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REPRESENTATIONS OF OCCUPATIONAL SIMILARITIES IN A CROSS- NATIONAL CONTEXT

Introduction & Background

A well-established tradition of measuring occupational prestige argues that prestige hierarchies are basically invariant through time and space, especially across countries (Treiman, D. J., 1977; Ganzeboom, H. B. G., De Graaf, P. M., and Treiman, D. J., 1992), and consist of a linearly ordered set of occupations. Yet, our research, based on an empirical study, tries to qualify this statement. The starting point of this study is the Coxon and Jones's work criticizing prestige measurement and the common interpretations of this kind of measurement (Coxon, A.P.M. & Jones, C.L. 1978).

Data & Methods

We have carried out a free-sorting of occupations study in which the respondents were divided into two different samples comprising Swiss and French people.

In this study, respondents (*n=30 in each group*) were asked to sort a set of thirty-five occupations on the basis of their perception of the similarity between each occupation. We analyzed data using both Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) techniques and hierarchical clusters analysis.

This methodology has provided information such as 1. a good representation of the proximities between occupations and a look at the cognitive map of the occupational structure shared by each group of respondents 2. the boundaries between several sets of occupations and the way in which each group perceives occupational groups and boundaries.

Results

We have found deep differences between the Swiss and French people's representations of occupational similarities: these discrepancies are strongly correlated to factors such as the national model and history of social stratification, tools for measuring it and debates over social classes.

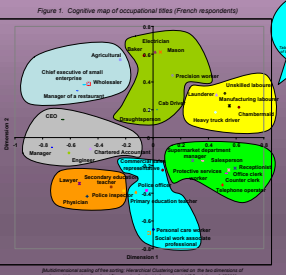
The French case

As it has been substantively shown by previous studies (Desrosières, A., 1977; see also Desrosières, A., 2008), the French social classification (the PCS, namely the '*Professions et Catégories Socioprofessionnelles*') is embedded in the history of French society and especially in the debates over social classes and the impact of the central state upon employment relations (e.g collective conventions codifying employment relations). Some specific notions, words and concepts are at the core of the French social classification: they are well-known and shared by a large part of the working population which is familiar with the PCS pattern (Boltanski, L. & Thévenot, L., 1983). The latter strongly shapes the French respondents' representations of occupational similarities. Rather than being a linear ordering of occupational status or prestige, the French perception may be seen as a social space comprising several "social milieu" well distinguished by different "lifestyles" [see Figure 1] (Bourdieu, P., 1979; Desrosières, A. & Thévenot, L., 1979).

The Swiss case

The Swiss people's representations of occupational similarities are different. At this stage, we have to emphasize that the Swiss society has developed its own socio-economic classification only recently (Joye, D. & Schüler, M., 1995). Indeed, "class analysis", or social stratification analysis, only appeared over the two or three last decades. Furthermore, the legacy of an historical model of occupational classification, of debates over social classes and the influence of the central State upon employment relations are not as meaningful as in the French case (Joye, D. & Schüler, M. 1995). Therefore, in this context, perceptions of occupational similarities are closer to a gradational schema or a linear ordering of occupations that remind us to a certain extent occupational stratification scales such as the International Socio-Economic Index of occupational status (ISEI; see Ganzeboom, H. B. G., De Graaf, P. M., and Treiman, D. J., 1992). This dimension is much less obvious in the French case [see Figure 2 and also Table 1.a & 1.b.].

Figure 1. Cognitive map of occupational titles (French respondents)

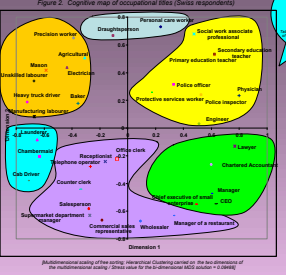


[Multidimensional scaling of free sorting. Hierarchical Clustering carried on the two dimensions of the multidimensional scaling / Stress value for the bi-dimensional MDS solution = 0.07586]

	ISEI
1st Eigenvalue	0.62277
2nd Eigenvalue	0.20127
Correlation between the two dimensions	0.00000

Table 1.a. Correlations of «Dimension 1 & 2 » of the MDS with ISEI (French respondents)

Figure 2. Cognitive map of occupational titles (Swiss respondents)



[Multidimensional scaling of free sorting. Hierarchical Clustering carried on the two dimensions of the multidimensional scaling / Stress value for the bi-dimensional MDS solution = 0.09406]

	ISEI
1st Eigenvalue	0.63377
2nd Eigenvalue	0.2112
Correlation between the two dimensions	0.00000

Table 1.b. Correlations of «Dimension 1 & 2 » of the MDS with ISEI (Swiss respondents)

Conclusion

Finally, these findings suggest that :

1. Representations of occupational structure amongst the population (or at least amongst the working population) seem difficult to reduce to a linear ordering or a gradational schema
2. Representations of occupational structure vary between countries; some representations are closer to linear ordering than others.

As a result, a hierarchical continuum of social status perhaps may never cover the wide range of representations of occupational structures.

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