

Article

Business Elite as Elected Representatives in Voluntary Organizations in Norway

Trygve Gulbrandsen

Institute for Social Research, 0260 Oslo, Norway; E-Mail: trygve.gulbrandsen@socialresearch.no

Submitted: 9 March 2020 | Accepted: 13 August 2020 | Published: 4 September 2020

Abstract

Little is known about the links between the business sector and civil society in Norway. To address the lack of knowledge, this study focused on members of the business elite who are elected representatives in voluntary organizations. Information about these representatives was obtained from a national survey of Norwegian elites and used to examine to what extent voluntary organizations are integrated into the business community's network of institutions and organizations outside the corporate world. The analyses demonstrate that voluntary organizations are well placed within this network. Moreover, business leaders who are elected representatives are well-connected. Several of them serve on state boards and have frequent contact with politicians and state administrators. Business leaders who have experienced pronounced social mobility seem to be more attracted to being involved in the governance of voluntary organizations than their colleagues with a more privileged background.

Keywords

business elite; civil society; elected representatives; Norway; voluntary organizations

Issue

This article is part of the issue “Civil Society Elites” edited by Håkan Johansson (Lund University, Sweden) and Anders Uhlin (Lund University, Sweden).

© 2020 by the author; licensee Cogitatio (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

In Norway, as in the other Scandinavian countries, Denmark and Sweden, the links between the state and voluntary organizations are many and dense (Enjolras & Strømsnes, 2018; Selle, 1993). Organizations turn to the state for cooperation, funding and legitimacy. The bonds between voluntary organizations and the business sector have, however, traditionally been weaker. One reason for this situation is that, historically, philanthropy has not been held in high regard in Norwegian society. Although the business sector has been involved in voluntary organizations through philanthropy and charity in Great Britain and the US, charity has been considered somewhat patronizing and something to be avoided in Norway (Sivesind, 2015). Nonetheless, the Norwegian business community is connected to voluntary organizations in various ways. Corporations contribute financially, and some business leaders hold positions in these orga-

nizations' governing bodies. There is, however, little systematic knowledge about the connections between the two sectors. The purpose of this article is, therefore, to learn more about the relationship between the business community and civil society.

In previous international research, the relationships between voluntary organizations and the business sector have been studied in various ways. Scholars have examined how business-like practices have been incorporated into civil society organizations (CSOs), which has led to the hybridization of these organizations (Billis, 2010; Hwang & Powell, 2009; Moore, Sobieraj, White, Mayorova, & Beaulieu, 2002; Suykens, De Rynck, & Verschuere, 2020). Others have described how the governing bodies of CSOs function as meeting places where members of the economic elite and the upper class socialize and bolster their status (Domhoff, 1967; Ostrower, 1998; Salzman & Domhoff, 1983). Several researchers have focused on the network linkages between busi-

ness corporations and CSOs (MacLean, Harvey, & Kling, 2014; MacLean, Harvey, & Kling, 2017; Moore et al., 2002; Moore & White, 2000; Salzman & Domhoff, 1983; Vidovich & Currie, 2012). They have used network techniques to survey, for example, interlocking directorships between business corporations and charities and voluntary organizations. In some projects, public bodies and industry associations are also included. Moreover, several scholars have discussed why voluntary organizations invite business leaders to participate in their governing bodies and have studied the motivations of leaders who accept these invitations (e.g., Abzug & Galaskiewicz, 2001; Middleton, 1987; Moore & White, 2000; Ostrower, 1998; Ostrower & Stone, 2006).

In this article, close attention is given to examining linkages between the business sector and civil society. This will be achieved by charting members of the Norwegian business elite who participate in what MacLean et al. (2017) call “extra-corporate networking.” MacLean et al.’s (2017) definition of extra-corporate positions includes board positions in institutions and organizations outside of individual corporations. This category encompasses positions held not only in voluntary organizations but also in business associations and state boards and committees. This information will be used to investigate to what extent voluntary organizations are integrated into the overall external network of the Norwegian business elite. In their study of the interlocking network between businesses, non-profits and federal advisory committees, Moore et al. (2002) found that non-profit organizations were relative outsiders in the interlocking network. These findings prompted two questions: Does the same pattern exist in Norway? And are voluntary organizations sparsely represented in the business elite’s overall extra-corporate network?

Business leaders who are elected representatives in voluntary organizations can be viewed as “bridging actors” (Burt, 1992; MacLean et al., 2017) or “boundary spanners” (Lewis, 2010) between the business community and civil society. Boundary spanners can perform tasks that benefit the sectors, organizations or groups they are spanning (Lewis, 2010). They can transmit important knowledge from one sector to the other, and they can stimulate learning and innovation across sectors. Bridging actors are in a position to form coalitions that can determine institutional settlements and control societal resource flows (MacLean et al., 2017). Bridging actors also build social and organizational capital that can favour their personal careers (MacLean et al., 2017). Accordingly, it would be interesting to learn more about people who occupy boundary spanning and bridging roles. This article, therefore, will also describe in greater detail people who are or have served as elected representatives in national voluntary organizations and address the following questions: What characteristics do they have? And do they distinguish themselves from business elite individuals having other forms of extra-corporate bonds/linkages?

To answer the four aforementioned questions, data from the 2015 Leadership Study, a national elite survey, conducted in collaboration between the Institute for Social Research and Statistics Norway will be used (Gulbrandsen, 2019; Torsteinsen, 2017). The analyses presented in this article are primarily descriptive and exploratory in nature. The intention is to provide plausible interpretations of the findings rather than test specific theories.

