

Determinants of Individualization – A Comparative Analysis of the Influence of Socio-Economic Factors on the Relevance of Social Class

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Summary:

Class analysis is one of the oldest assets of the analysis of social inequality and has been used naturally since early times of sociology. However class analysis has also undergone a criticism from the beginning which has become very popular particularly since the 1980s in Germany as the concept of 'Individualization'. With respect to social class, individualization means a weakening of the relevance of social class especially in the industrialized countries. This loss of importance affects the relevance of social class as a determinant for economic inequalities and cognitive or practical aspects as well. Among others an increase of wealth even in lower classes and a broad social security have been cited as reasons for this development. The emphasis of the debate on individualization centers on the question whether processes of individualization can be documented empirically. In contrast to the majority of investigations the present study not only analyses if individualization can be documented but also if the adopted causalities can be proved empirically. Contrary to the popular view the results do not approve the assumed effects of wealth, social security and material inequality for the relevance of class.