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**Towards a theoretical framework for
analysing organisational processes:
taking Norbert Elias and Pierre
Bourdieu into organisational analysis.**

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Abstract

In this paper, I discuss how a theoretical framework can be build to analyse social processes of transformation, making the link between macro and micro processes, in which this dichotomy can be overcome. The aim of this theoretical framework is to account for the transformation in societal characteristics and changes in actors' strategies at micro level, in a way that links macro changes and micro processes - the cognitive structures of the individual and social structures of the society. In order to build this

framework, I draw from the figuration sociology of Norbert Elias, the praxeologia of Pierre Bourdieu and the work of Michael Crozier.

Introduction

In this paper, I discuss how a theoretical framework can be build to analyse social processes of transformation, making the link between macro and micro processes, in which this dichotomy can be overcome. The aim of this theoretical framework is to account for the transformation in societal characteristics and changes in actors' strategies at micro level, in a way that links macro changes and micro processes - the cognitive structures of the individual and social structures of the society. However, this is not to be seen as a causal relation in which macro factors determine the behaviour of micro actors - the framework tries to link these processes in a dialectical relationship.

How to analyse the interplay between global forces and the actions of local actors and groups? Or, how to analyse the interplay between "forces of structuration" and the actors' responses? How to deal with transformation as a social process in which agents and groups have their actions influenced but not determined by the "forces of competition"? In order to build this framework, I draw from the figuration sociology of Norbert Elias, the praxeologia of Pierre Bourdieu and the work of Michael Crozier. In spite of theoretical differences and divergences, sometimes very strong as those between Bourdieu, Elias and Crozier, these authors have used a similar concept - the

concept of game - as a methodological tool and as a metaphor to understand social processes.

1.1 - Taking Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu into organisational analysis.

Elias, as well Bourdieu¹, stressed the importance of methodological relationalism, against all forms of methodological *monism* that imply the assertion of the ontological priority of structure or agent, system or actor, the collective or the individual. Sociology must avoid this commonsensical perception of social reality. Both authors point to the origin of this problem in the structure of the European languages, which drives us to "*draw involuntary conceptual distinctions between structures and processes, or between the actor and his activity, between the objects and relationships*"². Bourdieu similarly was concerned with transcending a number of conventional sociological dichotomies: the opposition between subjectivism and objectivism; symbolism and materiality; theory and empirical research; structure and agency and micro and macro analysis³. Bourdieu attempted to synthesise micro and macro levels of analysis without relegating analysis to either one level or the other. Bourdieu argued that actors are continually producing and reproducing the societal systems through their actions and through their interactions. "*The relation between*

¹ Bourdieu's concepts and theoretical development is heavily indebted with Elias, in spite of the fact that Bourdieu just few times quoted Elias. Actually, the economy of Bourdieu's references to Elias has masked the significance of his influence. Elias, for example, used the concept of habitus many years before it was popularised by Bourdieu.

² Elias, (1970: 113)

³ (Wacquant, 1992: 3)

*the social agent and the world is not that between a subject (or a consciousness) and a object, but a relation of “ontological complicity” – or mutual “ possession ”.*⁴

The consequence of seeing a society as a number of isolated objects in a state of rest is that we are driven to draw senseless conceptual distinctions between the individual and the society as two separated things. This dualism creates one of the most discussed problems in sociology; the relation between macro-variables and micro-theory. Although most sociologists can the close links between them and see that these two categories belong together, they are often treated separately for the purpose of analysis. Sociological research often concentrates on one level or another, by invoking the formula "other things being equal", as if this would permit to concentrate on either macro or micro level. However, Elias argues, as long as these two categories for the "purpose of analysis" are considered statistically, no links can be found⁵. Elias proposes to replace the separation between the categories micro and macro sociology by the use of a developmental model, in which both levels are seen in a state of structured flux, not only of historical flux. Elias argues that by exploring this alternative to the more classical models, the separation between the two categories becomes impossible and the unity between them can be seen. Instead of conceptualising a society as it is, which is the most common way of addressing it according to our philosophical traditions, the task is to think of society as it becomes - has become in the past, is becoming in the present, and may become in the future.⁶

⁴ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 20).

⁵ Elias (1987)

⁶ Goudsblom and Mennel (1998)

For Elias, social forces are forces exerted by people over one another and over themselves. *"The task of sociology therefore includes not only the interpretations of specific compelling forces to which people are exposed in their particular empirically observable societies and groups, but also the freeing of speech and thought about such forces from their links with earlier heteronomous models"* ⁷. The sociologist must intensely and constantly reflect, not only on the observations that s/he makes at the empirical level, but also on the ways of thinking and conceptualising what we observe.

