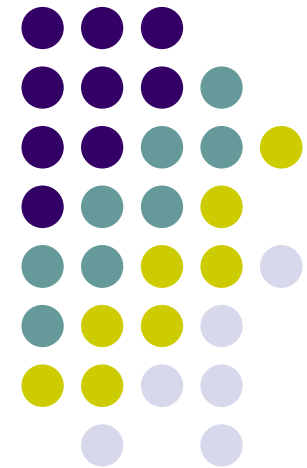


Adding Meaning to Numbers in the Swiss Social Report

Christian Suter
Institut de sociologie
Université de Neuchâtel





Framing meaning

- Focus on a specific (cross-domain) perspective
 - 2008: Switzerland in comparative perspective
- Focus on five thematic core domains
 - Distribution of social goods
 - Cultural diversity
 - Social integration
 - Political (re)shaping
 - Environment and society
- Focus on social cleavages
 - Between (language) regions within Switzerland (“rösti ditch”)
 - Openness-closure (Switzerland-Europe/World)
 - Between generation (age groups)
 - Gender
 - Between social positions (educational, occupational, income pos.)
 - Left-right orientation
- Debating on and struggling for meanings



Visualizing meaning

- Transforming numbers into diagrams:
75 indicators are represented graphically
(2-12 diagrams per indicator)
- Selecting, ordering and relating indicators/diagrams
 - Between indicators: grouping indicators into meaningful modules. Example: triad of education, employment/occupational position, income/wealth
 - Within indicators: ordering and relating diagrams
 - from the general to the particular
 - from Switzerland to European/international comparison
 - from objective to subjective indicators



Scriptualizing numbers/diagrams

- Descriptive perspective: indicators and diagrams are described and interpreted with a short one-page commentary (75 indicators, 15 indicators for each of the 5 domains); telling the story of the indicator/diagrams
- Analytical/explanatory perspective: deepening the descriptive interpretations in a detailed analytical review (for each of the 5 domains) written by scientific (guest) authors of different disciplines

“Temporalizing” meanings



- Comparison over time: time series
- Contrasting rhythms: Fast short-term changes vs. slow and long-term changes
- Focus on transitions
 - Transition into adulthood
 - Entry into working life
- Generational relationships
 - Educational inheritance



Contextualizing meanings

- Analytical reviews of guest authors
- International/European comparison
- Comparison between regions within Switzerland
- Analyzing and interpreting social cleavages
- Combining different perspectives
 - Indicators on attitudes, behaviour, policy measures
 - Objective and subjective indicators: e.g. Recycling
 - Combining information from different respondents: e.g. Role distribution in couples



