



# Between 'class project' and individualization: The stratification of Europeans' transnational activities

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**Jan Delhey**

Otto-von-Guericke University Magdeburg, Germany

**Emanuel Deutschmann**

Jacobs University, Germany

**Katharina Cirlanaru**

Jacobs University, Germany

## Abstract

In sociological transnationalization research, it is conventional wisdom that the upper strata are more involved in cross-border activities than the lower ones. However, proponents of the individualization/death-of-class thesis have argued that the significance of class (and of inequalities in general) for people's actions is declining in affluent societies. Using these theories as a point of departure, this article investigates the influence of class and inequalities, more generally, on transnational activity. Using Eurobarometer 73.3 data from 27 European countries, this article examines (a) the extent to which class determines, by itself, in conjunction with other inequalities, and relative to heterogeneities, transnational practices within countries; and (b) how much the social gradient of transnational activity produced by class and inequalities varies across countries, and whether socioeconomic development tends to decrease or increase this gradient. The findings show that, in most countries, heterogeneities explain more variance in transnational activity than class, but not more variance than inequalities as more generally conceived. Further, social gradients in transnational activity are systematically larger in more affluent European countries.

## Keywords

Class, Eurobarometer 73.3, Europe, individualization, inequality, transnational activities

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### Corresponding author:

Jan Delhey, Otto-von-Guericke University Magdeburg, Institute for Sociology, Postbox 4120, D-39016 Magdeburg, Germany.

Email: [j.delhey@ovgu.de](mailto:j.delhey@ovgu.de)

## Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that economies and organizations are increasingly more interconnected internationally, as are individuals (e.g. Castles and Miller, 2009; Held, 2004). A significant stream of research has developed around the cross-border practices of individuals, such as traveling, working and studying abroad (e.g. Favell, 2008; Recchi, 2012). A variety of terms have been proposed to denote these practices, including 'grass-root transnationalism' (Portes, 1999), 'transnational social integration' (Delhey, 2004; Rippl et al., 2010), 'individual transnationalism' (Kuhn, 2011) and 'social transnationalism' (Mau, 2010). Our article connects to this research using the term *transnational practices* to denote individuals' activities and experiences that extend beyond nation-state borders. Note that this definition does not necessarily imply that *physical* borders must be crossed.

A recurrent theme in this literature is that the upper strata are more transnationally active than the lower social strata (e.g. Sklair, 2001), an emphasis on vertical stratification echoed, in particular, for Europe (e.g. Mann, 1998; Mau, 2009). Perhaps most resonantly, Neil Fligstein depicted European integration as a 'class project' in his 2008 book *Euroclash*: 'Europe so far has been a class project, a project that favors the educated, owners of business, managers, and professionals, and the young' (2008: 156).

Conceptually, however, the 'class project' interpretation often seems to entertain an uncomfortably broad understanding of class, as the almost interchangeable use of class and other forms of inequalities, as well as the inclusion of age in the above quote suggest. Empirically, the evidence provided to date is still poor and inconsistent. Are class, and inequalities more broadly, really the *dominant* factor explaining transnational practices? Or is Europe, to an equal measure, a 'generational project' or a 'migrants' project'? Moreover, little is known about whether countries vary in the steepness of the social gradient of transnational activity, and thus, the countries that really fit within the label 'class project'.

Additionally, the emphasis on the class nature of transnational activity defies predictions that can be derived based on the 'death-of-class' thesis and the individualization theory, which both argue that individual socioeconomic position and class, in particular, are becoming increasingly less relevant for people's actions in contemporary societies (e.g. Beck, 1992; Clark and Lipset, 1991). Although these perspectives were originally not concerned with transnational practices, they not only call for taking into account other social divisions, such as age, gender, or ethnicity, they also suggest a hypothesis for cross-national comparisons, as affluence and mass education are said to generally drive down the significance of inequalities and class. Such a decreasing gradient, which has been demonstrated for highbrow cultural consumption (Gerhards et al., 2012), could also apply to transnational practices. In this article, however, we put forward an alternative view, the 'growing gradient hypothesis': with socioeconomic development, the social gradients in transnational activity become steeper due to a confluence of factors, including transnational habitus as a new status marker and new opportunity structures induced by globalization.

The empirical research presented in this article examines the stratification of the transnational practices of Europeans from a cross-national comparative perspective.

Using Eurobarometer (EB) 73.3 survey data for 27 European countries, we investigate (a) the extent to which class determines transnational practices by itself, in conjunction with other inequalities, and relative to heterogeneities, such as age and migration background; and (b) how much the social gradient of transnational activity produced by class and inequalities varies across countries, and whether socioeconomic development tends to decrease or increase this gradient.

The article is structured as follows. The next section outlines and discusses the relevant literature, and particularly, research portraying Europe as a class project, on the one hand, and research arguing for a generally diminished role of class, on the other. Then, we discuss two alternative predictions about social gradients from a cross-country perspective. Afterwards, we summarize the rationale for our research questions, followed by an introduction to the data and their operationalization. Thereafter, the empirical results are presented. Finally, the findings are summarized and discussed.

## **Class, inequalities and transnational activity**

### *Europe as a 'class project'*

The idea that transnational practices are vertically stratified has been advocated for a long time. In the 1950s, Karl W Deutsch argued that participation in extended networks of communication was mainly a characteristic of the upper social strata, while the middle strata just fairly participated, and the lower stratum was barely involved – a pattern which he described as similar to a 'layer cake' (1953: 170). Richard Münch (2001) maintains that new opportunities created by open borders mainly cater to educated professionals, who create most of the bonds of organic solidarity with people in other countries. Business leaders, politicians and experts are said to form an emerging 'transnational capitalist class' (Sklair, 2001), which shapes the world according to its fashion. Similarly, stratification researchers focusing on the link between globalization and class have emphasized that the impact of class and social inequalities, more generally, on individuals and their life courses is strengthened by contemporary trans- and supranational integration processes (Breen, 1997; Buchholz et al., 2009; Goldthorpe, 2002; Róbert, 2010).

With a specific focus on Europe, much has been written about the notion that the European Union (EU) is being driven by the self-interest of big-business capitalists (Cocks, 1980) or by EU-bureaucrats and other political elites (Haller, 2008). Similarly, Michael Mann observed that the emerging single European society 'is much more a network of upper social classes and elites than of the masses' (1998: 205). The book that touched most resonantly upon the stratification of transnational practices is probably Fligstein's *Euroclash* (2008). It argues that 'doing Europe' – the active involvement in the various transnational social fields created through EU law – has a marked social imbalance that has led him to describe Europe as a 'class project'. Other research has also found transnational activities to be more common among well-educated, high-income professionals and managers, emphasizing the role of other inequalities in conjunction with class (e.g. Andreotti and Le Galès, 2011; Baglioni and Recchi, 2013; Díez Medrano, 2010; Mau, 2009, 2010).

