

Mikael Börjesson's Research Domains

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Main roots and points of departure

My research in Sociology of Education is primarily rooted in a French tradition that originated among the Durkheimians and was further developed in the works of Pierre Bourdieu and his colleagues.

Within this tradition education and its institutions, content, forms, functions and connections to other parts of the social world, are regarded not only as social facts in the classical Durkheimian sense but as residing within spaces that need to be mapped in order to make the individual phenomena comprehensible. To be more concrete: in order to explain, for example, what goes on in a certain school or a certain university study programme it is fruitful to examine the location of that school or that study programme within a larger educational field, with its hierarchies and polarities separating schools and programmes. Further, when pupils, students, teachers or administrators are researched, their positions and trajectories should also be “plotted” into the “map” of the social space, i.e. the overall system of relations between social groups.

Such methods, focusing on relations between social phenomena rather than on these phenomena as purely individual ones, require a rupture with various conceptions that are taken for granted in everyday views on education or in the political debate. Statistics is a well-tried vehicle to achieve such an epistemological break. In face of hard numbers or structures that emerge out of analyses of substantial datasets, the researcher is forced to reconsider many presumptions (including his or her own).

Comparison is another indispensable principle in the study of, for example, educational fields and their connections to the wider society: comparisons of various subfields, of national fields in different countries, of different social groups' educational strategies, of strategies employed by competing educational institutions—and not the least comparisons over time. Time-series and other tools for analysing historical changes are of key importance to the kind of studies that I have undertaken or directed, in which a large number of scholars with a background in history or economic history have participated.

Even if statistical methods in many cases are indispensable in order to grasp the spaces or fields that encompass the individual objects of study, we have also made massive use of interviews, questionnaires, observations and document analyses. However, regardless of the methods employed a main purpose has always been to relate the specific phenomena to a wider societal context.

Four key areas in my research are: 1) transnational educational strategies and the internationalisation of higher education, 2) fields of education, 3) fields of culture, 4) prosopography, large-scale data-sets and geometric data analysis. These four research areas can be seen as important parts of an overarching research programme in Sociology of Education.

Transnational educational strategies and the internationalisation of higher education

In my thesis, *Transnationella utbildningsstrategier vid svenska lärosäten och bland svenska studenter i Paris och New York* [Transnational Educational Strategies at Swedish Educational Institutions and Among Swedish Students in Paris and New York] (2005), it was noted that education is usually a neglected area within the otherwise extensive globalisation research and that there were surprisingly few thorough studies in educational research focusing on cross-border phenomena. An alternative way of understanding the internationalisation of higher education was presented, where transnational strategies are studied as an ingredient in social groups' strategies and where the transnational investments of higher education institutions are understood as means in the struggles that take place between institutions in the national sphere.

One major finding in the thesis is that the access of Swedish students to the most attractive positions in the US and, above all, the French system often requires very extensive investments in the Swedish educational system. The international thus does not stand in opposition to the national. This should, of course, be understood in relation to the internal logic of the Swedish higher education system. Increased internationalisation contributes to an increased *national* stratification and hierarchisation of institutions and courses, where the predominant institutions due to their very extensive investments in international resources succeed in distancing themselves further from their national competitors. The leading institutions and courses in every country become enclosed in exclusive networks, where they are

able to add the symbolic value represented by exchange partners to their own assets, as a kind of social capital shared by all participating institutions. This means that the students who reach the top of the national hierarchies at the same time obtain access to the most desired positions in a global educational market and will benefit from the combined resources of the network.

I have continued to develop my interest in transnational strategies in two major research projects funded by the Swedish Research Council, *Transnationella strategier inom den högre utbildningen. Sveriges förhållande till Frankrike och USA, 1919–2009*, [Transnational Strategies within Higher Education. Sweden's Relations to France and the US, 1919–2009] project period 2007–2010, and *Internationaliseringens nationella arenor. Svensk högre utbildning och utländska studenter, 1945–2015* [Domestic Arenas of Internationalization. Swedish Higher Education and International Students, 1945–2015], project period 2011–2014. The findings from the first project have been published, inter alia, in articles in the journals *Retfaerd* and *American Studies in Scandinavia*. The article “The Global Space of International Students” has been submitted to *International Political Sociology*. Additional publications are in process.

