

# ASPECTS OF THE SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL STRATIFICATION AND MOBILITY IN ROMANIA

Csaba Bekesi<sup>1</sup>

University of Oradea

**Abstract:** *The paper aims to present, on one hand a theoretical approach on stratification and socio-professional mobility, and on the other hand an analysis of intra and intergenerational occupational mobility. The issue of social mobility is generally addressed by experts in the field both in terms of its dynamics and in what concerns the socio-demographic characteristics that influence it. In order to reach the proposed objective we realized a secondary analysis on the data collected through a representative research conducted at national level on social issues related to family, data which confirmed the existence of intergenerational and school occupational mobility. The stratification and dynamics of social mobility can be influenced by a number of factors such as: the overall state of economy, labor market legislation, the functionality of labor market institutions etc. composing the existing socio-economic context at a certain moment.*

**Keywords:** stratification, socio-professional mobility, intergenerational occupational mobility, labor market

## Introduction

We talk about social stratification as phenomenon in society today, as being analogous to the emergence of society; in all societies, social groups, individuals are different in terms of certain characteristics, such as: age, gender, profession, occupation, income, involvement or access to decision-making, etc. In addition, even within these variables there are differences from one individual to another (from one social group to another, from one society to another).

Differences between individuals are not static; dynamics characterizes variables influencing social structure. Some economic processes, for example, can influence

---

<sup>1</sup>**Author address:** University of Oradea, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Universităţii Street, no.1, 410087, Oradea, Romania. **E-mail:** [csaba\\_bekesi@yahoo.com](mailto:csaba_bekesi@yahoo.com)

social structure by changing the parameters to which we relate at one point. In Romania, in the context of the economic crisis, it is expected that during this period we'll witness a *social restructuring*; as our society has a pyramid shape (most of the individuals occupying the first layer, the base being the very strong), we can launch the assumption that in the future at the base of the pyramid we will meet more individuals than in the pre-crisis situation. Also in this period poverty is expected to widen, its threshold may change or/and income structure and professional structure will be influenced by this local, national and global phenomenon.

### **Theoretical aspects. Social stratification and mobility**

In sociology, the term social stratification was applied to studies of social structured inequality, meaning inequalities that arise between groups of people as an unintended consequence of processes and social relations. David Lockwood states that “since the formation of class and status are ways of social interaction not only empirically identifiable as variable configurations of total societies, but also analytically delimited by economics and politics, it is understandable why within the division of labor in social sciences ... social stratification should be considered as main distinctive subject of macro-sociology” (Marshall, 2003, pp. 589-590), we see here the importance of studying social stratification in terms of sociology, but also because this aspect is *sensitive* for individuals as it affects and determines their lives.

The definition of social stratification is based on the concept of social differentiation; social differentiation is a process caused by natural (innate) factors such as: strength, intelligence, health, and other social factors such as: mode of being, activity, behaviour etc. Hierarchy plays an important role, differences between individuals may be the result of applying non-hierarchical criteria (horizontal differentiation, e.g. by gender) or hierarchical criteria (vertical differentiation, such as age) or criteria which do not involve a relationship of order between categories (Rotariu & Iluț, 1996, pp.147-148).

Social stratification is the ranking of individuals or groups in a system of social positions within a continuum of hierarchically ordered positions on a vertical scale “we are talking about social stratification when a recognized hierarchy occurs, based on a criterion, according to which individuals or positions are judged in terms of superior/inferior, so when social inequalities are manifested” (Rotariu & Iluț, 1996, p. 148).

In order to define social stratification, sociology appeals to some of its basic elements, (Vlăsceanu, 2011, p. 296) such as:

- social statuses that relate to how individuals are positioned within a group, organization, society;

- social roles, related to statuses, refer to expected behaviors associated with status;
- groups, within their definition and characterization; there is a lot of reference literature, we refer to them as being composed of a number of people who interact with each other (the intensity of relationships is inversely proportional with their size) and have a common identity;
- social organizations represented by large groups of people with formalized rules and regulations;
- social institutions that are characterized by rules and values that support the basic functions of society.

Davis and Moore provide an overview of the school's role within social stratification (apud. Hatos, 2006, p. 61), as society is seen as a set of positions, the system needs are distributing in society these positions, the corresponding duties having to be met by individuals in society and occupying social positions (ensuring the proper functioning of the system). Professional positions are differentiated by criteria like: importance to society, the talent needed to meet specific positions, the amount of training needed to fulfill the role.

