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Nobilities in Europe in the Twentieth Century

Reconversion Strategies, Memory Culture
and Elite Formation

EDITED BY

Yme Kuiper, Nikolaj Bijleveld and Jaap Dronkers



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NOBLES AMONG THE AUSTRIAN ECONOMIC ELITE IN THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Philipp Korom and Jaap Dronkers

1. The non-existent Austrian nobility: a short introduction

‘Phenomena should be shown to exist or to occur before one explains why they exist or how they come to be’.¹ We take this claim seriously and therefore we would like to start with some historical remarks before elaborating on the phenomenon which is our main interest here, the nobility in twenty-first-century Austria. Apparently, Austrian nobility does not exist, if we assume that every current social object must have substantially similar predecessors. Nevertheless, two kinds of origins can be traced. Firstly, families which were ennobled during the time of the Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian Empire which comprised, among other regions, what we call today Austria, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Poland, Ukraine and Italy. Secondly, there are families which were ennobled during the Holy Empire of the German Nation ruled by the house of Habsburg-Lothringen for more than three centuries and which covered the whole territory of current Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, the Netherlands and parts of current France, Italy and Switzerland. Some members of noble families (such as Metternich) whose original place of residence was in what we today call Germany, lived mostly in Vienna, especially after the breakdown of the Holy Empire of the German Nation in 1805. On the basis of these various pre-Austrian origins, untangling the Gordian knot of historical origins of today’s nobility in Austria seems almost impossible.

At the end of the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian multi-ethnic state was divided into many nation-states. In one of its successor states – Austria – the National Assembly had passed a ‘law on the abolition of the nobility, the secular orders of chivalry, male and female, and of certain titles and dignities’ by 1919. That the main aim of this law was to put an end to the power of the nobility became clear in 1920 at the latest when it was

¹ Merton, R.K., ‘Three Fragments from a Sociologist’s Notebooks: Establishing the Phenomenon, Specified Ignorance, and Strategic Research Materials’, *Annual Review of Sociology* 13 (1987), p. 76.

added to the constitution. With regard to the abolition of the nobility, the Austrian legal system differed in one important respect from that of Germany. While noble predicates became part of names and ceased being regarded as class designations following the German Weimar constitution, Austrian citizens were not allowed to keep noble predicates such as 'von' and 'zu' as part of their name. Today, this constitutional law can only be abolished if at least two-thirds of the members of the National Council vote against it.² Given the neutral or negative attitude of all parties towards the nobility, a re-establishment of some former symbolic rights of the nobility in Austria can be regarded as highly unlikely.

In addition, the life history of nobles living in Austria today differs significantly from those who continued to live in successor states that became part of the Communist Bloc. The property of the latter group was nationalised to a considerable extent, while ownership structures in Austria remained untouched. In the following, we will examine these and other idiosyncrasies of present-day nobles in Austria in detail. However, a short historical excursion already makes clear that the category 'Austrian nobility' does not correspond to any entity in the past. This is why we will prefer to speak of the 'nobility in Austria'. We claim, however, that nobility in Austria evolved along a distinct trajectory, with its members sharing distinct common features, which justify speaking of a phenomenon in its own right. Having said this, we can turn to our main topic of this chapter: the position of nobility in the Austrian economic elite in 2008. We start our analysis, however, with a general *tour d'horizon* of nobles in twenty-first-century Austria. In addition to assessing their social, cultural and economic capital, we also examine the traditional affiliations that nobles had to banks which played a crucial role within the nationwide corporate network. We finally analyse in-depth the position of nobles on the corporate boards of Austrian firms.

2. Nobility in twenty-first-century Austria

In the second edition of her book on Austrian nobility today, Gudula Walterskirchen postulates a comeback of the descendants of nobles as an informal class ('informeller Stand').³ In her opinion, the official recognition of the Association of Nobles in Austria (Vereinigung der Edelleute in Österreich, V.E.Ö.) in 2006, a successor of the Vereinigung katholischer

² Olscher, W., 'Alles Recht geht vom Volk aus', in: Siegert, H., ed., *Adel in Österreich* (Vienna, 1971), p. 76.

³ Walterskirchen, G., *Adel in Österreich heute. Der verborgene Stand* (Vienna, 2007), p. 15.

Edelleute in Österreich, which was banned under the Nazis in 1938, marks a historical watershed. For the first time in the history of the Austrian Second Republic there again exists an official representative body for nobles in Austria. Recently spokespersons for the V.E.Ö. have even announced that they will appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in order to overturn the proscription of use of titles of honour⁴ – a law that is in any case frequently broken in a country that is rightly known and criticised for its obsessive use of academic and honorary titles like ‘Professor h. c’. Together with related evidence for the enduring socioeconomic advantages enjoyed by the Dutch and French nobility,⁵ the U-turn in official Austrian politics gives us cause not to dismiss the nobility in Austria as an anachronism.

In contrast to other European states, nobles of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, before its breakdown in 1918, were *de facto* and *de jure* in a class of their own. As they now no longer retain any privileges, and given the fact that even their titles were abolished, one is tempted to ask whether sources of noble identity have vanished and distinctions between nobles and non-nobles have become blurred. Due to the lack of systematic studies in Austria on the topic of noble identities in the twenty-first century, we can only hypothesise about the continuing existence of nobility as an informal class. In order to do so systematically, we will locate nobles – of whatever title – within a social space which we claim to be divided similarly to a geographical map showing different regions. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, we postulate that ‘the social space is constructed in such a way that the closer the agents, groups or institutions which are situated within this space, the more common properties they have; and the more distant, the fewer’.⁶ Agents are distributed in the overall space, in the first instance, according to the overall extent of the capital they possess and, in the second instance, according to the relative composition of their capital, divided along economic, cultural or social lines. We cannot provide an overview of the distribution of the assets of the nobility within Austrian society here due to a lack of available data. Nor are we going to discuss the histories of any noble lineages in detail. We

⁴ Walterskirchen, *Adel in Österreich heute*, p. 29.

