

**Power- and Network Structures of National Elite Networks as
Drivers of AI Discourses:
The German Economy and Swedish Digital Nation**

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Abstract

Through elite networks, actors cooperate to facilitate a flow of resources and power amongst each other. This research analyses the influence of national elite networks on the construction of national artificial intelligence (AI) discourses in Germany and Sweden by drawing on official policy documents. Through a comparative critical discourse analysis, the theoretical key expectation that elite networks convey their worldview, aimed at accumulating hegemonic power and capital, through AI discourses is examined. Power- and network structures of national elites are unwrapped and employed to explain as well as interpret the two elitist national AI discourses. It is found that German elite networks are working towards fuelling the powerful stand of the German economy in the light of the AI transformation, while Swedish elite networks continuously portray AI initiatives within the scope of enhancing Sweden's power in the field of digitalisation. In both cases, national elite networks are willing to cooperate with others on a transnational level, while solely focusing on benefits this will bring their national, elitist interests. This thesis argues that national differences in power- and network structures of elites account for differences in the construction of AI discourses. The findings contribute to explaining national differences in how elite networks wield power through constructing discourses.

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1. Introduction

The hegemonic power of elite networks is tremendous in enabling elite actors to diffuse their capitalist worldview in the politics of AI. Elites consist of networks with multiple, powerful stakeholders, including public and private actors, from different areas that may have diverging elite interests. What makes elite networks so significant is the hegemonic power they hold to impose their elitist worldview on society. Crucial in the transfer of elite networks' interests, especially the interest to uphold their hegemonic power, is discourse. By diffusing an elitist worldview in AI discourses, elite networks are constructing a social order, by which everyone is affected.

1.1 Background of the Problem

Previous research findings assert that differing elitist power structures are reproduced by AI and that their manifestation can be found as an underlying element in national AI discourses (Ossewaarde & Gülenç, 2020). Moreover, research emphasises that concrete AI objectives and policies differ strongly from country to country (Franke & Sartori, 2019; van Noordt, Medaglia & Misuraca, 2020). Every state has traditionally important issues that are now targeted with AI, as states are racing to be a leading AI power (Ossewaarde & Gülenç, 2020). Thus, there is a research gap between differing national power structures and the way they shape AI discourses. A research approach that connects these phenomena and focuses on elites is missing in the body of literature. It could, however, generate relevant new insights, as elites can disproportionately influence societal developments (Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2021). The power elite networks hold enables them to articulate phenomena in a specific way, which strengthens their hegemonic power by steering developments to uphold it. This reproduction of power structures is not articulated explicitly but masked by a discourse of opportunism on how issues can be tackled through AI (Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2021). What remains unaddressed is the unequal power distribution and how it will be perpetuated by such a discourse on AI. Similarities and differences between national AI discourses in the light of elitist power- and network structures have not been researched and constitute a gap in the scientific body of knowledge.

1.2 Research Problem

Building on these findings, this research aims to understand what role elite networks play in constructing national AI discourses, and to what extent elitist discourses and power structures differ or resemble the same pattern. The key assumption is that AI networks, actors steering discourses and developments in the politics of AI, have elite interests. The concept of elite networks plays an important role, as these networks talk an AI discourse into existence and, therewith, mask their hegemonic power. This project adds to the body of knowledge by investigating the gap of divergent national elite networks resulting in the reproduction of power structures in differing AI discourses. The high level of complexity

of elitist discourses that, when unwrapped, generates insights on the fuelling of elite networks' power structures, and the missing focus on elites creating national AI discourses, make this research urgent and scientifically relevant. Further, this research is socially relevant because of the massive power that comes with AI and how it is governed. An immense amount of control is exercised through the elitist influence on discourses and exercise of hegemonic power. Not only elites are affected by the politics of AI and how national AI discourses are constructed, everyone is.

The research question (RQ) that guides this thesis is derived from the described knowledge gap. The national AI discourses chosen for this analysis are those of Germany and Sweden. Germany is the leading economic power of Europe with big incentives on AI and the second-highest government AI readiness score in the EU (Oxford Insights, 2020). Sweden, on the contrary, is high in digital development and the leader of the Nordic-Baltic region's AI cooperation (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018). This makes the two countries interesting to analyse and suggests that there are significant differences between their elite network structures and AI discourses. This research is particularly interested in unmasking hegemonic elite interests. The key concept that will be critically interpreted is elite networks and their power to create national AI discourses, which is translated into the main RQ:

“What is the role of elite networks in the construction of national AI discourses?”

This question deserves to be researched as it brings the missing focus on the concept of elite networks and the discursive character of the politics of AI together. Elite networks' disproportionate power to steer societal developments makes the question with the focus on elite networks as discourse makers crucially important. The analysis of discourses is central in this since language is strongly connected to power. Linked to elite networks, the concept of hegemony is vital, as it describes the disproportionate power elite actors hold and seek to reproduce through dominating AI discourses. To address this overarching, interpretative RQ, it has been divided into three sub-questions (SQ). The first one is aimed at investigating and describing the two national AI discourses individually and asks

“What are the AI discourses of Germany and Sweden?”

This SQ lays the groundwork for an interpretation of the insights found in the data by carefully deriving the relevant information. Given the RQ, the concept of elite networks as discourse makers and the key assumption that elite networks dominate AI discourses is central in this SQ. Therewith, it is expected that the two AI discourses at stake are coined with elitist assumptions and the goal to foster hegemony. Following that, the second SQ seeks to compare the national AI discourses by asking

“What are the similarities and differences between the AI discourses of Germany and Sweden?”

The aim is to understand to what extent the two elitist AI discourses differ from one another. This comparative SQ, thus, further adds to the successful addressing of the main RQ. Essentially, this SQ is posed in the context of elite networks and hegemony. These phenomena are the focus of the comparison, intending to unmask hegemonic elite interests in the national AI discourses of Germany and Sweden. Importantly, the third SQ seeks to interpret and explain these findings and asks

“How can national differences in AI discourses be explained in terms of elite networks?”.

With this SQ, the findings that have been uncovered can be interpreted and evaluated in terms of the theoretical concepts that guide this thesis, elite networks, and hegemony. The last step to successfully uncover the role of elite networks and their hegemonic power in the construction of national AI discourses is taken. Consequently, the main RQ can be answered.

1.3 Research Approach

An interpretative, qualitative research approach is adopted to answer the RQ. The method used is a comparative critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is the most suitable research design to analyse power structures and unmask hegemony. This research aims to develop insights into how elite networks exercise hegemony in language (Fairclough, 2013). The cases selected due to their intriguing characteristics are the national AI discourses of Germany and Sweden. The collected data consists of strategy papers and other official policy documents that deal with the politics of AI. Applying the CDA to textual policy documents can give insights into interconnections between discourse and power. A theory-driven coding scheme connects the theoretical concepts and the data. By, for instance, investigating which issues are foregrounded and which are downplayed, elitist power structures and hegemonic interests in national AI discourses can be analysed.

This thesis continues by developing a theoretical framework to generate insights from existing research. The theory outlines the key concepts of elite networks and hegemony and explains the important connection between elites and AI. It highlights the power of discourses and links it to the role elite networks play in their construction. Subsequently, the methodological chapter explains the CDA, and why this method is the most suitable to fulfil the research goals. Furthermore, the coding scheme that has been developed to link the key concepts to the data is discussed. The chapter also presents insights into the case selection and data collection. The thesis continues with the analysis chapter, which provides and interprets the empirical findings developed in the light of the theoretical insights. Lastly, chapter five concludes this research by answering the RQ and demonstrating how this thesis was able to fill the scientific research gap.

2. Theoretical Framework: Elite Networks as Discourse Makers

This chapter aims to build a theoretical framework as a basis for this research. To do so, the meaning of the term elite is explained, followed by a theorisation of transnational elites and elite networks. It is discussed how discourses are constructed and connected to hegemonic power. This research builds on the theory of transnational elites, or as Sklair (2000) terms it, the transnational capitalist class (TCC), as well as the key concepts of *hegemony* and *elite networks*. Importantly, the role of elite networks as discourse makers is discussed. The key argument is that elite actors form complex, transnationally operating networks that enable a flow of resources to perpetuate a capitalist accumulation of goods and strengthen the hegemonic power of elite networks. These networks dominate the discourse on AI and have the power to construct discourses that conceal the power structures benefitting elite actors. This section offers insights into the existing theory and concludes by summarising the theoretical insights that guide the analysis.

