have for such actors’ ability to exercise power and influence. In order to make a concrete contribution in this regard, the work included in the present dissertation is firmly grounded in a structural understanding of social networks and social network analytic methods.

In analytical terms, elite integration refers to the fundamental question of whether the elite in a particular social setting is united into one cohesive social unit or fragmented into several loosely connected elite factions (Higley et al., 1991). Different institutional arrangements tend to generate
very different levels and forms of elite integration (Ibid.), and elite integration, in turn, has concrete implications for the functioning of political system (Ibid.). In the Swedish case, the common understanding is that the country’s elites are integrated into two internally cohesive but largely separate elite constellations that represent economic and political power, respectively (Hasselberg and Petersson, 2006). This aspect of elite relations in Sweden has mainly been studied at the national level of decision-making and from characteristically non-relational points of view, that is, outside of the network analytic paradigm. Elite integration as a concept is in the present dissertation dealt with at length in two of the original studies, albeit from very different perspectives and separate levels of political decision-making. Local elite integration is at the heart of Study 1, which is one of three original studies that empirically investigate aspects of local community elite structures. These studies draw upon original social network data collected by personal interviews with a positional sample (n=248) of local elites active in four municipalities located in the Swedish region of Västra Götaland.

The general aim of Study 1 is to investigate how well-integrated Swedish local elites are, both overall and within functionally separate elite spheres. Two of the study’s main research questions are (i) whether or not the dual elite structure of the Swedish national elite is also evident at the local level of political administration, and (ii) if between-municipal differences in elite integration can be explained by political and economic institutional factors. We find that the local elites in Sweden are well integrated, and can structurally best be described as a core-periphery structure.

Especially when dealt with in the social network analytic framework, elite integration is, however, conceptually closely associated with the broader and more general question of social integration. Thus, it is also a vitally important organizational aspect of elite relations: Internally well-integrated elites will most likely benefit from an organizational advantage over their disunited counterparts. This particular dimension of elite integration is investigated in Study 4, where focus is shifted away from local community elites and directed to a particular section of the Swedish national political elite; namely parliamentarians in the national legislative assembly, the Riksdag. More precisely, the aim of the study is to investigate empirically, and to compare aspects of social integration within two distinctly different oppositional multiparty coalitions that have played important roles in Swedish national politics over the past decade. Social integration within these coalitions is investigated strictly at the parliamentary level. The main research question is to what extent variation in social cohesion between such temporal political entities can be related to their relative success? What I find is that the center-right opposition coalition formed in the run-up to the 2006 general elections where it defeated the sitting Social Democratic government, was far better
integrated socially than was the left-green coalition, which unsuccessfully ran for power four years later. The study’s main contribution is twofold. First, it firmly draws attention to the potentially significant role that social integration plays in the organizational ability of political elites, and consequently for their overall political achievements as well. Second, the study represents a novel attempt to introduce social network analytic techniques derived from the subfield of legislative networks to a wholly new set of substantive political issues of parliamentary organization.

Who has power over whom and who does not? are obviously not only questions of pivotal importance in political analysis, but also perhaps the most compelling elite theoretical issues in layman terms. The question of how power and influence is distributed among actors within different functional segments of the elite, or between different elite groups is of such a nature and magnitude that it is more or less implicitly integrated into all theoretical questions regarding elites. In analytical terms within the network analytic paradigm, the question of power refers to the relative structural position of actors. In the present dissertation, this aspect of elite relations is particularly brought into focus and most explicitly dealt with in Study 2. The study takes as its point of departure the fact that while the influx of Swedish women into elite positions has been impressive (e.g. Bohman et al., 2011; Göransson, 2006; Wide, 2006); women are still strongly underrepresented in most elite groups (Ibid.). Furthermore, it has also been claimed that the women who actually make it into elite positions are effectively marginalized into socially peripheral positions and not granted access to closed, predominantly male, circles of true executive power. This last point is not very well understood, probably due to the intangible nature of the claim, but is nevertheless empirically investigated in Study 2. More precisely we compare male and female local elites’ structural positions, the main research question being whether women elites, as a group, are less structurally prominent than their male counterparts. Our results, however, find no evidence that, apart from their obvious underrepresentation, female elites are structurally disadvantaged due to their sex. Since these results shed concrete light on a theoretically vital and empirically elusive aspect of contemporary elite and gender relations, they must be regarded as one of the dissertation’s key findings and major contributions.

The third and final theme of the dissertation concerns the role of elites’ informal personal relations as opposed to their formal contacts. The idea that elites are tightly interconnected through friendship, kinship, and marital ties is a widespread and popular notion. It is also an issue which, on the one hand, has been dealt with at least since it was raised in the classic work of Hunter (e.g., 1953) and Dahl (e.g., 1958, 1961) on community elite social structures. Despite this early attention, it represents an aspect of elite rela-
tions that is still not well understood. I would argue that this deficiency is, at least partially, due to the fact that the specific mechanisms whereby elites’ informal and formal relations interplay have not been very well studied. To some extent, the question of elites’ informal personal relations is dealt with in each of the studies concerning local elite social structures. In Study 1, we examine the way in which informal relations contribute to the overall integration of local elites, and one of the main objectives of Study 2 is to observe whether formally powerful female elites are informally marginalized into structurally less prominent social positions. Study 3 examines the informal dimension of elite relations more specifically. The main goal of Study 3 is to investigate the extent to which the informal social ties the elites create and/or maintain through their membership activities in relatively exclusive voluntary associations like service clubs enhance their social connectedness within relevant networks of other community decision-makers. Concretely, I examine how the personal networks of community elites that belong to the Rotary Club differ from those who are not involved in such clubs. This difference is analyzed in terms of the social capital generating mechanisms embedded in their personal networks, and the main finding is that the community elite networks of Rotarians tend to possess both significantly more brokerage potential and closuring capacity. This finding suggests that a structural balancing of personal networks along the brokerage-closure continuum may potentially be the most beneficial affect of community elites’ involvement in Rotary clubs. The study’s main contribution is that it represents a novel effort to advance the study of elites’ informal personal relations by examining the relative merit of specific social-capital producing mechanisms, instead of just dealing with the salience of the elites’ informal social ties in terms less specific.

The remainder of this introductory chapter is structured in the following way. The following section, *Elites and Elite Theory*, broadly outlines the historical development of elite theory within the social sciences and elaborates on selected key aspects of this particular perspective. In the two subsequent sections, *Scandinavian Elites* and *Swedish Elite Structures*, I first highlight central similarities and differences between the national elites in Scandinavia, and then review the findings of previous research on Swedish elite social structures. The particularities of the social network analytic paradigm and the reasons for applying this particular perspective to the study of elite social structures are presented in the section titled *Elite Social Networks—The structural perspective*. This section is followed by a detailed presentation of the empirical work that has gone into the four original studies included in the dissertation under the heading of *Empirical work*, and the introductory chapter is rounded off with a section of concluding remarks.
Elites and Elite Theory

In rather general terms, society’s elites can be defined as small groups of actors who control a disproportionate amount of valuable resources and political power. According to a more elaborate definition, political elites are:

“...[persons] who, by virtue of their strategic locations in large or otherwise pivotal organizations and movements, are able to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially. Put differently, elites are persons with the capacity to make real political trouble without being promptly repressed. They consist not only of prestigious and ‘established’ leaders—top politicians, important businessmen, high-level civil servants, senior military officers—but also, in varying degrees in different societies, relatively transitory and less individually known leaders of mass organizations such as trade unions, important voluntary associations, and politically consequential mass movements.” (Higley, 2010).

It is, however, important to point out that this is essentially a political definition of elites, limited to actors who control economic, political, and social power (Higley, 2010; Putnam, 1976). Consequently, it does not consider all those in a society who enjoy high occupational, educational, or cultural statuses to be elites in a political sense (Higley, 2010). Given that the particular focus of the present dissertation is primarily directed toward actors who represent different dimension of political, administrative, and economic power, it is an adequate definition.

Theoretical interest in elites actually goes quite far back, but the work of Vittorio Pareto (1848-1923), Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), and Robert Michels (1876-1936) represent what has become regarded the classics of elite theory (e.g., Higley, 2010). Their efforts were the first to address systematically the role of elites in modern societies, and their work is today collectively referred to as the “Italian school” of elite theory (Ibid.).

As for their understanding of social elites, all three claimed that the cleavage between elites and non-elites represents the most fundamental social and political division in modern societies. Consequently, they regarded this cleavage not merely as a question of hierarchical stratification separating elites from non-elites, but also as a source of social momentum, capable of driving social conflict and profound social change (Higley, 2010).
Pareto was probably most influential thinker of the three. He was originally trained in engineering but had an academic career as an economist, and the role of elites in his scholarship can best be seen as a part of his principal aim to describe an equilibrium model of society. Today he is probably best remembered for his idea of socially optimal resource allocation, known as Pareto efficiency. Joseph E. Stiglitz has, for instance, written extensively on Pareto efficient taxation (e.g., Stiglitz, 1981). As far as elites are concerned, one of Pareto’s original ideas was the meritocratic notion that in societies with unrestricted social mobility the most talented and deserving individuals ought to make up the elite (1916 [1935]). In actual societies, however, the elites are those who are most able to use the two modes of political rule, force and persuasion, and who additionally enjoy important advantages like inherited wealth and family connections (Ibid.).

The general idea that elites are elites because of their superior qualities and capabilities is one that all three scholars shared. In this regard all three of them emphasized the significance of elites’ personality traits and psychological predispositions. For Mosca, however, the elites superiority over non-elites was also moral, and to some extent found in their ability to out-organize the disunited masses. He claimed that what he called the “political classes,” that is, the political elites, are not only superior as far as material resources or intellectual ability were concerned, but also morally superior over those they govern (1939).

