Temporal trends in intergenerational social mobility in Switzerland

A cohort study of men and women born between 1912 and 1974

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on analyzing whether the influence of social origin on life chances has changed over time in Switzerland, as to date little research has been carried out on this issue in this country. Furthermore, this study is interested in questioning social mobility measurement, through a comparison of the ESeC class schema (which has the same theoretical foundations as ESP) with an alternative one, namely the Oesch schema.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Q1: Has social mobility increased over time in Switzerland?
Q2: Has it fluctuated according to the economic context?
Q3: Have social mobility chances changed differently between men and women?
Q4: Does an alternative social class schema reveal different outcomes, in terms of trends, gender differences, etc.?

3. DATA


4. POPULATION


5. COMPARING TWO CLASS SCHEMA

5.a. ESeC

1. Higher salariat
2. Lower salariat
3. Intermediate employee
4. Self-employed
5. Lower white-collar
6. Skilled manual
7. Semi-skilled

5.b. Oesch

1. Technical experts
2. Technicians
3. Associate managers
4. Skilled office
5. Skilled service
6. Routine operatives
7. Routine service
8. Routine agriculture

While ESeC (in line with ESP) is rooted in the manual / non manual divide that characterizes industrial societies, Oesch’s schema by introducing horizontal distinctions within the social structure, was conceptualized to answer to the phenomenon of tertiarization, feminization and welfare state. In this respect, it reflects more adequately post-industrial societies.

6. ABSOLUTE TRENDS

6.a. Men

6.b. Women

7. RELATIVE TRENDS

7.a. Men

7.b. Women

8. DISCUSSION

Q1: Has social mobility increased over time in Switzerland?
Both measures of absolute and relative social mobility support the trend of no change (i.e., the constant flux thesis). In fact, not only do the rates of absolute social mobility remain steady over time, but the log-linear model estimates also clearly favor the model of constant social fluidity. Therefore, it seems that in Switzerland, neither upward directed changes in the social structure nor the overall expansion of the educational system resulted in a substantial reduction in the inequality of opportunity.

Q2: Has it fluctuated according to the economic context?
Too little evidence was found regarding the impact of economic variations on social mobility. The slight decrease in upward mobility and slight increase in downward mobility observed for younger men are not substantial enough to reach the conclusion that Switzerland’s economic context generated significant effects.

Q3: Have social mobility chances changed differently between men and women?
Globally, the greatest changes occurred among women. Women from recent birth-cohorts indeed enjoyed greater upward social mobility and lower downward social mobility than women of older birth-cohorts, resulting in an increasing convergence with men’s situation in terms of absolute social mobility chances. Yet, in relative terms, changes that this study has observed have not been substantial enough to suggest that inequality of opportunity in Switzerland decreased.

Q4: Does an alternative class schema reveal different outcomes?
Overall, similar outcomes are observed between the ESeC and the Oesch class schemas in both absolute and relative terms. Nonetheless, the Oesch class schema reveals gender-specific characteristics. Horizontal mobility (i.e. between work logics) is much higher among women than men, while reproduction within work logics is higher for men. Furthermore, although the CnSF model provides a better fit over the Unidiff, the Unidiff parameter with the Oesch schema points to different variations than ESeC. Therefore, future research inspecting more thoroughly the differences between both schemas is on the agenda.

9. REFERENCES

10. CONTACT

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