2. Definitions

In general, the term “elite” is defined as a select group of people who have superior abilities or qualities when compared to other members of a group or society. In sociology, the term is employed to describe powerful and influential individuals and groups and to analyse the power structure in a specific country. In previous research, several definitions or meanings of the term have been suggested (Gulbrandsen, 2019). In contemporary research, there are two prevailing definitions: Elites are defined as either (1) individuals who hold command positions in significant institutions and organizations (Mills, 1956) or (2) groups and individuals who control disproportionately large amounts of vital resources, particularly money (Bourdieu, 1986; Kahn, 2012). In the 2015 Leadership Study, we followed Mills (1956) and defined elites as holders of top leadership positions in significant institutions and organizations.

In the 2015 Leadership Study, the term “business elite” was defined as people who hold leadership positions at the apex of the largest corporations in the economy. We focused on two types of positions: CEOs and chairmen of the boards of the corporations. According to Kahn (2012) and Bourdieu (1986), wealthy or super-rich individuals should also be included in the “business elite” category. However, unless wealthy persons also held positions as CEO or chairman of the board in a large corporation, super-rich people were not considered to be members of the business elite in the 2015 Leadership Study.

3. The Norwegian Case: Capitalism with Strong State Involvement

Similar to how voluntary organizations are integrated with the state, business corporations also have many ties to the state. Firstly, a unique feature of the Norwegian economy is that the state has traditionally been an active participant in the economy and remains a large business owner. Currently, the state owns about 30 percent of the stock listed on the Oslo stock exchange. Secondly, the business community is highly dependent on the state for delivering various services and outcomes, such as a stable macroeconomic environment, effective infrastructure, a well-functioning educational and legal system and necessary market regulations. Moreover, the ongoing restructuring and innovations in the economy would not be possible without close collaboration be-

tween business companies and scientists and technologists at state-financed universities and research institutes. Thirdly, the state is heavily involved in containing and regulating conflicts of interest between capital and labour. The state has initiated extensive labour legislation. Moreover, the state has participated actively in tripartite agreements and cooperation between organizations representing capital and labour. The many ties between the business sector, other sectors, such as civil society, and the state have generated a national elite network. This network provides favourable structural conditions and meeting places for interaction between members of various elite groups in Norwegian society.

4. Description of the Norwegian Civil Society

The civil society in Norway, as well as in Denmark and Sweden, constitutes a distinct Scandinavian model, different from civil society regimes found in other countries (Enjolras & Strømsnes, 2018). The civil society in Norway is characterized by a high level of citizen participation in voluntary organizations, measured in terms of memberships and volunteers (Sivesind, Arnesen, Gulbrandsen, Nordø, & Enjolras, 2018). Individuals in what the authors describe as elite occupations are overrepresented as volunteers (Eimhjellen & Fladmoe, 2020). Secondly, these organizations have traditionally been hierarchically organized, with local, regional, and national chapters. The model for this organizational structure was originally the political party and the broad popular movements that historically played a pivotal role in these countries (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002). Thirdly, as mentioned above, the relationship between the state and civil society is characterized by close collaboration and integration.

However, significant changes took place in the Norwegian civil society during the second half of the 20th century. The composition of CSOs has changed. As a result of the emergence of the “leisure society” during the second half of the 20th century, the organizational society has become more dominated by organizations within the cultural and leisure fields, while the welfare field has become comparably smaller (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002).

At the organizational level, new organizations are often formed around more narrow issues than the traditional broad society-oriented organizations. However, the number of organizations at the local level is decreasing, but it is increasing at the national level. Currently, there are close to 4,000 national voluntary organizations (Arnesen & Sivesind, 2020). National organizations are increasingly more likely to not have local chapters, and local organizations are, to a lesser extent, connected to national organizations. A dual organizational structure is developing, where different organizations exist at the local and national levels (Sivesind et al., 2018).

In Norway, voluntary organizations and non-profits are regulated under the law of associations (Woxholth, 1998). The governing bodies of a normal democratic as-

sociation in Norway are the general assembly, executive committee and auditors. The general assembly is the supreme body of the association and consists of the members. In national associations with local chapters, the members are representatives elected by local chapters. The general assembly elects representatives to the executive committee. It is responsible for the day-to-day management of the association. In large, national, voluntary organizations, this responsibility is usually delegated to a hired manager. Business leaders can be elected to the executive committee, to the general assembly from a local chapter or to the audit committee.

5. Theory and Analytic Design

In earlier research on the relationship between the business community and voluntary organizations, the connections were often analysed in terms of elite integration (Moore et al., 2002; Ratcliff, Gallagher, & Ratcliff, 1979; Salzman & Domhoff, 1983). Scholars have discussed how the bonds and networking arenas between the two sectors contribute to promoting integration between or within involved elite groups. For instance, Salzman and Domhoff (1983) claimed that non-profit boards provide a place where business elites can exchange information and develop common viewpoints. In their opinion, these functions are instrumental in promoting class cohesion.

Studies of elite integration raise the question of to what extent different elite groups or segments within a specific elite group are united, divided and opposed or fragmented and not related to each other. For analytic purposes, it is necessary to distinguish between *manifestations* of elite integration and *structural circumstances* fostering integration (Engelstad, 2018; Gulbrandsen, 2019). Integration is manifested in various ways: (1) as consensus on significant values or desired properties of the society, (2) subjective feelings or perceptions of belonging to the same community, (3) mutual trust between different elite groups, (4) perceptions of complementarity (i.e., that they are mutually dependent upon each other), and (5) instances of collective action, compromises and cooperation.