Elias refuses the idea that it is possible to clarify actual problems without looking into the past. His arguments in the article *"The retreat of sociologists into the present"* is *an attempt to drive attention to what constitutes the present, a small momentary phase within the vast stream of humanity's development"*⁸. The present as a momentary phase reaffirms the idea that the past, the present and possible futures are embedded in each other.

The consequences of these statements are not simple. When Elias places the concepts of individual and society inside a temporal perspective, the self loses its temporality within the present, because it does not start in the present, but is constructed in relation to the past. For him, power relations are built into the subjectivity we have learnt as children. Elias exemplifies this with the case of court society and its civilised codes of emotional and behavioural restraint. Children of courtiers learnt a courtly subjectivity that was itself interwoven with the power relations of the royal

⁷ ibid pg 18

court; they were not just built in immediate relations. The behavioural patterns of any society are, for Elias, "*imprinted in the individuals from the earlier childhood as a kind of second nature and kept alert in them by a powerful and increasingly strictly organised self control*"⁹. Elias argues that it is the exercise of self-control that makes clear perception, rational analysis, and purposeful action possible. Language and discursive practices provide a means of controlling the self and others through the deployment of symbolic forms. Scientific method, for example, provides ways of subjecting potentially unpredictable events to a regime of control and predictability¹⁰.

To understand this civilisation process and how it affects individuals it is necessary to understand the concept of figuration, i.e. the network of people and institutions linked interdependently and simultaneously through different dimensions. Figuration sociology is as an invitation to disregard the analytical fragmentation which is characteristic of social analyses oriented by a search for variables. "*The contrast which is repeatedly drawn between individual and society makes it seem as though individuals could in some sense exist independently of society, and vice versa. This seems highly questionable in the light of models showing processes of interweaving. And it is a scientific superstition that in order to investigate them scientifically one must necessarily dissect processes of interweaving into their component parts.*"¹¹. A figurational sociology helps to catch the complex causal relations involved when organisations underwent processes of transformation linked to societal processes of change. Organisations are to be seen in the light of Elias as a system of dynamic

⁸ Elias, 1987

⁹ Elias (1994,1939: 469)

¹⁰ Smith (1999:93)

forces, which involve agents situated within and outside its borders. Relations and not conditions need to become the empirical emphasis; processes and not structures need to be the focus of analysis.

Since our subjectivity is linked to the changing power relations in the society where we live, we are in a continuous process of change interrelated with changing social processes. This breaks with the idea of the individual and his or her emotional and behavioural restraint as something that is deeply personal. It breaks with the idea of a "homo clausus" in organisational studies, in which an adult comes out of the blue, and starts his or her organisational life without any past. The relative licence for acting out or constraining emotional impulses corresponds to the form of integration, the degree and kind of mutual dependence in which people live¹². Elias first worked with the idea of personality as a Gestalt. With inspiration from psychologists, the human personality was viewed as a configuration of interdependent traits. Carrying this view a step further, he also tried to anticipate the individual personalities as constituting a figuration together. Elias suggests the idea of a *homines aperti*, in which individuals and groups acquire their multiple identities (individual persona, gender, kin-group, occupation, religion, ethnicity, nation, and so on) through the experience of participating in complex social networks or 'figurations' shaped by long-term social processes¹³. The concept of *homines aperti* points to the need for an image of people as interdependent and interconnected, 'the image of a multitude of people, each of them relatively open, interdependent processes' (Elias, 1970: 121).

¹¹ Elias (1970:98)

¹² Elias(1939;1994)

¹³ Smith (1999)

From this perspective it is possible to understand both our own historically formed subjectivity, and the way in which power relations reflect a complex interweaving of interdependencies amongst people.

Figuration is the ongoing relations between people, the way in which they are bonded to each other, and therefore when a change takes place in one part of this enormous web, it comes to affect other parts as well, but it also encapsulates a quite long-term perspective. Human life is not only deeply social. This sociality works through interdependency networks that operate across vast long periods of time¹⁴.

Elias's theory of a civilising process cannot be understood well unless the notion of "ego" and "social system" as two entities existing independently of each other is abandoned. *"Individual and society do not relate to two objects existing separately but to different yet inseparable aspects of the same human beings and both aspects (and human beings in general) are normally involved in structural transformation."*¹⁵ Universal statements, and everlasting theories and social research that aim to achieve those characteristics are totally in contradiction to Elias' concepts. But, changeability is not the same as chaos. It is a special kind of order.¹⁶

Elias argued that a major problem in sociology is the fact that the sociologist is an integral part of the society s/he studies. Society, he writes, in spite of the fact that it consists entirely of individuals, is often placed in counter position to the individual.

