



HAL
open science

Introduction: Thinking about class boundaries in Europe

Cédric Hugrée, Pénissat Etienne, Alexis Spire

► **To cite this version:**

Cédric Hugrée, Pénissat Etienne, Alexis Spire. Introduction: Thinking about class boundaries in Europe. *Class Boundaries in Europe. The Bourdieusian Approach in Perspective*, Routledge, 2022, 9781032122670. hal-03911346

HAL Id: hal-03911346

<https://hal.science/hal-03911346>

Submitted on 22 Dec 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Introduction

Thinking about class boundaries in Europe

Cédric Hugrée

Étienne Penissat

Alexis Spire

In the 1980s and 1990s, many studies called into question the very concept of social class as a way of describing the evolution of social structures in Western countries, with some even announcing the death of social classes (Pakulski & Waters, 1995; Evans, 1999; Clark & Lipset, 2001). Thirty years later, the continuing increase in income and wealth inequalities has shifted the terms of the debate once again. It is true that individuals no longer automatically use the concept of social classes to orient themselves in social space, but it nonetheless remains relevant for describing and thinking about the social and economic dynamics at work in Europe. The question of the distances that separate social groups has never been addressed explicitly, yet it is an underlying issue in a large number of comparative studies. This book is a contribution to the renewal of that issue. It offers a new panorama of the forms that class boundaries take in European countries.

In their study of the sociology of social boundaries, Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár (2002) draw a distinction between three types of approach: those that focus on the properties or characteristics of social boundaries, those that analyse the mechanisms of their construction and justification, and those that question individual perceptions of social boundaries and subjective membership of social groups. This book favours the first approach: Each chapter identifies the characteristics of social classes in different national spaces and describes how they are distinguished from or opposed to one another. We therefore propose to document objective social boundaries, those that form the basis of individuals' living and working

conditions. In a period marked by the resurgence of economic inequalities, the erosion of social protections, and the decline of public services, social structures have been shifting under the influence of globalisation, especially since the 2008 economic crisis. In addition to these economic and political transformations, the expansion of access to higher education and the diffusion of mass cultural goods are increasing the porosity of social groups. The studies presented in this book pay particular attention to objective boundaries but also to the ways in which these relate to symbolic boundaries between social classes, and the discrepancies that can exist between the two.

Beyond the classical analysis of class structures

Challenging the idea of the end of social classes, the Swedish and British sociologists Robert Erikson and John Goldthorpe (1992) developed a theory of class structure and its boundaries based on the concept of the employment relationship, and created the class model commonly known as the EGP (Erikson, Goldthorpe, and Portocarero) typology. It was adapted in the early 2000s to become the European Socio-economic Classification (ESeC) (Rose & Harrison, 2010), and this classification has subsequently come to be widely used in comparative work on social stratification, to the extent that it has supplanted other schemes such as that of Wright (1996) as a reference for work comparing class structures in Europe and the world (Penissat & Rowell, 2012). In the EGP classification, the “service class,” composed of managers and professionals, is distinguished from “manual workers,” “lower services, sales, clerical and technical occupations,” and “routine occupations.” In this approach, class boundaries are analysed essentially on the basis of the degree of class reproduction or, in other words, the opportunities that individuals have for social mobility. These studies (e.g., Breen, 2004) show that social fluidity has increased overall in Western countries, thereby weakening the boundaries between social classes. Nevertheless, patterns of social reproduction persist, which justifies the continued use of class analysis.

This same approach, which is marked by the characteristics of British society (Brousse et al., 2010; Maloutas, 2007), has been the object of much discussion and criticism (Crompton, 2008; Savage et al., 2013; Savage, 2016): It has been argued that this scheme, reflecting the class relations of the 1970s, is no longer adequately adapted to a world of work where there is an increased participation of women, where forms of employment have become more segmented (the increase in unemployment, temporary contracts, and part-time work), and where activities have moved from the industrial sector to the service sector. In a study based on four social structures in Northern and Western Europe, Daniel Oesch (2006) attempted to better integrate the growing participation of a female labour force into social class theory and the tools for international comparison. Criticising the use of vertical oppositions and those based on markers of formal status such as qualifications or employment contracts, which are central to the Goldthorpean approach, Oesch suggested that we should instead examine the horizontal distinctions between social groups according to “technical work logic,” “organisational work logic,” and “interpersonal work logic.” This approach to classification has the advantage of making more visible both the gendered segregation of jobs and national

differences due to the distinct economic trajectories of different countries. It also provides a better understanding of the place of each country in the new international configuration of class relations: For example, similar trends can be observed in the structure of skilled and service jobs in Switzerland, Germany, the UK, and Sweden. Furthermore, Oesch highlights the relative social and political homogeneity of socio-cultural professionals, and identifies a “bicephalous working class,” split between low-skilled masculine jobs in industry and feminine jobs in service (Oesch, 2006, pp. 219–220). A further degree of precision can be achieved through an approach that views social mobility in terms of micro-classes, which shows that a significant part of the reproduction of social classes is in fact the result of the reproduction of occupations (Jonsson, Grusky, Di Carlo, Pollak, & Brinton, 2009). In addition, by taking into account the social position of parents, it becomes possible to shed light on modes of reproduction from one generation to the next that may remain invisible at the macro-class level (Bernardi & Gil-Hernandez, 2020).