We can discern between at least two forms of structural conditions that are favourable for the development of elite integration. The first condition is social similarity between elite individuals and groups. Examples of social similarity are: (1) having grown up in families of the same social class or status, (2) having attended the same elite high schools and universities, and (3) having shared career experiences. The second condition is social relations and social arenas that bring elite individuals into contact with each other. Mills (1956), Domhoff (1967) and Farkas (2012) focused on social clubs as meeting places for building relationships between elite individuals and for promoting elite unity. According to Higley, Hoffmann-Lange, Kadushin, and Moore (1991), elite unity is facilitated by the incorporation of members of different elite groups into a national elite network where the top leaders meet

each other, deliberate and forge compromises. Wiesel (2018) showed how connections bridging diverse elite circles in elite neighbourhoods could be understood as a mechanism of elite integration. In this article, the analytic approach is primarily to study the structural conditions for integration between the business community and voluntary organizations.

As shown above, earlier studies of relationships between business corporations and voluntary organizations have focused on interlocking directorships between corporations and these organizations. In studies of interlocking directorships, researchers have concentrated on describing the properties of the network structure created by interlocks. Moreover, they have often been particularly interested in identifying the most central corporations or organizations and persons in the network.

In contrast, in the current study, the frequency of members of the business elite holding extra-corporate positions will be determined. The focus is on the prevalence of holding such positions, as well as the structure of overlapping positions. Moreover, a broader set of positions and contacts than the ones in the aforementioned studies will be examined. First, a survey of the extent to which business leaders have been elected representatives in national voluntary organizations will be conducted. Positions held in national employer and industry associations, political parties, state committees and boards, and the extent of contact with politicians and senior civil servants will also be surveyed. These data will help determine the overall external network of the Norwegian business elite and the place voluntary organizations have within this network. Comparing the prevalence of the different external network positions will enable the consideration of whether voluntary organizations are centrally located in the external business network or are rather isolated.

The number of positions the elected representatives have in other sectors will also be surveyed to address the following questions: How many of them are also members of boards of employer and industry organizations or members of state boards and committees? And how frequently do they have contact with politicians and senior public servants? This information gives another indication of the centrality of voluntary organizations in the business elite extra-corporate network.

As mentioned above, the business elite elected representatives in voluntary organizations are boundary spanners between business and civil society. Given the importance of the role of boundary spanner, more should be known about their distinguishing features. Ostrower (1998) and Moore et al. (2002) demonstrated that business leaders who are members of boards of CSOs are characterized by upper-class origin, distinguished education and family wealth. For these prominent leaders, participating in the governance of CSOs fosters feelings of belonging to the same elite community, as well as nurtures a shared outlook and consensus on significant val-

ues. In other words, CSOs constitute a significant mechanism for manifested elite integration.

In their study of access to the “power field” in French society, MacLean et al. (2017) discovered that the size of business leaders’ extra-corporate networks was significantly related to the leaders’ class background. Leaders who grew up in upper and upper-middle-class families had more board positions in voluntary organizations than their colleagues who had moved up from the lower classes. Elite education also appeared to be a significant predictor of occupying bridging positions. In line with these scholars, the business leaders’ social background, the parents’ and respondents’ education and wealth will be charted to address the following question: Do the elected representatives in voluntary organizations stand out in terms of wealth and an upper-class origin compared to business leaders without such positions?

6. Data and Method

The purpose of the 2015 Leadership Study was to examine the characteristics of Norwegian elite individuals, including their social background and careers, relationships to each other, attitudes on a large number of key policy issues, and lobbying activities. As in earlier national elite studies (Gulbrandsen et al., 2002; Higley et al., 1991; Hoffmann-Lange, 1992; Ruostetsaari, 2015), in the 2015 Leadership Study, we aimed to chart the whole population of elite individuals in the Norwegian society. The population was established by the so-called position method, which means that within selected sectors, we identified the most important formal top leadership positions. We then selected the persons holding these positions. The positions and persons holding these positions were identified in a collaboration between the Institute for Social Research and Statistics Norway. We included command positions from ten sectors, including the business sector (Gulbrandsen, 2019; Torsteinsen, 2017).

For the purpose of this article, members of the business elite—CEOs and chairmen of the board of the largest companies—were selected. The identification of members of the business elite was performed by Statistics Norway. Statistics Norway selected CEOs and chairmen of the board of all enterprises with more than 1,000 employees and those of all enterprises with more than five billion Norwegian kroner in turnover (and less than 1,000 employees). Sixty-three percent of the selected CEOs and chairmen of the board chose to participate in the survey, a total of 242 individuals. Thirty-one percent of these individuals were chairmen of the board of an enterprise, and 69 percent were CEOs or presidents.

The business leaders’ extra-corporate network was measured by asking them whether, in 2015 or the preceding five years, they had held any of the following four positions: (1) member of the board of a national employer or industry association, (2) elected representative in a national voluntary or non-profit organization,

(3) member of one of the governing bodies of a political party, (4) position in a state board or committee. Then, the business leaders' contacts with representatives of the political system were charted by enquiring how frequently in the previous year they had been in contact with (1) members of parliament, (2) members of the cabinet, and (3) top administrative leaders of ministries, public agencies and regulators. The question had four answer choices: (1) "weekly or more often," (2) "monthly," (3) "rarely," and (4) "never."

In the 2015 Leadership Study, the construction of the class variable was based on the father's occupation. Operational definitions of the various classes were derived from a model developed at the Institute for Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, referred to as the Oslo register data class scheme (ORDC; Hansen, Flemmen, & Andersen, 2009). For the purposes of analysis in this article, four classes are used: upper-class, upper-middle-class, lower-middle-class, and working-class/primary sector. The respondents' education level, as well as that of their fathers and mothers, is a variable with five values: (1) primary school, (2) secondary school, (3) university education at the bachelor's level, (4) university education at the master's level, and (5) university education at the doctoral level or similar. In the statistical analyses, education is a continuous variable.