⁵ Dronkers, J., ‘Has the Dutch Nobility Retained its Social Relevance during the 20th Century?’, *European Sociological Review* 19 (2003), pp. 81–96; *idem*, ‘Declining Homogamy of Austrian-German Nobility in the 20th Century? A Comparison with the Dutch Nobility’, *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 33 (2008), pp. 262–284; De Saint Martin, M., *Der Adel. Soziologie eines Standes* (Konstanz, 1993); Schijf, H., Dronkers, J. and Broeke-George, J., ‘Recruitment of Members of Dutch Noble and High-Bourgeois Families to Elite Positions in the 20th Century’, *Social Science Information* 43 (2004), pp. 435–475.

⁶ Bourdieu, P., ‘Social Space and Symbolic Power’, *Sociological Theory* 7 (1989), p. 16.

will, however, point to some of the main features common to nobles which might lead to similar dispositions and interests, on the basis of which they think of themselves as 'nobles' rather than 'commoners'. On this basis, we assume that nobles use their inherited social, cultural and economic capital to maintain advantages over their bourgeois competitors for elite positions.

According to De Saint Martin, nobility's modernised social and cultural capital are central pillars of identity construction.⁷ Bourdieu emphasised that the reproduction of social capital requires a continuous effort based in sociability and a continual, repeated mutual recognition by group members.⁸ Keeping both insights in mind we will turn to each dimension of the three-fold social structure separately: social capital (group membership), cultural capital (knowledge, skills, education) and economic capital (cash, assets).

2.1 *Social capital*

When it comes to affiliations we have to settle for anecdotal evidence and information given by insiders such as Georg (Freiherr von) Frölichsthal.⁹ Historically, the Association of Catholic Nobles in Austria (Vereinigung katholischer Edelleute in Österreich) was the most encompassing, with almost 2,300 members in 1937. When Austria lost its sovereignty in 1938 it was one of the first institutions to be abolished. After 1945 several endeavours to re-establish the association were blocked by Austrian authorities. In 2006, the federal police headquarters of Vienna surprisingly allowed the foundation of a society of nobles that aims, amongst other things, to assist members in financial need. Initially, it had only 50 founding members.¹⁰ Another meeting platform is the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (Souveräner Malteser-Ritter-Orden), or more precisely the Grand Priory of Austria (Großpriorat von Österreich). The Grand Priory currently has 420 knights and dames, 68 percent of which are nobles. Looking at the data of the Maltese Hospital Service, from which a good portion of the new members of the Order are recruited, one sees that this Service has 1,170 members of which 39 percent are noble.¹¹ Finally, two popular places for socialising have to be mentioned – the St. Johannis Club and the Jockey Club. The St Johannis Club with its 760 members, of which 500 are from the nobility, is said to have rather rigid accession criteria: a pedigree as proof of nobility

⁷ De Saint Martin, *Der Adel*, p. 27.

⁸ Bourdieu, P., 'Ökonomisches Kapital – Kulturelles Kapital – Soziales Kapital', in: Kreckel, R., ed., *Soziale Ungleichheiten* (Göttingen, 1983), p. 193.

⁹ Frölichsthal, G., 'Austrian Nobility since World War I', speech held at the German Adelsrechtsausschuss, September 13, 1997.

¹⁰ 'Aristokratie: Die Blaublutgruppe', *Profil*, January 5, 2005.

¹¹ Frölichsthal, 'Austrian Nobility since World War I'.

(optional), a private life without ostentation and no homosexual leanings.¹² Nobles who are purely interested in socialising and recreation frequent this club. The Jockey Club's originally intention was the breeding of thoroughbred horses. Malicious gossip has it that its 195 members (of which 60 per cent are nobles) are today incapable of distinguishing the horse's back from the front.

Today inter-noble marriage ceremonies attracting two to three hundred people are still to be observed quite frequently. While family strategies concerning viable marriage partners are no longer common and social disapproval for marrying beneath one's rank has been diminishing, there are still some marriage patterns prevailing among today's nobility: landowning male nobles tend more frequently to marry female nobles, while other members of the nobility more frequently marry commoners.¹³

2.2 Cultural capital

Despite the fact that nobles constitute a fairly heterogeneous group, from a social and economic point of view the formation of noble identities follows some universal principals.¹⁴ In modern times, it is not riding or fencing or symbols of conspicuous consumption that hold nobles together, but the credo of sobriety, discretion, a *savoir-faire* when it comes to small talk, a sense of family, self-esteem and sincerity.¹⁵ All of these features seem to be quite common among Austria's nobility today. To demonstrate how these features find expression in everyday behaviour we will quote the Goess-Enzenberg family explaining their central goals in relation to child-rearing.¹⁶ Ulrich (Graf) Goess-Enzenberg inherited the Tatzenberg castle in Tyrol from the brother of his mother, Antonie (Gräfin) Goess. (Gräfin) Marie von Meran is his grandmother, making him a great-great-grandchild of the empress Maria-Theresia (1717-1780). He studied economics, works as a trust manager and is married to the bourgeois fashion designer Kathrin Goess-Enzenberg. They live together with their two children in Tatzenberg castle.

¹² *Format*, 'Netzwerke zum Erfolg', March 3, 2006, p. 49.

¹³ Walterskirchen, G., 'Armut und Reichtum im österreichischen Adel im 20. Jahrhundert', in: Bruckmüller, E., ed., *Armut und Reichtum in der Geschichte Österreichs* (Vienna, 2010), p. 212.

¹⁴ De Saint Martin, M., 'Die Konstruktion der adeligen Identität', *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 1 (1991), pp. 527-539.

¹⁵ De Saint Martin, *Der Adel*.

¹⁶ The interview was conducted by the news magazine *Fiesta* 2006/2.

Interviewer: 'Your wife definitely wants your children to grow up normally and unburdened. What do you wish for your daughters?'

Ulrich Goess-Enzenberg: 'I wish that my children stay healthy and that they live in peace with their fellow men. They should care about the less well-off and should realise, what is essential in life. I hope that they will become strong characters who know how to distance themselves from bad people and influences. In addition, I wish for them that they choose their life partners with their hearts and their minds, regardless of whether they marry a noble or not. For me being of nobility is not a privilege, although it makes things easier from time to time. This is explained in the first place by the huge social networks resulting from our family history'.