Economists working on social inequality have developed a different approach, which delineates classes not by occupation but by wealth and economic resources. By aggregating data on income, recent studies have greatly advanced the understanding of inequality and its historical dynamics at the European and global levels (Piketty, 2013/2014; Atkinson, 2015; Milanovic, 2016). In this conceptual framework, classes are primarily conceived as wealth groups constructed according to metric thresholds—for example, the richest 10% for the upper classes, the “middle 40%” for the middle classes, and the bottom 50% for the working classes (Piketty, 2013/2014, p. 393)—which hardly correspond to real groups (Savage, 2021). However, the contribution of this work lies elsewhere. Firstly, it emphasises the strengthening of the boundary that separates the vast majority of society from a narrow elite or dominant class (the richest 1%, or even 0.1%), which has appropriated, in most countries of the world, a large part of the growth in capital income. Rather than focusing on the blurring of boundaries between the working and middle classes, this work emphasises the growing divide between a globalised dominant class and other social classes. This perspective places the possession of economic capital at the heart of the new class boundaries, linking social reproduction to inheritance and the transmission of wealth. In so doing, it relegates the effects of labour market position or cultural capital to the status of second-order oppositions.

Informed by these various approaches, the aim of this book is to study the boundaries between social classes in different European countries with a focus on the fractions to be found within each class and taking into account three dimensions: cultural capital, economic capital, and working conditions.

The contributions of Pierre Bourdieu’s social class theory

The representation of social space as proposed by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979/1984) made a valuable contribution to the analysis of class boundaries in Europe. Instead of a unidimensional and pyramidal representation in which individuals are situated on a continuous scale of positions, Bourdieu set out a

multidimensional analysis based on the geometric analysis of data. In this approach, each individual is positioned in a social space with multiple dimensions and is defined through the relationships they have with others (Bourdieu, 1991). The social classes are inscribed in this space both along a vertical axis corresponding to the volume of capital and along a horizontal axis referring to the composition of capital: the model therefore identifies fractions based on an opposition between those whose position depends mainly on cultural capital and those whose position depends mainly on economic capital. The concept of social space makes the relationship of homology between social positions and lifestyles visible, thanks to the concept of habitus. Thus, the working classes develop a “taste of necessity” that is opposed to the tastes of the dominant classes, which are instead orientated towards cultural legitimacy. The economic fractions of both the middle and the dominant classes, marked by their ostentatious consumption, are opposed to the more ascetic consumption of the cultural fractions of those same classes.

Many studies have drawn on this theoretical and methodological framework in order to explore the relationship between social position, lifestyles, and, especially, cultural practices (Coulangeon & Duval, 2015; Robson & Sanders, 2009). This approach has been replicated in several national areas other than France, such as the UK (Bennett et al., 2009; Le Roux, Rouanet, Savage, & Warde, 2008), Norway (Hjellbrekke, Jarness, & Korsnes, 2015), Hungary (Keller & Róbert, 2013), and Germany (Vester, 2005), and sometimes on narrower populations such as students in Sweden (Borjesson, Broady, Le Roux, Lidegran, & Palme, 2016). The relevance of this analytical model has also been demonstrated for regions and large cities, such as Flanders in Belgium (Roose, Van Eijck, & Lievens, 2015), Porto in Portugal (Pereira, 2018), Aalborg in Denmark (Prieur, Rosenlund, & Skjott-Larsen, 2008), and Stavanger in Norway (Rosenlund, 2015). These studies have reaffirmed the centrality of relative social positions in explaining differences in taste and unequal access to cultural practices and goods. Thus, class boundaries are still structured, in part, around cultural and symbolic oppositions, even if, in many Western countries, the classical culture of the elites is now more open to mainstream cultural productions than it was in the past (Khan, 2011). These studies therefore make visible the national patterns of distinctions and the classification struggles that are specific to each national history (Savage & Prieur, 2011).

Noting the limitations of the classical approach to class structures, sociologists working with Mike Savage (2013) have extended the scope of previous work in this field by seeking to identify class divisions no longer on the basis of employment but according to the economic, cultural, and social capital of individuals. Thus, in the Great British Class Survey (GBCS), conducted and analysed by this same group of sociologists, cultural practices are placed at the core of the definition of social classes. Furthermore, this approach makes it possible to assign a social class to the unemployed and the inactive, which is often difficult in the case of socio-economic classifications. It makes visible two boundaries that were not visible with Goldthorpe’s class scheme: firstly, the detachment of an elite from the rest of the upper classes, where the former owe their new position of domination to their over-accumulation of economic and cultural capital; secondly, the emergence, at the bottom of the social scale, of a “precariat” that is weakened not only in terms of economic capital but also in terms of cultural

and social capital. In a very different national context, Hungarian sociologists (Albert et al., 2018) have highlighted a similar configuration in Hungary, with an elite that is clearly distinct from the rest of society and a large underprivileged, precarious, racialised class with a significant proportion of Roma.