2.1 Elite Networks

Before diving into the theory on elite networks, it should be clarified what is meant by the term elite. The concept of elites has largely been coined by C. Wright Mills. At the centre of power, according to Mills, is the elite (Mizruchi, 2017). It can be defined as a group of largely unified actors consisting of leading figures from government, business, and the military that come from a highly privileged background. Together, they hold the decision-making capacity for key decisions and form what Mills has termed the power elite. This group of people is united by their interest in maintaining their position, disproportionate power, and ability to dominate (Mizruchi, 2017). Individuals of the power elite are connected via network ties that create cohesion and enable the elite to maintain its position (Wedel, 2017). There is nuance to the term and different definitions of what constitutes an elite, however, the groundwork laid by Mills' power elite, embedded in networks and holding a disproportionate amount of influence, is the starting point for this thesis.

According to Sklair (1997; 2000), the actors of the TCC form a power elite, which consists of four segments. Importantly, TCC networks operate across national borders, within the structures of global capitalism. The first segment consists of those actors that have control over transnational corporations. The second fraction is state actors, meaning politicians and other public authorities. The third group is the so-called globalising professionals, which refers to elite actors from a mainly technical point of interest (Sklair, 2000, p. 69). Lastly, the fourth segment includes elite actors from the media and merchants involved in business on a transnational level (Sklair, 2000). The division of elite network actors into four broad fractions acts as a guide, but each of these four groups of actors can overlap, and be divided into smaller fractions that may have differing individual elite interests (Sklair, 1997).

The TCC is embedded in *elite networks* (Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2021). Elite networks are systems that facilitate the interaction of elite actors and circulation of resources, ideas, and people (Parmar, 2019). These networks are formed both formally and informally. The disproportionate influence elite actors can realise through these networks is significantly more impactful than the influence of the masses (Caliskan, 2020). The composition of elite networks is complex, and dynamics are difficult to trace. What drives these networks is the objective of capitalist accumulation as a collective benefit that can be realised through long-term connections formed in elite networks (Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2021). Elite networks are fundamental to the power of transnational elites, their ability to prevent radical change and build hegemony as discourse makers (Parmar, 2019).

This research seeks to compare national AI discourses, making it important to note that the theory of the TCC emphasises that transnational cooperation, to enhance the reproduction of hegemonic, capitalist power structures, does not mean that the nation state is out of the picture. Actors cooperate through elite networks to the extent that it benefits their interests and power. In a globalised world, a crucial part of this is the ability to be internationally competitive, increasingly linking individual elite actors' interests on a transnational level (Sklair, 2000, p. 76). The open questions in this debate are on "National-level variations in how elites wield power, and engage with transnational networks" (Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2021, pp. 218-219). Key in this debate are discourses talked into existence by elite networks.

Thus, elite networks hold a disproportionate amount of power and are interested in fostering their influence. Elite actors share a high amount of privilege, however, they come from different backgrounds, such as corporate or political, and their network ties are difficult to untangle.

2.2 Hegemonic Power in Discourse Construction

Discourse, to Fairclough (2013) is a social practice. Consequently, discourses are always constructed within a specific, sociocultural context that depends on the language user (Boldyrev & Dubrovskaya, 2015). The term discourse can be defined as the way actors communicate their ideas (Jacobs, 2019). A discourse contains beliefs and conceptualisations of those actors who shape them. Meaning is always attached to discourse, it is never created in a vacuum. In how discourses are constructed, the world is construed in a certain way (Boldyrev & Dubrovskaya, 2015, p. 27). As a result, those who talk a discourse into existence have the power to outlay realities in a specific way. This definition of discourse illustrates the power and importance that comes with how it is constructed. As a result of this discursive power, discourse, especially political discourse, manifests norms and legitimises the views it conveys (Krzyżanowski, 2020). A crucial concept for the understanding of discursive power is hegemony, the

strategic masking of domination by an elitist group of actors that leads to subordinate groups consenting to it (Brown & Humphreys, 2006). Drawing on the concept of hegemony developed by Gramsci, the two dimensions of cultural and discursive hegemony are especially important for the study of elite networks constructing AI discourses.

The concept of cultural hegemony describes the complex relationship of dominant power and its legitimation through consent given by subordinates (Lears, 1985). Cultural hegemony emerges through a worldview widely diffused by ruling groups that appeals to different societal groups. This worldview conveys a certain social order. Because conceptions of the world transmitted by ruling groups contain symbols and values that are in line with those of various subordinate groups, subordinates may consent with the order imposed on them and become complicit in its legitimation (Lears, 1985). However, consent is a very complex, nuanced phenomenon that is always mixed with some level of ambiguity and discomfort (Lears, 1985). The diffusion of cultural hegemony through the ruling elite limits the possibilities for subordinates to locate the source of the unease they feel about the social order (Lears, 1985). The worldview and cultural hegemony established by elites are not static, but fluid phenomena that are constantly renewed. In reproducing cultural hegemony, discursive practices are crucial.

Cultural hegemony goes hand in hand with discursive hegemony, the concept that describes how hegemony constitutes itself in discourse. Along with the creation of cultural hegemony by ruling groups, discursive practices can reinforce cultural hegemony. Discursive hegemony is characterised by the limiting of language and imposing of boundaries on discourse. Consequently, discursive practices are always an enactment of power, legitimising their content and marginalising alternatives (Brown & Humphreys, 2006). A discourse does not reflect the world, but social realities are created and reproduced in it in an ongoing process (Townsend & Geist, 2000). In constructing a discourse, meaning and social relations are organised. By developing a discourse limited to the worldview of elites, alternatives to that perspective are discouraged, while creating a discourse that lets subordinates feel heard and represented in it. “The ideas, values, and experiences of dominant groups are validated in public discourse; those of subordinate groups are not” (Lears, 1985, p. 574). Through discursive practices, elite networks construct boundaries of what is acceptable, affecting the thoughts of people to an extent where the elitist worldview becomes so dominant and embedded that alternatives are unthinkable.

In other words, by constructing discourses, one constructs realities, while undermining alternatives to the perspective conveyed. The diffusion of a worldview through discourse has enormous implications for the establishment of hegemony. Cultural hegemony is fostered by the exercise of discursive hegemony. Being in a position to construct a discourse means having the power to introduce concepts and worldviews. Elite networks are dominating positions with the capacity to construct discourses.

Consequently, it can be expected that they are asserting their worldview in the construction of AI discourses, intending to foster and reproduce their hegemonic power.

2.3 Hegemonic Power of Elite Networks in Discourse Construction

One of the most significant tools of elite networks to strengthen their hegemonic domination is their ability to control discourses (Sklair, 2000). To Krzyżanowski (2020), discourses are constructed to appeal to different social groups. There is a certain flexibility and genericness to elitist discourses that make it possible for a discourse to fit with different values social groups hold (Krzyżanowski, 2020). Elite networks make use of discourses that enhance a misconception of humanitarian action, as actors are aware of the importance different social groups attribute to these issues (Graz, 2003). The superficial goal of the common good is incorporated into the discourse powerful elites diffuse, leaving out potential risks. This logic enables a public discourse to become hegemonic, as any counter-discursive action becomes powerless against its strategic catch-all tendencies (Krzyżanowski, 2020). Goals and incentives of perpetuating the elite actors' hegemonic position remain, while the discourse now signifies a utopian picture of initiatives that will help all (Graz, 2003).

Underlying the appearance of a discourse aiming for the common good is a social order that is established to achieve cultural and discursive hegemony. A discourse implies certain actions by, for instance, economic actors, and a “controlled power reproduction in society takes place” (Krzyżanowski, 2020, p. 437). These strategically constructed path dependencies that result from the formulation of discourses are barely noticeable. The hegemonic power conveyed can hardly be combated. The superficial aim of a discourse, the public good, encourages people to submit and conform to ideas proposed by elite actors, preserving their hegemonic power and ability to be at the top of the social order they assert in them (Krzyżanowski, 2020). What is in line with ideas contained in discourses is deemed as acceptable, normal, and inevitable. This successfully limits the imagination and power of all other ideas and, thus, dominates the public mindset (Krzyżanowski, 2020, p. 439). This hegemonic domination is achieved through strategically constructing discourses that, first, communicate a positive picture about an issue, second, present it in an inevitable, opportunistic light, and third, portray it as legitimate and, therewith, deserving to be supported (Krzyżanowski, 2020, p. 440). This immense, hegemonic power conveyed through discourses is exercised by elite networks as discourse makers.