Conceptualizing numbers

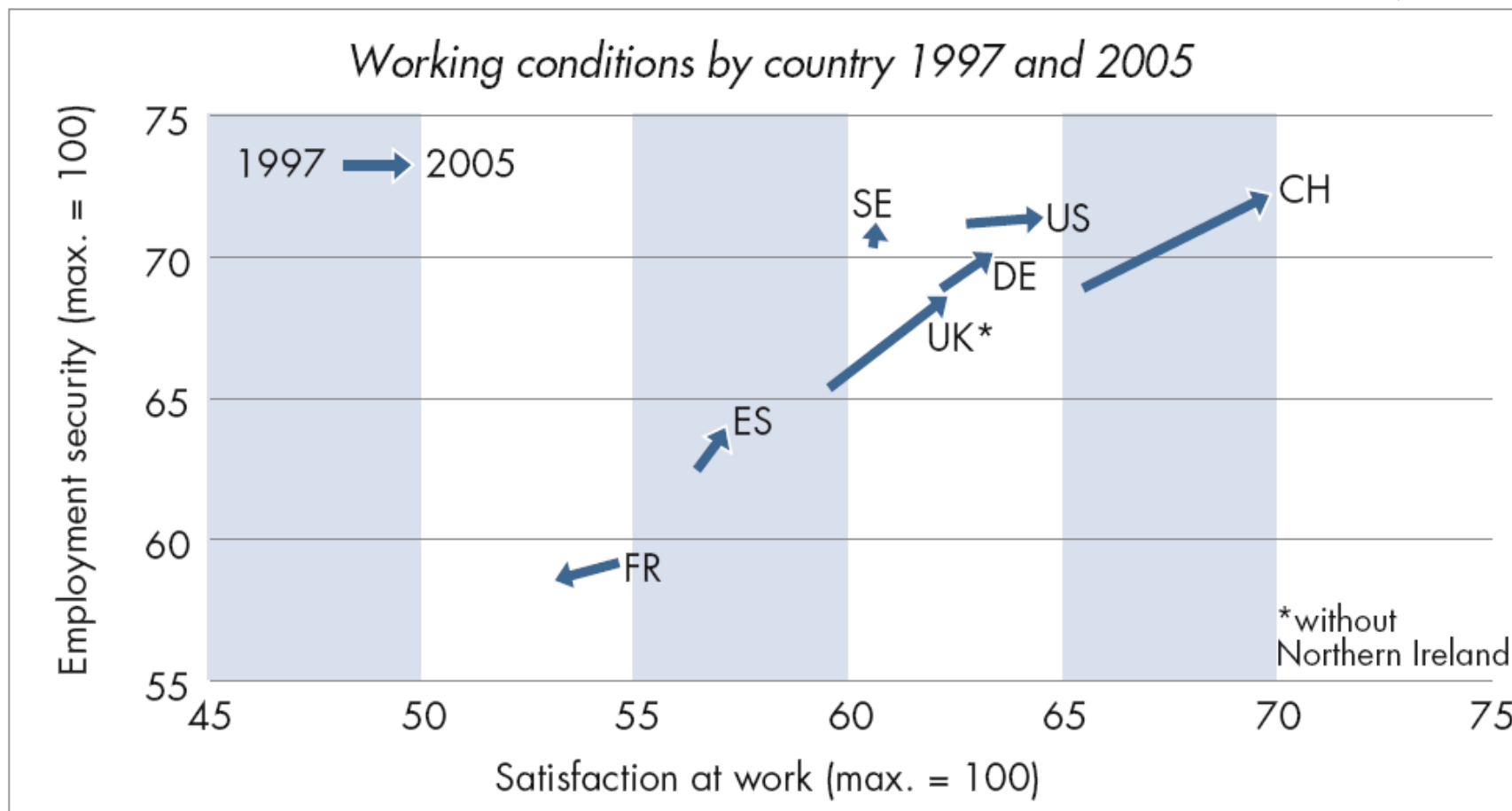
- Linking indicators (and diagrams) to scientific concepts

Examples:

- Indicator Working conditions (based on Serge Paugam's four types of occupational integration)
- Intergenerational mobility: Educational inheritance
- Homogamy: Educational homogamy
- Gender wage gap

