Subjective social status in places that don't matter: Geographical inequalities in France and Germany

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Abstract

In recent decades, the rise of the service economy and the growing attractiveness of large cities have created new social inequalities within countries, which have been seen as a source of resentment for people living in the "places that don't matter". We study spatial inequalities in terms of subjective social status using a measure of the place in the social hierarchy that individuals believe they occupy in France (1999-2017) and Germany (1992-2021) on the basis of data from the International Social Survey Program. In France we find important and persistent inequalities between urban and rural areas, as well as between the capital region and all the other regions, partially mediated by income differences. However, the time trend does not show any consistent increase in the geographical differences in subjective status apart from a possible negative trend in rural areas from 2006 to 2010 and in rural places and the outskirts of large cities after 2013 compared to large cities. In Germany, our analysis shows weak differences in subjective social status between urban and rural areas, but large inequalities between the West and East. While this gap is still relevant today, it has partially decreased over the past decades.

Keywords: spatial inequalities, geography of discontent, subjective social status, status anxiety

Introduction

The past few years have seen renewed interest in the topic of spatial inequalities within countries and their social and political consequences (e.g., Adler & Ansell, 2020; Jennings & Stoker, 2019; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). While social inequalities between the top earners and the bottom earners have risen in recent decades in almost all parts of the world (Piketty, 2019), spatial differences also seem to have widened in Western countries. In half of the OECD countries, GDP inequalities between regions have constantly increased since 2000, and in the whole OECD group the top 20% of regions now display, on average, twice the GDP per capita of the bottom 20% of regions in the same country[1] (OECD, 2020).

Spatial differences within countries have been driving forces of the recent success of populist and radical right parties. An analysis of European countries at the district level shows that the populist vote is concentrated in areas characterised by local economic and industrial decline, lower employment rates and less educated populations (Dijkstra et al., 2020). Donald Trump's electoral success was largely due to support that emerged among similar populations in rural areas (Cramer, 2016; Monnat & Brown, 2017).[2] In the United Kingdom, the Brexit vote in 2016 revealed a country divided between pro-European metropolitan areas, and towns and rural zones claiming national sovereignty (Jennings & Stoker, 2019).

Our analysis originates from these considerations and aims to provide new evidence about spatial inequalities within countries and the so-called "geography of discontent" (Dijkstra et al., 2020). The growing differences between the dynamic cores embedded in the global economy and the stagnating peripheries have generated growing discontent in the "places that do not matter", where people feel neglected by national politics (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Our study wishes to contribute to the description of the "geography of discontent" by analysing spatial differences and trends within countries in terms of subjective social status. This is a measure of the hierarchical position people believe they occupy in society and is particularly useful for studying political discontent because it reflects individuals' perceptions of their social standing. Our article thus shares in the renewed interest in subjective social status (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Gest et al., 2018; Engler & Weisstanner, 2020; Nolan & Weisstanner, 2020; Oesch & Vigna, 2021).

1 The 2020 OECD regional report refers to 2018 data.

2 Detailed maps of 2020 US presidential election can be found on *The New York Times* website: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/upshot/2020-election-map.html.

We study geographical inequalities of subjective status over the previous two decades and aim to answer two questions: how does subjective status differ between regions, notably between the urban centres and rural regions, and how have these potential differences evolved over the past two decades? We analyse the differences in subjective social status between areas and their trends, both at the mean level and controlling for objective individual socioeconomic factors that are heterogeneously distributed across space.

We focus on France and Germany, the two most populous countries in the European Union, characterised by different degrees of centralisation. In France, spatial inequalities have long been at the centre of the political debate, and some events as the spread of the Yellow Vests movement in small towns and rural areas have recently brought them to the fore. Germany, instead, has been characterised by a history of territorial division and still struggles for levelling West-East differences. Geographical inequalities in Germany have recently been made visible by the uneven distribution of the support for the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AFD) in the last federal elections of 2021[3]. We use individual-level data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) from the periods 1999-2017 for France and 1992-2021 for Germany.

In what follows, we first clarify the concept of subjective social status. After presenting our first two hypotheses on spatial inequalities of subjective status in Western countries, we discuss the specificities of our case studies and present some additional hypotheses on regional inequalities in France and in Germany. We then present the data and methods and show the main findings, confirming the relevance of spatial inequalities in the two countries but casting doubt on their recent increase. We conclude with a discussion of these results and their implications.

The concept of subjective social status

According to Weber (1978 [1922]), social status depends on a symbolic hierarchy of social recognition. It reflects the degree of social honour that is accorded to people (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007). This characteristic differentiates the concept of social status from the concept of social class, which is based on the position people occupy in the labour market and thus has an objective basis.

[3] For a map of the unequal geographic distribution of the AFD votes in Germany, see Financial Times, 2021: https://www.ft.com/content/501b1f94-67e7-4418-b2e9-eee6022bb12c [accessed on 17. 9. 2022].

Although social status is correlated with the objective position of individuals, namely, their education, employment and income (Andersson, 2015; Evans & Kelley, 2004; Lindberg et al., 2021), it is not limited to it. Social status constitutes a specific dimension of inequalities based on differences in esteem and respect.

Subjective social status is often measured by asking people to place themselves on a ladder representing society. This subjective response about where an individual feels he or she stands in relation to others captures the social recognition he or she believes is warranted (Gidron & Hall, 2017). The relevance of subjective social status in the study of inequalities is confirmed by its correlation to socially stratified outcomes. Often used in research on health outcomes, subjective social status has been shown to be positively correlated with several causes of mortality (Demakakos et al., 2018) and with both physical and mental health (Präg, 2020; Scott et al., 2014), even after controlling for several objective indicators of socioeconomic status.

Subjective social status has been recently used by scholars interested in analysing status dynamics and their consequences on political behaviour, especially exploring the link between status anxiety and the electoral success of radical right populist parties or the Brexit vote (Gest et al., 2018; Gidron & Hall, 2017, 2019). As subjective social status depends on people's perception of how much recognition they receive from society, it also serves as an indicator of people's feeling "left behind" by their society, a feeling populist parties are often said to appeal to. To the extent that subjective status is related to components of people's objective condition as well as their subjective perception, it has been considered as capturing both economic and cultural aspects of political discontent (Gidron & Hall, 2017).

In their influential article, Gidron and Hall (2017) analysed the evolution of the subjective social status of men and women without college educations relative to that of all men and women. They adopt a descriptive approach and compare the relative subjective status of people without college education over several points in time, finding that this specific portion of the population has become increasingly frustrated about their place in society. Even if subsequent analyses on time trends have cast doubt on the hypothesis of the status downgrading of the working class in most Western countries (Oesch & Vigna, 2021), Gidron and Hall's results are in line with the argument of status anxiety that other scholars have made. Gest points out "the emerging sense of displacement" of working-class communities (Gest, 2016, p. 127), and Arlie Hochschild (2016) shows in her ethnography that white working-class men in the US

feel that their status has been downgraded by the elite and is threatened by the rising status of minorities.

At the same time, another argument underlines the importance of the community dimension, suggesting that status loss was more heavily concentrated in specific areas within countries. The deindustrialisation and the rise of the service economy have led to the concentration of economic activities in large and dynamic cities, while towns and rural areas are often characterised by the lack of opportunity. It is people living in declining places that would feel increasingly left behind by the global economy and national political elites (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018).

Previous studies on the link between place-based factors and subjective social status are rare. The reference group theory suggests that people tend to compare their social position with colleagues, family and friends and thus people who are similar to them. As a consequence, they generally see themselves as being in the middle of the social hierarchy (e.g. Evans et al., 1992; Merton & Kitt, 1950). This would mean that economic changes at the community level do not have much influence on individual perceptions. Nevertheless, Evans & Kelly (2004) showed that national indicators like wealth and the unemployment rate have a significant impact on individual subjective social status. Moreover, comparative research has shown that high levels of income or education inequalities have a stigmatisation effect on people at the bottom of the social hierarchy, who tend to have a lower subjective social status in more unequal societies – but the reverse is not true for people at the top of the social hierarchy (Lindemann & Saar, 2014). If this mechanism holds not only between countries, but also within countries at the between-regions level, people living in declining areas should show lower subjective social status when objective spatial inequalities are larger, making regional differences in subjective positions also particularly large.

Rising spatial inequalities in the West

Although we observe a trend of economic convergence between countries, economic inequalities seem to be increasing within countries and between regions within a given country (Eurofound, 2019). These spatial changes in the Western world have their origins in the rise of the service economy and the decline of the ancient industrial poles. Moretti (2012) shows, for the US how deindustrialisation has resulted in a stark decline of the old manufacturing centres. At the same time, the human capital externalities of many service activities led to increasingly concentrated economic growth in a few globalised poles such as Austin, Boston, New York,

San Francisco and San José or Seattle, contributing to a geographical "Great Divergence". Some exurb and minor urban centres as Youngstown, Michigan Coty or Toledo in the Rust Belt of the US, have become "post-traumatic cities": they have lost their industrial basis, leaving their inhabitants disempowered, marginalised and nostalgic about the past (Gest, 2016).

The agglomeration effect of service activities also contributed to the success of European metropolitan centres, especially capital cities such as London, Dublin or Warsaw, while many regions became increasingly depopulated, namely, rural ones (Eurofond, 2019). The result is an increasing dualization between core and periphery. A new social divide may thus emerge that divides citizens who live in cities strongly benefitting from global economic growth and citizens who live in suburban communities, postindustrial towns and the urban periphery (Jennings & Stoker, 2017). In terms of people's attitudes, places that have experienced economic decline seem to have become more closed and communitarian, while dynamic cities enjoying strong economic growth have become more liberal and cosmopolitan (Jennings & Stoker, 2019).

All these elements suggest that within-country inequalities may have become increasingly important to understanding social change in Western countries. In particular, the growing concentration of economic activities in large cities may have depressed the subjective social position of people living in declining areas, which are former industrial cities and rural areas. To illustrate this claim, we can recall the French protest movement of the *Gilets Jaunes* (Yellow Vests), that took to the streets in 2018 primarily in the countryside and small cities. Rising fuel prices were the *casus belli*, and mobility was the issue around which the movement primarily rallied. The physical distance itself between the working class, disproportionately living in the countryside and small towns, and the elite living in the large cities was singled out as having played a role in building solidarity inside the movement (Jetten et al., 2020).

Our first two hypotheses, thus, are the following:

> H1: Subjective social status in France and Germany is higher in large cities than in suburbs, small towns or rural areas.
>
> H2: These spatial inequalities in subjective social status have increased over the past two decades.

Regional inequalities in France and Germany

While the increasing concentration of resources in large cities seems to be the case for most Western countries in recent decades, specific geographical characteristics differentiate France and Germany.

First of all, the two countries have different levels of centralisation, suggesting different configurations of the centre-periphery inequalities. Some data can give an idea of those differences. France is a centralised state, with 80% of total government expenditures managed at the central level. In contrast, Germany is a federal republic with substantive regional autonomy and only 60% of total government expenditures accruing to the central government, 23% going to the federate states, and the rest to the municipal level[4]. Moreover, with a population of almost 13 million, the metropolitan area of Paris accounts for almost 20% of the entire French population, and only one other large metropolitan area accounts for more than 2 million inhabitants: Lyon. In contrast, Germany has seven large metropolitan areas with more than 2 million inhabitants, and only 6% of the national population live in Berlin, the largest one[5].

France thus is a centralised country hierarchically organised around a predominant centre, Paris, with few other important cities, while Germany appears more like a network of dynamic cities. These differences should also be visible in the spatial disparities in subjective social status in the two countries: inequalities should be marked in France, especially between the capital region and the other areas of the country, while no specific city or region is expected to prevail in Germany.

The two countries also have two very different histories of spatial inequalities. The problem of spatial inequalities is not new in the French public debate. In 1947, the French geographer Jean-François Gravier (1947) published a book titled *Paris et le désert français* [Paris and the French desert], denouncing the large concentration of resources in the capital. This work constituted a reference for French territorial policies for several decades. The Interministerial Delegation of Land Planning and Regional Attractiveness (DATAR) was

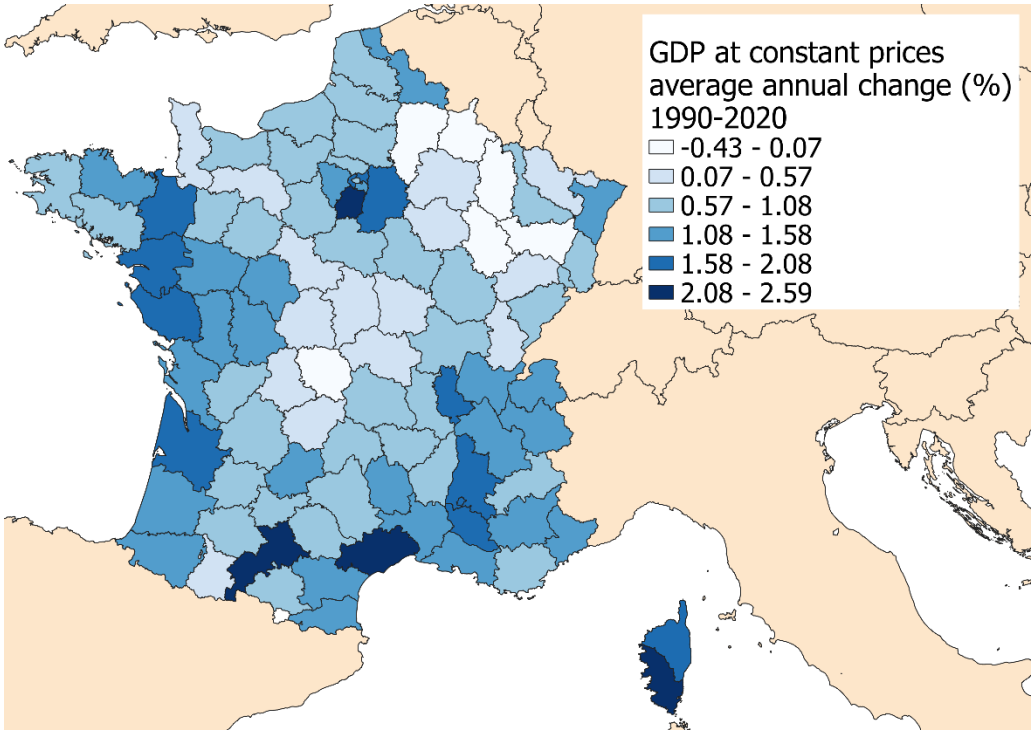
4 These data are from 2020 and are available on the OECD Fiscal Decentralisation Database: https://www.oecd.org/tax/federalism/fiscal-decentralisation-database/.