Interviewer: 'How do your children grow up – in a society of nobles?'

Kathrin Goess-Enzenberg: 'Our children grow up in a relatively modest way, in relation to, for example, pocket money, gifts or branded articles. Already in kindergarten we were able to get in touch with other families. Their social environment is not elitist. (...) For us education that is based on humanistic values has priority. We do not want to instil pretension. A noble context remains unavoidable because of our many family relations'.

This example nicely illustrates that the noble character has a distinctive foundation.

Equipped with cultural capital, young nobles often choose bourgeois professions, such as entrepreneurs, civil servants, university professors, judges or architects, known to account for a high proportion of noble university graduates.¹⁷ There is thus some evidence that incorporated cultural capital is also institutionalised in educational degrees.

In some way, noble titles still form an important part of the cultural capital of Austrian nobles of today as the 1919 ban is circumvented in everyday conversations. Some say that it is impossible to break the Austrian habit of addressing each other using academic titles. At the moment 869 various titles are awarded in Austria¹⁸ – it is therefore rather unlikely that unofficial use of titles of nobility might fully disappear.

¹⁷ Walterskirchen, 'Armut und Reichtum im österreichischen Adel', p. 207.

¹⁸ 'Titelverliebt Österreich. Küß die Hand, Frau Magister', *Spiegel*, August 2, 2005. Here are some examples in order to give a taste of Austria's 'title-consciousness': Hofrat, Regierungsrat, Amtsrat, Kanzleirat, Kommerzialrat, Obersonderkindergärtnerin.

2.3 *Economic capital*

Bourdieu stressed that economic capital determines the structure of the social world more than cultural capital and that the growing relative weight of educational credentials, linguistic abilities and general knowledge, for example, in no way effaces the ability of economic capital to propagate itself. Any sociological analysis of nobility should therefore take up the question of whether nobles are still in command of liquid assets.

The most important form of economic capital for the nobility in Austria today is property rights. The abolition of nobility did not affect existing ownership structures. The Esterházy, Habsburg-Lothringen, Batthyány, Draskovich and Erdödy families are still the wealthiest private forest owners in Austria. Austro-Hungarian nobles were deprived of their broad estates in the former Czechoslovakia¹⁹ by a law in 1919 that was designed to dispossess 'citizens of hostile nations' of their property, as they were said to have 'committed gross offences against the Czechoslovak Republic during the [First] World War',²⁰ having not chosen Czechoslovak nationality. However, Austria did not undertake any agrarian land reform during the interwar period. As a result, 'the nobility could preserve economic assets in times of political upheavals'.²¹ Assets in the Soviet occupation zone, such as 50,000 hectares of land owned by the Esterházy family, were only confiscated for a short time after the Second World War and were then handed back to their original owners. Without going into any details we will present some statistics on how much land is owned by nobles in eight out of the nine states of Austria.²²

¹⁹ Initially the Schwarzenbergs possessed 134,514 hectares of land, of which 110,417 lay in the national territory of the former Czechoslovakia. Comparable confiscations were observable in other successor-states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

²⁰ Bauerkämper, A., *Ländliche Gesellschaft in der kommunistischen Diktatur* (Cologne, 2002), p. 211.

²¹ Hanisch, E., *Der lange Schatten des Staates. Österreichische Gesellschaftsgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 1994), p. 90.

²² Data are compiled from the Austrian yearbook of forestry 2003 (*Österreichisches Forst-Jahrbuch* 2003). A detailed overview of all landowning nobility in Austria can be found in: Korom, P., *Die Wirtschaftseliten Österreichs. Verflechtungen von Großunternehmen, Parteinähe und Adel* (Munich, 2013).



Illustration 1. Archduke Otto von Habsburg (1912-2011), last Crown Prince of Austria-Hungary, and his wife Princess Regina von Saxe-Meiningen (1925-2010) (private collection)

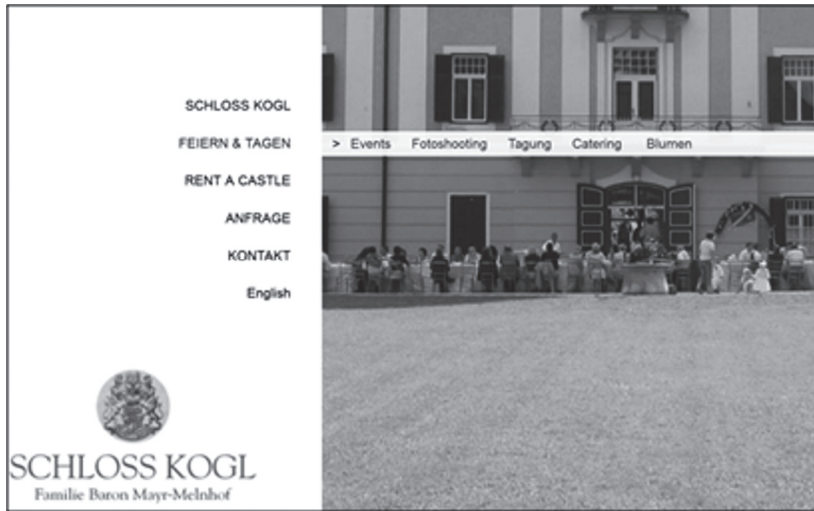


Illustration 2. Screenshot from the website of Schloss Kogl, partly opened for celebrations and events, owned by the Mayr-Melnhof family and still in use as their summer residence.



Illustration 3. Southeast view of Schloss Kogl, St. Georgen im Attergau, Austria (photo: Sir Gawain)

While the *Bundesforste* – a public company – is the largest landowner, without any doubt nobility ranks second. Considering the fact that nearly half of Austria is covered by forests, these inherited possessions are key to several of Austria's industries, such as the paper industry, energy and tourism. Franz Mayr-Melnhof-Saurau, the Styrian industrialist and offspring of a noble family is, for example, the main owner of the world's largest producer of cardboard cartons made from recycled material (Mayr-Melnhof Karton AG). According to information given by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture²³ all 15,400 Austrian forests which span over 3.3 million hectares of land generated an income of around 1.45 billion euros in 2006. Many families of nobility thus ensure their wealth by managing inherited landholdings. They also manage their wealth systematically.