The business leaders' wealth was quantified as the taxable gross assets of their households. This information was retrieved from public registers. This measure is a standard measure used in public statistics in many countries. In the statistical analyses, the logarithmic form of this variable is used. Measuring household wealth is particularly useful when studying elites since their lifestyle and welfare are influenced by both spouses' contributions to the family economy.

Age and gender are included as control variables. The older the business leaders are, the more years they have been visible as members of the elite. Visibility probably increases the number of invitations to join a voluntary organization as an elected representative. Ostrower and Stone (2006) have shown that women are increasingly involved in the governing of CSOs. It is possible that women's values make them more motivated to join the boards of CSOs; however, only 13 percent of the business leaders were women.

7. Descriptive Statistics

The CEOs and chairmen of the boards of the largest enterprises in Norway have busy work schedules. Table 1 reveals that many of them nevertheless emphasize participating in extra-corporate networks. Fifty percent of them were or had been members of the board of an employer or industry association. Fifteen percent (36 individuals) had been elected representatives in a national voluntary organization. Only 2 percent had participated in the governance of a political party, while 15 percent had been

members of state boards or committees. Nineteen percent had at least monthly contact with members of parliament, while 12 percent had contact with members of the cabinet, and 24 percent had monthly contact with the administrative leaders of ministries and directorates.

Nineteen percent of the CEOs and chairmen of the board of the largest corporations in Norway were from upper-class families, while 46 percent were from the upper-middle-class, and 10 percent were from the lower-middle-class. Twenty-five percent of the CEOs and chairmen of the board of the largest companies in Norway grew up in working-class families, indicating that there has been a significant degree of upward mobility into business-elite positions.

The business elite in this study are well educated. Only 6 percent of them have a secondary school education or less, while 16 percent have a bachelor's degree, 67 percent have a master's degree, and 10 percent have a PhD. As expected, the business leaders' fathers did not have the same level of education, on average, as their sons (and a few daughters). Even so, they were probably better educated than males in the same generation. Fifty-three percent of the fathers have a bachelor's or master's degree. Typically, the educational level of the fathers varied with their occupational status. As much as 48 percent of the fathers who, by occupation, belong to the working-class only have a primary school level of education. Only 4 percent of fathers belonging to the upper-class have this level of education. As much as 63 percent of the upper-class fathers have a master's or PhD degree, compared to 2 percent of the working-class fathers.

Thirty percent of the business leaders' mothers have completed only primary school, while 36 percent completed secondary school, 26 percent have a bachelor's degree, and 8 percent have a master's degree or higher. There is a strong correlation between the fathers' and mothers' educational levels (Pearson's $r = 0.51$). However, there is some variation in the fathers' occupational status. Fifty-nine percent of the mothers whose husbands belong to the upper-class by virtue of their occupation have only a primary or secondary school level of education, and 48 percent of mothers whose husbands have lower-middle-class occupations have a bachelor's or master's degree.

Average taxable gross assets among the members of the business elite were 90 million Norwegian kroner, close to ten million Euros. However, the business elite exhibited an unequal distribution of assets ($SD = 795$ million Norwegian kroner). Six of the business leaders had more than 600 million kroner. Three of these were billionaires.

8. Results

Table 1 demonstrates that the business elites' extra-corporate network primarily includes positions on the boards of national employer and business associations, which is unsurprising. The boards of these associa-

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

Wealth	90 million kroner (average)
Age	54 (average)
Member of the board of employer and industry associations (percent)	50
Elected representative in a voluntary organization on the national level (percent)	15
Member of the governing body of a political party on the national level (percent)	2
Member of state boards and committees (percent)	15
Monthly or more frequent contact with members of parliament	19
Monthly or more frequent contact with members of the cabinet	12
Monthly or more frequent contact with administrative heads of ministries and directorates	24
Class origin based on father's occupation (percent)	
Upper-class	19
Upper-middle-class	46
Lower-middle-class	10
Working-class	25
Business leader's educational level (percent)	
Primary school	
Secondary school	6
University education at the bachelor's level	16
University education at the master's level or higher	77
Father's educational level (percent)	
Primary education	15
Secondary education	32
University education at the bachelor's level	24
University education at the master's level	29
Mother's educational level (percent)	
Primary school	30
Secondary school	36
University education at the bachelor's level	26
University education at the master's level	8
Gender (percent)	
Men	87
Women	13
N	242

tions are salient as arenas where the business community's policies are discussed and determined. In contrast, Table 1 also shows that business leaders are not much interested in being members of the governing bodies of a political party; they seem to stay clear of party politics.

Outside the realm of corporations and employer and business associations, however, the number of connections that elite individuals have to voluntary organizations is on par with their connections to the political system. While (as mentioned above) 15 percent of the business leaders had been elected representatives in voluntary organizations, the same percentage had been members of state boards and committees. Only a slightly higher percentage of the business leaders have had monthly contact with members of parliament and senior civil servants.

Table 2 presents the correlations between the variables representing various extra-corporate positions. The variable "positions in a political party" is not included since so few of the business leaders had held such positions. Moreover, correlations between the three vari-

ables measuring the frequency of contact with representatives of the political system are also excluded.

The correlational analysis presented in Table 2 indicates combinations of positions that are (significantly) prevalent among the business leaders. In terms of the number of individuals, the members of boards of employer and industry associations have the most links to institutions and organizations outside the business community. Their wide network of connections is a result of their functions in business associations. They contribute to shaping the stance of the business community in various policy issues, and they are expected to actively represent business interests, vis-à-vis politicians and senior civil servants.