Michels elaborated extensively on the organizational platforms of the elites, or “oligarchies” as he called them. He argued that large organizations like trade unions and political parties needed leaders and experts in order to function efficiently. But as these individuals gain control over material resources, flows of information, and the like, power becomes concentrated in their hands (1911 [1968]). This meant that organizations themselves are inherently elitist—a fact he argued had far-reaching consequences for the potential for political organization in democracies. In his most influential book, Political Parties, Michels argued that internally democratic political parties were impossible to achieve because the “iron law of oligarchy” doomed them to domination by their leading cadres and party bureaucracies (1911 [1968]).

Encapsulated in these classics’ appreciation of society’s elites lay a deep skepticism of the emancipatory promises given by proponents of liberal democracy, not to mention the outlook of class warfare and the establishment of a ”dictatorship of the proletariat” anticipated by Marxists. Since they all subscribed to the basic idea that the existence of elites is an inescapable fact of social life, and that the elites are moreover fairly autonomous, an elite-dominated democracy was the best we could hope for. That said, there was a close affinity between some of their classic ideas and the intellectual founda-
tions of the European fascist movements that arose in the early 1900s. Perhaps unsurprisingly given this affinity, both Michels and Pareto were more or less closely associated with the Italian Fascist party, while Mosca chose to distance himself from public political life during Mussolini’s rule. This skepticism of democracy foreshadowed a more profound and long-standing tension that still exists between proponents of contemporary elite theory and the advocates of democratic theory.

During the post-war years European interest in elites faded, but it quickly found fertile ground in social sciences in the United States as these theories were brought across the Atlantic by American social scientists. Through this transition in the 1940s and 1950s, several aspects of elite theory were profoundly transformed. Perhaps most interestingly, it gradually changed political orientation away from a strongly right-wing stance embraced by its initiators, becoming much more left-wing. The most sophisticated elaboration of critical elite theory from the political left came initially from C. Wright Mills. Mills famously argued that political decisions with the most far-reaching consequences in the United States were predominantly made by a surprisingly small and largely unelected core of exceptionally influential actors: a “power elite,” as he put it (Mills, 1947). The power elite was, according to Mills, composed of representatives of three principal spheres of dominance: large corporations; the military; and the president along with political executives of key federal departments (Ibid.). Mills’s proposition came to be known as the “power elite model”. It represents a fundamentally different understanding of the elementary distinction between those who rule in a society and those who don’t than is present in the “ruling class model” found in Marxist accounts of society’s most fundamental stratification. The main difference is that the notion of a ruling class encompasses a broad segment of society and includes a large number of individuals who in effect lack direct power and influence over political decision-making. According to Mills, the power elite is a considerably smaller and more tightly knit, in class terms perhaps even elusive, core of executive decision-makers in key positions (Ibid.).

Even though Mills’s work specifically considered the national elite of the United States, another fundamental shift saw the empirical focus of elite research and theory redirected from national to local community power structures. This turned out to be an immensely fruitful change of direction, which contributed to some of the most important writings in the field during the 1950s and 60s. This reorientation also effectively initiated a theoretical and methodological debate that came to dominate elite research for decades to come. Hunter, in his study of Atlanta’s community elites (Hunter, 1953), found an extremely well integrated and closed circle of male elites who were
response for most important decisions made in the community. Hunter’s findings were very much in line with Mills’s elitist stance. The implications, as well as the methodological underpinnings of Hunter’s findings were immediately questioned, most forcefully by political scientist Robert Dahl. Dahl’s study of community decision makers in New Haven (Dahl, 1961) produced an entirely different picture of community elites in the United States than did the one that Hunter proposed. According to Dahl, whose viewpoint became known as the pluralist position, decisions in a community were made by a wide array of actors who were, however, only selectively involved in a few different political issues. The debate between elitists and pluralists continued for decades despite Bachrach and Baratz’s (1962) very convincing argument that the two positions are inherently irreconcilable since they refer to elites that exercise intrinsically different forms of power.

Regardless of how elites are defined, their origin constitutes a pressing and contested issue. From an elite theoretical point of view and according to John Higley, “Elites derive from a fundamental and universal fact of social life, namely, the absence in any large collectivity of a robust common interest” (2008). The reason for this general lack of common interests lay, at least partially, in the continuous rivalry among actors and groups of actors over status, rank, and position, as well as over valued goods and other material resources. Such a persistent state of social contention not only divides society along concrete cleavages of interests, it also induces the need for authoritative decision-making, embodied by the existence of elites (Ibid.). Elites are, furthermore, brought on by the need of complex collectivities for at least reasonably efficient and well-considered decision-making. This is an aspect of complex societies that more or less by necessity pushes the everyday task of concrete executive decision-making into the hands of a selected few (Ibid.). These aspects of large complex collectivities will necessarily create strategically located, privileged minorities with disproportionate societal power and influence (Ibid.).

While the development of elites may unavoidably result from societal rivalry in all large and complex collectivities, the specific elite configurations vary deeply according to political and social conditions. According to one well-established and influential perspective, the presence or absence of stable political institutions represents one of the key differences between political systems that can be directly related to distinct elite configurations (Higley, 2010). The basic distinction in this regard separates disunited elites from united ones (Ibid.). This is a distinction that ties directly into the broader theoretical question of elite integration, or to what extent the elite is united into one coherent social entity or fragmented into separate factions. This is
arguably one of the most persistent issues in political analysis (Higley et al., 1991).

Disunited elites are found mainly in societies in which stable political institutions do not exist. What we find instead is that, “Typically, there is a distinct elite group that effectively commands organized coercive forces and is prepared to act arbitrarily no matter what existing institutions prescribe” (Higley, 2010). Regardless of such elite partisan inclinations, it regards power as personalized and relies directly upon the support of coercive forces (Ibid.). Removing them from power demands that their opponents gain control of those same forces, at least temporary.

United elites, on the other hand, exist in nations characterized by stabilized political institutions. According to elite theory, stable political institutions have only been achieved when a united elite has formed and actively stabilized political institutions (Ibid.). In this discussion it is important to remember that the combination of disunited elites and unstable political institutions has represented the rule, while nations with stable political institutions have been the exceptions. United elites, furthermore, come in two distinct forms, and consequently two fundamentally different forms of institutional political stability exist. Elites may be ideologically united, like the political elite of the former Soviet Union or the theocratic elite of Iran since the fall of the Shah. Such elites are predominantly brought into power by revolutionary circumstances that enable them to suppress previous elites, and to impose their own forms of institutional stability. Consensually united elites, on the other hand, first and foremost originate in elite settlements brought about by far-reaching changes in relevant attitudes and other conditions of key elite groups (Burton and Higley, 1987; Higley and Burton, 2006). Such elites are far from ideologically coherent, but they are still united around the basic preconditions of the political system (Ibid.). Different elite configurations have very different implications for the functioning of political systems. Institutions established and operated by an ideologically united elite will, for instance, be stable for a longer period of time, and the networks of decision-making that are established by such an elite tend to be highly centralized around one particularly hierarchical organization (Higley, 2010). Consensually united elites will, on the other hand, establish institutions and networks that are not allowed to be dominated by one single elite faction, and they may even contain publicly open conflicts between opposing segments of the elites.
Although this dissertation focuses specifically on the social structures of Swedish elites, we have good reason to take the Scandinavian elites as one of our primary points of reference. The obvious reason for this is the strong historical bond between the Scandinavian countries.\(^1\) Not only are there numerous deep cultural, social, and linguistic affinities between them, but during the better part of the second millennium they have also been tightly integrated politically. Denmark, Norway, and Sweden were, for instance, unified into a common political entity by the Kalmar Union formed in 1397 (Götz, 2003). This alliance was initially replaced by a personal monarchical union, which united Denmark and Norway between 1536 and 1814, and was subsequently followed by a similar construction uniting Sweden and Norway from 1814 to 1904. As for what is today Finland, politically it constituted an integral part of the Swedish empire from the 13th century until it was conquered by Russia and became an autonomous grand duchy within the Russian empire in 1809 (Kirby, 2006). As far as more recent Scandinavian political histories are concerned, they share a number of important similarities. Most noteworthy among these are the 20th-century influence of Social Democratic parties, similarly constructed state welfare schemes, far-reaching gender equality, and the historical importance of corporatist arrangements (Arter, 1999). Suffice to say, modern-day similarities between the political cultures of Scandinavian countries and elite structures have roots reaching far back into history.

Proper comparative studies of present-day Scandinavian elites have, unfortunately, not been conducted. But starting with a Norwegian study of national power structures conducted in the 1970s (NOU 1982:3), large-scale, government-commissioned studies of power holders have since been carried out separately in each Scandinavian country. The pioneering Norwegian study was followed by several similar ones conducted in Sweden (SOU 1990:44; Göransson, 2006), in Finland (Ruostetsaari, 1993; 2003; 2006), in Denmark (Munk Christiansen et al., 2001), and a repeated round of elite power surveys in Norway (Gulbrandsen et al., 2002). In a general sense, the

\(^{1}\) Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are, strictly speaking, the “Scandinavian countries,” while the “Nordic countries” also include Iceland, Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, and the Åland Islands. For simplicity, I will here define the Scandinavian countries to include Finland.
main aim of these studies have been the mapping of the social composition, origins, and relative power of different segments within each country’s national elite constellations.

These studies have obviously not been conducted in a coordinated manner and are, due to their significant methodological differences, not readily comparable. Nevertheless, they do share enough theoretical common ground to serve at least as starting points for a tentative discussion of similarities and differences between the Scandinavian countries’ national elites. Theoretically grounded in a fairly conventional appreciation of elites’ roles and positions in modern societies, Ilkka Ruostetsaari (2007) has attempted to do just that. On the empirical basis of the above-mentioned national power studies, he has compared the national elites in Scandinavia from three perspectives: (i) their level of openness; (ii) their degree of integration or cohesion; and (iii) how socially close to or detached from the general public they are in each country.

