



Social Position and Social Status: An Institutional and Relational Sociological Conception

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Abstract

In this article, I discuss the concepts of social position and social status, the types of social position, as well as the determinedness of social statuses by the given positions in a new approach. In the first, introductory part of the article, I emphasize that the institutional sociological conception of social position in my approach is relatively closest to the structuralist position conception. In the second part, I introduce two different concepts, labelled social position and social status, and briefly review the social determinedness of social status. In the third part, social positions are typified from the point of view of the two components of social position: on the one hand, from that of social power relations and on the other from that of interest relations. I point out that the different social positions promote the realization of interests to different degrees, that is, they make it possible to attain different social statuses. In a related article, I illustrate the concepts and connections in question with a case study carried out on an industrial shop floor.

Keywords Social position · Social status · Social power relation · Interest relation · Determinedness of social status

Introduction

In sociological literature, very different conceptions have emerged regarding concepts that, in some sense, express the location of the given individual or group in society. In the English-language sociological literature, the authors usually use the terms social position, social location, class position, social status, or social situation for the naming of these concepts. While discussing the conceptions of other researchers, in the Introduction I occasionally mark the concepts in question with the term “social position,” and I put that term between quotation marks. However, to specify the location of a given individual or group within the society, I think it is

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necessary to make a distinction between three main concepts: namely social position, social status, and order position. In the present article, I deal with social position and social status in an institutional and relational conception expounded in a general sociological theory, within the theory of institutional sociology. Hereinafter, I will call this conception *the institutional sociological conception of social position*.

The theoretical conception concerning social positions and social statuses (as well as order positions) began to evolve in connection with my empirical sociological research at the beginning of my professional career. Originally, partly with the help of the concepts in question, I was trying to find the explanation mainly for what factors determined the considerable inequalities in earnings in the machine shop floors I had examined. According to my empirical research experience, the concepts discussed in the article are eminently usable in the research of social organizations. However, these concepts fit into a general sociological theory and thus can also be applied, for example, in the research of the structure and stratification of the state (or national) society.

One reason for the large differences in the definitions of the concept of “social position” is that different concepts may fit into the sociological theories representing different perspectives in a more or less consistent way. Thus, the various conceptions of the concept or concepts in question can be classified into certain types, which are closely related to the different sociological perspectives.¹ In my view, in respect of sociological perspectives, we can distinguish (1) theoretically neutral or weakly structuralist, (2) traditional class theoretical, conflict theoretical in a narrower sense, centre-periphery theoretical, elite theoretical, and capital theoretical conceptions, which are typical of the structuralist perspective, as well as (3) normativist, (4) creativist, (5) rationalist and (6) rationalist-phenomenalist, (7) network theoretical and relationship conception of the concept of “social position”.

In this article, for the reason of space, I set aside the discussion of the mentioned conceptions and the main theoretical interpretation problems of these conceptions.² I will only emphasize that the institutional sociological conception of social position is closest to the structuralist position conception. In this article I make a distinction between the concepts of social position and social status. However, it is mainly the definition of the former concept that I consider a problem, and I will define social position as the position according to social power relations and interest relations. In this way, my conception regarding this concept is relatively closest to the structuralist position conception mainly from the point of view of the consideration of social power relations and interest relations.

In the structuralist position conception, it is a generally or widely accepted conception according to which social power, authority or domination are the essential

¹ Here I just briefly refer to that, in my view, at the level of the main sociological perspectives, we can distinguish the normativist and structuralist perspectives within the holist perspective, and the creativist and rationalist perspectives within the individualist perspective, and the network theory represents a specific approach (about this see briefly, Farkas, 2017a: 13–18). This typification is perhaps the closest to Alexander's (1987: 10–12) and Hechter's (1987: 3–7) typifications.

² In a related paper, I have reviewed the main conceptions of the concept of “social position” and the main theoretical interpretation problems of these conceptions: Farkas (2022).

aspects of “social position” or class position. As for the classics, while analysing classes and class positions, Marx emphasized the authority relations between the classes, and the authority, domination or rule of capitalists over workers (Marx, 1972: 38f.; Marx & Engels, 1998: e.g., 60, 215, 220f., 348f., 457); Weber (1978: 926–928) expressly looked upon classes and class positions (as well as status groups, or orders and parties) as the phenomena or forms of the distribution of power. According to Poulantzas (1975: 21, 60, 118–127), relations of production and, within these relations, property relations are expressed in the form of powers, which are derived from these relations, that is, they are expressed in the form of class powers. In Parkin’s (1979: 44–46) approach, the most important forms of class relations are the power relations that are present in closure, exclusion, and usurpation. In Wright’s conception, the social relations between social classes and between individuals in different class positions are, from a certain point of view, social power relations, authority relations, or domination relations (Wright, 1979: 23f.; 1980: 328f.; 2000; 2005: 9f., 18; 2009: especially 107–109). According to Goldthorpe (1980: 39), classes are made up of categories of occupation the members of which are in a similar position in the systems of authority and control influencing the production process; as well as social class positions express the inequalities involved in the power relations between the individuals in different class positions (1983: 467). In Scott’s (1996: 5, 41) view, social class structure and the positions making up the structure are in close connection with power, authority, or rule.

The representatives of the conflict theory in a narrow sense make a distinction between typical class positions explicitly from the point of view of power relations and the possession or non-possession of authority (Dahrendorf, 1976: 136–139, 165f., 170–173, 204, 216, 238; Rex, 1961: 129). In a certain sense, Lenski (1966: 56f., 74f.) also distinguishes class positions mainly according to social power. One of the main aspects or the most important aspect of the analysis of the elite or the power elite and the ruling class is power relations or authority relations (e.g., Etzioni-Halevy, 1993: 31, 43, 94f., 201; Domhoff, 2014; Field & Higley, 1980: 20; Mills, 2000: 3–9, 18; Mosca, 1939: 50–53; Scott, 1992, 2008: 28, 32f.). In Scott’s (1992: 5) view, in establishing the analysis of the ruling class, the concepts of capitalist class, upper circle, and state elite are analogous terms for describing the advantaged groups in terms of the exercise of power; the property of the capitalist also exists in the form of power, and it determines the income of the capitalist (from property) in this form (1992: 64f.). In Aronowitz’s (2003: 10, 141) approach, the social class position can be distinguished according to power; class is a concept of historically constituted power and powerlessness rather than one confined to property alone. In a certain sense, the distinctions between centre (or core) and periphery, as well as central and peripheral positions, are also based on power relations (Friedman, 1977: 109–111; Wallerstein, 2004)

In the structuralist approach, it is also a generally or widely accepted conception that interests are the significant aspects of “social position” or class position. As for the classics, in Marx’s view the interests of the individuals in the same class position are identical or common (Marx, 1972: 37–41, 106; Marx & Engels, 1998: 85, 99). Weber (1978: 302, 928f.) thinks that classes are created by economic interests related to the market, and the interests of the individuals in similar class positions

are – with a certain probability – identical or similar. According to certain authors in modern sociological literature, following partly in the footsteps of the classics, class position involves or determines the interests of the individuals in the given position, and the interests of the individuals belonging to a given social class are identical or similar (Dahrendorf, 1976: 174–176, 201–205, 238; Hout et al., 2001: 58; Lenski, 1966: 76; Poulantzas, 1975: 204; Rex, 1961: 129; Scott, 1992: 122–124; 1996: 206, 208; Wright, 1980: 339; 2000: 962; 2005: 20f.). In Wright's (2016: 123, 128f.) view, one of the main aspects of the distinction between class positions and classes is material interest, and the material interests of individuals belonging to the same class have greater overlap than the interests of the individuals belonging to different classes.