In conjunction with the above mentioned project Domestic Arenas of Internationalization an international network “Transnational Capital and Transformation of the Elites” directed by Mikael Börjesson and Mikael Palme, SEC, Uppsala, and Anne-Catherine Wagner and Bertrand Réau, Centre européen de sociologie et de science politique de la Sorbonne (CESSP-Paris), has been established with its first colloquium in Stockholm in January 2013 and a second to take place in Paris in June 2014.

Fields of education

Alongside studies of transnational strategies, analyses of fields of education have been a strong research interest. The main focus was on the upper secondary school in *Välfärd och skola*, [Welfare and School] SOU 2000:139, which was commissioned by the Swedish Welfare Commission. Together with Mikael Palme, I was co-author of large section, “Skillnader, profilering och elevers utbildningsstrategier i gymnasieskolan under 1990-talet” [“Differences, Profiling, and Pupils' Educational Strategies in Upper Secondary School during the 1990s”], where primarily statistics from Statistics Sweden on all pupils in year 9 and in upper secondary school are analysed for a number of years. One key result was that competition between upper secondary schools increased during the 1990s, which per se led to greater differentiation both between and within the existing national programmes. The theoretical programmes became increasingly more popular. However, while the natural science branch of the natural science programme attracted more and more pupils with good educational merits, coming from homes with extensive assets of various kinds, the social sciences programme had become increasingly heterogeneous with respect to its social recruitment.

The observation that the natural science programme came to occupy an increasingly dominant position in the Swedish upper secondary school field, served as the point of departure for a project on natural science education and its position in the educational system, *Skolans kungsväg. Det naturvetenskapliga programmets plats i utbildningssystemet* [The Royal Road of schooling. The science programme within the Swedish educational system], funded by the Swedish Research Council from 2006 to 2008 and directed by Donald Broady. Comprising various sub-projects this research project mapped out long term changes in social recruitment from 1987 to 2008 to the upper secondary school and to the natural science programme in particular. Furthermore, interview series with pupils and teachers on the natural science programme confirmed that this programme was conceived as the Royal Road of schooling.

The focus was on higher education in the research project *Kampen om studenterna. Det svenska högskolefältet och lärosätenas rekryteringsstrategier 1993–2003*, funded by the Educational Science Committee of the Swedish Research Council between 2002 and 2004 and directed by Donald Broady. In this project, we could note that competition between institutions of higher education and courses clearly increased during the 1990s. The most sought after programmes in medicine, architecture and journalism became even more elitist in their recruitment while other programmes, in particular shorter engineering programmes and teacher education programmes fell behind with a weak basis of recruitment.

We have now made the overarching structure of higher education the subject of comparative studies in four Nordic countries, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, in the project *Nordic Fields of Higher Education*, funded by NordForsk 2013–2015 and directed by me. The aim is to analyse and compare the structure of the fields of higher education and changes over time. These analyses are based on national statistical register data at the individual level for all registered students in the respective country, from around 1980 until 2010. It is also aimed to combine studies of recruitment with analyses of the design of the higher education systems. In line with this ambition, a book chapter “Oraison funèbre

du modèle suédois. Trois dimensions de la marchandisation de l'enseignement supérieur" on the restructuring of the Swedish higher education system, was published in a French anthology on the marketization of higher education in a global perspective.

In parallel with studies of the entire field of higher education, the research unite has nourished an interest in specific sub-fields within the educational system. A special interest has been devoted to elite education. A large questionnaire survey (N=2,500) on students attending 25 different elite programmes in the Stockholm-Uppsala region was conducted in 2004–2006 and an article "Cultural and Field-Specific Capital among Students in the Elite Segment of Swedish Higher Education" based on the survey material has been submitted to *Poetics*. Here we show that the space of lifestyles has three distinct dimensions, where cultural preferences is most important one, and that there is a clear relation between the structure of the space and the distribution of study programmes.