5 These data refer to 2018 for France and to 2020 for Germany, and they are available on the OECD statistical database: https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?Datasetcode=CITIES#.

created in 1964 and immediately began work on reforms that were first called “regionalisation” and then “decentralisation” (Bodiguel, 2006).

Even if the concentration of industrial activities decreased somewhat over the past century (Bonnet, 2020), the economic inequalities between the region of Paris and the rest of the country seem to persist. The census in 2008 revealed that the region of Ile-de-France, which only corresponds to 2% of the national territory, accounts for 29% of the GDP, with the average salary being 28% higher than the national mean (Lafourcade, 2012).

Figure 1. Average annual percentage change in GDP in France by department during period 1990-2020



Source: European Commission, ARDECO database. https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/territorial/ardeco-online_en

These spatial inequalities seem to persist over time and even increase. The map in figure 1 show the average percentage change in GDP in each department between 1990 and 2020. We see that the most dynamic areas are around Paris, in the South and South-East - Haute-Garonne, Hérault, Corse, Rhône, Drôme and Vaucluse - and in the Atlantic coast, notably in Gironde, Vendée, Loire-Atlantique and Ille-et-Vilaine. France’s “empty diagonal”, identified in the portion of lands going from the southwestern department of the Landes to the northeastern department of the Meuse, traditionally described as a nondynamic and sparsely populated area, seems to further lose weight, and this is true even from the demographic point of view (Oliveau & Doignon, 2016). Currently, Lyon, Lille, Bordeaux, Nantes, Toulouse, Marseille/Aix-de-

Provence and Grenoble are the only poles alongside Paris where intercompany services and research activities are concentrated, while Paris remains the primary centre for finance and culture. New fractures would have emerged between the globalised metropolises and what has been called peripheral France *(France périférique*) (Guilluy, 2015).

The recent political events further brought the idea of a divided country to the fore. The 2022 presidential election revealed great spatial differences. During the first round of balloting, the radical right party, Marine Le Pen's then-called *Front National*, obtained more than 30% of the votes in several provinces in the northeast and southern parts of the country, while her score was less than 6% in the city of Paris[6].

These arguments lead us to suppose that spatial inequalities in France are deeply rooted, both from an objective point of view and in the perception of people. Differences between regions seem to have increased during recent decades due to structural changes in the national economy. This leads us to formulate the following hypotheses for France:

> H3: Subjective social status is higher in the departments forming the urban area of Paris, in the department of Marseille and in the one of Lyon - the three largest metropolitan areas - than in the other French departments, and it is higher in the capital region than in all the other regions.
> H4: These spatial inequalities in subjective social status have increased over the past two decades.

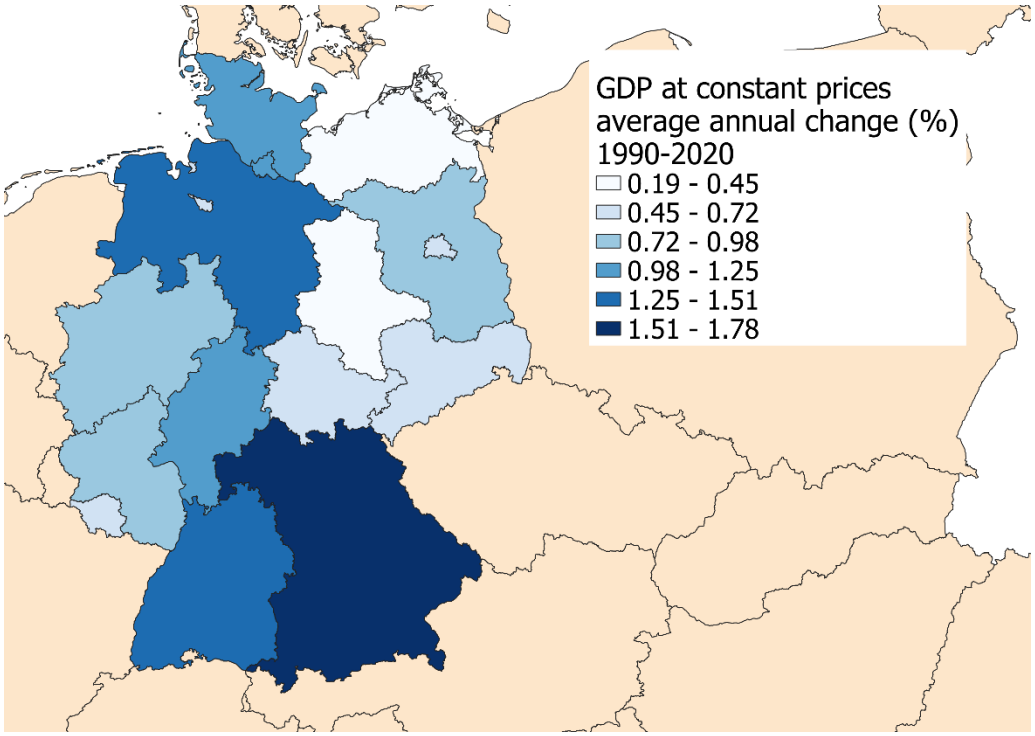
Having experienced 40 years of separation before the reunification in 1990, Germany has a recent history of division. At the moment of reunification, the East German economy was weaker, and wages and earnings were substantially lower than in West Germany (Fuchs-Schündeln et al., 2010). The following period consisted of the convergence of the eastern political and economic institutions towards the western ones. In an effort to reduce the economic disparities between the two regions, large financial transfers from West Germany to East Germany were made. Nevertheless, the gap proved hard to close. In 2012, almost 25 years after reunification, the average net wealth of West German residents was still more than twice

[6] For a map of the unequal geographic distribution of the votes for the Front National in the 2022 French presidential election, see Public Sénat, 2022: https://www.publicsenat.fr/article/politique/presidentielle-2022-la-carte-interactive-des-resultats-du-premier-tour-201841 [accessed on 17. 9. 2022].

that of East German residents (Grabka & Westermeier, 2014). Germany now includes some of the richest metropolitan areas of all OECD countries, notably Munich, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Cologne, but they are all situated in the former West Germany (OECD, 2019).

These strong objective economic differences are also visible in subjective indicators. While we are not aware of any studies on subjective social status, research on life satisfaction has shown that in 1991, the difference in mean life satisfaction between East and West was 1.3 points on a scale from 0 to 10. This differential decreased to less than 0.6 points in the following years, but did not disappear and even increased again after 2000 (Easterlin & Plagnol, 2008). We then expect subjective status gap to have also decreased over the last decades but to still be visible nowadays.

Figure 2. Average annual percentage change in GDP in Germany by department during period 1990-2020



Source: European Commission, ARDECO database. https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/territorial/ardeco-online_en

Beyond the East–West divide, strong differences also exist between the single federal states. In terms of income and economic dynamism, the country is composed of a small group of leading states, with the southern states at the forefront (Kokocin´ska & Puziak, 2020). The map in figure 2 illustrates this claim by showing the average annual GDP change for each state 1990-2020. The southwestern states have been much more dynamic compared to the others. While Bayern and Niedersachsen saw an average annual GDP change of 1.78 % and 1.41 %

respectively, this was only 0.19 % in Sachsen-Anhalt. District-level data help us to further illustrate those geographical differences. In 2016, for example, the average disposable income in Starnberg, a district of Bavaria, was almost 35,000 euros, while the mean for all German districts was only 21,700 euros. In 2019, while the Bavarian districts of Eichstatt and Donau-Ries had an unemployment rate of less than 2%, the north-western districts of Bremerhaven and Gelsenkirchen struggled with 13% (Franz et al., 2019).

Not surprisingly, these inequalities are also visible in the recent electoral results. The party of radical right Alternative for Germany (AFD) gained vast support in economically vulnerable and demographically old districts, mainly in the eastern part of the country, while the Green Party was disproportionately successful in economically thriving and younger places such as München, Stuttgart and Hamburg (Franz et al., 2019).

Our additional hypotheses for Germany, thus, are the following:

> H5: Subjective social status is higher in the western states than in the eastern ones and, within West Germany, it is higher in the southern states than in the northern-western ones.
>
> H6: Spatial inequalities between East and West Germany have partially declined in the past two decades but remain important today.

Data, measures and method

Data

We use individual-level data from the ISSP. Germany has been part of the programme since its foundation, and France joined in 1996. At the beginning, the question on subjective social status was only included in the modules about inequalities, but since 2002, it has been asked every year. Unfortunately, some geographical variables changed over time. Nevertheless, in our analysis, we can use up to 16 rounds for some models for France (from 1999 to 2017[7]) and up to 19 rounds for Germany (from 1992 to 2021)[8]. References to all datasets including DOIs are

[7] A first release of 2018 data for France was available at the moment of the review process, but the sample is small and the geographical variables do not seem reliable, leading to a sharp and sudden increase in subjective status levels across all places.

8 Our analysis attributes each ISSP round to the year when the survey was effectively fielded rather than the official year of a module. In Germany, the ISSP modules were administered in pairs every two

available in the Appendix. The annual samples vary from a minimum of 905 respondents (Germany 1999) to a maximum of 3,117 observations (Germany 2012). Table A1 in the appendix shows the size of each country-year sample.

We also replicate our analyses on data from the European Social Survey (ESS), the only other large international survey providing a measure of subjective social status. This variable is available in round 6, which was run in 2012. While we cannot reproduce trends over time with these data, the ESS allows us to replicate the analysis on levels[9].

Measures

Our analysis is set at the individual level, and our dependent variable is subjective social status. It is measured with the MacArthur scale, which asks individuals to place themselves on a 10-point social ladder representing society. This single-item measure captures individuals' perceived rank in the social hierarchy (Gidron & Hall, 2017). The question is worded as follows: "In our society there are groups that tend to be towards the top and groups that tend to be towards the bottom. Where would you put yourself on a scale from the bottom to the top?" Respondents are then shown the figure of a ladder going from 1 to 10[10].

Our key independent variables are geographic indicators that split the territory in different ways. We build four different geographical variables for France and three for Germany to verify each of our hypotheses and to make our results as robust as possible.

For France, statistical division NUTS level 3 (corresponding to departments) allows us to build three geographical variables. A first variable separates the three largest metropolitan centres — the department of Paris (with postal code 75) and all the departments of its first and second cluster (77, 78, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95), the department of Lyon (69, Rhône) and the department of Marseille (13, Bouches du Rhône)[11] —from all the other departments. A second

years (ex. The 2003 and the 2004 modules were both administrated in 2004) and the 2020 module was administrated in 2021.

9 The replication package for data preparation and for reproducing all analyses in Stata 17 is available: DOI 10.17605/OSF.IO/E28ZH

10 The corresponding question in round 6 of the European Social Survey, which we use for robustness analyses, consists of 11 categories, scored from 0 to 10.

11 The departments of Rhône and Bouches du Rhône include some municipalities that cannot be considered as part of the urban area of the departmental capital, as they are quite distant and

geographical variable groups the departments into six macro-regions: Île de France, Centre-Bassin Parisien, the northeastern region, the western region, Méditerannée-Pyrénées, and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes. A third indicator separates the departments into three groups—predominantly urban, predominantly rural, intermediate—following the OECD categorisation (OCDE, 2013).

For Germany, NUTS is only distinguished at the aggregate level 1 in the ISSP. A first indicator thus separates the West-German states from the East-German states. These two macro-regions correspond to the areas belonging to the former Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, with the region of Berlin entirely categorised in the eastern area. Another indicator divides the country into three areas: Southwest-Germany (Baden-Württemberg and Bayern), Northwest-Germany (corresponding to all the other western states) and East Germany.

Finally, we use an auto-assessed item available in ISSP that asks people in which kind of place they live. Our typology for France and Germany consists of four types of places: large cities, outskirts of large cities, small towns, and rural areas (the last category merges country villages and farms or houses in the countryside). The main limit of this variable is that it is available only starting from 2005 for France and from 2002 for Germany[12]. Tables A2 (France) and A3 (Germany) in the appendix provide descriptive statistics of all geographical indicators.

Method

For each country, we first describe the evolution of subjective social status in different places over time. We weight our individual observations using the probability weights provided by the ISSP. Moreover, we also use locally weighted scatterplot smoothing (LOWESS) to reduce

prevalently rural. Unfortunately, no information on municipalities was available to overcome this limitation.

