



Open Access Repository

[www.ssoar.info](http://www.ssoar.info)

## From statistical categorizations to ordinary categorizations of social space: history and legacy of an original study based on a card game

Penissat, Etienne; Brousse, Cécile; Deauvieau, Jérôme; Chevillard, Julien; Barozet, Emmanuelle; Mac-Clure, Oscar

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Penissat, E., Brousse, C., Deauvieau, J., Chevillard, J., Barozet, E., & Mac-Clure, O. (2016). From statistical categorizations to ordinary categorizations of social space: history and legacy of an original study based on a card game. *Historical Social Research*, 41(2), 135-154. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.41.2016.2.135-154>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

  
Leibniz-Institut  
für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der  
  
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Diese Version ist zitierbar unter / This version is citable under:

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-46962-5>

---

## From Statistical Categorizations to Ordinary Categorizations of Social Space: History and Legacy of an Original Study Based on a Card Game

*Etienne Penissat, Cécile Brousse, Jérôme Deauvieu, Julien Chevillard, Emmanuelle Barozet & Oscar Mac-Clure\**

---

**Abstract:** »Von der statistischen Kategorisierung zur alltäglichen Kategorisierung des sozialen Raums: Geschichte und Vermächtnis einer originären und auf einem Spiel mit Karten basierender Studie«. This article puts the sociology of quantification invented and promoted by Alain Desrosières into perspective regarding a fruitful but rarely addressed approach in this research stream: the relationships that are built between official (or scholar) classifications and ordinary categorizations of the social space. In order to achieve this, the article first sheds light on the history of an innovative study designed by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, a study which aimed to put ordinary people in the position to produce their own classification of the social space on the basis of a "card game." In a second step, we aim to compare and analyze the later uses of this study in France and abroad (Germany, Chile and Switzerland). Beyond differences due to each study's design and theoretical background, every study's collected ranking clearly depicts hierarchical social structures, even though those rankings show some variations which rely on the kind of information indicated on each card games, national contexts and respondents' dispositions.

**Keywords:** Quantification, official classification, ordinary categorizations, social space, comparison, State, card game, conventions.

---

\* Étienne Penissat, Lille Center for European Research on Administration, Politics and Society (CERAPS), University of Lille 2, 1 Place Déliot, BP 629, 59024 Lille Cedex, France; [etienne.penissat@univ-lille2.fr](mailto:etienne.penissat@univ-lille2.fr).

Cécile Brousse, Direction de l'animation de la recherche, des études et des statistiques (DARES), Minister of Labor, 39-43 Quai André-Citroën, 75015 Paris, France; [cecile.brousse@travail.gouv.fr](mailto:cecile.brousse@travail.gouv.fr).

Jérôme Deauvieu, Maurice Halbwachs Centre, Department of Social Sciences, Ecole normale supérieure, 48 Boulevard Jourdan, 75014 Paris, France; [jerome.deauvieu@ens.fr](mailto:jerome.deauvieu@ens.fr).

Julien Chevillard, Institute of Social Sciences, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lausanne, Bâtiment Géopolis, 1015 Lausanne, Switzerland; [julien.chevillard@unil.ch](mailto:julien.chevillard@unil.ch).

Emmanuelle Barozet, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Chile, Av. Capitán Ignacio Carrera Pinto 1045, Ñuñoa, 7800284, Santiago de Chile, Chile; [ebarozet@uchile.cl](mailto:ebarozet@uchile.cl).

Oscar Mac-Clure, Center for the Investigation of Society and Public Policy, University of Los Lagos, Moneda 1965, 8340500 Santiago de Chile, Chile; [oscar.macclure@ulagos.cl](mailto:oscar.macclure@ulagos.cl).

---

## 1. Introduction

---

The “sociology of statistics”<sup>1</sup> – renamed, in the early 2000s, as the “sociology of quantification” – emerged in France in the 1970s following the meetings between statisticians and sociologists at INSEE (National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies) – including Pierre Bourdieu, most notably, who then taught sociology at ENSAE (National School of Statistics and Economic Administration)<sup>2</sup> in the 1960s and urged future government statisticians to realize the need for reflexivity in the usage (development, handling, interpretation) of statistical categories (Desrosières 1998). At the crossroads of public statistics and sociology, Alain Desrosières is one of the main instigators of this new French sociological research project (Didier 2014),<sup>3</sup> one of whose main features is to turn statistics into an object of sociological study in its own right, not just as a source or mere data used by sociologists to prove their points. Alain Desrosières and colleagues intended to “denaturalize” statistics by showing that creating nomenclatures, categorizing, and counting objects or people make up a whole social activity which must be made intelligible (Desrosières 1998). Far from being “neutral” and “cold,” statistical information is based on conventions and categories that suggest a specific outlook on society. The point is then to observe statistical activity to highlight its survey and coding practices, but also power relations and bargaining between interviewers and respondents, between sponsors and data producers, as well as between statisticians and statistical clerks, etc. In this way, it becomes possible to show how statistic is not only a way to “reflect” reality but rather to actually “institute” it (Desrosières 1997).

This research program leads to a proliferation of studies scrutinizing various items. However, a particular object will, from the start, make up a kind of “model” of the sociology of statistics, namely, occupational classifications. The French nomenclature of the so called Socio-Professional Categories<sup>4</sup> (*Catégories socio-professionnelles*, henceforth CSP) indeed enjoys a special status in French society: This tool – developed in the early 1950s in a small INSEE department by an original statistician, Jean Porte – has emerged as the interpre-

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors thank Muriel Surdez for assistance with translating articles from German into French and Franz Schultheis who granted us an interview on the study based on a card game he completed with his students in the late eighties, although they may not agree with all of the interpretations/conclusions of this article.

<sup>2</sup> ENSAE is an institution of higher learning in the fields of statistics, economics, finance, and actuarial science which trains statisticians for INSEE.

<sup>3</sup> See also the contribution of Emmanuel Didier in this HSR Special Issue.