Other investigations have been devoted to the sub-field of teacher education programmes, where I have been able to show clearly declining numbers in recruitment to the majority of teacher education programmes between 1993 and 1998 as regards the proportion of students with high grades and good results on the national university aptitude test and from homes with substantial assets. This interest in recruitment-related issues for teacher education is also the subject of the ongoing doctoral thesis work in Sociology of Education by Emil Bertilsson, under my supervision. Furthermore, SEC was in 2008 commissioned by the National Agency for Higher Education to analyse recruitment to teacher education. We have also edited a special issue of *Praktiske Grunde* on the transformations of the recruitment to teacher education.

One area of education which is considered to be in a crisis, but for quite different reasons than teacher education is language studies. The much discussed problems are that the university students who take languages are too few and the declining interest in languages at upper secondary school. Within the framework of the project *Språken, skolan, samhället, 1960–2010* [Languages, Education and Swedish Society 1960–2010], funded by the Educational Science Committee of the Swedish Research Council, directed by Bo G. Ekelund, project period 2009–2013, I have together with Emil Bertilsson made analyses of the numbers studying languages in the education system and noted that the crisis is partial. Certain languages, above all German, are losing students while Chinese is actually increasing. These findings have been published in *Praktiske Grunde* and further publications are planned.

Another sub-field to which I have paid special attention is the arts education. Within the framework of the project *Konsten att lyckas som konstnär. Socialt ursprung, kön, utbildning och karriär 1945–2007* [The Art of Success in Art. Social Origin, Gender, Education, and Career 1945–2007], funded by the Swedish Research Council and directed by Martin Gustavsson and me, a study was made of the whole field of arts education and of certain specific programmes and higher education institutions. An extensive prosopographic study of all registered students at the Royal University College of Fine Arts in Stockholm between 1939 and 1986, totalling almost 1,200 individuals, has been collected for the project. In addition, there is extensive questionnaire material from art students as well as series of interviews with present and previous students. The Sociology of Education studies within the project were coordinated by me and I have also been responsible for carrying out the statistical analyses of the recruitment to artistic higher education courses. Results from the project have been published last autumn in a major anthology from Daidalos, *Konstens omvända ekonomi. Tillgångar inom utbildningar och fält, 1938–2008* [The Reversed Economy of Arts. Assets in Education and Field], edited by Martin Gustavsson, Marta Edling and me.

Fields of culture

The project *Konsten att lyckas som konstnär* is of interest not only to the world of education. Within this project, data has also been collected about artists who in one or another sense have succeeded in entering the field for artistic production. We have trawled through church registers, museum catalogues, gallery catalogues, scholarship funds, lists of positions of responsibility, the register of teachers of art schools, etc. hunting for names and information. The result is a prosopographic database of more than 14,000 artists who were active between 1945 and 2005. By then examining this database in the light of the characteristics of the student population at the most prestigious school in Sweden, The Royal University College of Fine Arts in Stockholm, it has been possible to analyse the significance of this school (and other art schools) over the years. Our findings indicate that higher education in the fine arts has been an increasing important prerequisite for entering the field of art. These findings will be published in a monograph at Daidalos and in a couple of scholarly journals.

In a previous project, *Litterär generation och social auktoritet. En undersökning av amerikanska prosadebutanterns bakgrund och karriär, 1940–2000* [Literary Generations and Social Authority: A Study of

US Prose-fiction Debut Writers, 1940–2000], funded by The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, 2000–2005 (Department of English, Uppsala University, and directed by Rolf Lundén and Bo G. Ekelund), I did participate by using Geometric Data Analysis to investigate what we refer to as “the space of fictional universe”, constructed on the basis of all prose fiction debutants in the United States 1940 and 1955. This project is unique in its ambition to take such a comprehensive approach to literary production as studying all debutants on three occasions and building up databases on 1) the literary works (number of pages, genre, structure of actions, narrative, etc.), 2) the authors (social background, literary career, number of publications, type of publications, other occupations) and 3) publishers (size, profile, location, etc.). Results have been published in *Poetics*.

The fields of cultural production have also been analysed within the project *Sextioåtta. Studentrevoltens sociala förutsättningar och kulturella effekter* [Sixty-Eight. The Swedish Student Rebellion, Its Social Conditions, and Its Effects on Cultural Fields. A Study in the Sociology of Educational Change], funded by the Educational Science Committee of the Swedish Research Council, directed by Donald Broady, project period 2009–2013. My contribution has mainly consisted, together with Martin Gustavsson and Andreas Melldahl, of providing analyses of the relationship between the educational system and the fields of culture in general and within the sphere of art in particular. An initial round of findings has been published in *Praktiske Grunde*.

