**Developmental paper for EDI 2017**

**Track: Crossing Borders: Class, Mobility and Inclusion**

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**Title: Social class in diversity research: A way of identifying socio-economic borders and disadvantaged people**

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*Introduction*

Inequality is increasing on the national and international level and leads to different forms of exclusion and segregation, which counteract the idea of social justice (Bowles, 2012; Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012). Inequality perpetuates into all realms of human life, group interaction, organizations, and civil society (Riaz, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). It interlopes into the hierarchical building of relations based on diversity categories, and therefore hierarchically ranks people along their diversity categories (Leana, Mittal, & Stiehl, 2012). Deriving from a critical diversity perspective this paper aims to address issues of social justice and inclusion in society and organizations. For advances regarding social justice and equality to happen however, disadvantaged people are in need of societal recognition and socio-economic redistribution (Fraser, 2005). This paper discusses an approach to gather disadvantaged people along socio-economic characteristics and aims to provide an example how identification of disadvantaged groups can be empirically achieved.

*Theoretical background*

Processes of inequality are mirrored in social relations, which can lead to oppression and exclusion of some people based on different diversity categories (Alberti, Holgate, & Tapia, 2013; Jones, 2011). Social relations between individuals and groups defined along diversity categories are not random. They are a result of historical, political and economic (re-) produced structures of power and hierarchy which are accompanied by a system of legitimation and hegemony (Weber, 2010; Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2010). Given these processes, critical diversity scholars have emphasized the role of social class as the prime explanatory diversity characteristic (Özbilgin & Tatli, 2011; Zanoni, et al., 2010). As such, social class does not only represent a diversity category but also an overarching explanatory concept which broadens the understanding of processes of difference, social exclusion and/or disadvantage in societies (Healy, 2015). Research on class draws attention to the its important role and its mutual influence with other diversity dimensions in the reproduction of unequal structures and practices. Thus, contextual class analysis reveals characteristics, which are influential on (re-)producing disadvantaged life realities. Despite this increasing inequality class as an explanatory concept seems to have lost its touch in diversity research for a long time and has been displaced by identity politics of diversity dimensions instead. Class research portrays and explains forms of inequality, power and so forth (Maclean, Harvey, & Kling, 2014). Class and power recursively shape each other and consequently structure relations between people (Côté, 2011; Kish-Gephart & Campbell, 2015). However, in the realm of diversity research, social class only slowly gains a position as an explanatory concept. Class analysis in diversity research has an immense potential to understand processes of exclusion and inequality and thereby to understand how diversity is organized. This has been brought forward by some scholars approaching diversity and organizational research from a critical perspective, to advance social class research in the field of diversity (Acker, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Fraser, 1995, 2000; Hanappi-Egger, 2013; Holvino, 2002, 2010; McCall, 2005; Weber, 1998, 2010; Zanoni, 2011; Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2010). They emphasize that, for social justice to happen, inequality mechanisms, and thus class, have to be a part of research. Social class as a diversity dimension stands out in defining and explaining inequality, difference, and oppression (Acker, 2000; Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013). Class is different from other diversity characteristics in the way how it is created and reproduced (Bourdieu, 1985a). While other diversity categories are per sé equal to each other, class categories come into being because of socio-economic inequality (Michaels, 2006; Weber, 1998). As an approach to gather people along their diversity categories, social class analysis can contribute to an understanding of distributional issues and offers the possibility of solutions to matters of social justice (Hanappi-Egger, 2013). For that reason a person’s position within the socio-economic relations tackles both recognitional and redistributional issues (Fraser, 1995, 2000). However, diversity research approaches are often categorical: research collective(s) and diversity dimensions are pre-defined. This does not come without risk of overlooking disadvantaged individuals and sub-groups (Hanappi-Egger, 2013; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). A few approaches have been proposed as a response to the preselecting and predefining diversity categories. Tatli and Özbilgin for example, argue that the categorical approach does not sufficiently address or uncover the disadvantaged diversity dimensions in a specific socio-historical context regarding power and hierarchy structures (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). In a similar stance Hanappi-Egger and Kutscher (2015) state a *supra-categorical approach* is an alternative, which is inclusive in terms of identifying and including belonging people along their diverse characteristics of disadvantaged life realities. The approach is supra-categorical because using the plural social class categories, people with different diversity characteristics can be gathered into one group, which is characterized by structural similarity. A supra-categorical approach offers an overarching roof for heterogeneity along the multi-dimensional disadvantage. People who are positioned in similar social spaces regarding their socio-economic disadvantage can be identified and therefore gathered as an entity. When their shared characteristics are identified, disadvantaged people can be addressed as a group and their interests can be made out and be a matter of representation for example.

*Objective and Methods*

In this endeavor social class analysis as an inductive approach helps to identify socio-ecnomically distinct groups within the society. The social class approach of Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1985a, 1985b) is perhaps the most useful theoretical approach to account for the multi-dimensionality of social class. Bourdieu (1985a; 1985b) proposed a holistic view of social class determined by three forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural. These capitals are primary determining the class structure, but are intertwined with secondary characteristics, most prominently diversity characteristics (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 182). The structural aspect of class can be determined by the capital structure while the subjective perception lies inherently in the identification with the structurally given socio-economic group. This way social class analysis contributes to identify disadvantaged groups that need recognition and redistribution (Fraser, 1995, 2000). The objective of this paper is therefore to apply social class analysis as a supra-categorical approach in order to identify disadvantaged groups of people within the Austrian society – the country case in this work. As a source of data the “EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions” 2013 (EU-SILC) data set has been chosen for analysis. The EU-SILC dataset is an instrument that provides EU structural data, employment status, forms of income, property, education, and social inclusion (Eurostat, 2015). The data quality has been reviewed by different organizations and researchers showing to fulfill the recommendations of quality criteria (Lamei, et al., 2013; Statistics-Austria, 2014). Cross-sectional data from 2013 is the most recent data set available to the author. Following similar empirical approaches (Savage, et al., 2013) cluster analysis has been chosen as an empirical method. Cluster analysis is a method to detect meaningful clusters of latent groups in a data set (Kaufman & Rousseeuw, 2005; von Luxburg, Bubeck, Jegelka, & Kaufmann, 2008). The analysis was carried out for every social class dimension following Bourdieu (1985a, 1985b); economic, social, and cultural. And the identified groups were investigated concerning additional characteristics (i.e. well-being) and diversity characteristics.

*Primarily Results and Discussion*

The preliminary results of this class analysis have unfolded characteristics of an unequally shaped society. High incomes, both from work and wealth, educational attainment, occupational level, as well as supervisory status are all skewed distributed from the group with the lowest distribution towards the group with the highest distribution of capitals. This also shows an association to aspects of satisfaction and well-being. These first results indicate that being a women, living in a single household, being either a single parent or having three or more children and working in certain occupational sectors show predictive characteristics of belonging to a low socio-economic group. The results will be a basis for a discussion about identified disadvantaged groups within the Austrian society.

*Contribution and limitations*

The results provide an explanatory pattern of who belongs to socio-economically disadvantaged groups and therefore is in need of societal recognition and redistribution. This information could also be a valuable source for practitioners and policy makers, in order to know which groups to address in social policy. As the source data has been collected by the Eurostat, the statistical office of the EU, the questions and investigated characteristics are predefined. Therefore there is a limited number of diversity characteristics, as well as other socio-economic and cultural aspects, which could be included into the analysis.

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