<sup>4</sup> CSP (turned PCS in 1982) is a classification that groups together occupations by combining several criteria (qualification, employed or not, hierarchical position, etc.). Since 1982, it has three aggregation levels, the most aggregated consisting of eight socio-occupational groups (farmers, craftsmen, shopkeepers and entrepreneurs, managers and higher intellectual professions, middle management, employees, workers, pensioners, others with no profession).

tative framework of social groups and social inequalities in France. Pollsters, public officers, political scientists, sociologists, statisticians, journalists, and experts refer to it daily (Desrosières and Thévenot 2002; Amossé 2013). The predominance of this “vision of social divisions” imposed itself on social actors (Bourdieu 1981), led by Alain Desrosières’ group of statisticians and sociologists to retrace the social history of this object, to show it as the product of a specific historical and political construction. This intellectual enterprise was all the more dynamic when INSEE, in the late 1970s, began a process of “renewing” CSP, which has elicited a series of studies on statistical work, and more broadly on the issue of categorizations. Alain Desrosières delved into the archives of public statistics to reconstruct the history of socio-occupational categories in France since the late nineteenth century (Desrosières 1977). Laurent Thévenot observed INSEE investigators’ and encoders’ practices in the field and in coding workshops to bring out the logic governing the growing statistical generality but also INSEE agents’ knowledge and expertise (Thévenot 1983). These works then matched Luc Boltanski’s concerns, who had for several years been reflecting on scholars’ taxonomies, and who was then completing his study of the construction of the social group called “*cadres*” (i.e. managers and professionals) in France (Boltanski 1979).

In the context of this intellectual ferment, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot then imagined an innovative study: placing “ordinary” respondents in the position of statisticians having to design statistical nomenclatures or having to find out the profession of a person based on only partial information about this person. This study is original in that it is not based on the usual social sciences methods – archives, statistical questionnaires, interviews, or direct observations – but on an experimental protocol where respondents are put in an extra-ordinary situation, namely that of producing and thinking out a classification of social space. The “fun aspect” of the experiment should not mask the major relevance of this device, which will be used to build up a reading grid of categorization and social cognition processes. Though Alain Desrosières was not directly involved in the investigation, this research fits completely in the sociology of statistics syllabus he had initiated in the 1970s. He, for that matter, used these study results extensively, as reflected in his famous book on socio-occupational categories, published with Laurent Thévenot in the late 1980s. This original study asked two sets of questions that turned particularly fruitful for the sociology of quantification and beyond, for any sociology that pays attention to the production of symbolic goods. First, this original shift – from the statistician to the layman – raises questions about what it means to classify and code, i.e. the different logics that form the structure of categorization practices, whether by experts or laity. Then, these investigation devices lead to the analysis of the relationships between official classifications (or by academic scholars) and common knowledge about the social world. Basically, they make it possible to carry out

the sociology of the way expert classifications are received and of the remoteness or similarities between expert and ordinary categorization practices.

By following the principles of Alain Desrosières' research program, this article aims to report on the ways experimental studies via card games are constructed and made use of in several national spaces. Indeed, this novel approach has recently been taken up again in France but also in Germany, Switzerland and Chile. We intend, at first, to show how the pioneering 1981 study is part of the quantification sociology syllabus by re-examining the context of its development and its main results. Secondly, we study the different uses of this "card game" abroad – focusing both on similarities with Alain Desrosières' sociology and shifts regarding the way this research design has been imported into different national contexts – and review the respective contributions of these investigations.

---

## 2. Towards the Sociology of Statistical and Common Categorizations: Going Back on the Lessons Learned from an Experimental Investigation

---

Alain Desrosières' historical work on CSP has revealed the historicity of categories used to describe the social world, but also the fact that statistical and legal categories participate in institutionalizing and anchoring a vision of social hierarchies in French society. Defining categories and delimitating groups belong to a political representation work that is not socially and politically neutral. Somehow, the CSP nomenclature participates in "building up" social groups and giving them visibility, hence a "reality" in society. The study, conducted from a series of games, is an extension of this work. Indeed, the approach focusing on the study of common categorization makes it possible, firstly, to denaturalize statistical categories by showing the degree of arbitrariness of these rankings and the plurality of possible classifications. Secondly, it becomes also possible to observe the way laypersons receive and internalize statistical classifications. Boltanski's and Thévenot's description of the experimental study allow tracing the game's features, its main objectives, and salient results.

The study was conducted with several groups of individuals presenting differentiated social profiles (marketing department executives, sales representatives of a multinational agrobusiness, school teachers who belong to a retirement club, etc.). Respondents were divided into groups of 12 or 14 persons – an even number that permits the formation of pairs. The study includes three games: the typical cases game, the card game, and the portrait (or poker) game.

In the "typical case" game, respondents must give examples of "cadres" (i.e. managers and professionals) and "workers" by specifying some elements relat-

ed to their characteristics (sex, age, and qualifications), their employment (the position held, company size, etc.) conditions, and living (home, car) standards. As for the card game, the point is to group pairs of players together, real people, represented by cards, who belong to the same “social environment,” using the information written on the cards: first name, age, educational level, occupation, status (self-employed or employee), qualification, the institution’s activity, and address. Secondly, respondents must provide a name and designate a representative card (“a case in point”) for each group. All the interviewees finally negotiate a common classification. The latest game, the so-called portraits or poker game, makes respondents compete with each other to find out a “mystery profession” from a series of clues they can (fictitiously) buy at a higher or lower price: the more information clues give on lifestyles, the higher their price. The winner is the person who finds the “mystery profession” by spending as little money as possible.

Note that this study system was then used as part of INSEE’s encoder-training (INSEE 1982). At the end of their training, all the practices and results implemented in these “games” were faced with the reviewed 1982 CSP and generally compared with the description of the social space as developed by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984). The material collected during interviews and games, but also during these training courses, then formed the empirical foundation of the article entitled “Finding one’s way in social space” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1983), taken up again by Desrosières and Thévenot in the book they published in 1988 (Desrosières and Thévenot 1988).

