THE CONCEPT OF STATUS AND ITS DIMENSIONS

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Abstract. *The matter of status is a current one especially under the circumstances of transformations caused by late modernity at the level of social stratification. The concept of status expresses, in essence, the relations between social and individual contexts, illustrating individual's position in the society. Statuses appear intermediary between the systemicity of the society and multiplicity of individuals, which leads to the possibility of grouping them on several dimensions. We are concerned with the analysis of the status-role, prescribed status, acquired status and subjective status. The study deals with revealing the aspects of current society development from the point of view of transition to a system of particular-descriptive standards or values, to a system of universal-permissive values. It also reveals the role of prestige and rewards in public administration.*

Keywords: status, social culture, consensual perspective, conflicting perspective

1. Introduction

Being a bi-psycho-social being, a being into ministry and for revelation, according to Lucian Blaga, man enters in many relations that implacably decrease it's solitarily. It occupies a position that identifies it in the society, defines it in relation to others, and in its relation as an individual with the society. As a form of objectification, the relation between the social and the individual contexts phenomenalizes into status. In social reality, statuses are grouped depending on various levels of coherence, resulting into groups (categories) of human individuals that look alike. This study is a development of the status idea explained by Bryan S. Turner, as well as essential differences between the consensual perspective and the conflicting perspective m approaching the concept of status.

2. Theoretical developments and actual reality

The status problem has concerned sociologic research, both American sociology and European sociology. With accent movements from the individual towards groups, with trials to replace concepts that are considered obsolete (like for instances social classes, economic classes), with citizenship or cultural living style

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related elements. The research in the field is productive but it is not simplifying at all. The problem of social stratification as social and inevitable problem is correlated to statuses differentiation as result of uninterrupted struggles for allocating insufficient cultural resources. Defined as individual position in society, status achieves the connection between social and individual contexts; statuses belong to social structure, as there are individuals that take this position and individuals that refuse to acquire status.

Max Weber opens the way towards a new subject, also called historic sociology, developed in the United States, but that has influenced at the same time large areas of European political sciences, especially of contemporary French political science. Developing its own theory - as an alternative for the analysis performed by Karl Marx on economic classes, Weber also makes the passing from individual status definitions to the notion of status groups or communities or collective lifestyles. This aspect will be the subject of another study that we want to make.

Being correlated to prestige, rewards, honours, the concept of individual status also illustrates the extent in which people feel the perceptions of others upon them (Lipset, Warner, Lunt, Turner etc.). This is another dimension that differentiates the new approaches in American sociology from the European sociologic tradition. And, starting from the possibility of grouping individuals on several content dimensions, we iterate the practical coordinate of legiferating the profession dimension through statuses (appurtenance normativity): public official's status, magistrate's status, teacher's status, police officer's status, etc.

3.   The concept of status and its dimensions

Status designates the individual's position in the society, making the connection between social and individual contexts [1]. Objectively, statuses relate to social structure, being various degrees of individuals' adherence to them, depending on the way in which they consciously assume their position and role or, on the contrary refuse to identify themselves in this position. There are high adherence statuses that create beings that assume their position, transforming the duties resulting from it into vacation [1]. Such people are what Henri H. Stahl calls characters [2] There are also statuses that individuals do not acquire" refusing – expressly or tacitly – to identify with them, and not admitting their position.

A great diversity of individuals is included in the social system. Because statuses designate individual's position in the society making a connection between social and individual contexts, they appear as intermediary between the systemicity of society and individuals' multiplicity, which leads to the possibility of grouping them on several content dimensions: profession, education, sex, age, position within the family etc. But the history of human society illustrates the development of social cleavages, social stratification,

social, and political conflicts etc. This is why we have to mention that every content dimension is two-dimensional in its turn. There are either two formal dimensions: a *horizontal dimension of equality* and a *vertical* dimension, *of hierarchy,* each of them being able to be analyzed from a double perspective: the *consensual one,* which insists on functional interdependence and the *conflicting* one insisting on domination relations and the tensions between various statuses [1].

Etymologically, the notion of status comes from the Latin word standing, a term which explains both someone position in the society and the rights and obligations resulting from that position. Moreover, since the notion of status extends over the political and legal rights of some persons within social and political communities, status related problems are in no way correlated to citizenship, but on the contrary [3]. This is why status can be defined as the position in the society granted to the individual that has certain rights and obligations, its quality of citizen within a political community [3]. A problem arising in relation to status is that connected to individuals' motivations in order to occupy these positions in the social structure. Some clarifications have been made from structural-functional point of view that considers the *status-role* unit as the essential element of *social stratification* [4, 5]. Therefore, the notion of social status is often correlated with the notion of *role,* which is a set of expectations that define a person's position in the society. Roles can be briefly defined as "a bucket of attributes and social- determined expectations, associated to some social positions"[6].

