Beyond Educational Inequality in Czechoslovakia

PETR MATĚJŮ*
Institute of Sociology, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Prague

Abstract: This paper addresses questions of the applicability of the meritocratic thesis to the explanation of educational inequality in Czechoslovakia. I defend the hypothesis that "non-meritocratic" or even "anti-meritocratic" processes might have generated patterns of social fluidity almost identical to those based on meritocratic selection. The arguments backing this thesis come from comparative research in educational mobility and inequality, and from the first wave of the longitudinal survey "Family 1989" started in Czechoslovakia in January 1989, almost a year before the November revolution. This survey, among other things, dealt with strategies for life success among teenagers and their parents. A "non-meritocratic" hypothesis is discussed, which might explain the relatively strong direct effect of social background on educational attainment in Czechoslovakia and other socialist countries. The hypothesis is based on Bourdieu's concept of "social capital". It argues that, because of bureaucratic rules applied in admission policy, the spontaneous tendency of higher social strata to use their "social capital" and to pass on social advantages to their offspring in socialist countries seems to be less restricted by meritocratic competition than in advanced capitalist countries. Some preliminary results from the survey "Family 1989" show that this hypothesis might be plausible.
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Comparative research on occupational mobility has always been focused on the question of the relationship between mobility rates and the social, economic and political attributes of social systems. Much less attention has been paid to the question of whether the processes that generated more or less similar patterns of occupational mobility in different social systems were also similar or at least of the same character. This question is obviously at least as important as the first one but unfortunately much more difficult to answer.

The question of the underlying process is still relevant, even after the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, because it opens the important theoretical question of the compatibility of bureaucratic redistribution and meritocratic selection, as well as the very practical question of the effect of inherited structures and patterns of behavior for the present "post-communist" transformation. In this paper I try to demonstrate that mobility patterns in state

*) Direct all correspondence to Petr Matějů, Institute of Sociology, Czechoslovak Academy of Science, Jilská 1, 110 00 Praha 1, phone + 42 2 235 89 68-71, ext. 202, fax + 42 2 235 78 88, E-mail mateju@cspgas11.bitnet. An earlier version of the paper was written when the author held the position of visiting scholar at the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science of the New School for Social Research, New York (November-December 1989). I would like to thank Ira Katznelson, the former Dean of the Graduate School, for providing the grant, the facilities and valuable help during my stay. I would like to thank Luise Tilly and Yossi Shavit for their helpful comments on a previous draft of this paper, and Dáša Oberreigner and Bradley Abrams for editing the English of the manuscript.

socialist countries, which might formally show a degree of fluidity similar to that of advanced industrial countries (see e.g. [Erikson and Goldthorpe 1987; Boguszak 1990]), have not been "produced" by selection mechanisms identical or comparable to those that have been at work for decades in advanced capitalist countries.

Specifically, I will demonstrate that "non-meritocratic" or even "anti-meritocratic" processes in Czechoslovakia might have generated patterns of social fluidity almost identical to those based on meritocratic selection. Data backing this thesis come from available comparative research in educational mobility and inequality, and from the first wave of the Czechoslovak longitudinal survey "Family 1989" which, among others things, dealt with strategies for life success among teenagers and their parents.

I assume that rather "anti-meritocratic" processes such as positive and negative political discrimination ("nomenclature"), bureaucratic mechanisms for the allocation of manpower, forced downward educational mobility based on a "quota" system, etc., have been at work in former socialist countries. It is widely accepted that these processes brought about a deep erosion of open competition and meritocratic selection, which are supposedly the major underlying processes generally governing the stratification process in market economies.

1. Is the "meritocratic thesis" always a good theoretical background for comparative analyses of occupational and educational mobility?

Research on social stratification and mobility has been oriented either explicitly or implicitly toward the examination of the meritocratic thesis. In fact, the majority of studies in mobility and attainment processes verify or challenge the meritocratic thesis. Though some specific assumptions and implications of the meritocratic thesis have long been questioned (see for example [Kerckhoff 1976; Griffin and Kalleberg 1981; Grusky 1983]) the general assumption that "a fundamental trend toward expanding universalism characterizes industrial society" [Blau and Duncan 1967: 429] seems to be accepted among scholars of social stratification. In other words, it is assumed that the relatively high social fluidity in Western democracies has its roots *primarily* in a great deal of universalism and meritocracy in the selection and allocation processes.

The "meritocratic thesis" as a theoretical background for research in social stratification was consistently formulated by Blau and Duncan [1967]. They interpret the development of industrial societies as the gradual expansion of universalism, or - as other scholars prefer to call it - the expansion of meritocratic principles of selection. The core of the meritocratic thesis, as accepted by most scholars in social stratification and mobility, can be summarized in the following way:

The meritocratic system of stratification is an essential condition of efficiency in the identification, development and exploitation of scarce human resources. Universally accepted, objective criteria of evaluation shape the process of the selection of people into occupational positions. Where ascription dominated in the past, individual effort, ability and achievement have become the dominant criteria of success. This is because the "standards of efficiency are applied to the

performance of tasks and the allocation of manpower for them" [Blau and Duncan 1967: 429]. Formal education, as a credential for labor market skills, gradually has become the decisive criterion for selection and allocation. Consequently, "superior status or top occupational position cannot be directly inherited but must be legitimated by actual achievements that are socially acknowledged" [Blau and Duncan 1967: 430]. Therefore, the degree of social fluidity in industrial societies becomes an indicator of the "meritocratization" of the society.[1]

In this context I propose to analyze the development of social stratification in state socialist countries before the collapse of their communist regimes as a process of *"de-meritocratization"* and *"de-stratification"*. These terms will be used to denote a process of the disintegration of the relationship between ability, effort and performance on the one hand, and social status, reward and prestige on the other. In other words, "de-stratification" means that particularistic criteria of evaluation penetrate the process of the selection of people into occupational positions, and that individual effort, ability and achievement relevant to the efficiency of the system play only a minor role in individual success. This is due mostly to the fact that ideological myths and visions rather than standards of efficiency are applied to the performance of tasks and the allocation of manpower.

A problem for the comparative analysis of mobility is the fact that "de-stratification" can be manifested by patterns of occupational and educational mobility similar to those generated by a meritocratic stratification system. To get more insight into this specific problem of educational mobility and inequality, it might be useful to begin with a short overview of results from comparative analyses of social mobility.

