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Social structure and integration: Occupational classes and integration mechanisms between 2015 and 2021

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Abstract

The topic of the paper is the relationship between social stratification based on occupational classes and the mechanisms of social integration. This was analysed using quantitative data collected in 2015, 2018 and 2021. We sought answers to how we can better understand the interaction of social and integration positions, as well as the functioning of complex integration mechanisms. In the examined six years, a definite stabilisation took place in the integration indicators of the occupational groups: this means that the indicators of occupational groups in some integration dimensions became closer. It is also part of our research results that there is an interpretable correlation between the hierarchy of occupational groups and the examined integration mechanisms: political participation, number of weak ties, subjective social exclusion, and the acceptance of norm violation. The upper strata of the occupational class model (mostly entrepreneurs, managers, professionals, and other white-collar workers) consistently reported more weak ties, less of a sense of exclusion, and greater political participation. We also found consistent yet opposing results for the lower strata, mainly among the unemployed and those in unskilled and semi-skilled work linked to lower-level qualifications. Increasing stabilisation and the impact of the hierarchy of occupational groups are simultaneous integrational characteristics of Hungarian society.

Keywords: social integration; inequalities; norms; networks; participation; exclusion

1 Introduction

The study's primary question¹ is how do different groups integrate into Hungarian society and what integration mechanisms facilitate or hinder the integration of people from different social situations. To examine the social phenomena associated with the decade after

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2010, we chose to apply a normative-functionalist occupational model (Huszár, 2013) used in social stratification analysis and the concepts of integration and disintegration. The mechanisms that result in and operate integration and disintegration offer the possibility of creating a multidimensional framework that can be used to basically complement the approach that considers labour market position a fundamental category in studies of social segmentation.

Most significant authors in the history of sociological theory, even if they did not necessarily use the term 'integration', were clearly concerned with what binds society together, triggers and motivates the cooperation of social actors, or the mechanisms that act counter to it. Understanding the functioning of society and the mechanisms that integrate or disintegrate the actions of individuals and groups has also been a constant subject of research throughout the history of sociology. Integration is a basic condition for social reproduction that takes place at the individual, institutional, and relationship levels, for which the necessary cooperation, security, and a kind of predictability can be ensured by accepted and relatively permanent written and codified and unwritten rules, norms, and values.

Integration mechanisms are those actions, attitudes, concepts, and norms that improve and maintain the cooperation of the actors in a given integration system, increase the feeling of belonging, and reduce the chance of communication disturbances and the development or deepening of conflicts. The agents of integration can be individuals, micro- or macro-level groups, economic units, institutions or states and supra-state organisations. Permanent and stable integration mechanisms have a distinguished role, as their operation determines the status, opportunities, and life chances of members of society. Gidron and Hall (2020) argue that social integration can be used effectively in the investigation of a social phenomenon (in their research, populism) if it combines economic and social approaches. Dupcsik and Szabari, citing Jeffrey Alexander's (1987) analysis of Parsons's proposed research on the integration mechanisms related to employment, occupation, norms, knowledge, social capital and social networks and politics, emphasise that actors' knowledge and ideas about integration mechanisms may be essential determinants of the success of integration (Dupcsik & Szabari, 2015). The renewal of the concept and model of social integration is also justified by the fact that the conditions of social reproduction have fundamentally changed – above all, the magnitude of the central redistribution of resources and development subsidies (Csanádi et al., 2022). Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) directly assume the existence of project-based, redistributive capitalism. The increase in the extent and magnitude of redistribution is a source of new social differences (Gerő & Kovách, 2022; Csizmadia & Szikra, 2019) and opens up space for central political control and interventions.

In our series of studies (Huszár et al., 2020; Kovách et al., 2015; 2016; 2018) we use a novel concept of social integration. The introduction of the new concept of social integration is justified by the fact that occupational class models (EGP and its variants) and income class models do not include the concept of social integration, and our study specifically aims to analyse the difference in the integration of occupational classes. The British new class model (Savage et al., 2013), created due to the need to renew class analysis, combines occupational position and consumption characteristics but also neglects the aspects of complex social integration. The main question addressed in this paper is how the social

integration of individuals is related to their status in the system of social inequalities and what integration mechanisms facilitate or even force interaction between social position and integration.

2 Theoretical background

In the classical theories of social structure and stratification research, the distribution of socially important goods is mainly connected with issues of social integration. For Marx, the class structure and inequality of capitalist societies were essential factors because of the social conflicts that led to the collapse of capitalism (its integrative systems) (Marx & Engels, [1848] 2008). In Weber's theory, an important question is to what extent can a position in a social structure be the basis of community contact and joint political action and how does this affect the validity of a legitimate order (Weber, 2019). Adherents of the functionalist tradition, who emphasise the normative integration of society, also systematically seek to explore the structural and stratification causes that threaten the normative integration of society (Parsons, 1949; 1970).

It was Robert Merton (1938) who probably most effectively reinterpreted the correlations between the place occupied in the social structure and social integration; he reinterpreted Durkheim's concept of anomie and differentiated different types of individual adaptation and their presence in different social structures based on socially designated cultural goals and institutionally available tools (norms, rules, and their controls). According to Merton, there may be different forms of adaptation to the norms and value judgements accepted by society, from full conformity to rebellion. If everyone in a society accepts norms to the maximum extent, then all change and all development stops, while total rebellion leads to anarchy. In stable societies, the most common type of adaptation is conformity, which involves the acceptance of both cultural goals and institutional tools. The other Mertonian types indicate some disorder of social integration. Innovators accept culturally defined, normative goals but no longer the institutional tools that are available. Ritualists, in turn, question goals while adhering to institutional tools. Retractors reject both cultural goals and tools, while Rebels also question goals and tools but actively seek to change them.