¹⁴ Newton (2001)

¹⁵ Elias, (1939;1994)

¹⁶ Elias (1987:115)

This mode of thinking and expressing the society obstructs the way and may even prevent the sociologist from understanding the nature of sociological problems. Elias argues that this conceptualisation and reification must be replaced by a more realistic picture of persons who *“through their basic dispositions and inclinations, are directed towards and linked with each other in most diverse ways. These people make up webs of interdependence or figurations of many kinds, characterised by power balances of many sorts, such as families, schools, towns, social strata or states ... all these are networks of individuals. Each one of us belongs among these individuals”*¹⁷.

For Elias societies are only composite units in which individual human beings form the component parts. However, he disagrees with those who try to understand and explain the functioning of societies by studying the individual. Human beings can only be understood by the interdependencies with each other, as part of networks of social relations, which he called figurations. Human beings are first and foremost social. He uses the word people in plural, signifying that people only exist through relations with others. This conceptualisation has profound implications for the concepts of self, identity and society. The society is introduced in the formation of the self. The social development and transformation is undeniably linked to the psychogenesis. In other words, processes of social development and transformation can not be separated from the processes of psychological development and transformation. Elias see figuration sociology as a developmental or processual approach, that is *“diametrically opposed to any tradition of social enquiry which*

¹⁷ Elias (1970)

seeks to construct everlasting, universal statements about the nature of social life”¹⁸.

Human agency needs to be seen as composed of interdependent networks, and therefore to analyse social processes it is necessary to look at the figurational development of interdependent networks and the ways in which they define power relations and inform subjectivity¹⁹. For Elias, human beings are embedded within complex figurations of social relationships, which can explain many aspects of human behaviour, emotions and modes of self-perception, including perceptions of identity and interest. These figurations change with relation to long-term social processes that have a discoverable pattern and structure.²⁰

When analysing the organisational transformation, the conceptualisation of the social interdependencies implies the identification of a network of actors who is the figuration. The use of this concept intends to support an approach that is more processual and dynamic, in contrast with expressions like “social system” and “social structure” which in common sociological tradition are not only very static but also give the impression of something separate from, beyond and outside individuals²¹. If one accepts the idea that figurations and processes have a powerful shaping effect upon the psychological habitus of individuals and groups²², the consequences for organisational research are extensive. First, organisational processes cannot be separated from societal processes in which people’s lives are interconnected in a structured way within societies and through history. Second, organisational research must take into consideration long-term social processes. Third, these processes have a

¹⁸ Rojek (1983: 586)

¹⁹ Newton (2001)

²⁰ Smith (2001)

psychological effect that impact the way in which organisational actors control themselves and other actors. If different societies create different figurations and long-term social processes, the way in which individuals and groups control each other and control themselves differ and, as a consequence, organisational structures and forms of control can not be equalised across societies. This is not the same as cultural explanations to organisational divergence because culture in most of the time is conceptualised as a static characteristic of societies. On the other hand, figurations are always moving, and individuals and groups consequently will act toward each other in a dynamic way. A dynamic that is not chaotic, but changes in a specific direction.

In this line of reasoning, processes of democratisation are likely to trigger organisational processes in which different actors will reposition themselves in the organisational arena. The legitimacy that actors may gain to express their demands brings about a shift in the type of questioning and framing of organisational issues, thus organisation and division of work are likely to be contested and changes are likely to occur. One important effect of the changes brought about by democratisation may also be the delegitimisation of authoritarian structures and powerful actors within organisations. In other societies, the feminists struggles can also have triggered social processes that are reflected in organisational arenas. Women are more likely to contest taken for granted patterns of sexual division of work, they are likely to fight for recognition to their demands in different fields of the social arena.

²¹ (Mennel, 1992: 251).

1.1.1 - Micro and Macro relation in Bourdieu and Elias

By trying to overcome the dichotomy of micro/macro, Elias as well as Bourdieu have been criticised for marginalizing the subjective choice in human affairs²³. In the case of Elias, some paragraphs in his book "The civilising process" have been used to exemplify the criticism of him falling in the trap of a naive realist position. An example: *"Our codes of conduct are riddle with contradictions and as full as disproportion as are the forms of social life, as is the structure of our society. The constraints to which the individual is subject today, and the forces corresponding to them, are in their character, their strength and structure decisively determined by the particular forces engendered by the structure of our society"*²⁴. The critiques come from those who see in the negation of structural and objective conditions the only way to advance social science.

