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## PRIMARY DIMENSIONS OF STRATIFICATION

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the social nature of stratification and its primary dimensions on the basis of the classical approaches in the science of sociology. In addition to the economic factor, which determines the social stratification and is regarded as fundamental to Marx's class theory, this paper analyzes other important dimensions of stratification such as power and prestige, introduced in the conception of M. Weber.

**Key words:** social stratification, society, inequality, class, power, status.

### INTRODUCTION

The social order of the groups in society necessarily involves a certain arrangement or stratification of the individuals and groups along the vertical from top to bottom into horizontal layers (strata). According to Karl Marx, *the means of production and the level of scientific-technological progress* determine the evolutionary processes in society and define the social stratification and inequality. Social inequality is expressed in social structures like the classes. Classes have a fixed position in the system of social production, which is determined by their relation to *the ownership of the means of production*.

Marx undoubtedly simplifies the nature of social stratification when he regards as the single source of social stratification the relation to the means of production, dividing individuals into those who possess (capitalist owners) and those, who can offer to the market only their own labor (proletarian wage laborers). In his attempt to overcome Marx's unidimensionality, Weber develops a multidimensional approach to stratification. He thinks that the economic position and class affiliation are not the only dominants in society that determine the system of social stratification. According to Weber, the different position of the individuals and groups

in the social space stems not only from the ownership relations, but also from the relation to power as well as the level of social prestige. On that basis, he introduces three primary dimensions of stratification: *class* (economic position), *party* (power) and *status* (prestige).

These dimensions express three distinct forms of social stratification, three types of stratification hierarchy, which stabilize the behavior of the members of society from different sides and through different principles. They are also interrelated to a significant extent. One form leads to another: the high level of material economic welfare provides power and prestige, the power generates social prestige and chances for economic enrichment, and the social status attracts money and power. In some societies, these dimensions might practically merge into one, while in others, they only demonstrate a tendency toward partial overlap.

*The first dimension* of stratification - *the economic* - consists of two elements: *income* and *wealth*. Income is the amount of money one receives. Wealth is property, the material possessions owned by the individual (immovable property, production and non-production assets, jewelry, shares, securities, expensive artworks, etc.). As shown by the proposed definitions, these components do not always overlap in the economic stratification system. This means that an individual can have high income without being wealthy, because he does not save money, has a tendency toward high consumption and manages to spend all of

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his available money. Or we could give an example of the opposite when an individual possesses substantial wealth (expensive possessions, jewelry, immovable property, material production resources, etc.) but still has insignificant income because he does not use this property as variable capital or receives only a small profit.

Whether separately or in conjunction, the different levels of income and the differences in the amount of wealth and property primarily determine the processes of socio-economic stratification of the society. On the basis of this stratification, *the class situation* is gradually formed, which, according to Weber, is ultimately a “market situation” (1) and involves the presence of different economic interests in the conditions of the market for goods. It is determined by the property and the type of service that is offered. The category of “class” is related to all the groups of people in the *socium* that are generated by such a situation. As Charles Hurst correctly notes, “class, at its core, is an economic concept ... it is how one is situated in the marketplace that directly affects one’s life chances” (2). Thus, we can talk about class when we have the following indications: 1. The presence of a group of people united by specific causal components pertaining to their life’s chances. 2. These components are economic interests, related to the production of goods and the obtainment of income. 3. Such components are determined by the situation at the market for goods. Based on that, class can be defined as a group of people, who have identical life’s chances and common economic interests, related to the action of the market mechanism.

The market position and chances are different for the members of the different classes. Those who have property form the class of the owners and on that basis receive the right to control the labor or the products of the labor of other individuals. Those who do not have property form the “negatively privileged” class (*lumpenproletariat*) and are differentiated on the basis of the level of potential for consumption, the type of services that are offered and the way of demonstrating their usefulness. In addition to the above-mentioned classes, there is also the so-called “middle” class or more precisely, a whole spectrum of middle classes. This class primarily incorporates people working in the sphere of management. Managing the companies, they

exercise significant influence over the formation and implementation of the economic policy. Apart from the representatives of the managerial structures, the middle classes also include the small and medium entrepreneurs as well as the merchants. The *intelligentsia* is also present there and it includes bankers, financiers, technical specialists, people who practice freelance professions. According to Weber’s methodology (even though he did not propose a strictly defined and structured class division) the following classes can be found in the contemporary capitalist society:

1. Working class;
2. Small bourgeoisie -the class of the small entrepreneurs and merchants;
3. Technical specialists and *intelligentsia*;
4. Administrators and managers;
5. Owners, who earn rental income or members of the commercial class.

The famous researcher of Weber’s conception, R. Bendix correctly notes that for Weber as for Marx, the basic condition of “class” lay in the unequal distribution of economic power and hence the unequal distribution of opportunity. But for Weber this economical determination did not exhaust the conditions of group formation (3). The people, whose fate is not affected by the market, do not form a class—they form status groups (4). Highlighting the difference between group and class, Weber states that status groups are real communities performing collective action as opposed to classes, which are only a potential foundation for joint action (5). This is the main point of disagreement between Weber and Marx. Unlike Marx, Weber believes that class cannot be the subject of action as it is not a real community, but a type of amorphous structure, which is even connected with the capitalist society.