Deviant behaviour occurs *en masse* in a society when the cultural value system privileges and highlights success-related goals valid for the whole population, while at the same time, the rigidity of the social structure and the lack of mass mobility restrict or completely block a sizeable proportion of the same population from using the permitted and approved means to achieve these goals (Merton, 1938). For example, exclusion from material goods, a manifestation of poverty and material failure, typically leads to deviance and norm disruption.

In this paper, we focus on how different occupational groups of society integrate into Hungarian society and how their integration changed between 2015 and 2021. The institutional tools assigned to the achievement of cultural goals appear through several different dimensions of social integration (Kováč et al., 2016).

It is particularly important to note that the social policy literature also uses the concept of integration, primarily in the sense of inclusion, the latter which mainly aims to

improve the social situation of the disadvantaged. In this sense, integration/inclusion refers to sub-social groups. However, our scientific endeavour was to understand the integration of the whole of society and the comprehensive mechanisms of integration/disintegration, of which ‘exclusion’ (Szalai, 2013) and ‘citizenship’ (Evers & Guillemard, 2012) represent only some, albeit essential, elements that have also been accepted in EU terminology. Robert Castel (2017) expands the interpretation of social integration with the complex dimension of work and the concept of ‘civil society’ reinterpreted in the direction of Habermas’ (1984; 1987) ‘lifeworld’ construction.

In our series of studies, we distinguished three levels of social integration (Kovách et al., 2016; 2018): system integration, social integration, and interpersonal integration. We consider *system integration* as political and social actions, activities, attitudes and norms that increase social and political cohesion, reduce the chances of communication disorders or political and social conflict, and, at the same time, promote the development of the diffuse legitimacy of the political system (Szabó & Oross, 2016; Gerő & Szabó, 2020; Huszár & Szabó 2023). *Social integration* refers to the ways, actions and tools through which members of society interact, communicate, strengthen and accept their belonging within a community (Dupcsik & Szabari, 2015). *Interpersonal integration* examines how people feel in their narrowly defined world of life (Albert & Dávid, 2012, p. 343; Dávid et al., 2023). Finally, these concepts are ideal-typical and very difficult to grasp on an empirical level. For this reason, we decided to attempt to operationalise all three levels of integration using measurable variables and groups of variables at the most basic level possible (Kovách et al., 2016). The *level of system integration* is covered by mechanisms and knowledge related to the political subsystem, institutions and, at least in part, norms and values. Political values and their differentiation are the subject of both political culture and political socialisation literature. *Social integration* includes mechanisms that redistribute available resources among different strata of society (Czibere et al., 2023; Csanádi, 2020) and labour market conditions (Illéssy et al., 2020; 2021). Social networks and the subjective sense of social exclusion belong *to the level of interpersonal integration*. In the 2015 research and its repetition in 2018 and 2021, we sought to measure each level of integration with at least two but rather three sets of variables. The variables captured the most important areas of the given integration mechanism. The specific method and tools of measurement for each integration level are presented in (Kovách et al., 2016).

We assume, on the one hand, that social integration has different dimensions and, on the other, that integration and disintegration-related problems occur in different ways and to different degrees in different segments of the social structure. In this paper, we analyse this on the basis of the normative-functionalist model of social structure (Huszár, 2013). For the purpose of this analysis, we selected four grouping dimensions of two integration mechanisms, political participation and acceptance of norm violation, that play a role in system integration, and two aspects of interpersonal integration: the *number of weak ties*, i.e. nexus diversity and *subjective social exclusion*. All four dimensions are part of the Mertonian theory of deviance, either in a manifest or latent manner.

The selection of these integration mechanisms allows the adaptation of Mertonian inspiration but also expands it in some way when researching integration and its mechanisms. Merton made it clear that the most important tool for adapting to cultural goals is compliance with norms. If we accept social norms and integrate somewhat into a given

society, deviance (and disintegration) can be somewhat alleviated. One's personal network helps with learning about social norms and facilitates adaptation. The broader this system of relations is, the more organic and the simpler it is to adopt or at least accept rules and control mechanisms related to social norms. The narrowing of the personal network can be accompanied by loneliness, social isolation and, ultimately, the intensification of social exclusion. According to Merton, rebellion as a form of action aimed at changing cultural goals and institutionally available means primarily refers to active political participation; 'organised political participation'. Therefore, one of the integration mechanisms we use examines participation. The fourth mechanism is the subjective *sense of exclusion*, interpreted as a form of social manifestation of deviance, involving when an individual feels that, whether or not they accept social norms and adapt to cultural goals, social integration mechanisms marginalise them based on their origin or material/financial, cultural and symbolic capital disadvantages. Without society effectively operating the institutions that control norms, such people are left alone and disconnected from institutional channels for advancement. The following sections examine how these integration mechanisms have changed in different occupational groups between 2015 and 2021.²

3 Data and methods

The study is based on three surveys carried out in 2015 (N=2687), 2018 (N=2700) and 2021(N=5000), all of them representative of the Hungarian adult population.³

3.1 Description of the variables of integration mechanisms

Acceptance of norm violation was created from four questions based on the *World Values Survey* questionnaire. We asked respondents to mark on an 11-point scale their tolerance of specific violations of social norms.⁴ The variable was recoded according to whether the respondent permitted or completely rejected the given violation. A principal component was created using the four responses. Positive values indicate acceptance of the norm violation; negative values indicate norm compliance.

Political participation was captured with a three-category variable (Kovách et al., 2016). Respondents were regarded as politically 'active' if they participated in parliamentarian elections and were involved in at least one of eight modes of political participation⁵

² In an earlier paper, we carried out the same analysis for the period 2015–2018 (Huszár et al., 2020).

³ The research was carried out within the framework of the HAS Excellence Cooperation Programme, Mobility Research Centre project. Interviews were conducted face-to-face (CAPI).

