

OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE AS AN ELEMENT OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract: *This paper aims to make an inventory of several theoretical models of social stratification which can be operational in a possible approach for the analysis of social stratification set in post-communist Romanian society. Therefore, the article presents classical models: the one established by Marx, in which view in any society there can be identified, for the final analysis, using the economic criteria, two diametrically opposed classes, between them being developed conflictual relationships (the class of owners and the class of those who do not capital goods); the model proposed by Max Weber which presents a more complex perspective on society, identifying the following structures: social classes - by applying the economic criteria, designed in a much larger perspective than Marx, involving factors relating to the credentials and qualifications of the individual, which allows him to access certain occupations that gives him different positions in the labour market, being placed according to the American terminology in the "blue collar" class (those who perform manual work) or the "white collar" class (performing activities within nonmanuale occupations); social status - in his opinion relates to social positions which differ according to social prestige granted by other individuals and, in modern societies, it began to be expressed in terms of lifestyles, which varies independently from class; political parties, consisting of groups of people involved in the use and allocation of power, that can influence the economic conditions of individuals and groups, influencing the class. Contemporary sociologists have tried to separate themselves from classical theories conceptualizing contemporary class using the occupational structure as the basic element, starting from the assumption that the material and social inequalities are mainly related to the type of jobs held by individuals. There were thus carried out operational descriptive schemes, considering stratification as an unproblematic element, part of the social order (see the functionalists), or schemes inspired from Marx or Weber, which focuses on the explanation of the relations between classes and society, enrolling in conflictualist paradigm to demonstrate divisions and tensions within society. Both types get criticism due to some of their limitations. The paper suggests that if we try to apply an operational scheme to identify social structure set in post-communist Romanian society, it would be appropriate to include such dimensions that capture the position of individuals in relation to society's resources (monetary capital, physical or labour resources) and also dimensions regarding the type of occupation and income, the level of skills and expertise of individuals, in order not to exclude from the analysis unemployed persons at the time of research. We also consider that the structure of Romanian society includes three fundamental classes specific for developed capitalist societies, differences consisting in their proportion in society, in detriment for the poor class, due to the nature of the transition process in Romania.*

Keywords: social structure; occupational structure; middle class; high class; blue collar class.

JEL classification: J21; J24; D31; E24.

1. Introduction

The concept of social stratification is a basic one in sociology, being developed in close connection with the idea of social inequalities, aware not only for the first theorists in sociology, whose works have appeared in the late nineteenth century (Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx etc.), but even with the first analysis attempts on social life, such as "Code of Hammurabi" from Babylon, "Laws of Manu" from India, the moral code from the "Old Testament", continuing with the works of the ancients (especially Plato and Aristotle, through their relevant work in sociology– Republic and Politics) aimed at ensuring a minimal social order in which to avoid inequality of people before the law and the development of normal social life without disturbances and conflicts. Subsequently, social stratification has become a topic of great interest to most sociologists who have made social analysis, particularly the macro - sociological type.

While in most systems of stratification known throughout history (slavery, caste, states) inequalities were expressed in particular by interpersonal relationships between their members in terms of debt, obligation with local or national aspect, class systems scale works by wide association, impersonal, on the basis of common shared criteria, for example in the workplace inequalities, inequalities in the payment system or to grant salary rights. The literature attests, on the other hand the idea that the characteristic of modern and postmodern societies have contributed and will contribute to changing stratification systems, in order to eliminate caste -based systems or systems based on slavery and generalization classes (Giddens, 2010: 290-294; Chișea, 2014:105-106).

2. Understandings of social and occupational structure concepts

The term social class defines a "form of stratification in which membership in different social groups and the relationships between them are determined primarily by economic criteria" (Zamfir and Vlăsceanu, 2003: 99). Therefore social classes are social macro-groups in social stratification, determined by economic criteria. The basic, classical theories, which have been reported, in one form or another, all social or occupational stratification approaches were those developed by Karl Marx and Max Weber.