Regarding the evaluation of mobility in a comparative perspective, two operational assumptions might be derived from the meritocratic thesis:

1) the link between educational credentials and occupational position becomes stronger (or at least remains stable); and
2) the effect of social background on educational attainment decreases as the role of ability, motivation and other achievement criteria become dominant over the role of ascriptive criteria.

It follows from the two assumptions above that as society moves toward more meritocracy, educational and occupational mobility increases. Therefore, the level of educational and occupational mobility is used as an indicator to evaluate how close society is to the meritocratic model of selection. In comparative analyses, a country with higher fluidity is considered more "meritocratic" than a country with lower fluidity.

In the area of occupational mobility, cross-national comparative studies do not provide much support for the thesis that advanced industrial countries are on the way toward more meritocracy. Though some trends in gross mobility rates have

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[1]) For example, Featherman and Hauser [1978] demonstrated that the role of social background in educational inequality has decreased in the United States in the recent past while the role of formal education in job assignment has become stronger.

been identified, related to the periods of rapid industrialization, *relative* mobility chances (fluidity) do not indicate any significant trend. The Featherman-Jones-Hauser hypothesis, assuming the existence of a common "genotypical" pattern of mobility regimes in all industrial nations with market economies and nuclear family systems, has been ascertained by most comparative analyses. It seems that a strong meritocratic backbone of social stratification in advanced industrial nations was created in the period of industrialization and the creation of democratic political systems. This is, probably, the main reason why *significant* trends in fluidity in advanced capitalist countries can hardly be identified over the past several decades. The same holds for *significant* cross-national differences.

However, the most relevant question is whether the above conclusion holds true even when East European countries are part of the analysis. Evidence has been scarce so far, but some studies [Grusky and Hauser 1984; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1987; Boguszak 1990] support the conclusion that state socialist countries do not produce a specific "pure socialist" pattern of social fluidity. Erikson and Goldthorpe reformulate the FJH hypothesis to specify the role of state apparatus, but not specifically the "socialist state apparatus".[2] They use more often the general expression "modern state apparatus" rather than "state socialist state apparatus" because some socialist countries (Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia) clearly show deviations from the "core pattern" that were identified also in the case of some non-communist countries (in the case of Sweden for example). In fact, these results support the hypothesis of the positive effect of long-run systematic state interventions into mobility processes. Clearly, state apparatuses both in communist regimes and in Sweden exercised a strong influence on mobility. But are we in a position to conclude or even hypothesize from these results that state intervention into mobility in these two groups of countries were of the same kind?

Indeed, *the results that generally make it possible to reject the hypothesis of the existence of a typical "state socialist" mobility regime should not lead to an absurd conclusion about the similarity of social systems.* I strongly agree in this respect with Erikson and Goldthorpe who claim that considerable similarity of social fluidity "must be taken as initial, and crucial, explananda," because "sociologists should not neglect the prior question of why these phenomena exist, and persist, in their general form, and should not make the error of assuming that the same factors will be at work in the one case as in the other" [Erikson and Goldthorpe 1988: 34].

2. Did "state socialism" bring about a reduction in educational inequality?

One may argue, however, that all the above assumptions about social stratification in state socialism may be ideologically biased. Undoubtedly, one of the aims of socialist reforms was to reduce educational inequality, particularly among social

2) Erikson and Goldthorpe expect a similarity of mobility regimes "across all nations with market economies and nuclear families where no sustained attempts have been made to use the power of state apparatus to modify the processes, or the outcomes of the processes, through which class inequalities are produced and intergenerationally reproduced." [Erikson and Goldthorpe 1987: 162].

classes. If that really happened, it could explain relatively high social fluidity in state socialist countries, because the link between educational attainment and occupational position was very strong there, particularly due to bureaucratic rules that, in fact, substituted for labor market mechanisms.

Unfortunately several comparative analyses of educational mobility [Simkus and Andorka 1982; Peschar, Popping, and Mach 1986; Boguszak, Matějů, and Peschar 1990, etc.] did not confirm the assumption about a substantial decrease of educational inequality. On the contrary, the results of these analyses contradict the hypothesis about a link between the transition to state socialism and the trend toward greater quality of educational opportunity.

The results of analyses of educational mobility call into serious doubt the assumption that the "equality of conditions" based on radical educational reforms and the bureaucratic redistribution of resources was the key to greater equality of relative educational chances. This conclusion should not be understood as meaning that the effort of the state apparatus to reduce educational inequality by administrative measures has had no effect on the development of educational mobility, however. The redistributional policy has given rise, at least in Czechoslovakia, to a very unusual pattern of development: a rapid increase in downward educational mobility between father and son was accompanied by stability or even decrease in upward mobility. *Educational mobility in Czechoslovakia has stagnated over the past several decades (it actually dropped during the 1980s), and the so-called "democratization" of education has been realized there by downward rather than upward educational mobility.* It means, in fact, that instead of a son attaining *higher* education than his father, the probability has increased over the past several decades that a son will not even reach the educational level of his father (see [Boguszak, Matějů, and Peschar 1990]).

This could happen mostly because of a unique educational policy based on redistributive measures and applied under conditions of very limited growth in general educational opportunities. As Boguszak, Matějů, and Peschar [1989] show in their study, the educational structures of capitalist and formerly socialist nations have not been becoming more alike over time. On the contrary, their results show evident "cross-system" divergences: an upward shift from elementary education has been achieved in former socialist countries more because of the growth of educational opportunities at lower levels (vocational training) and less because of the growth of opportunities at higher levels (secondary and college education). In advanced industrial countries the reverse has been true.

Forced downward educational mobility, particularly between generations of men, was the price paid in some state socialist countries for the *stability* of relative educational inequality at about the same level as in advanced industrial countries. This very unusual pattern of the "democratization" of education could not leave untouched the process of educational and occupational attainment,[3] the nature of inequality, the quality of education, etc.

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[3]) One of the first indications of significant differences in the attainment process between Czechoslovakia and the United States has been found in the results of a reanalysis of Šafář's

However, stability of educational inequality in most formerly socialist countries is not an astonishing fact. We face this phenomenon in many advanced industrial countries as well. It is often explained as a result of a mutual "neutralization" of two trends: a decrease in the *direct* effect (sometimes called "secondary") of social background on educational attainment, and an increase of the effect of scholastic ability on educational attainment.[4] As scholastic ability is related to social background, the *indirect* effect of social background is increasing as well. Because of this mutual neutralization, the overall level of relative educational inequality is rather stable in advanced industrial countries. Some scholars [Dronkers 1983; Dronkers and Bakker 1989, etc.] stress that this stability in educational inequality actually masks the reinforcement of the "hereditary meritocracy", described by Michael Young some 30 years ago [Young 1958].