There are good reasons for assuming a strong link between inequalities and transnational practices. First, it takes economic resources to travel or study abroad. Second, cultural capital, and particularly, foreign language proficiency, is a facilitator of many transnational practices (cf. Gerhards and Hans, 2013). Third, higher education furthers cognitive mobilization (Inglehart, 1970) and thereby increases the taste for variety, as research on cultural omnivores argues (Peterson, 1992; van Eijck, 2000). Fourth, many high-end jobs provide ample opportunities for business trips and international contact (Tannock, 2007). The upper classes in general tend to benefit from a conjunction of all these factors, and they should consequently constitute the most transnationally active stratum.

One conceptual weakness of the existing literature is that it blurs the line between class and other inequalities, often using the term 'class' to denote a wider set of socioeconomic statuses than is described by class in the strict sense of occupational position. In that respect, our article adheres to this stricter understanding of class. Another problem is the narrow focus on vertical stratification: after all, age has been singled out as 'one of the strongest predictors of being European' (Fligstein, 2008: 141), and the younger generations are often spotlighted as the most cosmopolitan groups (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2007; Kuhn, 2011; Pichler, 2008). Others portray migrants as the vanguard of transnationalism (Portes, 1999; Pries, 2008; Römhild, 2007). Such findings question the idea of transnational activity being, first and foremost, a 'class project', as they exemplify the significance of heterogeneities, i.e. horizontal forms of stratification. Furthermore, the spiral trajectories of transnational 'pioneers' who do not necessarily belong to the upper classes demonstrate the potential for shifting class and regional patterns in European spatial mobility (cf. Favell and Recchi, 2011).

In this context, it is useful to recall two largely overlapping sociological debates, which both assume a generally *declining* influence of class (and inequalities more generally) on people's behavior and worldviews in advanced societies: the death-of-class thesis (the term commonly used in the US) and the individualization thesis (the term typically used in Europe).

### *The death-of-class/individualization thesis*

Initiated by Terry Clark and Seymour Lipset (1991), the death-of-class thesis purports that traditional hierarchies are in decline. Changes in the occupational structure and growing affluence have 'stripped' class of its economic connotations, thereby effectively reducing its everyday significance, e.g. for voting (cf. Pakulski and Waters, 1996). Clark et al. (1993) conclude that although class remains a potentially influential stratification mechanism, it is slowly eroding, and alternative mechanisms are gaining ground:

While class theories can illuminate many patterns, they must increasingly be supplemented by considerations of non-class-based hierarchies. This follows because, while class distinctions have become less rigid, other hierarchies, especially ascriptive ones like those based on sex, race or ethnicity, continue to polarize many countries of the world, differentiating them, for example, by residential location, educational opportunities, or of course by future class location. (Clark et al., 1993: 313)

Under the term ‘individualization’, Ulrich Beck developed a very similar argument: ‘ties to a social class recede mysteriously into the background for the actions of people. Status-based social milieus and lifestyles typical of a class culture lose their luster’ (1992: 88). While class still exists, its impact on what people do and think is greatly diminishing – a consequence of what Beck describes as the ‘elevator effect’ of growing affluence and educational expansion. Other scholars are less radical in their assumption of how much significance class will lose, but expect a decline as well (e.g. Bauman, 2001; Giddens, 1991).

The dissemination of the death-of-class/individualization theses has led even canonical class researchers to concede that, for a world in flux, alternatives to class as an explanation for human action should be taken into account (e.g. Goldthorpe, 2002; Goldthorpe and Marshall, 1992). Numerous empirical studies have tried to disentangle the relative importance of class and non-class mechanisms of structuration since then, dealing with a wide variety of sociological topics. The majority have focused on political behavior and attitudes, commonly finding that ‘new’ social divisions (heterogeneities) such as age, gender, race, religious affiliation, or issue-based voting are indeed significant, while evidence for the continued importance of class remains somewhat mixed (e.g. Ansolabehere et al., 2006; Gerhards et al., 2012; Nieuwebeerta, 2001).

## **Socioeconomic development and the social gradient in transnational activity – diverging predictions**

So far, transnational practices have not been explicitly studied from the individualization angle, despite its relevance for the ‘class project’ debate. It is not even known whether there are some European countries that fit the ‘class project’ account better than others. The quantitative studies that do exist either pool EU countries together (Fligstein, 2008; Kuhn, 2011), effectively ignoring any international variation that might exist, or they are based on single-country studies (e.g. Mau, 2010). Thus, we still largely lack the empirical basis to adequately evaluate the effect of socioeconomic development on the vertical stratification of transnational activity. Moreover, the prediction of the ‘death-of-class’ account concerning the relative role played by class – and other inequalities – for transnational activity with increasing socioeconomic development (‘decreasing gradient’ thesis) not only awaits empirical proof, but can also be challenged on theoretical grounds. In the following, we quickly revise the ‘decreasing gradient’ thesis, then we present the ‘increasing gradient’ thesis as a theoretical alternative, and finally, we discuss the historical legacy of state socialism as a potential confounding factor.

### ***The ‘decreasing gradient’ thesis***

The death-of-class/individualization theory would predict that the ‘elevator effect’ of prosperity and education expansion softens the effect that unequal socioeconomic positions have on people’s lives. Consequently, more advanced societies should be more ‘democratic’ and ‘egalitarian’ with respect to the extent to which people from various socioeconomic backgrounds are involved in transnational practices. In the same vein, the link between occupational class and cultural consumption has been found to be weaker

in European countries with high human development (Gerhards et al., 2012), and socio-economic status produces smaller differences in health in richer countries (Mackenbach et al., 2008). If transnational activity followed the same logic, class and inequality-related gradients in transnational practices should particularly be smaller in the more socioeconomically developed countries. This expectation could be termed the '*decreasing gradient*' thesis.

### *The 'increasing gradient' thesis*

There are good reasons, however, to assume the opposite: a growing social gradient in transnational activity in the socioeconomically advanced countries, due to a confluence of several trends. First, engaging in transnational activity might constitute a new form of social distinction through which the upper classes consciously or unconsciously separate themselves socially from the lower classes (cf. Gerhards, 2014; Meuleman and Savage, 2013). These new status markers are especially relevant for the upper strata in the socioeconomically advanced countries, where cultural lifestyles are already rather egalitarian otherwise. Under the condition of material saturation, one could argue, distinction increasingly works via transnational activities, rather than via conspicuous consumption. The other arguments relate to the fact that more advanced societies tend to be more deeply embedded in the global economy (cf. Bergh and Nilsson, 2010: 1203). As a consequence, professionals and managers in those societies are more involved in transnational exchange in their work environments than their counterparts in less affluent and less globalized economies. Economic globalization might also induce the upper strata to actively develop transnational competencies and to seek cosmopolitan experiences as a strategic investment in better career opportunities (cf. Beck, 2007; Ong, 2002). Finally, engaging in transnational practices often requires spending power, which is higher for the well-off in affluent countries. None of these trends alone may necessarily be sufficient to increase the social gradient of transnational activity, but in conjunction, they might.