2.1. Social Classes in K. Marx's view

In Marx's view, social class represents a group of people who have a common relationship to the means of production, the means by which they earn a living. In a simplified introduction to Marx society (at any level of development) is divided into two opposite classes, which are in a constant struggle, namely rich and poor, leaders and followers, the government – the governed, exploiters - holdings, those with means of production - those without the means of production. In feudal societies, the exploitation was visible, consisting of direct transfer of product from the peasantry to the aristocracy, meaning that serfs, peasants, landless were forced to give a part of the crop or to work a certain number of days on the master landed property. In modern capitalist societies exploitation the phenomenon is less visible, being hidden in employment, according to Marx (1966: 313-314).

Between the two classes exists antagonistic and conflictual relations. Analyzing Marx's theory stands out that the fundamental principle underlying social stratification is the economic criterion, the property, and the relationship between classes is one of exploitation (Drăgan, 1985:102-106.).

Marx was deeply impressed by the inequalities that emphasizes continuously between two specific classes of capitalist society, even if workers receive higher wages and become richer in absolute terms. The process by which the capitalist class becomes richer and the working class poorer, is named by Marx *impoverishment*, which is associated with the alienation generated by repetitive boring and tiring work.

2.2. Social class, status and power - M. Weber

Like Marx, M. Weber believes that society is characterized by the conflict for power and resources, but he developed a more complex, multivariate view on society exceeding Marxist vision, that all conflicts lies in the center of polarized relations between classes and economic problems. In his opinion, at the configuration of the stratification system in a company, in addition to the criterion of social class, there are two criteria that are contributing, namely their status and power. Therefore, Weber believes that a society can be determined the following structures: classes, using economic criteria; social caste, using social criteria of social status; political parties, using the political criteria (Weber, 2004).

Social class in Weber's view is based on economic criteria, but he considered that in the determining of the class act a greater diversity of factors than those analyzed by Marx, among he mentions credentials or qualifications that influence the type of occupations (jobs) that individuals can handle. Weber believes so that individual's position in the labour market, greatly affects their life chances, meaning that those who hold managerial or professional occupations (the category of "white-collar") earns more and has better conditions, and as well they are more saleable on the labour market in relation to individuals in category "blue collar", which have lower qualifications. Also, individuals who are part of blue-collar and possess qualifications in various professions are well paid and benefit better conditions of work compared to unskilled workers.

Social status, according to Weber, refers to the social positions which distinguish according to social prestige awarded by other individuals and, in modern societies began to be expressed through lifestyles (Weber, 1978). In the eyes of others, social positions is measured by specific indicators and symbols statuses, such as housing, occupation, how to talk, how to dress etc. All statuses that have similar characteristics constitute a distinct social stratification, a community where there is a sense of shared identity. Unlike Marx, according to which status differences are the result of the divisions of class, Weber argued that their status varies independently of class. Although naturally rich should give the individual a higher status in reality there are many exceptions, often talking about the "noble poverty," people of aristocratic families who lost their wealth and continue to enjoy social prestige given by the noble class they belong, as the upstarts are regarded with contempt by those who have acquired wealth over time. (Giddens, 2010: 296). From this point of view, similar situations are found in the Romanian society, the teachers, for example, or other professions in the "white collar" category, although relatively small income continues to enjoy high social prestige derived from their high education.

Regarding stratification criterion based on the political parties' affiliation, Weber understands the political groups as sets of individuals involved in the use and allocation of power. Even if they live for politics (they don't seek to make any profit from politics) or of politics (politics professionals), members of political parties aspire one way or another to exert the power (a form of domination by force or violence) on other groups, and ensuring some form of legitimacy (social support, recognition from society members) (Weber, 1992). They may also be established on religious or ethnic aspect. (In this case there is, for example UDMR). In Weber's view, neither parties nor statuses cannot be reduced to class divisions, as required by Marxist theory; however both can influence the economic conditions of individuals and groups, influencing in this way the class.