One may argue that the stability of educational inequality in East European countries can be explained exactly the same way as in the West, i.e., by a decrease in the direct effect of social background and an increase in its indirect effect (via ability). Provided that there has been a very strong effort in the former socialist countries to wipe out so-called "unfair class inequality of the capitalist era", the proportion of the indirect effect of social background there should be even higher than in capitalist countries. This is a serious argument that should be taken into account, because - if it appears defensible - then the hypothesis about the "softening" of the meritocratic backbone of East European societies during the last few decades must be rejected or at least revised.

In order to evaluate the "neutralization" hypothesis, a model of educational attainment has been developed and tested on data from four nations - the Czech lands, Slovakia, Hungary and the Netherlands [Matějů 1990].

The idea behind the model was quite simple. In East European countries evidence on the role of ability in educational careers is rare, particularly in combination with other social indicators. It is widely accepted, however, that there is a high correlation between the quality of socialization within a family and educational performance (school success). As a proxy for the quality of socialization, the cultural capital of the background family has been used in explanatory models. If this assumption is correct, then the cultural capital of a family should predict the educational attainment of its children much better than the social status of the family itself, particularly in the formerly socialist countries, where radical educational reforms and special measures were introduced to reduce the "direct" effect of social background on educational opportunity.

However, the analysis of data from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the Netherlands has produced results that contradict the above hypothesis. First, there was no great variance in the total effect of social background on educational attainment among nations (in all nations being close to 0.6). Second, there was

replica of Blau-Duncan's model done by using Machonin's data from 1967 (see [Boguszak, Gabal, and Matějů 1990]).

4) The terms "primary" and "secondary" effects of social class on educational attainment were introduced by Raymond Boudon [1974].

some cross-national variance in the mediation role of cultural capital, but this variation clearly did not follow cross-system boundaries (we find two clusters: the Czech lands with the Netherlands in one of them, and Slovakia and Hungary in the other). Third, in all nations the direct effect of social status on educational attainment remains remarkably high, particularly when compared with the direct effect of cultural capital.

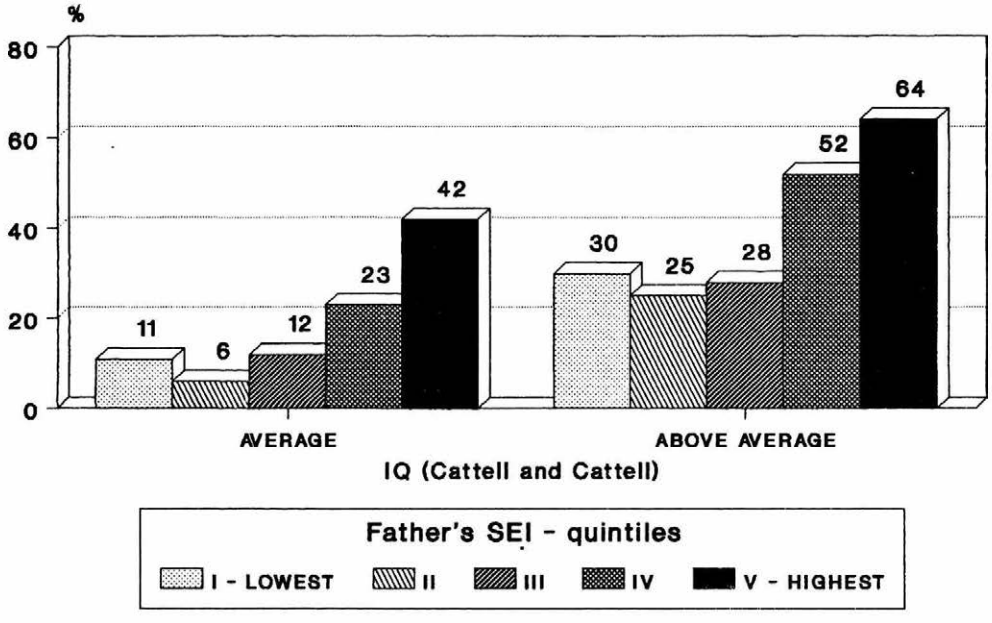
The results of the comparative analysis based on this model apparently did not provide much support for the conclusion that the proportion between the direct and indirect effects of social background on educational attainment showed any significant cross-national and cross-system variation.

In any case, this was not *stricto sensu* verification of any counter-hypothesis. Unless we include ability (IQ) and other important variables (aspirations, grades, value orientations, etc.) in the model, we cannot decide effectively in favor of any explanatory scheme. The only outcome of this analysis actually was that the results did not eliminate the possibility of setting up some alternative hypotheses for explaining the relatively strong direct effect of social background on educational attainment in the former socialist countries. One of these hypotheses, corresponding to the "non-meritocratic" thesis, might be put this way:

In order to eliminate the class dimension of educational inequality, the role of hereditarily influenced factors (like ability, aspirations, etc.) was significantly reduced by reinforcing the role of administrative measures (the quota system, preferential admissions policies, discrimination toward applicants of former ruling class parents - mostly well-educated, etc.). In such a way a considerable space was created for the operation of bureaucratic measures. It is true that these measures were originally implemented to open the educational system to children from lower social strata, but they very soon became the mechanism used by the new elite to secure access to higher education for their own children without any control being exerted by meritocratic competition.