### *Historical legacies: Socialism and capitalism*

What might complicate testing these different predictions are the long-term effects of a major historical experience that has divided Europe for roughly half a century: state socialism. Ideologically, the main goal in socialist systems was to ensure the leading role of the working class, which legitimized numerous means to equalize living conditions. A controlled wage scale, full employment and employment-related social benefits equalized income to an extent unknown in Western societies (Ferge, 1979; Kornai, 1992). Status equality was widespread and politically desired (Machonin, 1997), so a pronounced emergence of social classes and strata in post-socialist countries was prevented.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Eastern European countries that are now EU members have transitioned from state socialism to democracy and capitalism. Yet because the formation of a deep-rooted capitalist class society takes time, one can still expect post-socialist countries to possess, at any given level of socioeconomic development, a smaller degree of 'classness', as compared to Western Europe. Consequently, social gradients in transnational practices today could still be smaller in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. If EU member states are compared without taking these

historical legacies into account, the individualization effects leading to smaller social gradients might be obscured, as the countries possess very different ‘baselines’ of classness. Exploring social gradients in transnational activity requires a disentangling of historical path dependencies from modernization effects. Therefore, in this study, the post-socialist legacy is controlled for in the pan-European analysis.

## Research questions

As the different theories introduced have shown, there is some reason to question the dominance of class – or inequalities more generally – for the stratification of transnational activity suggested by the ‘class project’ thesis. Class could be the major structuration mechanism, play a significant role within a broader notion of inequalities that includes education and income, or matter little, once heterogeneities are taken into account. The first goal of the present article is to clarify the role of class, relative to other inequalities and to heterogeneities for Europeans’ transnational activities. In doing so, it will hold to Peter M Blau’s (1977) distinction between inequalities to signify vertical stratification (class, education, etc.) and heterogeneities to subsume alternative, mainly ascription-based mechanisms.<sup>1</sup> We search for answers to the following research questions:

*RQ1:* To what extent do class positions (and inequalities more generally) explain the variance in citizens’ transnational practices within the EU-27 countries?

*RQ2:* Are class positions (and inequalities more generally) more relevant than heterogeneities in explaining citizens’ transnational practices within the EU-27 countries?

Our second goal is to find out the way in which socioeconomic development shapes social gradients in transnational activity. As has been discussed above, at least theoretically, diverging predictions are plausible. Therefore, our third research question is:

*RQ3:* Are more socioeconomically developed countries characterized by smaller or larger social gradients in transnational practices?

## Research design

We use the Eurobarometer 73.3 from March–April 2010 (European Commission, 2010). It was conducted in all EU-27 countries, with approximately 1000 respondents per country, except for Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta, with about 500, and Germany and the UK, with around 1500 and 1300 observations, respectively. All participants are EU citizens. We decided to exclude respondents who were born in a country other than their country of residence from the analysis in order to avoid a tautology, because first-generation migrants *by definition* partake in cross-border interaction. It should be kept in mind that, due to this omission, our test for the importance of heterogeneity-related characteristics can be considered conservative. In trial computations that included first-generation migrants, migrant status trumped class-related variables by far as a predictor of transnational practices. Our working sample consists of 21,930 respondents. Because the 27

countries differ sufficiently in affluence and other indicators, the idea of a waning influence of class on transnational practices – as well as alternative hypotheses – can be analyzed by a country comparison (cf. Gerhards et al., 2012).

### *Dependent variable: The transnationalism index*

We measure transnational activity via a transnationalism index based on QB6, a battery of 12 questions covering cross-border practices and experiences, such as holidays in other countries, working abroad, having foreign friends and following foreign news (cf. Table 1 for a full list of items). The items cover most central dimensions of transnational practices.<sup>2</sup> They were recoded into dummy variables, with 1 indicating that the item applies to the respondent. An exploratory factor analysis revealed that only one factor has an Eigenvalue greater than 1, with all items loading sufficiently high on this factor (.42 or higher).<sup>3</sup> To keep the interpretation of the index as simple as possible, all items were summed up to form the transnationalism index. Any individual can score between 0 (not a single transnational practice) and 12 (all 12 transnational practices). While remaining somewhat less complex and detailed than the EUCROSS measurements of cross-border practices (Hanquinet and Savage, 2011), our transnationalism index is far more encompassing than the dependent variables used in earlier studies based on EB surveys (e.g. Fligstein, 2008; Mau and Mewes, 2012).

### *Independent variables, micro-level*

On the individual level, we differentiate between inequalities and heterogeneities. We treat class, education, difficulties in paying bills and self-placement in society as inequalities. *Class* consists of seven categories based on the Erikson–Goldthorpe–Portocarero (EGP) class scheme (Erikson et al., 1979), which we derived using the two-digit International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO88), together with Ganzeboom and Treiman's (1996) conversion table. The categories are: 'I Higher service', 'II Lower service', 'III Routine clerical', 'VI Skilled manual', 'VIIa Semi-unskilled manual', 'VIIb Farm workers', plus the additional category, 'never worked'. For the classification of individuals currently not employed, information on the previous job was used where available (cf. Róbert, 2010). *Education* is measured using the International Standard Classification of Education harmonized scale (ISCED97) and consists of seven categories ranging from 'pre-primary' to 'second stage-tertiary' education. *Difficulties paying bills* (dummy variable, 1 = yes) is used as a proxy for income, on which no information is provided in the EB. For *self-placement in society*, respondents are asked to position themselves on a scale from 1 ('lowest level in society') to 10 ('highest level').

For most of this article, we use these four inequalities individually, but to answer RQ3, we construct a latent variable (called *socioeconomic status*) by conducting an exploratory factor analysis using the 'polychoric' command in Stata. Only one factor emerges with an Eigenvalue > 1 on which all four variables load with at least .49. Thus, we attain a multidimensional measurement of socioeconomic position, which is preferable to one-dimensional measures (cf. Goldthorpe, 2010).<sup>4</sup> Because the polychoric command requires ordinally scaled items, we were forced to delete the residual class category 'never worked', so that the sample size for RQ3 is slightly reduced to 19,770.



**Table 1.** Items used for the transnationalism index.

No.	Item
1	<b>Lived abroad:</b> You have lived for reasons other than study or work for at least three consecutive months in another country than (OUR COUNTRY).
2	<b>Studied abroad:</b> You have attended school or studied for at least half an academic year in another country than (OUR COUNTRY).
3	<b>Worked abroad:</b> You have worked (including volunteering and traineeships) for at least three consecutive months in another country than (OUR COUNTRY).
4	<b>Foreign language:</b> You are fluent in at least one other language than (INTERVIEW LANGUAGE).
5	<b>Bi-national partnership:</b> You live or have lived with a partner of a different citizenship than your own.
6	<b>Friends from abroad:</b> You have close friends in (OUR COUNTRY) who have moved here from abroad.
7	<b>Friends abroad:</b> You have close friends who live in another country than (OUR COUNTRY).
8	<b>Relatives abroad:</b> You have close relatives (brothers, sisters, children, parents) who live in another country than (OUR COUNTRY).
9	<b>Foreign food:</b> You regularly eat food at home that is typical of another country than (OUR COUNTRY).
10	<b>Foreign news, culture, sports:</b> You regularly follow news, cultural life or sports from another country than (OUR COUNTRY).
11	<b>Holidays abroad:</b> You regularly spend your holidays/weekends in one particular country other than (OUR COUNTRY).
12	<b>Property abroad:</b> You own real estate property/properties in another country than (OUR COUNTRY) (not timesharing).

