

ASSESSING CONTEMPORARY HUNGARIAN SOCIETY

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Kolosi, Tamás: *A terhes babapiskóta. A rendszerváltás társadalomszerkezete*. [The Pregnant Sponge Finger. The Social Structure of the Change of the System] Budapest: Osiris, 2000.
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Both the two well-known and respected researchers of Hungarian society have said good-bye to the past century by a book. One of the books carries in itself the promise that a sociological work may become even a bestseller for several reasons, with its mysterious title, witty cover page, and also due to the public role its author has taken up. The other book, with its modest title and appearance, common in the world of academia, suggests that its author did not aspire much for ‘worldly’ success. If it is assumed that the outside appearance of the books is the result of rational choice, then one may toy with the thought that the above-mentioned features may refer to the major ultimate hypotheses of the authors: namely that those middle strata are emerging in Hungary who willingly open a book that speaks mostly about them, and to the question whether there are people who are interested about themselves and their social perspectives.

The two authors belong to a single workshop, to TÁRKI, set up in 1985 for empirical social research, for the systematization and analysis of their data on the basis of the studies of the stratification model. TÁRKI was founded by Tamás Kolosi, and Péter Róbert is its leading researcher. According to the inside cover Kolosi’s book was made with the cooperation, or, co-authorship, as it is put by Kolosi, of Matild Sági and Péter Róbert. Their common field of specialization is social structure, the study of inequalities and mobility, and these areas are partly regarded as traditionally some of the eminent fields of sociology, and partly may expect special interest in the Hungary of today experiencing social transformation changing the destiny of many.

If the two works are read by a person appreciating literature, a conviction may easily be reached that one of them was exactly like a novel, whereas the other resembled a series of short stories written about the same topic. The novel, looked at more closely, is a story of a family, and has two layers, similarly to the best of the genre. One layer is about what had happened to family members during the period under discussion, the other layer circumvents a grave philosophical problem, namely what is the meaning and explanatory principle of the entire sequence of events. The

pieces of the collection of short stories focus on brief, dramatic writings on some details of the above topics, but discuss the issues raised in analytical depth. Chapters two and three of Robert's book, dealing particularly with the objective and subjective processes of the change of the system and of mobility are closely linked to these topics. These chapters comprise the papers analyzing the social effects of the change of the system. Two major issues are discussed by both works, one of them is how the Hungarian society looks like after the change of the system, and the second one is whether we have a sensitive enough lens to assess it. In the following the results summarized by the two books would be discussed jointly by the major topics.

A QUEST OF THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PATH

The main stream of the texts of the books discusses social changes, but what is even more exciting to me is the level of the text built by several details in which the researchers of social stratification speak about their relationship to the major, known and the nascent new paradigms. In one of the works the discourse on social theory is the background of the outline of a personal story of development, and these parts of the text offer a framework to concrete analyses. In the other book each of the theoretical and methodological approaches are at equidistance from the milestones of the intellectual career. The reason may be the different age of the authors, or perhaps their different habit. It is remarkable that the structure of Péter Róbert's book is the following: after the first part applying the approach to the second generation of mobility researches, and the second part presenting the objectively sensible social effects of the change of the system, the panorama parading theoretical-methodological paradigms is located in the volume as a logical overture to the third part dealing with subjective processes, strengthening the impression that a quest for a theoretical path is the consequence of questions that have come to the foreground during empirical work.

According to Kolosi's own narrative, he started to deal with the study of social structure in the 60s, his thinking was initially determined by Marxian social theory, and subsequently he was strongly influenced by the slowly appearing, more differentiated initiatives that stressed the internal differentiation of classes, the different space of mobility of the party elite and the population, and the existence of inequalities.

In comparison to the classification of groups by the nature of work, elaborated by many and still used, Kolosi, setting a new research goal, namely measuring the status stratification of society and its description, developed a theoretical and methodological approach suited for the purpose. It does not only mean a richer approach by a more refined and tinged multidimensional measurement of a more complex topic, but it is based on the realization that it was insufficient to analyze the dual structure of society by a hierarchical inequality model according to the position occupied in the division of labor when the second economy was acquiring strength.