Finally, recent works based on Bourdieu's model of social space have shown that the ternary structure separating the working classes, the middle classes, and the upper classes is found in all European countries (Hugrée, Penissat, Spire, 2020), but that the internal oppositions between economic and cultural fractions are more salient in Western European countries (Brousse, 2017). In the same perspective, these works find that the volume of capital and the composition of capital can be seen as "universal principles of difference across capitalist nations old and new" (Atkinson, 2020, p. 59), even though the oppositions between cultural and economic fractions do not take the same forms in all OECD countries.

Reformulating the analysis of domination

These different studies have thus addressed the question of class boundaries in different ways in the light of economic and political developments since the late 1990s. They lead to a reformulation of the analysis of domination as first undertaken by Pierre Bourdieu.

First of all, the increase in income and wealth inequalities has changed not only the place occupied by the different types of capital in the reproduction of the social order, but also the role that gender plays in this reproduction (Bessière & Gollac, 2023). The question of the relative weight of cultural and economic capital has become central to renewing the sociology of classes (Savage, 2021), but this must be accompanied by a reflection on the elements that make up class boundaries. This is one of the aims of this book.

Secondly, studies on cultural practices in the UK (Savage et al., 2013), Norway (Hjellbreke et al., 2015), and Denmark (Prieur et al., 2008) have demonstrated the role of generational affiliation in cultural divisions. The mean age of different social classes, constructed from the GBCS, were found to vary considerably from one class to another. Furthermore, the preponderance of cultural capital over economic capital that had appeared in Bourdieu's work is becoming far less evident, and is the subject of debate among sociologists. Cultural capital corresponds to a form of domination that has changed over time (Serre & Wagner, 2015). Until the 1970s, the economic fractions of the "petite bourgeoisie" and the dominant classes invested mainly in the family transmission of cultural practices and tastes as a way of legitimising their domination, whereas the cultural fractions of the upper classes sought to consolidate their positions through academic certification. Since the 1970s, the economic bourgeoisie has invested more heavily in educational capital. In most European countries, strategies for gaining access to dominant positions now begin much earlier in children's school careers. Since the 2000s, these strategies have no longer just targeted certain educational qualifications, but rather the way in which they are obtained, and this quest for "flawless trajectories" now seems to preoccupy elites from the very beginning of their

children's schooling (Van Zanten, 2015). The studies collected in this book further clarify these findings: certified cultural capital—that which can be measured by the level of educational qualifications—remains a distinguishing marker at the bottom and in the middle of the social space, within the working classes and the destabilised fractions of the middle classes, but it is no longer a real criterion of distinction within the dominant classes, who now differentiate themselves more according to the types of establishments they have attended and the trajectories of excellence they have followed, rather than according to the level of educational qualifications alone.

The renewal of modes of domination can be found in all European social spaces, as illustrated by the Swedish case (Melldahl & Borjesson, 2015). The distinction between cultural practices is no longer the main focus of struggles between fractions of the upper classes, and the importance of the accumulation of international resources (travel abroad, investment in foreign languages, etc.) is one of the manifestations of the growing interpenetration between economic and cultural capital. In this context, the cultural bourgeoisie, whose position was mainly based on educational capital, has been downgraded owing to the rise of economic capital. At the same time, the expansion of access to higher education and the diversification of educational qualifications have also contributed to a depreciation in the value of cultural capital in relationships of domination. In several European countries, certain cultural fractions of the middle and dominant classes are now symbolically and economically destabilised, especially among teachers.

The neo-liberal turn of the 1980s, which occurred after Bourdieu's research presented in the 1979 book *Distinction*, thus invites us to re-evaluate the importance of economic capital in relation to cultural capital in relationships of domination. The increase in inequalities of income, and especially inequalities of wealth, has given a greater prevalence to economic capital, even in countries where these two dimensions were previously relatively autonomous. In countries where the state used to play an important role, political pressure to cut social spending and reduce taxation on the richest has largely weakened its redistributive functions. Debt has come to play a major role in consumption and in access to services such as education and health, which is thus becoming increasingly dependent on individuals' economic resources. As Magne Flemmen (2013) points out, this situation suggests that cultural capital should not be seen as a resource independent of economic capital. For example, the link between residential segregation and educational strategies has increased the relationship of dependency between economic and cultural capital: the acquisition of educational capital is increasingly dependent on economic resources that allow one to enrol one's children in expensive schools or to gain access, through residential criteria, to the best state-funded schools. Flemmen's analysis also calls for the reinsertion of class boundaries into our understanding of relationships of domination and exploitation at work (see also, Hugrée, Penissat, Spire, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic and its economic and social implications have shown the extent to which working and employment conditions constitute boundaries between social classes, in a situation, for example, in which some have the possibility of working remotely while others are exposed to health risks on a daily basis because their work brings

them into direct contact with the public. Several chapters of this book thus propose to integrate the question of domination at work in the sociology of classes inspired by Bourdieu.