12 The national sampling strategies do not guarantee the representativeness of each NUT sample with respects to its actual population. Nevertheless, we aggregated NUTS3 for France into larger macro-regions and, in the end, our analyses rely on sizable regional samples. As reported in tables A2 and A3 in the appendix, each round provides more than 100 observations in each category of all geographical indicators. Moreover, we estimate the trends based on many rounds for each country and not on sporadic points in time. These elements should reduce the concerns about the regional representativeness of the samples.

short-term fluctuations due to sampling errors and to highlight long-term trends. In this way, each data point is adjusted considering the adjacent points, with neighbouring points getting higher weights than distant ones.

We then estimate multivariate linear models, which allow us to compare similar profiles of people across different places. The models are defined by the following equation:

$$y_i = \beta_1 + \beta_2 \text{geovar}_i + \beta_3 \text{year}_i + \beta_4 \text{geovar}_i * \text{year}_i + \beta_5 \text{controls}_i + \epsilon_i$$

Our dependent variable is subjective social status, while $geovar_i$ corresponds to one of our geographical variables. The interaction term $geovar_i * year_i$ accounts for the differential time trends in each type of place defined by the geographical variable used. Our controls include gender, age, whether people cohabitate with a partner, education and social class. These controls allow us to determine the correlation between the place where people live and their subjective social status, independent of their objective standing. Unfortunately, we could not include the ethnic group or the migration status, as only poor data are available on this topic. For education, we recoded ISCED codes into three categories: tertiary education, secondary and post-upper-secondary education, and no more than compulsory education. For social class, we use a collapsed version of the Oesch class schema (Oesch, 2006), grouping occupations into four categories: the upper-middle class, the lower-middle class, small business owners and the working class[13]. Results are again weighted.

Further models were also run including income as an additional independent variable. Income cannot be considered a simple control variable, similar to class and education, as salaries from similar jobs strongly vary between places. We interpret income as a mediating variable between place and subjective social status. We use equivalent monthly household income, adjusted for inflation through the consumer price index based on the values of 2017[14].

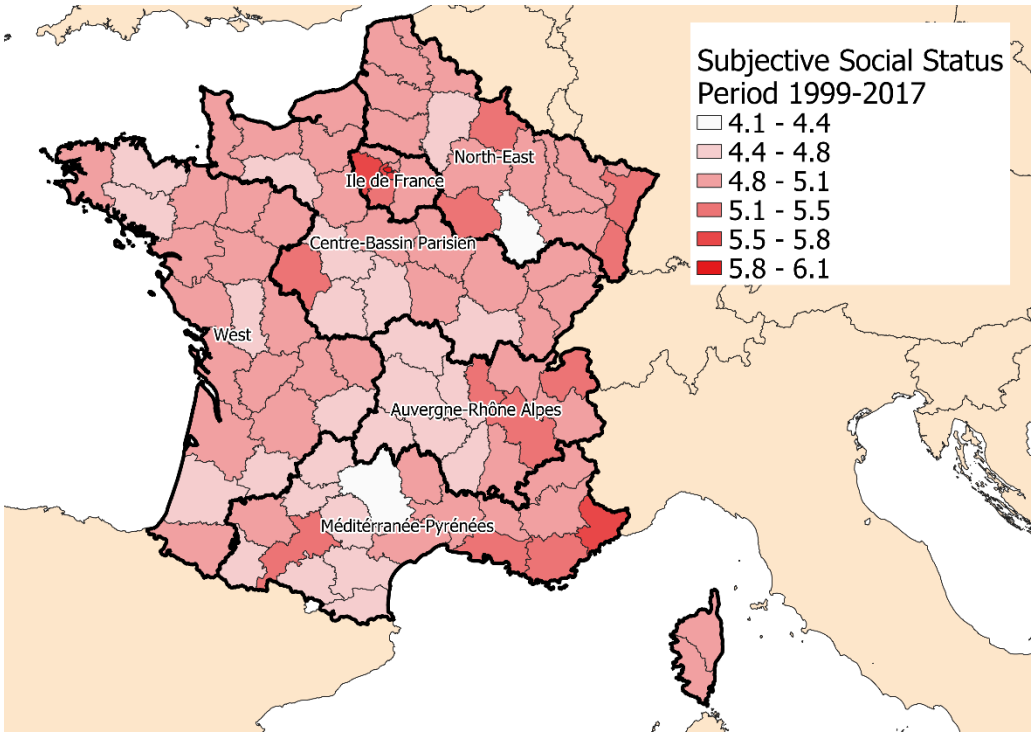
13 The upper-middle class includes large employers, managers and professionals; the lower-middle class is composed by semi-professionals, associate managers and technicians; the small business owners correspond to the so-called petite bourgeoisie; the working class includes both skilled and unskilled workers.

14 We compute equivalent monthly household income based on the OECD modified scale which assigns the value of 1 to the household head, 0.5 to every additional adult and 0.3 to every child. In same cases in which it is not possible to disentangle adults and children, all the members of the household are assigned the value of 0.4.

Results

France

Figure 3. Mean subjective social status (on a scale from 1 to 10) in France by department during the period 1999-2017



The map in Figure 3 presents the subjective social status for each French department averaged over the period 1999-2018 (see figure A1 in the appendix for the map showing standard deviation in the same period). The thick black lines delimitate the borders of the six macroregions we use for our analysis. We can see that subjective status ranges from less than 4,5 points in Haute-Marne (4.11), Aveyron (4.43), in Indre (4.47) and in Orne (4.48), to 6.13 in the department of Paris. This map also shows the so-called "empty diagonal" going from the southwest to the northeast of the country, characterised by low levels of mean subjective social status, while darker colours and higher social status are associated with the department of Paris, the departments of the Côte d'Azur including the cities of Marseille and Nice, the department of Lyon and a few others. Two maps in the appendix show the average subjective social status by department at the beginning of the studied period and at the end of it (figure A2).

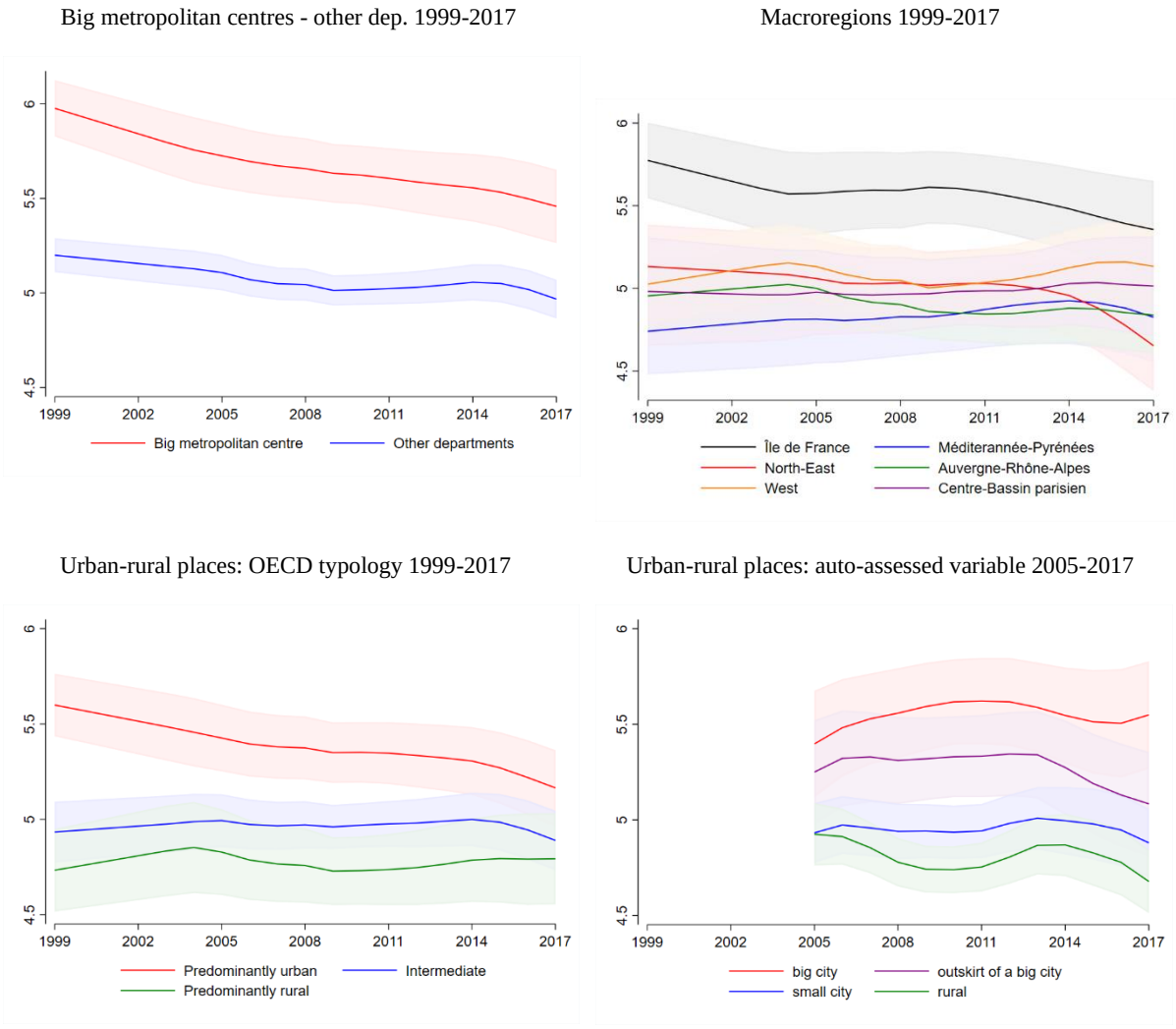
Figure 4 depicts more clearly the regional inequalities, as well as their trends over time. The descriptive trends are estimated through simple regression models that only include the interaction between each geographical indicator and time (and accounting for the available weights). Overall, we see that the average subjective social status slightly decreased in France during the studied period. The top-left plot illustrates the differences between the three largest urban areas – the departments of the urban areas of Paris as well as the departments of Lyon and Marseille -, and all the other departments. There is a large status difference between people living in the three main metropolitan centres and people living in the rest of the country. Nevertheless, subjective status decreased over the entire period in both groups of departments and the trend is no more negative for the second group (see table A4 in the appendix for coefficients and significance tests), meaning that, overall, average social status did not decrease more in the "forgotten departments" than in the three main urban agglomerations. Similarly, the difference between the region of Paris (Île de France) and all the other regions is visible, but the status gap seems to decrease over the period between the capital region and almost all the other regions, and stayed stable between the capital region and the North-East (top-right plot of Figure 3). These results cast doubt on the argument of a decreasing status of people living in "peripheral France".

The last two plots of Figure 4 show how subjective social status evolved over time in France depending on a place's degree of urbanisation. The graph on the bottom left is based on the OECD typology referring to the degree of urbanisation of the departments, while the graph on the bottom right reports the results produced with the auto-assessed typology (2005-2017). Even if confidence intervals overlap a little, both graphs show a clear-cut ranking between the types of places: the higher the degree of urbanisation, the higher the average subjective social status. Moreover, the predominantly urban departments saw a stronger decrease in subjective status than the intermediate and predominantly rural departments. These results partially conflict with what we observe in the graph based on the auto-assessed urban-rural variable: the right-hand panel shows a slightly decreasing status for people living in the outskirts of large cities after 2013 and for people living in rural areas from 2006 to 2010 and, again, after 2014, while status remained constant in large and small cities.

These apparently contrasting results could be partly due to the fact that the predominantly urban departments contain both people living in cities and people living in the outskirts of large cities, and possibly only the status of the latter may have declined over the study period. Nevertheless, the comparison between these two graphs questions the declining

subjective status of rural residents: if people who define themselves as inhabitants of rural areas (approximately 37% of the national sample in France) seem to report a decline in status, this is not true if we include people living in rural departments according to the OECD categorisation (less than 20% of the national sample). This could mean that the auto-assessed variable is a more precise indication of the kind of place people live in or that we should not overinterpret the small changes over time as they may simply reflect trendless fluctuations.

Figure 4. Evolution of subjective social status (on a scale from 1 to 10) in France: differences between places with 95% confidence intervals.



We move on to multivariate models, where we control for gender, age, cohabitation status, education and social class. We run several linear models using the different geographical divides as independent variables (for an overview of the regression results with period coefficients, see Table A5 in the appendix).

For an easier visualisation of the regression results, Figure 5 shows the predicted subjective social status for a man aged 40 with secondary level education, belonging to the working class and living in different places (the geographical indicators are presented in the same order of the descriptive results) [15]. We can see that the differences between the type of places are clear, confirming our first two hypotheses.

However, according to our multivariate analyses, the gap between regions does not seem to have widened over the period under study: Figure 5 shows that the gap remained constant between the large metropolitan centres and the other departments and even decreased between regions and between urban and rural departments. The interaction terms modelling relative time-trends of subjective status in those areas confirm these results (see table A5 in the Appendix). Only according to the auto-assessed variable does subjective social status seem to have decreased slightly more on the outskirts and in small cities and rural places than in large cities. An additional negative trend is particularly visible in rural places from 2006 to 2011 and on the outskirts of large cities after 2013. Nevertheless, these fluctuations are relatively small and cannot be considered a clear result. Overall, there is no clear increase in the status differences between the types of places, as only one of our four variables would suggest a possible increase in status inequalities, while the others suggest an appeasement.