Table 2 demonstrates, however, that elected representatives in voluntary organizations are significantly more active in the extra-corporate network than business leaders unconnected to voluntary organizations. They are more often members of state boards and committees. They also have significantly more frequent contact with representatives of parliament and administra-

Table 2. Combinations of extra-corporate positions.

	Elected representative in voluntary organizations	Member of the boards of employer or industry associations	Member of state boards and committees
Elected representatives in voluntary organizations	1.00		
Member of boards of employer and industry associations	0.08 (22)	1.00	
Member of state boards and committees	0.21*** (12)	0.12* (23)	1.00
Frequency of contact with members of parliament	0.12* (12)	0.13** (32)	0.27*** (17)
Frequency of contact with members of the cabinet	0.08 (7)	0.11* (20)	0.26*** (12)
Frequency of contact with administrative heads of ministries and directorates	0.12* (16)	0.19** (44)	0.20*** (18)

Notes: Pearson's *r* results are depicted; the number of individuals having each of the combinations is in parentheses; levels of significance are ***1 percent, **5 percent and *10 percent.

tive heads of ministries and directorates. Accordingly, these business leaders are bridges between the business world, voluntary organizations, and the political-bureaucratic system. They are, however, neither more nor less represented in the boards of employer and business associations.

As mentioned above, in earlier studies of the boundary-spanning network of members of the elite, the focus has been upon identifying the most central persons in the network (MacLean et al., 2014, 2017; Moore et al., 2002; Moore & White, 2000; Salzman & Domhoff, 1983; Useem, 1984; Vidovich & Currie, 2012). Useem (1984) labelled these persons as members of "the inner circle." MacLean et al. (2014, 2017) have similarly described such elite individuals as "hyper-agents" or as the "elite of the elite." As measures of centrality, the scholars have counted the number of overlapping board positions or the number of positions in extra-corporate organizations and institutions (MacLean et al., 2017).

The number of extra-corporate positions held by members of the Norwegian business elite was also counted. In this count, positions in (1) employer and business associations, (2) voluntary organizations, (3) political parties, and (4) state boards and committees are included. This simple operation showed that holding several positions is uncommon. Forty percent of the business leaders had held only one position, while 43 percent had held two positions, 14 percent had held three positions, and 2 percent had held four positions. Moreover, in a separate multivariate analysis not presented here, it appeared that, contrary to what MacLean et al. (2017) found, holding several extra-corporate positions is unrelated to the business leaders' class background.

More importantly, the number of such positions varies between different groups within the business community. Elected representatives in voluntary organizations have held, on average, 2.8 positions. Business leaders who are not involved in such organizations have held only 1.6 extra-corporate positions. Business leaders who are members of the boards of employer and industry associations (excluding the elected representatives in voluntary organizations) have held 2.1 positions on average.

Next, the characteristics of business leaders who have been elected representatives in voluntary organizations were analysed more closely. As shown above, they function as bridges not only between the business community and voluntary organizations but also, to some extent, between these institutions and the political system. This finding prompted a further examination of these individuals. A statistical analysis of all the members of the business elite was then performed to determine the extent to which being an elected representative in voluntary organizations is statistically related to various personal characteristics (cf. Model 1 in Table 3). In the model, the business leaders' education and class background, wealth, age, gender and mothers' educational level were included. Logistic regression was used in the analysis, and being elected representative or not was a dependent variable. The fathers' education was not included since this variable correlates strongly with both the fathers' occupational status and the mothers' educational level.

Model 2 in Table 3 shows the results of a similar statistical analysis where the dependent variable is whether the business leaders are or have been members of the boards of employer and industry associations. Leaders

Table 3. Personal characteristics of elected representatives in voluntary organizations and members of the boards of employer and industry associations.

Parameter	Model 1. Elected representatives in voluntary organizations	Model 2. Members of boards of employer and industry associations
	Estimates	Estimates
Intercept	-8.271*** (.2.631)	-5.741*** (2.157)
Class origin (compared with working-class)		
Upper-class	-1.567** (0.681)	0.212 (0.476)
Upper-middle-class	-0.999** (0.483)	-0.053 (0.398)
Lower-middle-class	-1.076 (0.744)	-0.169 (0.576)
Log wealth	0.286** (0.128)	0.229* (0.122)
Leaders' education	-0.085 (0.287)	0.492** (0.228)
Mothers' education	0.691*** (0.233)	0.231 (0.180)
Age	0.027 (0.027)	0.004 (0.021)
Gender. Male = 1	0.034 (0.593)	-0.686 (0.467)
-2 Log L	183.770	263.499
N	237	201

Notes: Logistic regression; standard errors in parentheses; levels of significance are ***1 percent, **5 percent and *10 percent.

who also were elected representatives in voluntary organizations were not included in this analysis. (Including these persons does not, however, alter the results of the analysis).

Notably, in Table 3, the two groups of business leaders are socially different, particularly as it relates to social origin. Model 2 in Table 3 demonstrates that being a board member in employer and industry associations is unrelated to the occupational status of the business leaders' fathers. Business leaders from upper-class families are neither more nor less inclined to join the governing bodies of associations in which individual corporations are members. In contrast, Model 1 in Table 3 reveals that leaders who have been elected representatives in voluntary organizations are significantly more likely to have been raised in working-class families.

Additionally, membership on the boards of employer and industry association is related to the educational level of the elite individuals. It seems that the best-educated leaders are chosen to represent the business interests of these associations. A surprising difference is that holding positions in voluntary organizations is significantly associated with the educational level of the business leaders' mothers. The higher the level of education the mothers have, the more likely that the leaders were or had been elected to the governing body in a voluntary organization. However, the two groups of business leaders have one characteristic in common: Table 3 reveals that wealthy business leaders, independent of their class background, have a higher probability of being represented in each of the two groups.