The social space described by Pierre Bourdieu was that of French society over the course of the “Trente Glorieuses” (The Glorious Thirty), the thirty years of relatively consistent economic growth following the end of the Second World War. In 21st-century Europe, income and wealth inequalities are now much greater, but the apparent reduction in distances in terms of cultural practices largely masks the renewal of class inequalities (Friedman & Reeves, 2020). This book aims to document these developments in order to study the empirical and theoretical validity of the paradigm of domination developed by Bourdieu.

Outline of the book

The book contains twelve chapters devoted to individual countries and two chapters that adopt a comparative perspective. It is divided into five parts: the first three parts apply the Bourdieusian approach to the contemporary period in several European countries; the next two suggest ways of supplementing this approach by highlighting dimensions that are intertwined in the analysis of class boundaries (gender and race, place of residence, working conditions, and employment status) and which have previously been overlooked on the one hand, and by suggesting ways of thinking about class beyond the nation-state on the other.

This thematic division does not exclude the possibility that a chapter address several of these perspectives. The chapters are based on summaries of the research that has been carried out in each country, but also, in most cases, on new surveys. The sources and methods used in each chapter vary according to the authors’ preferences, and although geometric data analysis is frequently used, several chapters employ other complementary quantitative methods (descriptive statistics, cluster analysis, modelling). Finally, the challenge of producing a collection of this sort consisted in bringing together sociologists from different countries where the reception of the Bourdieusian approach has taken different forms, such that the analytical categories used do not always perfectly align. Interestingly, the taxonomies used and translated into English by the authors are generally convergent when it comes to describing the middle and working classes, with the occasional need to distinguish a precariat, as in the case of Hungary. On the other hand, the delimitation of the dominant classes is less homogeneous from one country to another: some authors focus on the elites and the richest, others on the dominant class, and still others on the upper and upper-middle classes. This constitutes the first finding of the book as a whole: It is at the top of the social space that class boundaries seem to have shifted the most in the last twenty years.

Social space and class polarisation

In **Part One**, the authors apply the Bourdieusian social space approach to contemporary contexts by examining the forms of relations between economic and cultural capital in the production of class divisions. Using the Norwegian case as a starting point, Magne Flemmen, Johs Hjellbrekke, Jan Fredrik Hovden, and Vegard Jarness (**Chapter 1**) highlight the reinforcement of boundaries between the dominant class and the rest of the population. The rich and precise data that they use regarding elites make visible a process that goes unnoticed when using an approach limited to the observation of inequalities between large social groups. In Norway, a country which has always had the reputation of being one of the least unequal in the world, the separation of the dominant class is manifested first and foremost by their monopolisation of wealth, particularly of property. In addition to this reinforcement of inequalities from above, there is a clear tendency towards social reproduction, through an increasingly marked closure of channels for social mobility. Data on recruitment to the most prestigious Norwegian universities indicate that inherited cultural capital plays an increasingly important role and is reinforced by the transmission of economic capital.

Despite talk of the end of social classes in Eastern European countries and the emergence of a middle class accessible to the whole of society, the case of Hungary, analysed by Péter Róbert (**Chapter 2**), also highlights a strong polarisation of social space: On the one hand, a precariat is becoming separated from the working classes, and on the other hand, an elite is distinguishing itself by means of its economic capital and its proximity to the field of power, both of which are mutually reinforcing. Thus, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the most privileged economic elites were able to continue accumulating wealth with the financial support of the government, while the economic and social situation of the rest of society deteriorated rapidly. In this context, the prevalence of economic capital over cultural capital in the structuring of major social boundaries seems stronger than in the 1990s.

A similar pattern can be found in the Polish case studied by Tomasz Drabowicz and Tomasz Warczok (**Chapter 3**). The possession of economic and cultural capital still structures the boundaries that cross the social space, but unlike in the period before the 2000s, cultural capital is now subordinated to economic capital, in the sense that financial resources have become crucial for acquiring educational capital. The division between businessmen and intellectuals within the dominant class is disappearing in favour of a more subtle division between “cultural” and “economic” fractions, which follows the logic of the market. Members of the cultural sector and the public sector, who are more often women, are being relegated to the middle classes. In Poland, as in other Eastern European countries, the weakening of the public sector has made cultural capital dependent on economic capital in the process of social reproduction. Educational capital, on the other hand, remains decisive for differentiation within the working classes between a growing group of service workers and the traditional working class.

Questioning the cultural reproduction of class boundaries

With the development of financial capitalism and the increase in wealth inequalities, the role of cultural capital, which lies at the heart of Bourdieu's analyses of the manufacture of class boundaries, warrants being re-evaluated and updated. This is the focus of the chapters in **Part Two**.