The contours of this investigational device therefore take the opposite of the domination relationship usually applied: “laity” and not “experts” are, during the time of the study, in a position to delineate the social world. This is no trivial process as it supports a sociological project. First, it shows that statistical institutions’ classification and quantification work is not neutral, but involves imposing a particular vision of the divisions found in the social world. On the other hand, the point is to showcase laity’s expertise and knowledge of the social world (and INSEE encoders’ familiarity with it) to account for the plural tracking and identification logics in the social world.

## 2.1 Dissemination and Reception of Statistical Categories in Society

Starting from ordinary representations of society allows ultimately re-examining official categories in terms of their dissemination and reception in society. The question asked by the sociology of quantification is the following: To what extent do statistical categories – or “rankings by the State,” as Pierre Bourdieu puts it – impose themselves in the individuals’ reference and representation universe? This is one of the important results of the 1981 study taken up by Desrosières and Thévenot in 1988: For the most part, respondents describe the social world in a way that complies with expert categories, as dis-

seminated by official statistics and, more widely, by government institutions. Indeed, to name the groups they create, players mostly use the names found in the categories set up by INSEE's CSP classification, though these actually constituted groups are heterogeneous and not necessarily in agreement with the official definition of the nomenclature.

In other words, the lack of agreement among players on all occupations that belong to the "executive" group does not prevent most respondents from creating a group entitled as such to describe the top of the social space. Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot concluded:

The homogenization of the system of professional titles, names of occupations and, more generally, of social classifications, and above all the creation of official spaces for the representation of occupational groups (whether real ones, like the corporate bodies [conseils], or symbolic ones, like nomenclatures), belong to the series of unifying processes (linguistic, educational, legal, etc.) linked to the formation of the State. Just as the law is 'presumed to be known by all,' so nowadays, in France, everyone is sufficiently acquainted with the official system of occupational-group representation to be able to use it, whether to reconstruct it from memory, to perform classifications, to argue with other people about its validity, or, when the occasion arises, to situate themselves within it (Boltanski and Thévenot 1983, 672-3).

The study therefore allows for the conclusion that CSP have indeed been disseminated in, and have penetrated, the common representations of the French social space; and the same is true as well – by means of CSP – of the institutional categories that underpin them (Desrosières and Thévenot 2002, 54).

## 2.2 From the Political Representation Work to the Social Categorization Logics

The importance of the political work done on social groups' representation in common categorizations is confirmed by the designation of cases in point, or "good examples." Occupations considered the most representative of the groups constituted by respondents are those that were the subject of the most noticeable political representation work. For example, the skilled metallurgy worker is almost always considered representative of groups made up of cards representing the popular classes. It is as if the typical figure of the worker put forward in the post-war period by the CGT (General Confederation of Labor) and the PCF (French Communist Party) was "necessarily" assessed as representative of groups formed by respondents, again regardless of the cards put in the same pile in these groups. As observed by Alain Desrosières and Laurent Thévenot,

this political representation work thus determines the creation of good examples and it may explain, in contrast, why the following cases were rarely chosen, though they were all eligible to rank at the top of the pile of unskilled manual workers categories: housekeeper, car-dealership storekeeper, storekeeper assistant, and night watchman (Desrosières and Thévenot 2002, 56).

Thus, the “good example” is not necessarily the most statistically representative of the social group it stands for. Therefore, the “executive” considered as representative by respondents is very different from the executive deemed representative in a statistical sense. The study “clearly shows that cognitive categorization processes cannot, when it comes to social categorization, be separated from political representation procedures and principles” (Desrosières and Thévenot 2002, 59).

However, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot point out that this internalization of the state and political description categories of the social world does not prevent variations according to the respondents’ characteristic features and social trajectories. “In these debates, the participants sometimes speak as if they were the representatives or spokespersons of a social group, appointed to advocate its specificity, identity and interests in political or union bargaining” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1983, 656). Discussions between players having to agree on a common classification thus lead to the creation of a “system of antagonistic positions in which participants speak as a function of the dispositions and properties of habitus (see Bourdieu 1984) which they derive from their class origin and class position” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1983, 656). Thus, as did Coxon (1974) before them or, later, Dominique Joye and Lorenzi-Cioldi (1988), they use many examples to show that the forms of social cognition and spotting cannot be analyzed independently of players’ positions and social features.

### 2.3 The Plurality of Categorization Forms

Identifying these variations between individuals leads to another important conclusion: when respondents refer to the expert categories, this does not necessarily mean they have internalized statisticians’ technical logic. Therefore, to sort out the cards or find the mystery individual, they mobilize their personal experiences, often familiar clues and cases – not standardized criteria. As Desrosières and Thévenot put it,

we managed to measure the distribution of the official representation of CSP, while highlighting the cognitive mechanisms that guide practical ranking activity substantially depart from the logic of technical criteria. These mechanisms on one hand build on the formation of typical images of categories, which owe much to the political work of representing social groups. On the other hand, they rely on an interpretation capability that is anchored on a personalized construction of the social environment, treated as a familiar domestic world (Desrosières and Thévenot 2002, 61).

Card combinations, and even the mystery profession game, support the latter finding. Those who find it most easy are those that mobilize their intimate experience of the social world by relying not on general and institutionalized criteria (socio-demographic variables) but on clues related to the lifestyle associated to the mystery profession. This approach, based on experience and on the familiar knowledge of a number of social space fractions, precludes a “cri-



terion-referenced” approach. The authors conclude from it that there is a distinction between two forms of relationship to the world: one based on reference to the official representations of social position, the other on the knowledge and recognition of indirect signs (tastes, ways of living, etc.) related to these social positions. Building on these results, Alain Desrosières later suggested that

the opposition also explains what distinguishes, among social sciences survey methods, monographs on one hand – covering cases deemed typical, and whose generalization is based on the idea of exemplarity –, and on the other the surveys based on representative samples for which generalization is based on probabilistic schemata (Desrosières 1989, 236).

