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Department of Sociology

Call for papers Conference

Knowledge, status and power Elite education, training and expertise

Paris, October 23-24, 2014

Conference theme and sub-themes

What role does education, knowledge, cultural skills and other specific types of expertise play in processes of elite production and reproduction? How do these different dimensions contribute to the construction of elite identities, positions and social legitimacy? To what extent are processes of elite reproduction more or less important after the significant expansion of higher education? How have national elite groups been affected by the globalisation of educational and professional pathways and by other changes in the modes of access to elite jobs and positions? What has been the impact of economic, social and political changes on the type of expertise required from individuals in elite positions across different policy sectors and professions in different countries?

Keynote speakers

Shamus Khan, University of Columbia

Steven Brint, University of California Riverside

Claire Maxwell, Institute of Education, University of London

Rachel Vanneville, École normale supérieure de Lyon

This conference aims to address these questions by inviting papers from researchers in sociology and political science, as well as in related disciplines (such as history, anthropology, education). It will be organised around the two following sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1

Selection, training and socialization in elite education institutions: constructions of elite identity and legitimacy

Throughout the 20th century, traditional elites have shown an extraordinary capacity to reproduce their status and power through sophisticated educational strategies. Within this sub-theme we have identified a range of research questions we are interested in exploring further:

- To what extent and in which ways have elite groups managed to resist the 'usurpatory' strategies developed by the middle classes?
- Are elites in the North finding ways to limit the reach and impact of new elites from countries such as China, India and Brazil in gaining access to elite education institutions and elite tracks into professional positions?
- What is the division of educational labour between elite families and schools, and what changes have occurred within these relationships as a result of increasing academic selectivity evident in so many elite institutions today?
- What selection criteria do elite institutions use to recruit students? What kinds of markers are identified as important and how are these assessed? What kinds of selection procedures are implemented by different kinds of elite institutions?
- What has been the intended purpose and effects of policies seeking to increase the social, ethnic and racial diversity of students recruited into elite institutions?

Another central focus within this sub-theme would be the kinds of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are acquired in elite educational institutions. More specifically, participants are encouraged to propose papers on the following topics:

- While many elite primary and secondary schools are expected to follow the same official curriculum as other schools, the educational messages that are delivered might be different, or the teaching methods or methods of assessment. What are the most distinctive elements of the curriculum of elite schools? What forms of socialization are pursued through extracurricular activities? Contributions with this focus could consider curricular and cultural continuities and discontinuities across educational levels or similarities and differences between distinctive types of institutions (public, private, international etc) or between countries.
- Other papers might examine the specific kind of training provided by universities and other tertiary providers who aim to prepare students for elite positions. Do these institutions provide highly specialized tracks, or focus instead on pluridisciplinarity? What disciplines and subjects are taught and do the teaching staff or professionals facilitating the learning have any common characteristics? What role do internships and other opportunities for international travel and work experience play in elite training?
- Finally, this sub-theme could also include papers offering analyses of elite institutions' engagement in the global competition to attract talented students and that consider the impact of processes of internationalization on nationally-framed educational routes to elite positions.

Sub-theme 2

Professions, expertise and power elites

Despite a growing awareness that educational and professional selection systems are not perfectly meritocratic, there remains a strong sense of trust about the link between expertise and legitimately holding positions of power. That is to say, that the people who enter the top strata of public administration, politics, business or liberal professions are generally perceived to possess the skills and knowledge that make them deserving of the power and privilege they hold due to their position. But what is the nature of the connection between knowledge, power and privilege among professional elites? Which kind of knowledge legitimizes elite power in different contexts?

Further questions include: how is expertise attained, and what are the conditions for accessing and mastering authoritative expertise? What is the relationship between knowledge and skills acquired in educational institutions, or via on-the-job training, within professional organization? What other social dispositions are critical for the selection and legitimation of social and professional elites? Do the idea of the knowledge society, and the role of experts therein, accentuate or reduce the gap between elites and non-elites?

Contributions to this theme could focus on how distinct disciplines or fields of knowledge (i.e. law, economics, engineering or administrative science) shape the legitimation of elites in different sectors of society. How do disciplinary, institutional, professional and/or cultural logics interplay with such processes of legitimation? Do different kinds of knowledge underpin different kinds of elites or different kinds of power? What is the role of expertise in the legitimation of political elites? And in what ways does expert training contribute to shaping elite status?

Papers might also like to focus on the connections between certain professions and elite positions, or on how certain professions have lost or gained elite status over time. What are the dimensions along which such professions are defined as elite, and what are the processes or mechanisms that contribute to the acquiring or loss of elite status? Have processes of internationalisation –of educational institutions, of students and professionals or of science and ideas– altered the status of certain professional elites?

**Submission of abstracts
June 1, 2014**

**Submission of papers
September 15, 2014**

Scientific committee

- Olav Korsnes, Professor, Department of sociology, University of Bergen
- Marte Mangset, Research Fellow, Centre for the studies of professions, Oslo and Akershus University College
- Claire Maxwell, Senior Lecturer, Institute of Education, University of London
- Agnès van Zanten, Senior Research Professor, Observatoire sociologique du changement, Sciences Po/CNRS

Steps to follow to participate:

1) Online submission of abstracts: June 1, 2014

Log on to the website conference: <http://eliteduc2014.sciencesconf.org/>

The scientific committee will make a selection of participants based on the quality and relevance of the submitted abstracts. We invite both established researchers and doctoral students to submit abstracts. Abstracts' expected length is between 500 and 800 words and should include a title, the names and institutional affiliations of authors and a short bibliography.

2) Announcement of selected proposals: July 1, 2014

3) Online deposit of papers: September 15, 2014

Log on to the website conference: <http://eliteduc2014.sciencesconf.org/>

Papers' expected length is between 6000 and 8000 words. Although papers will not be published as such, some might be considered for publication projects linked to the conference depending on the quality and relevance to the topics addressed.

The organisers cannot pay for participants' travel and accommodation but can consider requests for financial help from doctoral students within the limits of the available budget. Coffee and lunch during the conference as well as a conference dinner on October 23 will be provided for all participants.

Contact information

- For all practical information please contact: mireille.clemencon@sciencespo.fr
- For other information about the conference please contact: marte.mangset@hioa.no or agnes.vanzanten@sciencespo.fr

Conference venue

Sciences Po, 98, rue de l'Université, 75007 Paris

From 10:00 on Thursday 23rd to 18:30 on Friday 24th

Updated information: <http://eliteduc2014.sciencesconf.org/>