Using a study covering a whole century and based on cultural activities reported in *Who's Who*, Sam Friedman and Aaron Reeves (**Chapter 4**) show that cultural capital does not function as an internal boundary for British elites and proves to be much less divisive than in the French case studied by Bourdieu. This can be explained firstly by the ability of cultural elites to impose their tastes and practices on economic elites. Furthermore, unlike in the French educational system, the intellectual training of British elites is more homogeneous. Finally, the most privileged elites have apparently adopted a strategy of integrating various popular tastes and practices in order to minimise the display of distinctive cultural practices. The authors conclude that increasing economic inequality has convinced those who have benefited most from it to adopt mainstream tastes and practices in order to make their privilege less visible.

While cultural capital is not very relevant for differentiating elites in the British context, it generally seems to be a determining factor in distinguishing between the upper-middle classes and the working classes, and also between different fractions of the upper-middle classes. In the case of Greece, Thomas Maloutas and Nicos Souliotis (**Chapter 5**) show that the reproduction of the upper-middle classes, in particular professionals living in Athens, is assured by the closure of higher education to the working classes, by means of competitive examinations that students study for in private institutions. Within the upper-middle classes, the division between the dominant fractions (the most prestigious and best paid professions) and the dominated fractions (professions in the social and education sectors) is based on gender, educational distinctions (fields and level of study, opportunity to study abroad), and the transmission of cultural and economic capital from one generation to the next.

Finally, the acquisition of cultural capital, especially educational capital, structures a significant part of the divisions within the working classes. Virgilio Borges Pereira, Vanessa Rodrigues, Maria Inês Coelho, and Tiago Lemos (**Chapter 6**) highlight this internal division of the working classes in the Portuguese case. Their chapter focuses on employees and self-employed workers in the construction industry, which is a particularly important economic sector in Portugal. The large companies established in the greater Lisbon and Porto areas make extensive use of subcontracting through opaque outsourcing schemes. While the social reproduction of small-scale self-employed workers continues to rely on family transmission of economic and cultural capital (craft culture), the authors observe a crisis in this mode of reproduction for skilled manual workers, who are increasingly subjected to the need to accumulate educational capital in order to ensure the reproduction of their position and to achieve even a modest degree of social mobility.

Homology between class boundaries and political orientations

Although the relative autonomy of cultural capital in relation to economic capital has become less significant in differentiating class structures in Europe, it still structures political divisions, as the Danish and German cases show in **Part Three**. From this perspective, the homology between positions in social space and the adoption of political positions, as observed by Bourdieu in the French case, proves to remain an important heuristic device, including in other national contexts.

Several studies have already shown that educational capital functions as a powerful marker between individuals voting for the political left and individuals voting for the right or far right (Flemmen, 2014). In the case of Denmark, Jakob Skjøtt-Larsen and Annick Prieur (**Chapter 7**) propose the use of a tripartite division of social space, which makes it possible to distinguish between those who are privileged in terms of cultural capital and whose political opinion is closer to social democracy or the Greens, those who are privileged in terms of economic capital and who are sympathetic to right-wing discourse, and finally those who are less privileged and who take refuge in abstention or populism. In the case of Germany, analysed by Andreas Schmitz and Jakob Horneber (**Chapter 8**), social differentiations are also reflected in political representations and participation. The divide between advocates of cosmopolitanism and nationalism corresponds to a fundamental difference in ways of representing oneself and others, of opening up to the world, and of communicating; in other words, a difference in habitus. In this context, left-wing parties' focus on the defence of multiculturalism has led them to neglect classical economic issues and to lose votes from members of the working classes, who have turned instead to voting for the far right or abstaining, while those with economic capital vote for the conservative, the liberal, and increasingly, the green party. These two case studies confirm the divide—now found in many Western countries—between a highly-educated “Brahmin left” and a high-income “Merchant right” (Gethin, Martínez-Toledano, & Piketty, 2021).

Blind spots in the Bourdieusian approach

The chapters in **Part Four** take a step away from Bourdieu's analysis of social classes. These case studies focus on dimensions that are secondary to, or even absent from, his work, such as the relations between class, gender, and race, spatial differentiations within a national social space, and conditions of work and employment.

The widespread increase in the number of women in employment has progressively modified the representation of the class structure (Skeggs, 1997), albeit at different rates in different regions of the European continent. In the case of France, studied in this book by Cédric Hugrée and Yasmine Siblot (**Chapter 9**), the feminisation of the working population has been much more pronounced at the bottom of the social space—particularly among female blue-

collar workers—than in the higher professions, which are still predominantly masculine. This gendered distribution of jobs is accompanied by a division of domestic labour that also remains very unfavourable to women: Female manual or blue-collar workers who have young children are often forced to leave their jobs because they have less control over their working hours and are paid less, whereas middle- and upper-class women can afford to delegate some of the domestic work to female employees. One manifestation of this can be seen in affluent neighbourhoods in the west of Paris, where the economic fractions of the upper classes strive to build a space for themselves that excludes, through material and symbolic separation, the poor and racialised fractions of the working classes who live in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods of nearby districts.