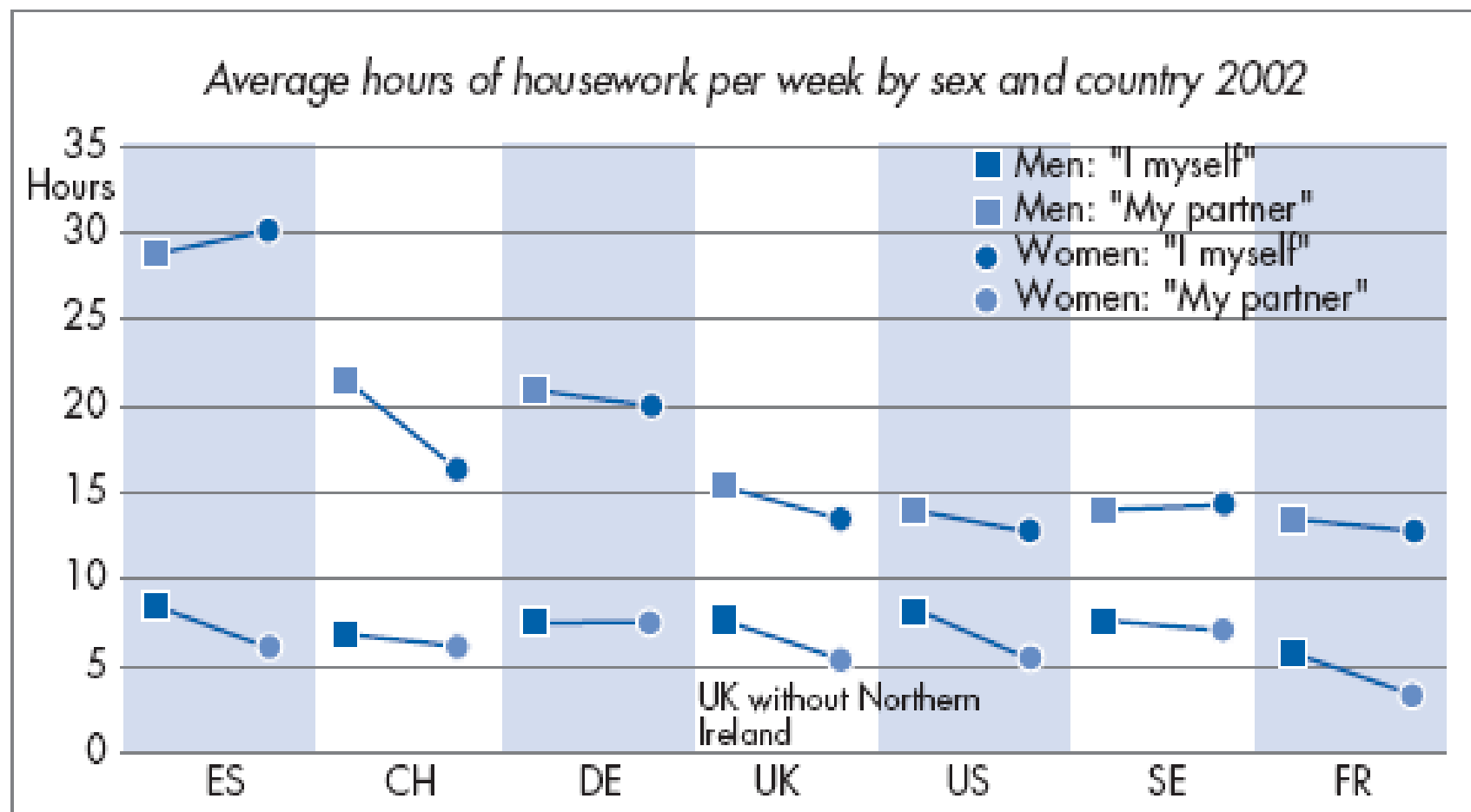


Working conditions

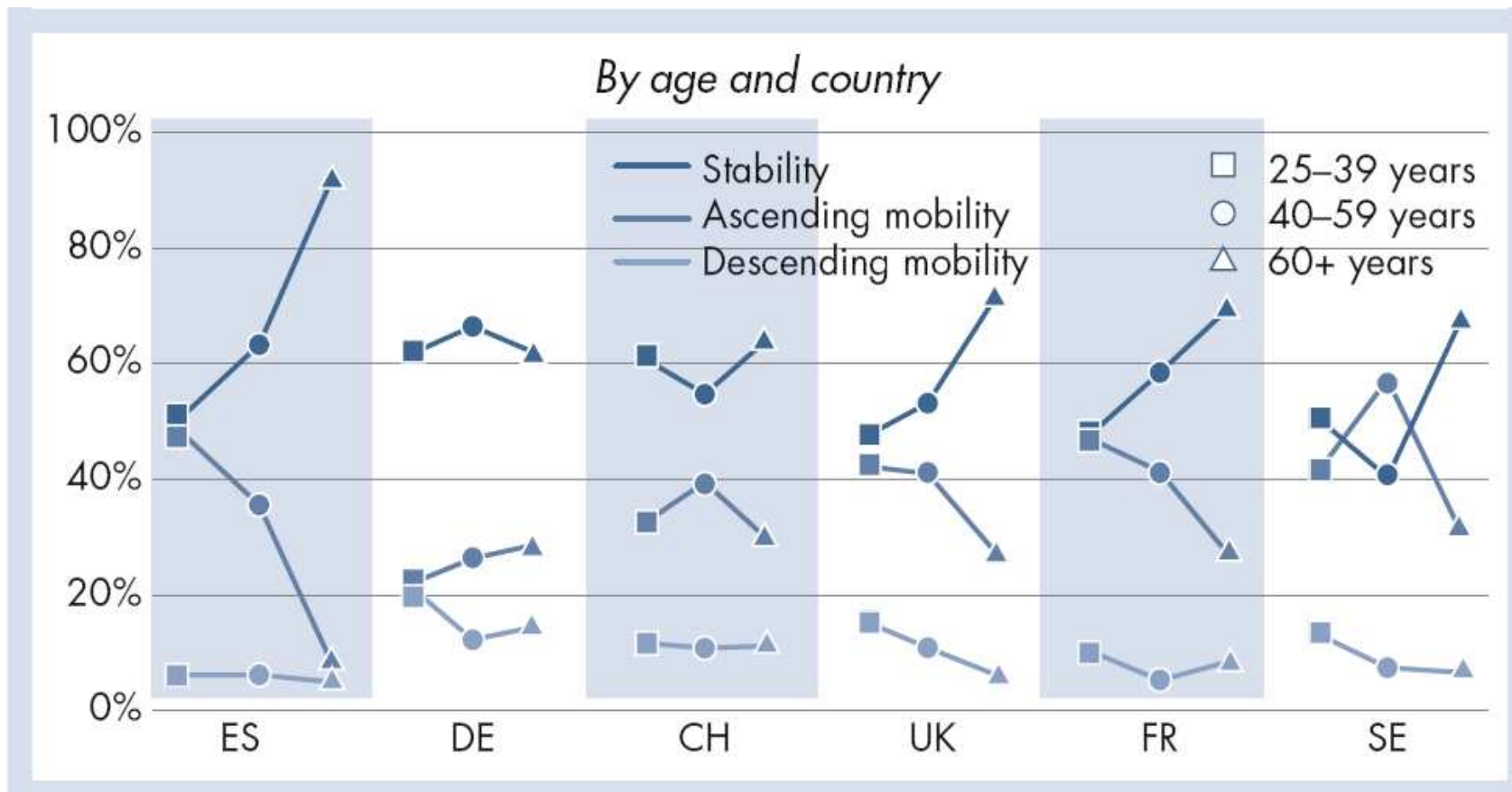