Before 1938, the *Familienfideikommiss* was the preferred legal instrument to restrict the power of inheritors to sell, mortgage or make testamentary transfers. The purpose was clearly to maintain large-scale proprietorship. Entailed land could not be sold during the owner's lifetime and was required to pass to the eldest son on the owner's death (or otherwise according to the rules of primogeniture). Due to transfer and inheritance restrictions the land thus remained within a family. When the *Familienfideikommiss* was abolished by law, nobles were stripped of a legal institution that for centuries had successfully prevented the fragmentation of noble family prosperity which resulted from the equal sharing among multiple heirs based on succession laws. However, since the Private Foundation Act came into effect in September 1993, Austrian nobles again have a financial instrument at their disposal that helps to avoid the splitting up of family businesses and family estates. Unlike other European countries, private foundations in Austria are only very rarely charitable in nature. They are easily set up by a notarised declaration and formally come into existence upon entry into the Austrian register of firms. The grantor must endow his foundation with assets of at least 73,000 euros. Private foundations in Austria benefit from a number of fiscal advantages, for example, tax exemptions for certain types of income from direct investment. The gift tax amounts to only 2.5 percent and the land deposit into the private foundation is even exempted thereof – another reason why they might be attractive to nobles.

Austrian news magazines report that there are currently more than 2,500 private foundations (*Privatstiftungen*) located in Austria that hold assets that altogether are worth between 20 and 45 billion euros.²⁴ The largest foundation was established by Friedrich Karl Flick, a German industrialist,

²³ land.lebensministerium.at/article/articleview/62725/1/13751 [accessed May 2, 2011].

²⁴ *Manager Magazin*, 'Flick vorn, Horten dahinter', August 5, 2004.

with assets totalling about 6.1 billion euros. According to the Austrian Association for the Protection of Creditors (Kreditschutzverband), Franz Mayr-Melnhof-Saurau had invested 1.981 billion euros, Karl Johannes Schwarzenberg 207 million and Ulrich Stepski 166 million into their private foundations. All of them are clearly from the nobility.

We do not intend to provide a definitive answer here to the question of whether nobility can be regarded today as an informal class. We suggest, however, that a significant number of noble families might dispose of the same amount of social, cultural and economic capital, some might only be similar to each other as regards cultural capital and others might occupy totally different positions in the multidimensional space. Given these manifold positions it still makes sense to us to test assumptions of the consistent advantages for nobles in attaining elite positions within the Austrian economy.

3. Austrian nobility in the banking sector

Relatively early in history nobles strived for the accumulation of property and finances in order to achieve political influence. Capitalistic-oriented nobles invested in the building of railways, industries and the formation of banks. In 1857, Count Johann Adolf Schwarzenberg, Count Vinzenz Carl Auersperg, Count Max Egon Fürstenberg, Count Otto Chotek and the banker Louis von Haber contributed 30 million gulden – a third of the entire capital stock – to the foundation of the first and leading financial institution of the monarchy, the Creditanstalt.²⁵ It seems that the influence of nobility in the banking sector was constant until the introduction of the so-called Verstaatlichtengesetze (1946-1947) that initiated not only the nationalisation of large industries but also of banks such as the Creditanstalt-Bankverein, the Länderbank and the Österreichische Credit-Institut. While at the time there were no longer any nobles in the new management, in 1995, twelve nobles were once again among the leading managers of Creditanstalt-Bankverein,²⁶ which may indicate that nobles are deeply rooted in the financial sector. Diagram 1 shows an agglomeration of nobles in the Austrian financial elite of 1995.

Other examples of nobles in leading Austrian banks are Johannes Attems, managing director of Österreichische Kontrollbank AG, and Alexander

²⁵ Stekl, H., *Adel und Bürgertum in der Habsburgmonarchie, 18. bis 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 2004), p. 26.

²⁶ Source: Hoppenstedt, *Wer leitet? Führungskräfte der österreichischen Wirtschaft* (Vienna, 1995), p. 155.

Leeb, supervisory board member of Steiermärkische Bank und Sparkassen AG.

Research on interlocked directorates in Austria²⁷ has shown that Austria was characterised by a German-type style corporate network in which the positions of banks were far stronger than in liberal market economies such as Britain or the United States. At least for the 1980s and 1990s one can speak of an oligarchic bank hegemony. Morawetz,²⁸ for example, discovered that the Creditanstalt held 30 personal ties to other industrial and financial enterprises and thus constituted the 'nerve centre' of the corporate network. Creditanstalt's outstanding market position can be accounted for by the predominant strategic orientations of Austrian banks in the past. Bankers could reduce the risks of loans and intervene directly to manage affairs in times of crisis because of existing interlocked directorates.²⁹ The interest of reducing risks also turned into a strategic orientation to regulate competition between industrial companies. Austrian nobles have formed part of such corporatist arrangements in the past.

During the last decade Austrian banks have reacted to the full liberalisation of the financial sector with very similar strategies. They 'attempted to boost their internationalisation process in a similar period (mid-1990s), in a similar direction (CEE countries), focused on similar banking products (retail), and used similar market entry strategies (mainly acquisitions)'.³⁰ The restructuring of Austria's banking industry is marked by fusions, especially the fact that in 1997 Bank Austria acquired the federal government's 70 percent stake in the Creditanstalt-Bankverein (CA-BA). The CA-BA was founded by the wealthy Rothschild family and later ranked among Europe's largest banks. Some historians argue that its 1931 crash triggered the Great Depression. While Bank Austria, continued to be owned by the federal government through the end of 1997, and was traditionally headed by bankers

²⁷ Morawetz, I., 'Personelle Verflechtungen zwischen Großunternehmen und Banken in Österreich. Ergebnisse einer Netzwerkanalyse', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 10 (1985), pp. 73-84; Ziegler, R., 'Das Netz der Personen- und Kapitalverflechtungen deutscher und österreichischer Wirtschaftsunternehmen', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 36 (1984), pp. 557-584; Ziegler, R., Reissner, G. and Bender, D., 'Austria Incorporated', in: Stokman, F. N., Ziegler, R. and Scott, J., eds., *Network of Corporate Power. A Comparative Analysis of Ten Countries* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 73-89.