Ruostetsaari conceptualizes the openness of national elites mainly in terms of elite recruitment. He compares the patterns of elite recruitment in the Scandinavian countries in terms of gender, educational background, and class-origin. With regard to gender, the Scandinavian countries are well known for their high level of gender equality, and in a broad international comparison, this pattern has been found in the countries’ national elites as well (Ruostetsaari, 2007). On the whole, however, women are still strongly underrepresented in elite positions, and some substantial differences between Scandinavian countries and segments of the elites have been identified. In Sweden, for instance, women held 26% of elite positions in the early 2000s (Göransson, 2006), while that figure was only 12% in Denmark (Munk Christiansen, 2001). A high proportion of these female elites were, furthermore, found within the realm of politics, an elite sphere to which Scandinavian women have been particularly successful in gaining access. Simultaneously, women’s share of economic elite positions was only about 5% in Sweden at the time of the last survey (Göransson, 2006), and even lower in the remaining Scandinavian countries (Gulbrandsen et al., 2002; Munk Christiansen, 2001; Ruostetsaari, 2003).

As far as the elites’ educational and social backgrounds are concerned, a somewhat mixed picture was found overall. The national elites in the Scandinavian countries are very highly educated and dominated by a strong overrepresentation of persons of upper- and middle-class origin (Ruostetsaari, 2007). Furthermore, there is strong evidence of the intergenerational reproduction of elite positions, that is, elites tend to be recruited from families in which at least one parent held an equivalent elite position. This is an especially significant phenomenon in Scandinavia, especially in Denmark.
and Norway, where about one-fifth of the national elites came from such families (Munk Christiansen, 2001; Gulbrandsen et al., 2002). Interestingly, this direct form of elite reproduction is much less pronounced in Sweden and in Finland, even though the elites in these countries can also be characterized by their strong upper-class dominance. Overall, these results in themselves would obviously point in the direction of socially closed and restricted national elites. This impression is, however, counteracted by the fact that substantial numbers of individuals from working-class backgrounds can concurrently be found in all segments of these countries’ national elites (Ibid., Ruostetsaari, 2003, 2007; Göransson, 2006). There are noteworthy differences between elite spheres in this regard as well. In all Scandinavian countries, the strongest upper-class dominance is found among the cultural, and corporate elites. These are clearly elite sectors with high barriers of entrance to individuals of lower social origin. In other words, the political and organizational elites represent important routes to elite power for Scandinavians of non-privileged social backgrounds, since these sectors are distinguished by relatively high number of individuals of lower-class origin (Ibid.).

The question of the elites’ cohesion is examined in terms of their opportunities for interaction and attitudinal unity (Ruostetsaari, 2007). This is an aspect of Scandinavian elite relations that can hardly be discussed without reference to the corporatist system of political decision-making that has been a hallmark of 20th-century political culture in these countries (Lewin, 1992; Rothstein, 1992). Corporatism as such can be understood as the institutionalized participation of large interest organizations in the formation and implementation of public policy (e.g., Lehmbruch, 1977), and it represents a high level of economic integration as opposed to economic pluralism (Siaroff, 1999). The Scandinavian countries have even been associated with their particular form of corporatism, often referred to as a Social Democratic version of the system. It is prevalent in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Austria (Hicks, 1988). Such arrangements will naturally have far-reaching consequences for how different elite factions relate to each other, and potentially affect their level of integration.

The general importance of corporatist arrangements in Scandinavia has, however, been on the decline lately (Lindvall and Sebring, 2005), and the cohesion of national-level elites has weakened simultaneously (Ruostetsaari, 2007). It has been suggested that these processes are interrelated (Ibid.) even though the relation between corporatism and elite integration is not necessarily linear. Neither have these developments evolved uniformly across the countries in question. In Denmark, where corporatism began to predominate in the 1960s, power studies report that the Danish elites have increasingly grown apart over the final decades of the 20th century. This has led to increasing fragmentation of the country’s national elite structure, a decrease in
consensual decision-making, and very little overlap and circulation between the business, the political, and the administrative elites (Togeby et al., 2003). Both fragmentation and integration are evident in the Norwegian case (Gulbrandsen et al., 2002). The long-standing corporatist arrangements which in a sense united Norway’s power holders into a single cohesive elite have, on the one hand, waned and been replaced by professional lobbying (Ibid.). But on the other hand, strong evidence of high levels of career circulation among elite sectors and a strong attitudinal unity within core segments of the country’s elite indicate that the Norwegian national elite is not as fragmented as its Danish counterpart (Ruostetsaari, 2007).

As far as Sweden is concerned, and as I have already mentioned, the general understanding is that the country’s national elite structure consists of two, largely non-overlapping and mutually exclusive elite constellations, the political elite and the corporate-economic elite (e.g., Göransson, 2006; SOU 1990:44; Drugge, 1990). This dimension of elite relations in Sweden will be dealt with at some length in the following section.

In the Finnish case, one clearly united and strongly integrated national elite has been identified (Ruostetsaari, 2003; 2007). In this sense the country differs remarkably from the three other nations under study. Even though there have been signs of slackening elite relations within Finland’s national elite, not even the desperately deep economic crisis of the 1990s, which thoroughly shook the social foundations of Finnish society, managed to substantially alter the coherence of its elite core (Ibid.). One of the main reasons for this can be sought in Finland’s consensual political culture manifested, among other things, by a string of majority governments, often left-right grand coalitions, since at least the 1980s (Ibid.). But the Finnish labor movement and the corporate world are also integrated into the same general elite network, giving further weight to the existence of one, fairly united Finnish power elite.

As a final step toward characterizing and comparing the Scandinavian national elites, we focus on the elite-non-elite interface, or in other words, the social distance between the elites and ordinary people. This is a very ambiguous concept. It has been conceptualized and measured in a variety of ways in the power studies that Ruostetsaari draws upon, which means that the conclusions should be treated as tentative at best. Nevertheless, the overall impression is that elite-non-elite relations have changed radically in the sense that the distance between Scandinavian national elites and the general public has grown recently (Ruostetsaari, 2007). This conclusion is mainly drawn from two streams of indicators. First, the diminished active involvement of ordinary voters in party politics has led to the erosion of an important organized interface between voters and the political elite. Second, a widening attitudinal gap about core political issues has been observed. In
this regard, the overall distance between elites and non-elites seems to be largest in Finland and smallest in Denmark, while Norway and Sweden are found between these extremes (Ibid.).

Overall, Ruostetsaari (2007) concludes that the national elites in the Scandinavian countries should be regarded as fairly open, in a social sense, mainly due to the relatively high proportion of women in elite positions, and the fact that actors from working-class backgrounds can actually be found in all segments of the elites; this despite the evident domination of individuals from an upper-middle-class background. As far as the elites’ internal cohesion and distance to the general public are concerned, he finds the Finnish national elite to be the most strongly integrated—and detached from the general public—while its Danish counterpart is at the opposite end of these spectrums: highly fragmented, but in better attitudinal harmony with broad segments of the general public. Again, despite their differences Sweden and Norway are between these extremes.

These conclusions are, however, must be viewed as tentative because of the aforementioned limitations: the underlying power studies were not coordinated. A further limitation is that they do not contain a clear structural perspective, that is, an attempt to systematically analyze the interconnectedness of the national elites in a social network analytic sense. A clear structural view could potentially shed substantial light upon both the national elites’ level of internal cohesion and the question of elite-non-elite social distances. Moreover, given the strict focus of these studies on national elites, they lack a sub-national perspective. This is certainly a limitation, especially in countries like Sweden, where the local level of political self-governance and decision-making is a deeply rooted right, and is therefore an immensely important arena in different elite constellations exert power and bargain over vital issues. In the following section I will, on the basis of previous research, elaborate more specifically on the structural features of Swedish elite relations.
Elite relations in Sweden are, as we have already seen, fundamentally characterized by the existence of a polarized elite structure composed of political and the economic elites. The reasons for this are to be found in the particular ways in which the processes of industrialization and democratization evolved in Sweden (Hasselberg and Petersson, 2006). These processes and the fact that the country’s modern economic base is dominated by a few large industrial conglomerates has come to define Swedish elite relations over the past century (Ibid.).

Combined economic and political power in pre-industrial Sweden had been in the hands of a single social class, the nobility. The industrial bourgeoisie, which developed during the 18th and 19th centuries, cogently challenged the power of the nobility but effectively refrained from claiming direct political power itself (Ibid.). This set Sweden clearly apart from many other Western European countries, where the new economic elites that arose as a result of the industrial revolution, often forged strong alliances with the old elite and thus ended up controlling both economic and political power (Ibid.). Instead, two distinctly separate elites evolved in early 20th-century Sweden: a welfare state elite in political power (Therborn, 1989) and an industrial elite in economical power (Glete, 1991). Both these elites coordinated internally through personal and formal organizational networks (Hasselberg and Petersson, 2006). The political elite was mainly composed of the leadership cadres of the political parties, strongly interlinked with representatives of powerful popular movements like the trade unions and the agrarian movement. A similar development within the economic elite later saw the establishment of large industrial confederations (Ibid.). Most notable among these were the Swedish Employers Association (SAF), formed in 1902, and the Swedish Industrial Association (Svenska Industriförbundet), established in 1910. Effectively, these organizations represented the interests of large industrial conglomerates and financial dynasties. But in practice they came to coordinate and integrate the interests of the Swedish economic elite in general and pursued the wider economic elites’ political interests as well (Ibid.).

Essentially, this development meant that economic and political power in Sweden was clearly decoupled and a dual elite structure was established, a
circumstance that has dominated Swedish political life for the better part of the past century. Historically, a hallmark of this polarized elite structure has been the somewhat unlikely combination of few and weak points of contact between the two opposing elites and a fairly high level of consensual understanding between the two. Perhaps most importantly for long term political stability and economic development, this latter point meant that the interests of the economic elites were firmly recognized by the welfare state elite, and industrial actors were granted certain influence over national policy through corporatist arrangements (Lewin, 1992; Rothstein, 1992). In exchange, the economic elite has during certain periods refrained from open hostility to all aspects of welfare state expansion, manifested by the so-called Swedish Model (Rothstein, 1998).