The concepts of involvement and detachment that he advocates are the most powerful evidences against the idea that Elias can be considered a naive realist. One of his most remarkable contributions to sociology is his analysis of "process reduction" tendencies in sociology, which is the tendency to reduce everything that is observed and experienced as dynamic into static conceptual categories²⁵.

Bourdieu also fought against the stamp of being a structuralist. He tried to show that his reflexive approach shifts the analytical focus away from both structure and

²² Smith(2001)

²³ See Smith (2001), Rojek (1986), Jenkins (1992)

²⁴ Elias (1939: 2000 : 443)

subjective experience towards one of social practice. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, doxa, capital, field and reflexivity enable the development of a conceptual lens through which researchers can absorb the reflexive nature of social processes. Used in isolation, his key concepts may create a structural approach to society. However, Bourdieu's key concepts should not be used and cannot be understood in isolation²⁶; the concepts must be utilised in an iterative way. The more iteration is found among the different concepts, the better. Implicit within Bourdieu's work is the notion that only through continual procedural and analytical iterations is it possible to develop an attempt at synthesis. Below I present these different concepts and how I use them in my research. To the concepts of habitus, field, doxa, capital, and reflexivity, I add Elias' concept of figuration, and the concept of uncertainty in Crozier and Friedberg (1980). These concepts will be employed to analyse the organisation of work as a game among the different work groups.

1.1.2 - Objectivism and Subjectivism - towards an integrated approach

As exposed above, Bourdieu is critically concerned to overcome the dichotomies embedded in the dualism of subjectivism and objectivism. Subjectivism as defined by Bourdieu is *“a form of knowledge about the social world based on the primary experience and perceptions of individuals and includes such intellectual currents as phenomenology, rational action theory, and linguistic analysis”*²⁷. This notion has

²⁵ See Rojek (1986)

²⁶ Garnham and Williams (1986) advice that “ fragmentary and partial absorption of what is a rich and unified body of theory and related empirical work across a range of fields...can lead to a danger of seriously misreading the theory.

²⁷ Bourdieu (1993:03)

been a dominant strand in Western Philosophy at least since the Renaissance, starting with Descartes and culminating with Kant postulating the innate, unchanging a-priori categories by which every human mind perceives the world outside itself. It is what Elias calls Homo Clausus, the closed person, which is difficult to resist, for it has entered into the mode of self-experience of people in modern societies²⁸. Elias and Bourdieu challenge the static polarity between objective and subjective points of view.

Objectivism, as understood by Bourdieu, is an attempt to explain the world by *"focusing on the objective conditions which structure practice independent of human consciousness"*²⁹. The work of Bourdieu and Elias reveal that subjective experiences and objective structures cannot be separated and that they contour one another. Both tried to break with the philosophical ways of thinking, the tradition that distinguishes between the society "outside" and the individual mind "inside". The concept of Doxa or Doxic society reveals some of the important points made by Bourdieu to overcome this dichotomy.

In the Doxic society the 'natural' and social world might look as being self-evident. This self-evident image takes the form of a 'political order' which is taken for as granted as the natural world, *"... the subjective necessity and self-evidence of the common sense world are validated by the objective consensus on the sense of the world, what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying"*³⁰.

²⁸ Mennel and Goudsblom, (1998)

²⁹ Bourdieu (1993:8)

³⁰ Bourdieu (1977: 167).

Things are thought to be what they are and always have been so. The question of legitimacy is not asked. “... *the established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary, that is, as one possible order among others, but a self-evident and natural order*³¹ . This taken for granted, the silent tradition engenders a “political order”, the Doxa. “*The truth of the Doxa is only fully revealed when negatively constituted by the consideration of a field of opinion, the locus of the confrontation of competing discourses... The critique which brings the undiscussion into discussion... destroys self-evident practicality*”³² However, such societies are exceptional. Therefore, questions concerning legitimacy are often raised. Heterodoxa emerges when competing discourses take place in the field of opinion “*The critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation, has as the condition of its possibility objective crisis, which, in breaking the immediate fit between the subjective structures and the objectives structures, destroys self-evidence practically.*³³ Bourdieu argues that it is necessary to go beyond the description of a primary experience of the social world; the question of the conditions of possibility of a doxic experience must be raised. Here, there is a link between the investigation of a social process and an ethnological experience in a comparative research, “ *The great virtue of ethnological experience here is that it makes you immediately aware that such conditions are not universally fulfilled, as phenomenology would have us believe when it (unknowingly) universalises a reflexion based on the particular case of indigenous relations to one’s society.*”³⁴ In researching settings that are not familiar, it is hard not to suspend one’s preconception. And this experience is twofold; it

³¹ Bourdieu (1977: p166)

³² Bourdieu(1977: 168-9)

³³ Bourdieu (1977: 168/169)

affects the way the researcher sees the unfamiliar as well as the way in which s/he sees the familiar when returns home.