9. Discussion

In international research, there are different opinions about the network relationships between the business sector and civil society. In a survey of the network in-

volving a selection of large corporations, charities, foundations, and state advisory boards, Moore et al. (2002) found that voluntary organizations were relatively isolated within the network. In a study of the French elite, MacLean et al. (2017) discovered that centrality in an extra-corporate network was a significant factor behind access to the "elite of the elite."

In contrast to what Moore et al. (2002) found in the US, voluntary organizations in Norway do not have a peripheral position within the business network with the outside world. Instead, the connections of the business elite to voluntary organizations are as common as links to various parts of the political-bureaucratic system. Moreover, as demonstrated above, the participants in the governance of voluntary organizations are among the most well-connected members of the business elite. Accordingly, they act as bridging actors between the business community, civil society and public sector and can, as such, facilitate elite integration across sectors.

There are probably various reasons why business leaders are invited to join the governing bodies of voluntary organizations. Similarly, the business leaders likely have had various motives for accepting the invitations. In the Norwegian context, well-connected business leaders are probably valuable to many national voluntary organizations. Norway is characterized by a large welfare state that is an important source of funding for many of these organizations. Many of them actively lobby politicians and senior civil servants (Sivesind et al., 2018). Business leaders with knowledge of the bureaucratic-political system are well equipped to give useful advice about how to manoeuvre in this complex environment to obtain funding and influence political decisions.

Another indication of the integration of voluntary organizations into the business elite network is the position of wealthy business leaders. These super-rich elite individuals (some of them are billionaires) are over-

represented among participants in the governance of both voluntary organizations and employer and industry associations. Given the definition of business elite followed in this article, these super-rich persons are probably CEOs or chairmen of the board of large corporations in which they are also large shareholders. They have acquired their positions as dominant owners through inheritance or by having built up the corporations themselves through entrepreneurship. It is well known that many of these “owner-managers” have considerable power and influence in the Norwegian economy.

Their attendance at governing bodies of voluntary organizations is possibly a result of an exchange of favours between the rich business owner and the voluntary organizations. The organizations have probably received a substantial donation, and in return, the donator is invited to join the organization’s governing body. Previous scholarship on board composition in CSOs indicates that this interpretation is valid. However, regardless of their reasons for having accepted positions in voluntary organizations, the participation of wealthy business leaders is a testimony to the integration of voluntary organizations in the business elite network.

However, business leaders who participate in the governance of Norwegian voluntary organizations differ from their colleagues on the boards of employer associations. As shown in Table 3, elected representatives in voluntary organizations are notably more likely to have grown up in working-class families. In other words, business leaders who have experienced pronounced social mobility seem to be more attracted to being involved in the governance of CSOs than colleagues from a privileged background. Seemingly, this finding goes against ideas in previous research that privileged elites seek positions in CSOs to engage in elite socializing and attain prestige and status (Moore & White, 2000; Ostrower, 1998; Ratcliff et al., 1979; Salzman & Domhoff, 1983).

In the theory section above (Section 5), social similarity was described as a structural precondition for elite integration. In some of the literature on elites, social similarity in the form of a shared upper-class origin is even portrayed as a manifestation of elite integration (Domhoff, 1967; Mills, 1956). One might ask whether their working-class background indicates that some of the elected representatives are less integrated into the business elite. However, the data provided by the 2015 Leadership Study do not support an unambiguous answer to this question.

The literature on elites and CSOs suggests that “outsiders” in the elite community are often eager to acquire positions in such organizations. Middleton (1987) mentioned that becoming a member of the board of a CSO is an important means to further one’s career in the business world. She also discussed board membership as a way to develop new friendships and become more fully integrated into the community. Similarly, Ostrower (1998) showed that membership on an arts board opened opportunities for making social connec-

tions and gaining social entrée. MacLean et al. (2017) emphasized that positions in CSOs enable elite individuals to accumulate social and organizational capital, which is beneficial for entering into the power field of the “hyperagents.” Norwegian business leaders who grew up in working-class families could be particularly preoccupied with these benefits. In line with the ideas and findings of Middleton (1987), Ostrower (1998) and MacLean et al. (2017), it is likely that they have perceived that their careers and standing in the community would both be helped by accepting invitations to become elected representatives in voluntary organizations.

As MacLean, Harvey, and Chia (2012) pointed out, class-bounded career constraints can be overcome if the individual becomes conscious of the unspoken claims and adapts to them strategically. Socially-mobile leadership candidates can identify and embrace behaviours that express the dominant repertoire of cultural capital, and they can build a social network and cultivate personal relationships that could advance their careers. Business leaders from a working-class background participating in the governing bodies of voluntary organizations—significantly more often than their peers who do not have such a background—are a testimony to the importance of such reflexivity.

An alternative interpretation is that socially-mobile members of the business elite want to give back to society. The persons who have moved into peak positions in the business world from an ordinary social origin have obtained a privileged life. They are well aware of the contrast between their new lifestyle and their lifestyle during childhood. If they are conscious of this contrast, they could feel a genuine desire to share the fruits of their success. One way to do this is by lending their competence to voluntary organizations. The wish to give back can also be paired with a need to legitimize their own success. Socially-mobile business leaders could, perhaps, feel that they must assure themselves and significant others that their good fortune is well deserved.