Studies of Swedish elite relations at the national level have all affirmed the dual elite model (e.g. SOU 1990:44; Göransson et al. 2006), but our understanding of elite relations at the local level of political decision-making is somewhat less clear. The main reason for this is that the kind of community power structure research that so fruitfully propelled the whole American theoretical debate about elites throughout the 1950s and 1960s, primarily thanks to the likes of Hunter and Dahl, never really took off in the Swedish social sciences. The characteristics and significance of Swedish elite social structures have instead mostly been studied at the national level. There are a few notable exceptions and such studies have made important contributions to our understanding of Swedish elite relations, in general and at the local level of political administration specifically.

Perhaps most important in this regard have been studies associated with the typical industrial town of Katrineholm (Drugge, 1990; Drugge and Svallfors, 1992). This is a municipality characterized by an immensely strong Social Democratic dominance. Industrially, SKF, Scania, and LM Ericsson have all had major manufacturing plants there, and its geographical location is strategic relatively close to both of Sweden’s two major metropolitan areas, Stockholm and Gothenburg (Drugge and Svallfors, 1992). In the first of these studies (Drugge, 1990), an attempt was made to trace historical changes the community’s elites between the 1950s and 1985. The study drew upon official records of those in power at each point in time, and was consequently limited to elites who held influential positions in politics, municipal administration, or the local business community. Drugge showed that the social composition of the community’s elite was somewhat diversified over the studied period, mainly due to the influx of women into elite positions (Ibid.). The study also concluded that local power became more dispersed during the period, which was interpreted as a general shift toward a local elite social structure somewhat more in line with the pluralistic elite model than seemed to be the case in the 1950s. It was, however, also noted that formal power at both points in time tended to be concentrated in the
hands of very few exceptionally powerful individuals who controlled a number of key elite positions (Ibid.).

The second study investigated a wide variety of questions concerning the conditions under which local elites in Katrineholm exercise power and drew on a small number of deeply probing interviews with elite community actors (Drugge and Svallfors, 1992). Most importantly, the study concluded that the local elite structure was strongly divided and polarized into two largely non-overlapping elite segments. On the one hand, the local political elite was dominated by Social Democrats and tightly integrated into the wider worker’s movement. On the other hand, the economic elite was also informally organized around corporate leaders and social life dominated by the activities of the local Rotary Club (Ibid.). To a large extent, Drugge and Svallfors’s results mirror and confirm at the local level what has already been said about the duality of Swedish elite structures at the national level. Interestingly enough, they found no overlapping positions between the two elite cores, which suggests that the dispersion of power since the 1950s had also widened the fundamental structural gap between the two elites (Ibid.).

Elite relations conceptualized in terms of personal networks are, of course, of particular interest given the specific focus of the present dissertation. The significance of personal relations and elites’ social interconnectedness has been explicitly highlighted by studies concerning the Swedish national elites, as well as those that have dealt with Swedish local elite relations (e.g. Drugge, 1990; Drugge and Svallfors, 1992). In this regard perhaps most interestingly, Olof Peterson has examined the role and importance of personal relations in the context of the Swedish Cabinet Office and the ministries (Peterson, 1989). He showed that actors within these loci of absolute executive political power were tightly interlinked through intricate systems of personal relations, upon which their functioning heavily relied (Ibid.). Birgitta Niklasson (2005) drew attention to the importance of what she referred to as “contact capital”—different forms of resources embedded in personal relations—among Swedish parliamentarians and other high-ranking political appointees. Anita Göransson and her coworkers have, furthermore, comprehensively surveyed a wide selection of Swedish national elites, mainly focusing on gender differences, but also posing important questions about the role played by personal relations in the professional lives and careers of elites (Göransson et al., 2006). Some of their most intriguing findings hold that both male and female elites rely heavily on resources they access through informal social networks, and that the personal networks of male elites tend to be more homogeneous in terms of sex composition (Djerf-Pierre, 2006). This is hardly surprising given what we know about the homosociality of male elites. Interestingly, however, their results show that female
elites in Sweden report a higher number of so called network persons, that is, personal contacts whom the elites regard as valuable social assets, than do male elites (Ibid.). This could either be taken as an indicator that women at the top echelons of society have a more socially expansive strategy or that women in such positions are more dependent on others.

Overall, these and a few additional studies have effectively highlighted the general importance of personal relations among Swedish elites (e.g. Drugge, 1990; Drugge and Svalfors, 1991; Glete, 1994; Stenlås, 1998; Åberg, 1998). In some of these studies, the elites’ relations are explicitly analyzed and discussed in terms of metaphorical networks (Knox et al., 2005), and therefore without a clear underlying structural intuition. Therefore, these studies are somewhat limited in their empirical treatment of elites’ personal relations. Their most problematic drawback in this regard is their lack of structural network data. In essence, this means that actors’ relations are effectively treated as attributes of the actors themselves rather than as a separate class of empirical entity in their own right. The consequence of this approach is that many of the most relevant properties of elite network structures, for example their cohesiveness, internal hierarchies, exact composition, and the like, cannot be analyzed properly. The reason for this is that such characteristics are simply not contained in the actor-level information about personal relations typically collected (Ward et al., 2001).

Since one of the central aims of this dissertation is to make a concrete contribution in this regard, the work presented here draws on relational data that has been analyzed with a proper set of social network analytic tools. In the following section, I will first highlight a few of the merits of a social network analytic perspective applied to the study of elite social structures. I will then briefly sketch the historical background of social network analysis in the social sciences, and finally tease out a few of the fundamental aspects that set this perspective apart from alternative understandings of the social.
Social Network Analysis—The Structural Perspective

As already stated, one of the main aims of this thesis is to apply a thoroughly structural, networks-based perspective to certain dimensions of Swedish elite relations in a way that has not been previously done. The network analytic perspective, therefore, represents a constitutive element of the work presented here. In essence, *social network analysis* refers to the formal study of social structures conceptualized as actors’ patterns of interpersonal connections (e.g., Wasserman and Faust, 1994). It constitutes a framework that contains both a distinct theoretical perspective on the nature and functioning of social structures and a wide array of methodological tools developed for their study. It can also be understood as a perspective utilized to study social (macro-) structures as outcomes of underlying (micro-) processes, and how such structures affect relevant outcomes, or change over time (Ibid.). It has been defined as an inherently *relational* perspective (Emirbayer, 1997) because of the importance that actors’ relations are given and because it is a fundamentally structural view of the social. Suffice it to say, the social network analytic perspective represents an integrated analytical perspective on the social, one that its adherents claim constitutes an independent paradigm within the social sciences (Marin and Wellman, 2010). We will now tease out the perspectives’ uniqueness, starting with a formal definition of a network, in the social network analytic sense, and continuing with a historical exposé sketching some of the streams of influence that have shaped this viewpoint.

From a formal point of view, a *social network* is composed of a set of *nodes* interconnected by a set of *links* or *ties* (e.g. Marsden, 1990; Wasserman and Faust, 1994). Nodes represent actors. Most often, at least in sociological applications of the network persuasion, they represent individuals, but no conceptual limitations exist in principle in this regard. They may just as well represent firms (e.g. Mizruchi, 1996), countries (e.g. Flandreau and Jobst, 2005), voluntary associations, or any other entity that within reasonable bounds can be regarded as an *actor*. This fundamental diversity applies equally to the ties by which nodes are interconnected. A tie always represents the existence of a relationship between two nodes, but the specific form and content of the relationship varies widely and is ultimately defined by the
specificity of the particular research question. Ties can, for instance, represent flows of communication (e.g., Monge and Contractor, 2003), economic transactions (e.g., Davern, 1997), kinship relations (e.g., Bott, 1957), or friendship ties (e.g., Lincoln and Miller, 1979). This particular combination of nodes and links represents patterns of relations and/or flows of interaction among social entities and is seen as a distinct representation of social structure (Ward et al. 2011). A social network analytic perspective focuses on these structures and often explicitly treats them as the actual units of sociological analysis (Marin and Wellman, 2010).

Academic interest in social structures formally conceptualized as social networks has grown exponentially during recent decades, and this has been accompanied by steady methodological developments in social network analysis (e.g., Borgatti and Foster 2003, Borgatti et al. 2009, Knoke and Yang 2008). Many of the core ideas of the social network analytic perspective are, however, far from new; the approach has gradually developed to become what it is today over a considerable period of time (Freeman, 2004). Tracing the origins of some of the ideas encapsulated by the structural vision inherent in social network analysis means, first of all, returning to some of the founding fathers of sociological thought. Several pioneers of sociological thinking nurtured ideas that contained profound structural intuition and can therefore be seen as precursors of modern social network theory and analysis (Ibid.). Auguste Comte (1798—1857), who not only coined the term sociology but also devoted most of his life and work to establishing the discipline, viewed the very object of this new science in unmistakably relational and structural terms. Most notably, he emphasized the importance of the interconnectedness of different elements of social systems. This was a genuinely structural notion, and Comte was, according to Freeman (2004), the first thinker to propose a model for studying society explicitly in terms of connections between social actors.

Comte may have been the earliest to formulate ideas around the nature of the social world in structural terms, but after him came a long succession of sociological pioneers who imagined the social in more or less relational ways. Network theorists have found examples of ideas that may be seen as predecessors to the structural perspective of modern social network analysis among such a diverse set of social theorists as Ferdinand Tönnies, Herbert Spencer (Ibid.), Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Erving Goffman, and Talcott Parsons (Emirbayer, 1997). Georg Simmel was, however, the classical sociological thinker who most clearly adopted a structural position in the network analytic sense (e.g., Freeman, 2004; Marin and Wellman, 2010; Knoke and Yang, 2008). Simmel wrote, “Society exists where a number of individuals enter into interaction” (Simmel, 1908/1971, p. 23). And continued, “If, therefore, there is to be a science whose subject matter is
society and nothing else, it must exclusively investigate these interactions, these kinds and forms of sociation.” This means that the study of social actors’ patterns of interaction should be at the heart of sociological inquiry, making clear and explicit the primacy of the relational, which is a core notion of contemporary studies of social network (Freeman, 2004).

The network perspective and social network analysis did not, however, descend straight from the ideas of its early sociological forerunners. Their origins can instead be traced to stepwise advances in certain sub-fields of at least four different academic disciplines: psychology, anthropology, mathematics, and sociology (Knoke and Yang, 2008). These advances were, however, often intellectually and geographically isolated from each other and were first brought together at a much later stage.

