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Special Issue Call for Papers

Classes and Categories of Classification in Contemporary Social Inequality Research

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The study of social class has experienced a revival in the early twenty-first century, driven largely by efforts to scrutinise the intensified inequalities of contemporary global capitalism, but also by debates surrounding the perceived polarisation of societal values and attitudes. The reassertion of class analysis is especially pronounced in certain Anglophone contexts – particularly the UK – as well as in French sociology (Atkinson 2017; Bourdieu 1982, 1985; Crompton 1993; Currid-Halkett 2017; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Lamont 1992, 2000; Savage et al. 2013; Skeggs 2004; Wright 2015). In German-speaking social research, by contrast, class has historically played a more limited role, though it has experienced a more recent comeback in specific areas (Butterwegge 2020; Müller and Reitz 2015; Rehbein et al. 2015), whilst rival concepts such as lifestyles and social milieu persevere (Hradil 2024; Rössel 2008; Schneickert 2024). Approaches to class differ across national contexts: in the UK, cultural-sociological and multidimensional analyses – drawing on Bourdieusian concepts of cultural capital, distinction, and lifestyle – coexist alongside class schemas emphasising occupational and structural inequalities (Atkinson 2009, 2017; Goldthorpe 1987; Savage 2015, Savage et al. 2013; Wright 1997, 2015) while in Germany, research has primarily focused on cultural-sociological studies of distinction and labour-sociological analyses of capitalist exploitation (Dörre 2025; Reckwitz 2019; Westheuser and della Porta 2022).

Comparative quantitative research often uses class-based indicators such as socio-economic status, but the concept of class itself is rarely theorised explicitly. In qualitative, particularly inductive research, class is approached more flexibly, frequently incorporating intersectional perspectives (Crenshaw 1991; Winker and Degele 2010). Across both contexts, contemporary debates on classism highlight forms of discrimination linked to class (Baron 2014; Bhopal and Myers 2023; Chassé 2016; Jones 2011; Pilgrim-Brown et al. 2025; Smith 2005), though socio-structural perspectives on class relations are often marginalised in these discourses (Keil et al. 2024). At the same time, the "class question" remains critical for understanding the mechanisms and organisational forms underlying durable inequality (Schneijderberg and Götze 2024; Tilly 1999) and for debates in economics and social policy (Piketty 2020a, 2020b; Savage 2014; Savage and Waitkus 2021).

In the light of these issues, we are keen to promote papers that explore class and classification in wider comparative perspective. While this special issue originates in a British-German dialogue, it aims to engage broader global debates on social inequality. Research in Sub-Saharan Africa has long highlighted the need to move beyond class alone and consider socio-economic, socio-cultural, and political dimensions of inequality (Kitching 1972; Neubert 2024; Wallerstein 1973).

Similarly, Jodhka, Rehbein, and Souza (2017) propose the concept of socio-culture to capture forms of stratification that precede, underpin, and coexist with social classes. Comparative studies across Europe and Latin America (Barozet et al. 2021), Asia and the Pacific (Kanbur and Zhuang 2014), and Latin America more broadly (Solís et al. 2019) demonstrate the value of moving beyond national and conceptual boundaries. We see these efforts as contributing to a "cosmopolitan social science" open to diverse voices and theoretical perspectives (Bhambra 2014). Accordingly, we invite contributors to reflect critically on the concepts, categories, and classifications they employ and on how their work advances global conceptual debates on social inequality.

This special issue invites empirical, methodological, and theoretical contributions examining how class and related categories of classification are conceptualised, operationalised, and contested across epistemological, methodological and national research traditions. Building on these strands of debate, contributions to the special issue are invited to address one or more of the following questions:

- Which concepts and operationalisations of class or closely related concepts are employed in contemporary empirical inequality research across its full methodological range (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, computational social science), what theoretical and methodological limitations and challenges do they entail, and how can these approaches be systematically compared?
- Which bodies of knowledge are drawn upon in defining social class in contemporary inequality research?
- Which theoretical concepts are required for analysing specific research objects in current inequality research?
- Which explanatory social mechanisms, approaches to class, and alternative concepts of differentiation (e.g. milieu, socio-economic status, wealth classes, or strata) are used to account for processes of social stratification and social inequality?
- How are new ways of thinking about social order, such as 'ordinalisation' (Fourcade and Healy 2024) or 'quantification' (Mau 2019), bound up with classificatory class practices?

Research addressing clearly related questions is very welcome as well. We welcome contributions that engage with concepts of class and categories of classification from various perspectives, addressing a wide range of social phenomena.

Please submit your abstracts of no more than two pages, excluding references by **1 October 2026** to **SISocialClass@kw.uni-paderborn.de**. Authors whose abstracts are selected will be invited to submit full papers by the beginning of November. Full papers are due by **30 April 2027** and will undergo a double-blind peer review process. Publication of the special issue is planned for the first half of 2028.

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