2.3. Approaches of social class concept according to Goldthorpe

A class diagram that captures the relational nature aspect is the one developed by J. Goldthorpe, considered by sociologists as one of Weberian origin whereas the diagram author identified class positions based on two factors: market situation of an individual who refers to the level of his salary, job security and its perspective to be promoted in his career, thus emphasizing the material rewards, life chances and employment situation refers to indicators regarding relating occupation respectively control, power and authority

within it (autonomy rate at the working place and general relations of control that affects the employee) (Goldthorpe, cited by Giddens, 2010: 299-301).

The scheme developed by Goldthorpe on these bases is more detailed than others used in the literature, based on fundamental standard as occupation held by individuals in the idea that this entails all other features of class: income, prestige, lifestyle, job security and the possibility for promotion qualification. On the other hand, the occupation is strongly associated with education and experience level acquired by the individual throughout his educational career, giving it both a degree of autonomy and control over resources. The scheme comprises eleven positions, which usually are compressed into three main formations class: a class of service (which includes the first two positions, namely highly qualified professionals, administrators and officials and experts with lower degree of skill and managers Located on a lower hierarchical level); an intermediate class (which includes three four positions of the scheme, consisting of employees in occupations routine non- manual office generally those in service and sales. This class includes the artisans and small businesses that are self -employed without employees, farmers and other self-employed persons in agriculture. There are also included lower level technicians, supervisors of manual workers); a working class (which includes manual skilled workers, semi-skilled and unskilled workers as well as agricultural workers).

The author acknowledges the existence, in the top of the hierarchy of a so called elite class, of employers, but he considers being so small in terms of number and percentage that its study is not significant as a separate category.

In terms of employment relations, Goldthorpe has focused his attention on employment contracts, analyzing their typology. For that purpose, the author states the specific employment contract (which involves a payments exchange and effort, clearly defined) to the service contract (involving a "prospective" element and the possibility of increasing the salary or a career promotion). According to Goldthorpe, the working class is distinguished by labour contracts and the services class by services agreements. Intermediate classes are characterized in this respect by intermediate types of employment relationships.

Although this scheme was frequently used in the study of social stratification, some sociologists have highlighted and reproached certain limits, of which we mention in this context, first of all the difficulties to be applied to the economically inactive persons, such as the unemployed, pensioners and students. Another limit consists in the impossibility to capture the property and wealth role in establishing the social class, as long as the wealthiest members of society, such as bankers and wealthy businessmen, in their capacity as "executives" or "directors" are placed in the same individual levels with the persons who have fewer resources, thereby diming the role of property and wealth in the class formation. On the other hand, in today's society great changes are produced even within the class, in the sense that there are new types of occupations, there is a massive migration of certain occupations from each other, and in the last decades a large number of women have entered to labour market, which affected the structure and quality of occupations (Larionescu, Mărginean and Neamțu, 2006).

Important changes occurred in the stratification system of companies too, generating new patterns of inequality. First, it is said that a proper social model is based on balanced economic development, which involves creating enough jobs, in order to increase employment of the population.

An economy based on knowledge and services generates a class structure and a division of classes different from specific industrial society. In the specific industrial society of social order, the largest class, considered by Marx the agent of social transformation was the working class or "blue collar" in American terminology. The new society, manual working class is in a minority, and its numbers will diminish as the manufacturing sector will decline. Old "middle class" has differentiated enormously, and the upper class of landowners almost disappeared. Now, there are new occupational divisions generated by technological and social changes associated with the new economy based on knowledge and services.