One of the most interesting early episodes in the development of social network analysis saw a group of Harvard social scientist (e.g., Homans, 1951) more or less unintentionally “discover” the importance of informal personal networks in organizations. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, these scholars conducted a series of studies at the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company, in Chicago. These essentially Taylorist worker-efficiency studies were originally set up to study how workers’ productivity could be increased by manipulating external factors in their environment, but produced valuable insight into the significance of workers’ social structures (Freeman, 2004). As part of the studies, researchers spent days monitoring the social interaction of employees at the plant. By doing so, they discovered the importance of informal networks among the workers, as opposed to their formal organization. These “hidden” social structures turned out to have at least as great influence upon workers’ efficiency and productivity as anything in the official organization of the company. These studies for the first time graphically mapped the social interactions among actors and analyzed their interaction in terms of points (nodes) interconnected by lines (edges) (Ibid.).

Many people credit Jacob L. Moreno with “inventing” social network analysis under the name of sociometry, in the early 1930s (Freeman, 2004). Moreno was a psychiatrist, a Romanian Jew who emigrated to the United States in the mid-1920s. Whether or not he invented social network analysis, he definitely took one of the most important steps along the way. His general aim was to understand actors’ psychological well-being in direct relation to their social surroundings, that is, their social structures. In order to achieve this, he and his coworkers mapped how actors within small and well-defined populations felt about each other by asking individual actors to name, for instance, those whom they would like to work or spend leisure time with (Ibid.). Moreno’s sociometric approach turned out to be ground-breaking in
several senses. His efforts and those of his colleagues represent the first serious attempt to collect and analyze relational data systematically, and they demonstrated the utility and explanatory power inherent in such an approach. In one of their most famous studies, for example, Moreno and his associates carried out a sociometric investigation at the Hudson School for Girls (Moreno, 1934). In this study, they showed that a wave of runaways among the girls could be explained by the interpersonal linkages among them, clearly demonstrating the explanatory potential inherent in the approach.

For a brief period, it looked as if sociometry was on the verge of becoming a well-established and fruitful branch within the American social sciences. This was, however, not to be. Mainly as a result of Moreno’s notoriously eccentric personality, he drove away some of his most ambitious and productive associates (Freeman, 2004). Without their input and drive, Moreno himself lost interest in sociometry and moved on to pursue other goals, mostly related to therapeutic work in psychiatry (Ibid.).

Partly as a result, interest in sociometry faded quickly in wider circles of the academic community, and the valuable insights of the approach were first to be integrated into the overall scheme of the network analytic perspective much later. Ideas that would later become foundational pillars of the network analytic perspective did, however, continue cropping up in other parts of academia, often in complete institutional, intellectual, and geographic isolation from each other (Ibid.). Within social anthropology, for instance, a growing theoretical emphasis was placed on the role of social relations. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1958 [1963]), Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1957), and Fred Nadel (1957) all, at least in principle, shared the theoretical understanding that interpersonal relations were constitutive micro-level elements of social structure. Highly relevant empirical studies were more or less simultaneously carried out by scholars at Manchester University’s Department of Social Anthropology (e.g., Bott, 1957; Mitchell, 1956).

The most important steps in bringing such disparate lines of relational and structural insights together were taken during the 1960s and 1970s, most notably through the work of a group organized around Harrison White and his students in Harvard University’s Department of Social Relations (Freeman, 2004; Marin and Wellman, 2010). In their work, they applied a firm relational focus with graphic representation of complex sociometric data and combined them with a set of methodological tools that made it possible to analyze such data in stringent mathematical terms. Apart from synthesizing what had until then been separated structural and relational theoretical lineages, arguably their greatest contribution was the systematic application of graph theoretical insights to sociological questions. Graph theory (Harary, 1969) is the mathematical foundation of social network analysis. It repre-
sents a form of discrete mathematics concerned with the study of graphs, that is, structures composed of vertices (nodes), interconnected by edges (lines). This is obviously very much in line with what network researchers since the days of sociometry regarded as their actual data, and graph theory has provided an extremely strong set of tools for the mathematical modeling of social structural phenomena. The work of Harrison White and his Harvard collaborators represented the final theoretical piece that brought together the different lines of research, consolidated the outlines of the structural perspective, and laid the foundation for what has since developed into the unique, multidisciplinary viewpoint of social network analysis.

The question is, however, wherein the uniqueness of this perspective lies? The uniqueness of the structural and relational perspective inherent in social network analysis must be seen in contrast to alternative perspectives on the social. Most importantly, it represents a clear alternative to both attribute-based conceptions of the social, like class-based analyses and sociological inquiries that take actors’ attitudes as their point of departure.

Explicitly placing the structure of actors’ relations in analytical focus is the most characteristic feature of the social network analytic perspective. This primacy of the relational sets the approach distinctly apart from alternative viewpoints. It has even been claimed that the social network analytic perspective should not even be seen as one perspective on the social world among others, but should be regarded as a fully integrated paradigm, distinctly different from alternative theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of the social (Wellman, 1988; Marin and Wellman, 2010). Why? Well, most obviously because, “…network analysts take [these] networks as the primary building blocks of the social world, they not only collect unique types of data, they begin their analyses from a fundamentally different perspective than that adopted by individualist or attribute-based social science.” (Marin and Wellman, 2010).

But what exactly is the fundamental difference between a network analytic perspective and other approaches. Marin and Wellman (2010) boil down the main characteristics of the social network analytic perspective to three guiding principles: (i) “relations, not attributes”; (ii) “networks, not groups”; and (iii) “relations in a relational context.” “Relations, not attributes” essentially means that the network analytic perspective always gives primacy to relational explanations over attribute-based accounts of social action. Attribute-based reasoning implicitly places causation within individuals, with attributes acting independently upon them to produce similar outcomes. From a network analytic perspective, however, causation is placed in social structure, that is, in the relations between actors. Actors with similar attributes like sex, ethnicity, or class, will to some extent behave similarly, but not
because of their similarities as far as their characteristics are concerned, but because they tend to be structurally located in similar network positions and their choices will therefore be conditioned by similar constraints and opportunities (Ibid.). “Networks, not groups” substantially means that actors’ group memberships are in the network analytic framework not treated as discretely bounded, binary properties of the actors. Group membership is, instead, regarded in terms of the connections between a particular set of actors, and for instance studied in terms of the strength and nature of their social ties (Ibid.). There are three main advantages to this approach. First, researchers can think of individuals as embedded in groups to varying degrees and therefore readily analyze the varying degrees to which their opportunities and constraints are influenced by group membership. Second, it allows researchers to define social circles according to their empirical existence rather than some a priori assumption. And third, it simplifies the move away from studying clearly identifiable groups to studying less easily recognized latent actor constellations.

As far as elite research is concerned, a basic structural and relational intuition was found in several of the earliest community elite studies from the 1950s and 1960s (e.g., Hunter, 1953; Dahl, 1961). Albeit in rather general terms, these studies firmly drew attention to the significance of community elites’ personal interconnectedness. Rapid methodological developments in the 1970s did however result in a veritable surge in structurally based, network oriented elite research (e.g., Breiger, Boorman, and Arabie, 1975; Burt, 1977; White, Boorman, and Breiger, 1976; Breiger and Pattison, 1978; Alba and Kadushin, 1976; Breiger, 1979).

Since this burst of methodological development in the 1970s, the social network analytic perspective has been fruitfully applied to a wide variety of substantial theoretical questions relevant to elites. A far from complete list includes, for instance, the question of women’s relative position in elite structures (Moore, 1988), national level elite integration in stable democracies (Higley et al., 1990), the structural properties of national elites’ policy networks (Heinz, et al. 1990), the significance of the small world phenomenon among the American corporate elite over time (Davis et al., 2003), the interlock between functionally different elite sectors (Moore, et al. 2002), international comparisons of national elite structures (Higley et al. 1981; Windolf, 1998), and the efficiency of collaboration networks within legislative assemblies (Tam Cho and Fowler, 2010).

From the perspective of the present dissertation, I would like to point out two main sets of reasons for why the social network analytical perspective has proved to be such a fruitful theoretical framework and methodological toolbox for studying elite social structures. The first of these is firmly con-
connected to the question of power, its conceptualization, and empirical measurement. The very nature of social power, how it is derived from social structure, how it is enacted and reproduced, are all questions at the very heart of elite theoretical reasoning. Social-network based thinking has not only contributed substantially with a number of vital insights about social power and how it is derived from social structure, but it has also provided concrete tools and indicators for measuring power.

The second reason is ultimately connected to the broader question of social integration. Social integration can, as we have already mentioned, be conceptualized in a number of ways. The social networks analytic perspective offers both theoretically elaborated ideas of the nature of social integration and concrete methodological tools for investigating it. As we see, both these strong points of the social network analytic perspective tie into at least two classic theoretical issues pertaining to elites, which happen to represent leading themes in the present dissertation as well: elite integration, and the distribution of elite power. In the following section on the empirical work that has gone into the original studies presented here, we will return to the empirical side of social network analysis and briefly elaborate upon a few of the concrete network-based methodological tools and concepts that were used in the original studies that comprise the dissertation.
Empirical Work

As already mentioned, the present thesis consists of four separate empirical studies. Studies 1-3 concern the social structures of Swedish local community elites, while Study 4 focuses on a particularly influential segment of the Swedish national political elite. The first three studies, consequently, draw on a completely different set of empirical data than does Study 4. I will now briefly present the empirical work that went into the studies, starting with the analyses that concern the structures of local community elite relations.

Local elites

The general aim of the project within which these studies were conducted was to deepen our understanding of the structures of local community power and of the social foundations of local decision-making processes in Sweden. In practice this meant putting social network analytic research strategies to work answering questions informed by elite theory, with a specific focus on the basis of elite social structures of Swedish local communities.

