

Social classes in european society



Although it could be argued that Europeans in middle and working classes now share many of the same social, economic and political goals, I do not agree that this has resulted in a diffusion of the classes. Authors such as Giddens have argued that these once prevalent social class discriminations are waning . While I believe that the landscape of social structures in UK and the rest of Europe may indeed be changing, I believe that social and working classes remain distinct, although there may be some blurring of the precise border between the two.

This essay will present the evidence which is available to support this theory, and discuss the reasoning behind this argument. Life Goals It is unarguable that those traditionally labeled as working class and those labeled as middle class have come to share many of the same goals in recent decades. In some areas of the country in particular, political actions from the 1970s onwards united the classes in defence of jobs and communities in the face of the changes occurring in the different areas of industry. It was not only the working classes affected by these changes, but also many in associated professions and managerial roles that constituted the middle classes in a particular area .

In particular, many of the governmental decisions made during the last few decades have resulted in convergence of opinion towards political parties, although this is a change which Doepke and Zilibotti claim has been developing since the industrial revolution . This means that today we have reached a point where social class plays a far less substantial role in politics than previously, and therefore political goals constitute less of a divisor factor. Despite this, there are various other factors, which will be discussed

in further depth in the remainder of this essay, which ensure that social and economic goals may still vary between the different social classes in Europe. For example those in working class families are still likely to have substantially lower incomes, particularly given that the distinction between classes in the present time is highly dependent on economic status .

This means that the economic goals are still likely to vary markedly between the working and middle classes. Spatial Segregation There are numerous studies which have indicated that segregations between social classes in terms of residential areas persist in many areas of Europe . Musterd suggests that levels of social segregation in cities in Western Europe are lower than those in cities in the US , but despite this their very existence indicates that there remain differences in classes. If there were no difference then surely both those traditionally assigned to middle class and those assigned to working class would live side-by-side and it would not be possible to identify clustering patterns within communities.

Many countries in Europe have however acknowledged that there is spatial segregation between different socio-economic classes, which has resulted in numerous policies being introduced in an attempt to better mix neighbourhood populations . The main aim behind such policies is to ensure that there is adequate access for all different socioeconomic groups to various facilities such as health care, education and other such resources. This is more likely to occur if there are higher social classes present in a community than if there are only those of low socioeconomic level. While the segregation remains, this does however mean that classes also persist - how can two different families be of the same class and social standing when one

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has access to adequate schooling and the other does not? This therefore leads to the next component in my argument, which is that middle classes may still be distinguished from each other according to the opportunities afforded to each.

Opportunities As mentioned already, the location of residence is likely to present different opportunities to families of different classes, as access to different resources and facilities may be dependent on this. There are many different studies which have also implicated social class in observed differences between groups in general opportunities available to individuals throughout their lifetime. Many of these studies are very recent and yet still show considerable differences in lifestyle factors between those of lower and middle social classes. Perhaps the most common finding of recent times is in differences in health status between lower and middle classes, particularly with reference to obesity.

For example studies have indicated that those of a lower social class have a much higher risk of obesity and associated health problems than those of the middle classes . It is not however isolated to obesity alone however. There is also marked evidence that those in the working classes still continue to have lower life expectancies than their middle class counterparts . Opportunities do not differ between classes only in health care however.

There is also evidence to suggest that there remain marked differences in education attained by working and middle classes . While in the past the difference by working and middle classes was mostly dominated by segregation those working in manual trades and those working in

professions, the difference now may instead lie in a more subtle distinction between low-end, low-pay jobs and high-end executive and professional roles. The differences in educational opportunities which are available to those in lower or middle class families is likely to ensure that there remains a certain element of segregation between classes in terms of the roles in which the group may be predominantly found. For example if a boy from a middle class upbringing has access to an elite education, it is likely that he would find it easier to progress through tertiary education and into a high level graduate job. In contrast, a boy from a lower, working class background who may not be afforded the same opportunities would not be able to pursue this same position, and so would be forced into a more menial and lower paid role, thus perpetuating the cycle.

Moving Through the Classes One factor which may have changed in recent years however is the ease of mobility through the different social classes. Breen and Jonsson suggest that it is now easier to ascend from working class to middle class even in spite of differences which may still exist in the level of education open to those from the two different social classes . This would therefore indicate that while social classes remain they are not as static as they may once have been. **Conclusion** This essay has presented evidence to support my opinion that there remains a distinction between working and middle classes. Although the definition of the classes may have changed, as has the level of mobility between the classes, there are some important attributes of the distinction which remain.

Economic disparity and access to opportunities mean that the difference between the classes remains substantial.