The author interprets his relationship to the major theoretical paradigms as follows: *"I strove to overcome this duality and to build a kind of methodological eclecticism"*. He presents the meaning of his methodological eclecticism by following the steps of

processing empirical material. A point preferred by methodological individualism appears in that he focuses on the movements of individuals and their household in his analyses, but going beyond it he also aims at grasping group-building characteristics. The definition of the location of individuals and households can be grasped in a variety of the dimensions of vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal (non-hierarchical) social differences. The next step is when “*we wish to describe the infinity of multiplicity by a useable finiteness*”. At the vertical slicing considered adequate by functionalism as well as conflict theory, in Kolosi’s view it is not the result of the researcher’s decision by the specific aim of analysis which of the possible structural groupings is applied. Thus by and large the cornerstones of this methodology are empirical commitment, a continuous, further thinking of theoretical generalizations, based on experience, and openness towards the points of newly emerging theoretical approaches.

It is a common feature of the models of social structure emerging as a result that there are inequalities inseparable from the mode of existence of society, and groups in a better position always try to hand down advantages, but the models show a different image by society. The indicators of comparison are the internal articulation of the elite, the extent the poor are lagging behind the average, the size of the middle strata, and the proportion of the vertical articulation of the middle strata and of their horizontal differences.

It is the merit of Kolosi and his associates that he builds the logic of analysis in the study of the stratification model on that the system of social inequalities cannot be traced back to a single explanatory factor, and he considers school education, occupational prestige, the status deriving from the division of labor, from the position occupied in interest assertion and power, from status in cultural, territorial, and housing situation as well in his analysis, hence he analyses social status as a position taken up in a multidimensional system of inequalities. The closing chapter of his new book, lending also the title of the publication, again opens up towards new paradigms. When assessing the possibilities of making the model of social structure more sensitive, he refers to international literature considering the traditional categorization of society, written during the past two decades, too rough which has informed itself of the social milieu, subcultures, and groups of life-style, and has defined the location of individuals not only by their position occupied in the social hierarchy, but also by their demographic properties and cultural choices, which, in other words, considers the utilization of the dimension of the way of life at building the three-dimensional structural model of the society. This approach is supported by the argument that the middle strata have been increasingly extensive in modern societies, and, going “beyond the Estate and the class”, it is worth considering the life-style characteristic of subcultures, categories of value and identity related to partnerships are also worth considering besides the traditional hard variables at the description of social segmentation, as it is precisely in these strata where the possibility of individual choice is the greatest.

According to the testimony of the study of the stratification model it has been the unequal distribution of cultural capital that has played the greatest role in the development of inequalities, and it could be explained by the fact that it had been the only kind of capital that could be legally accumulated under the conditions of that time,

and any other kind of capital was worth converting into it. A series of papers by Péter Róbert have justified in detail the assertion of the transmission of cultural capital, as examples of it were given also in the first chapter of his book. In one paper for instance, he presents the two sides of the process of acquiring status, namely the explanatory principles of the acquisition of education and of social position, and analyzing the role of cultural and material resources he dwells upon how difficult it is to operationalize cultural resources, though there is hardly anyone who had studied its possibilities more profoundly in Hungarian research (Róbert 1986). He mentions the case of the conditions of housing of which it is not always easy to decide whether they represent a material, or a cultural resource, when one studies Bourdieu's cultural capital.