Source: Obtained from EB 73.3, QB6.

*Heterogeneities*, per contra, refer to parameters without an inherent rank order. We consider age, gender, rural/urban and migration background. *Age* is measured in years; *age-squared* is additionally included, because we assume a non-linear relationship with transnational practices, increasing into adulthood and then decreasing again, as the decrease of openness with age is well documented (McCrae et al., 1999). *Gender* (1 = male) is considered, as earlier literature has found that women are less transnationally active (Fligstein, 2008). *Rural/urban* has three categories: 'rural area or village', 'small/middle sized town' and 'large city'. We expect city-dwellers, in particular, to have higher transnationalism index scores, as cities generally provide more opportunities for contact with people from diverse backgrounds. Finally, two dummy variables capture *migration background*: one for second-generation migrants (defined as having at least one parent

born abroad) and one for third-generation migrants (at least one grandparent born abroad). People with a migration background should be more likely to have links to another country via their relatives and should therefore score higher on the transnationalism index.

### *Independent variables, macro-level*

The two country characteristics that are of main interest for this study, as they represent the main drivers of the ‘elevator effect’ (Beck, 1992), are standard of living and education. A country’s *standard of living* is measured as the logarithm of the GDP per capita in purchasing power standards,<sup>5</sup> while *tertiary education* reflects the gross enrollment ratio of students in tertiary education.<sup>6</sup> To capture the post-socialist historical legacy, an *Eastern Europe* dummy is created, in which all EU countries that were formerly situated east of the Iron Curtain are coded as 1, and all other countries, as 0. In addition, *country size* (km<sup>2</sup>) is considered as an additional macro-level variable of interest that has been shown in past research to influence levels of transnational activity (Mau and Mewes, 2012).

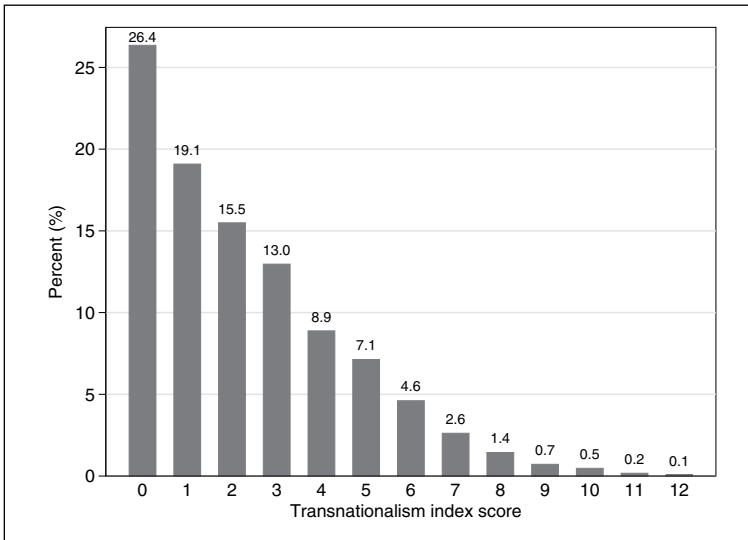
## **Methods**

This article combines several statistical modeling techniques. To answer the first two research questions, we run multivariate ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models on identical samples for each EU-27 country, individually, to compare the adjusted *R*-squared values (cf. Marks, 2005, for an earlier application of this procedure). For RQ3, we initially use bivariate and partial correlations between country-level aggregate values to establish whether national standard of living and tertiary education vary significantly with the variance in transnational activity explained by class and inequalities. We then construct a set of random coefficient multi-level regression models, complemented by a conditional-effect plot based on an OLS regression model.

### *Limitations*

There are various limitations resulting from the nature of the data. Not all independent variables are optimal in their operationalization, e.g. the binary proxy for income and the *migration background* dummy variables, which operate from a rather simplistic definition of foreign heritage. Whether the ISCED97-harmonized variable for *education* allows for truly unbiased country comparisons has been called into question by Schneider (2009), yet it remains the standard until better options are available. Generally, large-*N* quantitative studies are weak in uncovering complex processes, yet qualitative and mixed methods studies suffer from different limitations in turn.

Given the debate about the problems associated with methodological nationalism (cf. Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002), it may appear paradoxical to approach the topic of transnational activity via a study based on the comparison of nation-states. However, a truly relational approach to transnationalism (cf. Weiß, 2005) would require differently structured data: ideally, network data, which are not provided by the Eurobarometer series. Moreover, relational data typically do not allow for investigating within-country differences, which is a main focus of this article. A cross-national



**Figure 1.** The distribution of transnationalism index scores in the EU-27.

comparative approach still has merit, as ‘the central place of the national state in class analysis can be justified by its role in filtering world-system effects’ (Breen and Rottman, 1998: 15).

## Results

### *Descriptive findings*

Figure 1 shows the distribution of transnationalism index scores in the EU-27 (pooled analysis). About three-quarters (74%) of all Europeans are transnationally active. Almost half of the Europeans (48%) report 1 to 3 activities, and a fifth (21%) report 4 to 6 activities. A small minority of 5% mentions 7 to 9 transactions, and fewer than 1% reach the highest values of 10 to 12. Hence, the degree to which Europeans engage in transnational practices varies notably.

There are also substantial differences in average transnational activity (mean transnationalism index scores) between European societies (Figure 2): Italians (1.2 transactions) and Hungarians (1.6) score the lowest, whereas the Dutch (4.3) and Luxembourgers (5.7) score the highest. The working sample for Luxembourg – as for all countries – only contains EU citizens *born* in the country of residence. Hence, foreign-born EU bureaucrats cannot push Luxembourg’s transnationalism index score upwards, nor can the many commuters from neighboring France and Germany.

### *Pooled regressions*

In order to prepare the answers to the first two research questions, four individual-level OLS regression models are run with the transnationalism index as a dependent variable (Table 2, M1–M4). M1 includes only class. As expected, the higher classes, and the

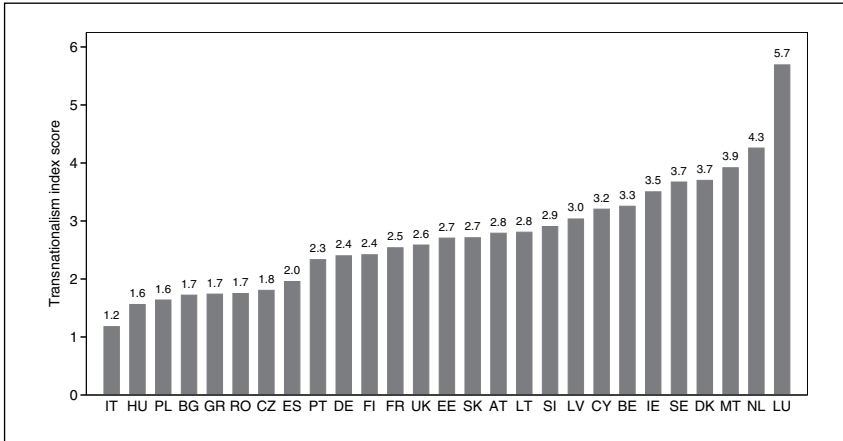


Figure 2. Mean transnationalism index scores, by country.