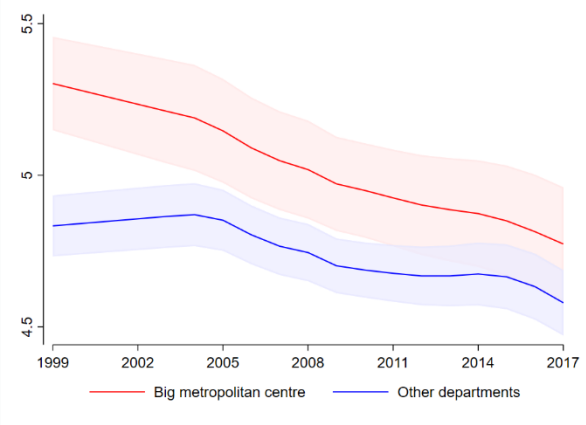
We test status differences between regions and by degree of urbanisation by reproducing our analysis with data from round six of the European Social Survey (see Table A6 in the appendix for the regression results). Even if subjective status differences are generally smaller in this survey, these analyses confirm that, in 2012, people living in the capital region had a higher subjective status than people living in almost all the other regions (with the exception of Centre-Bassin Parisien). The hierarchy between large cities, outskirts, small cities and rural areas is also confirmed by this robustness test.

We further investigate the link between place and subjective social status by running the same models adding household income as a further control variable (see Table A7 in the appendix for the regression results). We interpret income as a mediator between the place where people live and their subjective social status, as both earnings and prices vary across places. The results show that individual income effectively mediates a part of the association between places and subjective status, but another part of the story remains unexplained.

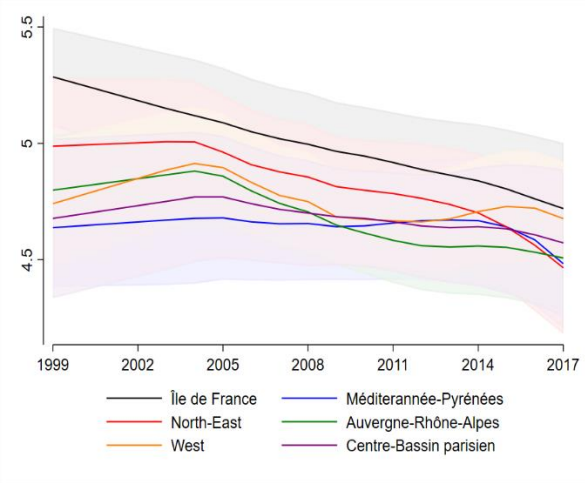
15 As in the previous plots, the estimates were smoothed locally to better illustrate real trends and get rid of trendless fluctuations.

Figure 5. Evolution of predicted subjective social status (on a scale from 1 to 10) and 95% confidence intervals in France for a man aged 40 belonging to the working class, depending on his place of residence.

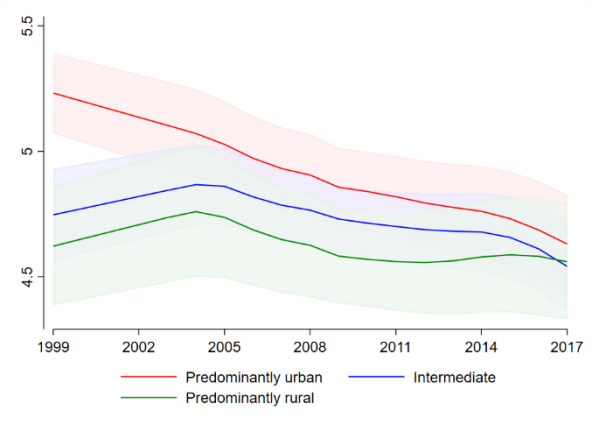
Big metropolitan centres - other dep. 1999-2017



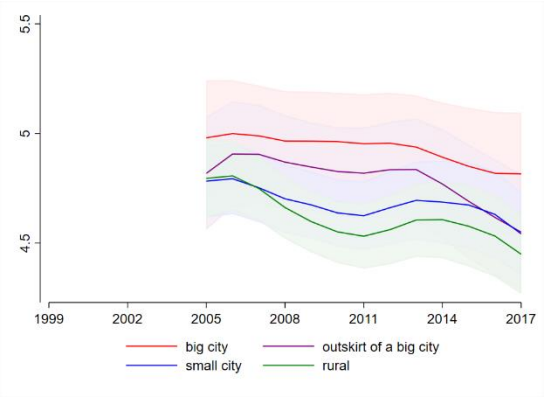
Macroregions 1999-2017



Urban-rural places: OECD typology 1999-2017



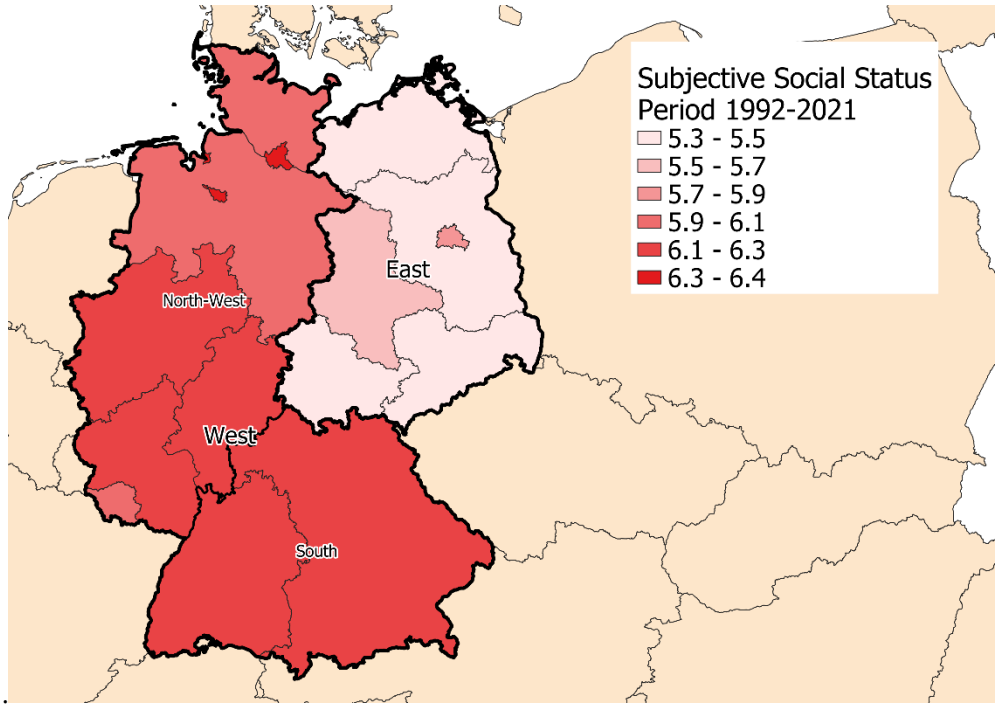
Urban-rural places: auto-assessed variable 2005-2017



Germany

The map in Figure 6 shows how subjective social status varies across the states in Germany, averaged over the period 1992-2021. There is a clear difference between the former eastern states and the western ones. Eastern states also show higher level of variance in subjective social status compared to the western ones (see figure A3 in the Appendix). And, comparing the same map in the 90' and at the end of the 2010s, it is evident that subjective status has increased in the entire country over time (figure A4 in the Appendix).

Figure 6. Mean subjective social status (on a scale from 1 to 10) in Germany by state during the period 1992-2021

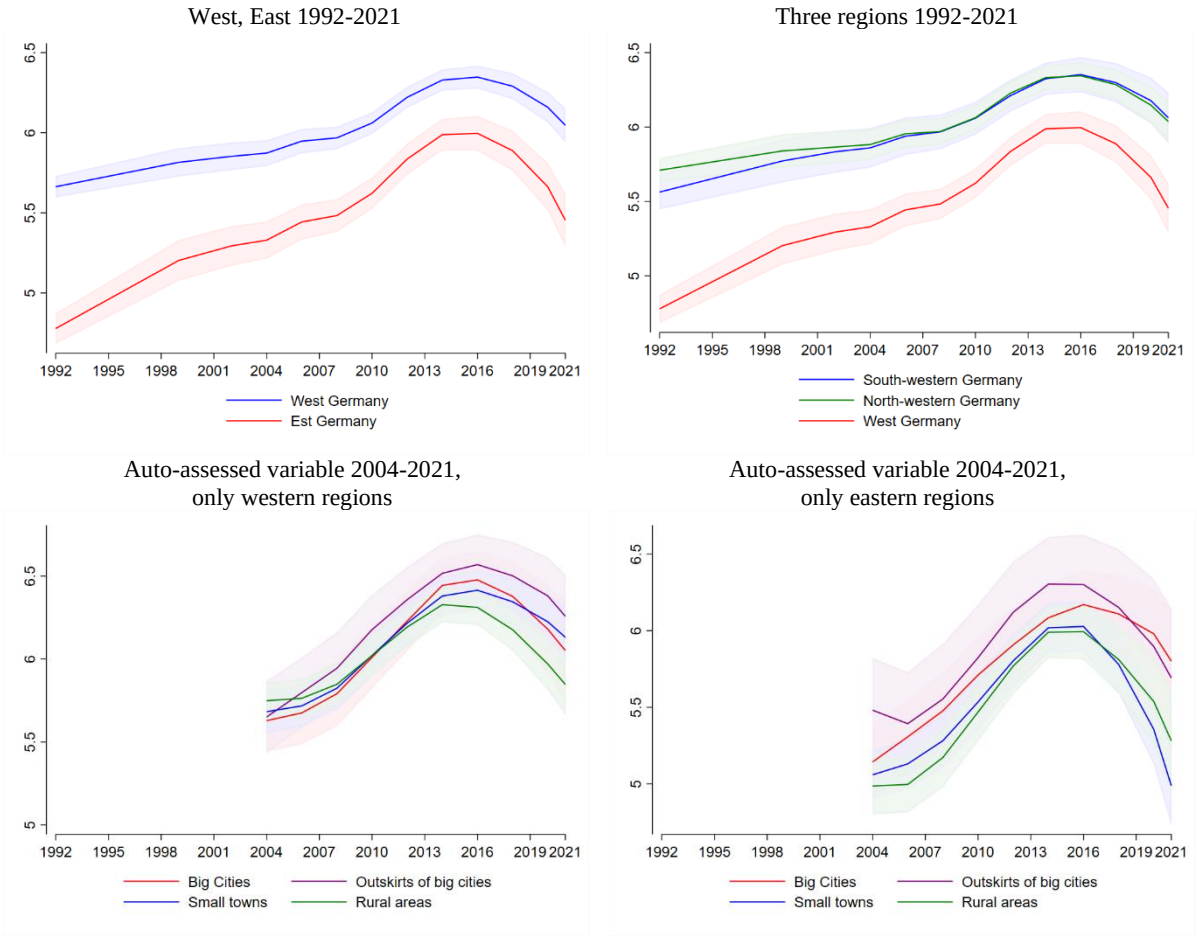


The top plots of Figure 7 allow us to better compare the evolution of subjective social status over time in West and East Germany (on the left) and between southern, northwestern and eastern Germany (on the right). Those are descriptive results. In all parts of the country subjective social status increased between 1992 and 2016 and decreased afterwards. The difference between the former western states and the eastern ones is evident, corresponding to almost 1 point on the 1-10 scale in 1992. As expected, this gap decreases over time, and in 2014 it corresponds to less than 0.5 points, staying stable thereafter. The significance test of periods interaction terms confirms that subjective status increased more rapidly in the East Germany than West Germany (see table A8 in the appendix for regression results). However, contrary to our hypothesis, we do not observe any significant differences between the southern and north-western states. The east-west divide seems to be the only significant difference in terms of social status.

The two bottom plots in Figure 7 show how subjective social status evolved over time in Germany depending on a place's degree of urbanisation declared by the respondents. The differences between the kinds of places are smaller than what we observe in France and not statistically significant. Surprisingly, the ranking between the four types of places is also different. Subjective social status increased in all kinds of places from 2004 to 2014, and only

people living on the outskirts of large cities showed systematically higher values of subjective status than the others. Comparing West and East Germany, we see that the differences between the curbs are slightly larger in eastern states than in western states.

Figure 7. Evolution of subjective social status (on a scale from 1 to 10) in Germany: differences between places with 95% confidence intervals.