Empirical class analyses point out on occasion the complexity of interest relations between social classes, especially regarding the contradictory or double positions of individuals in the so-called middle classes (e.g., Wright, 1980: 330f.; 1989: 26–28; 1997: 20). Besides, certain authors disapprove of the fact that the representatives of the conflict theory (in a narrow sense) postulate conflicting interest relations between the individuals having authority and the individuals subjected to authority (Wright, 1989: 5; Sørensen, 2000: 1530). Nevertheless, the representatives of the structuralist position conception consider interest relations mainly from the point of view that they suppose in principle or basically contrary interest relations between the social classes they distinguish (e.g., Dahrendorf, 1976: 174, 176; Goldthorpe, 1983: 467; Lenski, 1966: 76; Marx, 1972: 106; Wright, 1979: 22; 1997: 18; 2000: 962); they do not give due consideration to the coincidence or identity interest relations between the individuals in different class positions.

As I emphasized above, concerning social power relations and interest relations, I join the structuralist position conception or the different structuralist position conceptions. However, the institutional sociological conception of social position differs widely also in this respect from the other conceptions in question, especially in the following three aspects. Firstly, partly apart from the conflict theory (in a narrow sense) and elite theory, other conceptions define “social positions” or class positions expressly from other points of view (property, occupation, qualification, type of contract, etc.), and they relate the positions defined in this way mainly to power relations and partly to interest relations. By contrast, I define social positions in principle and expressly according to social power relations and interest relations, and I relate the positions defined in this way to other entities (property, occupation, qualification, etc.), which are regarded by other conceptions as direct position-constituting factors. Secondly, the most conspicuous difference between the structuralist position conceptions and my conception is the substantive consideration of interest relations. Namely, to define the concept of social position and typify social positions, besides social power relations, I also consider interest relations, according to their real significance.

Thirdly, compared to all structuralist position conceptions, the most important difference is that the position conception that I represent fits into a thoroughly elaborated sociological social theory. I call this theory *the theory of institutional sociology* and the perspective represented by this theory I call institutional perspective. In the theory of institutional sociology, the terms interest and interest relation, social

power, power relation, and authority, as well as social relation denote significantly different concepts from how they are used in other sociological theories, and these concepts have an appropriate explanatory power within the comprehensive and thoroughly elaborated theory. In this article, however, – given the size constraints of this article – it is not possible to present the theory in question. I only briefly review the main concepts that I define in the comprehensive theory in a specific sense, and I use them in the present article to analyse social positions and social statuses: interest and interest relation, social power, power relation, and authority, as well as social relation and social relationship. To the definition of these concepts, I also apply directly – among other concepts – the concepts of action possibility, action ability, social ability, institution, components of need satisfaction, as well as means and condition of need satisfaction. However, I have to set aside the discussion of these concepts. Thus, I will define the following concepts, which I elaborated in the comprehensive theory in detail, only very sketchily here (about this theory and the concepts in question see: Farkas, 2017a; 2017b).

Before reviewing the above-mentioned concepts, I think it is to be noted that, in the overall theory, I make a distinction between the four main spheres of human life: the spheres of private life, community life, social life, and coercive life. What we are interested in here is the sphere of social life. This sphere typically includes, for example, organized work activity, organized education, and learning, scientific research, public administration, political activity, etc. The concepts to be reviewed below and the concept of social position are used to denote the entities within the sphere of social life. However, besides the sphere of social life, the entity I call social status is, in a certain sense, (in the form of material life circumstances), also present in the sphere of private and community life.

According to my conception, *interest* is the network of action possibilities that are created by institutions and which constitute the means or positive conditions of need satisfaction for the given individual (or group) and which may produce the social goods for the direct need satisfaction and the probable gain of which is positive. *Interest relation* is the lasting interconnection of action possibilities composing the given interests between individuals (or groups). As the main types of interest relations, I distinguish interest identity, interest coincidence, and interest contrary.

According to my conception, *social power* is the degree of the social abilities of the given individual (or group) in which these abilities constitute the means or conditions of need satisfaction for another individual (or group) as an object. Social power manifests itself directly in the consequence that the power provides a possibility for the given individual (or group) to exert social influence on other individuals (or groups) to a certain extent, that is, to promote or hinder the realization of others' interests. *Social power relation* is the lasting interconnection of social abilities composing the given powers between individuals (or groups).³ I have introduced the concept of authority as derived from the concepts of social power and power relation. In this sense, *authority* is the social power superiority of the given

³ Even if I use the terms power or power relation without the attribute “social” in the present article, I also mean social power or social power relation by them.

individual (or group) in a given area of social life, within a given circle of individuals (or groups), which derives from the large social power of the given individual (or group) and the largely unequal social power relations. Considering its consequence, the authority provides a feasible possibility for the given individual (or group) to influence the realization of others' interests basically one-sidedly, and thereby, to realize his or her own interests and the interests represented by him or her to a great extent.

The concept of social relation is the central concept of the theory of institutional sociology. Therefore, I discuss social relations in the theory in question in detail. In the present article, however, I will only very briefly refer to what I understand by social relation. *Social relation* is the lasting interconnection of action possibilities and abilities created or determined by institutions and constituting the means and/or conditions of need satisfaction between individuals (or groups). Accordingly, social relations are composed of interest relations and social power relations. In the overall theory, I typify social relations from the point of view of what components of need satisfaction the action possibilities and abilities composing the relation of the two parties constitute for the parties involved in the given relation in terms of content. I regard identity, coincidence, and contrary social relations as the main types, and I make a distinction between direct and indirect social relations from another point of view.

In the theory of institutional sociology, I define the concept of social relationship as a concept different from the concept of social relation. *Social relationship* is mutual expectation and commitment between given individuals shaped by explicit or implicit agreement in that regard that they facilitate the realization of each other's interests. Within social relationships, I distinguish *tight relationships* and *loose relationships* from the point of view of whether the given relationships are shaped by an agreement drawn up in the form of institutional norms or moral norms. Furthermore, I also distinguish between *partner relationships* and *loyalty relationships* within loose relationships.

As mentioned above, to express the different sides of the position or status occupied in society (in the sphere of social life), I introduce three main concepts in the theory of institutional sociology. To contribute to the correct interpretation of these concepts, I feature the mentioned concepts in Table 1, complemented with the concept of (social) institutional position. In this article, however, I only deal with the concepts of social position and social status.