Table 2. OLS regression predicting the transnationalism index score.

	M1	M2	M3	M4
<b>Inequalities</b>				
<b>Class</b>				
I Higher service	1.035*** (0.05)	0.384*** (0.06)		0.382*** (0.05)
II Lower service	0.591*** (0.05)	0.237*** (0.05)		0.260*** (0.04)
VI Skilled manual	-0.641*** (0.05)	-0.352*** (0.05)		-0.404*** (0.05)
VIIa Semi-unskilled manual	-0.689*** (0.04)	-0.268*** (0.04)		-0.320*** (0.04)
VIIb Farm workers	-1.226*** (0.09)	-0.735*** (0.09)		-0.652*** (0.09)
Never worked	-0.320*** (0.05)	0.014 (0.05)		-0.245*** (0.06)
<b>Education</b>				
Second stage tertiary		2.140*** (0.13)		1.977*** (0.13)
First stage tertiary		0.865*** (0.04)		0.793*** (0.04)
Post-secondary		0.716*** (0.05)		0.668*** (0.05)
Lower secondary		-0.241*** (0.04)		-0.141*** (0.04)
Primary		-0.465*** (0.05)		-0.141** (0.05)

**Table 2.** (Continued)

	M1	M2	M3	M4
Pre-primary		-0.773*** (0.12)		-0.296* (0.12)
Difficulties paying bills		-0.106*** (0.03)		-0.217*** (0.03)
Self-placement in society		0.152*** (0.01)		0.138*** (0.01)
<b>Heterogeneities</b>				
Age			0.027*** (0.00)	-0.004 (0.00)
Age <sup>2</sup>			-0.000*** (0.00)	-0.000* (0.00)
Male			0.287*** (0.03)	0.269*** (0.03)
Rural/urban				
Large town			0.361*** (0.04)	0.135*** (0.04)
Small/middle-sized town			0.161*** (0.03)	0.046 (0.03)
Grandparents foreign-born			0.932*** (0.06)	0.838*** (0.05)
Parents foreign-born			0.820*** (0.07)	0.840*** (0.07)
Intercept	2.707*** (0.03)	1.691*** (0.07)	2.000*** (0.10)	1.923*** (0.13)
N	21,930	21,930	21,930	21,930
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> (%)	7.2	12.9	7.6	18.4

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses. Omitted category for occupation: III Routine clerical/sales. Omitted category for education: upper secondary education. Omitted category for Rural/urban: rural area/village. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

higher service class in particular, are more transnationally active, while farm workers are the least active. Class alone explains up to 7% of the variance in the transnationalism index scores in this pooled analysis.

M2 contains the other three inequality variables in addition to class. Transnational activity increases not only with class, but also with education and a higher self-placement in society, while people who have difficulties paying bills are less transnationally active. All in all, 13% of the variance in transnationalism index scores is explained.

M3 contains only the heterogeneities as independent variables. They all significantly impact transnational practices. As expected, there is a reverse U-shaped pattern for age that peaks at age 31. Men are more transnationally active than women, city-dwellers more than villagers, and people with a migration background more than those without such a background. Taken together, the heterogeneities explain roughly 8% of the variance in transnationalism index scores.

The last model, M4, contains both inequalities and heterogeneities. Most coefficients remain stable, except for the differences between small/middle-sized town dwellers and villagers, which become insignificant. The combined adjusted *R*-squared is 18.4%. This groundwork now allows us to take on the comparative perspective, which is at the core of our analysis.

### *The absolute impact of class and inequalities (RQ1)*

To answer the first research question, Models M1 and M2 are run separately for each EU country, and the resulting adjusted *R*-squared values are saved. We thus obtain the maximal percentage of the variance in transnationalism index scores that can be explained by class alone and by inequalities more generally. As Figure 3A reveals, there are substantial differences between countries. While in Ireland, 25% of the variance in transnationalism can be attributed to inequalities, this is the case for merely 4% in Latvia. Class alone, of course, explains less variance, ranging from 15% in Ireland to 0.5% in Latvia, but the country order is relatively consistent.

### *Comparing the impact of class, inequalities and heterogeneities (RQ2)*

Next, the maximal percentage of the variance in transnationalism explained by heterogeneities is extracted by running M3 for each country. There are again major differences between countries (Figure 3B): while heterogeneities account for 19% of the variance in transnationalism index scores in France, they are responsible for only 4% in Ireland.

But what matters more: class/inequalities or heterogeneities? To answer RQ2 for each country, we subtract the explanatory power of heterogeneities (cf. Figure 3B) from those of class and inequalities, respectively (cf. Figure 3A). The vertical line in Figure 3C ('Difference') demarks the point of equal importance; for the countries situated to the left of this line, heterogeneities are more influential for transnational practices than class or inequalities, respectively, whereas for the countries situated to the right of this line, class or inequalities are more important than heterogeneities.

If only class is compared against heterogeneities in predicting transnational activity, it turns out that in only 7 out of 27 countries class has more predictive power; in the other 20 heterogeneities are more powerful. If inequalities more generally are compared against heterogeneities, inequalities are more decisive in shaping how transnationally people live in 15 countries, while heterogeneities are stronger in 12 countries. Inequalities are particularly dominant in Ireland and in a range of countries from Denmark to the UK, while heterogeneities are especially significant in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia, four ex-socialist countries. Taken together, these findings cast some doubt on the accuracy of the portrayal of Europe as a 'class project' in the strict sense, rather suggesting that the focus on class needs to be complemented by considering inequalities more generally and, more importantly, by taking heterogeneities into account. After all, in a non-negligible number of European societies, heterogeneities are more influential for transnational practices than inequalities in general.