This elitist power in shaping a discourse has enormous implications, because the discourse is taken up, further diffused, and, consequently, strengthened. With the discourse strengthened, so are elite interests and the power to reach the goals of the TCC behind it. As Sklair (1997) shows, originally social movements quickly become movements that employ a discourse that fosters capitalism and interests of elite networks. The example of the creation of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable

Development illustrates this phenomenon of elite networks as discourse makers well, “it redirects attention away from the discourse of singular ecological crisis, a discourse that challenges the very existence of global capitalism, onto the discourse of multiple environmental challenges that corporations can cope with and global capitalism can live with” (Sklair, 2000, p. 80). Notably, it has been observed that the particular terminology, talked into existence by the elite network of the TCC, was taken up by the environmental movement (Sklair, 2000, p. 81). Thus, the environmental movement, which previously was aware that terms like ‘sustainable growth’ were part of the climate crisis, had picked up the discourse developed by a network of actors with elite interests.

Therewith, the key expectations are that the AI discourses are dominated by elite networks, and will be formulated according to an elitist conception of the world that limits alternatives. It is expected that elite actors construct discourses characterised by the superficial objective of the common good, which appeals to a wide range of people. Underlying this phenomenon, the AI discourses will be directed at generating capital and hegemonic power, also on a transnational level. It is expected that network structures between high-ranking actors are implicitly observable and that national elite network structures differ from one another. Thus, elite networks as discourse makers exercise discursive hegemony, which further fosters cultural hegemony and masks their hegemonic power.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

To close, this second chapter has provided the theory for the analysis of elite networks as discourse makers in the politics of AI. Firstly, the chapter highlighted the power held by elite networks that comes with the construction and diffusion of discourses. By linking the phenomena of discourse construction and hegemony, it has become clear that discourse always introduces a limited worldview that silences alternatives. Through discursive practices, discourse makers have the power to bring about cultural and discursive hegemony. Secondly, the actors interested in the realisation of hegemony are elites. This chapter has demonstrated the complexity of elite networks and emphasised that elite networks dominate AI discourses to foster and reproduce their hegemonic power.

3. Methods

This chapter seeks to explain the methods that will be applied in the analysis, and to show that the research design, a comparative CDA, is the most suitable for answering the RQ posed. First, the case selection is explained to clarify the relevance and intriguing characteristics of the cases. Next, a summary of the data collection is given and the selection of policy documents is explained. Subsequently, the research design is elaborated on to show the linkage between the insights this thesis seeks to develop, the theoretical concepts, and the method. Lastly, the coding scheme created as a tool for the analysis is discussed. The chapter closes by summarising the methodological key aspects.

3.1 Case Selection

The cases that have been selected are the AI discourse of the German government and as a comparative case the AI discourse of the Swedish government. These two AI discourses are particularly interesting cases for a comparative study due to, on the one hand, the ambitious objectives on AI they propose, and on the other, divergent starting points for their implementation.

Germany is the strongest national economy in Europe, which makes it a powerful standpoint for the development and implementation of AI. However, Germany has been slow to address AI issues and is lagging in the process of digitalisation as a historically manufacturing nation (Franke & Sartori, 2019). While Germany is expected to be an AI leader, digital technologies are met with scepticism from the public. Accordingly, the AI discourse of Germany is composed through an economic, traditional lens (Franke & Sartori, 2019). The benefits of the economy motivate German elite networks to push for initiatives to enhance economic strength (Ossewaarde & Güleç, 2020). Furthermore, Germany's AI strategy has not been developed by AI experts, but jointly composed by the long-established ministries of Education and Research (BMBF), Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi), and Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), significantly shaping the primary focus of the strategy on research, economic affairs and society (Franke & Sartori, 2019). Van Noordt et al. (2020) show that, while both have high AI ambitions, there are significant differences between the AI policies of Germany and Sweden.

In contrast, Sweden is Europe's leader in digital development, benefitting from high trust in digital technology and a strong start-up culture (Bertelsmann Stiftung, n.d.). Sweden's leadership in the implementation of digital technologies is as significant as a ten-year advantage compared to Germany (Bertelsmann Stiftung, n.d.). Additionally, Sweden is demonstrating leadership in AI as the leader of the Nordic-Baltic region's AI cooperation (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018). Hence, elite actors in Sweden are motivated by the prospects of leadership in digitalisation. The Swedish AI discourse is likely to build on these existing advantages. Contrary to the German AI strategy, Sweden's strategy paper has been created by the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation (MEI). Established in 2015, the

Ministry provides a modern approach, a stronger focus on expertise, and room for novelty in AI (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015). The key similarity between the cases is, firstly, the ambitious objectives on their national AI futures. A second characteristic that overlaps is their leadership, however, in two different fields of relevance for AI. The traditional German approach and Sweden's openness to novelty are strongly divergent, which makes a comparative analysis of the two AI discourses, and especially the elite interests they convey, the most interesting choice of cases. Economic leadership in Germany and leadership in digitalisation in Sweden are intersecting with AI, which makes the comparison of their AI discourses and elite network structures highly relevant.

3.2 Method of Data Collection

The comparative CDA draws on qualitative data in the form of AI strategy papers, as well as other policy reports and documents related to these. The analysis of additional documents, like official articles, further contributes to the understanding of the discourses. The basis of this data collection are the AI strategies of Germany and Sweden. Policy documents have been selected due to their discursive character that can be interpreted, making them the appropriate source for the analysis of an elitist domination of AI discourses (Fairclough, 2013). All documents have been published between 2017 and 2020, providing a timely picture of the AI discourses.

The documents have been retrieved from the websites of the German and Swedish governments. Data for the case of Germany was retrieved from the websites of the BMBF, BMWi, and BMAS. The selected documents are the official German AI strategy, and an update report on the strategy, released in 2020. Next, the German digitalisation strategy, and a progress report on the High-tech strategy, both in which AI plays an important role, will be analysed. In addition, six official articles released as information material have been selected. These deal with AI as a key to the digital future, the attractiveness of Germany for AI companies, AI in the German High-tech strategy, and two examples of AI innovation in Germany, amounting to 290 pages of government document (Appendix A). In the case of Sweden, documents were collected especially from the website of the MEI. The first document is the Swedish AI strategy. Additionally, an evaluation report on AI in Sweden has been retrieved from the Vinnova website. Vinnova is an agency under the MEI concerned with government funding for innovation research and development. Furthermore, an information sheet on the digital strategy of Sweden, and the Nordic-Baltic declaration on AI have been selected. In addition, three articles published by the Swedish government on AI strengthening welfare, and Sweden collaborating internationally on AI, have been chosen. The Swedish government documents add up to 206 pages (Appendix A).

In the light of the research goal to analyse the role of elite networks constructing national AI discourses, these documents enable the in-depth study of two AI discourses. For both cases, the types of documents

that have been carefully selected are similar in length and type, which ensures that the data gathered provides a rich picture of the national AI discourses of Germany and Sweden.

3.3 Method of Data Analysis

This comparative case study aims to identify the elitist AI discourses of Germany and Sweden and to explain them in terms of the central concept, elite networks. Thus, an interpretative, qualitative research approach is adopted to conduct a comparative CDA. Through the comparative element, it is clarified to what extent national elite discourses differ in today's transnational context. In this section, the CDA method will be outlined, followed by an elaboration on the coding scheme that connects the theoretical key concepts to the textual data.

Language and discourse are powerful and can serve the interests of elite networks as the actors that coin them. Hence, it is vital to unwrap how texts are constructed. A CDA brings forward the context and meaning of language, uncovering what narratives elite actors convey and why (Fairclough, 2013). Interrelations between discourse and social elements, such as power, are especially emphasised (Fairclough, 2013). To Fairclough, language as a social practice is intertwined with other social practices, constantly shaping each other reciprocally. Consequently, elite networks produce discourses coined by their objectives and practices, and the diffusion of these elitist national AI discourses leads to the reproduction of power structures. A CDA approach is highly relevant, as it is especially concerned with uncovering domination and hegemony, which is central in this research. Importantly, the CDA is suitable for a comparative analysis, as it grasps the individual context of a text, making the comparative CDA fit seamlessly with the research objectives. The findings can, thus, be compared and interpreted in the light of the theoretical concepts. Moreover, the CDA does not simply describe but evaluates and explains the realities it uncovers (Fairclough, 2013, p. 178). The SQ's mirror the descriptive, interpretative, and explanatory structure of the CDA, as the goal is to explain national AI discourses in terms of elite networks (Fairclough, 2013). First, the descriptive dimension of the CDA is used to describe and compare the discourses. Subsequently, the interpretative and explanatory dimensions of the CDA enable the explanation of AI discourses in terms of elite networks.

