Intergenerational Mobility in Switzerland

Status Transmission in Upper Class Families from 1924 to 1980

Subject
Switzerland defines itself as a meritocracy (cf. Becker/Hadjar 2009, Solga 2008). As a consequence, there should be no correlation between the social origin and the status of the respondent, when controlling for his/her achievements. Seeing that previous studies have failed to find a coherent trend, I combine multiple datasets and different statistical methods to overcome said insufficiency.

Due to limited space, I will only show, how upper class families transmit their privileged situation onto their children.

Current state of research
Concerning the intergenerational mobility of education and class in Switzerland, 9 studies have been conducted so far (time span: 1991-2010). While 5 studies have found an increased mobility (Lamprecht/Graf 1991, Buchmann/Sacchi 1998, Joye et al. 2003, Stamm/Lamprecht 2005 and Hadjar/Berger 2010), 4 stated no change (Buchmann et al 1993, 1996 and 2007, Bergann et al. 2002).

For Germany, the results are similar: Breen and Luijinx (2004) observed that social mobility with respect to class has stayed constantly low, while educational mobility has increased (Breen et al. 2009).

Central findings
1. The difference tests show hardly any significant changes concerning the influence of the independent variables on the possibility of belonging to an upper class.
2. Respondents with a tertiary education have the highest possibility of belonging to an upper class. However, because tertiary education depends strongly on social origin, the meritocratic principle isn’t fulfilled.
3. Surprisingly, a secondary education has the same influence on belonging to an upper class as parents belonging to an upper class.

Conclusions:
Intergenerational mobility concerning belonging to an upper class remained stable over the succession of birth cohorts. This possibility of belonging to an upper class depends mostly on the respondents’ tertiary education. Unexpectedly, respondents’ achievement of a secondary education has the same effect as parents belonging to the upper class.

Statistical model
I used a Multinomial Logit-Model to estimate my model with the following independent variables (full model): - Respondents’ and parents’ education - Parents’ class - Respondents’ sex - Birth cohorts - Datasets

Central findings
1. According to the difference tests, the possibility of completing a tertiary education does not seem to be influenced by the independent variables, except for the fact that women are getting better possibilities of higher education.
2. The possibility of achieving a tertiary education is primarily influenced by parents’ tertiary education, followed by respondents’ sex and parents belonging to an upper class.

Conclusions:
Intergenerational mobility concerning higher education remained pretty stable over the succession of birth cohorts. Respondents whose parents already hold a tertiary education have the highest possibility of achieving a tertiary education.

Operationalization
Education:
- Primary education: No further education after completing compulsory school
- Secondary education: High school graduation or completed apprenticeship
- Tertiary education: University degree or university of applied sciences degree

CASMIN (Goldthorpe 2000):
- Upper Class: Service class I + II, non-farm petty bourgeoisie w. employees.
- Middle Class: Non-farm petty bourgeoisie without employees, technicians and skilled manual workers, routine non-manual employees.

Explanation of the charts:
Solid lines: Significant change between cohorts.
Hollow markers: No significant difference to the reference group (i.e. primary education, low class and female).
Baseoutcome: Low class.
Significance level: 95%

How to interpret: A person born between 1955 and 1959 has a 50 percentage point higher possibility of belonging to an upper class if he/she has a tertiary education instead of no further education after finishing compulsory education.

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Literature