⁴ (A) giving money to a police officer to avoid punishment; (B) littering in public places; (C) not asking for an invoice so as to pay less; (D) keeping money returned from the store cashier or waiter even though one knows one received more than was due.

⁵ Contacted a politician; activity in the work of a political party, participated in its events; participated in other political organization or movement activity; wore or displayed political badges and symbols; signed a protest letter, petition; participated in a demonstration; deliberately did not buy, boycotted certain goods; donated money to an NGO.

listed in the questionnaire in the year preceding the survey. 'Only voters' participated only in elections; politically passive respondents were not involved in any political activities.

The *number of weak ties* was defined as the number of persons known to the respondents from the 21 occupational categories listed in the questionnaire.⁶

Subjective social exclusion was composed of four items (European Quality of Life Survey). Respondents had to state to what extent they agreed with four statements on a five-point Likert scale:

- 'I feel excluded by society'
- 'Life has become so complicated I can barely find my way.'
- 'I feel like the people I meet don't recognise the value of what I do.'
- 'Some people look down on me because of my job or because I don't work.'

The indicator of subjective social exclusion is the average of the four responses. The higher the value of the variable, the more the respondent feels excluded.

3.2 Description of the normative-functionalist class model

The normative-functionalist class model classifies members of society on the basis of their economic activity, occupation and other characteristics of the labour market (Huszár, 2013). Other class models (for example, EGP) incorporate those temporarily or permanently absent from the labour market into the model based on their previous occupation or labour market characteristics. However, the normative-functionalist model does this based on current economic activity. Retired people are grouped according to their previous occupation, such as retired professionals and managers or retired skilled workers. The normative-functionalist model also treats entrepreneurs as a separate group (Figure 1).

4 Results

4.1 Integration mechanisms and the normative-functionalist class model

Figures 2 to 5 show the distribution of the four highlighted integration mechanisms according to the occupational class model. It is important to point out that the relationship between the class model and social integration is fundamentally affected by the fact that the social structure itself has changed. The results of the six-year data collection process indicate this well. In parallel with the significant increase in employment, the share of those belonging to inactive groups decreased significantly, while that of the employed increased (Figure 1).

⁶ a) high school teacher; b) driver; c) computer technician, IT specialist; d) tax expert, accountant; e) mayor, local government representative; f) water-gas repairman; g) car mechanic; h) a lawyer; i) waiter; j) engineer; k) company manager, director; l) shop assistant; m) journalist; n) actor, musician, singer; o) surgeon; p) administrator; q) nurse; r) college, university lecturer, researcher; s) unskilled worker; t) individual agricultural farmer (peasant farmer); u) security guard.

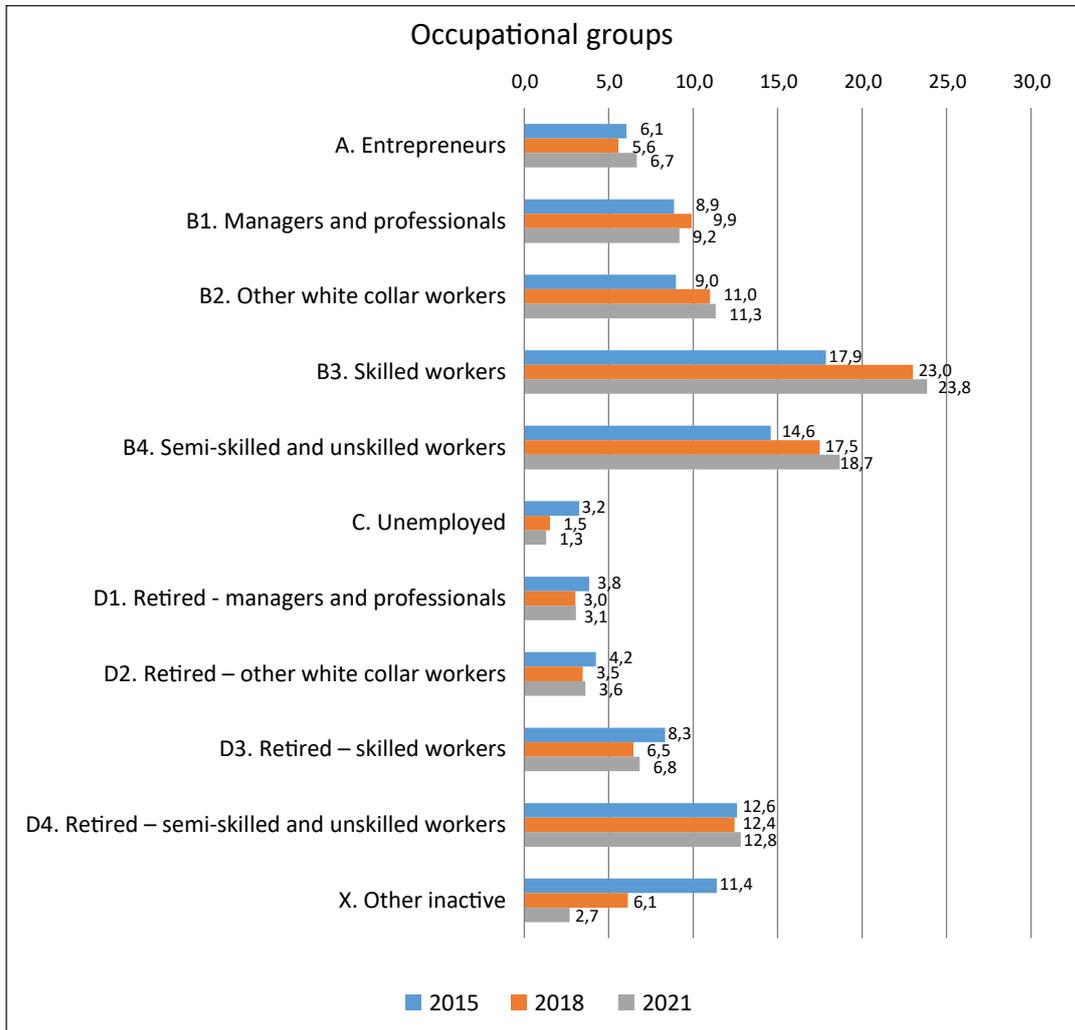


Figure 1 Occupational groups (normative-functionalist class model) 2015, 2018, 2021 (%)

Source: HAS Excellence Cooperation Programme ‘Mobility Research Centre’ project

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the number of weak ties for occupational groups. The average number of weak ties per respondent in the total sample was 8.5 in 2015, 11.2 in 2018 and 9.8 in 2021.