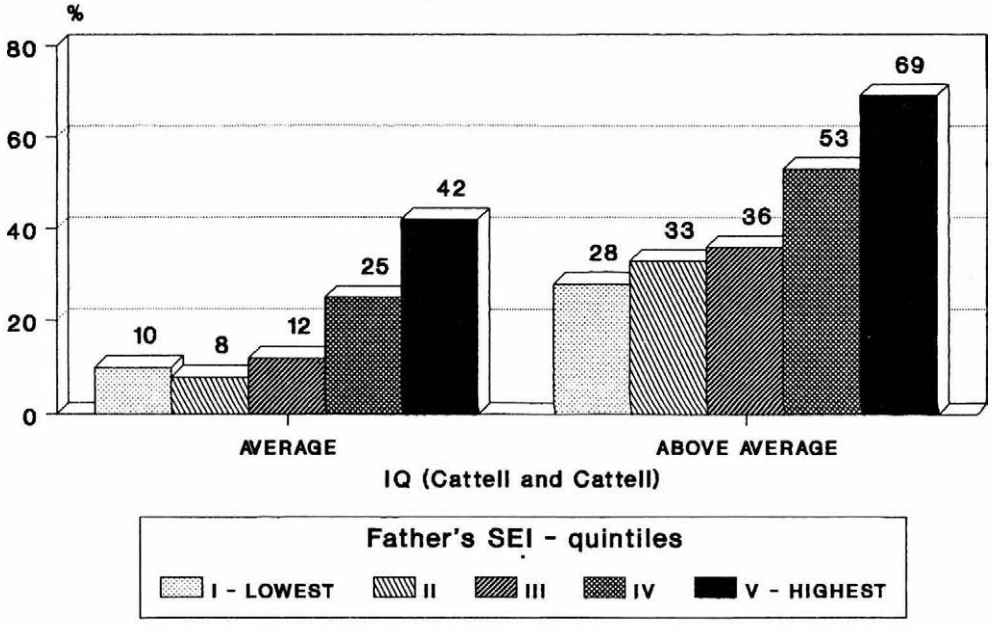
In short, competition based on meritocratic criteria was largely replaced by bureaucratic measures making room for those with higher "social capital". Thus, the system of favoring higher social strata (employees of the state apparatus, bureaucrats, high-level managers, etc.) who possess higher social capital, has been secured even in former socialist countries. The only difference from capitalist countries lies in the low corrective influence of ability and effort on educational careers. In other words, the spontaneous tendency of higher social strata to pass social advantages to their offspring in socialist countries seems to be less restricted by meritocratic competition than in advanced capitalist countries.

Figure 1a.: High school plans of eighth graders by father's SEI and IQ Spring 1989



Family 1989

Figure 1b.: High school admissions by father's SEI and IQ Fall 1989



Family 1989

Some preliminary results from the survey "Family 1989"[5] show that this hypothesis may be plausible. Figures 1a and 1b, for example, make it clear that in 1989, after four decades of socialist educational policy in Czechoslovakia, the net effect of social origin on high school aspirations and admissions was remarkable, and at least as high as in other industrial countries (see e.g. [Boguszak, Matějů, and Peschar 1990]).

It follows from the above results that the slightly higher social fluidity in East European countries cannot be attributed to the decrease in educational inequality, or - in other words - to the further reinforcing of meritocratic criteria of selection. Also, it becomes clear that the attempts of the state apparatus to introduce social justice through an egalitarian approach (i.e. via redistribution) might even create the illusion of a meritocratic society. This illusion is, however, relatively short-lived (if we accept that twenty or thirty years of social development is a relatively short historical time). As shown by the history of East European countries, this illusion died as soon as it became apparent that the general inefficiency of the system, rooted among other factors in general redistribution, was the most serious limit to general growth.

It may be concluded that the level and trends in social fluidity and educational inequality in the formerly socialist countries were similar to those identified in advanced industrial countries with market economies. At the same time, we may suspect that this similarity was not generated by identical or similar mechanisms and social processes. A review of the comparative analyses of educational mobility and the results from analyses of educational attainment point to the fact that it may be risky to interpret phenomenological similarities as generated by similar attainment processes.

The initial hypothesis of this paper was that the "de-stratification" stemming from the softening of the meritocratic backbone of the stratification system in Eastern Europe could produce a mobility regime phenomenologically similar to that found in advanced industrial nations. This is not to say, however, that there is any evidence strictly verifying such a hypothesis. Nevertheless, there are various indirect indications that such a hypothesis might be plausible: a) the general decline in the economic efficiency of state socialist countries; b) the extremely weak position of education in the system of distribution (wage and income differentiation); and c) the ambiguous position of education within the "strategies"

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5) The survey was launched in January 1989 using a sample of 3,700 children (pupils of the highest class in elementary school) and their parents. Children were exposed to a long questionnaire and to a personality test that included an ability test [Cattell & Cattell 1968]. Teachers were interviewed about characteristics of the children, and parents were exposed to an extensive questionnaire asking questions not only about their children but also about their own lives and "strategies". An attempt was made to measure the economic, cultural, political and social capital of the background family. Children were asked about their own perceptions of success and aspirations, and a "cultural test" was given to them at the end of the questionnaire. At the end of 1990 children were asked in a mailed questionnaire whether they had succeeded in their first educational progression (from elementary to secondary school), and contact with them was secured for the future.

for life success. Economic inefficiency in formerly socialist countries is not subject to question. Its link to the devastation of human capital, including the production and exploitation of education, is also clear. However, the evaluation or quantification of the economic consequences of a specific educational policy is not an easy task. Let us concentrate on the last two issues, for which evidence seems to be at hand.

3. Did education pay off in the redistributive economy of state socialism?

In his controversial book *IQ and Meritocracy*, Richard Herrnstein [1973] raised the question of what would happen in a society if the gradient of rewards were inverted by government fiat. He admits that it is difficult to imagine, for example, a situation in which bakers and lumberjacks received higher rewards than engineers, lawyers, etc., because that would call for the inversion of the scale of prestige, respect, social standing and the resulting sense of social utility, as well as the scale of income. After giving other examples of what could happen in such a "science-fiction society", the author concludes:

> But no government (let alone the people themselves) is likely to conduct such an experiment, for it is not a sensible allocation of a scarce resource like high-grade intelligence. Nor could a government long equalize the gains from all occupations. The lure of greater rewards (financial and otherwise) for certain jobs directs the flow of talent as the consensus dictates, like a labour pump. Without the pump, society would annul its influence over the allocation of talent, which it cannot and should not do. [Herrnstein 1973: 148].

Unfortunately, governments in Eastern Europe actually conducted such an absurd experiment. How well Herrnstein's description fits the situation in Czechoslovakia, the most egalitarian country in Europe, is shown in a number of studies of income differentiation. Večerník [1990] demonstrates the extent and consequences of the "wage revolution" in Czechoslovakia in the 1940s and 1950s. He shows that the situation implemented at that time has never been reversed. In his recent study he argues:

> During the "wage revolution" at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s a far reaching transformation had occurred in the rewarding of manual and intellectual jobs, in the gains from different levels of education, and in the special promotion of some jobs. Over that brief period, earnings relations were completely reversed to the benefit of industry and to the detriment of almost all other branches. The pay of miners and workers in heavy industry exceeded the earnings of university graduated personnel. The spheres with the highest concentration of highly educated labor (health services, education, culture) fell sharply below the national average [Večerník 1990: 4].