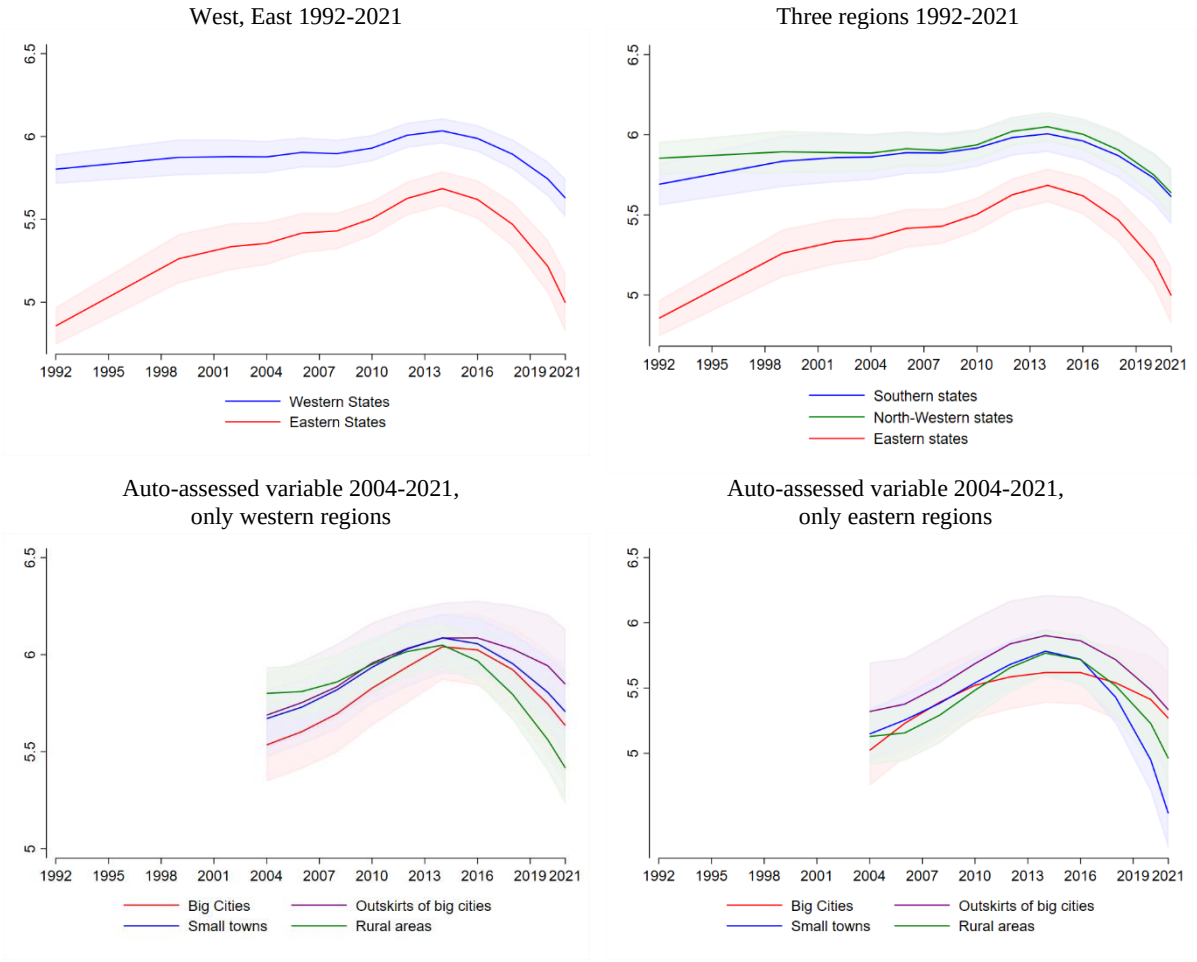


The multivariate regression results confirm the same large difference between eastern and western states. Even when controlling for gender, age, cohabitation status, education and social class, there is an average difference of 0.5 points between the citizens of the two parts of the country (see Table A9 in the Appendix for the regression results). Likewise, our robustness test on the ESS confirms the salience of the east-west divide, with a 0.6 points difference between East and West Germany in 2012 (see Table A10 in the appendix).

When running multivariate models with household income, we observe that this variable mediates part of the east-west difference in subjective social status. However, a sizeable difference of 0.4 points is not explained by individual income differences (see Table A11 in the appendix).

The multivariate analyses of trends confirm that the gap between the east and west has continuously decreased over the decades (and that, contrary to our expectations, no higher subjective social status is associated with living in the southern states compared to the northern ones. The top plots in Figure 8 help visualising those results.

Figure 8. Evolution of predicted subjective social status (on a scale from 1 to 10) and 95% confidence intervals in Germany for a man aged 40 belonging to the working class, depending on his place of residence



Concerning the degrees of urbanisation, the difference between the types of places remains small after controlling for age, gender, cohabitation status, education and social class. If there was a hierarchy, moreover, it would be the opposite of the one observed in France: citizens living in the outskirts of large cities have slightly higher subjective status than the others throughout the study period in East Germany, and people living in large cities have a lower subjective status than the others in the most recent years in both the west and the east (Figure 8, bottom plots). When adding income as an additional control, then even these small differences between the kinds of places disappear, meaning that they are due to differences in

economic conditions. At the end of the day, our hypothesis on the hierarchy between the kind of places should be rejected for Germany: in Germany, there is no negative correlation between subjective social status and living in rural places and no positive correlation with living in a large city. Our robustness test with the ESS survey confirms this result (see Table A10 in the appendix).

Discussion

Spatial inequalities within countries have been the source for new social and political divides in the past few decades (Gest, 2016; Jennings & Stoker, 2019; Moretti, 2012). According to an influential argument, the residents of the so-called periphery feel increasingly left behind (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Our study analyses spatial inequalities from a subjective point of view using social status and measuring the position people think to occupy in the social hierarchy. Our analyses show the levels and trends of subjective social status in different areas of the European Union's two most populous countries, France and Germany. We examine whether subjective social status differs between places of the same country and if those differences have increased over the last two decades.

Overall, the average subjective social status slowly decreased in France over the studied period, especially if we control for people's objective socio-economic conditions. In contrast, the average subjective status constantly increased in Germany from 1992 until 2016, but then decreased notably. In both cases, then, we observe a negative country-level trend at least in the most recent period, possibly reflecting the growing of a generalised sentiment of dissatisfaction.

Our analyses show two different patterns of geographical inequality in the two countries, pointing to the specific configuration of the spatial divides in different contexts. The centre-periphery divide is very evident in France's centralised state. Consistent with our hypotheses, people living in the three largest urban centres perceive their status to be higher than people living in the rest of the country – as do people living in the region of Paris more generally compared to those in all other regions. Subjective social status is overall significantly higher in urban places than in rural areas during the entire studied period from 1999 to 2017. These geographical differences are visible even when controlling for education and social class, and they are only partly mediated by income differences between places.

In Germany, by contrast, spatial inequalities appear to be different. The disparities in subjective status between urban and rural places are very weak, and people living in large cities

often place themselves lower on the social ladder than do people living in the outskirts or in rural areas. The urban-rural divide seems to play a subordinate role in self-evaluated social status in Germany. In contrast, and coherently with what objective indicators as GDP suggest, the east-west divide has not disappeared. Even controlling for gender, age, education and social class, people living in the eastern states have a significantly lower subjective social status than those living in the western part of the country. This difference is partially but not completely explained by income inequalities.

Overall, our paper gives credence to the relevance of within-country spatial inequalities from the subjective point of view. People's perception of their social standing is correlated to the place they live in. However, surprisingly, our results do not support the hypothesis that inequalities between regions have widened in the past two decades. Regional inequalities have even decreased in France over the entire period, especially because people's subjective social status has decreased more in the large metropolitan areas than in the other places. Coherently with Rodriguez-Pose's (2018) claims about the decline of France's North-East, then, subjective status decreased in that area, but it unexpectedly also decreased in the capital region and stayed more stable in the others. This definitely contrasts with our hypothesis about the growing frustration of the "peripheral France" (Guilluy, 2011, 2015). Only when we consider an auto-assessed categorisation of urban-rural citizens, which may be more precise than a geographical variable based on departments, we can possibly see increasing gaps between the types of places: both on a descriptive level and controlling for the objective socioeconomic position of people, it seems that people living in rural areas perceived a slightly decreasing status between 2006 and 2010 and after 2013 – similarly to people living in the outskirts of large cities, while subjective status was almost constant in large cities throughout the study period. Nevertheless, these trends are weak, and further analyses based on larger datasets with a more precise geographic location of respondents, as the municipality of residence, would be necessary to clarify this point. Survey data allow us to investigate the subjective dimension of social stratification, but they unfortunately provide limited information on people' location compared, for example, to register data.

Likewise, we do not see increasing spatial inequalities in Germany. Subjective status has decreased in the whole country starting from 2014, after a long period of constant increase, suggesting a generalised deterioration of people' perception of their social standing in the last years. But the only relevant geographical divide, the one between eastern and western States, has partially decreased over the study period.

The role of internal migration in the observed relative trends between places remains an open question. The observed decline of subjective status in the Ile de France and in the French large metropolitan centres, for example, could be due to the decrease of the perceived social position of citizens who lived permanently there, but also to the arrival of new low-subjective status people. Economic and demographic decline are intrinsically intertwined and are likely to combine differently in different areas. Further analyses based on longitudinal data could help understanding the role of migration flows.

In conclusion, in neither of the two countries does our paper find clear support for the hypothesis of growing differences between "central" and "peripheral" places. This casts doubt on the idea of a growing resentment in the "places that don't matter" (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). The recent popularity of right-wing populist parties in rural communities and the spread of specific political movements such as the French Gilet Jaunes in the same areas could be due to the successful mobilisation of silent spatial hierarchies that have long been in place, or to the more successful mobilisation of some latent discontent that grew, more or less recently, throughout the two countries.

Acknowledgments

I thank the four anonymous reviewers at European Societies for their helpful feedback to this article. Special thanks to Daniel Oesch for extensive feedback.

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Appendix

Table A1. Number of observations with non-missing values in analytical sample of ISSP data rounds for every model.

	France				**Germany**			
	NUTS 3 based variables		Kind of place (auto-assessed variable)		NUTS 2 based variables		Kind of place (auto-assessed variable)	
	Model without income	Model with income	Model without income	Model without income	Model without income	Model with income	Model without income	Model with income
1992	.	.	.	.	2,894	1,734	.	.
1999	1,519	1,428	.	.	905	710	.	.
2002	.	.	.	.	1,221	1,018	.	.
2003	1,238	917	.	.	.	.	.	.
2004	1,208	1,104	.	.	2,337	2,019	2,296	1,983
2005	1,244	1,090	1,243	1,090	.	.	.	.
2006	1,557	920	1,564	924	2,846	2,353	2,845	2,352
2007	1,772	1,505	1,769	1,504	.	.	.	.
2008	2,065	1,688	2,071	1,690	2,935	2,284	2,931	2,280
2009	2,539	2,334	2,535	2,335	.	.	.	.
2010	1,747	1,340	1,750	1,344	2,520	2,145	1,256	1,065
2011	2,762	2,101	2,764	2,103	.	.	.	.
2012	1,945	1,259	1,948	1,261	3,113	2,730	3,113	2,730
2013	1,697	834	1,691	832	.	.	.	.
2014	991	504	991	504	3,080	2,743	3,080	2,743
2015	1,043	584	1,048	587	.	.	.	.
2016	1,266	799	1,270	803	3,015	2,723	3,015	2,723
2017	1,291	807	1,291	806	.	.	.	.
2018	.	.	.	.	2,770	2,494	2,770	2,494
2019	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
2020	.	.	.	.	914	914	914	914
2021	.	.	.	.	1,529	1,529	1,527	1,527
Total	25,884	19,214	21,935	15,783	30,079	25,396	23,747	20,811

Table A2. Geographical distribution in analytical sample of ISSP data rounds for France

	Large metropolitan centres		Regions					
	Large metr. centres	Other departments	Île de France	Centre - Bassin Parisien	North-East	West	Méditérranée - Pyrénées	Auvergne - Rhône - Alpes
1999 Freq.	1331	188	335	188	257	337	225	177
%	87.62	12.38	22.05	12.38	16.92	22.19	14.81	11.65
2003	1110	128	223	162	208	288	220	137
	89.66	10.34	18.01	13.09	16.8	23.26	17.77	11.07
2004	1081	127	215	159	195	268	220	151
	89.49	10.51	17.8	13.16	16.14	22.19	18.21	12.5
2005	1131	113	227	162	205	277	198	175
	90.92	9.08	18.25	13.02	16.48	22.27	15.92	14.07
2006	1403	154	245	218	246	368	265	215
	90.11	9.89	15.74	14	15.8	23.64	17.02	13.81
2007	1587	185	270	278	267	413	310	234
	89.56	10.44	15.24	15.69	15.07	23.31	17.49	13.21
2008	1829	236	386	286	353	443	318	279
	88.57	11.43	18.69	13.85	17.09	21.45	15.4	13.51
2009	2349	190	334	403	390	622	441	349
	92.52	7.48	13.15	15.87	15.36	24.5	17.37	13.75
2010	1601	146	214	286	304	407	294	242
	91.64	8.36	12.25	16.37	17.4	23.3	16.83	13.85
2011	2485	277	481	385	443	589	451	413
	89.97	10.03	17.41	13.94	16.04	21.33	16.33	14.95
2012	1753	192	337	249	332	441	331	255
	90.13	9.87	17.33	12.8	17.07	22.67	17.02	13.11
2013	1507	190	281	225	263	363	316	249
	88.8	11.2	16.56	13.26	15.5	21.39	18.62	14.67
2014	893	98	162	133	166	211	183	136
	90.11	9.89	16.35	13.42	16.75	21.29	18.47	13.72
2015	925	118	176	134	188	212	185	148
	88.69	11.31	16.87	12.85	18.02	20.33	17.74	14.19
2016	1141	125	196	161	212	290	241	166
	90.13	9.87	15.48	12.72	16.75	22.91	19.04	13.11
2017	1148	143	204	183	197	286	247	174
	88.92	11.08	15.8	14.18	15.26	22.15	19.13	13.48
Tot.	23274	2610	4286	3612	4226	5815	4445	3500
	89.92	10.08	16.56	13.95	16.33	22.47	17.17	13.52

		Kind of department (OECD cat.)			Kind of place (auto-assessed)			
		Prev. Urban	Intermediate	Prev. Rural	Big city	Outskirt of a big city	Small city	Rural area
1999	Freq.	553	691	275				
	%	36.41	45.49	18.1	.	.	.	.
2003		441	570	227				
		35.62	46.04	18.34	.	.	.	.
2004		403	598	207				
		33.36	49.5	17.14	.	.	.	.
2005		393	610	241	190	180	417	456
		31.59	49.04	19.37	15.29	14.48	33.55	36.69
2006		492	744	321	206	217	500	641
		31.6	47.78	20.62	13.17	13.87	31.97	40.98
2007		539	865	368	241	257	575	696
		30.42	48.81	20.77	13.62	14.53	32.5	39.34
2008		715	962	388	363	298	677	733
		34.62	46.59	18.79	17.53	14.39	32.69	35.39
2009		660	1288	591	293	323	822	1097
		25.99	50.73	23.28	11.56	12.74	32.43	43.27
2010		463	894	390	205	211	544	790
		26.5	51.17	22.32	11.71	12.06	31.09	45.14
2011		915	1333	514	465	454	875	970
		33.13	48.26	18.61	16.82	16.43	31.66	35.09
2012		677	932	336	341	313	595	699
		34.81	47.92	17.28	17.51	16.07	30.54	35.88
2013		564	800	333	313	231	514	633
		33.24	47.14	19.62	18.51	13.66	30.4	37.43
2014		327	483	181	172	139	314	366
		33	48.74	18.26	17.36	14.03	31.69	36.93
2015		378	496	169	189	150	345	364
		36.24	47.56	16.2	18.03	14.31	32.92	34.73
2016		432	609	225	203	176	422	469
		34.12	48.1	17.77	15.98	13.86	33.23	36.93
2017		429	622	240	216	187	429	459
		33.23	48.18	18.59	16.73	14.48	33.23	35.55
Tot.		8381	12497	5006	3397	3136	7029	8373
		32.38	48.28	19.34	15.49	14.3	32.04	38.17