Table 1 Main Concepts Regarding Position and Status in the Theory of Institutional Sociology

Term designating the concept	Content of the concept
Institutional position (social)	Position in the validity scopes of social institutional norms
Social position	Position in social relations as interest relations and social power relations
Social status	Position in the inequality system of the degree of interest realization
Order position	Deviation of the real institutional position from the institutional position assumed on the basis of expressed values

In a largely similar sense to the concept developed and called status in normativist sociological theories, I speak of institutional position. *Institutional position* is the position of an individual or a group in the validity scope of the institutional norms of the given institution or system of institutions, which is marked out by the norms determining the validity scope of institutional norms. The institutional position can be characterized by characteristics (like gender, age, place of residence, qualification, occupation, etc.), from the point of view of which, concerning the individuals, the validity scopes of institutional norms are determined. In principle, in the sphere of social life, social institutions are valid, and social institutional positions are significant.⁴

The concept of social position is a relational concept that can serve as the determining factor or cause of phenomena in the explanation of social phenomena. In short, social position means the position of the given individual or group in the system of social relations as interest relations and social power relations. The concept of social status, however, denotes an entity mainly regarded as a phenomenon as long as we look upon an entity as a phenomenon if we examine it as determined by factors that exist outside it. As we will see below, the concept of social status expresses to what extent the given individual or group in general realize their interests, and to what extent the social goods are available for the given individual or group. Compared to the concepts already mentioned, I introduce the concept of order position as a newer concept, which is of a normative nature and refers to the institutional position. In short, order position is the deviation of the real institutional position of the given individual or group from the institutional position assumed on the basis of expressed values.

The article is organized as follows. In the next (second) section I introduce two different concepts, labelled with the terms social position on the one hand and social status on the other, as well as briefly point out the social determinedness of social status. In the third section, I typify social positions from the point of view of the two components of social position. I also point out what social statuses can be achieved from the typical positions. In a related article (Farkas, 2021a), I illustrate my conception concerning social position and social status by a case study carried out on an industrial shop floor.

Concepts of Social Position and Social Status, the Determinedness of Social Status

Concept of Social Position

The categorical-relational position conceptions compose a typical kind of the different position conceptions. In this view, the attributes or aspects taken into account

⁴ About the concept of institution in the sense used in the present article see: Farkas, 2019. In the overall theory, I make a distinction between community, social, and corporality institutions (briefly Farkas, 2017a: 58–61).

in the definition of the concept of “social position,” (e.g., property, form of employment, amount and form of capital, network position, social power), in principle, denote the position in the system or network of social relations. Thus, categorical-relational position conceptions can generally be interpreted in such a way that “social position” is, in a certain sense, the position held in the system or network of social relations. However, just as the representatives of the various conceptions interpret the concept of social relation in different ways, they also interpret the concept of “social position” in different ways if their conception is consistent.⁵

I accept the above-mentioned interpretation, so the concept of social position I am to define is a logical consequence of the concept of social relation mentioned above. *Social position* means the position of the given individual (or group) in the system of social relations, which includes partly the position in the system of interest relations, partly the position in the system of social power relations.

In the above definition, the term system is used in a wider sense, and I mean by it a specifically organized totality or whole, rather than a functional system. The subjects of social positions (and social statuses) can be not only individuals but, in a certain sense, they can also be social groups. However, in this article I do not deal with the question of in what sense social groups can be the subjects of social positions (and social statuses); by the subjects of social positions (and social statuses), I usually mean individuals. Therefore, in the above definition, I refer to groups in brackets. The social position of the given individual can be examined within a given social group, in the system of social relations within the given group; but it can also be examined in the given sphere of social life or in a narrower circle of individuals.⁶

The widely accepted conception according to which social position is the position in the system of social relations gains a special meaning in the theory of institutional sociology by a specific interpretation of social relations. In my conception, social relations are constituted of interest relations and social power relations, and I define the concept of social position in this sense. Thus, I distinguish the *two components of social position*: the position in the system of interest relations and the position in the system of social power relations.

In the concept of social position, we consider social relations as related to a certain individual or group. We can also say that the social position of a given individual or group is the totality of social relations that are important in this respect. In real life, social positions can be rather complex, but – as can be seen below – by typifying social positions, we can point out their main features as well as certain regularities of how social relations work.

The determining factors of social position are the same as the ones that determine social relations. The determining factors of social relations and the mechanism creating social relations are issues discussed elsewhere. Considering those statements from a different point of view to a certain extent we could also answer the question

⁵ (Farkas, 2022).

⁶ By social group I mean a group of institutional and, in a narrow sense, social nature; the members of the social group are linked by social relations created by institutions organized into a system (briefly Farkas, 2017a: 85–87).

of what factors create social positions and by which mechanism. However, I do not deal with this issue in the present article.⁷ I only remark here that in the analysis of social position I regard the features which in the traditional class theoretical conception are expressly taken into consideration (like property, occupation, qualification, etc.) as the determining factors of social position or as factors that are, to a certain degree, in correlation with the factors determining social position.

Concept of Social Status

The term social (or socio-economic) status is mainly used to denote the following three concepts in the sociological literature: socio-economic status, social status according to role, and social status according to prestige. Originally Duncan (1961: 116f.) developed the index of socio-economic status (SEI) for the measurement of occupational prestige, and he based his calculation on the education and average income of the given occupational group. This index, however, has been widely used mostly as the independent index of occupational status in the research on social inequalities and stratification (e.g., Ganzeboom & Treiman, 1996; Ganzeboom et al., 1992; Hauser & Warren, 1997; Nam & Boyd, 2004). The social status defined in connection with the role is a position in the social system to which specified rights and duties, specified expectations or norms, and the roles made up by them apply (Parsons, 1951: 25f.; 1964: 393f.). Some authors trace back the use of the term social status in the meaning of status as a marker of prestige to Max Weber's conception. Weber's German expression "ständische Lage" was translated as "status" by the translators of *Economy and Society* (Gerth & Mills, 1946: 187; Weber, 1978: 305), and – in this conception – Weber makes a distinction between the concepts of class situation and social status. Contemporary researchers typically interpret Weber's conception in question in such a way that social status is a status according to prestige (or prestige and lifestyle) (e.g., Crompton, 2012: 34f.; Hechter, 2004: 404; Martin, 2009: 242f.; Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001: 386; Ridgeway, 2014: 2; Scott, 2002: 29f.; Waters & Waters, 2015: 37; Wegener, 1992: 256f.; Zhou, 2005: 92f.).

I have discussed the conceptions concerning the concepts mentioned in the previous paragraph elsewhere in detail.⁸ Here, I only very briefly point out why I use the term social status to denote a new concept, rather than those I mentioned above. In my view, the concept of socio-economic status is a theoretically unclear concept, of the two components of which education can be considered mainly as a component of social power and social position, and income mainly as a component of social status. As mentioned above, in a largely similar sense to the position concept defined in connection with the role and called status, I use the term institutional position in the overall theory. In this conception, the institutional position is not the social position

⁷ About this see briefly, Farkas, 2017b: 63–65, 87–88.

⁸ (Farkas, 2022).

itself, but the social institutional positions of the given individual largely determine his or her social position.

Concerning social status according to prestige, I mention, on the one hand, that I have partly re-interpreted Weber's concept of "ständische Lage" and I call it order position (see Farkas, 2021b). On the other hand, compared to the widely accepted conception, I interpret the entities of social nature more narrowly, and I make a distinction between entities of social and community nature.⁹ In this sense, prestige is an entity of community nature rather than social nature, therefore, instead of the term social status, I suggest using the term prestige position or prestige status to denote position or status according to prestige.