Sociological analyses insist on other status coordinates. Therefore, for sociologists, the notion is useful also because positions within the society are generally distributed according to prestige and privileges of various levels. A mention is therefore required regarding the multidimensional character of features depending on which we can determine a person's status in the society, the relation between dimensions being variable and complex. " For instance- says B.S. Turner-, my status in the society can be determined at the same time depending on my income, my level of education, ethnic appurtenance or sex. When these aspects are coherent among them, sociologists often speak of the existence of status consistency or crystallization"[7]. The idea of status *consistency* does not have to be neglected.

Insisting on this aspect, B. Turner proves the way in which some sociologists, starting from status consistency, get to prove the genesis of radicalism in social groups characterized by the *absence of status crystallization.* This idea includes some "psychological presuppositions regarding the frustration levels felt by individuals whose position in the society is characterized by tensions or contradictions between various levels of their status" [7].

Authors like Bell, Lipset, Raab etc. associate reactionary or right-wing political actions with the anxieties, tensions and frustrations of those groups facing the "fear of status", due to their unstable position in the current society [8, 9]. As a matter of fact, status related anxieties characterize social groups whose position in the society is threatened by deep economic and social trades, by radical reforms that cause inevitable mutations in the habitat of that group. This also involves a series of schisms resulting at the level of traditionalized position legitimacies, generating alienations, refusal to accommodate, conflicts.

Specialized literature makes other distinctions regarding status. A distinction which is considered "usual" is that between *prescribed status* and *acquired status. Prescribed status* is represented by those attributes of persons that have no type of control over them or have an extremely low control over them. It is about race, sex and life. *Acquired status* expresses the position that some persons can acquire through education, decent living conditions, stimulating habitat etc. we have to say that, among authors, the opinion is developing according to which the two types of statuses correspond to different societies.

Therefore, Parsons and Turner claim that prescribed status is characteristic to pre-modem societies, while acquired status is the attribute of modem society and late modernity, societies in which values and regulations that cover these values derive from a greater attachment to *equality,* in general, the *equality of chances,* in special [7, 10, 11]. We mention that, these opinions are justified since the contemporary society launches positive discrimination public policies in order to employ and promote ethnics', young people, disadvantaged groups etc. Pluralism and plural societies are answers of contemporary society to the lack of tolerance towards various forms of discrimination. Moreover, a series of sociologists analyze the development of current society from the point of view of the transition from a *system of standards or particular-prescriptive values,* to a system based on *universal-permissive values* [7]. This type of approach resides in the contemporary social context that puts a greater accent on individual social mobility rather than on traditional standards of *prestige* and *honour* [12, 13].

Ever since John Stuart Hill *(About Freedom,* 1859), modem societies put a special accent on self-achievement through education. The only field that does not apply the principle of non-intervention — claimed Mill when drawing-up its objections against governmental action — is the field of education: "Now, any good intentioned and reasonably civilized government is free to believe, without arrogance that it has or that it should have a level of education beyond the average of the community it managers, and that it consequently should be able to defend a better education and training to people that most of them would

spontaneously ask. Therefore, education is one of those things that the government may actually give to people. This case is one that does not necessarily or universally apples the fears of the non-intervention principle" [14]. It is a demonstration of trust in the reason of civilizing history. Putting an accent on self-achievement, modem societies prove that "educational success and references accumulation become crucial in distributing prestige and rewards [7]. This aspect has made some sociologists name modem society as being a credential society [15]. We introduce here a last distinction regarding social status: the one between objective *status* and *subjective status,* between status as a social position determined externally/from the outside and status as self-perception. Therefore, developing some elements of Weber's analysis on status, M. Lipset made a more complex definition of status, this being "the positive or negative assessment of reputation or prestige given to an individual or to a social position. Therefore, the concept of status supposes that people feel others' perceptions on them." [16]. Turner speaks of a new cultural environment created in the American society, due to the accent put on *consumerism, social mobility* and *self-achievement,* an environment in which the perception of its own position in society increases in importance. This has resulted in accent movement in sociological research on social stratification towards prestige self-perception (Lynd, Warner, Lunt) [7].

In Mayer's opinion "prestige is a socio-psychological category. An individual or a social group cannot be satisfied unless its claims for prestige are admitted by others, willing to give it respect. Therefore, the existence of status differences depends on admitting the existence of some levels of prestige." [16]. At this level Turner makes a justified remark regarding the different type of approach of individual prestige in the American approach, relatively new in relation to the European tradition. In the European tradition, status referred to an objective position in the social structure, which provided rights and privileges and less self-perception. On the contrary, in American approaches (W. Lloyd Warner's research communities) status is frequently the equivalent of social prestige and less the equivalent of the notions of social obligations, rights and duties [7, 18].

Conclusions

According to Parsons, status is a position in a social structure, through which an individual is assessed depending on its prestige and reputation, according to various criteria, prescribed or acquired [11]. And because assessment can be both subjective and objective, it is certain that a person's self-assessment cannot make abstraction of external assessment that the person receives from other individuals significant for it, depending on its

position in a social hierarchy. This has made the specialized literature identify two fields of status: a *subjective* dimension – individual perception of prestige and an *objective* dimension- individual's socio-legal rights [7]. Both of them have theoretical and practical implications in redefining individual status and in explaining status groups and living statuses.

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