When Elias discussed the concept of time, he was concerned about showing how time and timing often become invisible to us and taken for granted. *“We have slipped into an ever-presented sense of time. It has become part of our person. As such it becomes self-evident. It seems that we cannot experience the world otherwise”*³⁵. The sense of time also represents a figurational development that emerged in the context of the complex interdependencies made possible by financial credit, railways, telegraphy, print, etc.

1.2 - The concepts of Bourdieu

1.2.1 – Habitus

The development of the concept of habitus represented to Bourdieu an attempt to overcome the determinism he saw in structuralism³⁶, and was also central to his aspiration for developing a theory of action. *“ Much of Outline as well as the epistemological excursions that pervade his other writing, can be read as a polemic against, on the one hand, phenomenological or subjectivist approaches – for example, social psychology or ethnomethodology – and on the other, strict*

³⁴ Bourdieu and Wacquant (1996:73)

³⁵ Elias (1992:162)

³⁶ Bourdieu(1986)

*structuralism, such as that of Claude Lévy-Strauss or Louis Althusser*³⁷. In other words, Bourdieu's attempt to overcome the opposition between individual and society is a reaction, on the one hand, to Sartre and existentialism and, on the other, to Lévi-Strauss and structuralism³⁸. Bourdieu introduced into his analysis of practice the concepts of habitus, field and strategy as an attempt to overcome this fundamental dualism³⁹. Habitus is conceptualised as: *"... systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1990a: 53)*

Habitus is a set of dispositions that inclines agents to act and react in certain ways; it functions as a matrix of perception, appreciation and actions and makes it possible to achieve infinitely diversified tasks. It reveals tendencies to act in particular ways. Habitus is iterative. Persons with the same and different habitus interact and recognise each other habitus inscribed in their reasoning, predilections, tastes and even in expressed emotions. It is in many instances a kind of worldview or cosmology held by actors. It also encapsulates skills and practical competence. It delineates aspirations and expectations concerning life chances and career paths. *"... the notion of habitus aims at eliminating: finalism/mechanism, explanations by reason/explanation by causes, conscious/unconscious, rational and strategic*

³⁷ (Di Maggio, 1979:1461)

³⁸ Jenkins (1992)

³⁹ Jenkins (1992)

*calculation/mechanical submission to mechanical constraints etc*⁴⁰. For Bourdieu, action is practical, pre-reflective, durable though adaptive, reproductive though generative. Actors are not rule followers, they need to develop strategic improvisations in order to respond to the opportunities and constraints opened by different situations. “... *choices do not derive directly from objective situations in which they occur or from transcending rules, norms, patterns, and constraints that govern social life; rather they stem from practical dispositions that incorporate ambiguities and uncertainties that emerge from acting through time and space*”⁴¹.

Bourdieu had two distinct aims when developing the concept of habitus. It could function as a possibility to overcome the structural theory and, by complementing it with strategic action; it could stress the importance of agency. However, the concept of habitus was also a critique to utilitarian theories of human agency. For him social groups have not only the capability to avoid rational calculation, they do so in order to achieve the goals that best fit their interests, and they do so by following their developed dispositions or habitus.

His theory is not a simple rejection of structural conditions. The habitus is also constructed under determined structural forces, “*as 'naturally' generated practices adjusted to the situation, producing 'natural distinction'*”⁴². The habitus generates practices, which are likely to reproduce the regularities imminent in the objective conditions of the production of their generating principle. It may seem deterministic

⁴⁰ . (Bourdieu, 1990b:107).

⁴¹ (Swartz, 1997:100).

⁴² (Bourdieu, 1990b)

and based on French structuralism; however, Bourdieu stressed that habitus does not determine outcome. Habitus is the internalisation of the objective structure, engendering dispositions in a dialectical relationship with history: the habitus, as a product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in harmony with the structures engendered by history. Habitus produces behavioural regularities, and therefore it is linked to systematic inequalities in society. Habitus and social structure mutually affect and create each other in such a way that dispositions and social positions are mutually congruent. *“Crucial in enabling individuals to manipulate cultural capital convincingly, habitus connotes one’s total social baggage. Its character varies among social fractions: it is socially valued or devalued by comparison with the habitus of others.”*⁴³ Persons in subordinate positions are often badly equipped with the dispositions that may allow them to successfully enter into competition with persons in dominating positions. These inequalities produce actions that are *“always tending to reproduce the objective structures of which that are the product”*⁴⁴.