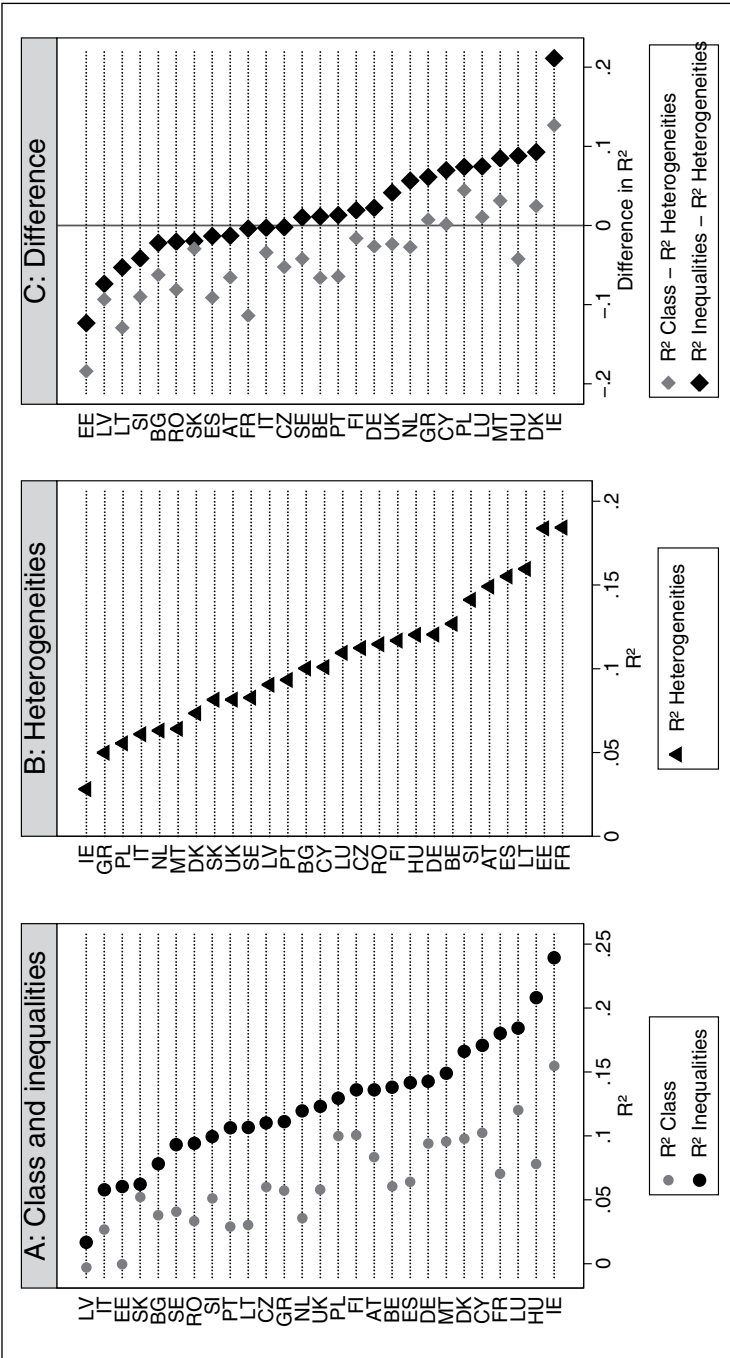


Figure 3. Explaining individual transnationalism scores: Comparison of R-squared values across the EU-27 countries.

**Table 3.** Macro-level correlations.

Variable	Pairwise correlations		Partial correlations			
	R <sup>2</sup> Class	R <sup>2</sup> Inequalities	R <sup>2</sup> Class	R <sup>2</sup> Inequalities	R <sup>2</sup> Class	R <sup>2</sup> Inequalities
Standard of living	.548** (.002)	.505** (.005)	.435* (.021)	.320† (.097)		
Tertiary education	-.289 (.128)	-.236 (.217)			-.275 (.157)	-.218 (.266)
Eastern Europe			.013 (.948)	-.126 (.523)	-.361† (.059)	-.419* (.026)

Note: R<sup>2</sup> Class  $\hat{=}$  M1, R<sup>2</sup> Inequalities  $\hat{=}$  M2 in Table 2. † $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### *The influence of socioeconomic development on social gradients in transnational practices (RQ3)*

To discover whether socioeconomic development increases or decreases the social gradients in transnational activity, we combine two approaches that are related in turn. First, we establish the extent to which the country characteristics of interest, standard of living and tertiary education enrollment, correlate with how much variance in transnational practices is explained by either class alone or by inequalities (as captured by the country-specific *R*-squared values, cf. RQ1 results above). The pairwise correlations in the left half of Table 3 reveal a positive correlation between the variance explained by class and inequalities, respectively, and standard of living, suggesting that the social gradient in transnational activity is systematically larger in richer countries. This tendency remains relatively stable after controlling for historical legacy (Table 3, right half). By contrast, tertiary education enrollment does not seem to shape social gradients in a statistically significant fashion, whether historical legacies are taken into account or not. Although not significant, the direction of the effect of tertiary education enrollment points to an association with lower gradients, in line with predictions derived from the death-of-class/individualization theory.

The second approach to RQ3 investigates the suggested interaction between individual socioeconomic position and national standard of living in determining transnational practices in more detail (tertiary education enrollment was excluded from further analysis due to its correlational non-significance). We construct three random coefficient multi-level models (Table 4). For the sake of completeness, we start with an empty model, without any independent variables. Of more relevance here are the next two models, which contain the latent variable socioeconomic status (capturing inequalities in one variable) in the random part. In particular, Model 2 contains all heterogeneities, socioeconomic status, as well as national standard of living and country size. In the final model, the interaction between standard of living and socioeconomic status is added. The interaction term is positive and significant, indicating that across the 27 countries, the relationship between socioeconomic status and transnational practices is moderated by national standard of living; inequality-related gradients in transnational activities are



**Table 4.** Multi-level regression predicting transnationalism index scores.

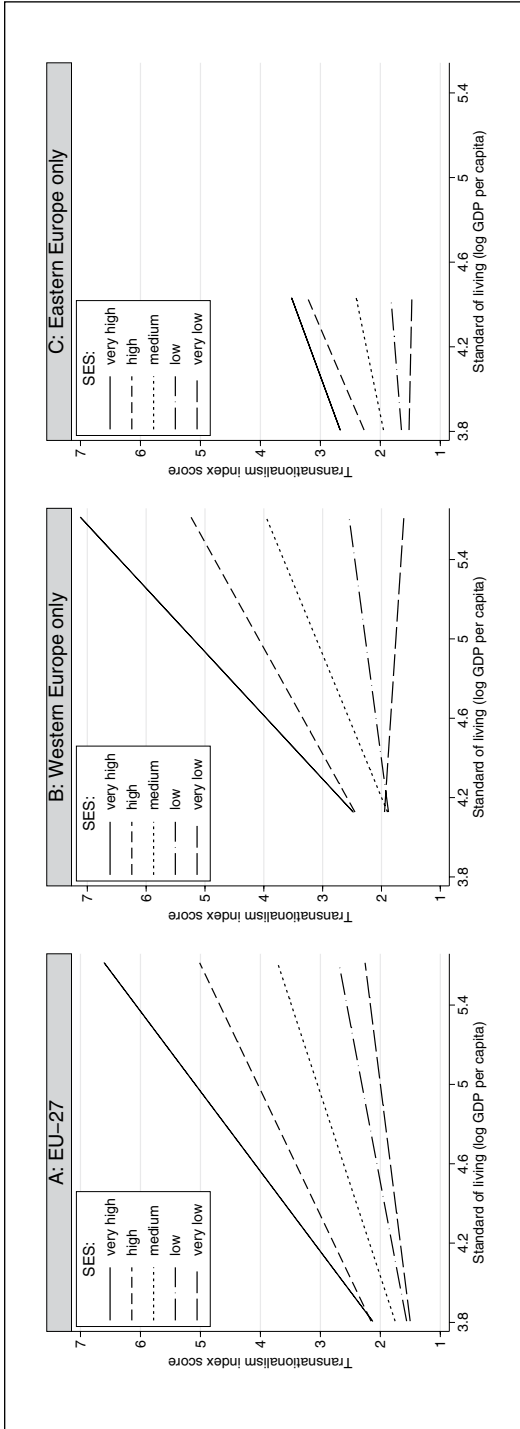
	(1)		(2)		(3)	
	Est.	(SE)	Est.	(SE)	Est.	(SE)
<b>Fixed part</b>						
Constant	2.746***	(0.19)	0.322	(1.13)	0.890	(1.09)
Age			0.001	(0.01)	0.001	(0.01)
Age <sup>2</sup>			-0.000**	(0.00)	-0.000**	(0.00)
Male			0.253***	(0.03)	0.254***	(0.03)
Rural/urban						
Small/middle-sized town			0.158***	(0.03)	0.159***	(0.03)
Large town			0.343***	(0.04)	0.347***	(0.04)
Grandparents foreign-born			0.753***	(0.05)	0.751***	(0.05)
Parents foreign-born			0.711***	(0.07)	0.714***	(0.07)
SES			0.601***	(0.04)	-1.572***	(0.32)
Country size			-0.337***	(0.05)	-0.330***	(0.05)
Standard of living			0.695**	(0.24)	0.561**	(0.23)
Standard of living*SES					0.483***	(0.07)
<b>Random part</b>						
SES			0.038	(0.01)	0.010	(0.01)
Slope variance (intercept)	0.973	(0.27)	0.181	(0.05)	0.166	(0.05)
Residual variance (intercept)	4.374	(0.04)	3.678	(0.04)	3.678	(0.04)
Observations	19,770		19,770		19,770	
Groups	27		27		27	
Log likelihood	-42708.575		-41001.892		-40988.248	
Wald chi <sup>2</sup>			1690.05		2250.56	
(Df)			(10)		(11)	