To successfully perform and draw conclusions from the comparative CDA, a coding scheme on discursive characteristics has been created. Codes make it possible to identify interests in the data, as discourse elements become measurable items. The first two SQ's can be addressed by employing codes to the textual data. Building on these findings, the characteristics of the national AI discourses can be interpreted and explained in terms of the theoretical concepts, which serves to address the third SQ and overarching RQ of this paper. The link between the theory and the national AI discourses is established, which facilitates a discussion on elite networks constructing AI discourses and underlying power

relations. The coding scheme has been created to derive a holistic picture of the two AI discourses, and the actors that decide on the focus of the discourses. That way, the findings are not biased, but all relevant information about the two national AI discourses that could be coined by elitist assumptions is retrieved. Interpreting the findings in terms of elite networks and hegemony is, therefore, crucial to fulfilling the objectives of this thesis. The analysis is performed with the help of the software ATLAS.ti.

As visualised in Figure 1, the coding scheme, firstly, focuses on actors. By deriving from the documents which actors make and execute decisions, who is affected by these decisions and how, as well as which actors are not involved, insights into power- and network structures are generated. This links to the theoretical concept of elite networks (2.1). It is clarified who actors exercising power are, shown whether those actors can, in the light of the theory, be regarded as elite actors, and to what extent they are operating as a network (Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2021). The codes, therewith, mirror the theory on elite networks. Secondly, by paying attention to issues that are foregrounded, it is derived what the elite interests of actors with decision-making power are. This includes issues that are emphasised and those discourse makers are concerned about, as concerns further reflect which topics importance is attributed to. These codes have been derived from the theory section on the hegemonic power of elite networks in discourse construction (2.3). The body of knowledge stresses that an elitist discourse, superficially, foregrounds how initiatives will benefit society (Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2021). By investigating which issues discourse makers highlight in the documents, it is possible to trace patterns of the elitist objective to appeal to different societal groups through the enhancement of a misconception of humanitarian action (Krzyżanowski, 2020). Consequently, it is crucial to understand what discourse makers want readers to pay attention to by emphasising, attributing importance or concern to aspects.

Next, the coding scheme enables an investigation of the portrayal of AI initiatives, connecting the codes to the theory on hegemony (2.2). Accordingly, elite networks exercise their power through constructing discourses that portray their worldview in a positive light, with initiatives that take advantage of opportunities, are legitimate and deserving of support (Krzyżanowski, 2020). The positive portrayal of a worldview is aimed at achieving consent, a discursive strategy that advances cultural hegemony (Brown & Humphreys, 2006). Lastly, investigating issues placed in the background of AI discourses, downplayed and deemed as unimportant, adds to the full picture of the worldview constructed. As obtained from the theory, by downplaying issues that are not in line with the worldview of elites, alternatives are marginalised to foster hegemony (Brown & Humphreys, 2006). The codes on issues in the background of national AI discourses, hence, are derived from the theory on the hegemonic power of elite networks in discourse construction (2.3). The specific findings of the analysis, including keywords and examples, can be found in the Appendix, which provides evidence of the usefulness of the coding scheme (Appendix B; C).

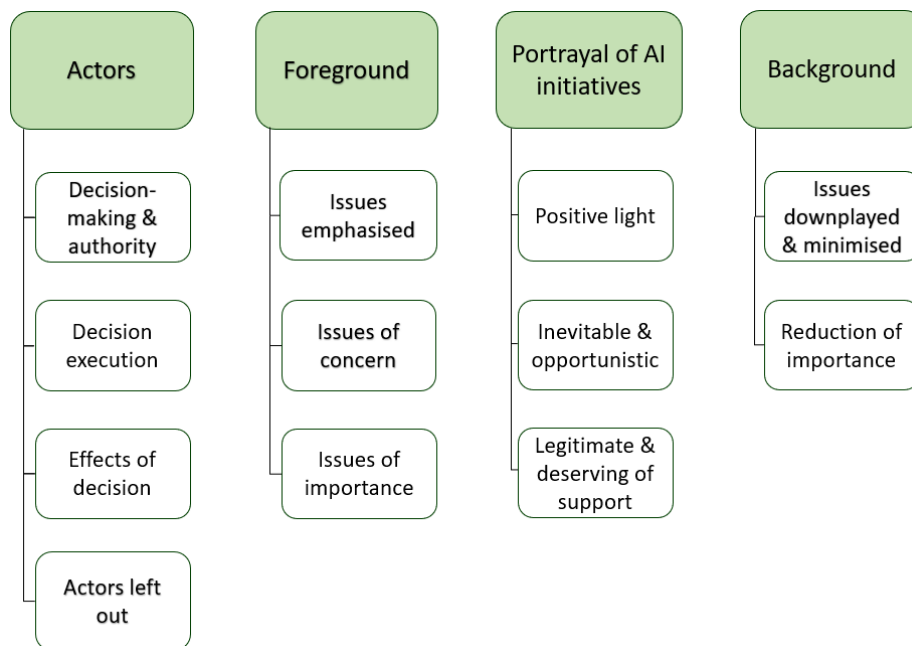


Figure 1: Coding Scheme - Hegemonic Power of Elite Networks as Discourse Makers

In sum, a comparative CDA is the best approach to uncover hegemonic elite interests in AI discourses. The key assumption is that elite networks exercise their power through shaping national AI discourses, reproducing power structures, which matches the focal points of the CDA. Employing a coding scheme to the textual data enables the connection between the abstract theoretical concepts and concrete keywords. Focusing on actors produces insights into power- and network structures of elite networks as discourse makers. Investigating which issues are foregrounded, backgrounded, and how they are portrayed, provides an overview of the elitist worldview conveyed. Hence, the key concept of hegemony, and how elite networks as discourse makers exercise power, can be analysed.

3.4 Concluding Remarks

To conclude, the characteristics of the German and Swedish AI discourses make the cases the most interesting for a comparative analysis of elite networks. A comparative CDA approach allows the unmasking of hegemonic power structures, which is in accordance with the research objectives, making it the most suitable method. With a theory-driven coding scheme, the AI discourses can be described and compared, which answers the first two SQ's. The coding scheme enables an investigation of, first, power- and network structures of discourse makers, and second, the hegemonic elite interests conveyed. Thus, the concept of elite networks in the two AI discourses at stake can be analysed. The coding scheme has been developed to concretise the theoretical key insights, and still allow a holistic investigation of the elitist national AI discourses. Hence, the findings can be interpreted in the context of the theory to answer the third SQ. By following the descriptive, interpretative and explanatory structure of the CDA, the RQ on the role of elite networks in the construction of national AI discourses can be addressed.

4. Data Analysis

In this subsequent chapter, the results of the empirical analysis of the German and Swedish AI discourses are presented, interpreted based on the key insights of the theory, and compared. The aim of carefully laying out the findings of the comparative CDA is realised by illustrating identified national elite networks' interests through key citations and their interpretation. The first subchapter embarks on the German elitist AI discourse that has been constructed within the scope of initiatives to foster Germany's strong economy. Subsequently, the Swedish elitist AI discourse, which is built on the premise of fuelling Sweden's lead in the digital transformation, is elaborated on. The third subchapter deals with the comparison of the discourses and argues that identified contrasts are caused by differences in power- and network structures of German and Swedish elite networks. Both AI discourses are coined by the will to preserve current national strengths to generate capital while masking this elitist interest with superficial positivity.

4.1 Business as a Watchdog in the German AI Discourse

The continuous thread identified as running through the German AI discourse is that all initiatives presented are ultimately directed at developing a skilled labour force for a strong economy. The ultimate driver of the German AI discourse are economic incentives, like each idea had to pass through a gate protected by business as a watchdog. Only initiatives that could serve it were allowed to pass through. In this section, the phenomenon is elaborated on and illustrated by drawing on the themes of AI research and environmental protection.