Thus, I will next define the concept of social status in a specific sense and differently from the concept of social position. As I have already mentioned, in my view, the concept of social position is a relational concept that expresses factual social relations, or rather the position taken in these relations. It can serve as the determining factor or cause of phenomena in the explanation of social phenomena. The concept of social status, however, refers to a real entity mostly regarded as a phenomenon (but in another context, social status can also be a determining factor of certain phenomena).

I define the concept of social status in connection with the concept of the degree of interest realization. So, first I will deal with the issue of what I mean by this latter concept. By *the degree of interest realization* I mean the extent to which the interests of the individual are or have been realized, regarding certain interests or certain components of the interests of the given individual.

As mentioned above, interest is the network of action possibilities that may produce the social goods for the direct need satisfaction of the subject. In this way, concerning the given interests, the concept of the degree of interest realization, on the one hand, means to what extent the given individual has social goods at his or her disposal. On the other hand, it also expresses the direct expenditures the given subject is or was required to produce or to acquire the social goods.¹⁰ The degree of interest realization involves the consequences of the actions of the given subject on himself since these actions are aimed to produce and/or preserve the social preconditions of need satisfaction, in the long run, social goods. Furthermore, the degree of interest realization also involves the social effect of others, that is, consequences of the actions of other individuals that affect the given individual's interests.

We can always speak about the degree of interest realization regarding a given social process and given interests, or the given components of the interests. The degree of interest realization can be examined within the interests of the given individual, regarding a particular interest or a particular interest component. The degree of interest realization, however, can also be examined in a comprehensive

⁹ About this briefly, Farkas, 2017a: 62.

¹⁰ The expenditure of action is the consequence of action that constitutes the negative component of need satisfaction for the given individual. I make a distinction between the direct and indirect expenditures of actions (about this in short see: Farkas, 2017a: 67). The indirect expenditures manifest themselves in the available social goods by decreasing them.

way, that is, regarding the whole of the interests of the given individual, and this is what the concept of social status refers to. *Social status* is the degree of interest realization in the given social group or social sphere of life regarding all the interests of the individual and compared to the degree of interest realization of others. The more social goods are available for the given individual and the less direct expenditure is needed to obtain these goods, the more favourable his or her social status is.

As an example, the social status of employees in a work organization is mainly indicated by how much they earn. To measure social status more accurately, we not only have to consider how high the payment to the given individual is, but also how exhausting his work is and how unhealthy the working circumstances are in which he or she earns the given payment. At the level of state (or national) society, the components of social status include, among other things, that the particular individuals or certain groups of individuals have different earnings, different housing circumstances, different supplies of durable consumption goods and public utilities, etc.

The social status of the given individual in the given circle of individuals is defined as compared to the social status of other individuals; more exactly, the social status of the given individual expresses to what extent he or she generally realizes his or her interests and to what extent he or she possesses social goods as compared to the extent to which other individuals in the given circle of individuals realize their interests, and to what extent the social goods are available to them.

Finally, I emphasize again that, in this conception, there is a considerable difference between the concepts of social position and social status. Social position is the position in the system of social relations and its components are formally made up of action possibilities and action abilities. The components of social status, however, formally comprise things and states and the status of a given individual can only be compared to the social status of other individuals quantitatively.

Determinedness of Social Status

Taking into account the length of the present article, I only very briefly deal with the issue of what factors determine the degree of interest realization and social status (see Fig. 1).¹¹ It is a widely accepted conception that it is the social power of the given individual or group that determines to what extent they realize their interests, and to what extent social goods are available to them. While analysing the types of social position, however, it will turn out that this conception does not reflect reality appropriately. According to my conception, *the degree of interest realization and the social status are basically determined by the social position of the given individual (or group), in other words by his or her (or its) positional social power given in his or her (or its) social position.*

Thus, it is not exclusively the social powers of the given individual (or group) that basically determine the degree of interest realization, but the resultant power

¹¹ See about this briefly Farkas, 2017b: 95–99.

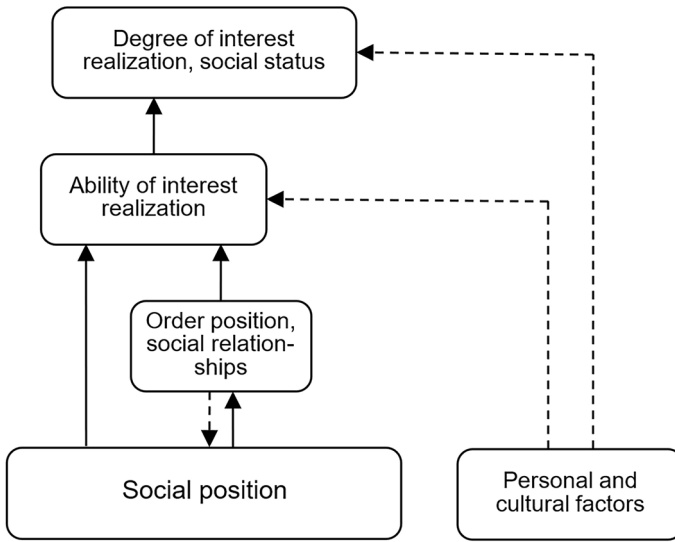


Fig. 1 The Determining Factors of Social Status, *Note. Reprinted from Farkas, 2017b: 96*

determined by the given interest relations and power relations. This resultant power I call positional social power.¹² *Positional social power* is the resultant of the given individual's (or group's) own social powers, as well as that of the social powers of all the other individuals and groups playing a part in the social process, that has its effects in the direction of the realization of the subject's interests. The positional social power of a given individual (or group) can, in principle, be defined by depicting vectorially the magnitudes of social powers and their directions according to the interest relations in a given social group. We can give the probable social statuses of the individuals (or groups) in the given social group compared to each other; the proportions between the probable social statuses of the given individuals (or groups) basically reflect the proportions between their positional social powers.

In the present article, I only very briefly refer to the fact that we can make a distinction between the interactive ("power over") and reflective ("power to") conception of social power. According to the interactive concept of social power, social power is the influence or effect of the subject on the other party, or the ability of the subject to influence or affect the other individual or group as an object (e.g., Ferguson, 2013: 66; Menge, 2018: 23; Molm, 1997: 29; Scott, 2008: 29). According to the reflective concept of social power, social power is the realization of the subject's interests or goals to a certain extent, or the ability of the realization of the subject's interest or goals (e.g., Habermas, 1996: 175; Mann, 1986: 6; Poulantzas, 1976: 104; Wright, 2000: 962). According to certain authors, these two concepts serve to denote the same real entity, but in different approaches; one of the concepts places the emphasis on influence whereas the other one on the outcome. For example,

¹² The term positional social power here does not mean the "positional power" that is based on the position of the actor in a directed network or in an organizational architecture (see, e.g.: Herings et al., 2005; van den Brink & Steffen 2012).

according to Pansardi's (2012: 81f.) view, "although the two concepts do not stand in a relation of perfect logical equivalence, they have an extremely high degree of correspondence". In the conception pointed out in the Introduction, I defined the concept of social power in an interactive sense. In my view, the two concepts in question do not denote the same real entity and the correspondence between them may be of a very different extent. Therefore, I do not call the ability marked by the reflective ("power to") power concept social power, but we can call it – using Héthy and Makó's (1978: 161) term – the ability of interest realization. Accordingly, the *ability of interest realization* is an ability to actually realize some interests.