State rankings therefore impose themselves neither perfectly nor unequivocally. In the “cases in point” game, though players rely on institutional and political categories to select examples of “cadres,” they are also able to distance themselves from the dominant representation. They select examples they know are far different from these standards but they wish, that way, to select a “case in point example” not in the sense of a “paradigmatic” one but one “worthy to be exemplary.” It is on this point, by emphasizing players’ reflexivity and critical distance face to the categories they handle, that Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (and Alain Desrosières, too), operated a turn toward what was later called pragmatic sociology.<sup>5</sup> These works mark the “shift from an interpretation in terms of institution language and classification struggles, to a plurality of logical identity production” (Amossé 2013, 1057).

Hence, this study can be said to be the bedrock of pragmatic sociology (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) and of an approach paying attention to the close relationship that develops between classification and assessment operations, where the classification of occupations is based necessarily on forms of judgments on profiles shown on the cards. Thus, Alain Desrosières claims this seemingly statistically neutral operation cannot be separated from and analyzed without reference to the types of judgment and perspective it brings into play on society (Desrosières 1989).

---

### 3. Classification and Ordinary Knowledge of the Social World in Switzerland, Germany and Chile

---

The “card game study” device initiated by these pioneers (Boltanski, Thévenot, and Desrosières) has long remained childless. However, it was re-discovered in the mid-1990s by several research teams and in different national contexts: in Germany (Schultheis et al. 1996, 1998), Switzerland (Neuhaus 2008a, 2008b,

---

<sup>5</sup> In the wake of this change, the *Groupe de Sociologie Politique et Morale* (GSPM) was created in 1984.

2011; Chevillard, 2009), Chile (Barozet et al. 2014; Mac-Clure et al. 2015a, 2015c), France (Deauvieu et al. 2014) and in a more general way in several European countries (Deauvieu et al. 2011; Filhon et al., 2013). The adaptation and re-use of Boltanski and Thévenot's card game occurred in special historical and national contexts as well as within affiliations differentiated from the sociology Desrosières and his two colleagues had initiated.

### 3.1 Between Bourdieu's Sociology and Pragmatist Sociology

In general, these investigations are part of contexts marked by debates on social classes and/or boundaries between social groups. This is particularly the case in the Chilean investigation that extends a large statistical survey on social inequalities in the context of the growing power of social movements initiated in 2011 by the middle classes (students in particular) challenging excessive social inequalities. Forty years of the neoliberal model have transformed not only the social structure, but also professional and class identities. Similarly, in the case of Switzerland, Lukas Neuhaus examines first the socio-economic changes that, he said, necessarily affect the representations of the Swiss social space. Since the population's general education level has increased sharply and jobs are being moved from manual labor to white-collar work, he hypothesized that perceived social cleavages are no longer at the same level as before and that distinctions among middle and upper professions have become greater.

This type of questioning is also pregnant in the case of Germany, in Schultheis' work, since it emerged in the wake of Ulrich Beck's work on the end of social class and the imposition of individualism, or then again in French team's case, in the context of the debate in France on the re-composition of class divisions (skilled/unskilled and private/public). However, in the latter two cases, the card game study is also used to test official classifications. Proximity to the pioneers' objective is then more conspicuous. Schultheis' comparison with the French case is seen as a means to evaluate the role of the State and of German public statistics in the dissemination of the way social divisions are represented. As for the French study, it developed within an intense debate consisting, on one hand, in questioning the relevance of PCS nomenclature to grasp today's French social space; and on the other hand, hinging around the relevance of making a European classification based on Goldthorpe's class schemata often seen as unsuited to French society (Brousse 2009; Rowell and Penissat 2012). Questioning the relevance of official categories is even more explicit in Chevillard's research, as it aims to test whether or not Swiss respondents and especially French respondents residing in France and working in Switzerland (i.e. frontier workers) reproduce identical classification schemata (or very close), thus raising the matter of the appropriateness of using the PCS nomenclature in the case of employees working on the Swiss labor market.

These distinctions are reflected in the growing importance (or not) of the issue of the relationship between lay and official categorizations (statistics), at the core of 1980s research works. This question is central to Schultheis, Deauvieu et al., or again Chevillard, who relate the classifications obtained by them and by statistical institutions. Conversely, this comparison is virtually absent from Neuhaus' and the Chilean team's works. These differences (we will see they also alter investigation protocols) are not only related to the contexts of use of the original investigation; they also have to do with the sociological trends these researchers are part of. A rather "Bourdieu-like" trend, visible as has been said above in Desrosières' early work, which focuses on "classification struggles" and the dissemination of "state rankings" in the case of Schultheis and of the French team, as well as a more pragmatic affiliation among Chilean researchers who focus more on the plurality of ways the social world is perceived and of the judgments that accompany them.<sup>6</sup>

Interest in the issue of the role played by the State in the production and dissemination of social classifications also heavily influenced Chevillard's decision to import the card game. This affiliation is coupled with reference to a very prominent tradition in Switzerland of works on multidimensional classifications of social space (Lorenzi-Cioldi, Joye 1988), as opposed to one-dimensional approaches disseminated via prestige scales.

Neuhaus' borrowing from Desrosières', Boltanski's, and Thévenot's sociology is not so obvious. He especially emphasized that the latter were content to take into account individuals' trajectories and their social positions but paid not enough attention to their professional socialization. Actually, Neuhaus assumes social groups' perceptions are closely linked to mental structures learned and internalized in the workplace. He therefore aims to make a contribution to the theory of social classes highlighting the anchoring of ways of seeing and perceiving related to professional socialization.

### 3.2 "Sorting Out" or "Naming"? Similarities and Differences in Investigative Protocols

Such imports and re-appropriations of the original study led research teams to adapt the initial study system of the card game in different ways.<sup>7</sup> The first distinction falls within the favorite polling mode: whether individual or collective. The Chilean and German teams, who were mostly interested in naming and classifying processes have, as in the original investigation, interviewed

---

<sup>6</sup> Note also that the Chilean team includes sociologists (Emmanuelle Barozet and María Luisa Méndez), a socio-historian who has long worked in the Chilean statistical system (Oscar Mac-Clure) and a psycho-sociologist (Virginia Guzmán). Funding: FONDECYT projects N°1130276 and N°1150808. We also thank COES CONICYT/FONDAP/15130009 and Cristóbal Moya, research assistant.

