

"CLASSIFICATION OF OCCUPATIONS – CONSEQUENCES OF THE 'KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY' ON THE RECIPROCAL PERCEPTIONS BETWEEN OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS"
- ABSTRACT -

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1. Introduction

Classifications are basic perceptual processes which guide individuals' actions and generate their views of society. For the sociology of knowledge, classification of occupations is an especially interesting case of classification, because it allows individuals to position themselves and others in society. Qualification standards and standardised prerequisites for an ever growing number of occupations have dramatically increased since the system of (public) education has been extended in the last 50 years. As the distribution of knowledge has undoubtedly broadened, the question must be asked whether this fact has an impact on the classification of occupations. Borrowing a notion of Pierre Bourdieu (1982), we assume that the struggles of classification are a "forgotten dimension of everyday class struggles", and that within these struggles of classification, knowledge and qualification are at stake. From this point of view, the potential of knowledge to act as a catalyst of social cohesion must be contested.

2. Presentation of the research project

Classical works claim that there are few basic types of classification. In their study of "images of society" (Gesellschaftsbilder) of industrial workers, Popitz et al. (1957) postulate a fundamental and universal dichotomy (i.e. binary opposition) between intellectual and physical work that is shared by all workers – with higher valuation of the productiveness of the latter. Ossowski (1972) sketches three basic views of society: a dichotomous one opposing powerful and powerless strata, a functional one integrating all strata into an organic social body, and a gradual one that supposes a hierarchy based upon gradual criteria such as income or educational degrees.

Our research project – funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (project no. 111927) – aims at a better understanding of the processes of classification, the classi-

fication of occupations in particular. Occupation and occupational status can still be considered the main source of identity, even though other sources have lately been described as important as well (such as different forms of consumer culture or different milieus of lifestyle). After a dramatic expansion of education and knowledge in the last decades, the question arises how occupation-bound self-images and images of other occupations have changed concomitantly. The re-structuration of the educational system has produced new educational titles and degrees and has hence changed the field of competition. Our basic assumption is that knowledge and qualification are competitive goods which serve as resources in the struggle for social positions and status. Furthermore, we propose the hypothesis that in the occupational field, new standards of education and the rise of "new occupations" tend to aggravate the struggle for positions and hence the mutual classifications will become more intense. Another important question is how the increasingly marginalised social groups of near-illiterates deal with the ascending pressure.

3. Outlook

Our study of new forms of classifications is based upon qualitative interviews of different occupational groups. The interviewees will first have to arrange a set of 40 cards that list different educational and occupational careers of fictional persons. This exercise allows us to indirectly conclude various logics of classification. The exercise is completed with selected open-ended and standardised questions on biographical and professional matters. As to the selection of the interviewees, we focus on occupations and professions that have recently been institutionalised or "professionalized" (such as computer scientists or information/documentation specialists). Contrasting these "new" occupations with traditional ones (such as elementary school teachers), and comparing older and younger cohorts within these occupational groups, we can uncover the rise of new logics of classification.

Referred literature:

- Bourdieu, Pierre (1982) [1979]: Die feinen Unterschiede. Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.
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- Popitz, Heinrich; Bahrtdt, Hans Paul; Jüres, Ernst August; Kesting, Hanno (1957): Das Gesellschaftsbild des Arbeiters. Soziologische Untersuchungen in der Hüttenindustrie. Tübingen: Mohr.