

Cohort dynamics of Class attainment in Switzerland

Julien Chevillard

LINES - Life course and Social Inequality Research Center

Contact: Julien.Chevillard@unil.ch

Several studies have shown the impact of historical changes and, hence, of birth cohorts on life chances (See for a seminal study: Elder, 1974). This impact has been for example well demonstrated for France (Chauvel, 1998) and Germany (Blossfeld, 1986). It has also been demonstrated that the impact of cohorts varies noticeably across countries: UK, USA and Scandinavian countries experience a very low (or even null) impact of cohorts on life chances and access to upper and middle class, while France and Mediterranean countries are characterized by a very high degree of inequalities between cohorts (Chauvel, 2008). From this point of view, the case of Switzerland has remained for a long time understudied, with the exception of a descriptive study (Joye & Bergman, 2004). Our current study precisely aims to fill this lack. For this purpose, we used biographical data from a retrospective longitudinal survey of the Swiss Household Panel (n=3103). These longitudinal data allow for an accurate assessment of work trajectories and class attainment across generations in the life course, for the 1940-2002 period. We used Survival analysis and Discrete-Time Models and choose as events the access to 1. upper class only and 2. upper and middle class both together.

Oppositely to our initial assumptions, Switzerland doesn't seem to be characterized by very significant differences of class attainment between cohorts (See Table 1&2). The only meaningful cohort effects concern 1. for both men and women, lower probabilities of access to upper and middle classes for the cohort born before the thirties and 2. for women only (See Table 2b), a huge increase of probabilities of access to upper and middle classes for those born during the sixties and seventies in comparison to elder women. Our others findings show that most of the access to upper and middle classes happens in the beginning of work trajectories: after ten years of employment, access to upper and middle classes becomes very scarce (See Figure 1). Our analysis also demonstrate that, all other things being equal, unsurprisingly access to upper or middle classes is strongly dependant of level of education, gender and social origin.

TABLE 1
- Discrete-Time Model -
Modelling access to Upper Class (Service class/Professionals, managers and executive), All Sample, (Switzerland / 1940 - 2002, Weighted file)

	B	S.E	Sig	Odds Ratio
Gender				
Men	0.522	0.102	.000	1.685
Ref. Women				
Age groups				
15-25 years	2.740	.423	.000	15.490
26-35 years	2.080	.409	.000	8.008
36-45 years	1.047	.422	.013	2.849
46-55 years	.385	.458	.401	1.469
Ref. : 56-65 years				
Birth Cohorts				
1909-29	-.510	.211	.016	.600
1930-39	-.137	.138	.419	.880
Ref. : 1940-49				
1950-59	-.314	.137	.022	.731
1960-69	-.097	.136	.479	.908
1970-77	.574	.185	.002	1.776
Educational level				
Compulsory	-4.289	.380	.000	.014
Lower Vocational secondary	-3.444	.340	.000	.032
Vocational secondary	-3.278	.136	.000	.038
Upper Vocational secondary	-2.096	.170	.000	.123
Lower Tertiary	-1.869	.122	.000	.154
Ref. : University/Other Tertiary				
Social Origin				
Upper Class	.406	.118	.001	1.501
Middle Class	.015	.125	.903	1.015
Ref. : Lower Class (Routine, Manual and others crafts)				
Constant	-4.303	.429	.000	.014
Pseudo R2 (Nagelkerke)			0.243	
N			3103	

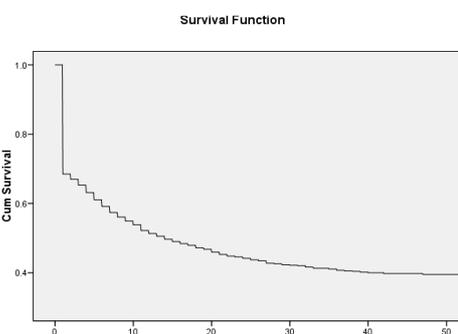


Figure 1. Access to middle or upper class according to duration (years) of work trajectories