4.1.1 The Leitmotiv of economic competitiveness and gains

The theme of economic competitiveness and gains has been identified as one of the key characteristics of the German AI discourse, fitting the overall theme of business as a watchdog. This Leitmotiv steered by economic incentives is sometimes clear, while in most chapters it is covered up by an ambiguous discourse that directs readers' attention towards superficial, positive aspects. The German AI discourse is constructed to present a picture of benevolence, of AI initiatives everyone will profit from, and a Germany that wants to help. This phenomenon is illustrated well by the misconception created by German elite networks on how Germany wants to help and increase the chances of success in the digital transformation for developing economies in Africa. Mostly, this is all the discourse mentions, that emerging economies need assistance by Germany in the transformation towards innovation and AI. However, the last few sentences dealing with this topic reveal the prominent reason why German elite networks are interested in 'helping' developing economies in Africa.

“Better access to technologies and **shaping the digital transformation is also the objective of building digital centers in Africa**” (The Federal Government, 2018c, p. 35).

Presented as an addition at the bottom of the paragraph, the reason why elite actors are interested in working with developing economies can be found. This citation illustrates that the driving force for this initiative is not the benevolence of German elite networks. By targeting developing economies, the digital transformation can be shaped in a German way on the transnational level. Assisting developing economies is seen as an opportunity for German elite networks to gain hegemonic power. Without this incentive, there would be no benefit for German elite networks, and no reason to target developing economies in such an unerring way. German elite networks want to

“**Leverage digital innovations for development**, in particular **by using** key technologies such as blockchain, internet of things, and **artificial intelligence in developing countries**” (The Federal Government, 2018c, p. 37).

Additionally, this example highlights that the German AI discourse clearly shows that national elite interests for power are always the driver of transnational projects. German elite networks do not want to help, but need to go beyond the nation state to stay competitive, and are willing to exploit chances to fuel their economic interests in developing economies. The misconception of helping emerging economies for benevolent reasons shows that this initiative that paints Germany as a contributor to the well-being of local people, is solely driven by the opportunity to push the elitist, German worldview forward by implementing it in developing economies. The nation that succeeds in diffusing its view on a transnational level can gain hegemonic power, benefitting national elite networks' capitalist interests. In relation to the theory, German elite networks mask their recklessness and greed for power by appealing to readers through seemingly benevolent misconceptions. Another phenomenon that highlights the predetermined Leitmotiv of economic gains becomes apparent in how initiatives on dialogues between different actors are discursively constructed. While creating a positive picture of inclusive initiatives to keep all actors informed and give them a voice, the discursive construction leaves the impression that actors from science, economy, and government are talking to, not with society

“The Federal Government will further develop the Plattform Lernende Systeme into an Artificial Intelligence Platform that hosts a **dialogue between government, science and commerce with civil society**” (The Federal Government, 2018b, p. 7).

A group of actors is imposing something on the people, leaving the impression that there is, in reality, no room to talk about or mutually develop AI initiatives. Rather, government, commerce, and science are unreceptive to civil society, while the emphasis on dialogue creates the impression that all actors can bring in ideas. In context, it becomes apparent that a network of actors is imposing its view, coined by capitalist interests, on society. In sum, both examples presented show that German elite networks as discourse makers have a specific, pre-determined conception of the world they are asserting in the AI

discourse while making an effort to mask their elitist objectives with an appeal to the common good (Krzyżanowski, 2020).

4.1.2 AI research as the key to a thriving economy

With the overall theme of business as a watchdog continuing through the German AI discourse, emphasis is placed on research. AI research is deemed important because it adds value to society (The Federal Government, 2018a). However, when investigating proposed initiatives closely, it becomes apparent that the emphasis on research is only as strong because research is needed as a basis for innovation, for AI applications businesses can enhance their economic competitiveness with. Research itself is not relevant to elite networks, the goal of accumulating capital is. AI research is simply seen as a tool to gain hegemonic power. The reasoning of research to foster German elite networks' capitalist interests and continuing Leitmotiv of economic gains is the primary, underlying goal of the German AI discourse dealing with research.

“AI is now finding its way from research into an increasingly broad range of applications in business. **Large digital corporations are investing substantially in the development and use of AI technologies. They expect these investments to raise the efficiency of existing business models**” (The Federal Government, 2018b, p. 10).

When interpreting this, the reason why AI research should be conducted with an orientation towards the use of AI in business is that business actors are aware of capitalist gains they could make from AI applications, and have invested money to advance AI research in their interest. The fact that this creates a strongly intertwined relationship between science and business is not contested, but it is argued that scientists need to deliver the results businesses are paying for. Connecting to the theory, German elite network structures, dominated by business, are visibly at work, pushing their power structures into the AI transformation. Adding to this uncontested argumentation of AI research as a tool to target existing economic interests is a line of argumentation pleading that

“having just a single centralised cluster of excellence for all industries would not **fit in with the structures that have evolved in Germany**” (The Federal Government, 2018b, p. 13).

Clusters of excellence are AI research clusters, and when considering how scientific research in Germany is intersecting with AI, it is implied that structures that have evolved should stay the way they are. To ensure that, the German AI discourse works from that premise as a basis, creating multiple research clusters. Power structures are purposefully reproduced, problems with these are not contested, but remain unaddressed. Briefly, an aspect connected to research is AI education. In the German AI discourse, the importance of education on AI is recognised. However, initiatives on AI education in Germany are slim, solely concerned with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

subjects. While lifelong education initiatives are mentioned, only the objective of increasing the number of university students in STEM subjects is elaborated on (The Federal Government, 2020b, p. 12).

The priority is not research, but business and how to increase power and capital. AI research is to be conducted as the key to a thriving, German economy, fulfilling the worldview constructed by German elite networks. In this, there is no added value to society, like misleadingly highlighted. Value is solely added for German elite network actors, especially those from business, by furthering economic interests through AI research. In terms of the theory, this implies that the interests of society at large are systemically downplayed and not considered in the effects elitist AI initiatives will have (Townsend & Geist, 2000).

4.1.3 Environmental protection as a market of opportunism

Another interesting theme identified is the discursive construction of AI in relation to environmental protection in the German AI discourse. German elite networks address the topic of environmental protection and AI but take from it only what can solidify existing power structures to generate capital as an economic enterprise. On the surface, AI is constructed as a solution to issues arising due to climate change, as the promotion of AI-based tools will help to address challenges for sustainable development (The Federal Government, 2020b, p. 16). Confirming the discursive pattern suggested in the theory, elite networks direct attention towards the positive portrayal of AI initiatives, presenting them as important opportunities that need to be exploited and, hence, are legitimate (Krzyżanowski, 2020). Elite networks exercise hegemony and mask that the main driver of AI initiatives for environmental protection is the opportunism sensed in an unfolding market for AI applications to combat climate change. In this market, Germany wants to be a competitive player, since chances to accumulate power are unfolding. The main incentive downplayed in the German AI discourse on environmental protection is the goal to boost Germany's innovative strength in the important markets for environmental and sustainability technologies and secure technological leadership of German companies (The Federal Government, 2020b, p. 16). In relation to theoretical insights, the interest of society, a liveable world in which the environment is protected, is unconsidered, while German elite networks use the language of environmental protection to convince readers of the opposite.

Importantly, to cover up elite networks' priority of economic gains, a discursive pattern has been identified that starts by portraying the main goal as societal benefits of proposed AI initiatives. However, the more concrete initiatives and goals are elaborated on, the less is stated about the added societal value of proposed AI initiatives, as the focus shifts to financial incentives. It becomes evident that described initiatives do not imply any change to the German behaviour that impacts the environment. Rather than prioritising a sustainable behaviour change to reduce emissions with the help of AI, the German AI discourse attributes importance to AI technologies that enable a more accurate

measurement of emissions (The Federal Government, 2020b). In reality, German elite networks intend to do nothing for the climate. Rather, economic elite actors are helped in their everyday practices to increase efficiency and, hence, expand capital by exploiting opportunities opening up in the market of environmental protection. What German elite networks intend to achieve is to keep existing practices, including the environmentally harmful ones, and power structures in place. It is ambiguous how proposed AI initiatives are to benefit society. The more goals are explained, the more it is uncovered that elitist discourse makers thought through capitalist benefits of AI initiatives. The discourse appears to prioritise the well-being of society, while not clarifying how this will be achieved. Thus, the worldview constructed lets different societal actors feel seen in the positive portrayal of AI initiatives while limiting their perspectives to capitalist initiatives proposed in the AI discourse to establish discursive and cultural hegemony (Lears, 1985; Brown & Humphreys, 2006). Moreover, a misconception created that fits the discursive construction of AI for environmental protection is the usage of the term

“AI ecosystem” (The Federal Government, 2020b).