²⁸ Morawetz, 'Großunternehmen und Banken in Österreich', p. 78.

²⁹ Windolf, P., 'Coordination and Control in Corporate Networks. United States and Germany in Comparison, 1896-1938', *European Sociological Review* 25 (2009), pp. 443-457.

³⁰ Venzin, M., Kleine, J. and Kumar, V., 'Internationalization of Retail Banks. A Micro-Level Study of Multinationality-Performance Relationship', *Management International Review* 48 (2008), p. 469.

close to the socialist party, CA-BA clearly belonged to the conservative sphere of influence. After the merger of both banks, Bank Austria also joined forces with the German HVB Group in 2000 and in 2006 became a member of the UniCredit Group. Bank Austria, like all other Austrian financial institutions, is today disengaged from local and social milieus.³¹ Accordingly, the initial advantages over their competitors traditionally available to descendants of noble families should have decreased over time.

4. Nobility in the economic elite

4.1 Sample, method, hypotheses

To test the assumption of consistent advantage we focus on nobility among the Austrian economic elite at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Having included the 5,000 largest Austrian companies based on turnover we are aware that our study interprets the term ‘elite’ in a broad sense. Not all of the nobles considered here dominate the dominant organisations.³² However, all of the selected nobles hold at least positions of leadership or are figureheads of smaller lines of business. When speaking of the ‘nobility in Austria’, we refer to the post-1918 nobility (irrespective of the origin of the noble title) who retained a relationship with the Austrian economy and society by participating in the governance of the largest Austrian enterprises.

We started our empirical analysis with all 16,642 members of the *Vorstand*, *Aufsichtsrat* and the *Geschäftsführung* (managing board, supervisory board and management) who are affiliated to the 5,000 biggest Austrian firms and are mentioned in the Austrian Company Register 2008 (*Firmenbuch*, updated in November 2008). From this list we deleted all double entries. By comparing family names in our list with those in Hueck’s catalogue,³³ we aimed at selecting only those who might belong to a noble family. In order to be able to say conclusively that someone is of nobility or not, we checked whether the first names and birthdays in the various volumes of the *Genealogische Handbuch des Adels* corresponded with our data on Austrian managers. We also used other means (for example, internet resources) for verifying that a particular person belonged to a European noble family (for example, Hooft-Graafland belongs to a Dutch noble family

³¹ Hofstätter, L., ‘Bankenwelt und Finanzkrise in Österreich’, in: Honegger, C., Neckel, S. and Magnin C., eds., *Strukturierte Verantwortungslosigkeit. Berichte aus der Bankenwelt* (Berlin, 2010), p. 361.

³² Giddens, A., ‘Elites in the British Class Structure’, in: Stanworth, P. and Giddens, A., eds., *Elites and Power in British Society* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 1–21.

³³ Hueck, S.-M., *Gesamtverzeichnis der Bände 1–127. Genealogisches Handbuch des Adels* (Limburg/Lahn, 2002).

while Davignon is Belgian). There were also those who were highly likely to be of noble descent but could not be found in the *Genealogisches Handbuch des Adels*, which points to an imperfection in our main reference source. The renewal of an entry in the *Genealogisches Handbuch des Adels* providing genealogical information depends on the collaboration of all family members and the willingness of the family to pay the costs.³⁴ Moreover, this handbook seems to be more oriented towards Germany than Austria. We also used noble predicates (such as 'von') as a selection criteria for a European noble family, as in Germany, as mentioned above, contrary to Austria, noble predicates became part of the family name after 1918.³⁵

Our results present an underestimation of the real number of people of noble decent among the Austrian economic elite for at least two reasons: firstly, not all noble Austrian/German families are included in the *Gesamtverzeichnis* by Hueck. Only 9 out of the 16 names with a 'von' included in their family name on the list of the Austrian business elite could be found. This result suggests an underestimation of 44 percent. Secondly, comparable lists of Hungarian, Balkan, Slovakian and Russian noble family names could not be consulted, either because they do not exist or because Austrian/German members were not included in these registers. One can assume that quite a number of these noble families work in one of the 5,000 largest Austrian corporations.

We have used the *Gesamtverzeichnis* and the various volumes of the *Genealogische Handbuch des Adels* to identify the noble title of those selected (simple nobility; baron or *Freiherr*; count or *Graf*; higher aristocracy) and the moment of first ennoblement of that particular family (before or after 1500). If the noble title was uncertain (various branches of the same family can have different titles) we assumed the lowest rank. If the time of first ennoblement of the family was unknown, we assumed that this happened after 1500. We could not make this distinction within the higher aristocracy, but the majority of these families are likely to have been ennobled before 1500.

We use Gudula Walterskirchen's latest book on the Austrian nobility at the end of the twentieth century as a starting point for our analyses. She estimates that there are approximately 180 families of nobility with about 11,000 members in Austria. This represents quite a small fraction of the whole Austrian population (8.350,000), namely 14 per 10,000 (0.14%). She therefore concludes that the question of whether nobility is over or

³⁴ Dronkers, 'Declining Homogamy of Austrian-German Nobility', p. 268.

³⁵ For more information on the data collection, the list of noble and non-noble board members and an extended data analysis see Korom, *Die Wirtschaftseliten Österreichs*, p. 12.

underrepresented in certain professions cannot be accurately answered.³⁶ By not looking at single professions, but at all higher positions in the Austrian economy we take this methodological problem into account and test some of Gudula Walterskirchen's main statements on the role of nobility in the economic elite.

The participation of Austrian nobles in banking declined after the Second World War, which was partly due to the nationalisation of the Austrian economy. Maintaining a large share of public ownership in infrastructure, banking and manufacturing up to the 1990s was an Austrian specialty among Western market economies. However, since the 1980s, the Austrian national economy has been increasingly deregulated and the trend not to accept nobles as managers has been reversed. According to Gudula Walterskirchen we can again find nobles not only in leading positions in banks such as Credit Lyonnais, Österreichische Kontrollbank and Giro-Kredit, but also among the top managers of industrial corporations.

