The derivation of the IPICS class scheme

While none of the reviewed class schemes is fully adapted to the task at hand, each class scheme provides unique elements that are necessary to derive a conceptualization of the inequality space for the analysis of social mobility in post-industrial societies. Each scheme employs a distinct logic for the assignment of occupational positions to classes. While Goldthorpe argues that it is the employment relations which differentiate occupations appropriately with regards to asset endowment and career prospects, Oesch and Esping-Andersen favor work logic and individual credentials or occupational skill sets to delimit class locations. Wright, in contrast, bases his class scheme on the process of exploitation. In the following, I take advantage of all four accounts by separating occupations first with regards to the dominant work logic horizontally into industrial and post-industrial class locations. Within these broad categories I further distinguish between vertically different positions according to employment relations represented by ease of supervision and skill specificity of the usual tasks performed. I relate both vertical hierarchies to different rent generating processes based on authority and skills. The resulting class scheme of industrial and post-industrial classes (IPICS) is designed primarily for the analysis of social mobility and occupational change. In the following, the horizontal and vertical dimensions for grouping occupations into classes are described in more detail. After the classes are presented, incoherencies with regard to self-employment and class assignment and question pertaining to the relationship of IPICS, gender and ethnicity are briefly discussed. This chapter closes with a discussion of how IPICS class position may affect social mobility mechanisms.

4.1 Horizontal differentiation according to the work logic

IPICS’ horizontal differentiation aims at realizing Esping-Andersen’s duality of industrial and post-industrial class locations. Industrial and post-industrial classes differ by the way they are situated within the division of labor. Following the micro-class literature, the division of labor is understood as an ongoing organic process by which “realist” classes are formed (Grusky & Sørensen, 1998). Instead of differentiating them in terms of institutionalization and social closure, however, I
resort to the daily work experience or dominant work logics for delimiting classes horizontally. Following Oesch, work logics are distinct with regards to the setting of the work process, the authority relations, the primary orientation and the required skills (Oesch, 2006b, p. 64). However, I only differentiate two of the three (employee) work logics proposed by Oesch (I will come back to that later).

Furthermore, work logics correspond to different assets that alter the exploitation process and create relevant class boundaries (Wright, 1985; Western & Wright, 1994). According to Wright, class societies are characterized by three important boundaries determined by ownership of property, authority and expertise. While ownership of property allows capitalist employers to appropriate the profits, authority and expertise enable employees to obtain a rent based on their strategic position within the overall process of economic production (ref. section 3.4 for details). Although originally designed to describe the different class locations relative to economic exploitation, i.e. the assets’ specific capacities to mediate the exploitation process through the creation of rents, this division can also be employed to understand the characteristic differences between industrial and post-industrial class segments within capitalist societies. While property ownership delimits the (petty) bourgeoisie from the employer classes, employment relations based on either authority or expertise are the assets which allow for primary rent production within the industrial-organizational and the post-industrial-interpersonal hierarchy. The hierarchies within each work logic develop around the different levels of either granted authority or required skill sets.

Arguably, both hierarchies are at least on the higher levels associated with different class interests which may correlate with opposing political attitudes. Kriesi suggests that managerial and administrative technocrats as well as technical, crafts and protective specialists on the one hand, and professional specialists on the other hand, populate antagonistic class positions because “the former are essentially concerned with the preservation of the integrity of the organization (or organizational unit) as a whole, while the latter are concerned with the preservation of the integrity of their specialized pursuit of a discipline or a profession” (Kriesi, 1989, p. 1081). The opposing interests of the conservators of the ruling order and the professionals who rather hold allegiance to their occupational codes may be overstated especially because it is the state which legally regulates the potential to obtain rents due to academic training. However, different socio-political preferences and action may give rise to conflicts between both groups even if they enjoy similar employment relations and living conditions (Kriesi, 1989, p. 1111).