Studying local elite relations in Sweden means focusing on the municipal level of administration as opposed to the two additional levels of political decision-making in the country: the national, and the regional. At the national level, the cabinet along with the parliament—the legislative assembly of the Riksdag—represent the highest political decision-making bodies in Sweden. They bear overarching responsibilities for national policy. Questions relating to the provision of healthcare are, however, dealt with at the regional level and are the primary responsibilities of the twenty county councils that represent this level of Swedish political administration. Finally, political and administrative power at the local level lies with 290 municipal authorities. These vary in size from small rural units, some with fewer than 3,000 residents, to large metropolitan areas like the city of Stockholm with a population of 850,000. What they have in common, however, is their basic governing structures. In each municipality, political power is in the hands of democratically elected general assemblies elected by the public every four years.

2 There are actually 18 county councils and 2 regions. We will refer to county councils and regions simply as county councils.
and a municipal board of executive directors composed of members from all or most political parties represented in the general assembly. As for the administrative side of municipal affairs, these are managed and overseen by groups of professional civil servants. The politicians on the municipal board of directors and the top-ranking civil servants in each municipality may be regarded as the elite of political-administrative power in Sweden.

One reason for giving attention to the local level of elite relations and decision-making is the sheer political significance of Swedish local politics. Since each level of political decision-making and administration has distinct areas of responsibilities and very far-reaching self-governing rights, their influence is immense over the domains they are actually responsible for. This also means that no obvious hierarchical relationship exists between the political decision-making levels, and municipal affairs are consequently viewed as very important. On the whole, municipal administrations are responsible for all matters related to their residents’ immediate surroundings and well-being, except questions of national interest and the provision of healthcare. This means, for instance, that Swedish municipalities are legally or contractually responsible for the provision of all social services, child-, and elder care as well as primary and secondary education. On a more or less voluntary basis, they are further responsible for providing housing opportunities, industrial and commercial services, and leisure activities for their populations. In sum, the combination of far-reaching sovereignty, regulated through the Local Government Act, and a wide spectrum of direct responsibilities means that the municipal level of political decision-making in Sweden is highly important.

The importance of Swedish municipal administrations does not end with their political and administrative responsibilities for community matters. They are also highly important economic actors and have an enormous impact on the country’s economy. Most importantly, Swedish municipalities (as well as the regional, country council levels of political administration) have the power to levy income taxes from all citizens regardless of income level. This stands in stark contrast to the national government, which in practice only levies income taxes on citizens in the highest percentiles of the income distribution. This means that the absolute bulk of all levied income taxes in Sweden end up in the budgets of municipal administrations, rendering them exceptionally significant economic actors. For example, almost one-fourth of Sweden’s GDP is made up of municipal expenditure, and some 760,000 people (Statistics Sweden) are directly employed by municipal au-

authorities, which makes them one of the largest and most significant categories of employers in the country.

The economic importance of Swedish municipal authorities means that they are relevant not only to their citizens in general, but to their local business communities as well. This is mainly due to the numerous strong economic links that intermesh the interests of local business communities with those of municipal administrations. As of late, for instance, a large majority of tax-financed public services are in practice produced and provided by private business. In some areas, the provision of various public services provided by the municipal authorities have been outsourced to private companies, effectively turning municipal authorities into important sources of income for both local businesses and other economic actors competing for local government contracts. In other areas still, private businesses are often in direct competition with municipally owned service providers, offering equal or similar services to the public. Suffice it to say, Swedish municipal administrations and local businesses are tightly intertwined.

Second, because of their mutual interests, municipal administrations and private business interests often collaborate intensely on local and regional development projects. Representatives of local business communities usually partner with local government officials through different forms of partnerships. This means that the broad outlines of community development are usually established through and accompanied by reasonably deep mutual understanding between political, administrative, and economical actors. Finally, in times of severe economic hardship, for instance during economic crises and periods of major structural transformation, the institutional framework of municipal government act as lenders of last resort and as intermediaries between the acute needs of local businesses and national government agencies. In such times local businesses rely heavily on the municipal administration’s willingness and ability to assist by mitigating the social impact of layoffs and other forms of economic restructuring.

Overall, we may conclude that Swedish municipal authorities represent not only an important level of political decision-making in the country, but also an absolutely vital interface between politics and the business world. As a result, they represent an absolutely vital interface between the democratic logic of decision-making and the interests of those in economic power. I will now present the actual sites of our empirical work and the reasoning underlying their selection.
The municipal sample

The research presented in Studies 1-3 draws on data collected in four mid-sized (25-45 thousand inhabitants) municipalities located in the Swedish region of Västra Götaland. The municipalities included in the study were chosen in order to represent a diverse cross-section of local communities varying along the following dimensions: their political history and stability, and the current structure of their economies (Table 1). I will now briefly present the four empirical settings by outlining some of their historical, economic, political, and demographic similarities and differences.

Table 1. Political and economic characteristics of the municipal sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Political Stability</th>
<th>Political Orientation</th>
<th>Economic Diversity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Right-wing</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Social Democratic</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Social Democratic</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Frequent shifts in power</td>
<td>High</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Municipality 1* is an important regional center for industry, transport, and education, with a population of just over 50,000. A few fairly large employers, mostly private companies, dominate the local economy. The community is also a large center for military training and boasts a University college employing a 500-person staff serving some 8,000 students predominantly recruited regionally. The presence of a higher education facility is also reflected in the fact that some 35 percent of the municipality’s adult population hold a university or college degree, which is somewhat above that in the three other communities.

This is a municipal setting that in a demographic sense hardly deviates from national averages. It is, however, somewhat less ethnically mixed than the region as a whole, suggesting that slightly fewer immigrants have found their way here than elsewhere in the region, but neither unemployment trends, nor the proportion of persons receiving means-tested social benefits deviate from regional averages.

In terms of politics, the governing bodies of Municipality 1 have historically been dominated by rightist coalitions, uniting Conservative, Liberal, Christian Democratic, and centrist parties against an opposition of Social Democrats, leftists, and the Green party. This was also the case at the time of our fieldwork. The relative long-term political stability of the community must also be seen in light of the population’s apparent satisfaction with how
things are run. According to polls, they are rather content with how the local polity handles public affairs and overall more satisfied with the functioning of local democracy than they are with national affairs. Overall, Municipality 1 can be characterized as an economically fairly well off and politically rather harmoniously functioning center of commerce and higher education.

Municipality 2 is an industrial town with some 30 percent of its workforce employed in the manufacturing industry. Lately, however, heavy investments have been made in order to complement its industrial economic base with tourism, media production, and higher education. Traditionally, Municipality 2 has been a Social Democratic stronghold and is best described as politically harmonious, with a population that according to polls is fairly content with the local political power’s functioning.

Due to its strategic location, the municipality grew in importance in the 19th century, and expanded considerably during the post-war era. Today some 50,000 inhabitants live here, most of them in one central city district. At the time of our fieldwork, one large private company dominated the local labor marked, both directly and via a large number of subcontractors. The municipality’s dependence on one massive economic actor was certainly the most obvious of motivations behind the municipal administration’s explicit goal of expanding and diversifying the economic base.

Further illustrating the industrial characteristic of the community, we find that the median income is slightly above the regional average, while the population’s average educational level does not stand out. Most probably because many of the labor-force immigrants who came to Sweden in the 1950s and 1960s ended up in communities with a strong industrial presence, the share of first- and second-generation immigrants in Municipality 2 was about 21 percent at the time of fieldwork, which is slightly above the regional average. On the whole, Municipality 2 could be considered a prosperous industrial town at the time of fieldwork even though its unemployment levels and share of inhabitants receiving means tested benefits were slightly above the national average.

Municipality 3—also a community with about 50,000 inhabitants—was once a highly flourishing industrial center, owing much of its post-war prosperity to one of Sweden’s largest shipyards, which began operation in the mid-1940s. The pressure of structural change in the aftermath of the oil crisis of the 1970s in combination with a general decline in the European shipbuilding industry, however, eventually led to the closing of the shipyard in 1985. This proved to be an exceptionally hard blow to the community, and its consequences in terms of long-term economic development and unemployment rates were immense. Municipality 3 has, to some extent, spent the decades since then recovering from this blow. Only recently have local unemployment figures, for instance, reached national average levels, even
though it was still somewhat higher than in the region as a whole at the time of our fieldwork. Other indicators of the municipality’s economy and its inhabitants’ social well-being show similar patterns.

When it comes to local politics, the picture is somewhat muddled. In line with its heavy industrial heritage the community has traditionally been a stronghold for the Social Democratic party, and their historical influence is still very much felt in the present. At the time of our fieldwork, however, Municipality 3 was ruled by a minority coalition of center-right parties, supported by a newly formed party born out of electoral discontent. The political aim of this party was to clean up municipal affairs after a number of highly publicized cases of misconduct by the traditional parties and the municipal administration’s representatives. Quite unsurprisingly, given the economic hardship and the recent political turmoil in Municipality 3, the citizens here are markedly less satisfied with local politics than the residents in our remaining fieldwork communities.

Finally, Municipality 4 has 25,000 inhabitants, and is therefore considerably smaller than the other three of our fieldwork settings. It is situated at the outskirts of the fertile plains where the region’s agricultural industry is concentrated and can be characterized as an affluent small town, without the heavy industries, railway junctions or mineral processing plants present in the three other municipalities. The largest employer here, apart from the municipal government itself (employing teachers, administrators, care workers, etc.), is the region of Västra Götaland (responsible for the local hospital and other healthcare institutions) and the Swedish Armed Forces. There are also a number of private enterprises, none with more than 500 employees, illustrating the diverse economic base of the community.

The municipality does not deviate much from regional or national levels when it comes to the rate of unemployment, level of education, and the like, but a slightly smaller proportion of its inhabitants receive means-tested social benefits than the national average. Its inhabitants are also on average among the wealthiest in our fieldwork communities, further illustrating the relative affluence of Municipality 4. Furthermore, we find this community to be less ethnically mixed than the region and Sweden as a whole. While 13 percent of the Swedish population were born outside the country, only 7 percent of the inhabitants here were born abroad, which is probably explained by the municipality’s non-industrial character.

