Women's Work in Early Modern Europe

23-24 September 2010

Jesus College, Cambridge

Proceedings

Session 7

Classification of occupations

Rosemarie Fiebranz

(see <u>PPT-presentation</u>)

Jacob Field

(see <u>PPT-presentation</u>)

Ariadne Schmidt

(see also <u>PPT-presentation</u>)

Classification system used in project on early modern women's work in the Dutch Republic, which has almost come to an end: three dissertations, working on synthesis.

Main aim of project: assess relation between women's work and remarkable economic development the Dutch Republic experienced in 17/18th centuries.

We used all kind of sources, including tax registers and occupation censuses with information on occupations.

Sheet 2

Occupations classified according to classification system used in 19th-century population census, chosen for this classification for pragmatic reasons:

System used most often by historians working on early modern period.

Enabled us to compare our data with data already published, on aggregate level.

Resembles the PST system: Divides labour market into four sectors, and subdivides sectors in occupational classes.

Advantages:

1. Data comparable

Enables us to compare different routes of developments, both across time and space.

Sheet 3

2. Helpful in comparing male and female occupations

Range of occupations carried out by women more limited than those of men

3. Possible to analyse economic development by looking at shifts **between** the economic sectors: primary → secondary → tertiary sector, and

within economic sectors

Especially the role of women in these shifts

Disadvantages:

Some of which are related to classification as such

- Labourers often not specified
- Some people have more than one occupation

Some related to this particular classification system

- Not refined. Does not show variations within different occupational classes Women in textiles working in woollen cloth industry (Leiden) or in rope making (Gouda)

- Public services category is problematic: includes production **and** services

Most important problem: classification does not grasp diversity of women's work

- only includes gainful employment (our project also on gainful employment)
- no information on labour relations/ professional status of women

Were women self-employed, in wage work, doing so-called unpaid 'assisting labour´?

This information crucial when studying the relation of women's work to economic development.

(=important result of our research project)

1. The question how economic development, commercial innovation, guilds, cultural norms etc affected women's work depended upon a woman's professional status 'Were guilds bad for women?'

   Initially Dutch guilds restrictive towards self-employed women but favorable to women providing unpaid assisting labour.

'Did an upward economic trend increase economic opportunities for women?'

Yes, for those women who were self-employed or wage workers.

No, for women who provided assisting labour.

2. Information on labour relations is crucial because in the 17th/18th centuries important shifts took place between different types of work, especially for women.
'What did women do **before** they entered labour market during Industrious Revolution?'

Were they only involved in subsistence work? Or did they produce for the market in a different context, in the family enterprise?

When we see a decrease of FLFP: what does this mean?

Bring into practice ideal of domesticity? Involuntarily unemployed?

Sheet 4

Further classification is needed (see also <u>handout</u>).

Taxonomy "Global collaboratory on History of Labour Relations 1500-2000" helpful.
Project of IISH. Aim: make world wide inventory of ALL types of labour relations in ALL parts of the world during five cross-sections in time 1500-2000.
For this purpose a taxonomy of labour relations was developed.

- Project uses broad definition of work of Tilly and Tilly**.**
  Defines work as "any human effort adding use value to goods and services"[1]
- It takes whole population as starting point and looks what part is as a rule not working, divided into 3 categories:
- cannot work/ cannot be expected to work
- the affluent
- The unemployed

Rest is working. This working population is subdivided in 3 main categories of labour relations, classified by **the goal of the production**.

---

[1] Chris Tilly and Charles Tilly, *Work Under Capitalism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 22-23.

1. Workers who provide labour within the household or the community

2. Work for the state, feudal or religious authorities (Tributary labour)

3. Commodified labour (employers buying labour power)

    o   subdivided into those working for market and those working for public institutions

Big advantage:

-Classification based on the aim of production

-Whole population and all forms of economic activity can be classified

Those without an occupational descriptor do not disappear in one broad category of those 'without occupation'.

The taxonomy is not perfect.

For analysis of economic activity in early modern Western Europe, a far more simple scheme might do as well. **Sheet 5**

Point I want to make: by taking into account different forms or labour relations and depart from broad definition of work, much of the work women carried out can be included, is perceived as "human effort adding use value to goods and services" and thus as economically relevant.

Discussion

(thanks to Jonas Lindström)

In the final session, the discussion returned to the subject of how to conceptualize work. Unlike the first session, however, issues were now of a more pragmatic than philosophical nature.

First, three different ways in which the concept of work has been dealt with in practical research were presented. The project "Women's Work in the Northern Netherlands in the Early Modern Period c. 1500-1815", introduced by Ariadne Schmidt, used the classification system of nineteenth-century censuses. The reason was mostly pragmatic: it had been used by earlier historians, and this made comparisons possible. The classification scheme proved helpful in tracing economic development as well as in comparing male and female occupations, although findings were more limited for female occupations.

Apart from failing to catch the diversity of female work (it only included gainful employment), censuses lacked information on labour relations. Therefore, the research group suggested a new taxonomy based on the axes working/non-working and the aim of production (reciprocal, tributary and commodified).

Jacob Field presented the PST model used in the Cambridge project "The occupational structure of Britain 1379-1911". The project wants to trace economic development, and shifts between the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors are likely to reflect this. Therefore, 26,000 raw occupational descriptors found in censuses and baptismal registers, are coded into 3,000 distinct systematic categories. This allows for comparisons across time and space.

Women's work remains a serious problem to the PST system. Sources are often vague when it comes to female occupations (e.g. "farmer's wife" or "housewife)". Also, women's unpaid reproductive and domestic work does not fit into the classification system.

"The Uppsala Gender and work project", described by Rosemarie Fiebranz, has chosen another path. Instead of listing occupational descriptors, of which there are few in Swedish sources, the project members search for source fragments expressing activities, i.e. verbs. When registered, phrases are translated into standardized descriptions (for instance, with a

modernized spelling, "wind silk" for "wynde Silk"). This is not a classification system, but simply a tool for data search and data retrieval. In order to further simplify search, standardized descriptions are grouped together in intuitive ways, creating overlapping groups. Since the project does not use a classification scheme with ready categories, adding new types of work does not create problems.

The following discussion was, for the most part, about the advantages and the disadvantages of using occupational classifications as a means of studying work in times past. Many occupational titles, male as well as female, are vague (e.g. "labourer") and people have had multiple occupations. Words change meaning over time and space (e.g. "banker" = a person engaged in financial activities **or** a person engaged in the repairs and maintenance of dykes). This raises questions about the consistency of occupation descriptors over time. Hence, the importance of retaining the original descriptor was emphasized. Moreover, in each case, the analysis of occupational descriptors presupposes knowledge of that particular place and time; for every finding, there is a need for a context. This could be achieved by linking censuses to other kind of sources. It is also important to bear in mind that different censuses have had different purposes and therefore their usefulness vary.

The problems with classification system make the verb-approach seem very appealing. However, using the census material makes possible the collection of vast numbers of observations in a comparatively short time period. It is, in the end, not a question of whether a specific system is better than another, but about what you need to answer the questions you ask.