Below we present our hypotheses.

H1 The percentage of nobles in the Austrian economic elite is above-average in comparison with nobles in the total Austrian population.

Gudula Walterskirchen's depiction of the Austrian noble class as an informal and hidden one implies that they do not share readily perceivable traits that reveal them as a distinct sector within the economic elite.

H2 The age and other individual characteristics of nobles in the Austrian economic elite do not deviate from those of non-nobles in the Austrian economic elite. Nobles can thus not be considered as residuals from a former *Stand*, whose members had distinctive common features.

By adopting a historical perspective, Gudula Walterskirchen aims to reconstruct the preferred business activities of nobles during the last century. She comes to the conclusion that after holding a significant share in the production of railways and cars before the First World War, and a reorientation towards business in agriculture and raw materials, specialisation in financing became predominant among nobility.³⁷

H3 Within the economic elites there is a significant concentration of nobles within the banking sector.

³⁶ Walterskirchen, *Adel in Österreich heute*, p. 16.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 118.

If Walterskirchen is right that the Austrian descendants of nobles form an informal class, then we should expect to find at least indicators of the existence of such an informal class. Jaap Dronkers³⁸ found that the noble rank and the distinction between nobles from families ennobled before or after 1500 was still significant for marriage patterns among the Austrian/German nobility but far less so among the Dutch nobility.

H4 Noble ranks are significant as a stratifying device within the Austrian economic elite.

We would also expect that a class, even if it is an informal one, has at its command at least some smaller institutionalised communication networks.

H5 Nobles form an informal network within the Austrian economic elite.

4.2 A comparison of nobles and non-nobles within the Austrian economic elite

This section focuses on the comparison of noble and non-noble members of the Austrian economic elite, primarily testing our first three hypotheses.

We found that 0.88 percent of the Austrian board members are descendants of a noble family. Compared with the relative size of the nobles in the Austrian population (0.13%) the 0.88 percent means a relatively higher ratio of Austrian nobles in the economic elite compared to all Austrians ($88/13 = 6.8$). The first hypothesis derived from Walterskirchen's research can therefore be accepted.

The percentage of nobles among the male economic elite is higher than the percentage of nobles among the female economic elite. In addition, the percentage of women within the non-noble economic elite was 9 percent, as opposed to 7 percent among the nobles. These differences are, however, too small to be significant. The results thus favour the second hypothesis.

Nobles among the economic elite are on average three years older than non-nobles – a significant result. However, they also differ more among themselves in their age compared with non-nobles, which means that they might be both older and younger than non-nobles. Thus, although nobles in the economic elite are generally older than the non-nobles, we do not consider this result should lead to the rejection of our second hypothesis, due to the larger variation in age among all nobles.

Table 2 shows that nobles have significantly higher academic titles than non-nobles. The greatest difference is to be found for the educational title

³⁸ Dronkers, 'Declining Homogamy of Austrian-German Nobility'.

'Dr' (PhD). As the attainment of high academic titles was not a characteristic of the pre-1918 nobility, these findings do not necessarily imply that our second hypothesis is correct.

Nobles are slightly more represented on supervisory boards (1.16%) than on executive boards (0.75%) or in the category of business executives (0.77%). As these differences are hardly significant we regard this result as being in favour of our second hypothesis.

Table 3 demonstrates that nobles do not have an outstanding preference for any given sector. The number of nobles within the financial sector only indicates a slight preference of nobles for finance-related business. Consequently, there is only limited support for the third hypothesis. One possible explanation for the shrinking number of nobles in banking could be the already mentioned merging of the conservative Creditanstalt and Bank Austria which later became internationalised.

The conclusion to be drawn here is that the noble members of the Austrian economic elite deviate from the non-noble members only to some degree. They work in firms with a higher turnover and more often hold an academic title. Furthermore the noble members of the Austrian economic elite are on average three years older than the non-nobles and are less often female. We also established that Austrian nobles are six times more likely to be a member of the Austrian economic elite in 2008 than non-nobles. We thus found confirmation for our first and second hypotheses. Our third hypothesis, however, has to be rejected.

4.3 The diversity of nobility within the economic elite

In this section we compare the noble members of the Austrian economic elite themselves, using the rank of the noble title and the moment of the first ennoblement of the family as a means of differentiation. In doing so, we mainly test our fourth hypothesis. Given the small sample, significance testing was not possible. We therefore discuss substantial differences between nobles without reference to statistical tests.

Table 4 shows that counts of families ennobled after 1500 are most frequent among the economic elites (28.4 percent), followed by simple nobility ennobled after 1500 (22.3 percent), aristocrats (*Fürst* or higher, in most cases ennobled at a lower rank before 1500; 14.9 percent) and barons ennobled after 1500 (12.8 percent). Compared to the distribution of titles in the *Gesamtverzeichnis*, those with the title count or higher are overrepresented in the noble Austrian economic elite, while simple nobility and barons are underrepresented.

The *Genealogische Handbuch des Adels* contains northern and southern German and Austrian nobility. Due to the religious and regional differences between the northern and southern parts of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation the Protestant nobility was concentrated mostly in the north and sought or received a higher noble title from their Catholic emperor less often, whose power was more concentrated in the south.³⁹ By contrast, the Catholic nobility in the southern parts had greater opportunities to obtain a higher noble title. This observation might partly explain the overrepresentation of counts and higher noble titles.

With regard to rank there is little variation in the age of noble members of the business elite in Austria in 2008. Barons from families ennobled after 1500 were the oldest, while barons from families ennobled before 1500 were the youngest. These mixed findings could be mere coincidence.