The previous explanations focus on socially-mobile business leaders and their motivations. It is, however, likely that an explanation of their overrepresentation in voluntary organizations might just as well be sought in the absence of business leaders from the upper-class. This prompts the question of why leaders from the upper-class are not more engaged in the governing of voluntary organizations. Being hesitant to take up positions in voluntary organizations could be rooted in a preference for avoiding public attention. Norway is characterized by relatively small income differences and an egalitarian culture (Aalberg, 1998; Myhre, 2017). Sometimes, this egalitarian culture stimulates a negative public focus on privileged families. Traditional upper-class families may feel that this public focus questions the legitimacy of their position in society. Some may counter the threat to their legitimacy by becoming large donators or participating in other types of prosocial activities. Others may prefer to keep their heads low. As the French scholar Daloz

(2007) observed some years ago, Norwegian elites are characterized by considerable “conspicuous modesty.” They prefer to downplay their power and status. Their inclination to avoid public attention could motivate them to abstain from accepting invitations to join the governing bodies of voluntary organizations.

Surprisingly, the analyses presented above revealed that joining the governing bodies of voluntary organizations is significantly related to the educational level of the business leaders’ mothers. This result might reflect that in many families, highly educated mothers are stewards of social and occupational ambitions. As Harding, Morris, and Hughes (2015) noted, they teach their children how to behave in both school and work life, as well as how to relate to authority figures so that it favours their careers. These mothers may also stimulate their sons’ and daughters’ ambitions. The mothers’ teaching and encouragement could have made the business leaders aware of the possible career advantages of participating in the governance of voluntary organization as elected representatives. This interpretation also suggests that voluntary organizations can be useful pathways to elite career and prestige. The various explanations discussed in the preceding paragraphs are attempts at plausible interpretations of the findings presented above. Further research focusing on business leaders’ motives for becoming elected representatives in voluntary organizations is needed to establish the validity of these interpretations.

10. Conclusion

Previous studies have demonstrated that voluntary organizations in Norway have many links to the public sector. The analyses presented in this article indicate they are also integrated into the extra-corporate network of the business elite through business leaders who are elected representatives in these organizations. Admittedly, the elected representatives constitute a minority of all members of the Norwegian business elite. However, they are well-connected. Several of them act as bridges between the business world, civil society and the state.

The relationship between the business community and voluntary organizations reflects the basic features of the Norwegian welfare-state model. This model is characterized by comprehensive responsibility for the well-being of citizens, a large public sector and generous welfare benefits, and is distinguished by a unique collaboration between strong trade unions, centralized employers’ associations and the state. A civil society with a high level of citizen participation is also an important element of this model. The Norwegian welfare-state model has given rise to a close-knit national elite network gravitating around the state at the centre. The business elite and the top leaders of national voluntary organizations are both firmly interwoven in this national network.

Individual business leaders have different motives for becoming elected representatives in voluntary or-

ganizations. From an overall perspective, their participation supports the business elite in their endeavours to promote the interests of the business community. The elected representatives can help build the legitimacy of the business community and form useful political alliances. Among the elite individuals who participate in the governance of voluntary organizations, there is an overrepresentation of leaders who grew up in the working-class. In this sense, being an elected representative in these organizations seems to be nearly a “prerogative” for socially-mobile business leaders. This pattern of recruitment could be due to conscious determination on the part of these leaders to use trusted positions as a pathway to elite status and prestige. Alternatively, it could be the result of a genuine desire to give something back to society and use their talents for the common good.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the very useful comments and suggestions provided by the journal’s three anonymous reviewers, the two academic editors and Kari Steen-Johnsen.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests.

References

- Aalberg, T. (1998). Norske likhetsverdier i et komparativt perspektiv [Norwegian egalitarian values in a comparative perspective]. *Tidsskrift for Samfunnsforskning*, 39(4), 490–515.
- Abzug, R., & Galaskiewicz, J. (2001). Non-profit boards: Crucibles of expertise or symbols of local identities? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 30(1), 51–73.
- Arnesen, D., & Sivesind, K. H. (2020). *Organisasjonslandskap i endring 2009–2019* [The organizational landscape in change 2009–2019; Rapport 2020:5]. Oslo and Bergen: Center for Research on Civil Society and Voluntary Sector.
- Billis, D. (2010). From welfare bureaucracies to welfare hybrids. In D. Billis (Ed.), *Hybrid organizations and the third sector* (pp. 3–24). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research in the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). New York, NY: Greenwood Press.
- Burt, R. (1992). *Structural holes: The social structure of competition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Daloz, J. P. (2007). Political elites and conspicuous modesty: Norway, Sweden, Finland in comparative perspective. In F. Engelstad & T. Gulbrandsen (Eds.),