According to the ANOVA report, the distribution of weak ties significantly differed among the occupational groups on all three data collection dates. Weak ties were distributed among the occupational groups as follows: In 2015, we found managers and professionals had an above-average number (12.2 ties), followed by entrepreneurs (11.1), retired managers and professionals (9.9), other white-collar workers (9.6) and skilled workers (9.1).

The average number of weak ties was mainly associated with the unemployed (8.3); semi-skilled and unskilled workers had below average (7.9), as did other inactive (7.8) and all other retired groups (7.1; 6.5; 5.8).

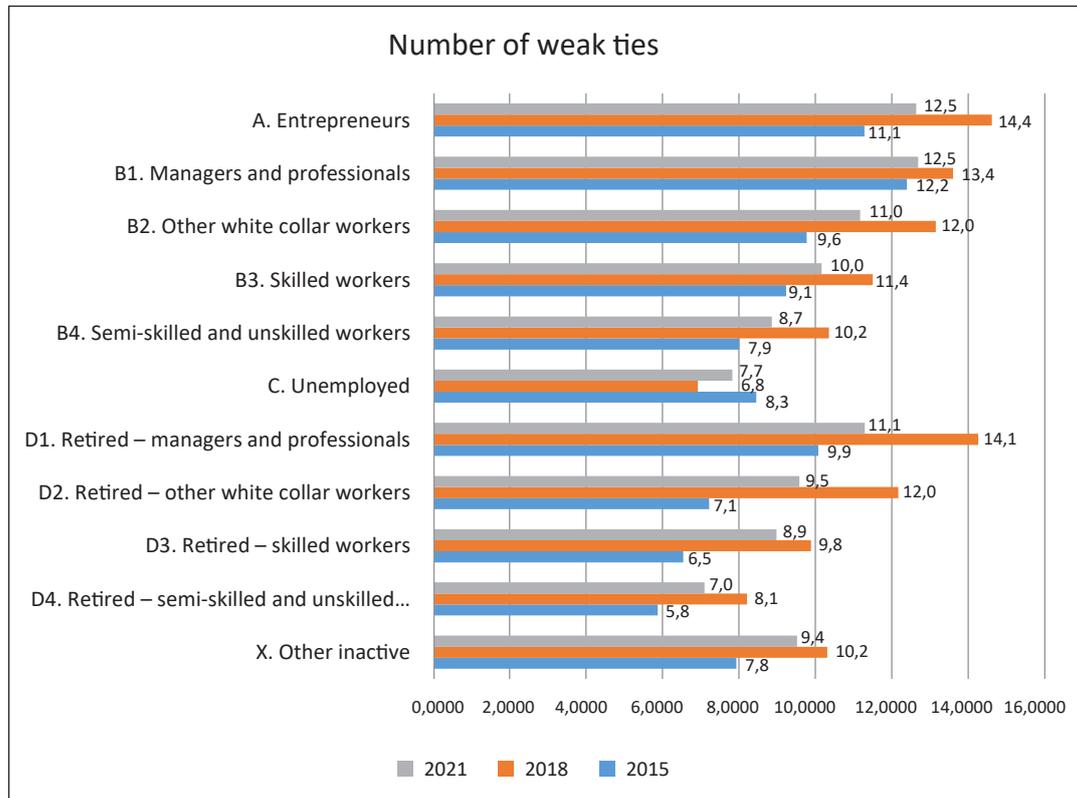


Figure 2 Number of weak ties per member of an occupational group in 2015, 2018 and 2021

Source: HAS Excellence Cooperation Programme 'Mobility Research Centre' project.

In 2018, alongside entrepreneurs (14.4), the average number of weak ties of retired managers and professionals (14.1) also exceeded that of active managers and professionals. We also found both active and retired other white-collar workers to have an above-average number (13 and 12 ties, respectively). The overall societal average number of weak ties in 2018 was best represented by skilled workers (with 11.4 ties). A below-average number of weak ties was identified among semi-skilled and unskilled workers and other inactive people (both 10.2), retired skilled workers (9.8), retired semi-skilled and unskilled workers (8.1) and, with the lowest average number, the unemployed (6.8).

In 2021, entrepreneurs, managers, and professionals had 12.5 weak ties on average. The following groups richest in weak ties were retired managers and professionals (11.1) and other white-collar workers (11). Similarly to 2018, skilled workers had slightly above the average number (10). Retired other white-collar workers (9.5), other inactive (9.4), re-

tired skilled workers (8.9), semi-skilled and unskilled workers (8.7), unemployed people (7.7), and retired semi-skilled and unskilled workers (7) had below the average number in respect of weak ties.

As weak ties are mainly linked to the division of labour, it is not surprising that pensioners and the inactive have fewer of these. It is noteworthy, however, that the average number of weak ties among managers and professionals exceeds the social average, even in retirement. It is also striking that the average number of weak ties for the group of unemployed in 2015 (presumably heterogeneous according to their original occupation) exceeded the average of the weak ties of working semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Overall, for those with an economically active status, a higher occupational position is associated with fewer weaker ties, which may maintain the hierarchy of occupational groups in the long run.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of subjective social exclusion across the occupational classes (Figure 3).