The results of other analyses do not indicate any trend toward higher differentiation, namely toward an improvement in the position of education in the distributive system. Večerník's study, for example, demonstrates that some improvement in the relative position of women was the only clearly positive trend we can identify in income differentiation. The rest is a rather sad story:

1) economic returns on university education were steadily decreasing;[6] 2) the relative position of the tertiary sector (trade and services) and quaternary sector (education, science, health care) was declining, while the primary and secondary (agriculture and industrial production) sectors moved up on the scale; and 3) the "gerontocracy" reinforced its position against "meritocracy", i.e., the relative position of young job-holders declined while older employees improved their position.

Though the egalitarian policy in Czechoslovakia has been the strongest among East European countries, its situation, regarding the "devaluation" of education, is not unique. Gorniak [1989] comes to similar conclusion for Poland:

> The diminishing role of higher education can be illustrated by the following data: in 1964 the average wage of a person with higher education was 1.78 times higher than the average for the country, in 1968 1.77, in 1980 only 1.11 and then it fell to the level of 0.91 (or 0.79 if a different method of calculation is applied) and it remains at this level. Such a structure of wages certainly has a strong influence on the choice of future education and job. According to the recent survey the significance of education as a social value has considerably decreased (on the list of the most appreciated social values, education fell from fourth position at the beginning of the eighties, to eleventh position in 1988). This negative process is accompanied by a widespread lack of desire for further and higher education. [Gorniak 1989: 136].

Comparative analyses (see e.g. [Večerník 1990]) show how much the distributive system in Czechoslovakia differs from the model more or less common among advanced industrial countries. For example, the net effect of a college diploma on income in France was found to be almost twice as much as in Czechoslovakia.

Many other analyses would show that the experiment Herrnstein calls absurd because it devastates the most important resources of social and economic development was in fact conducted by the governments of East European countries. The case of Czechoslovakia probably shows the most consistency.

In my view we touch here one of the most important problems in Eastern Europe, especially for its future economic and social development. Most likely, we are dealing here with some measure of consistency between the economic and cultural *devaluation of education* and the development of a distributive system that systematically reduces the economic returns on education. No matter what direction causality takes, the system seems to be highly consistent, at least as far as the two above-mentioned processes are concerned.

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[6] The adjusted deviation of gross earnings of university-educated employees from the national mean decreased between 1970 from 39 % to 25 % in 1984. Thus, in the mid eighties the relative distance between the earnings of employees with the lowest and the highest education (elementary only vs. university) was in Czechoslovakia about 31 % of the national average (30 % in Poland, 58 % in West Germany, 37 % in Canada, 70 % in the United States, etc.).

How people themselves perceive these processes, and to what extent their behavior and evaluations are consistent with the macrosocial environment is another relevant question we must raise in order to understand the specific features of educational mobility and inequality in East European countries. The unfavorable position of education among factors of wage and income differentiation undoubtedly has its impact on the perception of education, skills and related work performance as potential tools and strategies for life success.

4. Education and life success

To understand and interpret stratification and mobility in Eastern Europe, it is extremely important to know how people responded, via their individual life strategies, to their social environment, to state policy or system interventions. Consequently, the interpretation of results we obtain from the comparative analysis of educational and occupational mobility cannot be appropriate without taking into account cross-national and, particularly, cross-system differences in the strategies people might, or are allowed to, use to obtain similar or formally identical outcomes or achievements. In other words, as far as the formerly state socialist countries are concerned, it is necessary to acquire at least elementary empirical evidence about how people adapted themselves to a social environment in which a transparency of relations between ability, effort and social reward has nearly disappeared.

To understand stratification systems as they have crystallized in Eastern Europe during the last four or five decades, we should introduce and elaborate the concept of life strategies. It holds specifically when we attempt to properly interpret educational mobility and inequality. Without taking these aspects of social stratification and attainment process into account, we face serious danger in the interpretation of cross-system similarities in patterns of mobility as similarities in stratification systems, which would apparently be the wrong conclusion.

One of the things we learn from the meritocratic thesis is that the typical or prevailing pattern of individual life success in Western democracies builds more or less on the strong relationship between ability, effort and work performance. In words borrowed from Blau and Duncan [1967], *socially acknowledged economic rewards* are closely linked to *socially acknowledged achievements*. This means, among others, that there is implicit expectation of a transparent link between individual performance and the efficiency of the system. Therefore, socially acknowledged economic rewards (generally perceived as an individual success) would be *ideally* given to all individuals of the same occupational position *and* of the same work performance.

I use here the concept of an "alternative strategy" to denote a life strategy leading to individual success (particularly, but not exclusively, economic success) which **does not** build on the above-mentioned transparently meritocratic relationship. It builds rather on formal credentials not necessarily backed by real competence, merit or skills, then - of course - on advantages and privileges coming from political commitment, from informal relationships securing advantages on the labor market, from redistributive practices typical for a shortage economy allowing

profit from the holding of a position from which decisions can be made on the allocation or "re-allocation" of scare resources, etc. In short, *alternative strategies might bring individual economic assets without being part of socially acknowledged achievements or without taking a part in social and economic processes that contribute to the efficiency of the system.*

Alternative strategies might be individually effective substitutes for meritocratic strategies under the following conditions:

a) the allocation of people to occupational positions is strongly contaminated by non-meritocratic criteria (nomenclature, devaluated educational credentials, networks of informal relationships, seniority, etc.);

b) the society rewards positions rather than outcomes from work performance in a given position; and

c) the market has all the attributes of a "shortage economy", i.e. there are scarce commodities, services or other highly valued resources (like for example free education). This situation enables an individual to take advantage of his/her specific position simply by the illegal distribution of the scarce commodity (regardless whether the profit is directly economic or in the form of social capital).

An economy of scarcity accompanied by a general redistribution and bureaucratic allocation are the main factors that create opportunities for alternative strategies that offer equal or even higher rewards than careers that build on ability, performance and the contribution to the general efficiency of the system. No wonder people are lured to follow alternative strategies regardless of their ability, social background or other personal characteristics.