Habitus is an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions and situations in which it is constituted. Habitus engenders all thoughts, all perceptions, and all actions consistent with those conditions, and not any other, creating a set of structured expectations—scripts—about how the world is or should be.

⁴³ (Zolberg, 1992: 198)

⁴⁴ (Bourdieu, 1972, 1977).

The concept would be deterministic if Bourdieu had not conceptualised the relations between a habitus and a field as dialectic interaction. While location in a field shapes the dispositions of habitus to the extent that dispositions are the product of independent conditions, habitus and field *”have an existence and efficacy of their own and can help to shape positions”*⁴⁵. In another attempt to conceptualise habitus, he presents it as *”an acquired system of generative schemes adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted”*⁴⁶. Habitus is a form of cultural knowledge and praxis that is acquired, internalised, and interwoven - through socialisation - into the daily lives of an individual.

The employment of a reflexive analysis implies that it is necessary to look at the way in which an individual understands the world – the predisposition and orientations that affect her relationships, actions and strategies. Habitus is a structured and historical social practice that regulates the social and cultural lives of any person. These dispositions account for the similarity in the habitus of individuals from the same social class (Bourdieu, 1984). It is through their own habitus that actors read other people’s habitus. The concept of habitus rejects the distinction between body and mind, habitus is inscribed in the body, and is reflected in body carriage. Habitus is the person’s place in relationships, in the way they present themselves to others, their gestures, dispositions and tastes (Bourdieu, 1984). By being inscribed in the body it can be read by others, it will express the position within social relations. Social encounters in multicultural fields become in this sense more complicated than in mono-cultural environments: habitus may be misread.

⁴⁵ (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 341)

Habitus creates dispositions towards who may become a friend and who certainly is to be seen with suspicion. The picture becomes more complicated in the case of an organisational field, where actors with different national backgrounds meet each other. There, it will be more difficult to take a position towards the other because the other presents a habitus that may not be easily acknowledged. If one thinks about the relation between habitus and cultural capital, the issue of acknowledgement becomes more evident as Bourdieu argues that cultural capital is incorporated. “*Most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its instrumental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment*”⁴⁷. However, all these dispositions and embodiment are not automatic mechanisms; they can change, be expressed or not at different moments. As a power of adaptation “*it constantly performs an adaptation to the outside world which only exceptionally takes the form of radical conversion*” (Bourdieu, 1993 :88).

The concept of habitus enables an analysis of work groups as complex sociological and psychological processes that encompass more than materiality and social location. The concept of habitus is intricate, enrolls ambiguities and can give rise to criticisms of social determinism. One of the common criticisms to the concept of habitus is that social reproduction seems to be inheritable and unchangeable⁴⁸. However, another way of conceptualising habitus that avoids seeing it as determining structure is to conceptualise it as a generative structure, which can establish an

⁴⁶ Bourdieu (1977: 87)

⁴⁷ (Bourdieu, 1986: 244)

⁴⁸ .” Zolberg (1992), Garnham and Willians (1986), Hall (1992);

imaginative relation between the subject and the world. Otherwise, nothing could change; heterodox discourses could not be generated. Nevertheless, this generative structure cannot be forged and transformed by immediate self-determination because habitus works in a dialectic fashion, as an infinite yet strictly limited generative capacity⁴⁹ and it continues to operate long after the objective conditions of its emergence have been dislocated⁵⁰. The field, as structured space, tends to structure the habitus, while the habitus tends to structure the perception of the field⁵¹. The concepts of strategy and strategizing enter here to solve the problem of the relation between the habitus and the field in order to by-pass the problem of social determinism. Strategies are the ongoing result of the interaction between the dispositions engendered by the habitus and the constraints and possibilities that are the reality of any given social field⁵². The strategies are suggested by the habitus as a “feeling for the game”. Strategies then become objectively oriented lines of action constructed through practice. Yet, a strategy does not have the same meaning as for rational actor theorists; strategy does not refer to the purposive and calculated pursuit of goals⁵³.

Applying the concept of habitus to organisations led me to hypothesise that the workers and the managers brought to the shop floor ways of being, habitual states, aspirations, ambitions, predisposition, inclinations, and cognitive maps that were common to the members of their same group or class, and which were produced by the material conditions of their prior existence. Workers brought their notions and

⁴⁹ Bourdieu (1990b: 55)

⁵⁰ (Bourdieu, 1990: 13)

⁵¹ Bourdieu (1988:784)

expectations of what it means to work at a factory shop floor. Managers brought their notions of the ways to be a successful manager. Both reflected the values, beliefs and dispositions of their relatives and close social groups. Their habitus functioned as sets of principles for them to generate and regulate what they considered “usual” organisational practices. However, the notion of habitus does not support the concept of social class, in which there is an assumption that a social class is equivalent to the sum of its parts nor a social class as an objective economic relationship, which engenders assumptions about the normative consciousness and behaviour of industrial workers and employers. The encounter of actors and their different habitus takes place in fields which are structured spaces in which agents struggle. I discuss below the concept of field and its properties.