A series of studies have presented the status inconsistency among the various criteria (ownership, leadership position, intellectual work and high cultural and material consumption) of middle-class position existing in the Hungarian society after the change of the system (Fábián et al. 2000), but Róbert considers this life-style consisting of these factors as a consequence of social stratification, namely something that vertically puts members of the society in a hierarchy. He considers the milieu-focused approach a possible alternative, but according to his opinion in a paper of the book from 1997 (*From Social Stratification towards an Occupational Class Structure*) here social position is less determined by consumption and life-style but much more by the position occupied in the division of labor, by the quality of employment, by position in the labor market, and by specificities of branch and sector. Naturally, when studying the post-industrial society, such new points of consideration emerge like the chances of life, the variety of career patterns within the category, hence it is necessary to shape a new occupational class structure by the modification of groups by the type of work. He considers reviving class theory, surely its modernized variant applied in the practice of mobility researches, the most applicable categorization. He keeps himself deliberately at a distance from the quest for a culturally determined explanation when he analyses the assessment of the situation by the members of the society in Chapter 3 of the book. These papers are based on the conviction that the subjective interpretations of social mobility have become decisive factors of the place occupied in society, and the individual perception of social mobility can be understood largely as the result of people's interaction. When interpreting the various results obtained about the factors influencing social position, he mostly analyses the differences of occupational position and school education, though in this case an approach from the direction of milieu actually lends itself. Schulze (1992), even attempting an empirical sensing of milieus considers just the type of knowledge and view of the world, rooted in the microenvironment as the most important surface of separation among the milieus. When one is in quest of an explanation for Róbert's careful distancing, one has to capitulate in front of its practical side. One has to acknowledge the existence of social facts that can be well approached and handled by empirical processing, on the occasion of mathematical-statistical analysis, whereas others are difficult to measure, or have a low level of measurement, and may be straightaway unmanageable, not speaking about the fact that earlier and even today they do not figure in the usual databases of surveys, hence they cannot be compared. It is understandable that for a researcher

attracted by strictly quantitative analyses these not yet mature categories are less useable, and many things can be included in the incorporated variant of cultural capital that can be operationalized more or less without any problem.

HYPOTHESES ABOUT THE PRESENT HUNGARIAN SOCIETY

Kolosi this time, just as in his book entitled *Articulated Society* (1987) at first studies the image of the system of social inequality and the historically developed system of society, next he deals with the place of the individual in the numerous inequality systems of society, and their general status in its wake. Finally he attempts to grasp the real typical groups and status stratification of the population, and he is in quest of status characteristics that best describe them.

In the first Chapter the author takes up the theoretical and empirical antecedents and the hypotheses deriving from them. In the first place he discusses the hypotheses that can be derived from the general theoretical paradigms of social structure that pertain to transformation after the change of the system. His earlier researches proved the existence of a structural model at equidistance from the Weberian as well as the Marxian approach and the joint operation of the re-distributive as well as market forces shaping structure. The author assumes that these two major forces of the organization of society are present in the Hungarian society of today, just as they are present in a certain proportion in every modern society.

Further hypotheses concern the dimensions creating the system of inequalities. The dimensions of inequality are created by different measures of disposal over the different kinds of capital. Kolosi, when creating his hypothesis, and later on also in the analysis, considers a rather broad sphere of the kinds of capital, their all known rules of conversion, and the research results so far achieved. He also considers their possible dilemmas of operationalization. He mentions the difficulties of separating contact as well as cultural capital also among them (Kolosi 2000:54).

Social capital, deriving from contacts, was obtained either for the assertion of individual interests, or for the interest of a desire to belong to a group, was measured by HSWP-membership, or by the function performed in that party. Earlier analyses (Kolosi and Róna-Tas 1992) found that former party membership had a significant positive effect on economic success after the change of the system, but the author describes that cultural capital has proved to be a better explanatory variable and suppressed the effect of party membership in the extended variant of models. The complication is caused by the fact that the intelligentsia was over-represented in the party in the second part of the decades of socialism. If Bourdieu's words on re-conversion strategies and on the legitimizing function of school education are seriously considered, then one may agree with Kolosi for his anxiety that an empirical separation of contact and cultural capital is not reassuring. The result obtained is not an unambiguous one. It may mean that the rapid and successful conversion of positional capital into cultural capital is the explanation of economic success, in other words "cultural capital is a resource, by which its owners may reproduce their privileges" (Kolosi 2000: 55).