While mentioning in one footnote that AI ecosystems are not supposed to be understood as natural ecosystems, it is not explained how one is to understand them, or why this terminology has been chosen (The Federal Government, 2020b). Without explanation, the term is used frequently throughout the German AI discourse. An ecosystem is a positively connotated term associated with a natural cycle. Employing such terminology is not a random choice, but a purposeful way of shedding a positive light on the topic by trying to awaken a pleasing association of a natural cycle in readers. In terms of the RQ, this serves German elite networks as discourse makers to deflect attention away from economic incentives behind proposed AI initiatives.

To sum up, German elite network structures, dominated by business, have been discovered. Elitist AI initiatives are masked by a discourse that uses the language of benefitting society, while actions are solely aimed at reproducing power structures and imposing an economic worldview on society. Societal interests are unincorporated, and transnational cooperation is exploitative of developing economies.

4.2 AI: an Opportunity to enhance Sweden’s Lead in Digitalisation

The Swedish AI discourse is coined by a constant emphasis and explanation of AI initiatives from the premise of Sweden’s advanced standpoint in digitalisation. To Swedish elite networks, AI is always connected to the digital transformation and portrayed in its light. Swedish elite actors see opportunities to increase power and capital in the advancement of the lead in digitalisation, by leveraging Sweden’s head start. In this subsequent section, this will be elaborated on by examining the elitist, Swedish AI discourse and its peculiarities in depth.

4.2.1 Focus on AI risks as new opportunity to lead internationally

One peculiarity which highlights Swedish' elite networks fixation on digitalisation is the discursive construction of why Sweden needs to foster initiatives on AI risks and concerns. In this, Swedish elite networks see a chance to combine the benefits of Sweden's head start in digitalisation with opportunities to accumulate power and capital. Crucial for this is the favourable availability of digital data in Sweden as a leading nation in the digital transformation. With its high amount of digital data, Sweden has the chance to be innovative, generate results on precarious AI risks, and, at the highest importance, capital, faster than other nations. The Swedish AI discourse is very articulate about specific AI risks, constructing a discourse that places importance on the well-being of the individual. However, by articulating concerns about the development and use of AI explicitly, these risks are twisted to constitute opportunities in which Sweden can become an international leader and benefit from its focus on AI risks.

“The risks associated with AI are not only technical but also ethical. [...] **Sweden can take the lead in ethical, safe, secure and sustainable use of AI by actively working on this issue nationally and promoting it internationally**” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b, p. 8).

According to theory, it is untypical that Swedish elite networks propose initiatives on AI risks, as elites typically deflect attention away from precarious topics to create a positive appearance. However, what drives elite networks to work on AI risks is not their benevolence, like it may seem at first, but incentives to generate power to leverage on an international level. In this citation, also the national focus of the Swedish AI discourse becomes apparent, as national gains are to be promoted internationally to gain power. Furthermore, connecting the focus on risks associated with AI to Sweden's advantages in its lead in digitalisation, national elite networks want to leverage the widespread progress and societies' trust in digital innovation to further their capitalist interests. An issue that highlights this phenomenon is the discursive construction of the precarious topic of AI and data protection.

“**Sweden's public sector has an almost unique volume of high quality data**, which is often **a prerequisite for AI applications** and if properly managed can contribute to **creating considerable benefits**”, (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b, p. 8).

The Swedish AI discourse emphasises the well-being and protection of individual citizens, stating that data will be protected and safeguarded (Vinnova, 2018). Nonetheless, this citation contradicts the picture of safety and shows that it is only addressed to use data for AI applications and, thus, capitalist incentives. As the issue is further laid out, it is recognisable that

“**How different actors are able to interpret and implement the GDPR** in their various activities and in society as a whole will be a **very important process for the value-creating potential of AI**” (Vinnova, 2018, p. 76).

When interpreting the topic of data protection in the light of the theoretical concepts, the issue is twisted by Swedish elite networks to constitute a chance to exploit opportunities of the widespread digitalisation and availability of data in Sweden. Instead of concretising how the individuals' data is protected, an ambiguous paragraph encourages actors to interpret the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), a set of rules that should not have much room for interpretation, how it best fits different actors' goals. Swedish elite networks do not want to protect the individuals' data, but exploit it to drive forward AI innovation, whether through different interpretations of the GDPR or new regulatory developments that enable data access for AI innovation. Importantly, gaining data access ultimately leads to the realisation of capitalist interests, as digital data in Sweden is seen as key for the development of AI applications. Successful employment of AI applications, then, enables a flow of power into the hands of Swedish elite networks. The advanced standpoint of Sweden in the digital transformation offers opportunities for Swedish elite networks to exploit the availability of data to drive forward their capitalist, national elite interests. Focusing on precarious AI risks, combined with the favourable, digital landscape of Sweden, enables elite networks to further cultivate the lead of Sweden as a powerful digital nation.

4.2.2 Education and research as drivers of digital innovation and AI

Another large theme in the Swedish AI discourse is research and education. Sweden aims to completely reform its educational system, highlighting that citizens deserve to be educated about AI (Vinnova, 2018). The actual reasoning that drives elite networks to push for a reform of the educational system, however, is

“a shortage of people with AI expertise both in Sweden and around the world, resulting in stiff international competition for qualified people” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b, p.6).

For Swedish elite networks, this shortage of qualified workers constitutes a problem that leads to a shortage of AI innovation. In the light of the theory, the flow of capital and accumulation of hegemonic power is endangered. To tackle this issue, discourse makers spare no effort but are willing to reform the entire educational system of Sweden, starting with implementing AI education in all disciplines of higher educational institutions. The reform intends to incorporate the teaching of digital and AI skills in school curriculums and to invest heavily in teacher training (Vinnova, 2018). For Swedish elite actors, the core incentive for a broad-based educational reform that includes all educational levels and groups of the population is that digitally skilled people bring innovation (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017). Again, the digital aspect is specifically highlighted, as vocabulary in the Swedish AI discourse evolves around the topic of digitalisation. Elite networks are driven to do all they can to foster Sweden's beneficial position as a leader of the digital transformation and see AI as a means to do so. The reform of the educational system, thus, provides a constant supply of AI skills in the population (Vinnova, 2018, p. 14). From the theoretical perspective, the initiatives on education Swedish elite

networks assert serve elite actors to come closer to winning the international competition on power and capital by ensuring that Swedish society is as digitally skilled as possible, while discursively highlighting the inclusion of everyone in the AI transformation. Similarly, the Swedish AI story emphasises AI research. However, research is seen as a driver for digital innovation, always connected to the ever-present theme of digitalisation, as

“It is likely that **successful education and research institutions** will, in the future, **have high digitisation rates** in both core and support activities. **AI will be significant in this context**” (Vinnova, 2018, p. 12).

Here, digitisation is the aspect emphasised, while the connection to AI is only established in an additional sentence, as the Swedish digitalisation provides the biggest chances for elite networks to generate power. Connecting to AI research and proving that Swedish elite networks only cooperate on a transnational level to fulfil national elite interests is that

“**If Sweden is to be at the forefront of AI research**, it is important to maintain and **develop cooperation with research environments in other countries**” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b, p. 7).

With regards to the theory, it is evident that national elite networks’ only interest is to further their power in transnational cooperation. One last interesting, discursive phenomenon observed in the Swedish AI discourse is the continuous usage of formulations that portray initiatives by Swedish elite networks as the only way to govern AI in Sweden. Namely, the discourse asserts that

“Sweden must”, “Sweden needs to”, that “We have to”, or “The opportunities that AI offers only create value when”, (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018a; Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b).

Doing so deems the worldview presented as the only possible solution, which significantly contributes to limiting alternative ideas and worldviews. In sum, Swedish elite networks are constructing an AI story aimed at reproducing and strengthening their hegemonic power, also in transnational cooperation (Boldyrev & Dubrovskaya, 2015). Surprisingly, AI risks are addressed, through which elite networks present themselves as caring, while solely intending action that furthers their power. The highest potential for hegemony and power lies in the Swedish digitalisation.

