

What money can buy: Networks of the super-rich in Austria

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Abstract. The increasing concentration of income and wealth on the national and international level is a topic that has received increased attention both in social science research as well as public policy debates. Even severe crises such as the GFC in 2008 or the current Covid-Pandemic have not led to any trend reversal in this respect. On the contrary, the wealth of the top 1% has continued to rise sharply. Yet, it has been shown, that the huge wealth discrepancy is mainly driven by a small group of High Net Worth (HNW) individuals and families (households). While data availability is a well-known and often-lamented problem in wealth studies, due to missing statistical data and information, especially the group of HNW households remains largely unexplored. Our case study on networks of super-rich in Austria aims to address this research gap and contributes to a deeper understanding of the impact of HNW households and their networks on current wealth distributions. Against this background, we first provide an extensive review of the literature on national and international research on HNW households. Second, based on the insights from this review, we conduct an explorative study on the networks of HNW households in Austria. In doing so, we collect data from various databases and individual biographical research based on Austria's top HNW individuals and families (listed in wealth rankings of the richest Austrians). Methodologically, we follow a two-fold approach: On the one hand, we focus on institutional ownership and control and apply social network analysis (SNA) of two-mode networks (institutions and persons) to highlight networks of corporate ownership and (indirect) control. On the other hand, we apply SNA to investigate personal ego-networks of HNW individuals and families to highlight characteristics of the social field of super-rich in Austria. Overall, findings from our SNA suggest a strong link between the accumulation and preservation of mega-wealth and political proximity.

Keywords: Super-rich, High Net Worth individuals and families, Wealth Concentration, Social Network Analysis, Austria.

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