Pierre Blavier's study of the Spanish case (**Chapter 10**) shows the decisive importance of property ownership in class divisions in Spain in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis. Indeed, property ownership is a powerful medium for social reproduction, which is primarily spatial, separating the desirable areas of certain large, high-value conurbations from the less favoured areas, where social tensions accumulate. Property ownership also structures generational divisions between young people, who have to devote an ever-larger share of their budget to housing, and their elders, who were previously able to become homeowners at a lower cost. Finally, home ownership creates new class boundaries insofar as differences in wealth can constitute divisions within a given professional group. The Spanish case also highlights the importance of regional inequalities: There is a strong contrast between, on the one hand, urban regions and areas, which have a high concentration of service-related occupations and the most highly-skilled professions, and, on the other hand, rural regions and areas, which have more agricultural and blue-collar occupations. The largest cities are able to accumulate most of the wealth, as in the case of the capital, Madrid, which is home to a large proportion of the Spanish upper class (almost 40% of its workers are professionals or technicians).

Although Bourdieu's work is attentive to the symbolic dimension of relations of domination, he sometimes neglected the importance of work and the forms of domination that it brings about in other spheres of social life. The transformations of European capitalism, however, prompt us to extend our research on inequalities connected to work. The case of Sweden, analysed by Andreas Melldahl (**Chapter 11**), shows how differences in working conditions still strongly structure class inequalities. Even though economic inequalities have increased dramatically, this has not fundamentally changed the situation of different social classes in terms of working conditions. Between 1995 and 2015, one might have expected an increase in the share of workers performing complex tasks among the dominant classes, or a decrease in the share of workers subject to physical strain among the working classes. However, the data for the Swedish case show a very high degree of stability in the differences in working conditions and attest to the fact that work is a structuring and enduring dimension of the definition of social classes.

The contribution presented by Angel Baraud, Laura Galhano, and Paul Hobeika (**Chapter 12**) invites us to consider the role of employment status in thinking about social relations. The authors address the question of how to take into account the inactive (retired, long-term

unemployed, etc.) in order to describe the structure of social classes in Europe as accurately as possible. This dimension is not very present in Bourdieu's work, and is also a blind spot in many studies on social classes, even though European societies are marked by ageing and unemployment. Retired and unemployed people often continue to define and position themselves in the social space according to their former socio-professional membership, but European statistical sources do not allow them to be classified accordingly, since their last profession is not recorded. However, the comparative study of the French and Portuguese cases in this chapter shows that this implicit exclusion of the economically inactive and the unemployed results in an under-representation of the working classes and makes the place of women and immigrants relatively invisible.

Beyond nations? Social class and globalisation

The question of work can thus be understood as a structuring dimension of the differences between social classes. The chapter by Étienne Penissat, Cécile Rodrigues, and Alexis Spire (**Chapter 13**) proposes to combine the analysis of working conditions and subjective relations to work in order to study the homology between class positions and personal well-being at work. The authors undertake the projection of this analysis on a broad scale by constructing a European social space that makes it possible to measure the commonalities and divergences in subjective relations to work. In this way, they examine the convergent (or non-convergent) effects of the transformations of European capitalism on class boundaries.

The analysis presented by Mike Savage, Arun Advani, and Andrew Summers (**Chapter 14**) on the British dominant class shows that we can no longer limit ourselves to the national framework when studying the mechanisms of economic domination. Many recent studies have helped to renew the analysis of social reproduction by focusing on the dominant classes and drawing a distinction between the "wealth elites" and the "established middle-class" (Savage, 2015a). Contemporary economic elites are very different from traditional upper-class groups (Savage, 2015b). The analysis in this chapter supplements that picture by highlighting that the specific characteristic of the British dominant classes is their ability to forge strong links beyond the national space. By focusing attention on "non-domiciled" individuals, the authors show that the international dimension is structural to the exercise of domination. Before 2008, the geography of the 'non-doms' is dominated by the most powerful European nations and the former British colonies. After the crisis, the former British colonies recede, and China and India make substantial gains. Thus, the UK is a global hub for three different interconnecting elite networks (the Anglosphere; the European; and the rising Asian). This variable-geometry internationalisation has become the hallmark of the ruling classes.

The chapters in this book focus on social cleavages that differ according to their national contexts. It is therefore difficult to draw general conclusions about class boundaries on a European scale. Still, a number of points of convergence can be highlighted. Several chapters show a form of polarisation at both extremities of the national spaces they analyse. On the one

hand, the dominant class concentrates different kinds of capital to such an extent that the differentiation between fractions endowed with economic capital and those endowed with cultural capital loses its importance. This domination is constructed upon a combination of labour income and wealth, and to a lesser extent on educational qualifications (Norway, Great Britain, Poland, Hungary). In addition, it is the very international resources and high-quality jobs monopolised by this dominant class that set it apart from the rest of the upper and upper-middle class. This concentration of capital takes place against a backdrop of state withdrawal, with effects such as the decline of public schools in favor of private schools and the accentuation of inequalities through the lowering of taxation on wealth. This does not mean, however, that the economic and political elites are becoming more distant from one another. The interpenetration of economic and political capital is particularly striking in the Polish and Hungarian cases. It takes more subtle forms in other European countries, notably through a marked alignment between conservative and liberal parties—and sometimes social democrats—and the economic fractions of the upper classes (Denmark, Germany).

