

Perspectives on Social Mobility in 19th and 20th Century Switzerland

Simon Seiler, University of Bern, Institute of Sociology

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Intergenerational social mobility is both an essential part of every open society and a central aspect of some of the most important topics in sociology such as social stratification, inequality, or fundamental changes of society often described as industrialization or, more generally, modernization. For the proposed project, changes in intergenerational mobility in Switzerland will be investigated from four different and novel perspectives. A first perspective deals with gender-specific changes in social mobility during the 20th century. Recent publications have found such differences between the two sexes but did not analyze the mechanisms behind them. To fill this gap, I will introduce information on mothers in my analyses and I will analyze separately the effects of social origin on education and on class outcome in order to evaluate the mediating role of education (indirect effect of social origin on class). Furthermore, analysis of the changing influence of social origin across the life-course will account for the assumption that differences between the two sexes can, to some extent, be attributed to interruptions in the employment biographies of women. A second perspective is motivated by the fact that, with one exception, Switzerland was excluded from all international comparisons of social mobility. Therefore, this sub-project will investigate social mobility in Switzerland from a European perspective and will assess the importance of institutional arrangements for specific changes in social mobility. A third perspective will focus on social mobility during the industrialization of Switzerland. Preliminary investigations show that for three cantons of Switzerland historical sources are available, which directly link occupations of sons to the occupations of their fathers. Complemented with additional sources, these historical sources will enable me to extract an approximately representative sample of observations at the individual level that can be used to compare social mobility between time-points and among differently industrialized areas. Therefore, it will be possible to test various hypotheses on the relationship between industrialization and social mobility. A fourth and already ongoing methodological sub-project further develops and evaluates a new approach for quantifying social mobility. This alternative approach will provide the methodological fundament of most analyses in the planned project and will contribute to the international literature on methods for social mobility research.