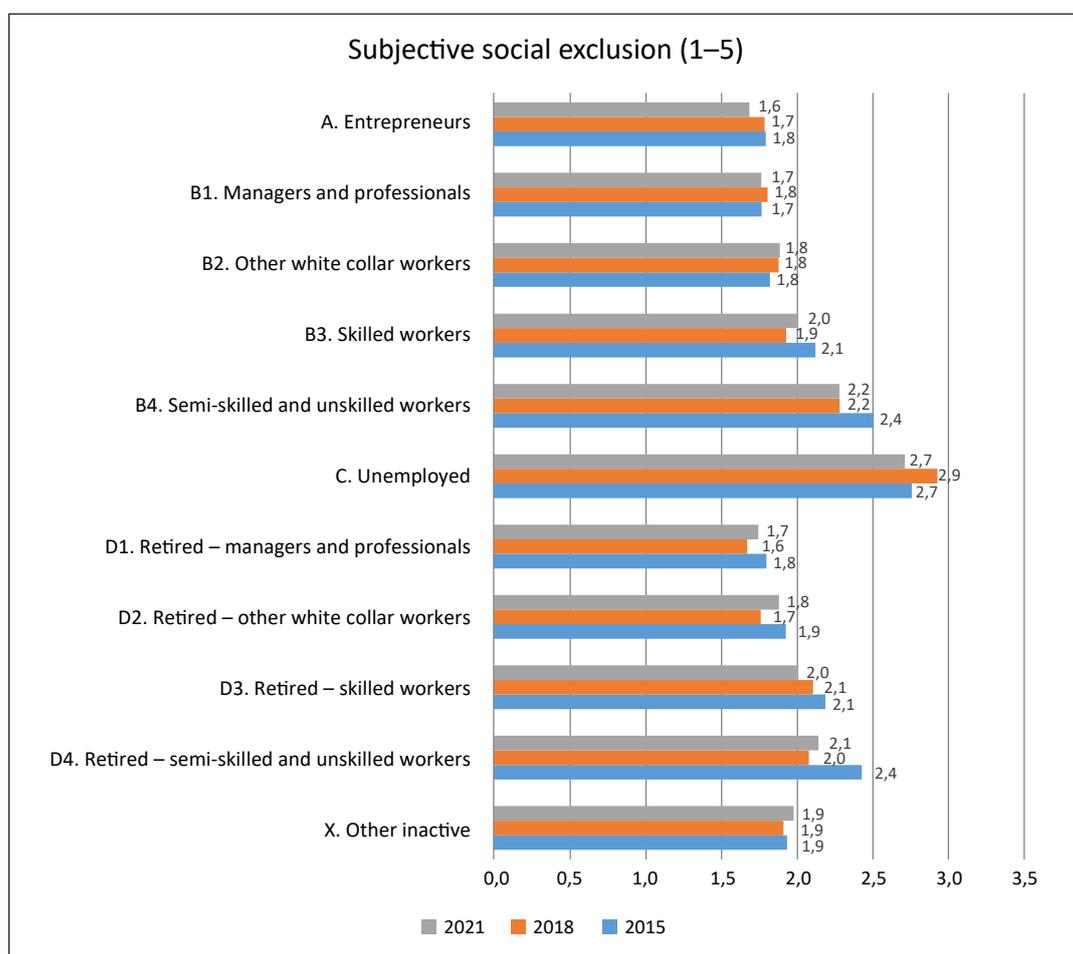


Figure 3 Subjective social exclusion according to occupational group, 2015, 2018 and 2021

Source: HAS Excellence Cooperation Programme 'Mobility Research Centre' project.

Similarly to weak ties, the distribution of subjective social exclusion was significantly different among the occupational groups on all three data collection dates, according to the ANOVA report. Between 2015 and 2018, this indicator declined somewhat, from 2.1 to 1.9, while between 2018 and 2021, it slightly but significantly increased to 2.0. In 2015, entrepreneurs (1.8), active and retired managers and professionals (1.7 and 1.8), active and retired other white-collar workers (1.8 and 1.9) and other inactive (1.9) persons perceived less than average exclusion. The subjective social exclusion of skilled workers and retired skilled workers was average (2.1); it was mainly active and retired semi-skilled and unskilled workers (2.4) and the unemployed (2.7) who perceived exclusion. Retirement status alone did not increase the subjective sense of exclusion – much less than low employment status (unskilled) and, of course, unemployment.

In 2018, retired managers and professionals (1.6), retired other white-collar workers (1.7), entrepreneurs (1.7), managers and professionals (1.8) and other white-collar workers (1.8) were those least likely to perceive themselves as excluded. The feeling of exclusion among skilled workers and other inactive people was average (1.9). Retired semi-skilled and unskilled workers (2), retired skilled workers (2.1), and active semi-skilled and unskilled workers (2.2) felt more excluded than the average. In 2021, similar patterns could be observed. Individuals with a higher occupational class and their retired counterparts felt less excluded; skilled workers and retired skilled workers represented the average (2), while unemployed people continued to feel seriously excluded. The high social positions of the economically active are accompanied by a lower subjective sense of exclusion, which largely persists into retirement. The subjective sense of exclusion experienced by the lower occupational strata, especially the unemployed, is also a lasting feature.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of political participation across occupational classes (Figure 4).

Political participation is another integration mechanism that was significantly different among the occupational groups on all three data collection dates. Political participation averaged 0.8 in 2015, 0.63 in 2018 and 0.64 in 2021. In 2015, political activity among managers and professionals (1.22), entrepreneurs (1.03), retired managers and professionals (1.03) and retired and active other white-collar workers (0.95 and 0.89) was above average. The political participation of skilled workers was closest to the average (0.77). Retired and active semi-skilled workers (0.69 and 0.67), retired skilled workers (0.65), other inactive (0.65), and the unemployed (0.60) were associated with below-average political participation.