<sup>7</sup> The Chilean team also again took up the portraits game (Mac-Clure et al. 2015b).

respondents collectively to observe interactions between players and the justification registers they mobilized. By contrast, the French team and Julien Chevillard, who wished to identify respondents' categorization logics, have opted for one-on-one interviews. Lukas Neuhaus has adopted the same interview method but with a different perspective: he articulated the game with biographical interviews to analyze the effects of socialization on social representations.

These differences are also reflected in the ways information is dealt with. The French team and Julien Chevillard sought to quantify their results<sup>8</sup> and have so far mainly focused on the rankings produced as revealing visions principles of social divisions. In contrast, the German and Chilean teams,<sup>9</sup> like Boltanski and Thévenot's, have mostly used their observations qualitatively, the former focusing specifically on the names given to groups, while the latter looked at classifications and titles. Unlike the pioneers, no team has really tackled the issue of the representative cards of the groups formed by respondents. This blind spot has to do with the fact that none of the teams has a priority interest in the issue of the political work of group representation.

These differences are also found as regards interrogation methods and material processing is not necessarily reflected in the choice of respondents and of the information written on the cards. In general, although only the French team could, so far, present a representative sample, the teams sought to vary respondents' social characteristics to assess the changes in ranking based on respondents' characteristic features. Lukas Neuhaus is the only one focusing on specific audiences (teachers, engineers, lawyers and health professionals) in connection with his approach geared toward the impacts of professional socialization. As for Julien Chevillard, he wanted to assess whether the PCS classification was relevant and useful in the context of the Swiss labor market, and has therefore deliberately selected a sample of Swiss workers, French workers and frontier workers.

The information on the cards has also been adapted firstly to national contexts, and secondly on researchers' other specific questions. The transposition of the card game has been first to "give a national flavor" to the games, for card profiles to be "understandable" because they were hence "representative" of the studied contexts. That is why, in the German case, the legally codified and institutionalized terms – *Angestellte* (employees) and *Beamte* (officials) had to be inserted in the card game. Now, the Chilean case has led to the most extensive reformulation since it was unthinkable, in this specific country's context, to ignore ethnic differences, including representing the Mapuche Indians – who

---

<sup>8</sup> The French study was conducted in partnership with INSEE and Eurostat, since lack of results quantification was unthinkable for the institution.

<sup>9</sup> Secondly, following an exchange with the French team, the Chilean team has also analyzed quantitative results. The quantitative analysis reinforces the qualitative one and prepares the ground for a large-scale survey in 2016.

are a numerically significant minority – or overlook gender differences, due to the significant presence of housewives.

Even in the French case, the card game was not the same as in the 1981 study. Some professions widely found in the original card-game, such as skilled workers in the secondary sector, had much less weight in 2008 than they had in the late 1970s. These workers' profiles have almost disappeared from the card-game, while tertiary-sector employees and workers are significantly more represented. These forms of "translating" the game to take into account national contexts or different socio-economic circumstances reflect the difficulties and interrogations raised by making comparisons in time and space, especially where social and professional structures are concerned. Here we are faced with the sociological problem Alain Desrosières recommended to take into account regarding the reconstruction and comparison of "long series" of statistics such as: inquiring about equivalence conventions, to harden the observation categories of social reality, and enable them to be transposed from one context to the next (Desrosières 1992).

Beyond these context effects, game translations are also very tightly suited to each team's specific research question. In the case of Chile, the objective was to question the perception of inequalities and hierarchical logics. So, the information written on the cards had to be very broad (income, education, occupation, place of residence, gender, age, ethnicity, and religion) and include cards representing inactive women (housewives) as well as pictures of the characters represented. In contrast, Julien Chevillard confined the social universe represented by the cards to the sole professions, as he was interested in questioning the representations of occupational differentiations. The German and French teams remained closer to the original game (name, age, occupation, degree, employer, status, activity of the institution, and the number of employees). However, the French team has also updated this kind of information: first, by introducing the type of work contracts (fixed term or open-ended ones), a criteria that has become very cleaving on the French labor market; and also the matter of supervision, a criteria discussed in the context of the debate on constructing a European socio-occupational nomenclature. Again, Neuhaus's approach is relatively unusual among the other teams since, besides the profession, he insists almost exclusively on information pertaining to education and vocational training.

### 3.3 The Dissemination of Official Classifications: A French Peculiarity

A first set of these study results puts into perspective what early 1980s pioneers had brought forward regarding the role of PCS nomenclature as a language for the description of social world. Indeed, Schultheis and his colleagues insisted, in comparison with the French case, on the much greater diversity of names used by

the German players. While French respondents mainly mobilized PCS taxonomic vocabulary and collective agreements, German respondents expressed moral and behavioral judgments and denominations, or frequently referred to the school-level or the occupation of profiles shown on the cards. They conclude that, in Germany, the State, official statistics, and sociologists have not imposed nor disseminated a socio-professional nomenclature of the CSP type, so that individuals' capacity to name social differences with a unified vocabulary is much lower than in France. While that issue is not central to the Chilean team's concerns, it indirectly breaks at the surface of results. Here, too, the rankings and names given to groups do describe clear social differences which are perceived as such in society. However, the vocabulary mobilized to describe them is not unified and does not refer to concepts or categories disseminated by the State or intellectuals. They are often based on a moral lexicon and judgments about people's positions in the social hierarchy. For instance, poverty is explained away by poor willingness on individuals' part, while success and social mobility are also said to result from individual characteristics and effort.