It is not easy to identify strategies people choose for achieving success in their lives. In the first place, life success undoubtedly has a variety of meanings and interpretations among people. We face difficulties even if we reduce the meaning of success to economic achievement or prestige. These difficulties are particularly serious if a society faces a deep erosion of "universalism" by strong interventions by the state apparatus into the allocation and distribution processes. In other words, the elementary question is: "What defined success in a society where competence, performance and work commitment did not play a key role in the competition for social positions and rewards?"

The empirical analysis of life strategies is extremely difficult. A deep analysis of life careers that combine economic, social and psychological approaches probably would be the most effective research strategy in this field. The longitudinal survey, "Family 1989", which started in the spring of 1989, is designed to provide data for such an analysis. The design of the survey follows the social psychological paradigm introduced into social stratification research by Haller, Portes, Sewell, Hauser and other scholars who have been participating in the development of the Wisconsin model. However, the scope of our survey is broader, particularly regarding the possibility of evaluating the role of specific forms of "capital" (political, social, cultural, etc.) in the attainment process.

The only data so far available come from the first wave of the longitudinal survey, so we may analyze only the determination of aspirations rather than the determination of the educational career, but even these data indicate that the stratification process in the former state socialist countries cannot be effectively described, understood and explained without an analysis focusing on individual life strategies and concepts of success developed to overcome or benefit from the social setting of a totalitarian political regime. In the next section some results will be presented to clarify this view.

Educational aspirations and educational attainment represent the key antecedents in stratification models. No matter how many independent variables precede educational variables and what proportion of their variance is explained, their central role in the attainment process is not subject to question. Indeed, educational aspirations are closely linked to occupational aspirations, and both educational and occupational aspirations are strongly correlated with income expectations. These three aspects of aspiration and life plans make up the essence of a concept of individual success, namely because education is strongly predicted by ability and school performance, and educational credentials represent for employers individual competence, knowledge and labor market skills. These elementary relationships, despite some cross-national variation in individual correlations, are the implicit premises of the analysis of educational mobility and inequality.

We should not make the mistake of assuming that the same relationships that have formed educational aspirations and mobility in Western democracies for decades have been at work in the formerly state socialist countries. Following earlier indirect argumentation based on the analysis of the objective aspects of the problem, a more direct argumentation, which aims to show its subjective dimension, will be pursued.

Table 1 displays frequencies of choices from the "instruments" of success we offered to our young respondents (see Appendix 1). The distribution of choices cannot not directly support or contradict any of our hypotheses. Indeed, the relatively high proportion of children that did not chose competence (62 %) or education (44 %) shows that the importance of some instruments that belong to "meritocratic" strategy is rather low, but on the other hand, the importance of "hard-work" is fairly high, and such strategies as "political commitment", "money" and "friends" apparently do not play dominant role.

If there is any disintegration of the values and expectations traditionally linked to educational attainment, we can find it only in the relationship between these items. A simple analysis has shown the following facts:[7]

a) More than a quarter of the children in our sample (26.5 %) rejected both education and competence as potentially effective strategies leading to success; 62 % of the children did not think at all that higher competence is a good

[7]) The answers to two questions concerning strategies of success, one for a child and the other for one of his/her parents, are analyzed here (see Appendix 1 for the exact wording of the questions).

strategy; the same opinion regarding education was expressed by 44 % of the children. Only 20 % of the children thought that education *and* competence belong to the best instruments of success, while 36 % of our young respondents thought formal schooling need not be accompanied by competence in order to succeed.

b) Almost a third of the children in our sample who expressed in the spring of 1989 the highest educational aspirations (college plans) did not choose education as an effective tool for success. Competence was rejected by more than half of this particular group.

c) Among those who expressed high ambitions to succeed in their lives, only 40 % choose higher competence as an effective strategy. Formal education was chosen by 60 % of this group of children.

Table 1. Instruments of success among children

Item	First choice	Second choice	Third choice	Not chosen
Relations	27.5	17.1	20.9	34.5
Competence	13.7	12.5	11.8	62.0
Money	0.6	1.2	2.7	95.5
Friends	5.4	16.0	18.1	60.5
Education	20.4	23.5	12.1	44.0
Work well	30.7	26.6	24.1	18.5
Political commitment	1.5	2.8	10.2	85.5

To capture what lies beyond educational aspirations some simple log-linear models were tested (see Table 2). There were two groups of models: a) models of the relationships between educational aspirations (A), ambitions to succeed in life (S), and the tendency to see competence as a potential instrument for a successful career (C); and b) models where competence from the previous models was replaced by formal education (E).

Table 2 gives simple but relatively clear results. Model 7 in the upper panel of the table in fact says that "success requires competence" (represented by the term S*C) and "competence depends on education" (A*C). In this respect this model may represent the "meritocratic hypothesis". Unfortunately, this model gets the poorest support from our data (it clearly returns the highest value in BIC statistics). On the contrary, the model that returns the best fit with the highest parsimony (according to BIC) is the model where competence is excluded from all the associations (Model 2). Model 6, with the second lowest BIC, may actually compete with this preferred model, but it only allows the *"importance of competence for success"* (C) to affect *"educational aspirations"* (A), but still leaves the *"importance of competence"* separated from *"ambitions to succeed"* (S). In other words, the association between ambition to succeed and the evaluation of competence as a potential instrument of success (S*C) seems to be the weakest association of the model. The lower panel of the same table provides statistics for models where

competence was replaced by education. Here again, the models that *exclude* the association between ambitions to succeed and evaluation of education as an instrument of success (S*E) give relatively good results in terms of BIC. In turn, models that include this association usually yield poorer results. As expected, the relationships that build on formal requirements and rules appear to be fairly strong (A*E and A*S).

Table 2. Instruments of success and educational aspirations among children

Model	L2	df	p	BIC
1 A S C	172.6	28	.000	-49.2
2 A*S,C	60.5	24	.000	-129.2
3 A*C,S	122.8	22	.000	-51.0
4 S*C,A	153.5	22	.000	-20.3
5 A*S,S*C	46.8	18	.000	-95.4
6 A*S,A*C	18.1	18	.446	-124.0
7 S*C,A*C	113.0	16	.000	-13.4
8 A*S,S*C,A*C	12.0	12	.445	-82.8
1 A S E	282.3	28	.000	60.8
2 A*S,E	158.3	24	.000	-31.6
3 A*E,S	125.4	22	.000	-48.8
4 S*E,A	239.8	22	.000	65.2
5 A*S,S*E	134.8	18	.000	-8.2
6 A*S,A*E	18.9	18	.393	-123.3
7 S*E,A*E	103.2	16	.000	-23.4
8 A*S,S*E,A*E	10.5	12	.571	-84.3

Variables in models:

A: Educational aspirations (1=vocational, 2=secondary, 3=college)

S: Ambitions for success (1=very strong, 2=strong, 3=weak)

C: Competence among instruments of success (0=not chosen, 1=third choice, 2=second choice, 3=first choice)

E: Education among instruments of success (0=not chosen, 1=third choice, 2=second choice, 3=first choice)

The confirmatory factor analyses of the two questions for parents and their children about their attitudes towards various "instruments" for life-success reveals more general patterns of life strategies that may help to explain such an unusual structure of choices among children. The analysis of parents' evaluations (Figure 2, Table 3) clearly confirms the existence of three strategies.