4.3 Comparison of the Elitist AI Discourses of Germany and Sweden

This subchapter brings together the findings of the empirical analyses of the German and Swedish AI discourse to highlight and compare the most striking similarities and differences. The role of national

elite networks as discourse makers that accounts for a different AI story in Germany and Sweden is emphasised.

4.3.1 Similarities

The strongest similarity between the elitist AI discourses of Germany and Sweden is that national elite networks are very focused on enhancing aspects in which the nation state is a well-established, international leader. The respective key focus, in the German case the strength of industry and economy, in the Swedish case the preservation of leadership in the digital transformation, coins the entire national AI discourse like a continuous thread, impacts which initiatives are deemed as important, and how they are discursively constructed. For elite networks, the guiding theme is how to link existent advantages to the AI transformation, to generate the highest amount of hegemonic power and capital out of initiatives. Both AI discourses mask their greed for power with a strong superficial positivity.

Secondly, what has been confirmed in both AI discourses is the focus on the nation. While elite networks in Germany and Sweden recognise that in an increasingly globalised context, AI initiatives beyond the scope of the nation are inevitable, the nation and national elite actors are always more important than anything else involved in transnational AI initiatives. Cooperation may only happen if benefits to the power and capital of Germany or Sweden as a nation are significant. It has become obvious that this objective is the only one national elite networks are interested in, even if other states are exploited. What matters is the advancement of national elite interests at all costs.

4.3.2 Differences

The strongest similarity in the national AI discourses of Germany and Sweden is also where their biggest difference lies. In seeking to advance national strengths and leadership, the cases differ in their guiding themes that influence all AI initiatives. These differences are a result of differing power and network structures of national elite networks in Germany and Sweden.

What differs between the cases is the background of elite network actors and the network composition. In the German case, there are significantly more actors from business, leading to a higher amount of economic interests. In Sweden, the amount of public authorities is higher. As highlighted in the theory, elite network actors have differing elite interests (Sklair, 2000). Initiatives are still directed at generating capital, but since the network composition differs, the resulting AI story and which elite interests of actors overlap are divergent. The two national elite networks hold the highest amount of hegemonic power in different areas. For Germany, the hegemonic power its national elite networks hold is highest when it comes to economic aspects. This is where most capital can be generated in the future. It is crucial for German elite networks to reproduce this leading economic position and hegemony that

comes with it. In the Swedish case, elite networks have accumulated capital and hegemony in Sweden's strength as a digital nation, making it a priority to foster the flow of capital and hegemonic power here. Differences in network configuration and in which field the two elite networks hold most power lead to a differing enactment of hegemony through discourse.

The German elites' Leitmotiv of economic competitiveness is caused by the powerful role German companies as elite actors play in discourse construction (Hoffmann-Lange, 1989). The Swedish AI discourse, on the other hand, is less gridlocked in traditional elite network structures. While in Sweden, there are large companies, such as Sony Mobile, that exert significant influence on the national AI discourse, elite network ties between different actors are weaker and less entangled than in the German case (Edling, Farkas & Rydgren, 2015; Vinnova, 2018). Another area where the stronger allowance for novelty in the Swedish AI discourse shows is initiatives on education. While Germany is hesitant in reforming the educational system as it plans to implement AI education in university STEM disciplines, Sweden is planning a broad reform of the entire educational system. Of course, this is partly caused by the federal system in Germany that complicates a reform (Jungblut & Rexe, 2017). However, that does not explain why AI education will only be implemented in university STEM subjects, while Sweden is aiming to incorporate it in all disciplines. The fact that the Swedish AI discourse addresses AI risks was an unexpected finding. The expectation taken from previous research was that dangers about AI remain largely unaddressed to strengthen the positive picture elites seek to paint. While this unexpected finding may at first indicate that the Swedish AI discourse is not elitist, it has been found that national elite networks focus on AI risks simply because an opportunity is arising where the availability of digital data in Sweden can be exploited to advance national elite networks' hegemonic power. The results of this comparison have been visualised in Table 1.

	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
<i>Similarity 1.</i>	Advancing aspects in which Germany is international leader	Advancing aspects in which Sweden is international leader
<i>Similarity 2.</i>	National elite interests only relevant aspect in transnational cooperation; even if developing economies are exploited	National elite interests only relevant aspect in transnational cooperation
<i>Difference 1.</i>	Guiding theme of AI strengthening traditionally strong economy	Guiding theme of strengthening Sweden as digital nation through AI
<i>Difference 2.</i>	National elite networks dominated by business actors	National elite networks dominated by public authorities; looser network ties to economic elite

<i>Difference 3.</i>	Little education initiatives; implementation of AI only in university STEM programmes	Broad reform of educational system to foster digital- and AI skills
<i>Difference 4.</i>	AI risks remain largely unaddressed	Numerous initiatives on AI risks
<i>Difference 5.</i>	Gridlocked by established, traditional elite network structures and interests	Elite network structures allow for changes and novelty; less gridlock

Table 1: Similarities and differences between the German and Swedish AI discourses

4.4 Concluding Remarks

To conclude this chapter, the key insights of the empirical analysis of the elitist, national AI discourses of Germany and Sweden are summarised.

The German AI discourse is coined with the goal to foster the power of Germany's economy in the AI transformation. This becomes evident in how elite networks continuously seek to leverage benefits for German companies through AI initiatives. Swedish elite networks, on the contrary, are driven by the interest to advance Sweden's lead in the digital transformation. To do so, they are willing to exploit the availability of data and trust of society in digital technologies to foster innovation, capital, and, most importantly, the strength of Sweden as a digital nation. An unexpected peculiarity in the Swedish AI discourse is its focus on risks of the AI transformation. This focus serves elite networks as another opportunity in which capital and hegemonic power for Sweden as a digital nation lie. In both cases, elite networks recognise the benefits of transnational projects to foster national AI interests, which is the only incentive driving elite networks towards transnational cooperation. However, the cases differ in the focus of their national AI discourses. This is because elite network actors in Germany and Sweden, traditionally, come from different backgrounds, resulting in divergent network configurations. This also accounts for contrasting elite interests, leading to a different field in which national elite networks aim to generate capital and power. National differences between power- and network structures of elites in Germany and Sweden result in a different discursive enactment of hegemony and divergent AI stories.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Answer to the Research Question

To conclude, elite networks play a significant role in the construction of national AI discourses. Through differing configurations of network- and power structures in Germany and Sweden, elite networks as discourse makers create contrasting AI stories. This has become most evident in the divergent focus taken by elite networks, in the German AI discourse on economic gains, and in the Swedish case on fostering Sweden's lead in digitalisation.

The findings largely confirm the theoretical key expectations. Both AI discourses are dominated by a national, elitist worldview constructed to limit possible alternatives to what elite networks convey. AI discourses coined by the superficial objective of the common good have been created as a tool to mask the hegemonic domination of discourses. Thus, both AI discourses are characterised by patterns aimed at establishing discursive hegemony, which plays into strengthening cultural hegemony. Notably, the supposition that national elite networks increasingly cooperate on a transnational level, but only to realise national elite objectives, has been confirmed. Here, the body of knowledge is torn between researchers arguing that nowadays, elite networks are a phenomenon detached from the nation state, and researchers arguing that the nation remains the prevailing playground and interest of elite networks (Gardner-McTaggart, 2016; Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2021). Recent insights from Young, Goldman, O'Connor & Chuluun (2021) highlight that national elite networks are still significantly more important than elite networks' activities on a transnational level. Adding to that, this research takes the argument one step further, as evidence in the German and Swedish AI discourses shows that transnational cooperation only happens to advance national elite networks' objectives. Besides national elite interests, there is nothing at a level beyond the nation.

The findings are in line with previous research on elitist power structures in Germany and Sweden. In Germany, elite networks are guided by the Leitmotiv of economic competitiveness because, traditionally, companies are powerful and play a large role in discourse construction. Out of a sample of German elite actors from a total of 3164 individuals, 983 come from the field of business, making it by far the biggest sector represented (Hoffmann-Lange, 1989, p. 58). To compare, 452 individuals come from politics, highlighting the disproportional influence businesses in Germany have on decision-making (Hoffmann-Lange, 1989). Furthermore, German business elite actors have a strongly intertwined relationship with public authorities, which fuels the economic orientation of the AI discourse. This confirms recent findings on the continuous hegemonic domination of German society by industry (Köstler & Ossewaarde, 2021). This thesis supports the argument that the AI discourse constantly emphasises the German AI economy and sets out a social order in which elite networks seek to reproduce established power structures (Köstler & Ossewaarde, 2021).