We can, however, spot differences when it comes to education. Simple nobility ennobled before 1500 have fewer academic titles (only 17 percent), while 42 percent of the counts from families ennobled before 1500 hold a doctorate, followed by counts from families ennobled after 1500 (38 percent). Our analysis also suggests that higher noble titles go hand in hand with higher turnovers. Noble ranks are not clearly associated with positions within the economic elite. Barons from families ennobled before 1500 are less often members of the *Aufsichtsrat* or the *Vorstand*, but more often the *Geschäftsführer* or the *Geschäftsleiter*, while barons from families ennobled after 1500 are less often *Geschäftsführer* and more often in the *Vorstand*. These small differences, however, have no significance. Furthermore sector specialisation is not clearly related to noble ranks. Only one trend can be singled out: the aristocracy seems to be more present in the financial sector (together with barons from families ennobled after 1500), while barons from families ennobled before 1500 are more often to be found in the service sector.

Taken together, all these findings suggest that there is no straightforward variation among the noble members of the Austrian economic elite according to the rank of their noble title and the time of the first ennoblement. Sometimes there seems to be a distinction between aristocracy and counts versus lower nobility, at others between families ennobled before or after 1500, but altogether no solid pattern emerges. Our main conclusion is thus that the rank of a noble title has lost its significance in the twenty-first century and that nobility has become a more homogenous social category. This means that we are left with no support for our fourth hypothesis.

³⁹ Margreiter, K., *Konzept und Bedeutung des Adels im Absolutismus* (Florence, 2005).

4.4 Networks of nobles

In this section we test our final hypothesis that nobles in the Austrian economic elite form an informal network. The fact that nobles proportionally hold more economic positions speaks in favour of the thesis that they do better in relational networking than non-nobles. We also found that companies with nobles on their board are slightly better connected than companies with non-nobles only. This finding can partly be explained by the exceptionally dense micro-networks of financial companies to which more nobles belong. Both results, however, should not be taken as strong support for our fifth hypothesis.

In order to test the phenomenon 'birds of a feather flock together' we investigated whether nobles are to be found in the same companies. While Charles Kadushin found that dyadic friendship is not directly important in determining who sits with whom on what board,⁴⁰ we found a pattern that contradicts this. If nobles are to be found on the same board, then they always form dyads. Table 5 shows that these dyads are only to be found on the level of supervisory boards (and not, for example, at the level of executive boards). We are not able to determine whether ties of friendship preceded these business relationships.

Apart from these results we could not find any evidence that suggests that companies are connected to each other by the principle of homophily (in this case being part of nobility). Even in the rare cases in which companies with nobles on their boards are linked to each other, these ties are not established by nobles themselves. We can thus conclude that nobles do not form an informal network within the Austrian economic elite.

5. Conclusions

Common modernisation theory holds that the rationalisation of societies entails the disappearance of traditional cultures. The implications for the foundations of social inequality are clear: 'the effect of ascriptive characteristics (for example nobility, class, and gender) is less in modern societies than in traditional ones, while the effect of achieved characteristics (for example intelligence, motivation, ambition, and education) is greater'.⁴¹ According to Elias,⁴² it is the paramount task of sociologists to hunt down

⁴⁰ Kadushin, C., 'Friendship among the French Financial Elite', *American Sociological Review* 60 (1995), pp. 202-221.

⁴¹ Dronkers, 'Has Dutch Nobility Retained its Social Relevance?', p. 81.

⁴² Elias, N., *Was ist Soziologie?* (Weinheim, 1996), p. 54.

myths if it is observed that commonly accepted ideas in society do not correspond to observable facts. As there is firm evidence that elite positions were transmitted among Dutch nobility in the twentieth century,⁴³ we found it worthwhile to investigate how Austrian nobles performed within the Austrian economic elite in 2008.

We started with a very provisional attempt to map out the positions of nobles within the Austrian social space. In contrast to the Netherlands, reliable data on the Austrian nobles of today is rare. We thus had to settle with some remarks on typical manifestations of social, cultural and economic capital. While we are aware of the fact that these descriptions are not applicable to every noble, we take the position that a significant fraction of today's nobles might take advantages of such configurations of capital in order to attain elite positions.

Our analyses are well grounded in relation to the social relevance of nobility in the Austrian economic elite. We considered 16,642 members of the *Vorstand*, the *Aufsichtsrat* and the *Geschäftsführung* of the 5,000 largest Austrian companies (by turnover) listed in the Austrian Company Register 2008. Referring to the various volumes of *Genealogisches Handbuch des Adels* and indicators of noble descent (such as the predicate 'von') we established whether managers belonged to a German or Austrian noble family. Applying quantitative methods only, we further examined whether the nobility in Austria has maintained some of its advantages regarding entry into economic elite positions in the twenty-first century.

Our main finding is that Austrian nobles have a nearly seven-fold greater chance of becoming a member of the Austrian economic elite in 2008 than non-nobles, almost a century after the revolution of 1918. Although such an overrepresentation of old elites under new societal circumstances, even after almost a century of official disavowal, is not unique in Europe,⁴⁴ it clearly contradicts the historical relic interpretation and makes us question the rigour of the constitutional abolition of the nobility in Austria. Noble members of the Austrian economic elite deviate from non-noble members in the following aspects: they work in corporations with a higher turnover, more often hold an academic title, are on average three years older and are less often female. However, they do not form any informal network within the economic elite. The comparison of nobles according to their social status within the nobility suggests that ranks have lost their significance completely in the twenty-first century, and that nobility in Austria has thus become a more homogenous social category. The persistence of the *ancien*

⁴³ Dronkers and Schijf, 'Transmission of Elite Positions among Dutch Nobility'.

⁴⁴ De Saint Martin, *Der Adel*.

*régime*⁴⁵ is thus weak in Austria 90 years after its breakdown. We therefore propose an alternative explanation of this surviving noble advantage in Europe. In modern societies, nobility is deprived of their former political means to form a class or *Stand*. Nearly a century after the end of the First World War the last remnants of that former *Stand* have gone and the noble marriage homogeny is rapidly declining (although it is still significantly higher than chance). However, noble families have maintained a distinctive social and cultural capital,⁴⁶ which in modern society assists upward mobility or the avoidance of downward mobility. This distinctive social and cultural capital, as an inherited characteristic of the descendants of noble families, may provide an additional positive selection-criteria in competition for jobs and positions. Good manners, cultural knowledge, social relationships and a well-known family name become advantages, all other things being equal (academic title, language knowledge, etc.). Thus, in a globalised Europe, this distinctive noble social and cultural capital can be an additional advantage, as noble families have maintained on average a stronger relationship with international culture and social ties despite nineteenth and twentieth-century nationalism.⁴⁷

Our research does not necessarily imply that nobility plays a central role in the Austrian economy. What it does show is that belonging to a group that disposes of a specific combination of social, cultural and economic capital might have advantages in climbing career ladders within the economic system. To put it in a different way, the noble title as an indicator of a distinctive *Stand* is dead, but noble social, cultural and economic capital as a useful social device is alive and well.