For Davis and Moore social stratification is based on rewards arising from employment of each position (economic, aesthetic and symbolic) and argue that school fulfills two important functions:

- transmits knowledge necessary for employment in certain social positions;
- assigns by mechanisms of selection and evaluation, individuals in social positions.

School is an instrument for generating social inequality, but it influences other variables such as income (Hatos, 2006, p. 81); in certain situations (on equal terms) the level of education has the strongest effect on revenue, excluding age:

- salary increases according to age up to a maximum and then it decreases regardless of level of education level;
- debut salary depends on the level of education. Salary increases more rapidly in the early stages of life;
- an increased level of education leads to the increase of the maximum salary.

Meritocracy is defined as “a system in which promotion is based on individual achievements and abilities” (Hatos, 2006, p. 112), and for a society to be considered meritocratic, it must fulfill the following assumptions:

- access to education should be made only according to merit;
- social status and educational rewards should be determined only by educational accomplishments.

Social mobility is determined by more causes (Schifirnet, 2004, p. 29):

- derived from income or wealth, from the power and the level at which an individual can make decisions, the level of training, the skills and qualifications of the individual;
- mechanisms and orientation channels of adequately trained people for certain positions: school system, selection system in any organization, the activity of political and economic institutions;
- adequate incentives which determine people to act in order to reach the hierarchical levels that match their aspirations: salary, prestige, power, access to desired goods.

“For sociologists, mobility is structural, redefining the relations between classes and social groups, being at the same of habitus, of changing relations between positions and provisions of social actors or of exchanges between generations” compared to historians who see mobility as geographical, cultural and political scientists or management experts who see it as an action organization, strategic positioning related to an objective that reflects from an ideological worldview (Gheorghiu & Lupu, 2008, pp. 23-24).

In our country the labor market trends in terms of employment are influenced by (Borza, Popa & Osoian, 2006)

- foreign investment flows that will result in new jobs;
- the evolution of the restructuring and privatization progress that will determine waves of layoffs.

If we analyze these two factors, the link between them and the way they influence occupational structure, we can say that these complement causing a relative balance in the occupational structure. However, the amount of jobs that will oscillate in the labor market is different, the impact of these two factors is determined by the context in which they are triggered and the temporal distances, even if relatively small, affect labor market dynamics with negative social consequences in most cases.

Schifirneț (2004, p. 30) states that, reported to Romanian society “throughout the career of working population” we encounter at least six types of mobility: mobility in the territory, professional mobility, instructional mobility, mobility of social role, mobility of social status, mobility of inter-unity.

Regarding mobility among Romanian elites, we have captured two relevant points of view for its analysis, as follows:

- “power elite is generally closer than sector elite, and especially acquired by birth” (Gheorghiu & Lupu, 2008, p. 10);
- “The research shows that the circulation of elites in Romania had a higher magnitude than their reproduction” (Gheorghiu & Lupu, 2008, p. 335).

These issues warn us that the movements that take place at the level of elites occur more difficultly and that in the Romanian context the way of acquisition was

different.

Generally, we must admit that “social changes are procedural, continuous, sectorial” (Vlăsceanu, 2011, p. 115), this fact being based on the dynamics and multitude of forces that are engaged in society and the complexity of their relationships.

### The analysis of research data

In order to see what the national occupational structure is, the Center for Urban and Regional Sociology together with the University of Bucharest, Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj and University of Oradea conducted a nationally representative survey in 2010 on social and related to family issues. Below we present some data collected from this research on the occupational structure of respondents, parents and grandparents and data on their schooling. The research was conducted on a sample of 4508 respondents, 46.4% male and 53.6 female. 56.3% of them were born in rural areas of 42 counties in Romania.

**Table 1.** *Respondent's main status at the first job*

<b>Respondent's main status at the first job</b>	<b>%</b>
employees	76.4
inactive persons	6.7
member of an agricultural or non-agricultural cooperative	6.6
worker without contract	3.9
family worker without salary	3.4
self-employed worker	1.9
unemployed	0.2
Total	99.2

Most of the respondents had the original status of employee, followed by inactive persons, members of an agricultural or non-agricultural cooperative.

**Table 2.** *Respondent's main status at the second job*

<b>Respondent's main status at the second job</b>	<b>%</b>
employees	45.1
Self-employed worker	2.3
Family worker without salary	1.8
Worker without contract	1.8
Inactive persons	1.8
member of an agricultural or non-agricultural cooperative	1.3
unemployed	0.5
Total	54.4

From the table above we can see that in the second job most of those who responded to this item were employed, followed by self-employed workers and unpaid family workers.