Conversely, Chevillard's experiment emphasizes the penetration of logics underlying the official rankings of occupations in the French context. First, he shows that the "French" and the "Swiss" have significantly different classifying and naming ways. They boil down to each country's specificities regarding how the issue of social classes has been approached and the tools that have been developed in each country. In French respondents' results, groups like "*dirigeants*" (managers), "*cadres*," "*professions intellectuelles supérieures et libérales*" (upper and intellectual jobs and the professions), "*indépendants et artisans*" (self-employed and craftsmen) have been found and they refer as well to the world of "*ouvriers et employés peu qualifiés*" (low-skilled workers and employees), all proving quite close to the PCS nomenclature logic. If Swiss respondents' representations prove to be closer to a social stratification scale combining, in a one-dimensional way, the level of income and education<sup>10</sup> (as for example the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status), it is because the Swiss context has been impacted by the absence of a multidimensional model accepted by all, such as the French PCS. He then stressed that, for their part, frontier workers adopt classification and naming logics that are close to the other French respondents, i.e. close to the PCS perspective. Therefore, when respondents hold a job outside the national primary and secondary socialization context, it does not fundamentally alter their representa-

---

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted, in connection with this finding, that there are no groups referring to socio-historical constructions backed by any form of institution whatsoever (PCS nomenclature, collective agreements or others). The groups made up by Swiss respondents do not bear the mark of identifiable criteria such as the notion of self-employed, director, executive, upper intellectual professions, or the professions.

tions of social positions. Hence, this finding underlines that official classification schemata of professions have been internalized by French citizens.

The French study complements that table with qualifications. It shows that respondents' general ranking structure is actually relatively close to the one found in PCS, especially as regards the gap between the self-employed and wage-earners and the distinction of social groups according to the logic of professional qualification (managers and higher intellectual profession, intermediate occupations, skilled and unskilled operating staff). In other words, while Boltanski and Thévenot insisted groups' names were closer to PCS far more so than their rankings, the results of the 2008 study indicate that rankings themselves are not unrelated, in France, to the official classification. However, they also show that studies have mobilized other ranking logics, namely occupation, employment contract, or academic qualifications.

Comparing these surveys is particularly interesting in the perspective of the sociology of statistics as Desrosières understands it. Indeed, it highlights the time or space variations in the links between the categories produced and disseminated by official institutions – public statistics particularly, or by legal authorities and/or intellectual (including sociologists) – and the perception categories lay people resort to about the social world.

Therefore, we can reveal the conditions under which statistical categories can emerge as formatting tools of the social world. The widespread use of PCS in the French context plays the role of a powerful inculcation and unification vector to impose a reading grid of social divisions, but to a lesser extent in other national contexts. The variable capacity of different countries' States to centralize data, to unify the production of statistical categories, and monopolize their dissemination gives more or less strength and "reality" to expert classifications in their ability to organize ordinary representations. It then becomes obvious that the political and institutional representation greatly impacts the very construction of social groups. The issue of the State and statistical categories was a pivotal one in Desrosières' early work (but also in Boltanski's and Thévenot's work); it is also deeply entrenched in his later work, especially when he tried to model the possible relation combinations between government forms and ways of using and processing statistics (Desrosières 1998).

### 3.4 Studies and Countries: Do they Bring about Differentiated Representations of Social Spaces?

Even if card games are not fully comparable across countries – and the comparison of results should therefore be conducted with caution – the various research teams' work reveal the plurality of forms of representation of the social world according to different national contexts or among individuals in the same country. This question was also pregnant in the work of Desrosières, who insisted that, besides official rankings, other worldviews are being deployed: "lay" peo-

ple's and unionists' (Desrosières and Thévenot 2002), or more generally, the outlooks constructed by social movements (the unemployed, precarious employees, artists and casual staff, etc.) who are challenging the representation forms of social issues as imposed by official categories. Focusing the study on these "other" forms of world representation, including through controversies and polemics (Desrosières 1998) then allows, firstly, highlighting the arbitrariness of "expert" categories, and secondly emphasizing the role of institutions – in Durkheim's sense of the word – which shore up social representations.

The Chilean study shows that, in a context where State intervention is limited – which erases the traditional European divide between state-owned and private establishments – and where economic disparities are very striking, the social world is essentially perceived one-dimensionally, because income and educational levels are particularly linked.<sup>11</sup> While Chevillard's work indicates that Swiss respondents are less prone than French ones to mobilizing a plurality of dimensions (and that the rankings they perform are closer, statistically, to a one-dimensional model corresponding for example to a social stratification scale), it is no less true that the classifications they operate are not strictly one-dimensional and hierarchical, as Dominique Joye and Fabio Lorenzi-Cioldi's work (1988) had already shown.

Finally, the French study shows how ordinary representations of the social space are based on multiple dimensions, sometimes mutually orthogonal. Thus the distinction between the top and bottom of the social space is articulated with other range of opposites: the divide between public and private employers or differentiations depending on the nature of the work to be done – for example the distinction between white collar clerical workers and blue-collar technical ones. Now, the investigation goes further: from a hierarchical clustering, it typifies respondents' logical categorization. This technique makes it possible to distinguish four main ones: according to the degrees written on the cards (10% of respondents), to the employment contract (10%), to the nature of the activity (40%), to qualifications and between the self-employed and employees (40%). The statistical results can account all at once for the high heterogeneity of classifying ways – very few respondents produce exactly the same rankings – but at the same time for similar logics that result in some areas of the social space being identified in a clearer and more consensual way (civil servants, employers and the self-employed, the low-skilled) while others are more blurred (intermediate occupations). Thus, compared to the findings in pioneering investigations, they insist that the diversity of rankings does not prevent shared ranking logics of the social space from being internalized.

---

<sup>11</sup> We must also consider this team was the only one that had included income in the information provided on the cards.



### 3.5 Respondents' Ordinary Representations and Social Characteristic Features

These representations of social space thus differ depending on the content of studies, on national contexts in connection with the socio-historical construction of social groups and work institutions – but also in terms of respondents' social characteristic features. For example, the pioneers would emphasize that social differences among respondents weighed heavily on their ways of naming groups: those most endowed with cultural capital most readily endorse official categories.