Thus, social position determines the degree of interest realization and social status by determining the ability of interest realization of the given individual or group. Here I only refer briefly to the fact that the examined determining effect of social position is realized partly in connection with the order position and the social relationships. In reality, the personal and cultural factors that are independent of the social position may also have an impact on the degree of interest realization and social status, but we can only consider this connection at the eclectic level of the theory.¹³

In a given social process, the degree of interest realization is determined by the given social position of the individual. However, we do not necessarily refer the concept of social status to a particular social process; therefore, the aspect of historicity arises here. Social status in a given time is not necessarily the consequence of the social position where the subject belongs in the given shorter period, since the social status may partly remain even after the change of the social position forming its basis. As an example, the social status of the individual who has recently become unemployed reflects mainly his or her past rather than his or her present social position. Of course, the fact that he or she may have savings, a good house, a car, a weekend house, etc. can be explained by his or her previously well-paid job and – in connection with it – his or her relatively good position, rather than with his or her bad social position as an unemployed person. Thus, more specifically, the social status of a given individual is basically determined by his or her present social position and/or was basically determined by his or her past social position.

Types of Social Position and the Social Statuses

Aspects of Typifying Social Position

As mentioned above, the social position of the given individual can be examined within a given social group, in the system of social relations within that group. However, it can also be examined in a particular sphere of social life or in a narrower circle of individuals. Next, while typifying social position, we examine the social

¹³ About the distinction between the abstract, concessionary, and eclectic levels of a theory, see briefly Farkas, 2017a: 23.

Table 2 The Types of Social Position

Power relations with those in the authority position	Interest relations with those in the authority position			Neutral interest relation
	Interest identity or coincidence	Ambivalent interest relation	Interest contrary	
Balanced	<i>Authority position</i>	<i>Strong tolerated position</i>	<i>Rival position</i>	<i>Marginal positions</i>
Moderately unequal	<i>Supported position</i>	<i>Medial tolerated position</i>	<i>Restricted position</i>	
Largely unequal	<i>Patronized position</i>	<i>Weak tolerated position</i>	<i>Exposed position</i>	
Neutral power relation	<i>Parallel positions</i>			<i>Neutral position</i>

position of individuals within a given social group. The given social group can be, for example, the state (or national) society, a social organization, a town, or a village.

Next, I typify the social positions from the point of view of the two main components of social position; that is – mentioning power relations for typifying first –, of the social power relations and interest relations of the given subject, as demonstrated in Table 2. In real life, social positions are usually rather complex, and the revealed social position of a given individual may be different depending on which of his or her different social relations with other individuals or groups are considered. To find ideal types that are logically consistent, we have to highlight a given individual or group, or a typical position, and we have to take into account the social relations attached to it.

Concerning reality, it is worth choosing an individual or a group to whom the most important social relations are attached in the given society. Therefore, I focus on individuals who have authority or are in an authority position in the given society. Thus, *taking the authority position as a reference position, I typify the various social positions from the point of view of the two components of social positions: the social power relations with those in the authority position and the interest relations with them.*

I focus on the relations with those in authority position partly because the most important direct social relations of a given individual are those that attach to the individual or group in an authority position. In addition, it is worth pointing out briefly here that, regarding the social relations between the individuals and groups with a comparatively low level of power, the indirect social relations that are mediated by individuals or groups having large powers are very often even more important than their direct social relations. Besides, by highlighting the individual or individuals with authority, we can define types, some of which can be used to express

social positions within social relations that can be characterized by moderately unequal and relatively balanced power relations.

Accordingly, the intersections of the above-mentioned social relations mark out the typical social positions. However, I would like to emphasize, that these positions are ideal types, which do not usually occur in their pure form in real life. During the typifying process, we narrow down considerably the existing social relations which are explicitly taken into consideration. Still, typifying social positions is an efficient method to get to know social reality, since, on the one hand, it allows us to create an embraceable order in the diversity of social positions experienced in reality; on the other hand, in this way we can shed light on certain regularities regarding the working of social relations and social positions.

According to the above-mentioned table, one aspect of typifying is the social power relations of the individual or group with those in an authority position, distinguishing balanced power relations, moderately unequal power relations, and largely unequal power relations or authority relations. More simply and less accurately it can also be said that from this point of view I make a distinction between individuals with large, medium, and small amounts of power.

The other aspect is that of the interest relations with those in an authority position, pure types being interest identity and interest coincidence, as well as interest contrary.¹⁴ Besides the pure types of interest relations, however, I also distinguish ambivalent interest relations here. Interest relations are ambivalent if the interests of two parties are identical or coincident to the same extent as they are contrary, or if their interest relations are diffuse. This mixed type is inserted among the pure types because this makes it possible to get closer to real interest relations, where we can often find relations that are closest to the mixed type.

We can make a distinction between complete social relations and partial social relations.¹⁵ Complete social relations include both interest relations and power relations, whereas in partial social relations there are only either interest relations or power relations between individuals or groups. While typifying, concerning partial social relations, I distinguish neutral power relations and neutral interest relations, and the social positions held in these relations, that is, parallel and marginal social positions. However, we are interested in the social positions developed in complete social relations. Thus, I will not discuss social positions in neutral power relations and neutral interest relations in the present article.

In real life, interests and interest relations are rather complex. In certain respects, interest relations between two parties can be identity or coincidence relations, in other respects, they can be contrary relations or ambivalent relations. While typifying, I assume that, in terms of interest relations, individuals can be unequivocally categorized into the typical positions. However, in some cases, I will point out that, in comparison, real interest relations are more complex, which I will take into consideration when drawing the conclusion concerning to what extent individuals in the given social position can realize their interests and what social status they can achieve.

¹⁴ About these types of interest relations see briefly, Farkas, 2017b: 23–26.

¹⁵ About this briefly Farkas, 2017b: 62.

According to the conflict theoretical conception in a narrower sense, the first task of the research into social phenomena (as conflicts) is to define social positions according to the distribution of power and authority, that is, authority or dominant and subjected positions (Dahrendorf, 1976: 165f.; Rex, 1961: 122). I note that my conception of typifying social position is similar to the conflict theoretical conception in the sense that we have to define the authority position first, and we can define the other typical positions in relation to the authority position. In other respects, however, the present conception essentially differs from the conflict theoretical conception.

The difference between the two conceptions that I distinguish three categories according to power relations, rather than only two, in principle is not important, rather it is an important difference from the point of view of empirical applicability. Nevertheless, from the point of view of interest relations, there is a significant difference between the two conceptions in principle also. The representatives of conflict theories in a narrower sense simplify real interest relations to a large extent, when, considering power relations, they distinguish polarized social positions only from one point of view. They assign *ab ovo* contrary interest relations to them, whereas I, though in an idealized way, while typifying, consider the complexity of real interest relations. The main difference between the two conceptions is, as I have already mentioned, that my conception regarding social positions and the types of social position fits into a comprehensive and thoroughly elaborated social theory.

I pointed out above that there is a considerable difference between the concepts of social position and social status. In this context, it is important to see the difference between the components of social position and the consequences of social position. The two main components of social position are the position in interest relations and the position in power relations, and I typify social positions from the point of view of these two components. However, in this article, I consider the degree of interest realization and social status as the consequences of social position. As for *the types of social status*, I distinguish between the following: (1) very bad, (2) relatively bad, (3) medium, (4) relatively good, and (5) very good or excellent social status.