In 2018, the order of occupational groups changed somewhat. However, the trend was similar: the values of active entrepreneurs (0.86), active and retired managers and professionals (0.78 and 0.75), and active and retired other white-collar workers (0.74 and 0.71) were above average. The political activity of retired skilled workers was average (0.65), and that of skilled workers (0.58), semi-skilled and unskilled workers (0.58), other inactive people (0.53) and retired semi-skilled and unskilled workers (0.50) was below average. This year, the unemployed (0.42) were also at the end of the line.

In 2021, retired managers and professionals were even more active politically (0.9) than their active counterparts (0.82) and entrepreneurs (0.77). The political activity of retired other white-collar workers (0.74) also exceeded that of their active counterparts (0.65). The same pattern could be observed among retired (0.70) and active (0.58) skilled workers. The political activity of the unemployed slightly exceeded the average (0.65), while that of active (0.58) and retired (0.55) semi-skilled and unskilled workers, together with the other inactive (0.51), remained well below average.

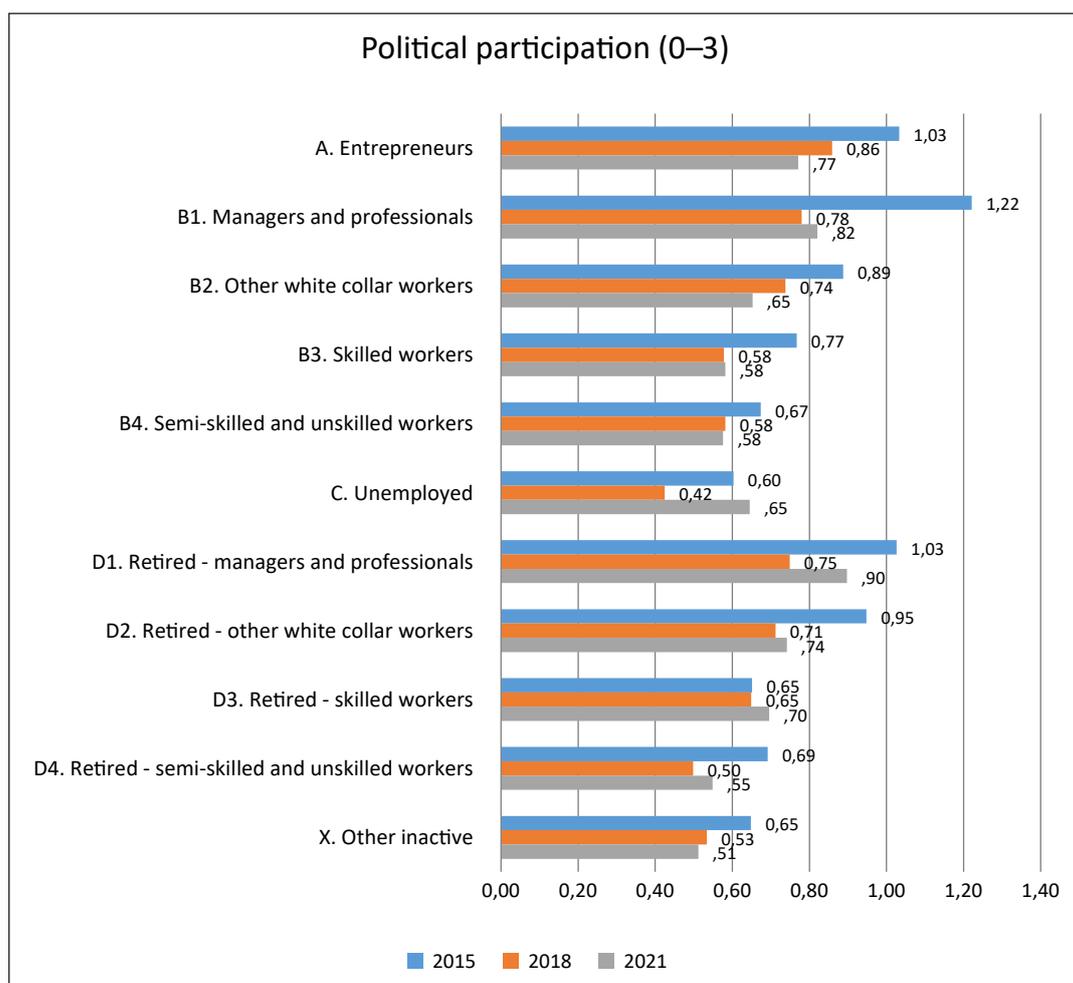


Figure 4 Index of political participation according to occupational group, 2015, 2018 and 2021

Source: HAS Excellence Cooperation Programme 'Mobility Research Centre' project.

Figure 5 shows changes in the acceptance of norm violation across occupational groups.