2.3 - Power, Games and the Position of actors in the game.

Power and, more specifically, balance of power form an integral part of all human relationships, and has been conceptualised quite differently, depending on ontological assumptions and consequently epistemological ones, which have led to a myriad of different conceptualisations. Here I present my own. Power is relational and variable, cannot be reified, it has the capacity to create uncertainty in interdependent relations. In order to turn to clearer sociological problems, Elias uses the games model to deal with power relationships. He proposes the term power balances, which is more adequate for understanding the nexus of relationships that interdependent human

⁵² See - Jenkins (1992)

beings have with each other. For Elias, power balances are not only a result of possession of non-human objects, such as weapons and means of production; power balances are linked to figurational aspects, especially differentials in the degree of internal cohesion and communal control, which may be a decisive element in power ratio of one group in relation to another⁵⁴.

The use of the image of people playing a game as a metaphor for people forming societies together, makes it easier to rethink the static ideas that are associated with most of the current concepts used to understand social phenomena. They can be transformed into far more versatile concepts, which are needed to improve methodological tools for dealing with the problems of sociology⁵⁵.

What is the basis of power? Crozier and Friedberg (1963) argue that *“the answer is obvious: the advantages, resources, and forces of each of the parties involved – or, in short, their respective strengths – determine the result of a relation of power”*. Bourdieu would say that strengths are the different forms of capital.

Then they argue that, in a relation of power, what is actually exchanged are possibilities of action. *“A does not enter into a relation of power with B solely in order to test his strength against B’s. He has a more definitive objective: to obtain from B a behaviour on which his own capacity to act depends. In other words, B in some sense controls, by means of his own behaviour, A’s capacity to achieve his*

⁵³ Swartz (1997:67)

⁵⁴ Elias (1994: xviii)

⁵⁵ *ibid*:92

objectives. The more B can bargain over his willingness to do what A wants, and the more his available resources allow him to keep his future behaviour from becoming perfectly predictable for A, then the more power he will have over A in this particular relation. Power, therefore, lies in the margin of liberty available to each partner in a relation of power. In other words, the more one partner is free to refuse what the other asks of him, the more power he has. Force, wealth, prestige, authority –all the resources, in short, which any one of the parties may claim- play a role only to the extent that they provide a greater freedom of action.” (ibid:32)

People in organisations struggle to control the level of uncertainty over their future actions. Uncertainty thus becomes the main source of power and consequently the motivation for hidden confrontation. Any person in an organisation takes advantage of uncertainties and rules in his/her own interest⁵⁶. As Crozier suggests, even in circumstances of dependence and constraint, agents do not adapt passively, they may make active use of regulations and formal procedures, which appear at first sight as a constraint, but can be diverted from its original intention and used as a protective device against the superior⁵⁷. *“Power is a reciprocal, but unbalanced, relation. Its reciprocity derives from the fact that negotiation always involves exchange. If one of the two parts involved has no further resources to commit to the relationship, it no longer has anything to exchange, hence it cannot enter into what may properly be called a relation of power”*⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ This contradicts the Weberian notion of domination. In Weberian terms, power is conceptualised as “*the instrument of `structures of domination', whose objective is to construct, justify and stabilise the obedience of people.* Courpasson (2000: 143).

⁵⁷ Crozier and Friedberg (1977:18)

⁵⁸Ibid 31

The possibility that a centralised and legitimised authority can take place in an organisation is put into question by Crozier and Friedberg, *“A given organisational situation never completely constrains an actor. He always retains a margin of liberty and negotiation. This margin of liberty (signifying a source of uncertainty for his partners as well as for the organisation as a whole) endows each actor with power over the others, which increases with the relevance for these others of the source of uncertainty controlled by the actor. This relevance is to be understood as the extent to which the source of uncertainty affects the capacity of the other actors to play according to their strategies”*⁵⁹. Even in the most extreme situations, an actor always keeps a minimum of liberty.

Games for Elias and Bourdieu are not intentionally created. In the case of organisational games they should not be seen as intending to create relative satisfactions, which reduce the strain of an “endless series of meaningless motions”⁶⁰. Games take place and are neither independent of nor in opposition to management⁶¹. Games take place in different forms and with distinct objectives, with different stakes, rules and norms, but they are always present.