In the Chilean context, class position also seems to weigh on the rankings and names given to groups. Players belonging to the most affluent classes carry out the task of classifying cards in a multidimensional way, and manage to establish a multidimensional representation of society while the lower classes do it one-dimensionally, by mobilizing education levels – a highly valued resource in terms of mobility in Chilean society. On the contrary, these distinctions are less noticeable in the French study. Rather, they suggest that changes in classification logics are not very sensitive to differences in class position, even though they do point out the young and the working classes are less likely than managers or professionals and the more educated to adopt rankings based on the hierarchy of qualifications or degrees: the former are more prone to conduct their rankings according to the nature of the activities performed. The rudimentary nature of the tested social determinants (gender, age, educational level, and PCS) probably helps explain the difficulty to highlight these differences, which should be assessed in connection with social backgrounds and career paths.

In his own investigation, Lukas Neuhaus goes more deeply into that latter dimension: he crosses categorization logics with professional socialization or more specifically what he dubs “professional dilemmas” in which individuals are caught up, especially regarding women teachers and architect-engineers. This focus on specific jobs that are highly structured around specific professional practices and ways of thinking brings out the logics found in each of these distinct categorizations.

Women teachers implement two structuring logics: they make a distinction between concrete-bodily work and diffuse-intellectual work, as well as between “narrow” thought and “broad” thought, which in fact corresponds to an opposition between those with a highly specialized profession (medical practitioners, for example) and those with a low-skilled job (manual workers, among others). The logics they use to construct their rankings remind us of the main problem they have to deal with: the vocational orientation of students and their selection. The surveyed teachers set great store by manual trades, distributed into distinct groups, because they seek to enhance these jobs relatively to intellectual and more skilled trades, because their students cannot necessarily aim for the

latter. They also classify teachers not among diffuse-intellectual professions but in a group they entitled “social professions.”

Rankings by engineers and architects pertain to three clearly antagonistic perceptions: productive vs. unproductive occupations, creative professions vs. routine occupations and trades that rely on practical operations as opposed to those based on theory or abstraction. Again, these oppositions arise based on these engineers and architects’ “professional dilemmas”: some aspects of the categorizations they implement do not depend on their environments or their career paths but clearly on the way their professional practice is organized. They reflect a functionalist and organic vision of society.

This approach seeks to understand how forms of representation of the social space in relation with social origins and class position or to career paths and professional socialization are a reminder of what Desrosières and colleagues had – at the beginning of their careers – mischievously pointed out about statisticians: the eye-glasses that are used to see and interpret the social world are not independent from the forms of affiliation and socialization specific to individuals who wear them.

---

#### 4. Conclusion

---

Framing the uses of an experimental study about ordinary categorizations of the social space in historical and comparative perspectives brings out the importance of this type of device for issues pertaining to categorization practices. While the sociology of quantification has shown great interest in the conditions data and statistical categories are produced, this device permits the analysis of the penetration of official categories in the ordinary representations of societies, an issue originally raised by Alain Desrosières in his work on CSP. This anchoring, we then realize, is different depending on the weight of State intervention in the centralization and dissemination of these categories. The singularity of the French case, marked by a public statistical system that has managed to monopolize the production and dissemination of the social world description-categories, stands out from what is happening in countries such as Switzerland, Germany, and Chile, where these categories are less unified under the aegis of the State. However, the State’s symbolic power does not impact all levels of categorization practices in the same way. In the early 1980s in France, it has mostly colonized the vocabulary and expressions mobilized to describe social hierarchies but it seems less able to account for respondents’ classification practices. Does it play no part on these, for all that? The 2008 French study and Julien Chevillard’s investigations indicate that some classification schemata in connection with PCS have been internalized by French respondents, whether they work in France or Switzerland.

The particular weight of public statistics in the inculcation of these representations should probably not be overestimated, though. Indeed, PCS has a particular feature in that it is partly rooted in the working-world legal and labor institutions. French workers are actually socialized to these categories in their social and professional environment, which is less the case in countries where statistical classifications do not lean, or less directly so, on labor institutions that are so pervasively present and unified at the national level. In all cases, what is at stake is institutions' capability of shaping the representations of the social space.

The use of these devices raises questions, more broadly, about the cognitive mechanisms at play when categorizing social space. Transversely, the rankings that have been made, though they were produced from substantially different card games in various countries, describe societies represented with hierarchical structures. But they also point to significant variations depending on what information is available on cards, on national configurations and respondents' dispositions. In other words, social rankings and their designations are determined by the relationship that develops between individuals' socialization and a study protocol, conventions or understandable and recognizable institutions in a particular political and social space of reference. Putting surveys back in their context of production, carrying out the sociology and history of the categories designed to understand and describe social world, and being attentive to changes in various individuals' viewpoints on reality: these are precisely a few of the key sociological principles bestowed to us in Alain Desrosières' legacy.

---

## References

---

- Amossé, Thomas. 2013. La nomenclature socio-professionnelle: une histoire revisitée. *Annales* 68 (4): 1039-75.
- Barozet, Emmanuelle, and Oscar Mac-Clure. 2014. Nombrar y clasificar: aproximación a una epistemología de las clases sociales. *Cinta de Moebio* 51: 197-215.
- Boltanski, Luc. 1979. Taxinomies sociales et luttes de classes. La mobilisation de la "classe moyenne" et l'invention des "cadres". *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 29: 75-106.
- Boltanski, Luc, and Laurent Thévenot. 1983. Finding one's way in social space: a study based on games. *Social Science Information* 22: 631-80.
- Boltanski, Luc, and Luc Thévenot. 2006. *On justification: Economies of Worth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Boltanski, Luc. 2008. *Rendre la réalité inacceptable*. Paris: Démopolis.
- Boltanski, Luc. 2009. *De la critique. Précis de sociologie de l'émancipation*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction. A social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1980. L'identité et la représentation. Eléments pour une réflexion critique sur l'idée de région. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 35: 63-72.