The study of the processes of mobility emerging as an effect of the change of the system in the higher regions of social hierarchy is one of the most interesting topics of the volumes. It is here that the greatest tension can be sensed even among the alternative hypotheses. The author quotes a series of hypotheses based on various theories in relation to the issue whether party bureaucracy had fully or only partially salvaged itself in the form of a new elite and how it was done (the “great coalition”, the theory of the conversion of symbolic kinds of capital, “continuity of technocrats”, a modified survival of networks based on reciprocity, the theory of the “founders’ freedom”), whereas others pertain to the issue of how new the composition of the elite was that has reached the top, and who are they in reality (“manager capitalism”, “interrupted embourgeoisement”, and the “revolution of the deputy heads of department”), and in addition to them he does not parade only the theoretical but also the empirical antecedents in relation to the individual hypotheses. Of the hypotheses concerning the losers of the change of the system the first one posits the workers (“the wild eastern variant of the original accumulation of capital”), the second one the various demographic groups (the elderly, children, women), and the third one the inactive people and the poor as the major victims.

In the next three chapters the author concentrates on controlling the hypotheses listed above, at first on structural changes, next on the changes of inequalities and to issues of class structure and the replacement of the elite, and finally on the changes of the destiny of status groups originating from the 80s. In the following the major findings of these chapters are surveyed.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

The process of structural transformation can be described partly by the changes of the occupational structure, by those of the ownership structure and partly by changes in the participation in the labor market. While in the 80s it was the redistributive structure that was dominant despite the fact that almost three-fourths of the families were equally interested in the first as well as second economy, and the relationship of the two structures was characterized by mutual dependence, as a consequence of the change of the system, on the one hand it is the market that has become the dominant structuring factor, and their separation has become a definite one on the other. On the level of the elite the sectors had been separated at an early stage, but the man of the street tried to apply his experiences in the second economy for a short while, though usually without success; but by the late 90s society has split into two along this dividing line.

The process of the change of the ownership structure was largely determined by the fact that it had taken place without significant domestic capital. The means utilizable by enterprises were essentially transferred into private ownership free of charge, and as a consequence of capital shortage special techniques of privatization emerged and were applied for the massive privatization of state property. At the initial stage of transformation positional and contact capital were revaluated, the old company managers acting as quasi-owners, the managers of large companies and those

belonging to their close network enjoyed advantages, and made their decisions without any kind of owner's control, exclusively in keeping with the short-term interests of the management. According to the author's statement part of the old leaders remaining in position during the course of self-privatization and used to the lack of an owner, left their places, though he does not support it with a series of data. The squeezing out of domestic investors was also a consequence of the fact, that no indemnification instruments could be utilized in the wave of green-field investments.

One of the consequences of political transformation and the change of the economic structure has been the emergence and rapid growth of unemployment, mostly among the unskilled, the commuting, the very young and those of Roma origin, but in addition the author also calls attention to hidden unemployment among those with small children, the housewives and people who retired early. One may witness the emergence of a special stratum, balancing on the boundary between the employed and the unemployed in agriculture. The theory of interrupted embourgeoisement could not be justified in agriculture either, according to which the descendants of farmers of half a century ago would continue the transformation of the peasantry into bourgeoisie, instead, and as a result of capital concentration a constantly decreasing number of people cultivate increasingly large plots of land and produce for the market. The significant number of small cultivators, who had been successful in the second economy, have been broken off from the economy as a consequence of the decline of co-operatives and without their coordinating and allocating activities under pure market conditions, and while the movables of the co-operatives were acquired by the former management, landowners struggling against a shortage of capital and means of production, sold, or rented their land to the more successful farmers and thus the so-called rural underclass (Kovách 1997) emerged. In the present agricultural economy the scene is essentially dominated by three types of farming: state farms and the traditional co-operatives, a new-type co-operatives, and the uppermost group of full-time farmers. Agricultural production is the decisive source of livelihood altogether in one-tenth of the families, in other words, it is a narrow group of agricultural entrepreneurs that dominates a significant part of agricultural production.

