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Conclusions

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In this concluding chapter we have three main aims: to summarise the results found in the preceding twelve chapters, to explain them, and to decide the extent to which they support any of the general theories of social mobility that were discussed in Chapter 1 and by a number of the authors of the country chapters.

Absolute mobility and class structure

The class distributions of men and women show less variation between countries in the 1990s than they did in the 1970s. This is mainly due to the declining significance of the farm classes, IVc and VIIb, in those countries where a large farm sector persisted until the last quarter of the twentieth century. But there have also been some internationally consistent trends, such as the growth in the service class, I + II, and the decline in manual work, particularly of the unskilled kind. Among women, increased rates of labour force participation have been associated with a reduction in international variation as more and more of them enter occupations in the white-collar classes, I + II and III. This trend towards convergence in class structures has occurred together with decreasing variation between countries in their rates of overall mobility, of vertical, of upward, and of downward mobility—and, again, this is evident among both sexes. But, further, the distribution of people in the mobility tables of the different countries has also grown more similar. If we calculate the Δs from comparisons, between all pairs of countries, of their entire mobility tables, we find that the average Δ (the average difference between countries) falls from 43 percent in the 1970s to 33 in the 1980s and 30 in the 1990s, among women, with the comparable figures for men being 39, 30, and 30 percent. And the variance around these means has also declined: from 163.2 to 62.6 to 41.6 among women and from 137.5 to 62.9 to 56.1

among men.[1] Although European countries continue to show differences in their absolute mobility flows, these have become smaller.

Absolute mobility concerns the observed rates and patterns of flows between origin and destination classes and, in mobility analysis, is treated as the consequence of social fluidity (the relative chances of people from each origin being found in each destination class) operating within fixed origin and destination distributions. In Chapter 3 we saw that a model in which origins and destinations are independent, given the observed distributions of these two in each country and at each point in time, correctly classifies over 80 percent of cases, while a model which also assumes a common level and pattern of social fluidity correctly classifies around 95 percent of cases. It is evident, therefore, that changes over time, and differences between countries, in absolute mobility are driven by variation in the origin and destination distributions rather than in social fluidity.[2]

Can such variation be said to follow a pattern? We believe that the answer, in very broad terms, is yes. We might imagine societies following a developmental path that incorporates two major transitions: from an agricultural to an industrial society, and from an industrial to a post-industrial society. The consequences, for the class structure, of the former transition are a decline in the proportions in classes IVc and VIIb and a growth in the remaining classes, especially (among men) the manual working classes V + VI and VIIa. The transition to a post-industrial society sees the decline of V + VI and VIIa and the growth of I + II and III.[3] Everywhere the decline in agriculture is either more or less complete (Britain, Germany, Sweden, Israel, the Netherlands) or well underway while, in eight of our eleven countries (Ireland, Poland, and Hungary being the exceptions), between the 1970s and 1990s, the class structure saw a steady fall in the proportion of men in classes V + VI and VIIa and a consistent increase in the proportion in I + II and III. Among women the pattern was exactly the

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[1] Tables 3.10 and 3.20, show, *inter alia*, the goodness-of-fit of the model of common social fluidity among countries within each decade. This model misclassifies between 3 and 4% of cases. But if, instead of allowing each country to have its own distribution of origins and destinations, we force these to be common in the same way that social fluidity is common (so we fit the Model *C OD*) we find that such a model misclassifies, among men, 24% of cases in the 1970s, 19% in the 1980s, and 20% in the 1990s, and, among women, 29, 22, and 21%. Because this model sets both fluidity and the origin and destination distributions to be the same in all countries, and because its fit to the data (measured by Δ) improves over decades, this is further confirmation that absolute mobility flows are becoming more similar. In addition, the difference in Δ between this model and the common social fluidity model can be seen as an approximate index of the importance, for absolute mobility, of differences between countries in their origin and destination distributions. Evidently these differences are of declining importance; in particular they declined between the 1970s and 1980s.

[2] This point is widely recognised. Compare, for example, Grusky and Hauser: 'intersocietal differences in observed rates must be attributed to variations in occupational distributions' (1984: 29) and Erikson and Goldthorpe: 'if we wish to understand cross-national variation in absolute rates, it is on differences in the structural contexts of mobility that our attention must, almost exclusively, be focused' (1992: 213–4).

[3] As observed in Chapter 3, however, for the majority of countries the decline occurred in class VIIa and not in V + VI.

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same. These differences mean that some countries display a post-industrial class structure with a heavy concentration of people in classes I + II and III; this is particularly true of the male class structure in Britain and the Netherlands and it is true of the female class structure in several countries. But the important thing, from the point of view of the study of absolute mobility, is the recent rapidity of the transition out of agriculture. Similarly, we saw in our comparative analysis, that the shift towards a concentration of women in the white-collar classes has been more rapid in countries such as Hungary and Poland where the class distribution in the 1970s differed most from this. The result has been the growing similarity in destination distributions that we have already remarked upon. But because countries embarked on this developmental path long before the first of our surveys was fielded, there is also decreasing variation in class origins. The mean value of the Δ between class origins for each pair of countries fell from 33 percent in the 1970s to 23 in the 1980s and 24 in the 1990s.[4] Absolute mobility flows converged because their main determinants did.

This convergence chiefly occurred between the 1970s and 1980s (see Tables 3.3 and 3.14) and whether the trend will persist, or even strengthen, is, of course, difficult to say. Clearly, if the working classes continue to decline in those countries where the decline has begun, and if this extends from VIIa to V + VI, then further convergence will be inevitable as men, like women, come to be heavily concentrated in classes I + II and III. Recent historical experience of the location of industrial production would suggest that we can expect further convergence: in any event, it seems unlikely that any of these countries will display a growth in classes V + VI and VIIa, while some at least will experience a decline. As for the countries in which these classes have not yet begun to decline (Ireland, Poland, and Hungary), the outlook seems less certain. In Ireland the growth of classes I + II and III has outstripped that of V + VI and VIIa over this period, but this is not true of the male class structure in Poland and Hungary. On the other hand, among women in Poland and Hungary there has been a steady growth in classes I + II and III and an increase, then a decline, in V + VI and VIIa, suggesting that the second transition may be under way. Much here depends on the nature of economic development. Foreign direct investment in manufacturing, as in the Irish case, is one mechanism by which the size of the working class may be sustained and the rate of convergence consequently slowed.

Social fluidity

A striking result evident in many of the analyses presented in this volume is that the values of Δ for models allowing temporal change in fluidity, or, in

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[4] These figures are for men. For women the figures are 36, 24, and 24 percent. The slight differences arise because our samples of women include only those in the labour force and we have no data for women in Ireland.