Prosopography, large-scale data-bases and geometric data analysis

Within the framework of projects linked to SEC and with the financial support of the vice chancellor of Uppsala University as a result of a positive review in the university's major evaluation Quality and Renewal 2007 (KoF), a large database infrastructure has been developed under my direction over the years. This endeavour comprises both statistical data retrieved for Statistics Sweden at the individual level on all grade 9-leavers 1988–2008, all registered in upper secondary school 1988–2008, all students in higher education, 1977–2009, all employed in higher education, 1984–2008, the Swedish Board for Study Support on study loans for studies abroad, 1991–2010, and the whole population for certain years from 1960 and onwards, and a large number of prosopographic (collective biographical) databases comprising information on, for example, American debut authors and their works, art students and artists in Sweden and grantees from the Sweden-America Foundation. A lot of effort has been invested into the creation of sociologically relevant classification schemes on education (see my dissertation) and on social positions (see for example chapter on social classes “Om kunsten at konstruere sociale grupper”, in Hammerslev, Ole, Jens Arnholtz Hansen & Ida Willig (red.), *Refleksiv sociologi i praksis*, Hans Reitzel, Köpenhamn 2009) for the numerous accomplished analyses based upon the data. Also some ten major research projects are based on the use of these data, and seven Ph.D. theses draw extensively on the same material).

In parallel with the construction of these databases, Geometric Data Analysis (GDA) has become an increasingly central method of analysis, a topic that was taken up at a European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop on prosopographic methods in historical and social sciences arranged by SEC in 2007. Within the family of methods assembled under the heading of GDA, we in particular use different versions of multiple correspondence analysis, which is suitable for analyses of surveys and large data material, as well as Euclidean classification that is useful to arrange individuals in groups on the basis of the outcome of the correspondence analyses. Since 2003, SEC has worked closely with Brigitte Le Roux, who is world leading in this area together with the late Henry Rouanet. I stayed in Paris in the spring of 2004 and the analyses of the Swedish students in Paris in my doctoral thesis were made under Brigitte Le Roux's supervision. We have on many occasions invited Brigitte Le Roux and Henry Rouanet and their colleagues to Uppsala for courses, lectures and seminars. Le Roux is also included as a statistical consultant in a number of the ongoing projects. Thanks to the competencies in GDA, interesting possibilities for national and international collaboration open up. I participate for example as a statistical consultant in the research programme *Mod et internationalt retsvæsen: En analyse af judicialiseringen af international ret og fremkomsten af en transnational Rule of Law* [Towards an International Justice: An Analysis of the Judicialisation of International Law and the Emergence of a Transnational Rule of Law], and the Centre of Excellence *Centre for International Courts (CIC)*, both directed by the professor in Sociology of Law Mikael Rask Madsen.

A research programme in Sociology of Education

I regard my different research interests as integrated parts of a large research programme in Sociology of Education, where a central ambition is to relate the sociological study of education to wider processes in

society such as globalization, the transition to a knowledge-based economy and the restructuring of educational systems in line of New Public Management. For example, the studies of transnational educational strategies and the internationalisation of higher education are related to the globalisation process. Reversely, higher education and student mobility also contribute to these processes. This implies that the sociology of education forms a central discipline for the understanding of current societal transformations.

The research programme has also the aim of overcoming a number of unproductive boundaries in the study of education. One such boundary is the customary division of labour among researchers based on the levels—primary, secondary, professional, higher—of the educational system. More integrated studies are called for where the relations between levels are better understood and the pupils/students trajectories through the entire system are taken into account. Another obstacle resides in the micro/macro and qualitative/quantitative gulfs. Such divisions become unnecessary when you combine the study of comprehensive educational fields and their transformations with close investigations of certain institutions or programmes, groups of pupils, students or teachers etc. situated in a specific corner of the space. Finally, the temporal dimension and questions of change over time, that is an historical perspective, is needed in the study of contemporary education. A precondition for the programme is evidently fruitful collaborations with specialist in a wide range of disciplines.