**Table 3.** *Respondent's main status at the third job*

<b>Respondent's main status at the third job</b>	<b>%</b>
employees	20.3
self-employed worker	1.4
worker without contract	0.9
inactive persons	0.8
family worker without salary	0.6
unemployed	0.3
member of an agricultural or non-agricultural cooperative	0.2
Total	24.4

Employment situation in the third place for respondents is similar to data previously obtained, the respondents were mostly employed in the third job.

**Table 4.** *Respondent's main status at the last job*

<b>Respondent's main status at the last job</b>	<b>%</b>
employees	3.1
self-employed worker	0.3
worker without contract	0.2
family worker without salary	0.1
inactive persons	0.1
Total	3.7

With a very small score of answers to this item, the structure of respondent's status at the last job is similar to those presented above.

**Table 5.** *Father's main status when the respondent was 14 years old*

<b>Father's main status when the respondent was 14 years old</b>	<b>%</b>
employees	56.4
member of an agricultural or non-agricultural cooperative	14.9
family worker without salary	13.8
self-employed worker	6.2
worker without contract	2.7
inactive persons	2.4
unemployed	0.3
Total	96.7

Most respondents' fathers are employed, 56.4%, followed by members of an agricultural or non-agricultural cooperative, unpaid family workers and self-employed workers.

**Table 6.** *The code of father's main occupation when the respondent was 14 years old*

<b>The code of father's main occupation when the respondent was 14 years old</b>	<b>%</b>
qualified farmers or farmers in their own household	32.3
qualified workers	30.5
mechanics and plumbers	8.5
technicians	5.4
workers in services and trade	4.8
unqualified workers	4.1
intellectual occupations	3.7
public servants	2.3
unit managers, company owners, mayor	1.5
military	1.2
military	1.2
housewife	1.0
NA	4.7
Total	100

Most of the respondents' fathers were qualified farmers or farmers in their own household (32.3%); the following categories are qualified workers (30.5%) and mechanics and plumbers (8.5%).

**Table 7.** *Type of the economic unit in which father worked when the respondent was 14 years old*

<b>Type of the economic unit in which father worked when the respondent was 14 years old</b>	<b>%</b>
state	62.2
private	21.8
other	9.2
mixt	0.7
NK	6.2
Total	100.0

Respondents' father worked in state economic unit at a rate of 62.2, and nearly a quarter of them worked in private enterprises.

**Table 8:** *Did father have subordinates when the respondent was 14 years old?*

<b>Did father have subordinates when the respondent was 14 years old?</b>	<b>%</b>
no	80.3
yes	12.1
NK	7.6
Total	100.0

**Table 9:** *Respondent's occupational status before 1989*

<b>Respondent's occupational status before 1989</b>	<b>%</b>
employees	38.1
inactive persons	33.4
member of an agricultural or non-agricultural cooperative	2.6
family worker without salary	0.9
self-employed worker	0.5
worker without contract	0.4
Total	75.8

Occupational status of respondents before 1989 was represented in the highest proportion by employees and inactive people.

**Table 10:** *Respondent's main status at the moment of the interview*

<b>Respondent's main status at the moment of the interview</b>	<b>%</b>
inactive persons	47.2
employees	35.8
self-employed worker	4.8
family worker without salary	4.7
unemployed	4.1
worker without contract	3.1
member of an agricultural or non-agricultural cooperative	0.4
Total	100.0

The table above reflects the employment status of respondents at the time of interview, most are them stating that are inactive, 47.2%, the second category consists of employees, 35.8%. Relatively similar percentages are self-employed and unpaid family workers, 4.8% respectively 4.7%.



- There is association between occupational status of the respondent before and after 1989 ( $\chi^2=596,12$ , sig.=0,000), explained by the fact that the most inactive persons before 1989 were students (28%).
- Also, there is association between occupational status of the respondent's first job and his occupational status at work at the time of interview ( $\chi^2=1417$ , sig.=0,000). The situation persists when we make associations between their second and third job or the third and fourth, with the exception of the association between the first and last job (due to the small number of responses to the item on the last job).

**Table 11:** *Last school graduated by the interviewed person*

<b>Last school graduated by the interviewed person</b>	<b>Percent</b>
highschool	22.4
professional, apprentice or complemetary	18.1
secondary school	16.8
university, long duration	13.7
technical or post-highschool studies	8.1
primary	7.0
10 grades	6.5
master's degree	3.3
university, short duration	2.7
no school	1.0
doctorate	0.4
Total	100.0

Most respondents graduated from high school, about a quarter of them 22.4%, the next category is represented by those who have completed vocational education, apprenticeship or complementary education, those with secondary school, university studies of long duration and technical or post high-school studies.

