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ABSTRACT

Reanalysis of a standard set of data for 16 nations has brought new insights into the leading issues of comparative social mobility. The reanalysis provides considerable support for the Featherman-Jones-Hauser hypothesis, which claims that there is convergence in mobility processes once conditions of occupational supply and demand are controlled. The hypothesis is modified, however, in two respects: First, it is qualified by the suggestion that uniformity in mobility regimes is not limited to highly industrialized societies but may apply equally to less developed societies; and second, it is elaborated through specification of the structure of the shared mobility regime. Properties of mobility shared by the 16 countries considered are: (1) symmetry of exchange between occupational strata; (2) equality of mobility chances off the main diagonal; (3) severe immobility at the two extremes of the occupational hierarchy; and (4) considerable mobility in the middle of the hierarchy. These findings of basic similarity do not preclude findings of deviation from the common mobility regime, which seem to be at least as much a consequence of political organization as of economic development. The effects of political and economic variables on mobility processes are more complex than commonly supposed because they differ across occupational strata. (Author/CMG)

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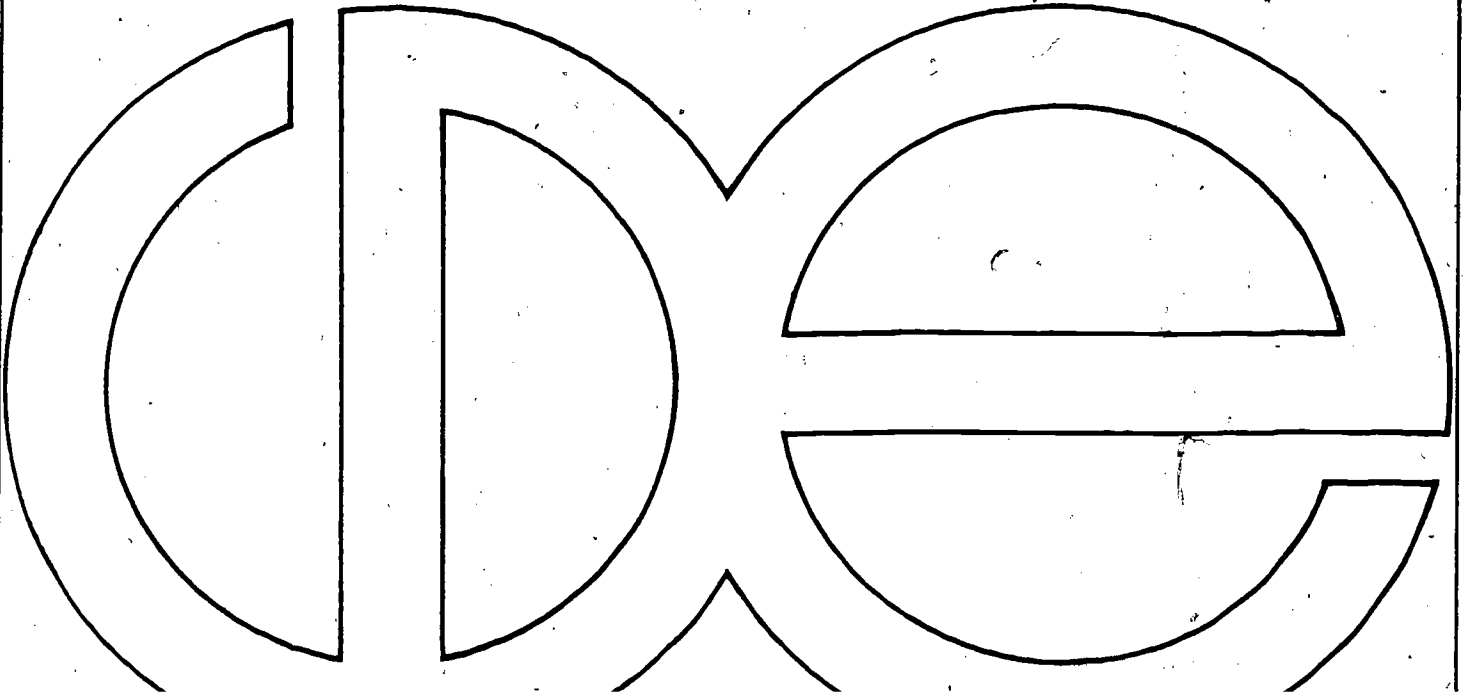
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**Comparative Social Mobility
Revisited: Models of Convergence
and Divergence in 16 Countries**