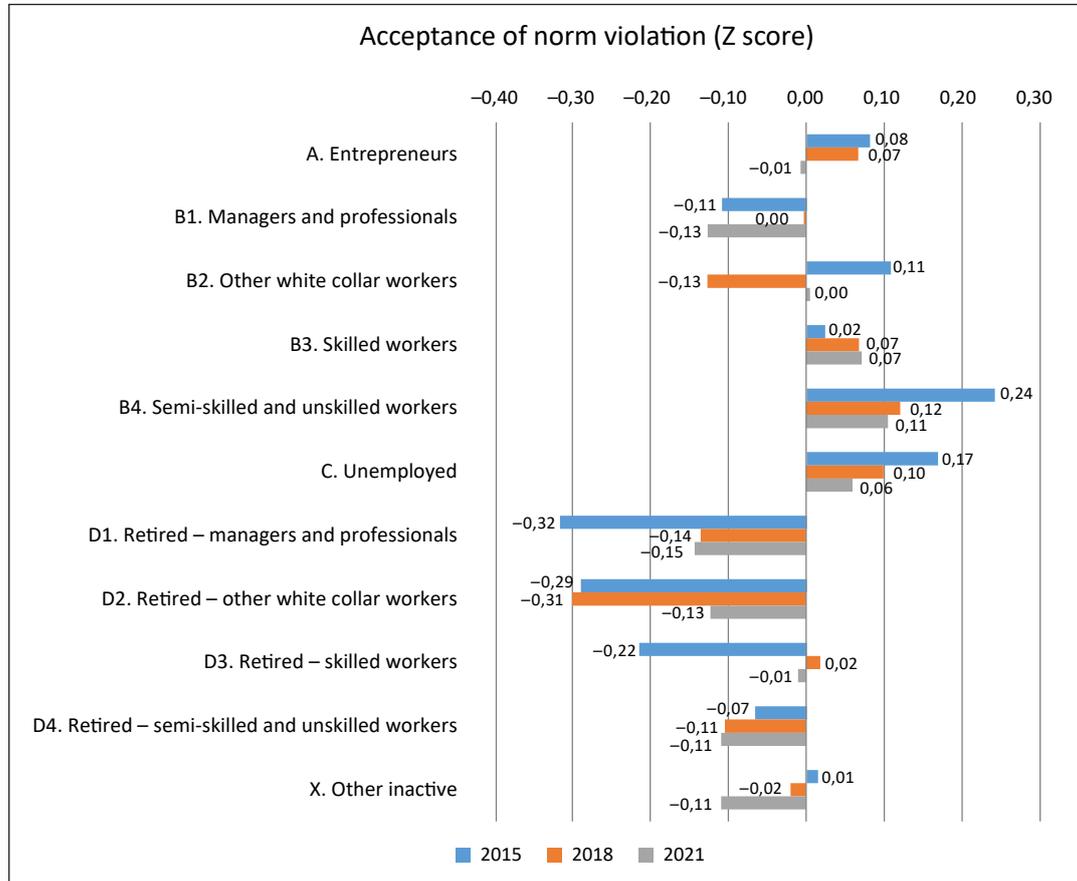


Figure 5 Acceptance of norm violation according to occupational group, 2015, 2018 and 2021⁷

Source: HAS Excellence Cooperation Programme 'Mobility Research Centre' project.

In all three studied years, the acceptance of norm violation was significantly different among occupational classes. The general trend in 2015 and 2018 was that white-collar workers and retired people were more norm-compliant than blue-collar workers, entrepreneurs and the unemployed. This pattern somewhat changed in 2021. While active blue-collar workers were still more tolerant of norm violations, entrepreneurs no longer exceeded the social average in terms of accepting norm violations.

In the following section, we analyse how the above integration mechanisms relate to each other, i.e., how occupational groups can be located in the two-dimensional space stretched by the pairs of every two integration mechanisms. Correlation statistics for the

⁷ Positive values indicate acceptance of violation; negative values indicate norm compliance.

four mechanisms (pairwise) are shown in the Appendix (Table 2). Generally, the number of weak ties and political participation is correlated moderately strongly but permanently. At the same time, there is a relatively strong correlation between subjective social exclusion and the acceptance of norm violation that increases over time.

4.2 The location of occupational groups in the space stretched by the integration dimensions

Figure 6 displays occupational groups located on the basis of subjective social exclusion and number of weak ties.

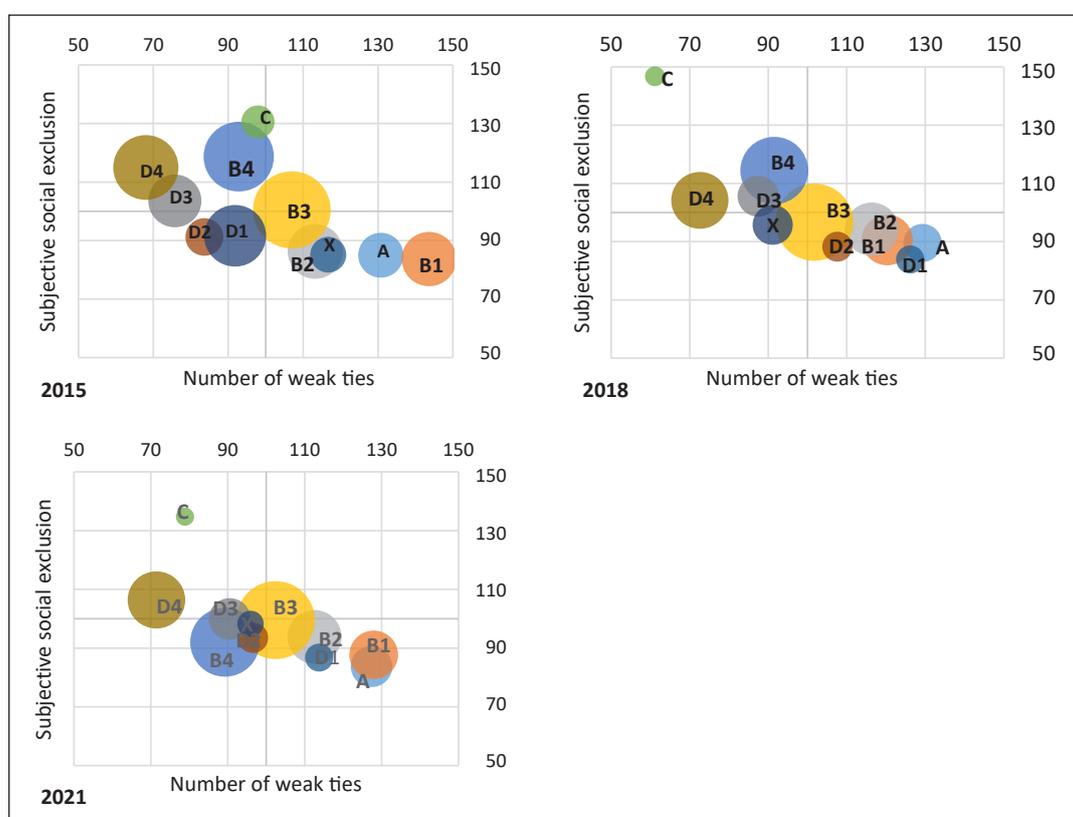


Figure 6 Occupational groups in a space stretched by weak ties and social exclusion (2015, 2018 and 2021)⁸

