

Intergenerational class mobility in Hungary between 1865 and 1950: Testing models of change in social openness

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Abstract

This article describes long-term changes in the occupational class structure and intergenerational social mobility in Hungary between 1865 and 1950, a period that has not been studied in previous mobility research. The study's long time span and the fact that the Hungarian economy began to industrialize in the second half of the 19th century allows us to test several competing hypotheses about changes in social mobility. We use a large, individual-level, historical dataset with over 73,000 marriage records, representing all regions of present-day Hungary. Although the occupational structure remained predominantly agrarian, total mobility increased over the observed period, with an upward shift in the occupational distribution. Log-multiplicative association models were used to compare relative mobility patterns of men across 17 mobility tables over five-year periods. Relative mobility increased, lending partial support to the modernization thesis. The increase of relative mobility can be attributed to decreasing diagonal association. Off-diagonal association, indicating class-based inequalities in mobility chances, increased during the first period of industrialization. The results call for a closer examination of the mechanisms causing changes in social mobility during industrialization.

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1. Introduction

In this article, we analyze intergenerational social mobility in Hungary between 1865 and 1950 with a large-scale dataset of marriage records from the territory of present-day Hungary. The results of this study contribute to the tradition of research on intergenerational mobility in at least two ways.

First, previous research on intergenerational mobility in Hungary suggests that interesting changes took place in Hungary from 1865 to 1950, but no study has thoroughly investigated this claim. Studies on intergenerational mobility in Hungary have so far focused on two important economic-political transitions in Hungarian history: the socialist restructuring of the 1950s (Andorka, 1982; Ganzeboom, De Graaf, & Róbert, 1990; Luijkx, Róbert, De Graaf, & Ganzeboom, 2002; Simkus, 1981, 1984; Szelényi, Aschaffenburg, Chang, & Poster, 1998) and the transition to a market economy (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2009; Róbert & Bukodi, 2004). These studies conclude that relative intergenerational mobility increased during the socialist restructuring, but they

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also find evidence that changes in the mobility regime might have taken place before the 1950s (Ganzeboom et al., 1990; Luijkx et al., 2002; Simkus, 1981; Szelényi & Szelényi, 1995). In one study that included birth cohorts before the 1950s, the overall trend in increasing relative mobility did not change its pace after the communist takeover (Ganzeboom et al., 1990). Luijkx et al. (2002) found similar results and concluded that “the communist take-over cannot be considered as an important break in the developments of declining ascriptive criteria for social mobility in Hungary.” These studies, however, cover only a short period before 1950 that includes World War II, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions about long-term changes. Our study covers almost a century, allowing us to analyze long-term trends in intergenerational mobility and the effects of historical events, such as World Wars I and II and the Great Depression. This long time span makes it possible to test the claim that a long-term increase in relative mobility occurred in Hungary before the communist takeover.

Secondly, this study provides empirical tests of hypotheses about long-term changes in relative mobility. In the theoretical literature, there are contrasting views about how the social mobility regimes of industrialized societies have changed over time. According to the *modernization thesis*, modernization processes gradually break down the barriers of traditional society and lead to increasing social mobility over time (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Treiman, 1970). Others cast doubt on the proposition that social class rigidities gradually decline over time. Building on Featherman, Jones and Hauser’s (1975) hypothesis of constant relative mobility, Grusky and Hauser argue that there might have been a *one-time increase* in relative mobility rates during the early industrialization period, but relative mobility rates do not change or vary between countries once a certain level of industrialization is reached (Grusky, 1983; Grusky & Hauser, 1984). Conflict theorists doubt that there has been any increase in relative mobility over time. In their view, social elites react to developments threatening their positions by adopting strategies of *status reproduction* to maintain high status for themselves and their children (Bourdieu & Passeron [1970] 1990; Collins, 1971). The period covered by our data includes both the onset and development of industrialization in Hungary, providing an excellent opportunity to test these competing hypotheses.

More than 60 years of stratification and mobility research have not been able to solve the theoretical debate surrounding changes in mobility. Using large-scale mobility surveys, stratification and

mobility researchers have mainly investigated if industrial societies since the 1950s have had similar levels of absolute and relative social mobility and if social mobility changes over time (Breen, 2004; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Featherman et al., 1975; Ganzeboom, Luijkx, & Treiman, 1989; Grusky & Hauser, 1984; Hauser & Grusky, 1988; Lipset & Zetterberg, 1959). Recent comparative studies on intergenerational social mobility show considerable cross-country differences in the extent of social mobility and no evidence that the mobility regimes of industrial societies have converged toward a common pattern of mobility since the 1970s (Breen & Jonsson, 2005). These findings call for a closer examination of mobility patterns over longer periods of time to understand the driving factors behind present day differences in social mobility.

Sociologists increasingly rely on historical micro-data to analyze long-term changes in social mobility (van Leeuwen & Maas, 2010). Until recently, only a handful of countries have been studied, including Great Britain (Lambert, Prandy, & Bottero, 2007; Miles, 1994), the U.S. (Grusky & Fukumoto, 1989; Guest, 2005; Guest, Landale, & McCann, 1989), France (Fukumoto & Grusky, 1993), the Netherlands (van Leeuwen & Maas, 1997), and Sweden (Maas & van Leeuwen, 2002). There have also been a few comparative studies between these countries (Long & Ferrie, 2005, 2007). One challenge presented by studies of long-term mobility is to obtain micro-data that are representative across a given time period for a specific geographic area and reliable enough to make generalizable conclusions and comparisons with other periods or countries (Goldthorpe, 2007; Grusky & Fukumoto, 1989). With some exceptions, such as the Dutch Historical Sample of the Netherlands (Mandemakers, 2000), historical datasets are not collected using random sampling techniques and often only represent the working population of smaller geographic entities, such as towns and cities (Kaelble, 1983; Thernstrom, 1980). As a result, conclusions based on these data are susceptible to sample selection bias because of geographic mobility or the geographic distribution of occupations.

In this study, we utilize a large, recently collected, occupation-based mobility dataset based on marriage records from Hungary (Lippényi, Maas, van Leeuwen, & Margittai, 2011) that were collected using probability sampling techniques and include all regions and municipalities of present-day Hungary between 1865 and 1950. Our research question is: *How did Hungary’s social structure and social mobility patterns change between 1865 and 1950?*

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