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CDE Working Paper 83-6

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ABSTRACT

New insights into the leading issues of comparative social mobility are gained from a reanalysis of mobility tables for 16 nations. We find considerable support for the Featherman-Jones-Hauser hypothesis, which claims there is convergence in mobility processes once conditions of occupational supply and demand are controlled. We qualify the hypothesis with evidence that convergence does not emerge from the standardizing logic of industrialism, and we elaborate the hypothesis by specifying the structure of the common mobility regime. Properties of mobility shared by the 16 countries include (a) symmetry of exchange between occupational strata, (b) equality of mobility chances off the main diagonal, (c) severe immobility at the two extremes of the occupational hierarchy, and (d) considerable mobility in the middle of the hierarchy. These findings do not preclude systematic effects of political and economic variables on mobility processes. However, those effects are more complex than commonly supposed because they differ across occupational strata.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The consequences of economic development and political programs for rates and patterns of social mobility continue to be matters of contention, despite a long tradition of research addressing these issues.¹ Indeed, the current diversity in the field of comparative social mobility may rival the variation in opinion during the 1960s about mobility trends in the United States (Duncan 1968). That disparate conclusions have been reached even from the same set of data may be a problem for the sociology of knowledge (Koffel 1974). Alternatively, we suggest that some of the diversity derives from the application of inadequate statistical methods, and from repeated failures to distinguish mobility processes among occupational strata. We elaborate these ideas after briefly reviewing the current state of comparative mobility research.

Three issues have dominated this field, yet remain largely unresolved. The first issue, and the starting point for most research, is the thesis advanced by Lipset and Zetterberg (1959) that observed mobility rates are much the same in Western industrialized societies. Informed by a theory of developmental convergence, it is argued that the logic of industrialization demands a certain uniformity in institutional structures and mobility patterns. However, the more recent and detailed data lend little support for this position (Hauser and Featherman 1977; Erikson, Goldthorpe, and Portocarero 1979).

In a comparative analysis of occupational mobility in Australia and the United States, it was suggested by Featherman, Jones, and Hauser (1975) that the Lipset-Zetterberg thesis might be salvaged if

reformulated to pertain to underlying fluidities rather than observed mobility rates. This hypothesis, labelled the FJH revision by Erikson, Goldthorpe, and Portocarero, argues that the mobility process becomes invariant only after conditions of occupational supply and demand are controlled. Although the FJH revision has been confirmed in pairwise or three-way comparisons (Erikson, Goldthorpe, and Portocarero 1982; McRoberts and Selbee 1981), research with a larger sample of countries tends to emphasize variability instead (Tyree, Semyonov, and Hodge 1979; Hazelrigg and Garnier 1976; McClendon 1980a).² There is also some disagreement about the degree to which "structural influences," reflected in the margins of the mobility table, can account for national differences in observed mobility rates. The FJH revision implies that variation in observed mobility must be attributed to marginal differences, yet McClendon (1980b) has recently reported results that suggest otherwise. This issue will be discussed in more detail during the presentation of results. At this point, suffice it to say there is considerable evidence that the Lipset-Zetterberg thesis in its original version can no longer be sustained, while the status of the FJH revision remains unclear.