- Brousse, Cécile. 2009. ESeC: the European Union's Socio-economic Classification project. *Courrier des statistiques. English series* 15: 27-36.
- Chevillard, Julien. 2009. *Representations of occupational similarities in a cross-national context*. Poster presented at the RC28 Spring Meeting 2009: Social Inequality and Social Change, May 14-16, Beijing, China.
- Conein, Bernard. 1991. Catégorisation professionnelle et classements sociaux: un ou deux savoirs? *Cahiers du Réseau Langage et travail* 1: 21-9.
- Deauvieu, Jérôme, and Tristan Poullaouec, eds. 2011. *Les catégorisations de l'espace social en Europe*. Research report for INSEE, Employment division.
- Deauvieu, Jérôme, Etienne Penissat, Cécile Brousse, and Cyril Jayet. 2014. Everyday categorizations of French social space. Analysis based on a card game. *Revue française de sociologie* 55 (3): 411-57.
- Desrosières, Alain. 1977. Eléments pour l'histoire des nomenclatures socioprofessionnelles. In *Pour une histoire de la statistique*, vol. 1, ed. Joëlle Affichard, 155-231. Paris: INSEE.
- Desrosières, Alain. 1989. Comment faire des choses qui tiennent: histoire sociale et statistique. *Histoire et Mesure* 4 (3-4): 225-42.
- Desrosières, Alain. 1992. Séries longues et conventions d'équivalence. *Genèses* 9: 92-7.
- Desrosières, Alain. 1997. Refléter ou instituer: l'invention des indicateurs statistiques. In *Les indicateurs socio-politiques aujourd'hui*, ed. Elisabeth Dupoirier and Jean-Luc Parodi, 15-33. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Desrosières, Alain. 1998. *The politics of large numbers: A history of statistical reasoning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Desrosières, Alain, and Laurent Thévenot. 2002 [1988]. *Les Catégories socio-professionnelles*, 5th ed. Paris: La Découverte.
- Didier, Emmanuel. 2014. Alain Desrosières, savant essentiel et homme de qualités. In *Prouver et gouverner. Une analyse politique des statistiques publiques*, ed. Alain Desrosières, 5-29. Paris: La Découverte.
- Filhon, Alexandra, Jérôme Deauvieu, Laure de Verdalle, Agnès Pelage, Tristan Poullaouec, Cécile Brousse, Martine Mespoulet, and Karolona Sztandar-Sztanderska. 2013. Un projet de nomenclature socioprofessionnelle européenne: une construction savante face aux variations nationales de représentation du monde social. *Sociologie* 4 (4): 373-93.
- Gollac, Michel. 2005. La rigueur et la rigolade: à propos de l'usage des méthodes quantitatives par Pierre Bourdieu. In *Rencontres avec Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. Gérard Mauger, 55-67. Bellecombe-en-Bauges: Éditions du Croquant.
- INSEE. 2002. *Formation aux nomenclatures sociales. Module de formation destiné aux agents de l'INSEE. Guide de l'animateur*. Paris: INSEE.
- Lorenzi-Cioldi, Fabio, and Dominique Joye. 1988. Représentations sociales de catégories socioprofessionnelles: aspects méthodologiques. *Bulletin de psychologie* 383: 377-90.
- Mac-Clure, Oscar, and Emmanuelle Barozet. 2015a, forthcoming. Judgments on (in)justice in a mature neo-liberal regime: results of an empirical game-based research. *Current Sociology*.
- Mac-Clure, Oscar, Emmanuelle Barozet, and Cristóbal Moya. 2015b. Juicios de las clases medias sobre la élite económica: ¿Crítica a las desigualdades en Chile? *Polis* 41: 2-19.

- Mac-Clure, Oscar, Emmanuelle Barozet, Cristóbal Moya, and Carolina Galleguillos. 2015c. La clase media clasifica a las personas en la sociedad: resultados de una investigación empírica basada en juegos. *Psicoperspectivas* 14 (2): 4-15.
- Mariot, Nicolas. 2012. La réflexivité comme second mouvement. *L'Homme* 203-204: 369-98.
- Mariot, Nicolas, and Wildfried Lignier. 2013. Où trouver les moyens de penser? Une lecture sociologique de la psychologie culturelle. In *Le mental et le social*, ed. Bruno Ambroise and Christiane Chauviré, 191-214. Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS.
- Neuhaus, Lukas. 2008a. Vom "weiten Denken" der Handwerker. Wie Lehrerinnen Berufe klassifizieren. *Swiss Journal of Sociology* 34: 95-113.
- Neuhaus, Lukas. 2008b. Produktives Problemlösen: berufsbedingte Muster sozialer Klassifizierung bei Ingenieuren und Architekten. *Sozialer Sinn* 1: 95-120.
- Neuhaus, Lukas. 2011. *Wie der Beruf das Denken formt. Berufliches Handeln und soziales Urteil in professionssoziologischer Perspektive*. Marburg: Tectum-Verlag.
- Penissat, Etienne, and Jay Rowell. 2012. Note de recherche sur la fabrique de la nomenclature socio-économique européenne ESeC. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 191/192: 126-35.
- Schultheis, Franz, Barbara Bitting, Sabine Bühler, Patrick Kändler, Kristina Mau, Markus Nensel, Andreas Pfeuffer, Elke Scheib, and Winfried Voggel. 1996. Repräsentationen des sozialen Raums – Zur Kritik der soziologischen Urteilskraft. *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 1: 97-119.
- Schultheis, Franz. 1998. L'identité dans les comparaisons internationales. Une imposition de catégories administratives. *Regards sociologiques* 16: 51-60.
- Thévenot, Laurent. 1983. L'économie du codage social. *Critiques de l'Economie Politique* 23/24: 188-222.
- Thévenot, Laurent. 2004. Les enjeux d'une pluralité de formats d'information. In *Du partage au marché. Regards croisés sur la circulation des savoirs*, ed. Eric Delamotte, 333-47. Lille: Edition du Septentrion.
- Thévenot, Laurent. 2006. *L'action au pluriel. Sociologie des régimes d'engagement*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Thévenot, Laurent, 2007. The plurality of cognitive formats and engagements: moving between the familiar and the public. *European Journal of Social Theory* 10 (3): 413-27.