

Données sociales

How does the publication use socio-occupational categories?*

This article focuses on a specific aspect of INSEE's triennial compendium of social data entitled *Données sociales*. We examine the share of the socio-occupational classification¹ in the latest edition of *Données sociales* (2002/2003), which contains some 70 contributions grouped into nine broad chapters.

For brevity's sake, we confined our attention to tables and charts, excluding all textual analysis.

We did a chapter-by-chapter count of the pages comprising at least one table or chart referring to the socio-occupational classification. This gave us our indicator, expressed below as a percentage of total pages (table 1).

The "peak" value is found in the "Employment" chapter, which is

hardly surprising. A more unexpected result is that "Education/training" comes in a close second—ahead of "Wages and salaries, working conditions." Does this indicate a legacy of Pierre Bourdieu's school in education-research circles? And our two zeros—especially the first—do, of course, provide food for thought. Whatever happened to social inequality in healthcare, which we know is very real? The consolidated percentage for all chapters works out at just under 6% (37 pages out of 640).

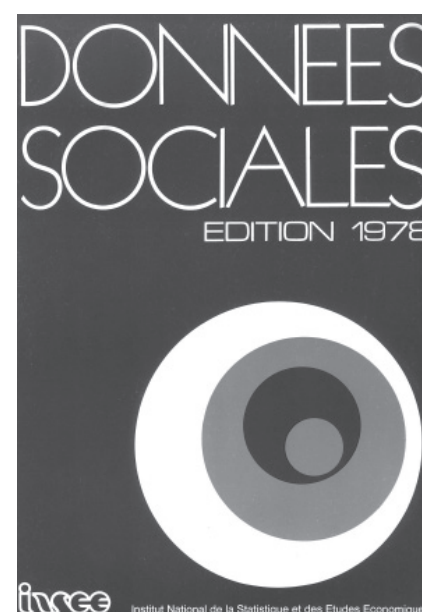
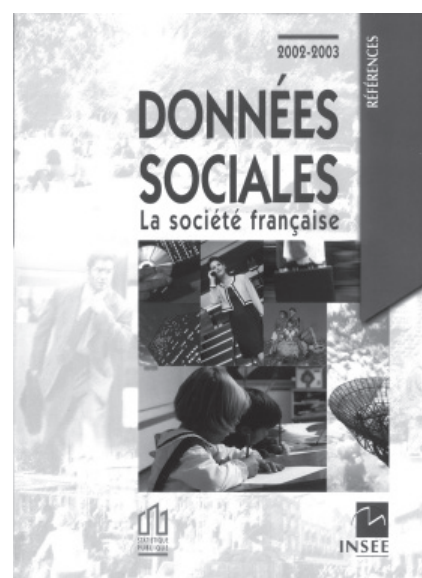
But what was the situation "once upon a time"? The same method, applied to one of the earliest editions of *Données sociales*—1978, i.e., a quarter-century ago—yields substantially different results, at least in absolute value² (table 2).

Table 1

1.7	Population, family	(1 page out of 60)
9.8	Education, training	(10/102)
12	Employment	(12/100)
7.4	Wages and salaries, working conditions	(5/68)
0	Health	(0/60)
5.7	Income, wealth, living conditions	(5/88)
2.9	Spatial dimension	(2/70)
4.5	Social links	(2/44)
0	Social protection	(0/48)
5.8	<i>Total</i>	(37/640)

Table 2

5.3	Population, health, training	(2 pages out of 38)
27.4	Work, working conditions	(20/73)
37.5	Individual coverage of needs	(30/80)
4.4	Collective coverage of needs	(4/90)
57.9	Socialization and cultural practices	(22/38)
39.3	Female activity and family: demographic aspects	(11/27)
33.3	Female activity and family: socio-economic aspects	(8/34)
25.5	<i>Total</i>	(97/380)



* Originally published in *Courrier des statistiques*, French ed., no. 107 (Sept. 2003), pp. 41-42.

1. The initial reference classification was that of 1954. It was replaced, in 1982, by the classification entitled "Occupations and socio-occupational categories" (Professions et Catégories Socioprofessionnelles: PCS).

2. However, we did not include a 20-page dossier specifically devoted to the social status of small farmers. This item, it could be argued, was entirely dedicated to the socio-occupational classification.

An author-based approach

The 2002/2003 edition of *Données sociales* included contributions from 117 authors, of whom 47 held positions at INSEE, 55 worked in ministerial statistical offices, and most of the 15 others came from academia. How did they display their sensitivity to the socio-occupational category as a descriptive variable of French society?

For an initial answer, we can simply count the authors of contributions including at least one table or chart pertaining to the variable: 32 of our authors, or just over one-quarter of the total, made some form of reference to socio-occupational classification in their analysis.

Curiously, this proportion of just over one-quarter remains nearly constant, irrespective of the authors' backgrounds. And, of course, the results corroborate those concerning article topics. One-half of the INSEE authors who relied on socio-occupational categories consist of contributors to the chapter on employment. Similarly, the two ministerial statistical offices that rely most readily on that variable are those of the Labor Ministry and Education Ministry.

From 26% in 1978 to 6% in 2002/2003, the drop is steep indeed. And to think that the 1984 edition had devoted an entire chapter to the new PCS classification...³

Our suggestion here is that a research group should explore the topic further, through a detailed analysis covering all eleven editions of *Données sociales* published since 1973.

3. The chapter, entitled "New tools for socio-occupational analysis" ("De nouveaux outils pour l'analyse socioprofessionnelle"), was "orchestrated" by Alain Desrosières, Jean-Paul Girard, and Laurent Thévenot.

Naturally, the analysis should not simply recapitulate, topic by topic, the change in the weight assigned to the socio-occupational classification in successive editions. It will also need to "explain" the relevant curves in the light of the publication's editorial shifts (see preceding article by Philippe L'Hardy) and the events and arguments—external and internal—that drove those shifts. This will show the professional community how and why its sharpness of vision is steadily diminishing, and the extent to which this entails a loss of information and

understanding for French society as a whole.

The current mantra is that class antagonisms have disappeared. But what if the reality were that observers no longer wanted to see, watch, or show?

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