

## Socio-economic classification models and contextual difference: the ESeC model seen from a southern European angle

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This communication hinges on an article published by *South European Society and Politics* (vol 12/4, 2007) and penned in response to the author's input on the wrap-up stage of the ESeC project to validate the classificational matrices produced as project output in different regional settings.

The article gives a keynote overview of the ESeC classification system's structural features and logical foundations before focusing on the central issue of gauging how compatibly the ESeC model fits the South-European contexts. Given that the ESeC model was triggered by Goldthorpe theory and remains anchored on the Goldthorpean employment relation, the paper raises a core context-driven incompatibility issue centred on the fact that a substantial part of the working population of Southern Europe falls outside the radius of the Goldthorpean relation scheme, either because they have no employee status or because they are active in small firms where internal hierarchies remain highly limited.

Figures show that the employee percentage breakdown throughout most of EU15 at the start of the decade revolved around the 90% mark, against 70% in Southern Europe and as low as 60% in Greece. Over this same period, the percentage of employees registered at SMEs (i.e. less than 25 employees) was less than 45% across the EU25 against close to 65% in Greece, Portugal and Spain, and almost 50% for Italy. These figures underline a marked split with the UK – contextual bedrock upon which Goldthorpean theory is built – where employees supervise the work of other employees in 40% of cases, which is a far higher rate than the 20% recorded in most of Southern Europe. These differences are coupled with fewer discretionary powers and limited scope for alternative opportunities for the employees in the region (and, coincidentally, for Eastern-European employees too).

The paper concludes with discussion on ESeC classification issues for Southern Europe – mirroring the pattern of marked intra-Europe contextual differences found in other model frameworks – before tackling the dilemma between whether to adopt a Europe-wide socio-economic classification system when it is essentially relatively inappropriate or whether to plough on without one.