On the other hand, though the concepts used are significantly different, several authors describe a structural cleavage within the working classes between stable and destabilised fractions (Poland, Portugal, France, Spain), with the latter sometimes referred to as the precariat (Hungary, for Great Britain, see also Savage et al., 2013). The internal cleavage within the working classes is also linked to inequalities in access to educational capital, which has become essential for any hope of minor social mobility (France, Portugal, Poland). Boundaries are also formed in relation to territorial and migratory resources (Spain), or as a function of gender and racial discrimination (France, Hungary, Poland). Finally, differences in working and employment conditions (France, Sweden, Poland, Hungary) also structure the internal boundaries of the working classes.

In a context of redeployment of European capitalism marked by the proliferation of low-skilled jobs and pressure on wage costs, relations of domination at work take on particular importance. These developments are accompanied by a symbolic devaluation and a political relegation of the working classes, who no longer support the majority of the social democratic and radical left parties. Some turn away from electoral mobilisation, sometimes—as in the German case—even turning to the extreme right for representation. Finally, the little space dedicated to the middle class in each illustrates the marginalisation of this social group in recent studies, despite its being hegemonic in political discourse. Whether from the point of view of economic capital (homeownership in particular), cultural capital, or employment and working conditions, it seems difficult to identify precisely the intermediate positions in the national social spaces studied. However, in most European countries, and particularly in Eastern European countries such as Hungary and Poland, the reference to the middle classes remains symbolically attractive—both for working classes that no longer identify with the declining working class and for those amongst the upper class who appropriate this label to mask their domination (see the chapter on Norway).

By providing, for the first time, an overview of social boundaries in Europe, this book joins the series of recent comparative works demonstrating the relevance of the concept of social class. By taking seriously the unequal effects of the globalisation of economic and cultural

activities, we hope to open up a dialogue between various fields of empirical research in order to improve our understanding of a European social space in the making.

References

- Albert, F., Dávid, B., Kmetty, Z., Kristóf, L., Róbert, P., & Szabó, A. (2018). Mapping the post-communist class structure: Findings from a new multidimensional Hungarian class survey. *East European Politics and Societies*, 32, 544–565.
- Atkinson, A. B. (2015). *Inequality*. Harvard University Press.
- Atkinson, W. (2020). *The class structure of capitalist societies: Volume 1: A space of bounded variety*. Routledge.
- Bennett, T., Savage, M., Silva, E., Warde, A., Gayo-Cal, M., & Wright, D. (2009). *Culture, class, distinction*. Routledge.
- Bernardi, F., Gil-Hernandez, C. J. (2020). The social-origins gap in labour market outcomes: Compensatory and boosting advantages using a micro-class approach. *European Sociological Review*, 37(1), 32–48.
- Bessière, C., & Gollac, S. (2023). *The gender of capital: How families perpetuate wealth inequality* [Manuscript in preparation] (J. Roger, Trans.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 2020)
- Börjesson, M., Broady, D., Le Roux, B., Lidegran, I., & Palme, M. (2016). Cultural capital in the elite subfield of Swedish higher education. *Poetics*, 56, 15–34.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (R. Nice, Trans.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1979)
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). Social space and the genesis of “classes”. In P. Bourdieu, *Language and symbolic power* (J. Thompson, Ed., G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.) (pp. 229–251). Polity Press. (Original work published 1983)
- Breen, R. (Ed.). (2004). *Social mobility in Europe*. Oxford University Press.
- Brousse, C., De Saint-Pol, T., Gleizes, F., Le Ru, N., Marical, F., Monso, O., & Wolff, L. (2010). *Assessment of the European socio-economic Classification prototype (ESeC): Lessons from the French experience*. INSEE, series “Document de travail de l’Insee”, n° F1006.
- Brousse, C. (2017). L’Union européenne, un espace social unifié ? [The European Union, a unified social space ?]. *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 219(4), 12–41.