TABLE 2
- Discrete-Time Model -
Modelling access to Upper and Middle Classes (Service class/Professionals, managers and executive, associate professionals and self-employed/small employer), All Sample, (Switzerland / 1940 - 2002, Weighted file)

	B	S.E	Sig	Odds Ratio
Gender				
Men	.743	.087	.000	2.103
Ref. Women				
Age groups				
15-25 years	2.942	.403	.000	18.947
26-35 years	2.229	.393	.000	9.287
36-45 years	1.420	.401	.000	4.138
46-55 years	1.007	.419	.016	2.737
Ref. : 56-65 years				
Birth Cohorts				
1909-29	-.380	.170	.026	.684
1930-39	-.012	.132	.926	.988
Ref. : 1940-49				
1950-59	.343	.123	.002	1.413
1960-69	.288	.120	.016	1.333
1970-77	.546	.167	.001	1.727
Educational level				
Compulsory	-3.495	.183	.000	.030
Lower Vocational secondary	-2.990	.205	.000	.050
Vocational secondary	-3.112	.114	.000	.045
Upper Vocational secondary	-2.114	.171	.000	.121
Lower Tertiary	-1.970	.125	.000	.139
Ref. : University/Other Tertiary				
Social Origin				
Upper Class	.703	.111	.000	2.021
Middle Class	.371	.106	.000	1.450
Ref. : Lower Class (Routine, Manual and others crafts)				
Constant	-3.715	.411	.000	.024
Pseudo R2 (Nagelkerke)			0.248	
N			3103	

TABLE 2b
- Discrete-Time Model -
Modelling access to Upper and Middle Classes (Service class/Professionals, managers and executive, associate professionals and self-employed/small employer), Women, (Switzerland / 1940 - 2002, Weighted file)

	B	S.E	Sig	Odds Ratio
Age groups				
15-25 years	1.912	.459	.000	6.764
26-35 years	.951	.436	.029	2.589
36-45 years	.634	.444	.154	1.885
46-55 years	.406	.470	.388	1.500
Ref. : 56-65 years				
Birth Cohorts				
1909-29	-.122	.283	.666	.885
1930-39	-.039	.241	.872	.962
Ref. : 1940-49				
1950-59	.130	.208	.532	1.139
1960-69	.696	.203	.001	2.006
1970-77	1.209	.277	.000	3.350
Educational level				
Compulsory	-3.455	.290	.000	.032
Lower Vocational secondary	-2.888	.273	.000	.056
Vocational secondary	-2.879	.186	.000	.056
Upper Vocational secondary	-2.069	.250	.000	.126
Lower Tertiary	-1.678	.271	.000	.187
Ref. : University/Other Tertiary				
Social Origin				
Upper Class	.738	.174	.000	2.091
Middle Class	.413	.175	.018	1.511
Ref. : Lower Class (Routine, Manual and others crafts)				
Constant	-3.006	.471	.000	.049
Pseudo R2 (Nagelkerke)			0.189	
N			1520	

Finally, our research show that Switzerland occupies a kind of "in-between" position regarding the typology of Welfare states and structures of inequalities proposed by Chauvel (2003) on the basis of Esping-Andersen work on types of Welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990). This typology notably opposes countries with high intragenerational and low intergenerational inequalities, such as UK and USA, to countries characterized by the opposite pattern (such as France for example). On the basis of 1. indicators of the OECD (OECD, 2009), 2. the Swiss Social Report 2008 (Suter & al., 2009) and 3. our current work, we conclude that Switzerland belongs to none of these two configurations. Indeed, this country is characterized by a low degree of both intra- and intergenerational social inequalities. Nevertheless, the degree of intragenerational inequalities is still too high to classify Switzerland in the third configuration of this typology, mainly composed by Scandinavian countries and characterized by an exceptionally low degree of both intra- and intergenerational inequalities.

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