*Power* in Weber’s conception constitutes the second dimension of stratification. Power is the ability or possibility to exercise and enforce one’s will, affecting other people’s behavior by various means - economic, political, ideological, religious, etc. It is by these means that power can be used as force. At the root of the relations of power lies the mechanism of domination and force. Apart from domination, however, power is also expressed in a variety of other forms - guidance, organization, management, control. When intentionally influencing other people’s behavior, those who have power use certain

resources. Their main categories are the following: *punitive, restrictive resources* or the so-called domination instruments which refer to some type of punishment or restriction-material, physical or spiritual; *encouragement resources*, which consist of a carefully chosen arsenal of various rewards or types of encouragement, stimulating and motivating for the fulfillment of the orders of those in power; *resources utilizing conviction*, which give those in power the ability to influence the consciousness and beliefs of the others and to change them in order to realize the objectives of the people in power. The impact of conviction can be based on authority, personal charisma, reputation or manipulative, controlling influence, but its main function as an instrument of power remains unchanged: just like the other types of resources, it serves to promote the intentional domination and to force the other people to perform certain actions.

Power allows those who possess it to dictate the common rules of the game and to secure a more attractive individual or group social position by means of having control over the resources. In this way, it dynamizes the processes of stratification, determines the character of the formation of elites and the arrangement of the social strata within the hierarchical social structure. The distribution of power in accordance with Weber's ideas, not only stratifies society, but also creates specific, mighty political structures like the parties.

Parties are associations that aim at securing power within an organization (or the state) for its leaders in order to attain ideal or material advantages for its active members (6). They are the incarnation of power and serve to unite people based on their shared dispositions and interests. As parties are directed at goals, which involve the creation and implementation of specific political programs, as well as obtaining positions of influence in the organizational structures, Weber believes that they exist only in communities which have rational order as well as a special group of people, whose job is to monitor the practical, real-life application of this order. While Marx uses the class approach in explaining the genesis of the various parties (and statuses), Weber thinks that their origin should not be viewed solely through the prism of class. The class differences in their economic sense are

not the only source of the organization of parties, which can also be built on the basis of a common religious affiliation or nationalist ideas.

According to Weber, apart from an economic and a political dimension, stratification also has a purely social indicator - *status* (or *prestige* as an assessment given to different social statuses on the basis of comparison performed by the members of society). Status is the relative social position of the individual or group in the social hierarchy, which includes certain rights and obligations. Status also incorporates such socio-cultural characteristics as the way of life. Stratification by status goes hand in hand with a monopolization of ideal and material goods or opportunities (7). By analogy with how Weber sees class situation as economically determined, the status situation is also determined in terms of the positive and negative social esteem and privileges. This, however, does not mean that there is no connection between class and status differences. Property, for example, does not always serve as a status characteristic, but in most cases it gradually acquires this quality.

Weber believes there are two kinds of status - class and social. *Class status* involves material possessions or commodities, externally demonstrable living conditions and the subjective sense of inner gratification. Class statuses differ, depending on the types of class. For the members of the class of owners, with all its diversity, it is primarily expressed in the monopoly on acquisition and sales of expensive commodities, the control over investments and business, the socially prestigious consumption. The class status of people, who are not owners and who lack professional qualification is of a single type and is characterized by the absence of freedom for economic activity and a position of subordination.

In addition to class status, there is also social status, which is somewhat different but still closely related to the first type. Social status is linked to a certain level of social esteem and honors through the category of "prestige". It is typically expressed and determined by the lifestyle and thus, by the formal education and the corresponding types of behavior, by the hereditary and professional attributes. In real life, status according to Weber is expressed in

the marital relations, commensalisms, monopolistic appropriation of the privileged forms of consumption or the prohibition of certain types of consumption. Following Weber's idea, Swedberg specifically notes that as opposed to a class, a status group is typically related to consumption rather than to production (8).

To differentiate between the hereditary and professional forms of status and prestige, Weber introduces a very important distinction, which would later acquire the sociological qualification of ascribed and achieved status. Depending on whether the individual occupies a certain position due to hereditary attributes (such as: social or family origin, gender, age, racial or ethnic affiliation, etc.) or due to his own efforts, personal qualities and achievements (education, profession, merits, etc.) two types of status can be defined - *ascribed* and *achieved* status. The predominant impact and significance of certain attributes in the status field, hereditary or acquired, depends on the specific historical age and the type of society. In the earlier historical periods, the leading role undoubtedly belonged to the hereditary attributes and the position of the individual in the social hierarchy, his personal status depended a lot more on origin and other hereditary characteristics than on his personal qualities and skills. In contrast, with contemporary societies characteristics like educational level, profession, appearance, manners and lifestyle become much more important in determining the personal social status.

Social status is one of the most powerful determinants affecting the actions and behavior of people. The struggle for status is typical of every individual and social group and this fact has its explanation. Social status (Stand) itself, in Weber's view, is simultaneously expressed in two hypostases: as a social position and as an estate group. In this way, it becomes a "corporate symbol", which constitutes a community of people (status group) on the basis of a specific lifestyle, social habits, values, beliefs, etc. Each status is ascribed a certain symbolic esteem - external symbolic acclaim or prestige. And this prestige serves to legitimize the status community and its social

position. Such an artificially constructed assessment or image tries to affirm itself by means of various types of demonstration (titles, ranks, a certain dress code, etc.). The forms of demonstration close the circle of the symbolic stylistics, created by the status community, with the language of social communication and subculture typical of it. All of this helps to differentiate between its own members and the outsiders, to organize both the space inside and outside the community by means of interactions and connections with the others, and eventually leads to *institutionalization of the stratum*.

What is especially valuable in Weber's conception is the analysis of the status positions determined by the prestige of education, profession, lifestyle and socio-cultural orientations, as well as the demonstration of their relation to the market positions. When studying the phenomenon of social stratification, Weber convincingly supports the thesis that the possession of the means of production is one of the most important sources of power and stratification in society, but not the only one, and that there are many factors as a result which stratification occurs. Each of them involves the presence of certain types of inequalities, as well as specific means of legitimizing, maintaining and reproducing them.

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