2.4. Class division in contemporary Western societies, proposed by Giddens

We consider very challenging and relevant the new structure of post-industrial society class, proposed by A. Giddens as a result of the analyses carried out in the advanced Europe economies (Giddens, 2007: 99-108), that distinguish the following levels, depending on the held occupations:

- leading group of this structure is a mixture of elite powers with trans-national and national perspectives, especially perceptible in the "global cities of Europe"; this high level includes the cosmopolitan elites, revolving around government, business and higher levels of professions, representing the lowest area of the society;
- the second level consists of senior managers and professionals, accounting more consistent than the elites ;
- the third level of the social hierarchy is occupied by groups that require advanced IT knowledge and also the "Apple Mac" groups, which grew in the analyzed period from 20 to 24%;
- the fourth level is occupied by "connect" workers, including officials, meaning those who use the computer an important part of the day without being IT specialists ;
- small business owners are fifth in the hierarchy;
- the sixth place is occupied by a numerically quite significant social category, Big Mac workers, for example those who perform routine activities such as: the ones who serves in cafes, shops, supermarkets, gas stations ;
- the last but one is occupied by industrial workers ;
- the last of the eight is occupied by farmers with a decrease role.

2.5. Trends in major classes of contemporary society

Many contemporary studies on social stratification of European societies emphasize several manifestation trends even in major classes of society (Giddens, 2010: 301-323).

2.5.1. Dominant class

Essentially everywhere can be identified a ruling class, meaning that in any society there is a group that holds the main wealth and power, which would represent about 1 % of the population. Individuals placed in the category of the rich are a dynamic and heterogeneous group with a very different profile. After families with a considerable fortune, built over time, range the music, sports and movies celebrities, and the representatives of the "new elite" who have accumulated huge wealth through the promotion of new information technologies: computers, telecommunications, the Internet. Likewise we may observe that a relatively small but growing number of women step among the richest members of society (to review "Top 100 richest people in Romania" in recent years).

John Scott (cited by Giddens, 2010: 306) believes that although the rich class has now changed its shape, it has retained a distinct position to achieve the control and profit from big business. The author indicates the existence within the contemporary rich class of three distinct groups: managing directors of big corporations, which may not have their own companies but are able to purchase shares, which connects both the old industrial entrepreneurs (who have made a fortune in business and more recently in the promotion of technology and telecommunications information) and financial capitalists (a category of people working in insurance companies, banks, investment funds and other large organizations which owns institutional titles and which, according to Scott is at the heart of today's ruling class).

2.5.2. Services class

Right after the ruling class, will follow the class service, as we have previously established, according to Goldthorpe's scheme, by experts, managers and top managers, considered to be the intermediate class, most commonly known in the literature as the middle class or

the so called – “white collar” class .

From the point of view of its importance in society is noted that it is associated with social stability, prosperity, functional market economy, democracy and civil society, being the only class that has expanded in contemporary capitalist societies in relation to the majority population.

The literature shows a clear distinction between the *old middle class*, which differs depending on the type of owned capital (income, lifestyle, consumption, etc.) and a *new middle class*, which is characterized by the type of cultural and educational capital that it holds. Educational capital accumulation and increasing the conversion opportunities into economic, social and symbolic capital, becomes the main source for the formation of the so called “white collar class” (Mills, 1951), or the “new middle wage class ”(Scott, 1991, cited by Giddens, 2010: 306) that led to the social pattern changing for Western societies.

The twentieth century was characterized by a continuous increase of non- manual occupations, a phenomenon which depends on the labour market and not on property. Mărginean (1993) includes in the definition of middle class the element regarding the work nature, endorsing in particular its *professionalization* . The middle class is placed in the social hierarchy between the upper class and the working class, starting just from the argument that non- manual work enjoys a higher prestige than manual. The middle class is very heterogeneous in terms of education, occupation and earnings. Therefore it was necessary to operate a stratification right in its interior, which can be identified as follow (Larionescu et al., 2006: 24-25):

- a *lower middle class* , highly heterogeneous in terms of occupations, including “the routine nonmanual working class” (Giddens, 2010: 279.), such as sellers, nurses, teachers, minor officials or small business owners who are as well the traditional middle class ;
- a *middle class itself*, which contains lower or subordinate class service, consisting of managers of small businesses, small professional, assistant managers;
- an *upper middle class*, made up of high educated managers and experts, who have superior benefits consisting of income, job security, promotion possibilities;

Expanding the role of organizations, bureaucracies in contemporary society has generated a need for more experts in the social, legal, finance, banking, information technology which contributed to wide-spread increase of middle class..