- Clark, T. N., & Lipset, S. M. (Eds.). (2001). *The breakdown of class politics: A debate on post-industrial stratification*. Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Coulangeon, P., & Duval, J. (Eds.). (2015). *The Routledge companion to Bourdieu's "Distinction"*. Routledge.
- Crompton, R. (2008). *Class and stratification*. Polity Press.
- Erikson, R., & Goldthorpe, J. H. (1992). *The constant flux: A study of class mobility in industrial societies*. Oxford University Press.
- Evans, G. (Ed.). (1999). *The end of class politics: Class voting in comparative context*. Oxford University Press.
- Flemmen, M. (2013). Putting Bourdieu to work for class analysis: Reflections on some recent contributions. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 64(2), 325–343.
- Flemmen, M. (2014). The politics of the service class. *European Societies*, 16(4), 543–556.
- Friedman, S., & Reeves, A. (2020). From aristocratic to ordinary: Shifting modes of elite distinction. *American Sociological Review*, 85(2), 323–350.
- Gethin, A., Martínez-Toledano, C., & Piketty, T. (Eds.). (2021). *Political cleavages and social inequalities: A study of fifty democracies, 1948–2020*. Harvard University Press.
- Hjellbreke, J., Jarness, V., & Korsnes, O. (2015). Cultural distinctions in an “egalitarian” society. In P. Coulangeon & J. Duval (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to Bourdieu's "Distinction"* (pp. 187–206). Routledge.
- Hugrée, C., Penissat, É., & Spire, A. (2020). *Social class in Europe: New inequalities in the old world*. Verso.
- Jonsson, J. O., Grusky, D. B., Di Carlo, M., Pollak, R., & Brinton, M. C. (2009). Microclass mobility: Social reproduction in four countries. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114(4), 977–1036.
- Keller, T., & Róbert, P. (2013). Structural components of lifestyle and beyond: The case of Hungary. *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, 3(1), 55–75.
- Khan, S. R. (2011). *Privilege*. Princeton University Press.
- Lamont, M., & Molnár, V. (2002). The study of boundaries in the social sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28(1), 167–195.
- Le Roux, B., Rouanet, H., Savage, M., & Warde, A. (2008). Class and cultural division in the UK. *Sociology*, 42(6), 1049–1071.

- Maloutas, T. (2007). Socio-economic classification models and contextual difference: The “European Socio-economic Classes” (ESeC) from a South European angle. *South European Society & Politics*, 12(4), 443–460.
- Melldahl, A., & Borjesson, M. (2015). Charting the social space: The case of Sweden in 1990. In P. Coulangeon & J. Duval (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to Bourdieu’s “Distinction”* (pp. 135–156). Routledge.
- Milanovic, B. (2016). *Global inequality*. Harvard University Press.
- Oesch, D. (2006). *Redrawing the class map: Stratification and institutions in Britain, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland*. Springer.
- Pakulski, J., & Waters, M. (1995). *The death of class*. Sage Publications.
- Pereira, V. B. (2018). Urban distinctions: Class, culture and sociability in the city of Porto. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 42(1), 126–137.
- Penissat, É., & Rowell, J. (2012). Note de recherche sur la fabrique de la nomenclature socio-économique européenne ESeC [Research note on the construction of the European socio-economic nomenclature ESeC]. *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, (191–192), 126–135.
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the twenty-first century* (A. Goldhammer, Trans.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 2013)
- Prieur, A., Rosenlund, L., & Skjott-Larsen, J. (2008). Cultural capital today: A case study from Denmark. *Poetics*, 36(1), 45–71.
- Robson, K., & Sanders, C. (2009). *Quantifying theory: Pierre Bourdieu*. Springer.
- Roose, H., Van Eijck, K., & Lievens, J. (2015). Bourdieu’s space revisited: The social structuring of lifestyles in Flanders (Belgium). In P. Coulangeon & J. Duval (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to Bourdieu’s “Distinction”* (pp. 207–226). Routledge.
- Rose, D., & Harrison, E. (Eds.). (2010). *Social class in Europe: An introduction to the European Socio-economic Classification*. Routledge.
- Rosenlund, L. (2015). Working with distinction: Scandinavian experiences. In P. Coulangeon & J. Duval, *The Routledge companion to Bourdieu’s “Distinction”* (pp. 157–186). Routledge.
- Savage, M. (2015a). Introduction to elites from the “problematic of the proletariat” to a class analysis of “wealth elites”. *The Sociological Review*, 63(2), 223–239.
- Savage, M. (2015b). *Social class in the 21st century*. Penguin UK.

- Savage, M. (2016). The fall and rise of class analysis in British sociology, 1950–2016. *Tempo Social*, 28(2), 57–72.
- Savage, M. (2021). *The return of inequality*. Harvard University Press.
- Savage, M., Devine, F., Cunningham, N., Taylor, M., Li, Y., Hjellbrekke, J., ... Miles, A. (2013). A new model of social class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment. *Sociology*, 47(2), 219–250.
- Savage, M., & Prieur, A. (2011). Updating cultural capital theory: A discussion based on studies in Denmark and in Britain. *Poetics*, 39(6), 566–580.
- Serre, D., & Wagner, A. C. (2015). For a relational approach to cultural capital: A concept tested by changes in the French social space. *The Sociological Review*, 63(2), 433–450.
- Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of class and gender: Becoming respectable*. Sage Publications.
- Van Zanten, A. (2015). A family affair: Reproducing elite positions and preserving the ideals of meritocratic competition and youth autonomy. In A. Van Zanten, S. Ball, & B. Darchy-Koechlin (Eds.), *Elites, privilege and excellence* (pp. 29–42). Routledge.
- Vester, M., (2005). Class and culture in Germany. In F. Devine, M. Savage, & J. Scott (Eds.), *Rethinking class: Culture, identities and lifestyles* (pp. 69–94). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wright, E. O. (1996). *Class counts: Comparative studies in class analysis*. Cambridge University Press.