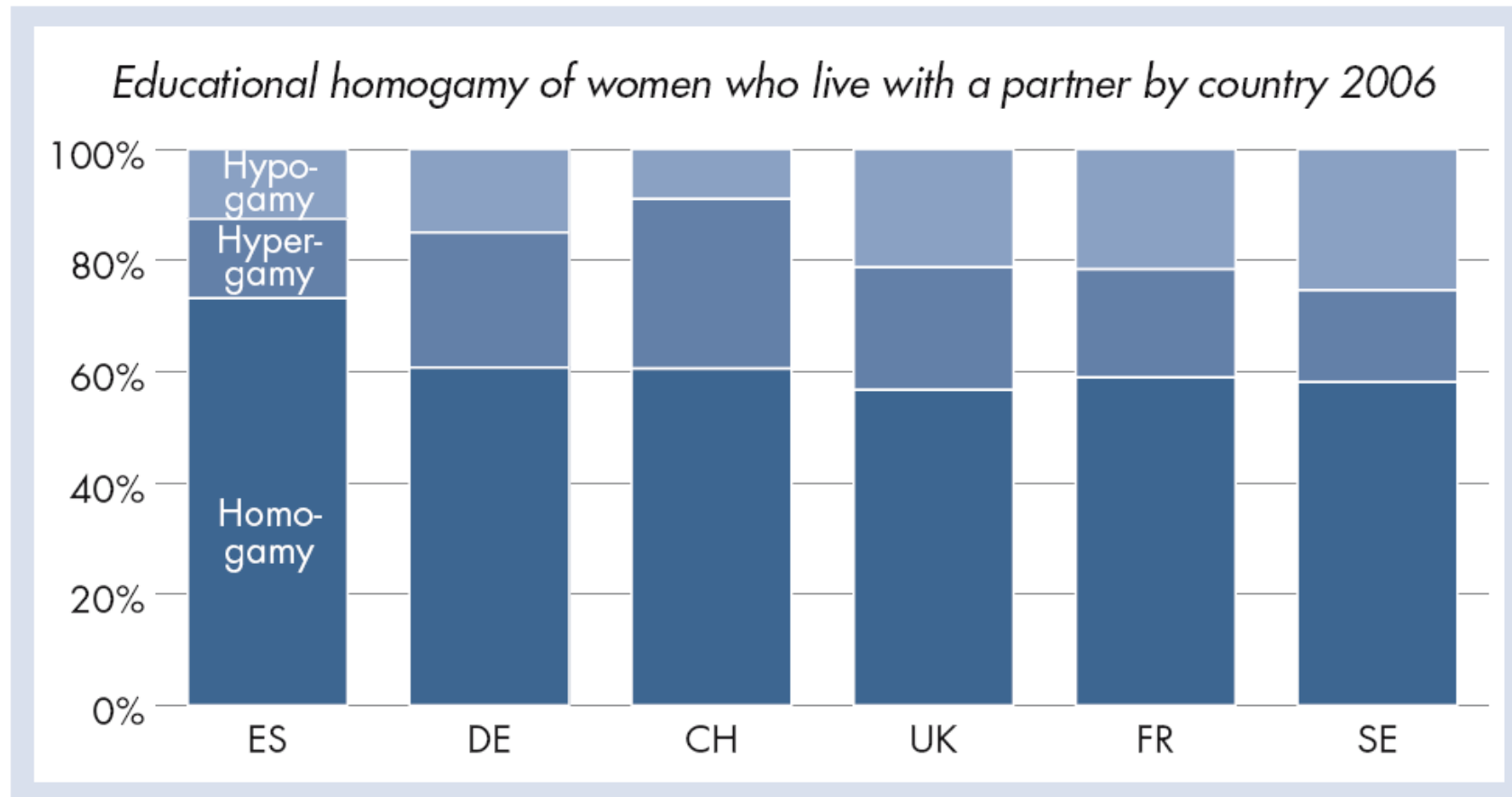
Role distribution in couples



Educational inheritance