Notes: SES = socioeconomic status; omitted category for Rural/urban: rural area/village. † $p < .1$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

steeper, rather than more even, in more affluent societies (as had already been suggested by the initial macro-level correlations in Table 3).

For illustration purposes, we show this macro-micro interaction graphically, using a recoded categorical version of socioeconomic status (Figure 4). Three patterns emerge. First, there is substantial stratification, as the higher social strata are consistently more transnationally active everywhere. Second, the more affluent the country, the higher the average number of cross-border practices for all social strata. Finally, the increase in transnational activity is steeper for the higher social strata, resulting in a widened gradient in more affluent countries. If we look at Western European and Eastern (post-socialist) European countries separately, the same pattern of the increasing social gradient with growing affluence is observable, although more clearly among the Western countries (among the post-socialist countries, the national income differences are smaller).

If one dared to infer trends from these cross-sectional data, they would suggest that, while all social strata become more transnational as the national standard of living rises, the upper strata do so at a faster pace than the lower ones. As a consequence, the



**Figure 4.** Transnationalism index scores: the interaction between individual socioeconomic status (SES) and national standard of living. Notes: Conditional effect plot based on a regression model that contains all heterogeneities plus the categorical form of SES, as well as the interaction between log GDP and SES. The categories are defined as follows: very high [+1.5SD, MAX], high [+0.5SD, +1.5SD], medium [-0.5SD, +0.5SD], low [-1.5SD, -0.5SD], very low [MIN, -1.5SD].

stratification of transnational practices *increases* with national prosperity. This finding clearly challenges the ‘decreasing gradient’ hypothesis and supports the ‘increasing gradient’ hypothesis.

## Discussion and conclusion

This article examined the stratification of transnational activity within and between European societies, (mainly) departing from two theories – the ‘class project’ account of EU sociology, and the death-of-class/individualization theory from stratification research. We would like to highlight three findings:

1. Although class and social inequalities more generally explain transnational practices in all EU countries to some extent, the prominence of their role differs starkly between European societies.
2. When class specifically is compared to heterogeneities, the former accounts for more variance in just 7 of 27 EU countries. By contrast, all inequalities combined matter more than heterogeneities in 15 societies.
3. With increasing prosperity, all social strata become more transnationally active. Yet due to a steeper increase in transnational practices for the upper classes and strata, the social gradient in transnational activity increases as well. This gradient-increasing effect of affluence remains when the countries’ historical legacy (capitalism or socialism) is taken into account.

Our findings challenge the dominant portrayal of Europeans’ transnational activity as a mere ‘class project’. While class does matter for transnational practices to some extent (as it does for most areas of human life), this narrative ignores powerful divisions within societies other than class, most notably age and migration background, which, in most countries, turned out to be stronger than class divisions. In that sense, the ‘class project’ narrative overemphasizes the link between class position and transnational activity. Only if ‘class’ is understood in a broader sense, i.e. as inequalities more generally (which is a questionable practice), are citizens’ transnational activities better explained than by heterogeneities in the majority of EU countries – but by no means in all. Over-proportionally, post-socialist countries are among those countries in which inequalities are *not* more powerful than heterogeneities.

But a capitalist versus socialist legacy is not the main explanation. We found the social gradient in transnational activity to be systematically *larger* in more socioeconomically advanced EU countries, over and above historical legacy, and contrary to what one would expect based on the death-of-class/individualization theory, thus supporting our ‘increasing gradient’ hypothesis. Our results stand in stark contrast to previous studies that have found rather egalitarian lifestyle patterns in Europe, especially in more affluent societies, e.g. for cultural consumption (Gerhards et al., 2012). In our understanding, these divergent patterns demonstrate that not all realms of modern life follow the same logic of ‘democratization’. Transnational activities constitute a social field in which class differences and inequalities maintain their relevance, in particular, in more affluent parts of Europe.

Our findings also qualify the death-of-class/individualization thesis in another important aspect: at least for transnational activities, the twin drivers of the ‘elevator effect’ of individualization – affluence and educational expansion – do not affect the social gradient in a uniform fashion. Our findings suggest that, while tertiary education is not significantly related to gradient size, it tends to decrease, rather than increase, the gradient. Affluence, by contrast, is systematically related to large social gradients in transnational activity, both across the EU and in subsamples of Western and Eastern Europe.

We have suggested that a confluence of factors helps to explain why, in more affluent societies, social gradients in transnational activity are particularly large. The first two arguments – transnational habitus as a new way of social distinction and as a new form of career-related investment – are strategic in nature. The other two stress opportunities and capabilities regarding increased transnational activities due to the upper classes’ greater transnational involvement in the work environment or their greater spending power in more affluent countries.

None of these suggested factors – which we believe are stronger in the affluent part of Europe – can be formally tested with EB data, so digging deeper into these mechanisms is one crucial direction for follow-up research. Qualitative studies, in particular, are needed to tap into the motivation behind transnational experiences: To what extent are they a matter of choice or of opportunities? Assuming that transnational experiences are actively chosen, is the main motivation of the upper classes to set themselves apart as cosmopolitans from lower-class locals? Or is the main goal to get a head-start on the labor market (so that the reference group is rather peers of similar educational and occupational backgrounds)? Or do transnational practices mainly satisfy an inner curiosity, without involving strategic intentions? Further, longitudinal research is needed to assess whether social gradients in transnational practices are actually widening when countries become more affluent. Another promising avenue lies in combining the empirical insights from stratification research focusing on the impact of globalization on social structure with our work on the effect of social structure on transnational activities. It could be fruitful to investigate whether reinforcing feedback loops between the effects of globalization on stratification (cf. Breen, 1997; Buchholz et al., 2009) and cross-border practices exist, and – if so – what forms they take. After all, transnational activity not only depends on social position, but may, itself, reinforce and reproduce the stratification system, much like cultural consumption does (Bourdieu, 1984). Evidence of such a feedback loop would justify giving transnational practices a more prominent place on the agenda of general stratification research.