In Sweden, however, the influence of public authorities on discourses is traditionally larger and less contested (Gronow, Wagner & Ylä-Anttila, 2020). Business is a relevant factor, but its role in discourse construction is not comparable to the strong network ties and influence of companies on the German AI discourse (Edling et al., 2015). Instead, the body of knowledge asserts that there is, on the one hand, a Swedish political elite, and on the other an economic elite (Edling et al., 2015). Importantly, network ties between these two elites exist, but are traditionally loose, creating two distinct elite entities that work together significantly less than in Germany. Interestingly, Ibsen, Ellersgaard & Larsen (2021) found that high-ranking national elite networks are consciously pursuing corporatist policymaking while excluding politicians and voters. The authors add, which applies to the Swedish case, that in Scandinavian countries, not only business interests are prominent drivers of elite networks, but, for instance, large labour movements can exert equally strong influence. This research adds to the line of argumentation that actors from labour movements or trade unions too have capitalist interests they assert in AI discourses. These capitalist interests differ from business interests, like in the German case, but are nonetheless important elite objectives. Hence, this research connects its findings to the insights by Ibsen et al. (2021) and stresses that the particular national context in which a discourse is constructed needs to be factored in to interpret elitist network structures. This thesis was able to contribute to the body of knowledge by connecting the threads between the context and configuration of elite networks in Germany and Sweden, and their AI discourses. By highlighting how differences in national elite networks' power- and network structures led to the creation of different AI stories, this research adds to the scientific body of knowledge and closing of the research gap. The findings of this thesis confirm that national elite networks' power structures exert significant influence and account for differences between AI discourses, which is an important aspect that has, until now, not been researched.

5.2 Suggestions for Future Research

This thesis is limited to the comparison of only two cases, their elite network structures, and AI discourses. Looking forward, future research should examine national elite networks' power structures and influence on AI discourses in a larger set of countries to build a richer body of knowledge and contribute to the generalisability of findings. This could also be done in additional policy domains for a larger body of evidence. Another question that arises is which AI initiatives society regards as important, in contrast to what elite networks currently assert in national AI discourses. Moreover, the discursive pattern of a) communicating an issue in a positive light, b) presenting it as inevitable and opportunistic, and arguing that, due to this portrayal, an issue is c) legitimate and deserving of support, has turned out to be an important pattern in the national AI discourses at stake (Krzyżanowski, 2020, p. 440). Passages in which these three steps were employed to argue for the legitimacy of proposed AI initiatives were frequently encountered. It was helpful to be alert for this discursive pattern, which has originally been discovered in studies on normalisation discourses (Gavriely-Nuri, 2009). Hence, future

research on the construction of elitist discourses should work with this discursive pattern as a tool to identify how elites wield power and exercise hegemony through discourses. This would contribute to answering the question resulting from this research on whether the discursive pattern described can be regarded as a tool generally employed by elite actors in discourse construction.

5.3 Practical Implications

Knowledge on elite networks exercising hegemony through discourse is highly important, as it gives insights into inequalities and structures responsible for power distributions (Young et al., 2021). Since power structures are an underlying phenomenon of discourses that needs to be interpreted, it is difficult to provide information in an accessible manner. Thus, it is crucial to continue researching on the power and influence of elites, as research like this thesis contributes to unwrapping elitist discourses. It becomes possible to bring awareness to the influence of elite networks on initiatives that affect all. The findings of this research provide important insights into power structures that should be used to inform social policy seeking to counteract inequalities. Another crucial aspect to counteract elitist power is to encourage alternative worldviews. Specifically, this can be done by increasing the media presence of scientists informing about elite networks, as modern platforms of communication can challenge traditional, elitist power (Castells, 2008). Finally, the information generated on an elitist domination of the politics of AI should be used to establish an open dialogue on AI initiatives, in which actors can equally bring in their thoughts without a network of elite actors imposing their worldview on society.

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Appendix A: Data Collection

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Appendix B: Results of Analysis with ATLAS.ti

Individual Codes	Number of Citations	
	Relative	Absolute
Decision-making & authority	5,47%	63
Decision execution	4,78%	55
Effects of decision	8,86%	102
Actors left out	3,04%	35
Issues emphasised	19,21%	221
Issues of concern	8,08%	93
Issues of importance	16,00%	184
Positive light	15,04%	173
Inevitable & opportunistic	7,39%	85
Legitimate & deserving of support	5,47%	63
Issues downplayed & minimised	5,30%	61
Reduction of importance	1,30%	15
Total	~ 100%	1150

Appendix C: Keywords and Examples

Theme	Code	Key words	Examples
Actors (Theoretical concept: <i>Elite networks</i>)	Decision-making & authority	Developed by Response to Feedback from Consultation process Networking	“ As ministers responsible for digital development [...] we adopted in April 2017 the declaration “The Nordic-Baltic Region: a digital frontrunner [...] and support the following policy objectives for making the Nordic-Baltic region digitally leading” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018b, p. 1)
	Decision execution	Collaboration between Work involves Work together	“This means that automotive companies need to work together when it comes to the generation/recording, management and analysis of driving and sensor data.” (The Federal Government, 2018b, p. 35)
	Effects of decision	Effect This means Enhancement Improvement	“ The leverage effect this will have on business, science and the Länder will mean that the overall amount available is at least doubled.” (The Federal Government, 2018b, p. 6)
	Actors left out	Dialogue between Leading actors	“Engage in dialogue and if possible reach agreement on joint guidelines with other leading regions and economic areas. ” (The Federal Government, 2018b, p. 41)
Foreground (Theoretical concept: <i>Hegemonic power of elite networks in discourse construction</i>)	Issues emphasised	Goal/Aim Focus on Major potential Significant Of value Committed to	“My role is to drive development that will make Sweden the world leader in seizing the opportunities of the digital transformation. That is the goal we have set.” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018a)
	Issues of concern	Challenge Threat Lack of Shortcoming Difficulties	“Global demand for AI competence will therefore increase sharply, which means that an already significant lack of AI competence is expected to grow further. ” (Vinnova, 2018, p. 12)
	Issues of importance	Overall objective Important Essential Fundamental	“ It is essential that a sufficient number of people have the skills required to develop and use AI technology if the whole of Sweden is to benefit from AI.” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b, p. 6)

<p>Portrayal of AI Initiatives</p> <p>(Theoretical concept: <i>Hegemony</i>)</p>	<p>Positive light</p>	<p>Benefits Serve humans Added value Support humans</p>	<p>“The development and use of AI must in this case be driven forward responsibly and to the benefit of society, while also unlocking new value-added opportunities.” (The Federal Government, 2018c, p. 45)</p> <p>“Technology is to support human beings and ease their burden” (The Federal Government, 2018b, p. 14)</p>
	<p>Inevitable & opportunistic</p>	<p>Opportunity Solution Support Possibility Inevitably We need to Meaningful</p>	<p>The use of AI in this area offers the opportunity not only to provide information and services in a more targeted, tailored and low-threshold manner within the administration as well as for business and science, but also to support the goal of a climate-neutral federal administration by 2030. (The Federal Government, 2020b, p. 23)</p>
	<p>Legitimate & deserving of support</p>	<p>In Sweden’s interest In Germany's interest Therefore Well-being</p>	<p>“It is therefore in Sweden’s interest to stimulate innovative applications and use of AI in society in various ways.“ (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b, p. 8)</p> <p>The well-being of the individual is always at the center of our actions. (The Federal Government, 2020c)</p>
<p>Background</p> <p>(Theoretical concept: <i>Hegemonic power of elite networks in discourse construction</i>)</p>	<p>Issues downplayed & minimised</p>	<p>Briefly Relatively Limited Next to</p>	<p>“In this chapter, an attempt is made to more closely account for different types of company involvement in AI-related development, as well as briefly discuss the links between different types of companies.” (Vinnova, 2018, p. 77)</p>
	<p>Reduction of importance</p>	<p>Not Already given Long established</p>	<p>AI research has long been established in Germany (The Federal Government, 2020b, p. 4)</p> <p>To successfully develop and shape AI, national measures are usually not enough. (The Federal Government, 2020b, p. 20)</p>