As mentioned above, social position – causally or with a high degree of probability – determines the degree of interest realization and social status. *Determined by the typical social positions, the individuals in a given social position realize their interests to a certain extent and achieve a better or worse social status.* When typifying social positions, I will point out the connection between social position and social status, which is demonstrated in Table 3. In the next section of the article, I am going to define the typical social positions and point out how far the typical positions help the realization of interests and what social status they make it possible to achieve.

Table 3 Connection Between Social Position and Social Status

Social position	Degree of interest realization, Social status
Authority position	Very good interest realization and status
Strong tolerated position	Relatively good interest realization and status
Supported position	Relatively good interest realization and status
Medial tolerated position	Medium interest realization and status
Patronized position	Medium interest realization and status
Restricted position	Relatively bad interest realization and status
Weak tolerated position	Relatively bad interest realization and status
Exposed position	Very bad interest realization and status
Rival position	Medium or relatively good interest realization and status

Main Types of Social Position

Authority Social Position

As I have already mentioned, the reference point of typifying is the individual or group who has authority and is in an authority position. So, we have to define the authority position first. *The individual or group in the authority social position has on the whole prominent social power in the given social group and has authority over a large part of the individuals in the group.* If there are several individuals in an authority position, the social power relations between the individuals in that position are balanced and, in principle, they are bound together by tight social relationships and identity social relations. An authority position does not necessarily mean that those in the given position have authority over all the individuals or groups in the given social group. Authority may also be partial, that is, it does not necessarily cover all the examined individuals or groups.

If several individuals are in an authority position, the given individuals have to be capable of social co-operation to exercise their power and authority. As a prerequisite of this, an important feature of an authority position is that the individuals in this position are bound together by social relationships. In principle, these relationships that I call tight social relationships are the cognitive and normative equivalents of identity social relations; and the given relations and relationships determine regular social cooperation between the parties. At the concessionary level of the theory of institutional sociology, it can be taken into consideration that, in real life, loose, partner social relationships can also bind individuals in an authority position together. In the latter case, social cooperation among the individuals is occasional and social relationships are revived on the realization of given interests.

In this article, I do not deal with the topic that tight social relationships and identity social relations between individuals can be found in social union and loose social relationships in social network. I would only like to point out that, in this sense, if there are several individuals in this position, the individuals in an authority position form a social union or, considered at a concessionary level, a social network.

The first question from an empirical point of view that arises while typifying social positions is whether there is an individual or a group among the examined individuals and groups that is in an authority position. In real life, individuals or groups in an authority position emerge in almost all societies or social groups, mostly in connection with ownership and division of labour. Some authors point out that in a relatively complex division of labour the necessity of specifying and coordinating tasks implies the emergence of authority (Dahrendorf, 1976: 299; Engels, 2010; Vanfossen, 1979: 142; Wrong, 1979: 248f.). For example, Dahrendorf (1976: 167f.) argues that authority is present in every social organization, which he calls imperatively coordinated association. In his view, authority is a characteristic of social coexistence as general as society itself.

In my view, every social group with a relatively high number of members involves authority and an authority position, but in smaller social groups, power relations can be relatively balanced, that is, authority and authority position do not necessarily come into being in relatively small social groups. While typifying, I assume, however, that there is an individual or a group in an authority position within the given social group.

As a consequence of the authority position, the individual (or group) in this position usually realizes his or her (or its) interests to a large extent and attains an excellent social status. To illustrate the connections between social positions and social statuses, I highlighted Fig. 2 (Fig. 7 there) from the related article, which shows the average earnings statuses as social statuses depending on social positions (Farkas, 2021a). Accordingly, there is a rather tight connection between social position and social (earnings) status. We can see that on the examined shop floor the workers in the authority position achieved excellent social (earnings) statuses, that is, they earned very high earnings for an acceptable amount of work. On a scale (which can

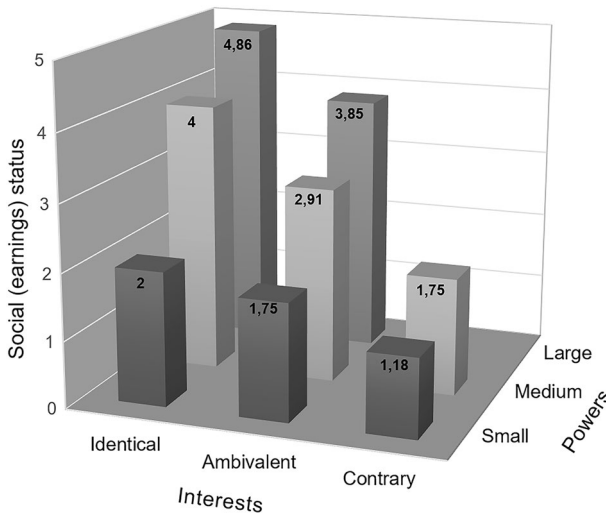


Fig. 2 Shop Floor Example Demonstrating the Connection Between Social Position and Social Status. Note. $N=80$. Reprinted from Farkas, 2021a: 24

also be considered as a ratio scale) ranging from 0 or 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good), the social (earnings) status of workers in the authority position was 4.86.

Exposed and Restricted Social Positions

Next, I will define the exposed social position, which, from the point of view of inequalities, represents the other pole, compared with the authority position. *The individuals in the exposed social position have little social power, they are in authority dependence in relation to those in the authority position and their interests are contrary to the interests of those in the authority position.*

As mentioned above, according to the representatives of the conflict theory in a narrower sense, two typical social positions can be distinguished on the basis of the distribution of power: authority or dominating position and subjected position, and the interests of those in these two typical positions are contrary (Dahrendorf, 1976: 136–139, 165f., 170–173, 174–176; Rex, 1961: 122–124). Thus, what I call exposed social position is in a certain sense similar to the subjected position as applied in conflict theory. According to my conception, however, the exposed position is only one characteristic type of the various positions held by individuals and groups outside the authority position, and only one characteristic type of the positions held by individuals with little power and in authority dependence. The interests of individuals with little power, both in principle and in real life, can also be identical or coincident with the interests of those in an authority position. Besides, there may also be ambivalent interest relations between those in an authority position and those in authority dependence.

As a result of the specified position, in principle, the individuals in an exposed position cannot realize their interests, or only to a very small extent, and they have a very bad social status. If we consider the pure types of interest relations and assume purely contrary interest relations between those in an authority position and those in an exposed position, those in an exposed position do not realize their interests at all. If we focus on the fundamental interest relations while typifying, and with regard to real life we allow that the interests of the given individuals are not in certain regards contrary to the interests of those in an authority position, we may say that those in an exposed position can only realize their interests to a very small extent. As an example, we can see in Fig. 2 that the workers in an exposed position on the given shop floor have achieved a very bad social (earnings) status; the earnings status of the workers in an exposed position was 1.18.

From the point of view of interest relations, the restricted position is similar to the exposed position, but from the aspect of power relations, it is more favourable. The individuals in the *restricted social position* have medium social power in relation to the individual or group in the authority position and their interests are contrary to the interests of those in the authority position.