- Comparative studies of social and political elites* (Vol. 23, pp. 171–210). Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Domhoff, G. (1967). *Who rules America?* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Eimhjellen, I., & Fladmoe, A. (2020). *Frivillighet, klasse og sosial ulikhet. Norsk frivillighet i et klasseperspektiv* [Volunteering, class and social inequality. Norwegian volunteering in a class perspective] (Rapport 2020:1). Oslo and Bergen: Center for Research on Civil Society and Voluntary Sector.
- Engelstad, F. (2018). Models of elite integration. In H. Best & J. Higley (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of political elites* (pp. 439–457). Basingstoke: Palgrave-MacMillan.
- Enjolras, B., & Strømsnes, K. (2018). The transformation of the Scandinavian voluntary sector. In B. Enjolras & K. Strømsnes (Eds.), *Scandinavian civil society and social transformation: The case of Norway* (pp. 1–24). Cham: Springer.
- Farkas, G. (2012). *Essays in elite networks in Sweden* (Stockholm Studies in Sociology, New Series 52). Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Gulbrandsen, T., Engelstad, F., Klausen, T. B., Skjeie, H., Teigen, M., & Østerud, Ø. (2002). *Norske makteliter* [Norwegian power elites]. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Gulbrandsen, T. (2019). *Elites in an egalitarian society*. London: Palgrave-MacMillan.
- Hansen, M. N., Flemmen, M., & Andersen, P. L. (2009). *The Oslo register data class scheme (ORDC): Final report from the classification project*. Oslo: Institute of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo.
- Harding, J. F., Morris, P. A., & Hughes, D. (2015). The relationship between maternal education and children's academic outcomes: A theoretical framework. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(1), 60–76.
- Higley, J., Hoffmann-Lange, U., Kadushin, C., & Moore, G. (1991). Elite integration in stable democracies: A reconsideration. *European Sociological Review*, 7(1), 35–53.
- Hoffmann-Lange, U. (1992). *Eliten, macht und konflikt in der bundesrepublik* [Elites, power and conflict in the Federal Republic of Germany]. Opladen: Leske und Budrich.
- Hwang, H., & Powell, W. (2009). The rationalization of charity: The influences of professionalization in the non-profit sector. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 54(2), 268–298.
- Kahn, S. R. (2012). The sociology of elites. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 38, 361–377.
- Lewis, D. (2010). Encountering hybridity: Lessons from individual experiences. In D. Billis (Ed.), *Hybrid organizations and the third sector* (pp. 219–239). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- MacLean, M., Harvey, C., & Chia, R. (2012). Reflexive practices and the making of elite business careers. *Management Learning*, 43(4), 385–404.
- MacLean, M., Harvey, C., & Kling, G. (2014). Pathways to power: Class, hyperagency and the French corporate elite. *Organization Studies*, 35(6), 825–855.
- MacLean, M., Harvey, C., & Kling, G. (2017). Elite business networks and the field of power: A matter of class? *Theory, Culture and Society*, 34(5/6), 127–151.
- Middleton, M. (1987). Non-profit boards of directors: Beyond the governance function. In W. W. Powell (Ed.), *The non-profit sector: A research handbook* (1st ed., pp. 612–628). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Mills, C. W. (1956). *The power elite*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Moore, G., Sobieraj, S., White, J. A., Mayorova, O., & Beaulieu, D. (2002). Elite interlocks in three U.S. sectors: Non-profit, corporate, and government. *Social Science Quarterly*, 83(3), 726–744.
- Moore, G., & White, J. A. (2000). Gender and networks in a local voluntary-sector elite. *International Journal of Voluntary and Non-profit Organizations*, 11(4), 309–328.
- Myhre, J. E. (2017). The cradle of Norwegian equality and egalitarianism: Norway in the nineteenth century. In S. Bendixen, M. B. Bringslid, & H. Vike (Eds.), *Egalitarianism in Scandinavia* (pp. 65–85). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ostrower, F. (1998). The arts as cultural capital among elites: Bourdieu's theory reconsidered. *Poetic*, 26, 43–53.
- Ostrower, F., & Stone, M. M. (2006). Governance: Research trends, gaps, and future prospects. In W. W. Powell & R. Steinberg (Eds.), *The non-profit sector: A research handbook* (2nd ed., pp. 612–628). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Ratcliff, R. E., Gallagher, M. E., & Ratcliff, K. S. (1979). The civic influence of bankers: An analysis of the influence of economic power and social prominence in the command of civic policy positions. *Social Problems*, 26(3), 298–313.
- Ruostetsaari, I. (2015). *Elite recruitment and coherence of the inner core of power in Finland*. New York, NY: Lexington Books.
- Salzman, H., & Domhoff, G. W. (1983). Non-profit organizations and the corporate community. *Social Science History*, 7(2), 205–216.
- Selle, P. (1993). Voluntary organizations and the welfare state: The case of Norway. *Voluntas*, 4(1), 1–15.
- Sivesind, K. H. (2015). Giving in Norway: An ambitious welfare state with a self-reliant non-profit sector. In P. Wiepking & F. Handy (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of global philanthropy* (pp. 230–248). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sivesind, K. H., Arnesen, D., Gulbrandsen, T., Nordø, Å. D., & Enjolras, B. (2018). An organizational landscape in transformation. In B. Enjolras & K. Strømsnes (Eds.), *Scandinavian civil society and social transformation: The case of Norway* (pp. 67–116). Cham: Springer.
- Suykens, B., De Rynck, F., & Verschuere, B. (2020). Examining the extent and coherence of non-profit hybridization toward the market in a post-corporatist welfare state. *Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Quar-*

terly. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764020908344>

Torsteinsen, A. (2017). *Lederskapsundersøkelsen 2015* [The Leadership Study 2015] (Documents 2017/17). Oslo: Statistics Norway.

Useem, M. (1984). *The inner circle*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Vidovich, L., & Currie, J. (2012). Governance networks. Interlocking directorships of corporate and non-profit boards. *Nonprofit Management and Leader-*

ship, 22(4), 507–523.

Wiesel, I. (2018). Distinction, cohesion, and the social networks of Australia's elite suburbs. *Urban Geography*, 40(4), 445–466.

Wollebæk, D., & Selle, P. (2002). *Det nye organisasjonssamfunnet. Demokrati i omforming* [The New organizational society. Democracy in transformation]. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Woxholth, G. (1998). *Non-profit law in Norway* (Report 1998:12). Oslo: Institute for Social Research.

About the Author



Trygve Gulbrandsen earned a Dr. philos. in Sociology from the University of Oslo and is a Research Professor Emeritus. Previous positions include Special Advisor in the Planning Department, Ministry of Finance and Professor II in the Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo.