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Key Processes of Structural Transformation and Mobility in Hungarian Society since the Fall of Communism

Abstract

The paper investigates labor market participation patterns and its consequences for acquired status. The analysis builds on detailed information on labor market participation between 1988 and 2003 as well as on status characteristics in 2003 with respect to housing, wealth and consumption. The latter part of information served as basis for a complex status index, the dependent variable of the research. The retrospective questions were used to develop a labor market career typology, the main independent variable. Regression analysis is applied to detect how labor market participation (and other demographic and status variables) affect the acquired status. The paper shows that both demographic and sociological factors influenced the success or failure of respondents during transformation. The conclusion underlines the importance of separating different effects in status attainment research, like the age when one 'meets' historical changes and opportunities, or the difference in labor market interruptions caused by demographic or sociological reasons.

Keywords: social mobility, labor market, status attainment, life course analysis
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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine the change in social inequalities and individual mobility over the 15 years since the fall of communism, from 1988 to 2003. The analysis consists of two parts. The first section is a time series comparison based on data from Hungarian Household Panel Surveys (henceforth: HHPS) and Household Monitor Surveys of the TÁRKI Social Research Centre (henceforth: TÁRKI Monitor Survey). HHPS, one of the sets of data used here, is essentially a longitudinal database, but in this analysis we will not draw on this feature of our data.¹ For the purpose of this paper, HHPS data will be treated as cross-section data and the time series derived will be supplemented with data from TÁRKI Monitor Surveys generated in genuine cross-section assessments. The first part of the study will focus on three main issues: (1) changes in economic activity-inactivity over the period examined; (2) the shaping of the strata of workers; and (3) key trends in income disparities. At the end of the first section, two combined indicators of the stratification of Hungarian society will be introduced: a status index based on the respondents' per capita family income, housing conditions, financial situation and consumption, and a combined class pattern based primarily on the respondents' occupation, but also drawing on their status index described above.

In the second part of the study, retrospective life-course data from the 2003 TÁRKI Monitor Survey will be used to typify the mobility processes of the period between 1988 and 2002. This part will also contain an analysis of the social status acquired by the respondents as a result of various typical life histories. In the analysis, four life history types will be mentioned. The oldest generation consists of respondents who were no longer active in the labour market in 1988. From the perspective of the transition they are a 'lost generation'. One segment of the next generation is the so-called 'exit generation', whose members left, or were forced out of, the labour market between 1988 and 2002 due to demographic (reaching the retirement age) or economic reasons (lost their jobs, became unemployed or dependent in the long term, chose early retirement). The other segment of the mid-generation is the 'active generation', whose members remained present in the labour market effectively throughout the period between 1988 and 2002 by either maintain-

¹ Longitudinal analyses of the HHPS database were conducted in other research projects (see Kolosi and Sági 1998; Bukodi and Róbert 2002).

ing their gainful employment or by becoming unemployed or dependent in the short term. The last group, the 'entry generation' consists of the youngest respondents who, as students, were still dependent in 1988. Members of this generation 'grew up' and finished their studies between 1988 and 2002, and a large proportion of them found work after 1988. In the life history analysis we will seek to identify the social class status reached by these generations and the various subgroups via different mobility paths by 2003.

Structural transformation and key features of stratification in Hungarian society, 1992–2003

Changes in economic activity

Our data show clearly that one of the key features of the post-1988 transformational crisis is the low level of economic activity (see *Table 1*). According to data from the first wave of HHPS, less than half (46.5 per cent) of the population aged over 16, including occasional workers and those who remained active after retirement, were present in the labour market in 1992 in one form or another. Although impossible to compare precisely with other sources, our data suggest that the rate of employment began to fall as early as in the 1980s and that its decrease accelerated after 1990.² A similar analysis of data from 1992 to 2003, however, shows a trend that forms a very flat U-curve. In the 1990s, the employment rate dropped slightly lower. According to HHPS data from 1996—also covering occasional workers and those who remained active after retirement—43 per cent of the population were active in the labour market at the time. The respective figure in 2000 was 42.4 per cent.³ After 2000, the employment rate began to show signs of moderate growth. The latest data from 2003 indicate that the employment rate was practically the same as in the initial year, 1992 (46.2 per cent).

² E.g. certain time series in the publications of the Hungarian Central Statistics Office (HCSO) offer data concerning the 'working age population' (men aged 15–59, women aged 15–54). In these cases, economic activity rates were as follows: 79.5 per cent in 1980, 75.2 per cent in 1990, 56.8 per cent in 1996. (HCSO 1997: 17) Figures in *Table 1* are obviously lower as they refer to the population aged 16 and over, without an upper limit.

³ The data from 1996 belong to the longitudinal HHPS research, therefore the problem of sample attrition applies (adjusted with the appropriate weighting). The year 2000 data, however, come from the cross-section assessment of the respective TARKI Monitor Survey. Having different data sources therefore has no effect on the trend.

Table 1.: The economic activity distribution of the population aged 16 and over (%)

	1992	1996	2000	2003
Employed	40.2	34.8	34.6	38.9
Self-employed	3.7	5.3	5.1	4.8
Occasional worker	1.0	1.3	1.1	1.8
Active after retirement	1.6	1.6	1.6	0.7
On parental leave (child care allowance or child care fee)	3.7	4.0	4.0	3.8
Unemployed	5.7	4.1	7.2	5.2
Retired	35.1	33.8	34.4	32.2
Dependent	9.1	15.0	12.1	12.5
N	4508	4131	4355	4763

A third of the inactive population, which constitutes the majority of the population aged 16 and over, are retired people. The proportion of this group in the period assessed was more or less constant, and it even fell slightly in 2003.⁴ The other large inactive group is made up of dependent people. Their proportion rose dramatically from nine to 15 per cent in the first half of the 1990s, but dropped slightly to 12 per cent by the turn of the millennium.

Changes in the occupational structure

The occupational structure was also impacted by the transformation of the economy. In the management category, the proportion of top managers remained effectively constant at around two per cent during the entire assessment period. There was a slight increase in the proportion of mid-level managers, whereas the proportion of junior managers fell slightly. By the end of the period assessed, in 2003, the total proportion of top and mid-level managers was slightly higher (7.1 per cent) than in 1992 (6.8 per cent). This may be a factor of privatization, the 'revolution of the deputies' and a faster change of generations (Kolosi 2000).

⁴ Data of the Hungarian Central Statistics Office show a tendency of growth in the proportion of those who receive a pension or pension-type benefits within the entire society in the 1990s. This growth, however, had disappeared by the turn of the millennium (HCSO 2003: 201, diagram 11.8).

Table 2: The occupational distribution of the population aged 16 and over (%)

	1992	1996	2000	2003
Top managers	2.2	1.7	2.7	2.1
Mid-level managers	4.6	4.4	2.9	5.0
Low managers	7.1	5.5	5.5	4.5
Professionals	8.5	10.7	9.8	11.4
White-collar (clerical) workers	15.8	14.4	15.2	13.2
Self-employed	8.1	12.9	11.1	11.0
Skilled workers	24.8	22.8	29.1	30.1
Semi-skilled workers	16.7	15.6	15.6	21.3*
Unskilled workers	6.6	8.0	5.5	–
Agricultural workers	5.6	4.0	2.6	1.4
N	2024	1723	1829	1706

Note: *The categories of semi-skilled and unskilled workers were combined in the year 2003.

The proportion of white-collar employees also increased over the period assessed. The qualifications of employed workers improved, in line with the expansion of higher education that also began after 1988. In comparison to a mere three per cent in the communist era, the proportion of the self-employed among wage earners reached a relatively high level (eight per cent) as early as in 1992. The proportion of the self-employed peaked at 13 per cent in the mid 1990s and remained constant thereafter. The qualification structure of blue-collar workers also improved, which is demonstrated by the higher proportion of skilled workers. This process, however, took place in the second half of the 1990s. In the category of unskilled workers, the proportion of agricultural workers experienced the most marked decline, essentially uninterrupted from 1992 to 2003.

Changes in income groups

Since other papers in this volume address income disparities and poverty in detail, our analysis will only refer to key changes in income strata and essentially take the wider perspective of social stratification. The transformation of the social structure will be described using two indicators. One of the indicators is the ratio of the highest and lowest deciles on a spectrum based on per capita household incomes. As is typical of most income disparity indicators, this indicator increased significantly in the first phase of the social transformation period, from the end of the 1980s to 1992 (Tóth 2003). According to the data below (*Table 3*), this ratio was up to 7.4 as early as 1992, i.e. the per capita household income in the top 10 per cent was nearly 7.5 times higher than in the lowest decile. According to our calculations, this

income disparity indicator rose relatively moderately in the next phase of the transformation, reaching 7.5 by 2000. The latest data of TÁRKI Monitor Surveys show that the ratio of the highest and lowest 10 per cent of per capita household incomes jumped again, to 8.4 in 2003.

Table 3: The ratio of the highest and lowest deciles based on per capita household incomes

	1992	1996	2000	2003
Highest/lowest decile	7.44	7.04	7.52	8.43

Earlier research findings indicate that the polarization of Hungarian society had diminished by 2000. The findings also show that the economic growth put an end to the decline of the middle strata of society in the second half of the 1990s, and better material conditions and welfare began to ‘filter down’ to these layers of society (Kolosi 2000). The latest data, however, do not confirm this trend, which is probably due to the slower growth in the economy and the acute economic problems of the past few years.

Table 4: The increase in per capita household incomes from 2001 to 2003 by income deciles (data in HUF)

	Lowest	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Income: 2001	13,706	22,018	26,641	30,998	34,634	38,436
Income: 2003	19,173	29,589	36,548	42,175	47,051	53,032
Increase	1.40	1.34	1.37	1.36	1.36	1.35
	7th	8th	9th	Highest	Average	
Income: 2001	43,020	48,455	58,494	108,347	41,368	
Income: 2003	58,900	67,752	83,155	161,535	59,767	
Increase	1.37	1.40	1.42	1.49	1.44	

The second disparity indicator shows by how many times the per capita household income increased in each income decile from 2001 to 2003. In absolute terms, the mean average value increased by nearly 150 per cent, from 41,000 to 60,000 forints (*Table 4*). The data also indicate that the very highest and lowest deciles saw the largest absolute increase over the average (1.4 and 1.49), meaning that, in absolute terms, the incomes of the highest and lowest social groups grew at a rate higher than the average. The increase in the latter group is probably due to the impact of the minimum wage increase, which is the most important factor affecting this group. The growth rate of incomes in the highest decile was even higher. In the light of these data it would be difficult to claim that the differentiation of incomes, which does have a considerable impact on the structure of society, has stopped.

Moreover, the absolute growth of incomes in the middle of the social spectrum was below the average from 2001 to 2003. This also indicates that the positive trend in the middle segments of society in the second half of the 1990s has been derailed in the past few years: the ‘downward spread’ of prosperity in society has—hopefully only temporarily—come to a halt.

The vertical differentiation of Hungarian society in 2003

Generating status indices that allow for the vertical differentiation of society has been a long-standing tradition in social stratification research both in Hungary and abroad. In this analysis, we will not engage in the debate on stratification that sets vertical and horizontal differentiation against each other, and that focuses on the consistency and inconsistency of social statuses. Instead, the focus of our analysis will be on hierarchical inequalities.⁵

As in several of our earlier research projects in which we analysed data from HHPS and TÁRKI Monitor Surveys, this social status analysis will again be measured against several vertical dimensions.⁶ Based on the data available from the 2003 TÁRKI Monitor Survey, the first factor of vertical social differentiation is the per capita household income examined above. Housing conditions constitute the second factor, generated from the following four basic categories of data: population density; household infrastructure (toilets, form of hot water provision, provision of cables: ISDN, ADSL); housing deficiencies (musty, damp, dark, noisy, poor state of repair—based on the opinion of the respondents); and finally the standards of the interior (based on the opinion of the interviewer). The third index reflects the respondents’ financial situation and (material) circumstances and also draws on four basic information categories including savings (savings accounts, shares and securities, cash savings); properties (second house, land); availability of the usual consumer durables (colour TV, automatic washing machine, microwave oven, VCR, DVD, home theatre, hi-fi equipment, dishwasher, video camera, digital camera), cars and assets such as PCs or access to the Internet. Holiday practices were also considered in the third index. We differentiated between those who never went on holiday and those who had

⁵ Vertical stratification models which lay great emphasis on inconsistencies also rely on vertical dimensions and analyse typical combinations of hierarchical positions in the context of various social inequalities, as seen at Lenski (1954) and in the first such analysis in Hungary, the Stratification Model Survey (Kolosi 1987).

⁶ E.g. Fábán, Róbert and Szivós (1998) looked at dimensions such as income status, volume of savings, availability of consumer durables; in Fábán, Kolosi and Róbert (2000) status index analyses were based on dimensions such as housing conditions, material consumption and cultural consumption.

had at least a one-week holiday in the past five years. The latter group was further broken down to select the holidaymakers who had had hotel accommodation and/or had dined in restaurants.

The basic assessments used for the indices were standardized (z-score) and then summarized. As a result, the variables were included in the index, weighted according to the frequency of their occurrence in society.⁷ As a last step, a joint status index was created by a principal component analysis based on the three indices.⁸

The results of our vertical social stratification research are summarized in *Table 5*. The table includes the average values of the income, housing and financial/material indices, and the social status index by the respondents' occupation/activity status in 2003 (in the inactive group, the last occupation and main category of inactivity is indicated). The data show that the owners of large and medium-sized businesses, and freelance white-collar workers enjoy the best social status in every respect. (Due to the low number of respondents in this category, this conclusion is hard to interpret, and yet seems credible.)

In terms of per capita net household income, top and mid-level managers also rank high, followed closely by smallholders. The housing conditions of top managers are only minimally poorer than those enjoyed by owners of large and medium-sized businesses and freelance white-collar workers. These groups are followed by the self-employed, mid-level managers and the professionals. Top managers and the self-employed also rank second and third, respectively, in terms of wealth and financial circumstances, followed by mid-level managers and professionals. The lowest position in the social hierarchy is held by inactive people who have never worked, as well as by agricultural and unskilled workers. Skilled workers are the closest to the average. Altogether, these results are considered to be authentic, and the measurement tools generated seem valid.

⁷ The correlation between the housing condition and material/financial status indices is 0.546; the correlation between the per capita household income and the housing condition index is 0.255, and that between per capita household income and the material/financial status is 0.318.

⁸ This method yielded 1 un-rotated principal component with an Eigen value over 1 (1.76). This principal component shows the vertical differentiation of society based on incomes, housing conditions, and financial status and (material) consumption, and explains 58.7 per cent of the total variance of the three original variables. The communality was 0.813 for housing conditions, 0.843 for the financial/material status and 0.624 for the per capita household income. In the status index generated with the above method, housing and material conditions play a more important role as they are based on a wider pool of information than income data.

Table 5: The vertical differentiation of occupational and inactive groups, * 2003

Occupation/activity status	Per capita household income (HUF)	Housing conditions	Properties and material consumption	Social status (principal component)
Owners of large and medium-sized businesses + freelance white-collar workers	216 459	4.19	12.78	2.16
Self-employed	78 275	2.62	5.87	0.76
Smallholders	81 337	0.43	4.11	0.51
Top managers	97 676	3.99	7.04	1.08
Mid-level managers	84 666	2.57	5.05	0.78
Low managers	75 893	1.57	0.79	0.34
Professionals	80 228	2.26	5.03	0.69
White-collar(clerical) workers	66 406	1.56	1.99	0.37
Skilled workers	59 386	-0.04	-0.81	-0.00
Unskilled workers	46 287	-2.02	-5.08	-0.52
Agricultural farm workers	43 767	-3.41	-6.53	-0.73
Pensioners, on pension-type compensation, never worked	50 910	-1.29	-5.09	-0.39
Students	57 006	0.47	3.75	0.31
Other inactive, never worked	33 799	-5.21	-5.87	-0.96
<i>Mean</i>	<i>60 122</i>	<i>0.17</i>	<i>0.75</i>	<i>0.00</i>
Standard variation	56 660	4.61	8.41	1.00
Eta	0.30	0.43	0.49	0.55
N	4000	3843	3898	3745

Note: *Last occupation in the inactive group, main inactivity category for those who have never worked. The reason for a decrease in the numbers is the (cumulative) lack of information on the original variables.

Classes and stratification in 2003

The first part of this analysis will be completed with a combined class pattern based partly on the respondents' occupational position and partly on their status in the social hierarchy.⁹ The following five groups were defined:

(1) *Elite*: owners of large and medium-sized businesses, freelance white-collar workers. Only top managers and white-collar workers in the top 10 per cent of the status index are included.

(2) *Upper middle class*: top managers outside the highest 10 per cent of the status index, mid-level managers, the self-employed group and smallholders

⁹ In practice, the status index was divided into deciles and the respondents were classified into categories based on the combined distribution (cross table) of the 12 occupational groups and the status deciles.

in the top 10 per cent of the status index; and professionals in deciles 6–9 of the status index.

(3) *Middle class*: mid-level managers, self-employed respondents and smallholders whose status falls outside the highest 10 per cent, professionals whose status is within deciles 1–5, low managers, other white-collar (office) workers and skilled workers whose status falls within the top three deciles.

(4) *Working class*: skilled workers with a lower status, as well as unskilled and agricultural workers whose status indices fall into decile 4 or higher.

(5) *Deprived*: unskilled and agricultural workers in the lowest three deciles of the status index.

In line with stratification research practices in Hungary and abroad, this class pattern builds primarily on the occupational status, adjusted with the social status index. For respondents who were no longer employed or were temporarily unemployed in 2003, the last occupational position was taken into consideration. Also, the earlier occupational position was adjusted with the social status index achieved in 2003. Those who had never had an occupation were not included in this classification.

The final results of the analysis are indicated in *Table 6*. According to our data, three per cent of the sample population falls into the *elite* category, which consists of owners of large and medium-sized businesses, freelance white-collar workers, as well as 35 per cent of top managers and 23 per cent of professionals whose status index falls within the top 10 per cent.¹⁰ The *upper middle class* constitutes eight per cent of the sample, with the remaining 65 per cent of top managers, 26–28 per cent of mid-level managers, the self-employed and smallholders and 59 per cent of white-collar workers whose status index falls into deciles 6–9. The *middle class* makes up nearly 31 per cent, comprising 18 per cent of professionals (whose status is within deciles 1–5), nearly three-quarters of mid-level managers, the self-employed and smallholders, and the upper quarter of junior managers, other white-collar (office) workers and skilled workers. The *working class* constitutes 38 per cent of the sample, with three-quarters of skilled workers—based on their social status—half of unskilled workers, and 40 per cent of agricultural workers. Finally, 20 per cent of the sample is considered *deprived*, including half of the unskilled workers and 60 per cent of farm workers whose social status falls into deciles 3 or lower.¹¹

¹⁰ By way of comparison: in an earlier model (based on the 1999 TÁRKI Monitor Survey), also based on three dimensions, we looked at social status from the perspective of lifestyle categories rather than occupation and income. A cluster analysis in the model showed that only one per cent of the sample fell into the elite category (Fábián, Kolosi and Róbert 2000).

¹¹ Again, for comparison: in the lifestyle typology quoted above, as a result of a cluster analysis of data from four years earlier, 31 per cent of the sample was classified in the deprived, poor category (Fábián, Kolosi and Róbert 2000).

Table 6: Social classes in the population aged 16 and above,* 2003 (%)

Social class	Distribution
Elite	3.0
Upper middle class	8.1
Middle class	30.8
Working class	37.8
Deprived	20.3
N	3604

Note: * Inactive (retired, unemployed, dependent) respondents were classified based on their last occupation. Their classification was also adjusted by the value of the social status principal component (which refers to the current situation). Persons who had never worked (home makers, dependants, students) were not included in the classification.

Typical life histories and their impact on stratification

Life history types in the transition period

In the 2003 TÁRKI Monitor Survey we used a retrospective method to collect data on the activity and occupational history of the respondents from 1988 to 2003.¹² By mapping out the respondents' life history types, we identified four main life history categories and some subcategories within the wider groups.

The *lost generation* consists of old people for whom the change in the political regime came too late. Already inactive in the labour market by 1988, they lost out on the opportunity, and also the risk, of having their professional careers influenced by the economic and political changes. With their careers already completed, they pursued no recordable work activities from 1988 until 2003.

The members of the *exit generation* had been active workers in 1988, but no longer held jobs in 2003. In the course of the 15 years of the transition assessed in this survey they withdrew from the labour market. One of the subcategories in this group (*exit generation I*) is that of the *demographic exit group*, the members of which became inactive in a 'natural process': either by reaching the retirement age during this period and duly retiring, or going on parental leave on child care allowances ('gyes') or fees ('gyed') after

¹² In the survey we used a simplified version of the so-called *calendar method*. Respondents were asked to recall whether or not they had had work every year from 1988 to 2000. If yes, which occupational category they belonged to (from the 12 categories also shown in *Table 5*). If not, which inactive group they fell in (pensioner, student, home maker, unemployed, on social benefits).

childbirth. Such parents had left the labour market with the possible prospect of returning, but had not returned by the date of the data collection (2003). The other subcategory (*exit generation 2*), however, consists of people who did not leave the labour market of their own will, but were *compelled* to leave. Between 1988 and 2003 they left the market and became unemployed, home makers or dependent on social benefits. In theory, they could return, but have not done so as yet. Many of them became pensioners after a period of inactivity, and therefore are certain not to return. Those who became pensioners through early retirement also belong to the *forced exit* generation.¹³

Those who worked both in 1988 and in 2003 were identified as the *active generation* of the transition. Respondents who were active in the labour market throughout the 15-year period form one subgroup (*active generation 1*). The second subgroup (*active generation 2*), however, had some sort of break in their career during this period—either demographic or occupational; i.e. during their active earning career they went through a period of unemployment, had children and became full-time parents, or lived on social benefits, etc.

The *entry generation* consists of young people who were not yet present in the labour market in 1988. At the time they were either dependent minors or students engaged in some level of education. The genuine ‘entry group’—the members of which ‘grew up’, finished their studies and started to work during the 15 years of the transition period—form the largest subgroup (*entry generation 1*). Young people who had not completed their studies by the date of the survey also belong to this generation, but, being students, they were not yet able to become a ‘natural’ component of the labour market. Within their generation, they form a smaller subgroup (*pre-entry generation*). Also in this group are those young people (*entry generation 2*) who were no longer students but, unable to find work, had joined other inactive groups (unemployed, full-time parents, social benefit recipients). This third group failed its entry and became inactive not of their own will, but because they were unable to find gainful employment.

¹³ The official retirement age was not considered strictly here. Obviously, early retirement for men is at and before the age of 54, and for women at and before the age of 49. We also supposed an ‘escape’ into retirement and therefore a non-voluntary exit for those who retired at an age between these age brackets and the official retirement age (therefore not so ‘early’), but had been inactive before retirement (e.g. as unemployed, home makers or on social benefits), therefore did not retire from an active position. Those who had been on parental leave, but later joined another inactive category (except for students), were classified in the involuntary exit group.

Table 7: Life history types in Hungarian society from 1988 to 2003 (%)

Life history type	Proportion
Lost generation	15.6
Exit generation 1 (demographic exit)	16.8
Exit generation 2 (forced exit)	16.1
Active generation 1 (active working career without interruptions)	16.7
Active generation 2 (active working career with interruptions)	11.1
Entry generation 1 (youth able to launch working career)	15.7
Entry generation 2 (youth unable to launch working career)	2.1
Pre-entry generation (students)	5.9
N*	3947

Note: *This classification was prepared for the entire population aged 16 and over, except where impossible due to lack of data.

Table 7 shows the result of the classification. According to the data, the transition had no effect on the occupational life history of 15.6 per cent of the population aged 16 and over. These people were either no longer active in the labour market in 1988 or never had jobs. Exactly one third of the population left the labour market during the period from 1988 to 2003. Half of these people left the market for demographic reasons, whereas the other half consisted of those who had been compelled to leave. Some 28 per cent were active in the labour market in the period assessed. Most of these people continued to work without any interruptions in the transition period as well. A significant group (11 per cent), however, left their jobs temporarily during this period. Nearly 18 per cent completed their education in the transition period after 1988. Most of them (16 per cent) found jobs, but the remaining two per cent had still been unable to find work with their qualifications in 2003. The latter group, which, in terms of the qualifications they had, should be called ‘school drop outs’ rather than simply ‘school leavers’, makes up a rather significant 11–12 per cent of their age group. Finally, nearly 6 per cent of the population aged 16 and over are still full-time students.

The impact of life histories on social status

This part of the analysis will look at social classes and statuses generated by different life histories. On the one hand, the analysis will draw on descriptive statistical results to explore the social class status achieved by respondents with different life histories and the average social status of each generation in 2003. On the other hand, causal models will also be assessed to test specific research questions for each generation. We will look for answers to the following questions:

(1) *Lost generation*: here the research will focus on whether their social status in 2003 was determined primarily by their age (a demographic factor) or their last occupation (a social factor).

(2) *Exit generation*: in this group the analysis will explore differences between the status of those who left the labour market due to demographic reasons (retirement, childbirth) and those who were compelled to do so.

(3) *Active generation*: here the aim of the analysis is to identify differences between the status of those who were present in the labour market without interruptions and those whose working career was interrupted at some point between 1988 and 2003.

(4) *Entry generation*: the analysis of this group seeks to identify how the social status of young people who were able to find a job after 1988 (successful entrants) relates to the status of those who held jobs throughout the period from 1988 to 2003.

Table 8: Connection between life history types and social classes (%)

Generation / Class	Elite	Upper middle class	Middle class	Working class	Deprived	Total
Lost generation	0.4	3.1	22.5	39.7	34.3	100
Exit generation 1 (demographic exit group)	3.3	7.4	26.4	40.2	22.7	100
Exit generation 2 (forced exit group)	0.8	2.8	20.8	42.4	33.2	100
Active generation 1 (uninterrupted career)	5.9	15.2	42.0	31.6	5.3	100
Active generation 2 (interrupted career)	3.4	10.3	34.9	36.6	1.8	100
Entry generation (career launched)	3.6	10.0	39.3	35.8	11.3	100

Note: The data in this table are quasi outflow mobility rates which show the proportions in which members of the generations reached various social class locations. Those who had never worked (home makers, dependants, students) were not included in this table. Sample size: N=3556.

Table 9: Connection between life history type and social status

Generation	Social status
Lost generation	-0.46
Exit generation 1 (demographic exit)	-0.04
Exit generation 2 (forced exit)	-0.44
Active generation 1 (uninterrupted LF participation)	0.56
Active generation 2 (interrupted LF participation)	0.15
Entry generation 1 (able to enter the LM)	0.28
Entry generation 2 (unable to enter the LM)	-0.75
Students	0.32
Mean	0.00
Standard variation	1.00
Eta	0.38
N	3696

Note: These figures are average values of the social status key component in each generation. Here the number of cases is lower than in the tables presented earlier due to a lack of data on both social status and the generations.

Tables 8 and 9 show the descriptive statistical results of the analysis. Table 8 only contains data on respondents who, at the time of the data collection (or before), held jobs (i.e. their last occupation could be identified), since they were the only ones included in the social class pattern described above (see Table 6).

The table shows that just over a quarter of the *lost generation* have a middle-class status or higher, while the remaining three-quarters belong to lower social classes. The two subgroups of the *exit generation* are also distinctly different. The proportion of the deprived among those compelled to become inactive is 10 per cent higher than in the other subgroup. Over 10 per cent of the demographic exit group belong to the upper middle class or the elite, which is three times higher than the respective figure in the group compelled to become inactive. (The social class patterns of the group compelled to leave and the lost generation are very similar). In the deprived class there are nearly three times as many members of the *active generation* whose career was interrupted, as there are of those whose career was uninterrupted. Active workers with an uninterrupted career constitute the largest group in the middle, upper middle and elite classes. The class status of the *entry generation* is poorer than that of the active members who had been in the labour market without interruption, with nearly twice as many of their members belonging to the deprived class. Also, they are underrepresented in the middle, upper middle and elite classes.

Since the status index, unlike class status, is calculated for the entire population, the relationship between life history and social status can be examined from a wider perspective (Table 9). It is hardly surprising that

those who were active in the labour market without interruptions from 1988 until 2003 rank highest (0.56) in the list. Members of the middle-age generation whose career was interrupted during this period, e.g. they became unemployed, come significantly behind the top group (with 0.15 points). Their life history group is outstripped even by the successful members of the entry generation (0.28) who began their careers after 1988. Even more interestingly, the social status of those who were still studying in 2003 is even higher (0.32).¹⁴ The social status of the demographic exit group (-0.04) is close to the grand mean. However, those who were forced out of the labour market between 1988 and 2003 and the lost generation have a markedly poorer status (-0.44 and -0.46). The worst social status (-0.75) was held by those who had completed their education (or dropped out) but had been unable to find a job. Descriptive data therefore suggest that social status depends primarily on whether or not people can secure their presence in the labour market. Among the unemployed, those who drop out of the market irrevocably are in a worse position than those whose unemployment is temporary. People unable to even start working face an even more severe social problem.

For the causal analysis the regression method was applied. A total of four models will be presented here in the search for answers to the four research questions pinned down earlier. In all instances, social status is the dependent variable. All four models will use the data in two phases: *Model A* will always apply to the given specific question of the analysis, whereas in *Model B* various control factors will also be considered. For the results, see *Table 10*.

The answer to the first research question is clearly that the last occupation¹⁵ of the members of the *lost generation* had a much greater impact on their current social status in 2003 than their age (*Model 1/A*). This applies despite the fact that the members of the *lost generation* completed their careers at least 15 years ago, before 1988. The conclusion remains valid even when the control factors are added.¹⁶ Accordingly, these elderly people en-

¹⁴ The social status of students, of course, usually means the social status of their parental families: the per capita net income, housing conditions, material/financial situation of the families. These data therefore provide additional information on the relationship between (further) education and a good family background.

¹⁵ Here, as in the other models, occupations (whether current or last) were based on the detailed occupational code (ISCO). Each respondent who was active or ever had been active was assigned the respective ISEI rating used in mobility research internationally. (For more about the method, see Ganzeboom and Treiman (1996)). As such, those who had never worked were not included in the analysis on the lost generation.

¹⁶ Control factors such as whether there were active wage earners in the family, whether the respondents lived alone or whether the respondents came from a Roma household, were measured by binary variables: (yes: 1, no: 0). Settlement categories for the place of living were coded according to the respective population numbers to ensure the appropriate level of measurement for the variable.

joy a much better status if they have active wage earners in their families. Their status, however, deteriorates if they live alone. Coming from a Roma background has the same negative effect on social status. People living in large cities have a better status than those who live in small communities (*Model 1/B*).

The answer to the second question of our research is that—within the *exit generation*—the social status of the group forced out is significantly lower than that of those who left the labour market for demographic reasons (*Model 2/A*). As such, the difference based on descriptive data (*Table 9*) has statistical significance as well. However, once the control factors are also applied (*Model 2/B*), the distinction between the two subgroups drops by over 50 per cent, but remains significant (beta values are -0.229 and -0.097). This shows that other factors—such as occupation, whether the occupation is in the form of self-employment or employment,¹⁷ age, the composition of the family, the number of children, being of Roma origin, the size of the living community—are in strong correlation with being forced out of the labour market. The impact of the control factors corresponds to expectations: a better occupation and, to a lesser extent, being self-employed improves one's social status. Also, those who live in larger cities or who have active wage earners in their families enjoy a significantly higher status than people who live alone or are of Roma origin.¹⁸

The answer to the third question of the research is that—within the *active generation*—the social status of people whose work career was interrupted in the period from 1988 to 2003 is significantly lower (*Model 3/A*). Again, our descriptive results (*Table 9*) have been confirmed. The control factors (*Model 3/B*), however, 'destroy' more moderately the main effects than in Question 2 (beta values are -0.189 and -0.139). The factors that had a stronger correlation to whether people were forced out of the labour market for good during the transition period from 1988 to 2003 had a smaller impact on temporary unemployment during the same period.

¹⁷ Given that the ISEI rating applies to occupations regardless of whether they are in the form of employment or self-employment, a separate binary variable was applied to the self-employed category (self-employed: 1, other: 0).

¹⁸ The number of children does not really 'work' here, since the assessment (3 or more children: 1, other: 0) shows that this factor is not significant in comparison to other variables in the analysis (although the estimate has a negative sign, i.e. a high number of children results in a lower social status).

Another interesting aspect concerning control factors in this model is that here people's social status was relatively less affected by the fact if they came from a Roma background (-0.139 as opposed to the beta values of -0.264 and -0.233 in *Models 1/B* and *2/B*, respectively). In other words, though still significantly lower than non-Roma respondents in a similar situation, the status of Roma who manage to remain in the labour market over a long period of time—or with short interruptions—will not be so poor as it would be if they had no jobs, either because of old age or because they had been forced to withdraw from the labour market.

As regards the fourth question, our inquiry goes beyond simply checking how the social status of those active in the labour market during the entire period from 1988 to 2003 compares to that of respondents who started working after 1988. The descriptive results (*Table 9*) show that the former group has a clear edge over the latter in terms of social status. The difference, however, could simply be the consequence of 'ageing', since the active generation had more time to accumulate higher status than the entry generation. Therefore, only active generation respondents under the age of 45 are considered in the comparison to reduce the impact of the age factor. As such, in the model (*Model 4/A*) the status of the young members of the active generation is only minimally higher than that of the next, entry generation ('claimants to the throne'). Moreover, this impact disappears completely when the control factors are applied (*Model 4/B*). The conclusion, therefore, is that the variance in the social status of the two successive cohorts is not the result of generation factors (the impact of age is not significant), but rather of factors such as occupation, place of residence and ethnic origin. This last factor plays a prominent role in this model as well. Additionally, in the model of the entry generation (but also in that applied to the active generation), self-employment has a stronger positive impact on social status.

Occupational mobility and social status

In the last part of our analysis, we will examine the *active generation*, to explore in more detail the relationship between the occupational mobility and social status of the mid-generation. A conventional intragenerational mobility table is used to compare occupational statuses in 1988 and 2003. Based on this, the members of this generation are classified as upwardly mobile, immobile and downwardly mobile. Then the social status achieved by each category by 2003 is analysed. Those who worked throughout the period, and those whose careers were in some way interrupted, are examined separately. Data concerning men and women are also explored in a separate analysis.

Table 10: Impact factors on social status by generation (standardized regression coefficients)

	1) Lost generation		2) Exit generation		3) Active generation		4) Young active generation and entry generation 1	
	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B
1) Generation subgroups								
Forced exit (ref.: demographic exit groups)	–	–	–0.229***	–0.097***	–	–	–	–
Active with interruptions (ref.: active without interruptions)	–	–	–	–	–0.189***	–0.139***	–	–
Young active without interruptions (ref.: entry generation)	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.071*	0.007
2) Features of the current (latest) status in the labour market								
Occupational status index (ISEI)	0.375***	0.344***	–	0.374***	–	0.382***	–	0.348***
Business owner (ref.: employee)	–	–	–	0.047*	–	0.191***	–	0.184***
Household with an active wage earner (ref.: none)	–	0.257***	–	0.223***	–	–	–	–

	1) Lost generation		2) Exit generation		3) Active generation		4) Young active generation and entry generation 1	
	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B
3) Demographic features								
Age	0.094*	0.086*	–	0.124***	–	–0.002	–	0.028
Large family: 3+ dependent children in the household (ref.: no children or 1–2 children)	–	–	–	–0.004	–	–0.030	–	–0.028
Living alone (ref.: not living alone)	–	–0.083*	–	–0.102***	–	–	–	–
Of Roma origin (ref.: non-Roma origin)	–	–0.264***	–	–0.233***	–	–0.139***	–	–0.245***
Size of living community (number of inhabitants)	–	0.102**	–	0.106***	–	0.103***	–	0.068*
R ² (explanatory power)	15.1%	29.3%	5.2%	40.0%	3.5%	27.9%	0.4%	28.2%
N	505		1183		1014		828	

Notes: In this generation breakdown, *Model A* always applies to the given research questions proper, whereas in *Model B* various control factors are also be considered.

Significance levels: *** p< 0.001; ** p< 0.01; * p<0.05.

Table 11: Intragenerational mobility and social status in the active generation, 1988–2003

	1) Owners of large and med. businesses + freel. white-collar	2) Top and mid-level managers + professionals	3) Self-employed + smallholders	4) Low managers + white-collar	5) Skilled workers	6) Unskilled workers	Total
1) Owners of large and medium businesses + freelance white-collar	(2.34) 2	.	(2.96) 2	.	.	.	(2.64) 4
2) Top and mid-level managers + professionals	(2.39) 6	1.01 148	(1.44) 20	(0.94) 22	(0.24) 5	(0.05) 3	1.0 204
3) Self-employed + smallholders	.	(0.68) 7	(0.71) 23	(0.82) 2	(-0.05) 2	(0.12) 2	0.64 36
4) Low managers + white-collar workers	.	1.23 30	(1.25) 15	0.45 106	(0.53) 7	(0.11) 13	0.61 171
5) Skilled workers	.	(0.83) 15	0.72 47	(0.48) 25	0.23 287	-0.19 52	0.27 426
6) Unskilled workers	.	(0.45) 4	(0.15) 16	(0.53) 3	(-0.04) 20	-0.39 146	-0.27 189
Total	(2.37) 8	1.01 204	0.85 123	0.53 158	0.22 321	-0.30 216	0.40 1030

Note: The data above show the mean average of social status points and the number of cases. Where the number of cases is under 30, status points are indicated in brackets.

The ‘input’ data of this analysis are shown in *Table 11*. This 6x6 mobility table contains the following categories: owners of large and medium businesses + freelance white-collar workers; top and mid-level managers + professionals; the self-employed + smallholders; low managers + white-collar (clerical) workers; skilled workers; and unskilled workers. The figures show both the average social status point value of each cell and the number of cases based on which these scores were computed. The latter figures suggest that 69 per cent of the 1,030 respondents are on the ‘diagonal’ of the mobility table, meaning that, in terms of occupation as defined here, they were not mobile from 1988 to 2003.¹⁹ Also, a major proportion of mobile people be-

¹⁹ Naturally, we also analysed the 12x12 table generated from the original set of occupational categories. There the proportion of immobile respondents on the diagonal was 63 per cent.

long to cells close to the ‘diagonal’.²⁰ The data, therefore, show no signs of mass occupational restratification. However, we are not in a position to check our results against other data, as such information does not exist. It is, however, very likely that occupational mobility has been slightly underrated in the approach taken here. Another occupational analysis of the 1988–2003 period based, for instance, on ISEI ratings would very likely show a more dynamic mobility pattern, since our categories would be intrinsically more heterogeneous in a more detailed assessment such as this.

Table 11 also highlights the fact that movements in various directions among occupational categories are not in obvious correlation with social status. The assumption that upward and downward mobility are always associated with, respectively, higher and lower status ratings than immobility does not hold. As such, there is no ‘linear’ relation between occupational mobility in the traditional sense and social status, as proven by the results presented in *Table 12*.

Table 12: Occupational mobility and social status in subcategories of the active generation

Type of mobility	Career with no interruptions				Career with interruptions				<i>Total</i>	
	Men		Women		Men		Women		(<i>%</i>)	<i>Status</i>
	(<i>%</i>)	<i>Status</i>	(<i>%</i>)	<i>Status</i>	(<i>%</i>)	<i>Status</i>	(<i>%</i>)	<i>Status</i>		
Downward	8.1	0.84	8.6	0.77	21.3	−0.01	18.6	0.24	12.5	0.40
Immobile	69.5	0.48	80.5	0.42	56.2	−0.23	65.3	0.21	69.3	0.32
Upward	22.4	0.89	10.9	0.77	22.5	0.34	16.1	0.67	18.2	0.72
<i>Total</i>	100.0	0.59	100.0	0.49	100.0	−0.06	100.0	0.29	100.0	0.40
N	394		267		170		199		1030	

The merger of the categories therefore brought only a minor change in the mobility rates. However, the mobile persons in the 12x12 table varied very highly.

²⁰ We checked a few ‘extreme’ mobility cases. Two people who moved ‘down’ from the top category to category 3 had been freelance white-collar workers who became self-employed. Some manual workers who showed a strong upward tendency and were classified in category 2, had become mid-level managers, rather than top-level managers or professionals. Some respondents who ‘sank’ to the manual worker category from category 2 had been either professionals or mid-level managers earlier, but not top managers.

In the *active generation*, respondents whose career had been interrupted demonstrated greater mobility than those who had been in the labour market during the entire period from 1988 to 2003. Also, men were more mobile than women. Among mobile workers, those who had interrupted their active career show a stronger tendency for downward mobility. Women, in general, were less upwardly mobile than their male counterparts. In terms of social status, the results show that the social status generated by upward mobility was much higher than the status of respondents who had been immobile in the past 15 years, whereas the social status of downwardly mobile respondents was slightly better than that of the immobile group. The status ratings of respondents with an uninterrupted career form a U-shaped curve in both sexes, with slightly lower values for women. It is clear, therefore, that such 'downward' movements were deliberate, not forced, as a traditional occupational mobility approach would suggest; in effect, these respondents drifted 'upwards'. It is more likely, however, that downward occupational movements (or in fact mobility in any direction) after career breaks were involuntary. In this group, upwardly mobile respondents of both sexes had a higher social status rating than those who had been immobile, but their status ratings are lower than those whose career rise in the occupational hierarchy had been uninterrupted. The social status of downwardly mobile respondents is only slightly higher than that of respondents whose career had been interrupted but who remained in the same occupational category.²¹

Interestingly, among respondents whose career had been interrupted, women had a higher social status than men. Unit numbers here did not allow for a differentiation between interruptions of a demographic and non-demographic nature, but the results show that interruptions were more 'damaging' for men than for women. It is likely that career interruptions for women were more often due to demographic reasons (childbirth), whereas for men such interruptions were non-voluntary, i.e. the consequence of a temporary loss of employment. On the whole, the analysis also suggests that career interruptions are a greater risk factor for social status, and respondents whose careers had been interrupted in the past 15 years suffered a greater loss of status than those who were able to remain in the labour market throughout the period, even if in a lower occupation position.

²¹ An alternative interpretation of this is that housing and material/financial factors which would not necessarily be lost by 'downward' mobility played an important role in the social status assessment.

Some conclusions

Our analyses outline three distinct phases of social stratification in the post-communist period. First, at the turn of the 1990s, pro-forma employment was replaced by real unemployment as a result of the grave economic crisis that accompanied the transformation of the political system. This period brought a radical surge in social inequalities and income disparities. A large number of business owners and, subsequently, owners of large businesses appeared in the market. The economic position of managers who met the requirements of the market and white-collar workers improved rapidly. The volume of poverty remained effectively unchanged. However, a decline in the standards of living due to the economic crisis drove a large proportion of the mainly middle strata of society near to poverty. The growth of the economy in the 1990s, for the second phase, effectively stabilized the inequalities. The first beneficiaries of economic growth were the upper strata, and, as the growth spread downwards in society, a further 10 per cent of society benefited from the positive changes every year. As a result, the position of the middle strata became stable and another third of these strata shrugged off poverty to join the upper third that had been one of the obvious beneficiaries of the transition. The first years of the new millennium, the third phase, brought new trends. The increase in the minimum wage, as well as social and pension policies, on the one hand, and the good market positions carved out by business players, and government actions benefiting public workers, on the other, led to greater material improvement in the upper and lower strata than in the 40–50 per cent in the centre of the social spectrum.

All in all, the structure of society is moving towards greater stability. The upper middle class, which makes up 10–12 per cent of society, though highly heterogeneous, has clearly improved its status in the past 15 years. The classic middle class, with its 30 per cent of the population, is also heterogeneous, but a majority of its members are among the beneficiaries of the transition. Unlike the upper strata, the status of the working class, which comprises nearly 40 per cent of society, was badly hit by the effects of the economic crisis and a narrowing labour market in the 1990s. It was also this group that benefited least from the new economic growth and the ‘spending generosity’ of various governments during their terms in office. The remaining 20 per cent form the deprived group, whose members have lived in continuous poverty and dependence on the state, even though the growth rate of their income has been above the average over the past two to three years.

Our analyses confirmed the decisive role of labour activity in social stratification. Analyses that take into consideration generation aspects lead to the same conclusion. Generation analyses show that the social status of those who had been inactive in the labour market before the fall of communism is much less determined by age (i.e. the number of years they have spent in retire-

ment) than by the occupational status held before the transition period. There are significant differences among those who have withdrawn from the labour market over the past 15 years, depending on whether they retired for demographic reasons or were compelled to become inactive. Moreover, the second greatest factor of differentiation even in the active generation, preceded only by the occupational status of the respondents, is whether their economic activity was interrupted or not for any length of time. Conspicuously, the worst drawback affecting the Roma is also whether or not they can maintain a continuous presence in the labour market and whether they can enter the market in the first place. Ethnic segregation has a considerably smaller impact on those who find and can keep their jobs. And finally, the worst status is not that of pensioners, but of young people (10–12 per cent of each entrant generation) who finish their education but cannot find a job.

Our data indicate that the occupational mobility of the active generation was relatively moderate in contrast to the turbulent changes of the transition. This phenomenon can better be described using the language of voluntary or involuntary actions, rather than ‘upward’ or ‘downward’ movement used in the classical approach. Over the entire period, two-thirds of the male and three-quarters of the female respondents were immobile in terms of occupation. Over 20 per cent of men and nearly 15 per cent of women have been ‘upwardly’ mobile in all aspects since 1988. However, there is a high number of ‘downwardly mobile’ workers who opted for an occupational status with lower prestige in return for higher material benefits. Altogether, over 10 per cent of the active generation have been forced into a ‘downward’ mobility that has also generated a lower standard of living for them.

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