It is a long-standing discussion whether the consideration of individuals or households is justified as an analytical unit. In Kolosi's view the adjustment strategy of individuals emerges as a result of the more or less conscious and coordinated activities of families. One of the most significant changes is the extremely rapid growth of the proportion of pensioner households in the composition of households, which, according to the surveys of the research group, is the result of early retirement and less of the ageing of the population. It seems to be a typical strategy of the former political elite, and mostly of its elderly stratum that since it was unable to convert its political capital into significant economic positions, therefore early retirement was chosen which was massive in the years of the change of the system.

It is a significant point of analysis in what proportion unemployment affected the households. In addition to stating that unemployment greatly affected one-tenth of the households and mildly almost one-third of them, and also giving the factors that enhanced its probability, it is a remarkable innovation of processing the related data that the households are typified by their strategies related to unemployment and

enterprise, namely mapping the proportion of the categories of the passive ones neither trying unemployment nor enterprise, the passive losers suffering unemployment but not trying enterprise, unemployed losers who attempted enterprise but gave it up, those experimenting unsuccessfully with enterprise but not experiencing unemployment, forced entrepreneurs fleeing from unemployment, and entrepreneurs successfully operating without breakages out of their free will.

CHANGES OF INEQUALITIES

The growth of inequalities is visible at sight as well, but the authors survey the related empirical data by focusing on some inequality dimensions, such as income or the assessment of one's position. Income inequalities have grown because the income of the lower middle and lower strata has not changed, that of the upper middle strata has significantly improved partly because they sold their work also in the international labor market, and partly because the domestic wages artificially kept at a low level were also released. When studying income inequalities the authors did not only focus on shocking disproportions but they also studied the stability of the income situation by involving the time factor in their analysis, and as a result they obtained a far more detailed image. They state that 16% of the population belongs stably to the upper middle strata and one-tenth to the poorest ones. A large degree of income insecurity characterizes the situation of the middle strata between the two poles after the change of the system; moreover, this tendency has taken a further unfavorable turn in the middle of the decade. The authors stress this fact also because it explains the issue analyzed in detail in Péter Róbert's book why the proportion of those having a pessimistic view of the situation and of the society is so significant in our country. According to Kolosi it is income insecurity that strengthens the sense of being a loser in a large part of the society. In addition instability of income is particularly strong in the age groups below 35, and it is closely related to school education lower than higher education (!), to an occupational status lower than the elite and to non-urban domicile.

The study of attitudes related to inequality extraordinarily enriches the analysis and it can be put into parallel to numerous former research results related to alcoholism or psychological harms among others. A lot is disclosed about society and the individual strata how they assess and to whom they compare their situation, whether they find inequalities and their growth legitimate.

Chapter three of Péter Róbert's book performs the longitudinal as well as international comparative study of these trends. During the course of his studies he found that the subjective assessment of social situation and objective mobility does not move together, in other words the sense of upliftment is not accompanied by satisfaction, and the majority of the population feels that its situation is hopelessly weak compared to the rich few. The author develops the conviction that views about social inequalities are objective phenomena; they are social facts and constitute part of the social relations. The author studies the phenomenon by the analysis of the assessment of the individual's position, of views on social upliftment and of a condensed sensing of social position, further on of the image of the society held. The

result of the international comparative study is not surprising to those who are familiar with the Hungarian literature and historiography of the past two centuries: the Hungarians are the most despondent of the inhabitants of the neighboring countries, and it is also obvious that this unfavorable reassessment of the situation dates back to a much earlier time. When the author analyses the causes of the growing disappointment sensed in public opinion, he draws further important conclusions. According to the opinion of authors quoted by Kolosi, members of the past socialist society sense the changes in inequality through the dual filter of the West and the past. As a result of detailed analyses Róbert finds that the subjective sensing of the social situation is significantly determined by what reference group is chosen by the individual, and it is also related to school education and occupation, so clearly this element of the sensing of reality also largely depends on the composition of the individual's network of connections, and one should think about either information or its assessment. Another significant observation is related to the different assessment by social group of the legitimacy of social upliftment and the recognition of investment behind it which seems to support Bourdieu's (1978) theory on the social differences related to dispositions concerning the future, investment into the future and investment as such.