The power relations between those in an authority position and those in a restricted position are moderately unequal; the former do not unequivocally have authority over those in a restricted position. In a restricted position, there are comparatively more favourable interest realization opportunities than in an exposed

position. As a result of the given position, the individuals in a restricted position realize their interests to a relatively small extent and have a relatively bad social status.

Patronized and Supported Social Positions

From the aspect of power relations, the patronized position is similar to the exposed position, but from the point of view of interest relations, it is significantly different from the exposed position. *The individuals in the patronized social position have little social power, they are in authority dependence in relation to those in the authority position and their interests are identical or coincident with the interests of those in the authority position.*

It is a widely accepted idea that it is power and power relations that determine to what extent individuals realize their interests. In my conception, however, power relations and interest relations together determine the extent of this realization, that is, the social position determines the degree of interest realization and the social status. *The individuals in the patronized position can usually realize their interests to a satisfactory degree and they are in a medium social status, but sometimes they can also realize their interests to the same extent as individuals in the authority position.* Individuals in the patronized position have little influence on the social process, the realization of their interests is partially or perhaps fully because their interests are identical and/or coincident with the interests of those in the authority position.

In the patronized position, the degree of interest realization depends, on the one hand, on to what extent the interests of the individuals in the patronized position are composed of the action possibilities of those in the authority position and to what extent of their own action possibilities. In the former case, when the individuals in the authority position realize their action possibilities composing their interests, due to interest identity and/or interest coincidence, they more or less also realize the interests of the patronized ones. In the latter case, besides the social abilities and social power of those in the patronized position, the degree of interest realization also depends on to what extent those in the authority position are capable of, and interested in, substituting the individuals in the patronized position in the realization of their action possibilities that the patronized ones are not able to realize. On the other hand, while typifying, in principle, we take the social relations between the two parties into consideration, and we assume a pure identity and/or coincidence of interest relations between those in the authority position and those in the patronized position. In real social life, however, the degree of interest realization also depends on to what extent the interests of the individuals in the patronized and the authority position are identical and/or coincident. Taking all this into consideration, we can state that the individuals in the patronized position usually realize their interests to a satisfactory degree and are in a medium social status. As an example, we can see in Fig. 2 that the workers in a patronized position on the given shop floor have achieved a significantly higher social (earnings) status, (2 on the scale), than the workers in an exposed position, but from the theoretical model we can usually deduce a better status.

Individuals and groups in the authority position can support the realization of the interests of those in the patronized position both intentionally and unintentionally. When individuals in the authority position realize their interests, they also represent the interests of those in the patronized position to a certain extent. Besides, they help the individuals in the patronized position to realize their interests usually also in a conscious way.

A patronized position can also develop independently of the intentions of the given individuals, due to the coincidence of the interests of the party in the authority position and the party with little social power. Such a patronized position, however, can come to an end relatively easily, since, compared to power relations, interest relations tend to change more easily in real life. If the change in interest relations brings the coincidence of interests to an end, the patronized social position will also end, so the chances of interest realization of those in the former patronized position will decrease considerably. This is when it can also be more obvious at the level of everyday knowledge that the given individuals owed the appropriate realization of their interests to the power of those in an authority position, rather than their own power or their social influence resulting from that power.

The patronized social position can also be formed intentionally, through the formation of a social relationship, especially – considered at a concessionary level – loyalty relationship, shaped by an agreement between the party in the authority position and the party with little social power. In the present article, I do not deal with loyalty relationships (patron-client relationships) in detail. While shaping loyalty relationships, the parties, in an expressed or implicit way, agree that the party in an authority position (as the one who gives rewards for loyalty), helps the patronized individual (as the beneficiary of loyalty rewards) to obtain certain social goods. In return, the patronized individual takes on the obligation to perform certain services and behave in a way that is in accordance with the interests of the party in the authority position (see, e.g., Arriola, 2009; Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1980; Flap, 1990; Jiang, 2018; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007; Sekeris, 2011). What I call extrinsic authority mostly enables those in the authority position to help the individuals in authority dependence to obtain the goods the distribution of which those in authority position are free to determine. Thus, they distribute these goods partly as rewards for loyalty and expect certain services in return. These goods can generally be obtained by the individuals who are already beneficiaries of or are willing to accept loyalty rewards.

The supported social position may be interpreted as a transitional position between the authority position and the patronized position. Yet, it is advisable to distinguish it as an independent type, since this is a typical social position in real life. The individuals in the *supported social position* have medium social power in relation to those in the authority position, and their interests are identical or coincident with the interests of those in the authority position. From the point of view of social status, the position in question can also be found between the authority and patronized positions. Partly as a result of their medium power and partly due to their identity or coincidence interest relations with those in the authority position, the individuals in a supported position usually realize their interests to a relatively large extent and have a comparatively good social status.

Tolerated Social Positions

Compared with the types discussed so far, the tolerated social positions represent a less pure type from the point of view of interest relations. Among the tolerated social positions, I focus on and define the medial tolerated position. *The individuals in the medial tolerated social position have medium social power in relation to those in the authority position, and their interest relations with those in the authority position are ambivalent.*

The interest relations between the individual or group in a medial tolerated position and those in an authority position are ambivalent, that is, their interests are to such an extent contrary, inasmuch they presume each other's realization. Tolerated social positions can also come into being if interest relations are diffuse: if the interests of the given individual or group are neither contrary nor coincident with the interests of those in an authority position. *The individuals in the medial tolerated position – partly due to their medium social power, partly as a result of the ambivalent interest relations – can usually realize their interest to a satisfactory degree and they have a medium social status.*

The so-called tolerated social positions can be characterized by both a comparatively large and small amount of power. The individuals in the *strong tolerated position* have relatively large social power, whereas the individuals in the *weak tolerated position* have relatively little social power in relation to the individual or group in the authority position, and their interest relations with those in the authority position are ambivalent. The former type includes mixed components of the authority position and the rival position, while in the latter type the components of the patronized and exposed positions are mixed.

Those in an authority position have no authority over those in a strong tolerated position. Power relations between them are theoretically balanced, that is, regarding the social relations only between these two parties they are both in a strong tolerated position. In real life, however, the individuals that can be classified among those who are in a strong tolerated position have slightly weaker powers over those in an authority position than the other way round. Due to their relatively large amount of power, as well as the ambivalent interest relations, in principle, the individuals in a strong tolerated position realize their interests to a similar extent to those in an authority position and have a similar social status. Considering the totality of real relations, however, those in a strong tolerated position usually realize their interests to a relatively large extent and have a relatively good social status. Individuals in a weak tolerated position usually realize their interests to a relatively small extent and have a relatively bad social status. However, individuals in a weak tolerated position can realize the components of their interests that are not contrary or are eventually coincident with the interests of the individuals or groups in an authority position to a satisfactory degree. As an example, we can see in Fig. 2 that the workers in a strong tolerated position had a social (earnings) status of 3.85, those in a medial tolerated position had a status of 2.91 and those in a weak tolerated position had a status of 1.75 on the scale.

Rival Social Position

Finally, among the main types of social position, I will define the rival social position. Meanwhile, we have to simplify real social relations to the most significant degree, and/or we have to make the most significant concessions as compared with the pure types of social relations regarding the complex real relations.