As inequalities in transnational activity seem to increase rather than to diminish with economic well-being, the stratification of transnational activity will continue to be a salient issue in the years to come.

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## Notes

1. The research center 'From Heterogeneities to Inequalities' in Bielefeld (Germany) considers inequalities to be a sub-form of heterogeneities: 'Inequalities here refer to categorizations of heterogeneities which lead to regularly unequal access to resources, status (recognition of roles associated with heterogeneities), and power (decision-making, agenda setting, and the shaping of belief systems)' (Faist, 2014: 5–6). As this research group nevertheless distinguishes inequalities from general heterogeneities that do not lead to a hierarchical structuring of society, there is no immediate conflict with our interpretation of Blau's concepts.
2. If compared to the encompassing EUCROSS typology of cross-border practices (Hanquinet and Savage, 2011: 41–42) – which itself is partially based on Eurobarometer questions – the following parallels become apparent: 'lived abroad', 'studied abroad', 'worked abroad' (EB)  $\hat{=}$  'long stay' (EUCROSS); 'foreign language' (EB)  $\hat{=}$  'cultural goods in foreign language' (EUCROSS); 'foreign news, culture, sports' (EB)  $\hat{=}$  'news' (EUCROSS); 'foreign food' (EB)  $\hat{=}$  'ethnic food' (EUCROSS); 'holidays abroad' (EB)  $\hat{=}$  'short stays and tourism' (EUCROSS); 'friends from abroad' and 'friends abroad' (EB)  $\hat{=}$  'friendships' (EUCROSS). Thus, the only EUCROSS dimensions that are absent in our transnationalism index are 'use of new telecommunication technologies', 'remittances' and 'spatial competence'. Also note that none of the items makes reference to a specific geographic (e.g. 'Europe') or institutional (e.g. 'EU') frame. Thus, we cannot distinguish between European and extra-European transnational activity in the way we have elsewhere (Delhey et al., 2014).
3. The required minimum value suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) is .32.
4. Fachelli and Lopéz-Roldán (2013) construct a similar inclusive inequality measure by combining four dimensions (work, education, income and housing) using multiple correspondence and cluster analyses. While their more complex methodology reflects their ambitious goal of obtaining the multidimensional social strata of Argentinian society, the authors emphasize the urgent need to depart from one-dimensional measures of social stratification.
5. Values from 2011. *Source*: Eurostat ([epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tec00114](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tec00114), accessed 28 August 2012). Using the logarithm of GDP per capita is a standard practice in econometric research, and it makes sense for similar reasons here.
6. Values from 2002–2011. *Source*: UNDP ([hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2013/](http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2013/), accessed 12 February 2013).

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### Author biographies

Jan Delhey is Professor of General Sociology/Macrosociology at Otto-von-Guericke University Magdeburg. He holds a diploma in Sociology from Otto-Friedrich University Bamberg and received his doctoral degree from Free University Berlin. His research interests include cross-national differences in subjective well-being, trust and social cohesion; social inequality and its consequences; and sociological aspects of European integration and globalization. He is currently leading the project 'Cross-border Interactions and Transnational Identities', which is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) as part of the research unit 'Horizontal Europeanization'.

Emanuel Deutschmann is a research associate at Jacobs University Bremen and an affiliated PhD fellow at the Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences. He holds a BSc in Social Sciences from the University of Cologne and an MSc in Sociology from Nuffield College, University of Oxford. His research interests include social networks and transnational social interaction, both within specific world regions and the world at large.

Katharina Cirlanaru (née Richter) is a research associate at Jacobs University Bremen. She holds a BA in Integrated Social Sciences from Jacobs University Bremen and an MSocSci in Ethnic Relations, Cultural Diversity and Integration/Sociology from the University of Helsinki. Her research interests include social transnationalism, transnational sense of community and denationalization, especially with respect to the European integration process.



## Résumé

Dans les travaux sociologiques sur la transnationalisation, il est généralement admis que les strates sociales supérieures participent plus à des activités transnationales que les strates inférieures. Cependant, les tenants de la thèse de l'individualisation ou de la « mort des classes » soutiennent que le poids de la classe sociale (et des inégalités en général) sur les actions des gens diminue dans les sociétés riches. En partant de ces théories, nous étudions dans cet article l'influence de la classe, et plus généralement des inégalités, sur l'activité transnationale. À partir de données de l'Eurobaromètre 73.3 portant sur 27 pays européens, l'article examine (a) dans quelle mesure la classe détermine - en soi, conjointement à d'autres formes d'inégalités, et par rapport à différents facteurs d'hétérogénéité - les pratiques transnationales dans chacun des pays ; et (b) dans quelle proportion le gradient social de l'activité transnationale qui résulte de la classe et des inégalités varie d'un pays à l'autre, et si le développement socioéconomique tend à diminuer ou augmenter ce gradient. Les résultats montrent que, dans la plupart des pays, les facteurs d'hétérogénéité expliquent davantage que la classe sociale la variance dans l'activité transnationale, mais moins que les inégalités en général. Qui plus est, les gradients sociaux au niveau de l'activité transnationale sont systématiquement plus importants dans les pays d'Europe les plus riches.

## Mots-clés

Activités transnationales, classe, Eurobaromètre 73.3, Europe, individualisation, inégalités

## Resumen

En la investigación sociológica sobre transnacionalización, generalmente se da por hecho que los estratos superiores están más involucrados en las actividades transfronterizas que los inferiores. Sin embargo, los defensores de la tesis de la individualización o de la desaparición de las clases han argumentado que la importancia de la clase (y de las desigualdades en general) para las acciones de las personas está disminuyendo en las sociedades desarrolladas. Tomando estas teorías como punto de partida, este artículo investiga la influencia de la clase y de las desigualdades, en términos más generales, sobre la actividad transnacional. Usando los datos del Eurobarómetro 73.3 sobre 27 países europeos, este artículo examina (a) el grado en que la clase determina, por sí misma, conjuntamente con otras desigualdades, y en relación con otros factores de heterogeneidad, las prácticas transnacionales dentro de los países; y (b) cuánto varía entre países el gradiente social de actividad transnacional producido por la clase y las desigualdades, y si el desarrollo socioeconómico tiende a disminuir o aumentar este gradiente. Los resultados muestran que, en la mayoría de los países, las heterogeneidades explican más varianza en la actividad transnacional que la clase, pero no más que las desigualdades concebidas en términos más generales. Además, los gradientes sociales en la actividad transnacional son sistemáticamente mayores en los países europeos más desarrollados.

## Palabras clave

Actividades transnacionales, clase, desigualdad, Eurobarómetro 73.3, Europa, individualización