In conclusion, the middle class which represents an increasingly important segment in the developed Western societies and which is regarded as ensuring the stability of society is characterized primarily by credentials, skills, diplomas and certificates according with the demands of the labour market, demands that become increasingly exigent as a result of the unprecedented pace of development in new information technologies, communications and transports.

2.4.3. Working class

The working class or “blue-collar class” is a class that seems to have become increasingly limited in contemporary societies despite Marxist prophecy whereby it will become the most powerful class. In addition to the type of work referred to manual labour in determining the working class operates as well other characteristics, such as low education level, a different lifestyle, a different attitude towards work, different political views, a specific way achieving the socialization of their children which usually takes place at home with close family members, relatives and close neighbors .

On the other hand, some studies have shown that also exist a tendency among some of the blue -collar class which has opportunities for gain better, to adopt the lifestyle of the middle class, which will generate changes in the structure of class.

The working class has emerged a segment located in the bottom of the class structure, underlined as the *subclass* (in American sociology), a group characterized by multiple disadvantages. It consists of long-term unemployed, homeless people, which may depend on long compensations. In Western sociology, especially since 2000 (Lisbon Summit), to

characterize the processes that generate such groups, we use the concept of *social exclusion* (Chipea, 2011: 45-67).

Stratification of society, consisting in placing individuals on a hierarchical scale in social prestige aspect, is a characterization of any society, manifesting itself in different forms depending on the type of company and historic level where it stands. Post-industrial society is expected to introduce new criteria in setting social stratum. The fact is that today the destiny of individuals is strongly influenced by individual projects in which the education and the skills acquired through study prevail in relation to predetermined class structures (Vlăsceanu, 2007: 70-103).

3. Concluding remarks

We will discuss here some aspects regarding the stratification scale model specific to contemporary Romanian society.

The theme of social stratification, the fundamental classes of society, remains a basis one for contemporary sociology, especially since the information society and the Internet creates a new form of accumulation of wealth and well-being, which is not uniformly distributed in society, deepening more and more social inequalities.

Although classical theories of social stratification developed by Marx and Weber are often considered obsolete by new developments of societies, it seems that they remain largely operational in these new contexts. The sociologists who attempted to operationalize contemporary class using the occupational structure as the basic element, starting from the idea that material and social inequalities are mainly related to the type of jobs held by individuals, ended either by developing descriptive structures (see the functionalists), or by making a scheme which focuses on the explanation of the relations between classes and society, following the conflictualist paradigm.

Illustrative in this sense is the scheme of Wright (1997) which proposes contemporary societies stratification approach using three dimensions of control over resources: control over capital investments or money; control of production of fixed assets (land, offices, factories); control over the labor force. Those who have control over these resources would be the capitalist class, and those who have no control represent the working class. Between the two classes would be ranked a "contradictory class", the middle class, with an uncertain position, which depends on the degree of specialization, expertise and approach to authority.

Regardless of the point of view taken, the fact is that we cannot ignore in determining classes in contemporary society any position (control) of individuals in relation to society's resources, nor the type of occupation held. The last one should be viewed not only in terms of nature of work performed manually or nonmanual (blue and white collar American theory), but also in terms of the level of expertise required by the job and the report with authority. We also consider that a class scheme, operational for the knowledge and explanation of stratification model in the Romanian society, cannot ignore the incomes of individuals that constitute the structure of society. In this way, people who are not engaged in activity such as the unemployed, pensioners, housewives, or other categories would not be excluded from the analysis. We estimate that in Romanian society structure can be identified three fundamental classes specific to developed societies (a ruling class, a middle one and the poor lass), indicating that differences will consist primarily in their proportions. On the other hand, we expect that applying a scheme of stratification will show a large heterogeneity within classes, with the possibility of identifying the original models, determined by the specific Romanian transition.

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