Homogamy



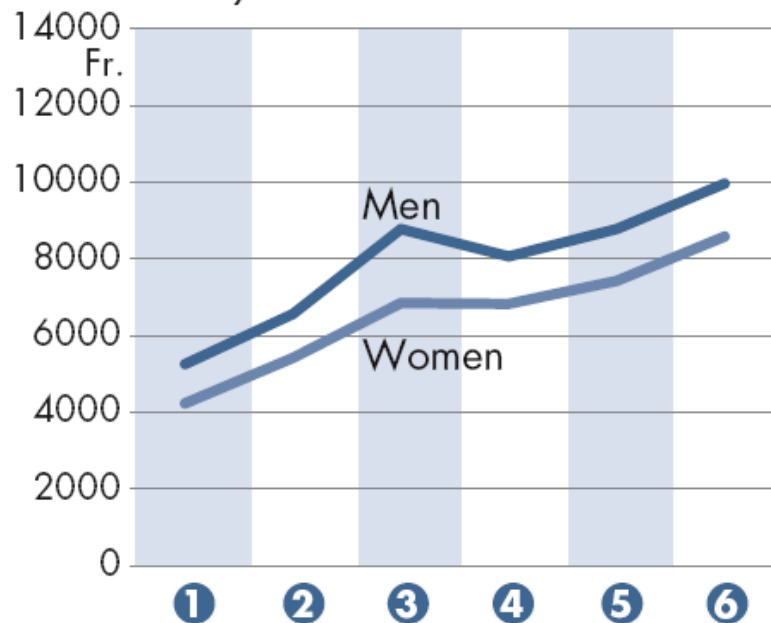
Source: ESS 2006

Gender wage gap (Switzerland)