For Bourdieu, in order to understand the game being played, it is necessary, first, to make an analysis of the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power. Second, it is necessary to map out the objective structure of the relations between the positions

⁵⁹ *ibid*: 45.

⁶⁰ See Burawoy (1979:80)

⁶¹ Burawoy (1979)

held by the different players who compete for the legitimate form of specific authority in the field. Third, the habitus of the different players need to be analysed to grasp the different systems of dispositions they have developed by internalising a determinate type of social and economic condition.⁶²

Elias points out that the 'players' in increasingly complex networks gradually alter their positions in the course of the game, and advises that, to understand it, the game cannot be reduced to individual moves. The assimilation of events progressively leads to the development of more impersonal concepts that take more account of the relative autonomy of the players than of the motives of individual players. However, it is worthwhile to remember that the course of the game is uncontrollable for the players themselves. The course of the game cannot be reduced to the actions of individual players, because it results from the mutual dependency among the players, from being interdependent as players and from the tensions and conflicts that go along with this.⁶³ To complement this, it is necessary to be aware that the game is also embedded within larger social processes of transformation. To develop a figural approach to social games is to be aware of the constantly shifting nexus of interdependent forces. There is the assumption in the figural sociology that nothing in the social world is constant in the way natural scientists have come to use the term.

1.4 - Summarising the theoretical approach

⁶² *ibid* 105

My intention in exposing all the concepts that I draw from Bourdieu, Elias and Crozier was to construct a framework of analysis to investigate organisational processes. I have presented how the metaphor of game can be used to understand organisational processes, and how it fundamentally helps to integrate the different concepts that I use from different authors. The use of the concept of habitus (in Bourdieu and in Elias) can be a way to bridge the gap between the attempt to uncover the games that are being played and to understand the social construction of the actors that are playing them. The feel for the game for Bourdieu *"is the social game embodied and turned into a second nature"*⁶⁴. When using the metaphor of social life as a game, I assume that different groups possess different habitus that provide them with 'a feel for the game' that affects the way in which they understand and perceive the social world.

Within a complex organisational structure there is likely a variety of groups with different levels of education, access to information, and economic possibilities (in Bourdieu's words with different amounts of total capital) that will facilitate and constrain their strategic action, or in Crozier words, their possibilities to create uncertainty. In order to understand organisational processes, the game models are useful because they reveal that the outcomes of the complex interweaving of actions of different agents may lead to outcomes which no single player or group of players intended. As the number of players and the complexity of the game increase, and as the power differentials between the players diminish, so the course of the game becomes increasingly volatile and beyond the ability of any single individual or group

⁶³ Elias 1982

of players to control. The use of the Doxa as a method of analysis helps to understand how different actors see the world, it helps to understand how action is legitimated and how disparities of power between social appear to be facts of nature.

Bourdieu have been criticised for producing a kind of pessimism/fatalism and an unavoidable reproduction of existing patterns of thought and action. I try to solve this problem by developing a theoretical approach that emphasise not the either/or of agency and structure, but the both/and, recognising not only their mutual constitution, but also the need to examine the interrelationships between them⁶⁵.

Bourdieu's concepts are not so clear to assess how agency is created in organisational fields. Crozier concepts helps to understand the degree of autonomy that actors have. Crozier points to the relations of power and how actors are fighting for gaining power that in Bourdieu's praxeology is capital. Crozier's understanding of the relationship between power and uncertainty enters here as a possibility to investigate the strategies of the actors in order to create uncertainty. But, this is to be done by analysing first the figuration that is formed by the interdependencies among actors in the factories. By using Crozier I try to see the games inside the figuration that are formed among the distinct actors. Crozier showed that it was necessary to be careful when analysing the functioning of firms in terms of power struggles and actors' strategies. He argued that it is necessary to play attention to *'the series of social controls that prevent people from taking too much advantage of their own strategic situation'*⁶⁶ However, he lacked a concept of actor that could match an analysis conducted in terms of strategic games. Bourdieu's concepts

⁶⁴ Bourdieu (1990: 63)

⁶⁵ (Archer 1995;).

⁶⁶ Crozier (1964:166)

give the possibility to uncover which kinds of tools (capitals) different actors and groups may use in order to create uncertainty in a specific figuration. In this way the concepts of Crozier and Bourdieu complement each other. Elias demonstrated that macro-societal developments and behaviour changes at the micro-level are interrelated, inviting for a multileveled, historical perspective to analyse organisations. Thus, Elias's perspective in organisation studies implies attention to the long-term development of managerial, craft and worker habitus.

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