Figure 2
Measurement model for parents

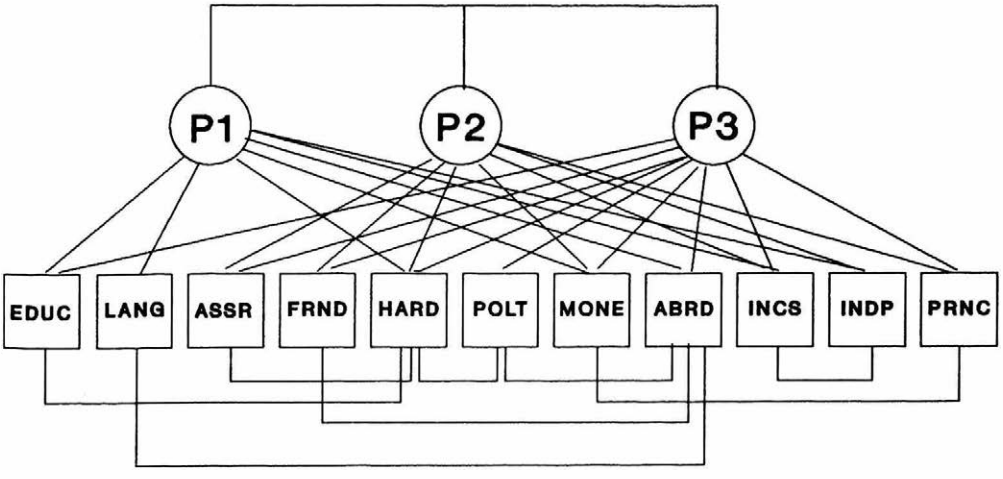

Figure 3
Measurement model for children

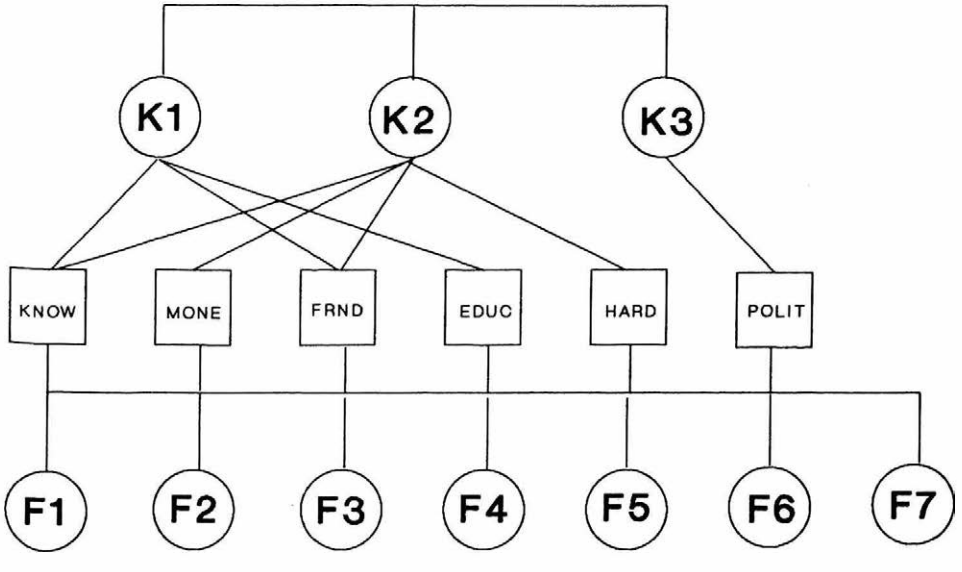

Table 3. Parameter estimates - model II. for parents (standardized solution)

A. Factor loadings and correlations between factors

Observed variables	Latent variables P1 par.	P1 T-val	P2 par.	P2 T-val	P3 par.	P3 T-val
01 Education	.585	15.9	-	-	.068	2.5
02 Languages	.937	21.9	-	-	-	-
03 To assert	-	-	.135	4.2	.368	12.7
04 Friends	-	-	-.229	-5.3	.730	18.9
05 Hard work	-.025	-0.9	.404	12.8	-.065	-1.7
06 Polit. commitment	-	-	-	-	.402	16.9
07 Money	-.364	-8.9	.503	11.8	.411	10.6
08 Abroad	.197	5.5	-	-	.379	11.4
09 Inconspic.	-.131	-4.8	.227	7.4	.080	2.6
10 Selfsuffic.	-.303	-8.9	.511	16.6	-	-
11 Principles	-	-	.573	13.1	-.338	-7.4
P1	1.000	x	x	x	x	-
P2	.313	6.7	1.000	x	x	-
P3	.426	13.1	.412	6.4	1.000	-

B. Correlations between errors of measurement observed variable

Observed variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
01	.620										
02	x	.122									
03	x	x	.805								
04	x	x	x	.552							
05	.109	x	.060	x	.856						
06	.053	x	x	x	.090	.838					
07	x	x	x	x	x	x	.517				
08	x	.068	x	.051	x	-.057	x	.753			
09	x	x	-.085	x	x	x	x	x	.937		
10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	.075	.744	
11	x	x	x	x	x	x	-.144	x	x	x	.717

Diagonal numbers represent errors of measurement.
Model statistics: N = 2614, df = 19, L2 = 20.26, prob = .379
goodness of fit = 0.999
adjusted goodness of fit = 0.995

The first strategy, identified by the first factor (P1), might clearly represent the meritocratic alternative (high loadings to education and foreign languages), but apparently lacks a positive correlation with work performance. At the same time, this strategy is not linked to economic success. Actually, the loadings show it is the other way around (negative loading to "earn money").