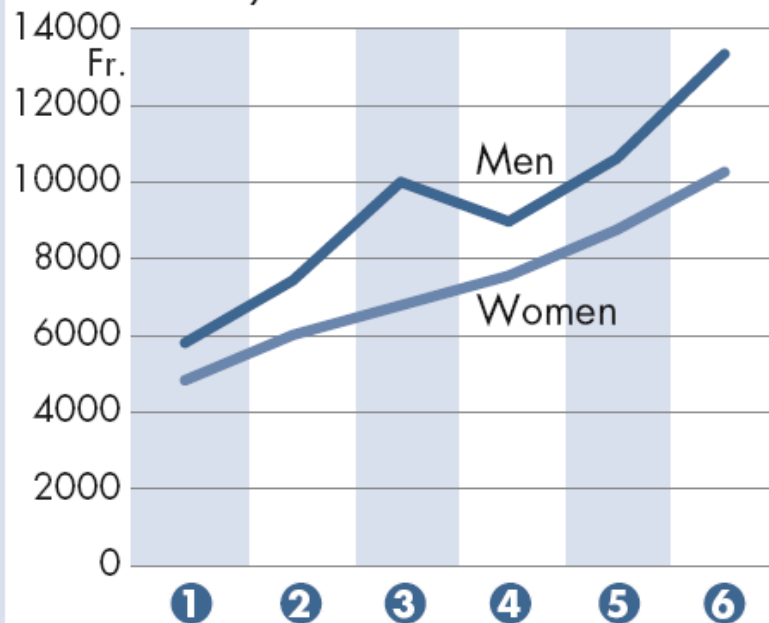


Wage differences: median of monthly full-time gross wages 2006

Employees in lower management:
by sex and education



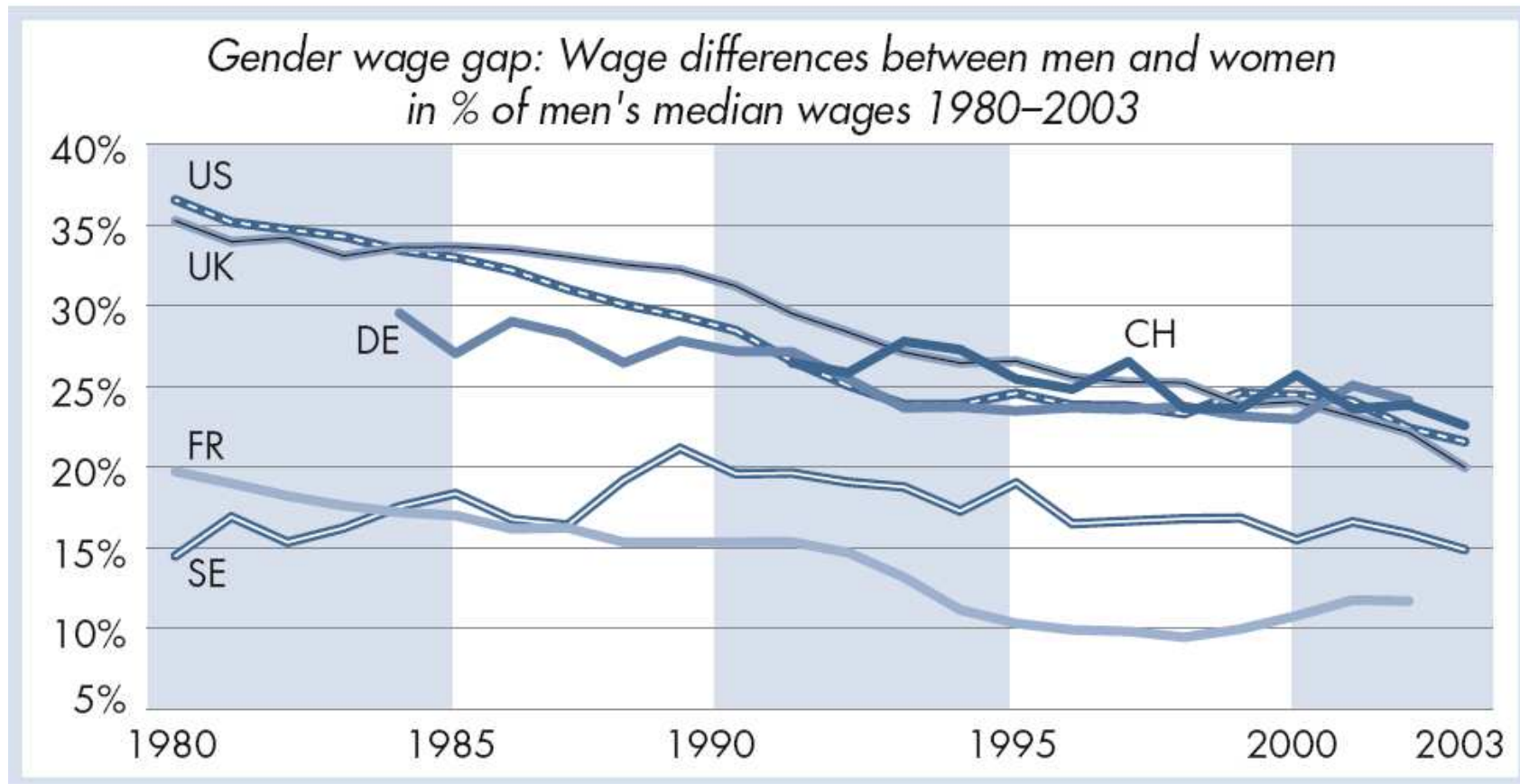
Employees in middle and upper management:
by sex and education



- 1 Without vocational qualification
- 2 With vocational qualification
- 3 'Matura'

- 4 Higher vocational qualif., technical college
- 5 University of applied sciences/college of education
- 6 University

Gender wage gap (int. comp.)



Source: SFSO, OECD