⁴⁵ Mayer, A.J., *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York, 1981).

⁴⁶ De Saint Martin, *Der Adel*.

⁴⁷ Dronkers, 'Urban and Rural Twentieth-Century Dutch Nobility'.

State	Examples of forests owned by nobility	Hectares	% of all forestry within the state
Burgenland	Esterházy, Batthyany, Draskovich	61,284	55.93%
Carinthia	Habsburg-Lothringen, Foscari, Orsini-Rosenberg	85,781	35.77%
Lower Austria	Seilern-Aspang, Rothschild, Reuss, Thurn-Vrints	227,035	39.13%
Upper Austria	Czernin-Kinsky, Cumberland, Schaumburg	81,389	53.72%
Salzburg	Reverta, Mayr-Melnhof, Nesselrode	30,868	20.32%
Styria	Schwarzenberg, Mayr-Melnhof, Liechtenstein, Croy	301,740	41.24%
Tyrol	Sachsen-Coburg	1,296	0.72%

Table 1. Forests larger than 500 hectares in eight states of Austria.

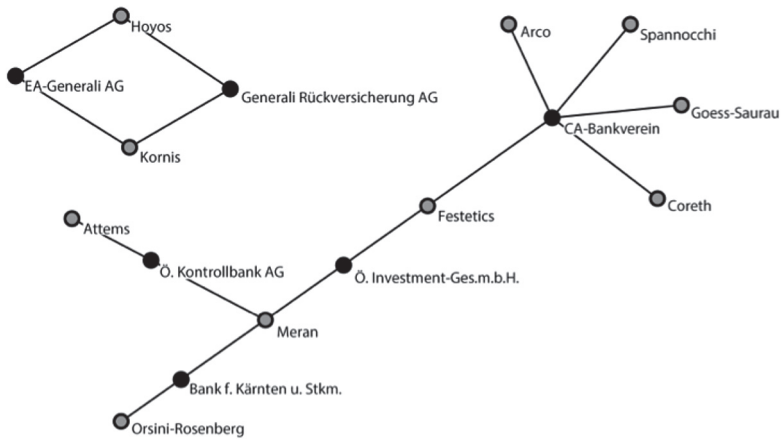


Diagram 1. Nobility within the Austrian banking sector in 1995.⁴⁸
Note that black nodes stand for companies while open nodes represent nobles; non-nobles are not shown.

⁴⁸ Source: Hoppenstedt, *Wer leitet?*

Highest academic titles							
	No academic title	<i>Dipl.-Ing.</i> (Graduate engineer)	<i>Bakk.</i> (Bachelor)	<i>Ing.</i> (Engineer)	<i>Mag.</i> (Master)	<i>Dr.</i> (PhD)	Total
Non- nobles	9,747 59.1%	720 4.4%	5 0.0%	1,046 6.3%	2,337 14.2%	2,639 16.0%	16,494 100.0%
Nobles	61 41.2%	8 5.4%	0 0.0%	10 6.8%	23 15.5%	46 31.1%	148 100.0%
Total	9,808 58.9%	728 4.4%	5 0.0%	1,056 6.3%	2,360 14.2%	2,685 16.1%	16,642 100.0%

Table 2. Highest academic title of the noble and non-noble members of the elite.

Business sectors						
	Agrarian	Industry	Financial	Service	Culture	Total
Non-nobles	224 1.4%	1,156 7.0%	5,740 34.8%	8,411 51.0%	963 5.8%	16,494 100.0%
Nobles	1 0.7%	8 5.4%	69 46.6%	64 43.2%	6 4.1%	148 100.0%
Total	225 1.3%	1,164 7.0%	5,809 34.9%	8,475 50.9%	969 5.8%	16,642 100.0%

Table 3. Business sectors of firms to which noble and non-noble elite members belong.

Noble title	Frequency	Percent	Hueck
Simple ennobled before 1500	6	4.1%	7%
Simple ennobled after 1500	33	22.3%	39%
Baron ennobled before 1500	7	4.7%	33%
Baron ennobled after 1500	19	12.8%	
Count ennobled before 1500	19	12.8%	18%
Count ennobled after 1500	42	28.4%	
Aristocracy: Fürst or higher	22	14.9%	/
Total	146	100%	100%

Table 4. Distribution of noble titles.

Supervisory board	Members	Area of business	Economic importance*
Steiermärkische Bank und Sparkassen Aktiengesellschaft	WINCKLER, Georg LEEB, Alexander	Bank	High
Allgemeine Sparkasse Oberösterreich Bankaktiengesellschaft	STARHEMBERG, Georg ALTGRAF SALM-REIFERSCHIEDT, Niklas	Bank	High
Mayr-Melnhof Karton - Aktiengesellschaft	MAYR-MELNHOF, Friedrich MAYR-MELNHOF, Georg	Production of cardboard	High
Constantia Industries AG	BULGARINI D'ELCI, Aleco HARTIG, Alexander	Production of synthetic materials	Low
CAG Holding GmbH	VON MEISS, Hans HOYOS, Martin	Real estate	Low
Grazer Wechselseitige Versicherung Aktiengesellschaft	MERAN, Philipp HARNONCOURT, Franz	Insurance	Low
Bank Sal. Oppenheim	FREIHERR VON OPPENHEIM, Christopher GRAF VON KROCKOW, Matthias	Bank	Low
Securitas Sicherheitsdienstleistungen GmbH	STERNBERG, Filip MENSCHDORFF-POUILLY, Emanuel	Providing safety in public spaces	Low

* Measured by turnover

Table 5. Nobles within the same company.