The second strategy, identified by the factor P2, is the only one based on work performance. Unfortunately, this strategy does not build on education or the skills provided by schooling. Heavy emphasis on self-sufficiency might help to interpret the positive link to economic success (money). It seems that economic success, as it is defined within this strategy, really does not build much on meritocratic relations governing the labor market (i.e., on the chain education - labor market skills - work performance - income). Rather, it builds on self-sufficiency, on participation in the informal economy, etc.

The third factor (P3) clearly represents the strategy typical for former communist countries: the inclination to use influential acquaintances and advantages from political commitment (which does not allow one to "stick to one's principles") as the principal instruments for the pursuit of an occupational career seems to shape a very consistent strategy of success (not excluding its economic dimension).

Similar conclusions can be drawn from the factor analysis made on the data for children (Figure 3, Table 4). Due to the "ipsative" property of variables, the model looks different from the one specified for parents (there are additional "latent" variables F1-F7 solving the ipsative property of measured variables) but, in fact, the differences are small.

Table 4. Parameter estimates - model for II. children (standardized solution)

Factor loadings and correlations between factors

Latent variables Observed variables	K1 par.	T-val	K2 par.	T-val	K3 par.	T-val
01 Knowledge	.122	3.2	.107	2.6	-	-
02 Money	-	-	.904	9.9	-	-
03 Friends	-.407	-10.1	-	-	-	-
04 Education	.621	9.9	-	-	-	-
05 Work well	-	-	-.132	-4.1	-	-
06 Polit.commitment	-	-	-	-	.761	27.6
K1	1.000	x	x	x	x	x
K2	-.150	-	1.000	x	x	x
K3	.082	-	.016	-	1.000	x

Model statistics: N = 2900, df = 3, L2 = 3.68, prob = .299
goodness of fit = 1.000
adjusted goodness of fit = 0.997

Again, three distinct strategies were identified. The first builds on education, which - according to our expectations - does not assume or imply competence (knowledge) and money. Economic success (money) represents a strategy that does not build on education (negative loading), competence or work performance.

The third strategy represents again a career that builds on political commitment (without any link to education, competence, etc.).

The results, though they are rather tentative, make it clear that the "science-fiction" experiment described by Herrnstein and realized by communist governments has led, at least in Czechoslovakia, to a deep disintegration of the concept of success. The link between life-success and education or competence is rather weak, and higher competence and education are primarily perceived as instruments of avoiding hard work, etc. It explains, among others, the tendency of high status parents to get their children the highest possible education, even if it is not rewarded as in advanced industrial countries. The only relationships that remain strong are those based on formal credentials, administrative measures, etc. Using measures representing predominantly these relationships to show similarities between societies developed under state socialist political regimes and social systems based on political democracy, market principles, competition and meritocratic selection, though far from being ideal, can lead us to very bizarre conclusions, like the one mentioned at the beginning, that Czechoslovakia and Sweden are close to each other because their mobility regimes show high degree of similarity.

5. Conclusions

The principal conclusion documented in this paper is, in fact, very simple: we should not disregard the definition of success and the strategies people use to succeed in the analysis and interpretation of educational and occupational mobility in comparative perspective. Regarding the study of educational stratification and inequality, we should not ignore the *context* and the *content* of educational mobility in different socioeconomic systems. Even though these different contexts might converge quickly in the future because of the political changes in Eastern Europe, the change in the content of education (curriculum, quality of education, aspirations, etc.), in values and value orientations, or in life-style patterns will take a much longer time. That is why scholars of education and educational mobility should invest much more energy in comparative analyses of these underlying processes. In my view, comparative analyses of educational mobility will not bring more **understanding** of the reality in countries with different political pasts without concentration on the **resources** of inequality. However, this a difficult task. As already stressed, we should improve the explanatory power of attainment models, particularly by implementing social-psychological dimensions that - besides aspirations and the influence of significant others - would cover values, value orientations, preferences and attitudes that most likely form specific meanings and patterns of success. At the same time these models should cover specific *channels* of or *constraints* on success (different forms of capital: social, cultural, political, etc.). I believe this should be in the mainstream of social stratification research in a comparative perspective in the near future. As Campbell argues [Campbell 1983], we are at the end of the beginning in this respect.

Appendix 1: Questions about success for parents and children

1. Question for parents:

What do you think your child should have or know in order to be successful in life?

	Label	Formulation in the questionnaire
01	Education	(the highest possible education)
02	Languages	(knowledge of foreign languages)
03	To assert	(know how to assert him/herself)
04	Friends	(influential friends)
05	Hard work	(work hard)
06	Polit. commitment	(commit him/herself politically)
07	Money	(know how to earn money)
08	Abroad	(the chance to work abroad)
09	Inconspic.	(to be inconspicious)
10	Selfsuffic.	(to be handy and self-sufficient)
11	Principles	(to adhere to his/her principles)

Rating scale: 1. definitely yes; 2. perhaps; 3. rather not or definitely not.

If you were to name the three most important of these qualities, which would you choose?

in the first place: .....
in the second place: .....
in the third place: .....

2. Question for children:

What should one do, in your opinion, to be successful? You are asked to choose three out of the seven possibilities given below, putting first the one you think is the best strategy leading to success.

	Label	Formulation in the questionnaire
1.	Relations	(be on good terms with everybody)
2.	Competence	(be more competent in some respect)
3.	Money	(know how to earn a lot of money)
4.	Friends	(have influential friends)
5.	Education	(get the highest possible education)
6.	Work well	(work hard and well)
7.	Polit. commitment	(commit yourself politically)

Fill the vacant spaces in the following sentence with the respective numbers:

In order to become successful, the best thing is to _____, it is also useful to _____, and it probably pays off to _____.

New variables were created by the following transformation: 1. all variables were set equal to zero; 2. if a particular item was chosen for the first place it was

set equal to 3. Values 2 or 1 were assigned to variables if the corresponding item was chosen for second or third place.

PETR MATĚJŮ *is a head of the team for the research of social stratification at the Institute of Sociology, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. His principal areas of research have been: social stratification and inequality in Eastern Europe, comparative research on educational inequality and attainment process. His main current research projects are: "Transformation of Social Structure in Czechoslovakia" and "Determinants of Success in a Changing Society - Longitudinal Study". Also is he is a coordinator of the Czechoslovak participation in the international comparative research project "Social Stratification in Eastern Europe after 1989". He has published several papers in Czechoslovak sociological journal, in international journals, monographs and volumes.*

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