Róbert has also experienced significant variation when he studied who would consider which inequality dimension as decisive when assessing his/her own social position. After the dimensions regarded as the most marked ones differences can be experienced particularly in the case of the better educated respondents. According to Róbert's results the ranking orders are being rearranged particularly by differences of culture and education and by the possession of cultural and contact capital. In this area the author particularly engages himself essentially in the study of the sociology of knowledge or of values when he analyses the responses given to the question how big role is attributed to factors like luck, way of thinking, values followed, appreciation, religion, political views, etc. by members of the society.

When studying the sensing of inequalities, Kolosi raises the issue what may be the reason of a much greater underestimation of the inequalities of the 80s by the society than they were in reality, and a large overestimation of the polarization of the late 90s. In his view the reason is that the changes in time of the inequality conditions of the society are sensed belatedly. In addition phenomena so far silenced becoming themes in public parlance and in the media may also contribute to it, and inequalities that have become more visible after the change of the system have been "spoken to life" (Berger and Luckmann 1996).

In the case of the changes of inequalities Kolosi's book surveys the changes of material and income situations again also from the angle of households. The index of the general material situation of households is composed on the basis of four factors (equivalence income of households, housing situation, supply with consumer durables, and changes in the structure of expenditure). The authors find an interrelationship between changes in the occupational structure in households and the material situation, and they state that those who successfully attempted enterprise could achieve a consistently improving material situation.

It is the analysis of the composition and structural characteristics of households when the utility of the choice of households as an analytical unit becomes

unambiguous, as they determine the place occupied by the individual in the system of social inequality just as much as macro-economical changes, or the place occupied in the social structure.

THE ELITE AND THE LOSERS

It is not easy to study the hypotheses built in relation to the mobility processes of the upper regions of the social hierarchy as the emergent big capitalist stratum is “characterised by hiding” (Kolosi 2000: 147), therefore the researchers have used the data of targeted surveys. According to the result of the surveys six typical big capitalist groups were identified by the authors from the angle of what kind of capital was used to upliftment. The former state leaders with market activity, or without such practice, and the former autonomous entrepreneurs altogether constitute three-fourths of the present big capitalist society. There are only a few who purely relied on political career, as the re-conversion strategies of the former political elite had pointed towards economic positions earlier. The early entrepreneurs could not mobilize so much symbolic capital as the former redistributive elite could, who had participated in the privatization of their company, utilized their old and new political contacts skillfully and most frequently used the advantageous credit constructions. They have filled the present positions of the redistributive elite that had been reduced in number and proportion to one-third, and shared the current elite positions of the market with the early entrepreneurs and the returning emigrants from the West. More than half of the elite before the change of the system lost their elite position within a short period of time, as their former elite position could be sustained without damage mostly if the positional capital was accompanied by cultural capital, for instance only 15% of them could consolidate themselves in elite market positions. According to the results of research the hypothesis of the revolution of deputy heads of department is true in the case of part of the new market elite, when the old company manager could not retain his position due to his excessively frequented political role or inability to adapt. According to data the proportion of the homo novus entering the elite is very low, because the boom of the change of the system, when suddenly there was an opportunity for rapid upliftment, ended fast.

Róbert found on the basis of the comparative empirical analysis of data taken between 1983–87 and 1988–93 in six former socialist countries, that the extent of the influence of the change of the system on social transformation was different in the region. He tried to find an answer to the question on what kind of capital those becoming entrepreneurs after the change of the system could most successfully rely, how and when did they accumulate them and for this reason he investigated a longer period of time. In Hungary communist-party membership by itself did not make entrepreneurship probable but the time spent in the party had a positive influence on it. It is an important recognition of Róbert that party membership in itself did not mean political capital, but a longer period of time spent in the party did because this was a precondition to the accumulation of capital, and cultural capital joined it after 1968. It is an interesting coincidence that this well-known legitimating function of cultural

capital came to the foreground at the time when the already existing base of leaders and experts could solve its reproduction within its own circles and was interested in slowing down the process of mobility and in squeezing out other social groups from competition (Ladányi 1994), and for this reason the prescribed numbers of admission to higher education started to drop.