Politically, Municipality 4 has since the mid-1990s been governed by a leftist coalition, although political life here has historically been characterized by relative frequent shifts in political power, and the popularity gap between the leading coalition and the right-wing opposition has gradually narrowing since the 2002 general elections.
The elite sample and data collection

After locating the empirical work in the municipalities described above, we set out to identify each community’s elites. Defining the members of a particular elite in a community is not a trivial issue, neither from an elite theoretical vantage point, nor from a network perspective. The researcher is, most importantly, faced with very serious boundary specification issues (e.g. Marsden, 1990; Knoke and Yang, 2008). The solution we employed identified the individual elites according to a multistep procedure in each community under study.

First, we decided on defining community elites as including four main segments of decision makers: (i) local politicians, (ii) business representatives, (iii) civil servants within municipal administration, and (iv) representatives of important additional organizations and institutions (e.g. museums, sports associations, trade unions, health-care institutions, etc.) assumed to be influential in local issues.

Second, we compiled fundamentally positional samples (Knoke and Yang, 2008) of elite individuals in each elite category. Relying on a positional strategy means that in each elite segment we included individuals according to their formal position. Hence, high-ranking politicians, leaders of large businesses and important chambers of commerce, the formally most important members of the municipal administration, and further representatives of institutions deemed influential where selected and included in our positional sample.

These initial samples were subsequently validated through expert interviews conducted with locally knowledgeable political journalists, at the time themselves not included in our samples. These interviews led to only minor modifications in our initially compiled positional samples. The share of individuals excluded from our initial sample or included in the final sample on the basis of information solicited through the expert interviews equals a number less than 3 percent of all individuals in the final sample. The expert interviews, which in effect incorporated a reputational element into our sampling strategy (Knoke and Yang, 2008), therefore tended to corroborate the general validity of our initial samples.

Altogether these steps identified 298 elite individuals as our main population in the four communities. They were initially contacted by mail, and repeated attempts were thereafter made to reach them by phone, with the aim of interviewing them in person. Consequently, data was collected through personal interviews. An absolute majority, approximately 60 percent, of the interviews were conducted in person at the offices of the elites, while the remaining 40 percent of those who took part in the study were interviewed over the telephone.
Overall, 248 of the originally sampled individuals actually participated in the study, which equals a satisfactory response rate of 83 percent. This means, however, that 50 individuals included in our original sample were not included in the actual study. We were not able to reach a majority of them despite repeated attempts, but only two individuals (one each in Municipalities 1 and 3) refused participation outright.

In total, 190 male and 58 female elites were interviewed, which means that women made up slightly less than one-fourth of our population. The interviewees’ ages ranged from 27 to 73 years, with an average of 54 (SD 9.7). The majority of individuals included in the study were either politicians (33.9 percent) or representatives of privately owned corporations and business associations (29 percent). A further 14.8 percent were civil servants within municipal administration, while a mere 4.8 percent of the interviewed elites represented companies and businesses under direct municipal ownership. The final 17.7 percent of the included elites were composed of a broad cross-section of representatives of locally important organizations and institutions not included in the previously mentioned categories.

The interviews conducted varied in length between 30 and 90 minutes, were highly structured and strongly focused upon the elite actors’ social networks. In each municipality, we collected complete network data (Marsden, 1990; Wasserman and Faust, 1994; Knoke and Yang, 2008). This means that we collected data on all potential social ties for each and every actor included in each municipal elite. This was accomplished with the help of name rosters containing a full list of names of individual elites included in each municipal sample, which were distributed to the respondents at the time of the interview. Those who were interviewed over the telephone received the relevant roster as an e-mail attachment sent to them in connection to the interview.

Guided by the names on the roster, the interviewed elites were asked to indicate with whom they have interacted in (i) work-related, and/or in a (ii) informal, friendly manner during the 12-month period prior to the interview. Furthermore, they were queried about any contacts that they may have had with actors whose names were found on the roster in direct connection to (iii) a specific political process with clear implications for economic develop-

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[4] The exact wording of the question was: “First of all, I would like you to look over the names on this list and mark with an X in column A those persons with whom you have had some form of work-related contact during the past twelve months!”

[5] The exact wording of the question was: “Second, I would like you to once again look over the names on the list and mark with an X in column B those persons with whom you have had some other, non-work-related, private form of contact during the past twelve months!”
opment within their local community, and (iv) a certain political situation with clear environmental relevance for each municipality.\(^6\)

Directed complete information about three types of work-related and one informal kind of network tie was hereby obtained. Directed complete network data is “complete” in that it contains information on all social ties of a particular kind within a specific population (Figure 1). It is, furthermore, “directed,” often because ties represent flows of information or resources, but in our case it is directed because it captures the reciprocity, or lack thereof, in the sociometric choices actors make. Concretely this means that Actor A may nominate Actor B as a friend \((A \rightarrow B)\), without Actor B doing the same \((A \leftrightarrow B)\), that is, reciprocating A’s choice.

<table>
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<th>E</th>
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*Figure 1.* Directed complete network data for six nodes (actors A-F) shown as a matrix. \(i\) in a matrix cell means that a sociometric choice was sent from one actor to another (e.g. \(B \rightarrow A, C \rightarrow B, D \rightarrow C\)), while \(0\) denotes the absence of a tie.

This immensely rich data allowed us to map the elite actors’ interaction patterns in each municipality at a very high level of detail. Furthermore, it made it possible for us to measure the structural positions of both individual actors and groups of actors with a high level of accuracy. These data were utilized in three of the original studies included in the dissertation, and further details are obviously given in the original three studies.

**Parliamentary political elites**

The fourth paper included in the thesis (Study 4) puts the social structures of one particularly important segment of the Swedish national political elite in focus; namely those of members of parliament. More precisely, this study

\(^6\) The exact content of these questions varied between municipalities, but the wording followed the general format of the previous two questions: “Third/fourth, I would like you to mark with an X in column C/D the names of those persons with whom you have had some form of contact in direct connection to the process related to [the particular economic/environmental issue]…!”
concerns the parliamentary level of social integration within oppositional multiparty coalitions formed during the past decade. A distinct network perspective is here applied in order to study the social integration and cohesion within such political constellations at the parliamentary level.

The empirical analyses presented in Study 4 build upon a very different form of network data than those utilized in the first three studies described above. While the local elite network data was solicited through personal interviews in a painstaking and immensely time-consuming manner, the network data analyzed in Study 4 was obtained by indirectly identifying ties between individual members of the Swedish parliament. More precisely, instances of collaboration among the MPs were identified and compiled from readily available official records of their joint work on of specific legislative initiatives handled by parliaments chamber. In practice, this means that each specific piece of legislative initiative during the studied time periods that was co-authored by two or more private members of parliament is regarded as a specific instance of collaboration between the individual MPs involved.

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<th>E₁</th>
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Figure 2. Two-mode network data for 6 actors (A) and 3 events (E) shown as a matrix. 1 in a matrix cell means that an actor (A₁₋₆) has participated in an event (E₁₋₃), while 0 denotes the absence of such a tie.

In network terms such data is defined as being 2-mode (Borgatti et al, 2009) since the complete underlying information contains two different sets of entities: a set of actors (A) and a set of events (E) (Figure 2). In our case, this concretely means a population composed of (i) individual members of parliament and (ii) legislative initiatives. Theoretically, 2-mode network data have, for instance, been conceived of as a set of individuals and a set of groups, where the value of the tie between any two individuals is determined by the number of groups to which both of them belong (Breiger, 1974). This is very different from 1-mode network data where individual actors are directly linked to each other through personal relations of one sort or another. In this sense, 2-mode network data capture a very fundamental but methodologically elusive characteristic of social life, namely the duality of persons and groups (Breiger, 1974), meaning that a tie between any two individuals,
in essence, also constitutes a tie between the distinct social circles to which they belong (Ibid.). In elite contexts, such data have, for instance, been used extensively to study director interlocks (e.g., Mizruchi, 1996; Bohman, 2006), but work within the burgeoning field of legislative networks frequently draw upon this type of data as well.

One apparent downside of this kind of network data in sociological contexts is, however, the inherent uncertainty regarding the actual content of ties interconnecting individual actors. Since the ties are inferred indirectly through a second set of entities other than the individual actors themselves, there is some uncertainty regarding their specific content. In the 1-mode case, the researcher can obviously specify what he or she believes constitutes a social relation and measure its existence within the studied population with the highest possible accuracy. In the 2-mode case, however, this is not possible. Instead, the researcher has to assume that an indirect tie between two actors actually represents a relation between them, through which social exchanges in fact transpire.

In the present case, where the personal ties interconnecting individual members of parliament have been inferred from their officially recorded co-authorship of specific pieces of legislation, I have, for instance, no means of directly estimating the strength or content of their relations as this is perceived by the legislators themselves. Some of them may have been close friends for several decades, while others may hardly know each other at the personal level. Their mutual work on certain legislative initiatives does, however, indicate that there exists a personal link of some sort between them, and this knowledge is sufficient to analyze the global properties of their social structures in a manner that is in line with the fundamental research question and aim of Study 4.

Social Network Analysis, Power, and Social Integration

The theme of power and its relative distribution conceptualized in network terms is dealt with in all four original studies included in the thesis. Perhaps most explicitly so in Study 2, in which the relative access of female local elites to the structural power is examined empirically. Most sociologists would probably agree on two basic premises of power. First, power is relational, that is, it is found in the relations between actor A and actor B rather than in an inherent property of either actors. Second, the actors’ power is derived from social structure. Beyond these basic principles, however, there is much less agreement on how power can and should be studied. A benefit of the social network analytic paradigm is that it contains concrete methodological tools with clear theoretical underpinnings for the analysis of how
power is actually derived from social structure. Actors’ potential to exercise power and influence is, from the network analytic perspective seen as a function of their structural location in systems of pertinent personal relations. This is actually just another way of saying that one of the basic premises of social network analysis is that actors’ structural location and embeddedness define their opportunities and constraints.