A second and closely related issue is the effect of economic development on patterns of social mobility. The contention is that mobility increases with industrialization, even after controls are introduced for changes in class or occupation distributions. Proponents of the "industrialism thesis" argue that economic development entails a process of rationalization that weakens ascriptive allocation of roles.

It is also suggested that the expansion of mass communication attenuates cultural barriers to mobility and that increases in geographic movement reduce parental control over the occupations of their offspring (Treiman 1970). The industrialism thesis is to be contrasted with the FJH revision; the latter allows an initial developmental effect on mobility, but it implies there is no further effect once a certain level of industrialization is reached. Unfortunately, the evidence on the industrialism thesis is no more conclusive than that addressing the FJH revision. While one body of literature reports a positive relationship between industrialization and exchange mobility (Tyree, Semyonov, and Hodge 1979; Hazelrigg 1974; Cutright 1968), another reports no significant association (Hazelrigg and Garnier 1976; Hardy and Hazelrigg 1978). In an effort to reconcile these findings, McClendon (1980a) claims that the positive relationship holds only when the sample is restricted to men of nonfarm origins. Although McClendon's research leads in a fruitful direction, we will show that his conclusions are incorrect.

A third issue in comparative mobility is the impact of noneconomic variables on mobility processes. Contrary to the view that the logic of industrialism results in a uniform institutional structure, it has been suggested that the shape of the mobility regime is open to manipulation by political agencies or social policies. The claim is that noneconomic variables not only influence mobility rates indirectly by affecting the structure of occupational demand, but that they also have implications for fluidities freed from marginal effects. This argument

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has been advanced persuasively with regard to the consequences of social democratic policies for reducing class-based inequalities in life chances (Parkin 1971; Stephens 1980; Erikson, Goldthorpe, and Portocarero 1982). Although it is conceded that social democrats have done little to redistribute material rewards, they may have rendered such inequality more palatable by ensuring meritocratic forms of class recruitment.

Others argue that state socialist societies offer yet stronger testimony to the role of political ideology in effecting changes in the stratification system. Aside from increasing the material rewards and prestige of skilled manual workers, socialist policies may also have consequences for the reproduction of classes over generations. In particular, a more fluid class system is suggested by blue-collar educational quotas, the déclassément of upper administrators, the absence of inheritable private property, and the attenuation of a working class subculture (Giddens 1973; Parkin 1971; Simkus 1980). At the same time, there is reason to suppose that the current mobility regimes of socialist states may not differ altogether from those of capitalist states, since many of the egalitarian policies have been reversed in the "secondary stage" of socialist development.

We should mention two further variables that might be classified as noneconomic determinants of mobility regimes. First, it has long been argued that the expansion of educational opportunities should produce a more fluid society. Not only are opportunities to learn skills equalized when the locus of training shifts from the home to the school

(Featherman and Hauser 1978), but cultural barriers to mobility also diminish as mass education resocializes students to a shared system of values. Second, it has been suggested recently that rates of mobility are affected by the distance between social classes (Tyree, Semyonov, and Hodge 1979). Large socioeconomic gaps between classes imply less fluidity because the elite have increased power and motivation to prevent upward or downward movement.

The goals of this paper are to address, both the convergence and industrialism theses and to explore the role of noneconomic variables in mobility processes. The preceding review shows these issues are not new, nor are the data we shall employ. These data are provided in Appendix 1 as 3 X 3 classifications of son's by father's occupation for sixteen countries; each table categorizes occupations as white-collar, blue-collar, or farm. The tables were originally assembled by Hazelrigg and Garnier (1976) from "first generation" mobility studies in the 1960s, but they have been reanalyzed extensively (Hardy and Hazelrigg 1978; McClendon 1980a, 1980b; Tyree, Semyonov, and Hodge 1979; Heath 1981).³ We will not discuss problems of validity and comparability associated with these data since they have been outlined in detail by Hazelrigg and Garnier (1976:500).