Table A3. Geographical distribution in analytical sample of ISSP data rounds for Germany

		West-East		Three regions			Kind of place (auto-assessed)			
		West	East	South	North-West	East	Big city	Outskirt of a big city	Small city	Rural area
1992	Freq.	1848	1,088	601	1,247	1,088				
	%	62.94	37.06	20.47	42.47	37.06	.	.	.	.
1999		590	319	221	369	319				
		64.91	35.09	24.31	40.59	35.09	.	.	.	.
2002		804	420	309	495	420				
		65.69	34.31	25.25	40.44	34.31	.	.	.	.
2004		1507	836	524	983	836	419	239	815	829
		64.32	35.68	22.36	41.95	35.68	18.2	10.38	35.4	36.01
2006		1813	1,040	581	1,232	1,040	470	314	1,053	1,015
		63.55	36.45	20.36	43.18	36.45	16.48	11.01	36.92	35.59
2008		1935	1,007	695	1,240	1,007	544	309	1,142	943
		65.77	34.23	23.62	42.15	34.23	18.52	10.52	38.87	32.1
2010		1727	804	678	1,049	804	201	162	464	436
		68.23	31.77	26.79	41.45	31.77	15.91	12.83	36.74	34.52
2012		2031	1,093	777	1,254	1,093	624	346	1,049	1,105
		65.01	34.99	24.87	40.14	34.99	19.97	11.08	33.58	35.37
2014		2055	1,035	798	1,257	1,035	484	467	898	1,241
		66.5	33.5	25.83	40.68	33.5	15.66	15.11	29.06	40.16
2016		1960	1,056	711	1,249	1,056	578	337	1,030	1,071
		64.99	35.01	23.57	41.41	35.01	19.16	11.17	34.15	35.51
2018		2111	1,046	760	1,351	1,046	620	350	1,125	1,062
		66.87	33.13	24.07	42.79	33.13	19.64	11.09	35.64	33.64
2020		774	440	296	478	440	251	163	384	416
		63.76	36.24	24.38	39.37	36.24	20.68	13.43	31.63	34.27
2021		1016	518	375	641	518	278	259	528	467
		66.23	33.77	24.45	41.79	33.77	18.15	16.91	34.46	30.48
Total		20171	10,702	7326	12845	10702	4,469	2946	8488	8585
		65.34	34.66	23.73	41.61	34.66	18.25	12.03	34.66	35.06

Figure A1. Standard deviation of subjective social status (on a scale from 1 to 10) in France by department during the period 1999-2017

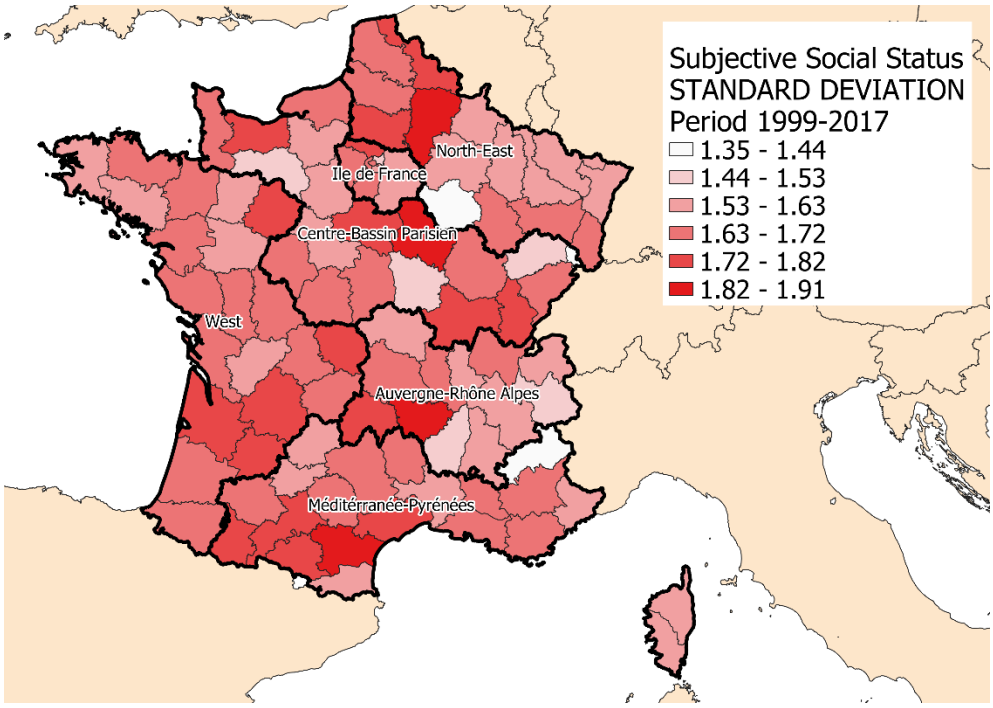
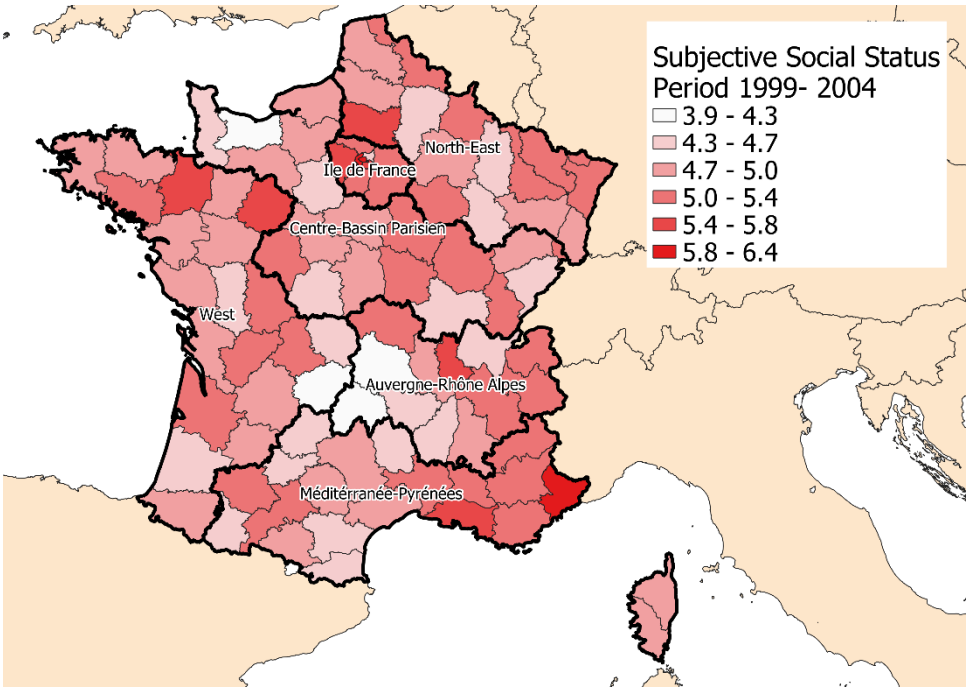


Figure A2. Mean subjective social status (on a scale from 1 to 10) in France by department at the beginning of the studied period (1999-2004) and at the end (2015-2017).



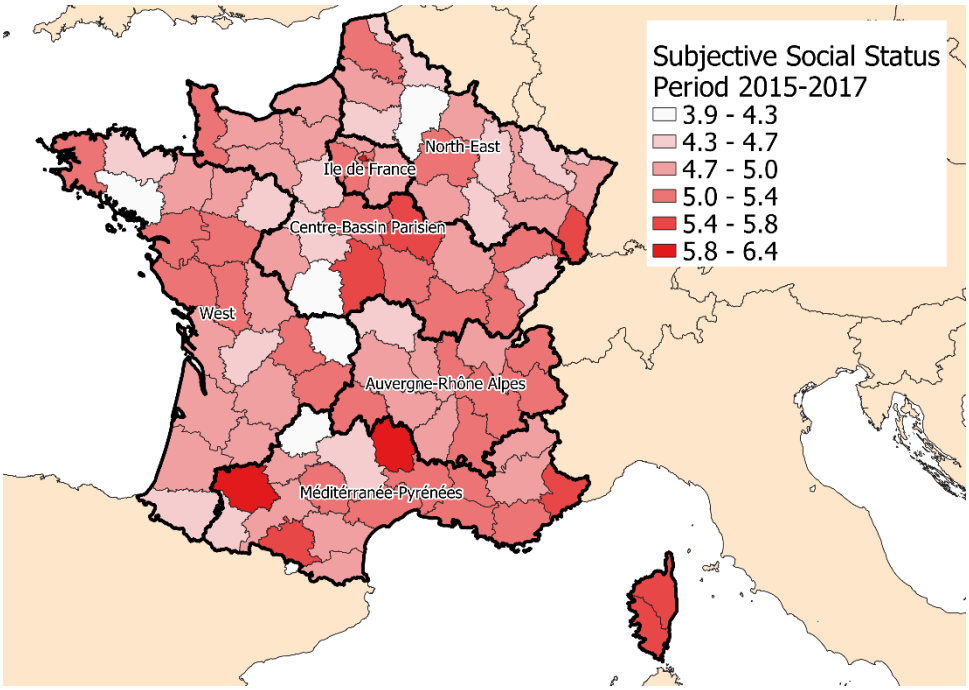


Figure A3. Standard deviation of subjective social status (on a scale from 1 to 10) in Germany by state during the period 1992-2021

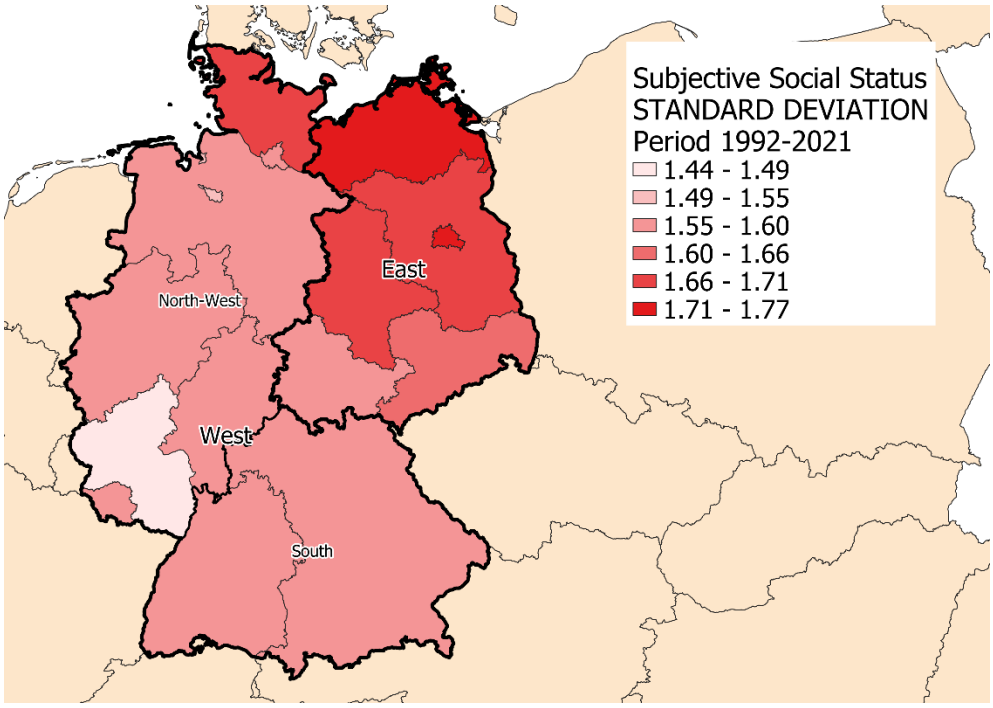
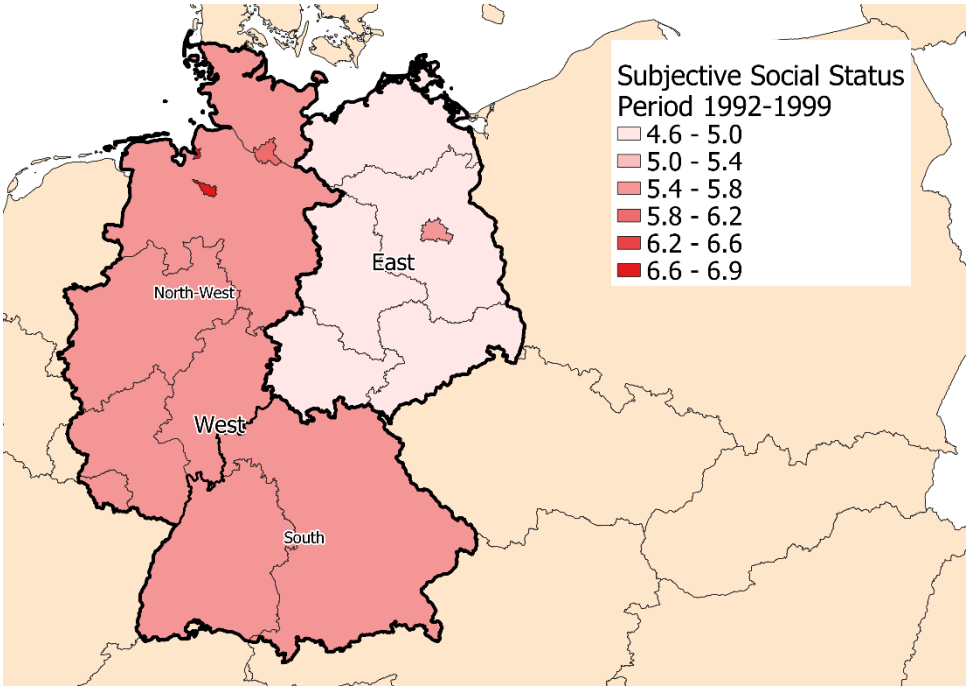


Figure A4. Mean subjective social status (on a scale from 1 to 10) in Germany by state at the beginning of the studied period (1992-1999) and at the end (2018-2021).



