Profession as a measure of social stratification

(Short version)

Professional employment is an important component of a person’s status; it is a measure of his or her role in the social division of labor, and, through earnings, also the criterion of the quality of life. It plays a central role in the stabilization of social life, in overcoming problems connected with the socialization of a person; it channels a person’s efforts to the sphere of professional activity, urges one to build relations that are not based on discrimination on the grounds of a formal attribute (ethnicity, religion) but to take into account empirical parameters, which, even if as a whole does not eliminate ethnic, cultural and social contradictions, can reduce tension.

In the present report I attempt to accentuate the roles of professional employment as a means of stabilizing situations of discontent arising, in particular, on ethnic ground. Professional occupation as an element of social relations can reproduce inequality that is embedded for example in education. Although it is a social and individual feature which, unlike, say, age or origin, can be changed by a person during his/her lifetime, that is to say, a person, it would seem, shapes his/her own destiny.

Professions as a rule tend to be relevant for different market economies, but that is not a question I am going to discuss here. I see the role of professions not only in the functioning of the modern economy but also in solving social issues. They help to preserve better some human values, although in some instances they may challenge the status-quo and acquire new roles.

I use the term ‘professional employment’ to emphasize the presence with the worker of professional training, since the mechanism of social selection operates already at the level of education. The problems of social differences and inequalities manifest itself in the sphere of professional training quite graphically. Reproduction of social inequality is in most cases predetermined by the family and the nearest environment of the pupil since a person is mostly integrated in the environment for which he or she was prepared in the course of formation and the social context in which he or she stayed during education/training. Therefore, the social status of a family is inherited by every new generation from the previous one and can be views as a deep track from which it is difficult to get out. I would like to underline that education received during one’s green years differs in the influence on the person from what is learnt when one is already an adult (see figure below).

Professions function in the conditions of a constant search of balance with the economic structure of a society (this finds the most strong expression particularly in the situation of a crisis). In such a case the less prepared part of the society unable or not willing to fit in under new conditions resists innovations. This leads to problems of a social nature.

The absence of professional employment influences immediately the person’s behavior in such conditions. Dissatisfaction with social relations usually decreases when a person acquires some trade, since it is the basic component of one's social status and role.

Professional occupation channels personal efforts into work-related activities, which can decrease the ethnic and cultural tension if not eliminate it totally, and favors the development of professional skills (in particular, in multiethnic working teams). Professional occupation prevents discrimination because it helps people judge others by their merits. A successful professional development (career) gives a person the feeling of stability and prosperity. Even if different ethnic groups sometimes find themselves on different levels of the social ladder.

The blossom of the world information society has provided the widest circles with an opportunity to participate in new forms of interaction in the cyberspace by making access to information more democratic. Education, it would appear, as never before can carry out its inherent functions: promote sustainable development, help overcome crises, preserve the bases of civilization, and help in solving problems of sustenance of the person, his or her spiritual life,
understanding of the identity and, finally, the socialization. However, it is not all as easy as it sounds. General education is more often acquired at an early age, and it forms a person’s consciousness; the person takes possession of knowledge necessary for an independent execution of a future social role. School teaches him or her to have a position on various issues (in particular, it teaches how not to come under influence of radical views) and creates conditions for self-determination and socialization on the basis of socio-cultural, spiritual and moral values, rules accepted in the society and norms of behavior in the interests of the person, his or her family, society and the country.

If social selection takes place more often during the choice of the place of study, the foundation for the cognitive abilities of a child are laid earlier, even before the child goes to school, at the level of preschool education, which represents often a problem for poor families. This does not imply, however, that it is possible to overcome social inequality in education only by creating a large number of places in preschool establishments, at low prices. It is necessary to consider the problem as a whole, including the educational level of parents, their income, the level of regulation of the labor market, ethnic features, migrant background.

Functions of modern education

Professional education requires constant ‘updating’ in difference to classical general education during which common knowledge is acquired of eternal cultural values existing outside of time, so to say.

The concept of life-long education (includes informal, additional and further regular education) needs the interaction between the establishments of formal and informal education, including the possibility of accreditation and formalization of the previous and informal training of the person, his or her individual experience. The latter becomes more and more important in the process of expansion of the possibilities of online training. That is a special question.

By updating the education system, re-thinking pedagogical scenarios, overcoming the gap between school culture and youth culture the situation can be changed in many respects. No matter how highly one might think about the importance of education as an inherent worth (see figure above), necessary for understanding one’s civil role in the society, one should not forget about the purely pragmatic component of education. The acquisition of a trade and subsequent employment are basic elements of a person’s socialization that allows him or her to become integrated in the society. That is to say the ‘foundation’ (see the bottom of the figure above) is the useful professional work required in the labor market.

The level of socialization achieved as a result of training and allowing the person to be integrated in the society may be considered a yard-stick of the education received. Acculturation of a person, especially a young person, will be all the more successful if the labor market is closer to
his or her personal knowledge, skills, attitudes and needs. An unemployed teenager will be bound to have a civic stand different from the one who has had vocational training with the prospect of paid work in the profession.

Research unambiguously shows that a person with professional education adapts much easier in cardinally varying environment both in social and in professional quality. The accelerating flexibility of daily life provides to a prepared person the conscious choice and the possibility to resist instability. Profession can be regarded as something quite important for ‘building’ the future in accordance with the demands of the market and competition that needs constant innovation. It becomes especially evident in a crisis situation.

While a prepared person remains functional in case of changes, he or she is ready to the solution of those new tasks which might arise, whereas the society as a whole can ‘reset’ itself, increase the social involvement of the person, enhance the number of the citizens who are able to do without social support of the state, to provide for themselves and to participate in the formation of riches of the country and to conquer (overcome) social instability in the society. As a whole, professional employment as the source of economic independence and expansion of opportunities can become an instrument of development irrespective of whether we are talking about the development of a person or long-term development of the society as a whole.

Professional knowledge is still one of main factors of social differentiation, a precondition for the division of labor in the future and their lack a formula for social exclusion.