During the course of the survey leaders of the state cultural and political institutions were also classified under the old redistributive elite besides the managers of state-owned companies. The situation of the old cultural elite was not altered by the economic and political change, their position was not only made more solid by the legal possibility of handing down cultural capital, but also their aversion from the inconsistency of status caused by the lack of power and by their Estate-like solidarity that assured an extreme measure of interest-asserting possibility.

According to Kolosi's wording partly those have become the losers of the change of the system who did not make their choice or made a bad one when the redistributive and market axes of the L-model split, hence they were forced to retire or became unemployed, and partly those who became wage laborers due to their position between the two axes of the L-model, and thirdly those who remained quietly rotting as lower controllers and routine white-collar workers in the redistributive sector.

CHANGES OF THE STATUS GROUPS

Besides surveying the structural changes caused by the change of the system and the inequality system of the society the next issue is how the arrangement of the individuals changed in the multidimensional space of inequality. Kolosi and his co-authors compared the data of empirical surveys taken at three different points in time within twenty years to the study of this question. The purpose of this part of the analyses is to explore what kinds of typical life situations exist in the current Hungarian society. This approach is a novel one, related to the outlook of the studies of life-style, in which they intended to use dimensions playing a significant role in the reproduction of inequalities (school education, occupation, income, position in power and interest assertion, character of the environment of domicile, cultural consumption), but according to the author the mechanisms of interest assertion have undergone so significant changes during the periods compared that the analysis could be performed in five dimensions. At first typical groups were developed separately for each dimension, next in the five-dimensional space thus obtained the authors targeted the identification of the typical groupings of individuals in space by the implementation of cluster analysis. Based on the purity and sociological interpretation of the groups, ten relatively homogenous groups were obtained that were described by the authors with the help of the following characteristics in all the three points in time studied: their proportion in the population, average status value and inconsistency, occupational, educational and income statuses, material and cultural life-style, average age, the proportion of males, the dominant type of settlement, economic activity, type of occupation and school education; in other words, the groups appear not only in their

vertical articulation but also in their horizontal differences, thus one may obtain a plastic, photograph-like image.

One characteristic feature of the groups is the extent of their status inconsistency that was expressed by the sum of the square of the differences by pairs of the individual dimensions. After the change of the system, the level of status inconsistency characteristic of the society has again grown after a transitory drop.

The relative social position of more than half of the status groups did not change during the period under survey. The lowest and topmost group, consisting mostly of women having a high status but low income, groups of high income and low status, belonging to the lower middle class with good housing of low income and good income lower groups can be found in each of the three points in time. In the 90s the worker elite, the cultural middle class, and the group of high income but poor housing disappeared as autonomous groups. By the late 90s the group of those coming down and climbing back appeared whose members of low school education and with an experience of unemployment were able to find a foothold. The topmost group is actually of two parts, in addition to the elite estimated at 1% the growing upper middle class also belongs here, usually consisting of active earner degree-holder top leaders or experts, among whom women and the younger ones also appeared in the 90s. It is mostly the consistently low status, unskilled agricultural manual laborers, or inactive ones that belong to the group of the deprived of the lowest 30%, whose domicile is usually in villages.

THE SOCIETY OF THE FUTURE

The “optimum arrangement” (Kolosi 2000: 206) of modern society is the following as outlined by theories as well as public opinion: between the small or medium membership of the internally articulated elite and the more or less similarly sized group of the poor there would be a vertically as well as horizontally differentiated middle stratum, actually precisely of the shape of the metaphor given as the title of the book, namely a pregnant sponge finger. I confess that under the spell of this metaphor I immediately drew a figure representing the proportion of the status groups in the 1999 population when I completed reading the book, and I saw a pregnant sponge finger towards the end of the first trimester if not about delivery. The blessed state was indicated by the sight of the high-status group waiting for joining the upper middle, the one of lower middle income and the lower middle in a good material condition, and next to it the internally differentiated, broadening lower middle group, integrating the sliding down and again emerging one. Despite the fact that the extent of the poor falling behind the average started to shrink, their significant proportion threatens to endanger that pregnancy.

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