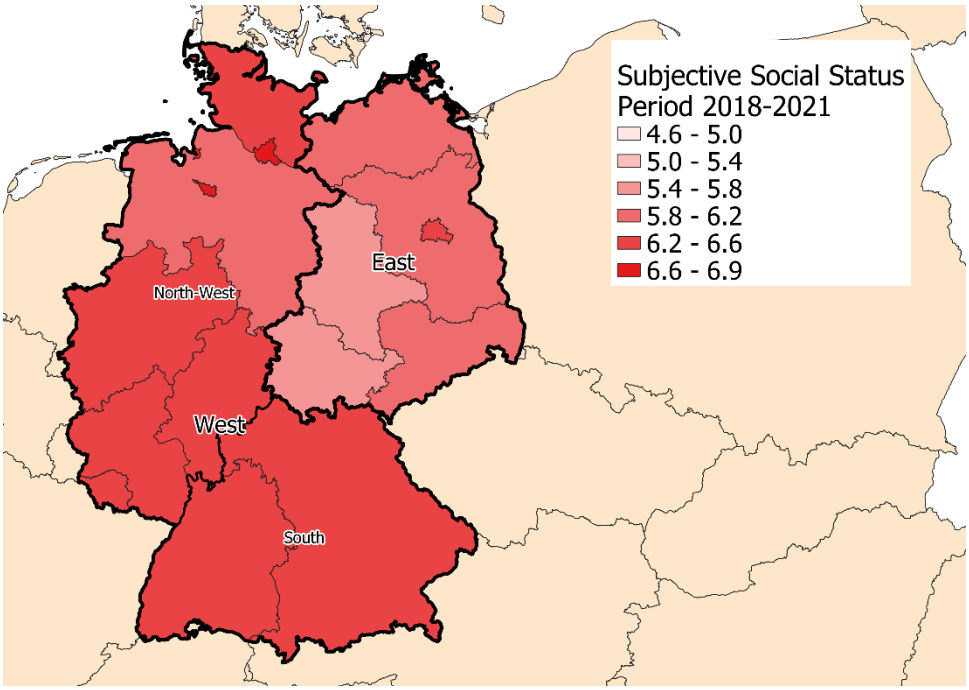


Table A4. Linear regressions on subjective social status (from 1 to 10) for France including different geographical variables. Descriptive models without any controls (* p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p <0.01).

Large metropolitan centres vs other departments			**Regions**			**Kind of place (department categorisation)**			**Kind of place (auto-assessed variable)**		
Period (ref: 1999-2004)											
2005-2009		-0.13			-0.08			-0.20**	**Period** (ref: 1999-2007)		
2010-2014		-0.13			-0.07			-0.14*	2010-2014		0.11
2015-2017		-0.29**			-0.28*			-0.33***	2015-2017		-0.04
Department (ref: large metropolitan centers)			**Region** (ref: Ile de France)			**Kind of place** (ref: prev. urban)			**Kind of place** (ref: big city)		
Other departments	-0.59***	-0.66***	Centre - Bassin Parisien	-0.74***	-0.92***	Intermediate	-0.41***	-0.57***	Outskirt of a big city	-0.26***	-0.20**
Time trend differences			North-East	-0.57***	-0.57***	Prev. rural	-0.62***	-0.72***	Small town	-0.62***	-0.61***
Other departments # 2005-2009		0.05	Ouest	-0.69***	-0.67***	**Time trend differences**			Rural area	-0.79***	-0.72***
Other departments # 2010-2014		0.09	Méditerranée- Pyrénées	-0.52***	-0.51***	Intermediate # 2005-2009		0.19*	**Time trend differences**		
Other departments # 2015-2017		0.23*	Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes	-0.60***	-0.67***	Intermediate # 2010-2014		0.17*	outskirt of big city # 2010-14		-0.08
			Time trend differences			Intermediate # 2015-2017		0.31**	outskirt of big city # 2015-17		-0.15
			Centre-Bassin P. # 2005-2009		0.13	Prev. rural # 2005-2009		0.12	small town # 2010-14		-0.05
			Centre-Bassin P. # 2010-2014		0.22	Prev. rural # 2010-2014		0.05	small town # 2015-17		0.07
			Centre-Bassin P. # 2015-2017		0.43**	Prev. rural # 2015-2017		0.31*	rural area # 2010-14		-0.17*
			North-East # 2005-2009		-0.03				rural area # 2015-17		0.01
			North-East # 2010-2014		0.06						
			North-East # 2015-2017		-0.05						
			West # 2005-2009		-0.05						
			West # 2010-2014		-0.06						
			West # 2015-2017		0.14						
			Méditerr.-Pyr. # 2005-2009		-0.06						
			Méditerr.-Pyr. # 2010-2014		-0.07						
			Méditerr.- Pyr # 2015-2017		0.26						
			Auvergne-R.-A. 2005-2009		0.03						
			Auvergne-R.-A # 2010-2014		0.05						
			Auvergne-R.-A. # 2015-2017		0.33*						
cons	5.51***	5.63***		5.58***	5.67***		5.37***	5.53***		5.58***	5.54***
N	28,783	28,783		28,783	28,783		28,783	28,783		24,127	24,127

Table A5. Linear regressions on subjective social status (from 1 to 10) for France including different geographical variables, controlling for gender, age, cohabitation status, social class and education (* p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p <0.01).

Large metropolitan centres vs other departments			**Regions**			**Kind of place (department categorisation)**			**Kind of place (auto-assessed variable)**		
Gender	0.12***	0.12***		0.12***	0.12***		0.12***	0.12***		0.13***	0.13***
Age	0.01***	0.01***		0.01***	0.01***		0.01***	0.01***		0.01***	0.01***
Cohabitation status	0.27***	0.27***		0.26***	0.26***		0.26***	0.27***		0.30***	0.31***
Class (ref: higher-grade service c.)											
Lower grade service class	-0.58***	-0.57***		-0.58***	-0.57***		-0.59***	-0.58***		-0.60***	-0.59***
Small business owners	-0.57***	-0.53***		-0.57***	-0.53***		-0.58***	-0.54***		-0.57***	-0.54***
Workers	-1.00***	-0.98***		-1.00***	-0.98***		-1.01***	-0.99***		-1.02***	-1.00***
Education (ref: university ed.)											
Secondary and post-secondary	-0.49***	-0.52***		-0.48***	-0.53***		-0.48***	-0.52***		-0.45***	-0.49***
Compulsory education	-0.89***	-0.93***		-0.89***	-0.93***		-0.89***	-0.93***		-0.81***	-0.84***
Period (ref: 1999-2004)											
2005-2009		-0.23**			-0.20*			-0.26***	**Period** (ref: 1999-2007)		
2010-2014		-0.30**			-0.28***			-0.33***	2010-2014		0
2015-2017		-0.46**			-0.46***			-0.50***	2015-2017		-0.18*
Department (ref: large metropolitan centers)			**Region** (ref: Ile de France)			**Kind of place** (ref: prev. urban)			**Kind of place** (ref: big city)		
Other departments	-0.29***	-0.41***	Centre - Bassin Parisien	-0.36***	-0.59***	Intermediate	-0.18***	-0.36***	Outskirt of a big city	-0.15***	-0.12
Time trend differences			North-East	-0.20***	-0.24*	Prev. rural	-0.30***	-0.46***	Small town	-0.30***	-0.30***
Other departments # 2005-2009		0.14	Ouest	-0.34***	-0.38***	**Time trend differences**			Rural area	-0.41***	-0.34***
Other departments # 2010-2014		0.12	Méditerranée- Pyrénées	-0.27***	-0.31**	Intermediate # 2005-2009		0.23**	**Time trend differences**		
Other departments # 2015-2017		0.22	Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes	-0.32***	-0.48***	Intermediate # 2010-2014		0.19*	outskirt of big city # 2010-14		-0.05
			Time trend differences			Intermediate # 2015-2017		0.30**	outskirt of big city # 2015-17		-0.11
			Centre-Bassin P. # 2005-2009		0.22	Prev. rural # 2005-2009		0.18	small town # 2010-14		-0.06
			Centre-Bassin P. # 2010-2014		0.30*	Prev. rural # 2010-2014		0.13	small town # 2015-17		0.09
			Centre-Bassin P. # 2015-2017		0.42**	Prev. rural # 2015-2017		0.36**	rural area # 2010-14		-0.18*
			North-East # 2005-2009		0.02				rural area # 2015-17		0.02
			North-East # 2010-2014		0.1						
			North-East # 2015-2017		0.03						
			West # 2005-2009		0.09						
			West # 2010-2014		-0.01						
			West # 2015-2017		0.13						
			Méditerr.-Pyr. # 2005-2009		0.05						
			Méditerr.-Pyr. # 2010-2014		0						
			Méditerr.- Pyr # 2015-2017		0.24						
			Auvergne-R.-A. 2005-2009		0.18						
			Auvergne-R.-A # 2010-2014		0.17						
			Auvergne-R.-A. # 2015-2017		0.35*						
cons	5.94***	6.06***		5.86***	6.07***		5.76***	6.02***		5.83***	5.85***
N	25,828	25,884		25,884	25,884		25,884	25,884		21,935	21,935

Table A6. Linear regressions on subjective social status (from 0 to 10) for France including different geographical variables, controlling for gender, age and social class, with data from European Social Survey data round6. (* p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p <0.01).

Regions		**Kind of place (auto-assessed variable)**	
Gender	-0.1		-0.1
Age	0.01*		0.01
Cohabitation status	0.25*		0.30**
Class (ref: higher-grade service class)			
Lower grade service class	-0.46***		-0.42**
Small business owners	-0.42*		-0.38*
Workers	-0.67***		-0.65***
Education (ref: university ed.)			
Secondary and post-secondary	-0.44***		-0.41***
Compulsory education	-0.51***		-0.50***
Region (ref: Ile de France)		**Kind of place** (ref: big city)	
Centre - Bassin Parisien	0.03	Outskirt of a big city	-0.15
North-East	-0.03	Small town	-0.1
Ouest	-0.14	Rural area	-0.36**
Méditerranée- Pyrénées	-0.40**		
Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes	0		
cons	5.77***		5.78***
N	1824		1823

Table A7. Linear regressions on subjective social status (from 1 to 10) for France including different geographical variables, controlling for gender, age, cohabitation status, social class, education and income (* p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p <0.01).