**Table 12:** *Last school graduated by the respondent's father*

<b>Last school graduated by the respondent's father</b>	<b>%</b>
primary	29.9
secondary school	28.3
professional, apprentice or complemetary	12.4
highschool	8.8
no school	5.2
university, long duration	3.6
technical or post-highschool studies	3.4
10 grades	2.1
university, short duration	1.0

master's degree	0.4
doctorate	0.1
Total	95.1

The interviewees' fathers are mostly graduates of primary and secondary schools, 58.2%. On the third place we can notice those who graduated from vocational school, apprenticeship or complementary studies, 12.4%, 8.8% high school graduates, 5.2% no school.

**Table 13:** *Respondents' participation in formation / specialisation / (re)qualification courses*

<b>Respondents' participation in formation / specialisation / (re)qualification courses</b>	<b>%</b>
no	59.8
yes, at work, before 1989	18.8
yes, at work, after 1989	9.2
yes, paid courses	8.5
yes, free courses offered by public institutions	3.7
Total	100.0

Most respondents answered this item negatively, 59.8% of those who responded affirmatively attended such courses at work before and after 1989, and 8.7% of respondents attended paid courses and 3.7% attended free courses offered by specialized institutions. There is association between the last school graduated by the respondent's mother / father and last school graduated by him, ( $\chi^2=2521,21$ , sig.=0,000, respectively,  $\chi^2=2779,98$ , sig.=0,000), school mobility being observed between primary and secondary school and between secondary and high school.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the aspects regarding social mobility, in general, and occupational mobility, in particular, are complex, even if we capture at the level of data links between different variables that confirm our assumptions, we have to be aware of the fact that an effect is not determined in all cases by a single cause, a multitude of relations are acting simultaneously and continuously in the social sphere.

The results depict an image of occupational stratification, measured by occupational status, in Romania, in the analyzed context in the case of 2 generations. In the first case, that of the respondent, most of those who participated in the study were found in the category of inactive persons at the time of interview, the score being similar to active persons. Even before 1989 the ratio between active and inactive was similar but in favor of active persons (most inactive persons before 1989 were students).

Regarding the occupational status of the respondent's father, most of them, when the respondents were 14 years old, were employees or members of an agricultural or non-agricultural cooperative, unpaid family workers and self-employed workers.

Regarding the occupational mobility of respondents, a trend has not emerged if we refer to the individual's path of employment. The data indicate the existence of association relations between the first and the second status at work, or the second and third job (most employees remain employees). Among the limitations of the analysis we can notice that the data were presented in relation to the total Romanian sample even if some people did not answer all items (first, second, third job) because they did not answer or were not in the situation of changing jobs thrice.

The differences between the occupational status of the father when the respondent was 14 years old, and the respondent's status at the time of interview, are at the level of employees as compared to respondents; at the father's level the respondents' status of employee was encountered in a high proportion, fact which can be influenced by the changes that have occurred in our society since 1989 and by the existing context before that period.

## References

- Borza, A., Popa, M. & Osoian, C. (2006) *Mobilitatea profesională și flexibilitatea resurselor umane- premise ale îmbunătățirii ocupării forței de muncă în industrie* [*Professional mobility and flexibility of human resources-premises of improving employment in industry*]. Available at <http://www.managementmarketing.ro/pdf/articole/3.pdf>. Accessed 10 January 2011.
- Gheorghiu, M. & Lupu, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Mobilitatea elitelor în România secolului XX* [*Mobility of elites in 20<sup>th</sup> century Romania*]. Pitești: Editura Paralela 45.
- Hatos, A. (2006) *Sociologia educației* [*Sociology of education*]. Iasi: Polirom
- Marshall, G. (Ed.). (2003). *Dicționar de sociologie Oxford* [*Dictionary of sociology Oxford*]. Bucharest: Encyclopedic Universe.
- Rotariu, T. & Ilut, P. (1996). *Sociologie* [*Sociology*]. Cluj Napoca: Mesagerul.
- Schifirneț, C. (2004). *Sociologia profesiilor* [*Sociology of professions*]. Available at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/19421547/sociologia-profesiilor>. Accessed 11 January 2011.
- Vlăsceanu, L. (2011). *Sociologie* [*Sociology*]. Iasi: Polirom.