The individuals in the rival social position have large social power in relation to those in the authority position. Social power relations between them and those in the authority position are balanced and their interests are contrary to the interests of those in the authority position. Accordingly, those in an authority position have no authority over those in a rival position. Power relations between them are balanced; thus, regarding the social relations only between these two parties they are both in rival positions. Those in rival positions harm each other's chances of interest realization significantly, since they have considerable power towards each other and, at the same time, their interests are contrary.

While typifying, in principle, we take only the power relations and interest relations between the two parties into consideration. In this case, we can say that those in a rival position realize their interests to a similar extent to those in the authority (another rival) position and they have a similar social status. In real life, however, it is an important question what powers the given individual or group has towards other members of the given social group, apart from the individual or group in a so-called authority position. Regarding the totality of real social relations, those in a rival position usually realize their interests to a satisfactory or relatively large extent and they have a medium or relatively good social status.

A permanent rival position in a given social group is rather improbable. In general, rival positions only emerge under extraordinary circumstances. Rival positions can come into being in periods when, for example, the assignment of a manager expires, and the new manager is about to be appointed. Individuals who have the coverage of institutions usually intentionally shape such institutions that create social relations where given individuals or certain circles of individuals have authority and eliminate rival social positions.¹⁶ If despite this, rival positions appear, they usually determine social conflicts, too, and are in the long run unfavourable for all individuals in rival positions, so efforts will be made to terminate such positions. One possibility is that the rivals come to an agreement and merge into one authority group. The other possibility is more probable: in time, one rival party obtains comparably larger power over the other one, and, by depriving the other party of the overwhelming part of its institutional social abilities, forces the other party into a restricted or exposed social position, eventually removing it completely from the given social group. There are other ways, besides these, of terminating rival positions.

¹⁶ About the concept of the coverage of institution, see Farkas, 2019: 80f.

Typical and Real Social Positions

As mentioned above, by focusing on the individual or group in an authority position, we obtain a typifying method that is partly suitable to represent positions under social relations where there are no authority relations and where there is no authority position. Thus, between individuals or groups with similar powers towards each other, that is, in balanced power relations, tolerated, “semi-supported” and/or rival social positions can come into being. In moderately unequal power relations, supported, medial tolerated, and/or restricted social positions may appear, while there is no, or only partial, authority position. Such types can be considered both at an abstract theoretical level and a concessionary level.

Starting from certain basic concepts and presuppositions, at the abstract level of a theory, we logically constitute ideal–typical concepts, and, by using such concepts, we formulate connections. In real life, however, the entities that can be represented by using ideal–typical concepts do not exist in a purely, typically ideal form. Systematic theories formulated at an abstract level are indispensable for the deep understanding and explanation of social phenomena, but, in empirical sociological research, the theory can usually be applied effectively at a concessionary level or even by making more concessions than usual at this level. While typifying social positions, I also made concessions compared with the pure types of power relations and interest relations. However, when researching real social positions empirically, further concessions may be necessary.

At the concessionary level of the theory and in empirical research into social positions, we can consider the complexity of real social relations to a more significant extent, especially (1) possibly the relative undeterminedness of the authority position, (2) possibly the existence of rival position, and (3) the social relations of the given individual or individuals in relation to those outside the authority position.

Firstly, in real life, it may to a certain extent be undetermined who have generally prominent power and who have authority. The individuals having generally prominent power do not in real life necessarily form a unified social union or network. Possibly, we can allow that the circle of the individuals in an authority position should be divided to some extent, in respect of certain interests, but in other respects, it should be unified. In empirical research, we can define the circle of the individuals in authority positions both in a narrower and in a wider sense depending on what social phenomena it is the focus of our interest to explain, and from this point of view which social relations are especially important.

Secondly, in real life, there may be rival positions that we can take into consideration while researching real social positions. The individuals and groups that are in rival positions in relation to each other may both have authority over the individuals and groups having relatively little power. As long as there are individuals or groups in rival social positions among certain individuals or groups, and those in such a position have considerable powers over other individuals or groups besides those in the so-called authority position, too, this, compared with the ideal–typical model, makes the social positions of other individuals or groups much more complex. A given individual or group can be in an exposed position in relation to one of the parties in a rival position, but they can be in a patronized position concerning the other

party. Thus, regarded as a whole, it can be in a weak tolerated position. As an example, the interest relations between the direct head of an organizational unit and the upper manager with employment rights may be contrary; therefore, the employees of the given organizational unit find themselves, to a certain extent, in an ambivalent social position regarding the direct head on the one hand, and the upper manager on the other.

Thirdly, during empirical research of the social position of a given individual or group, not only can we consider their social relations with the individual or group in an authority position, but, to a certain extent, also their relations with other individuals or groups with relatively large powers. As an example, during the research of the social positions of particular individuals or groups within a larger social group, we can partly consider their relations with the individual or group having comprehensive authority, and partly their relations with those having authority in smaller social groups within the larger social group.

In our conception, social relations exist factually, so the social position of a given individual also exists factually. However, factual social positions determine the social actions of the individuals and social phenomena in general by the ideas and knowledge about such positions or in connection with these ideas and knowledge. At the concessionary and/or eclectic level of the theory and in empirical sociological research we can also take into consideration that real social positions and the social positions interpreted or attributed by the given individuals can be different from each other, which can also affect the examined social phenomena.

Conclusions

In the present article, I have introduced two different concepts, labelled social position and social status. In my conception, social position means the position of the given individual (or group) in the system of social relations, which includes partly the position in the system of interest relations, partly the position in the system of social power relations. I have defined the concept of social status in connection with the concept of the degree of interest realization. Social status is the degree of interest realization in the given social group or social sphere of life regarding all the interests of the individual as compared to the degree of interest realization of others. I pointed out that the degree of interest realization and the social status are basically determined by the social position of the given individual or group, in other words by his/her or its positional social power given in his/her or its social position.

In real life, social positions can be rather complex, but by typifying social positions, we can point out their main features as well as certain regularities of how social relations work. Taking the authority position as a reference position, I typified the various social positions from the point of view of the two components of social positions: the power relations with those in the authority position and the interest relations with them. I distinguished authority position, exposed position, restricted

position, patronized position, supported position, (strong, medial, and weak) tolerated positions, and rival position as the main types. I pointed out that determined by the typical social positions, the individuals in a given social position realize their interests to a certain extent and achieve a better or worse social status.

As mentioned above, the concepts of social position and social status, as discussed in the present article, fit into a general sociological theory and play an important role in the explanation of certain phenomena. To better point out the applicability of the concepts in question, I refer to the structure- and stratification conceptions that are in close connection with the conception of social position and social status as discussed in the present article.¹⁷ In my conception, social class is the aggregate of individuals in essentially similar social positions in the given social group. Thus, we classify the individuals on the basis of their essentially similar or different social positions into the same or different social classes. In principle, we can make a distinction between classes in conformity with the typical social positions. Social structure is the specific whole of the social classes making up the given social group and the typical social relations between the given classes. We can make a distinction between the social positional stratification denoting inequalities according to social positions and the social status stratification denoting inequalities according to social status. In accordance with the connection between social position and social status, social positional stratification – as the inequality section of social structure – basically determines social status stratification.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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¹⁷ On the mentioned structure- and stratification conception, see briefly: (Farkas, 2022).

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