Large metropolitan centres vs other departments			**Regions**			**Kind of place (department categorisation)**			**Kind of place (auto-assessed variable)**		
Gender	0.09***	0.09***		0.09**	0.09**		0.09***	0.09***		0.10***	0.10***
Age	0.00***	0.00***		0.00***	0.00***		0.00***	0.00***		0.00***	0.00***
Cohabitation status	0.24***	0.27***		0.24***	0.27***		0.24***	0.27***		0.27***	0.31***
Class (ref: higher-grade service class)											
Lower grade service class	-0.38***	-0.37***		-0.38***	-0.36***		-0.38***	-0.37***		-0.41***	-0.39***
Small business owners	-0.30***	-0.25***		-0.29***	-0.25***		-0.30***	-0.25***		-0.32***	-0.27***
Workers	-0.68***	-0.65***		-0.68***	-0.66***		-0.68***	-0.66***		-0.72***	-0.69***
Education (ref: university ed.)											
Secondary and post-secondary	-0.41***	-0.46***		-0.41***	-0.47***		-0.41***	-0.46***		-0.38***	-0.43***
Compulsory education	-0.72***	-0.78***		-0.72***	-0.78***		-0.72***	-0.77***		-0.66***	-0.71***
Equivalent household income	0.33**	0.33***		0.33***	0.34***		0.34***	0.34***		0.32***	0.32***
Period (ref: 1999-2004)											
2005-2009		-0.16**			-0.13			-0.18**	**Period** (ref: 1999-2007)		
2010-2014		-0.27***			-0.27**			-0.31***	2010-2014		-0.08
2015-2017		-0.36***			-0.41**			-0.43***	2015-2017		-0.17
Department (ref: large metropolitan centers)			**Region** (ref: Ile de France)			**Kind of place** (ref: prev. urban)			**Kind of place** (ref: big city)		
Other departments	-0.19***	-0.26***	Centre - Bassin Parisien	-0.25***	-0.43***	Intermediate	-0.10***	-0.23***	Outskirt of a big city	-0.16**	-0.14
			North-East	-0.08	-0.06	Prev. rural	-0.20***	-0.33***	Small town	-0.22***	-0.20**
Time trend differences			Ouest	-0.22***	-0.28**				Rural area	-0.33***	-0.26***
Other departments # 2005-09		0.11	Méditerranée- Pyrénées	-0.17***	-0.17	**Time trend differences**					
Other departments # 2010-14		0.07	Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes	-0.22***	-0.30**	Intermediate # 2005-09		0.17*	**Time trend differences**		
Other departments # 2015-17		0.08				Intermediate # 2010-14		0.15	outskirt of big city # 2010-14		0.02
			Time trend differences			Intermediate # 2015-17		0.17	outskirt of big city # 2015-17		-0.2
			Centre-Bassin P. # 2005-09		0.19	Prev. rural # 2005-2009		0.17	small town # 2010-14		-0.04
			Centre-Bassin P. # 2010-14		0.25	Prev. rural # 2010-2014		0.11	small town # 2015-17		-0.01
			Centre-Bassin P. # 2015-17		0.29	Prev. rural # 2015-2017		0.25	rural area # 2010-14		-0.15
			North-East # 2005-2009		-0.05				rural area # 2015-17		-0.07
			North-East # 2010-2014		0.06						
			North-East # 2015-2017		-0.12						
			West # 2005-2009		0.13						
			West # 2010-2014		0						
			West # 2015-2017		0.12						
			Méditerr.- Pyr. # 2005-2009		0.02						
			Méditerr.- Pyr. # 2010-2014		-0.06						
			Méditerr.- Pyr # 2015-2017		0.21						
			Auvergne-R.-A. # 2005-09		0.08						
			Auvergne-R.-A # 2010-14		0.11						
			Auvergne-R.-A. # 2015-17		0.22						
cons	5.00***	5.23***		5.01***	5.16***		4.94***	57.28***		5.07***	5.09***
N	19,214	19,214		19,214	19,214		19,214	19,214		15,783	15,783

Table A8. Linear regressions on subjective social status (from 1 to 10) for Germany including different geographical variables. Descriptive models without any controls (* p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p <0.01).

West vs East			**Three regions**			**Kind of place (auto-assessed variable)**			**Kind of place only West**		**Kind of place only East**	
Period (ref: 1992-1999)												
2002-2006		0.13***			0.23***	**Period** (ref: 2004-2006)						
2008-2012		0.43***			0.51***	2008-2012		0.61***		0.54***		0.62***
2014-2016		0.78***			0.82***	2014-2016		1.02***		0.94***		0.96***
2018-2021		0.60***			0.71***	2018-2021		0.88***		0.77***		0.99***
Region (ref: West)			**Region** (ref. South-West)			**Kind of place** (ref: big ciy)						
East	-0.61***	-0.80***	North-west	0.00	0.12*	Outskirt of a big city	0.15***	0.15	0.10*	0.05	0.10	0.16
Time trend differences			East	-0.61***	-0.72***	Small town	-0.09**	0.02	-0.06	0.05	-0.25***	-0.1
Eastern states # 2002-2006		0.24***	**Time trend differences**			Rural area	-0.10**	0.05	-0.09**	0.11	-0.29***	-0.17
Eastern states # 2008-2012		0.34***	North-West # 2002-2006		-0.16*	**Time trend differences**						
Eastern states # 2014-2016		0.48***	North-West # 2008-20		-0.12	Outskirt of big c. #2008-12		0.01		0.11		-0.1
Eastern states # 2018-2021		0.42***	North-West # 2014-16		-0.06	Outskirt of big c. #2014-16		-0.06		-0.03		0.08
			North-West # 2018-21		-0.16*	Outskirt of big c. #2018-21		-0.04		0.05		-0.32
			East # 2002-2006		0.14	Small town # 2008-2012		-0.13		-0.11		-0.17
			East # 2008-2012		0.26***	Small town # 2014-2016		-0.07		-0.14		0.1
			East # 2014-2016		0.44***	Small town # 2018-2021		-0.13		-0.09		-0.33*
			East # 2018-2021		0.31***	Rural area # 2008-2012		-0.13		-0.16		-0.08
						Rural area # 2014-2018		-0.15		-0.26*		0.07
						Rural area # 2018-2021		-0.29**		-0.37***		-0.21
_cons	6.11***	5.67***		6.11***	5.59***		6.07***	5.42***	6.21***	5.60***	5.78***	5.17***
N	34,302	34,302		34,302	34,302		26,764	26,764	17,623	17,623	9,141	9,141

Table A9. Linear regressions on subjective social status (from 1 to 10) for Germany including different geographical variables, controlling for gender, age, cohabitation status, social class and education (* p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p <0.01).

West vs East			**Three regions**			**Kind of place (auto-assessed variable)**			**Kind of place only West**		**Kind of place only East**	
Gender	-0.03	-0.03		-0.03	-0.03		-0.05*	-0.05*	-0.06*	-0.06*	-0.02	-0.02
Age	-0.00***	-0.00***		-0.00***	-0.00***		-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.01***
Cohabitation status	0.35***	0.36***		0.35***	0.36***		0.40***	0.40***	0.37***	0.38***	0.40***	0.41***
Social class (ref: higher-grade service class)												
Lower grade service class	-0.36***	-0.39***		-0.36***	-0.39***		-0.38***	-0.40***	-0.42***	-0.42***	-0.22***	-0.25***
Small business owners	-0.41***	-0.44***		-0.41***	-0.44***		-0.44***	-0.46***	-0.49***	-0.50***	-0.25**	-0.28***
Workers	-0.81***	-0.85***		-0.81***	-0.85***		-0.82***	-0.86***	-0.82***	-0.84***	-0.73***	-0.77***
Education (ref: university ed.)												
Secondary and post-secondary	-0.32***	-0.31***		-0.33***	-0.31***		-0.32***	-0.32***	-0.35***	-0.35***	-0.24***	-0.23***
Compulsory education	-0.87***	-0.75***		-0.87***	-0.75***		-0.94***	-0.78***	-0.88***	-0.80***	-0.99***	-0.82***
Period (ref: 1992-1999)												
2002-2006						**Period** (ref: 2004-2006)						
2008-2012		0.15***			0.23***	2008-2012		0.42***		0.37***		0.40***
2014-2016		0.22***			0.25***	2014-2016		0.56***		0.50***		0.39**
2018-2021		0.00			0.08	2018-2021		0.41***		0.34***		0.33**
Region (ref: West)			**Region** (ref. South-West)			**Kind of place** (ref: big ciy)						
East	-0.52***	-0.86***	North-west	0.04	0.13*	Outskirt of a big city	0.12**	0.17*	0.04	0.11	0.14*	0.09
Time trend differences			East	-0.50***	-0.77***	Small town	0.04	0.12	0.02	0.12	0.00	0.07
Eastern states # 2002-2006		0.33***	**Time trend differences**			Rural area	0.02	0.16**	-0.02	0.20**	-0.21	0.02
Eastern states # 2008-2012		0.43***	North-West # 2002-2006		-0.14	**Time trend differences**						
Eastern states # 2014-2016		0.53***	North-West # 2008-20		-0.12	Outskirt of big c. #2008-12		-0.04		-0.02		0.02
Eastern states # 2018-2021		0.44***	North-West # 2014-16		-0.04	Outskirt of big c. #2014-16		-0.12		-0.16		0.22
			North-West # 2018-21		-0.12	Outskirt of big c. #2018-21		-0.08		-0.07		-0.16
			East # 2002-2006		0.23**	Small town # 2008-2012		-0.09		-0.09		-0.1
			East # 2008-2012		0.34***	Small town # 2014-2016		-0.05		-0.12		0.12
			East # 2014-2016		0.50***	Small town # 2018-2021		-0.16		-0.15		-0.31*
			East # 2018-2021		0.36***	Rural area # 2008-2012		-0.13		-0.15		-0.09
						Rural area # 2014-2018		-0.17*		-0.28**		0.06
						Rural area # 2018-2021		-0.32***		-0.43***		-0.14
_cons	7.09***	7.00***		7.07***	6.91***		6.99***	6.60***	7.11***	6.76***	6.57***	6.29***
N	30,079	30,079		30,079	30,079		23,747	23,747	15,563	15,563	8,184	8,184

Table A10. Linear regressions on subjective social status (from 0 to 10) for Germany including different geographical variables, controlling for gender, age and social class with data from the European social Survey round 6 (* p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p <0.01).

West vs East		**Three regions**		**Kind of place (auto-assessed variable)**		**Kind of place - only West**	**Kind of place - only East**
Gender	-0.14*		-0.14*		-0.14*	-0.04	-0.32**
Age	0		0		-0.00*	0	-0.01**
Cohabitation status	0.30***		0.30***		0.31***	0.27**	0.29*
Social class (ref: higher-grade service class)							
Lower grade service class	-0.50***		-0.50***		-0.54***	-0.51***	-0.56**
Small business owners	-0.55***		-0.54***		-0.55***	-0.77***	-0.16
Workers	-0.83***		-0.83***		-0.87***	-0.91***	-0.66***
Education (ref: university ed.)							
Secondary and post-secondary	-0.31***		-0.31***		-0.29***	-0.22*	-0.51***
Compulsory education	-0.50***		-0.51***		-0.42***	-0.50***	-0.39
	-0.14*						
Region (ref: West)		Region (ref. South-West)		Kind of place (ref: big ciy)			
East	-0.61***	North-west	0.12	Outskirt of a big city	0.05	0.07	-0.05
		East	-0.53***	Small town	-0.11	-0.02	-0.19
				Rural area	0.17	0.16	0.07
_cons	6.90***		6.84***		6.79***	6.65***	6.80***
N	2,657		2,657		2657	1710	947

Table A11. Linear regressions on subjective social status (from 1 to 10) for Germany including different geographical variables, controlling for gender, age, cohabitation status, social class, education and income (* p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p <0.01).

West vs East			**Three regions**			**Kind of place (auto-assessed variable)**			**Kind of place only West**		**Kind of place only East**	
Gender	-0.06**	-0.06**		-0.06**	-0.06**		-0.09***	-0.08***	-0.09***	-0.09**	-0.07	-0.07*
Age	-0.00***	0.00***		-0.00***	0.00***		-0.00***	0.00***	-0.00***	0.00***	0	0.00*
Cohabitation status	0.30***	0.31***		0.30***	0.31***		0.33***	0.33***	0.32***	0.32**	0.31***	0.31***
Social class (ref: higher-grade service class)												
Lower grade service class	-0.21***	-0.24***		-0.21***	-0.24***		-0.23***	-0.26***	-0.27***	-0.28***	-0.12	-0.14*
Small business owners	-0.28***	-0.31***		-0.28***	-0.31***		-0.29***	-0.32***	-0.36***	-0.37***	-0.13	-0.16
Workers	-0.54***	-0.58***		-0.54***	-0.58***		-0.54***	-0.58***	-0.56***	-0.58***	-0.48***	-0.52***
Education (ref: university ed.)												
Secondary and post-secondary	-0.21***	-0.19***		-0.21***	-0.19***		-0.20***	-0.20***	-0.24***	-0.23***	-0.13*	-0.13*
Compulsory education	-0.75***	-0.61***		-0.75***	-0.61***		-0.81***	-0.64***	-0.76***	-0.65***	-0.86***	-0.69***
Equivalent household income	0.36***	0.36***		0.36***	0.36***		0.38***	0.38***	0.35***	0.35***	0.45***	0.45***
Period (ref: 1992-1999)												
2002-2006		0.04			0.20**	**Period** (ref: 2004-2006)						
2008-2012		0.19***			0.35***	2008-2012		0.42***		0.36***		0.40***
2014-2016		0.26***			0.35***	2014-2016		0.53***		0.47***		0.39**
2018-2021		0.10*			0.24**	2018-2021		0.39***		0.32***		0.32**
			Region (ref. South-West)									
Region (ref: West)						**Kind of place** (ref: big ciy)						
East	-0.39***	-0.66***	North-west	0.03	0.22**	Outskirt of a big city	0.06	0.04	-0.02	-0.05	0.11	0.05
			East	-0.37***	-0.51***	Small town	0.03	0.01	0	0.05	0.05	0.13
Time trend differences						Rural area	0.04	0.18*	-0.01	0.19*	0.06	0.09
Eastern states # 2002-2006		0.25***	**Time trend differences**			**Time trend differences**						
Eastern states # 2008-2012		0.35***	North-West # 2002-06		-0.25**	Outskirt of big c. #2008-12		-0.02		0.08		-0.02
Eastern states # 2014-2016		0.46***	North-West # 2008-20		-0.23*	Outskirt of big c. #2014-16		-0.04		-0.06		0.27
Eastern states # 2018-2021		0.32***	North-West # 2014-16		-0.12	Outskirt of big c. #2018-21		0.04		0.09		-0.13
			North-West # 2018-21		-0.20*	Small town # 2008-2012		-0.10		-0.08		-0.13
			East # 2002-2006		0.08	Small town # 2014-2016		-0.03		-0.06		0.08
												0
			East # 2008-2012		0.20*	Small town # 2018-2021		-0.11		-0.05		-0.30*
			East # 2014-2016		0.37***	Rural area # 2008-2012		-0.14		-0.16		-0.09
			East # 2018-2021		0.18	Rural area # 2014-2016		-0.16		-0.24*		0.04
						Rural area # 2018-2021		-0.24**		-0.32**		-0.11
_cons	6.13***	5.99***		6.11***	5.84***		6.02***	5.64***	6.22***	5.88***	5.51***	5.23***
N	25,396	25,396		25,396	25,396		20,811	20,811	13,488	13,488	7,323	7,323

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