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Summary

The paper describes the development of status inconsistency in the Czech Republic between 1991 and 1999. The initial high level of inconsistency has decreased in the observed period and, at the same time, relationships between education, occupation and income have become stronger. The described process of status crystallisation is, according to our hypotheses, related to changes in the social structure, an increase in inequalities and changes on the labour market. The development of relationships between individual variables representing social status also shows that the process of status crystallisation was slowing down as the transformation proceeded. This may be due to a stabilisation of the labour market or a slowdown in increases in social inequalities. The period from 1995 to 1999 seems to have been affected by phenomena that took place outside the strengthening of stratification relationships (an increase in income in the highest levels of the income hierarchy) that did not contribute to status crystallisation.

The comparative analysis of individual groups within the Czech society revealed the groups for which high inconsistency is typical. Tension between higher education and socio-economic status on one hand and low income on the other hand occurs, in particular, in the case of administrative, non-manual workers and professionals. Self-employed individuals show the lowest average inconsistency. From the point of view of economic sectors, employees in the public sector and state-owned enterprises show the highest inconsistency. Originally, we derived the need for increases in status consistency on the basis of an economic need that will force owners of companies to emphasize performance, competence and abilities. Now, the same logic can be applied to different sectors of the economy. It is obvious that principles of merit will not be emphasised as strongly in the public sector as in the private one. Similarly, the increase in income inequalities will not be as high in the public sector as in private companies.

In spite of differences within society, social status inconsistency was proved to have decreased throughout the analyzed period. The question was what the impact of the on-going status crystallisation would be like. We offer the following answers. First, there is more harmony between the place people belong to within society and how they feel in social terms. The increase in relationships between adequate positions in education, occupation and income hierarchies leads to a stronger relationship with subjective self-ranking on the social ladder. The emerging shape of the social structure has a stronger relationship with the notion of where one belongs within society. A clearer social position then means a clearer subjective self-ranking in the social hierarchy.

Second, status inconsistency affects voting behaviour. If status inconsistency is added to the traditional model of voting behaviour that relates the higher and lower strata to support for right-wing and left-wing parties respectively, the relationships become even clearer. The highest levels of the social hierarchy support left-wing parties the least. However, even at the top of the social hierarchy, the likelihood of voting for a left-wing party depends on status crystallisation. People with the same status belonging to the lowest status crystallisation category are 2.6 times more likely to vote for a left-wing party than for another party, whereas people with the highest social status crystallisation the opposite ratio holds true: they are 2.6 times more likely to vote for a non-left party than for a left one.