Power, bluntly put, is a question of being well connected. To be well-connected can, however, mean several very different things, but the notion of centrality captures in a general sense the relation between network position and potential power. Centrality is a graph-theoretical concept, and a variety of concrete measures draw upon the basic idea of determining the relative importance of nodes in a network. Degree centrality, closeness centrality, and betweenness centrality represent three distinct examples of such measures (Bonacich, 1987). Each of them captures specific aspects of how actors’ structural prominence in social networks can be related to social power and influence.

Degree centrality refers to the number of relevant social contacts an actor has within a specific network, or simply to the sheer volume of actors’ social connectedness (Wasserman and Faust, 2004). How can the volume of social contacts be related to power? As we recall, actors’ network positions capture the structural dimension of their opportunities and constraints. An actor with an abundance of social ties will, for example, always have a greater selection of choices than less well-connected actors. If he is in need of a particular resource or a certain kind of support, chances are that at least one of his contacts will be able to provide him with it. This means, for instance, that he will be less dependent on his less well-connected peers than vice versa, which is a very concrete form of power.

Degree centrality captures a very fundamental and intuitively clear dimension of actors’ connectedness. But since it is a mere headcount of contacts, it does not capture a particularly sophisticated parameter of the potential power structurally embedded in actors’ network positions. The notion of closeness does, however, probe somewhat deeper into this relation since it is not simply a function of actors’ number of social contacts, but also of how well connected these contacts are themselves (Ibid.). Having a number of well-connected friends is, structurally speaking, of potentially greater benefit than being friends with an equal number of hermits. Mathematically, an actor’s closeness is defined as the inverse of his farness, which in turn is the sum of social distances to all other actors in the network. Consequently, it is a measure that draws on the simple intuition that a friend, or any other person to whom the focal actor is directly connected, is one social step away, while a friend of a friend is at distance of two, and so on. The closer on aver-
age an actor is to all other actors in a network, the more visible will he be to others, and the easier will it be for him to diffuse his particular point of view throughout the entire network (Wasserman and Faust, 2004). It is easily understandable how such structural benefits can be transformed into power over those in less privileged positions as far as closeness is concerned.

Structurally central actors with many social ties can thus transform the benefit of their structural location into power over others. Another specific set of mechanisms whereby structural location can yield actors a return in the form of power over others is what is called brokerage. The basic idea is that actors who are able to span structural voids (Burt, 1992), that is, bridge otherwise disconnected parts of the social structure, will be able to benefit from this. The theoretical roots of the brokerage concept goes back to Simmel’s notion of “tertius gaudens,” or “the third who benefits” (Simmel, 1923), but was later captured by both the “strength of weak ties” argument (Granovetter, 1973) and the notion of “structural holes” (Burt, 1992). Gould and Fernandez (1989) have theoretically defined five specific brokerage roles: coordinators; itinerant brokers; representatives; gatekeepers; and liaisons. These distinguish between brokerage situations mainly on the basis of whether or not actors connected by the broker themselves belong to the same primary group as the broker. The basic idea of brokerage can, however, also be measured with the more general and simpler indicator of betweenness centrality. This is a measure that quantifies the number of intermediary positions an actor holds between all other actors in the network. Concretely, this means that an actor with high betweenness centrality can control vital flows of information or resources between others. When Actor B receives a piece of valuable information from Actor A, he can choose not to pass it on to Actor C, or to pass it on against a commission. Either way, B’s intermediary position between A and C will result in his being able to exert one form of power or another within his immediate social surrounding.

The structural basis of elite power is, however, only one of the main themes explored in the dissertation; elite integration is another. The social network analytic framework offers a number of theoretical concepts and stringent methodological tools related to the question of social integration. Network density and clustering, or transitivity, represent two distinct forms of social network analytic concepts with clear relevance for social integration. Network density can be seen as a global indicator of social cohesion within a group. Mathematically, a network’s density equals the share of actual social ties in comparison to all potential ties (Wasserman and Faust, 2004). Density can be seen as a concrete indicator of actors’ propensity to form ties with one another and is therefore an apt indicator of social integration at a global, macro level of network analysis (Monge and Contractor, 2006). Social settings in which a high proportion of potential social ties ac-
tually exist will obviously be deemed to be better integrated than social settings with a lower share of potential ties that are actualized.

*Clustering* refers to actors’ tendency to form tightly bounded, closed social circles. *Transitivity* is the mathematical term for clustering, and strictly speaking it denotes instances in which Actor A is a friend of Actor B (A → B), Actor B is a friend of Actor C (A → C), and Actor C is a friend of Actor A (C → A). In contrast to network density, transitivity ought to be seen as an indicator of social integration in the local, immediate micro-level social surroundings of the actors. Thus, it can complement the global view of network density with a distinctly different alternative aspect of social integration.

**Figure 3.** The principle of blockmodeling: the rows and columns in the original network matrix (left) are rearranged (right) so similarly connected actors are brought together and socially cohesive sub-groups can thereby be identified.

Both network density and transitivity capture salient aspects of the *level* of social integration among bounded groups of interlinked actors. Variation in the structural *forms* of social integration is, however, largely independent of the network’s level of integration. This means, for instance, that two equally dense networks with similar levels of transitive tendencies can still differ widely as far as their structural properties are concerned. Complex methodological tools like blockmodeling procedures (Doreian et al., 2005; Nowicki and Snijders, 2001) and community identification algorithms are examples of categories of tools aptly designed to identify and analyze the structural forms of social integration within networks. I let the example of blockmodeling illustrate one aspect of the fundamental underlying logic of these methods. Blockmodeling is a technique that takes the original network matrix as its starting point, and rearranges the information within its rows and columns so that actors with matching or similar patterns of social ties are grouped together (Figure 3). The blockmodeling procedure can either be run for a specified number of classes (generalized blockmodeling), or for a latent number of classes (stochastic blockmodeling). Either way, the cohesive,
tightly integrated sub-groups identified by the procedure will shed substantial light on the fundamental forms of integration within the studied network.

After this brief description of the logic underlying some of the concrete and key empirical tools that have come to be used in the analyses presented in the original studies included, I will in the next section briefly summarize their main aims and key findings.
A Note on the Studies

STUDY 1

Study 1 focuses on the question of elite integration among Swedish local community elites. It takes as its point of departure the established understanding according to which Sweden’s elite structure is a dual one and sets out to investigate this from a network analytic perspective at the local level of decision-making. What we find in general is that community elites in Sweden tend to be exceptionally well integrated socially. The level of integrations, however, differs among different segments of the elite. Politicians and municipal civil servants are particularly tightly integrated, while local business communities tend to be more loosely connected. One of the study’s main results is that local elite structures in Sweden, as opposed to their national counterparts, are best described as core-periphery structures. Furthermore, these cores tend to be reasonably well diversified in terms of actors’ main spheres of activity, but with politicians and municipal civil servants clearly dominating. Thus, Swedish local elites on the whole do seem better integrated and not as structurally polarized as their national level counterparts. The relative underrepresentation of the economic elite within the local elites’ structural cores nevertheless suggests that a basic gulf between political-administrative and economic power exists at this level of political administration as well.

STUDY 2

Study 2 utilizes the local elite data in order to highlight the relative structural position of male and female community elites, respectively. The study departs from the fairly well-established idea that women are not only strongly underrepresented among elites (23 percent in our sample), but that those women who actually make it into the elite also tend to become socially marginalized into relatively disadvantaged positions, distant from real executive power. The empirical support for this claim is, however, meager. In Study 2, we examine this notion empirically in the context of Sweden being a country where gender equality has long been high on the agenda and the influx of women into elite positions has been substantial. Somewhat surprisingly, we find no empirical evidence whatsoever that female elites are less structurally
prominent than their male counterparts. Instead, the results clearly suggest that female local elites in Sweden are not systematically disadvantaged by their sex as far as their structural potential to exercise power and influence in community dealings is concerned.

STUDY 3

Study 3 investigates the significance of a particular aspect of informal elite relations, namely the role of the Rotary Club membership of local elites. I posed the question: In what way does this particularly prevalent form of voluntary activity among local community elites contribute to the social connectedness of these actors within the elite? The elites’ informal personal networks are here regarded as a vital dimension of their entrepreneurial opportunity structures, and they are studied from a network-based conception of social capital theory, distinguishing between brokerage and closure forms of mechanisms that generate social capital. The results indicate that Rotarian elites’ personal networks tend to contain both more brokerage opportunities and higher levels of networks closure than do non-Rotarian’s networks. These results suggest that the predominant impact of Rotary Club membership may potentially be a balancing of elites’ personal networks along the brokerage-closure continuum. The findings are discussed in light of the theoretical claim that in order to reap the benefits of individual-level social capital, brokerage opportunities are necessary in the creation of a competitive advantage, while social closure is instrumental in maintaining that advantage over time.

STUDY 4

Social integration and cohesion within oppositional coalitions is investigated in Study 4. Theoretically the study draws upon Robert Dahl’s notion of Oppositional cohesion (Dahl, 1966), or to what extent a political opposition can be regarded as one cohesive political force that represents a unified alternative to the sitting government cabinet. Two distinctly different oppositional multiparty coalitions that have been formed in Sweden during the past decade are studied empirically from a comparative perspective: The Alliance for Sweden—a center-right four-party coalition formed in 2004, which defeated the sitting Social Democratic government in the 2006 general elections, and the three-party Red-Green coalition of socialist and environmentalist parties that unsuccessfully challenged the sitting center-right cabinet for government power four years later in 2010. The relative social cohesion of these multiparty coalitions is studied at the parliamentary level. The results suggest that parliamentarians of the Alliance for Sweden coalition were far bet-
ter integrated into one, unified social entity than were members of the Red-Green coalition. These results are discussed in light of two principal mechanisms whereby social cohesion of oppositional multiparty coalitions may impact their organizational and electoral achievements: Socially well-integrated coalitions will, first and most importantly, enjoy an obvious organizational advantage over less cohesive political alliances. Second, they will also be able to convey an image of "government-ready" unity that may appeal to the electorate, but this form of signaling can, strictly speaking, not be analyzed on basis of our data.


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