It would be fair to argue that the Hazelrigg-Garnier data have been rendered obsolete by the national mobility studies of the early 1970s (Featherman, Hauser, and Sewell 1974; Broom and McDonnell 1977). Data from those studies have been preserved in unit-record form, and comparative studies based upon them may thus specify mobility processes

within nations in far more detail. Moreover, for those nations where detailed data are available from repeated surveys, it will be possible to incorporate a true temporal dimension into comparative analyses. At the same time, we think it useful to analyze the Hazelrigg-Garnier data once more, if only to provide methodologically sound baseline findings and a template for future comparative research. In our analysis, we gain new insights (a) by applying improved statistical methods, (b) by specifying cross-nationally invariant features of mobility, (c) by specifying multivariate models of the effects of economic, social, and political variables on mobility, and (d) by distinguishing among the inheritance processes of occupational strata. We discuss each of these points in turn.

Perhaps the most serious deficiency of prior research with these data is the use of methods that confound marginal and interaction effects. Research to date has either rescaled marginals arbitrarily or has fitted saturated loglinear models for each country. The former procedure yields altogether uncertain results. The latter estimates interactions that are too large in rows or columns with consistently weak associations, and vice versa (Featherman and Hauser 1978:161-6); in this manner it mutes disparities between occupational strata in the strength of inheritance. This is an important point, for we shall argue that these disparities constitute one feature of a substantial invariance in mobility processes. The analysis presented in the following section fits multiplicative and log-multiplicative models that estimate social fluidity, net of marginal effects. In the later

sections of this paper, we also fit a series of models that directly incorporate economic and noneconomic determinants of social fluidity. That is, these models provide an integrated framework for measuring and interpreting patterns of social mobility, differences in those patterns among nations, and sources of those differences. In addition, the models avoid problems of heteroscedasticity associated with methods that separate the estimation of mobility measures from their regression on explanatory variables (e.g., Tyree, Semyonov, and Hodge 1979).

These models yield new insights into debates on semipermeable class barriers (Blau and Duncan 1967), blue-collar status disinheritance (Goodman 1969a), and vertical class mobility (Hope 1982).

Cross-national results are of particular interest since the evidence that currently informs these debates is limited to the United States and a few European countries. Evidence of this nature will also help specify the structure of the mobility regime that is putatively shared by Western industrial societies. Convergence theories have remained notably agnostic on this issue; the FJH revision states there is a single pattern of mobility but leaves the shape of this pattern unspecified. We hope to add substance to the FJH thesis by offering preliminary hypotheses about invariant features of the mobility regime.

Although we argue that there is a broad similarity in mobility processes, this is not to preclude national variations of sociological interest. Moreover, we believe these variations are best explored using multivariate models that represent the effects of several relevant political and economic variables. Indeed, the primary points of

contention demand multivariate analysis. For example, Ossowski (1957) argues forcefully that the question to ask is not whether the introduction of socialism increased mobility, but whether this increase was any greater than might have been expected from the concurrent economic expansion. Similarly, the general debate over convergence also pertains to the consequences of political programs net of developmental processes. In addition to resolving claims for an independent "ideological effect," a multivariate analysis can elucidate the processes by which industrialization influences mobility chances. In this respect it is of particular interest if developmental effects are mediated entirely by the expansion of education and the growth of class equality.

Finally, we investigate differences between occupational strata in opportunities for mobility or inheritance. We believe that these differences in social fluidity arise primarily from variation in the resources and desirability accorded occupations. However, we emphasize variation in economic resources since their transmission is perhaps the most decisive and reliable mechanism of intergenerational inheritance (Goldthorpe 1980:100). It follows that white-collar immobility should be especially strong, since fathers within this stratum can transmit resources in the form of a business enterprise, professional practice, or privileged education. The desirability of white-collar positions strengthens inheritance further, as white-collar sons wish to retain positions comparable to their fathers' positions. In contrast, sons from the blue-collar stratum do not receive economic resources which