Source: HAS Excellence Cooperation Programme 'Mobility Research Centre' project.

⁸ The size of the circles indicates the size of the given occupational group. Colours help identify groups because the same colour always indicates the same occupational group. Group names: A. Entrepreneurs; B1. Managers and professionals; B2. Other white-collar workers; B3. Skilled workers; B4. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers; C. Unemployed; D1. Retired managers and professionals; D2. Retired other white-collar workers; D3. Retired skilled workers; D4. Retired semi-skilled and unskilled workers; X. Other inactive.

The visualisation clearly shows that the unemployed (marked C) group is separate from the other groups. Even in terms of weak ties, this group is the worst off, but it is really the strong perception of social exclusion that manifests in the form of distance in the figure, especially in 2018 and 2021.

The other occupational groups feel much less excluded and instead only show greater dispersion according to average number of weak ties. For this indicator, the group of retired semi-skilled and unskilled workers (D4) lags, but this cannot be said of the other groups of pensioners (D1-3); instead, they appear to be similar to their own active group with the same occupational status.

The following figure clearly shows the strong correlation (see Table 2 in Appendix) between political participation and the number of weak ties in occupational groups: political activity and the number of weak ties increase almost linearly together (Figure 7).

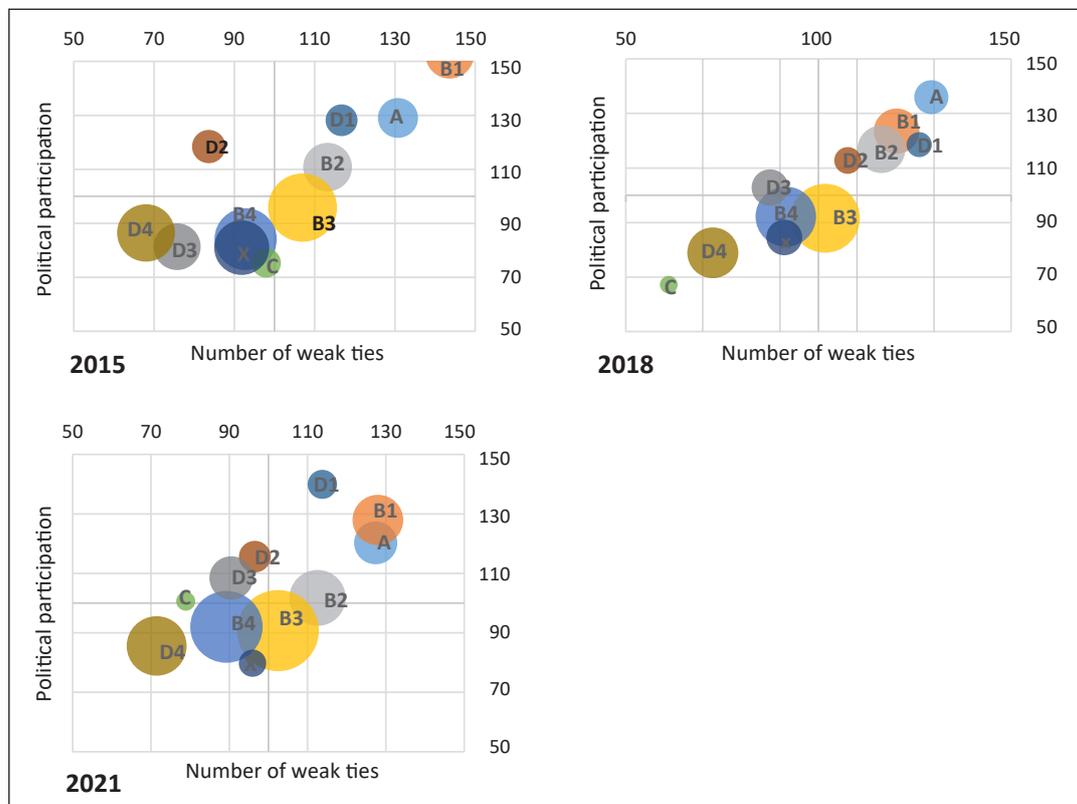


Figure 7 Occupational groups in a space stretched by weak ties and political participation (2015, 2018 and 2021)

Source: HAS Excellence Cooperation Programme 'Mobility Research Centre' project.

The strong political participation/many weak ties quadrant is occupied by the higher strata of the occupational class model: entrepreneurs (A), managers and professionals (B1) and other white-collar workers (B2). Low-skilled workers, unemployed and retired semi-skilled

and unskilled workers are located in the low political participation/few weak ties quadrant, while other occupational groups are roughly oriented around the origin (retired skilled workers [D3] are slightly more politically active, while non-retired skilled workers [B3] have slightly more weak ties). The social groups on the top in the normative-functionalist model have spectacularly high values in terms of both the number of ties and participation.

The figure for political participation and social exclusion (Figure 8), similar to Figure 6, is less scattered according to social exclusion than by the other dimension, political activity.

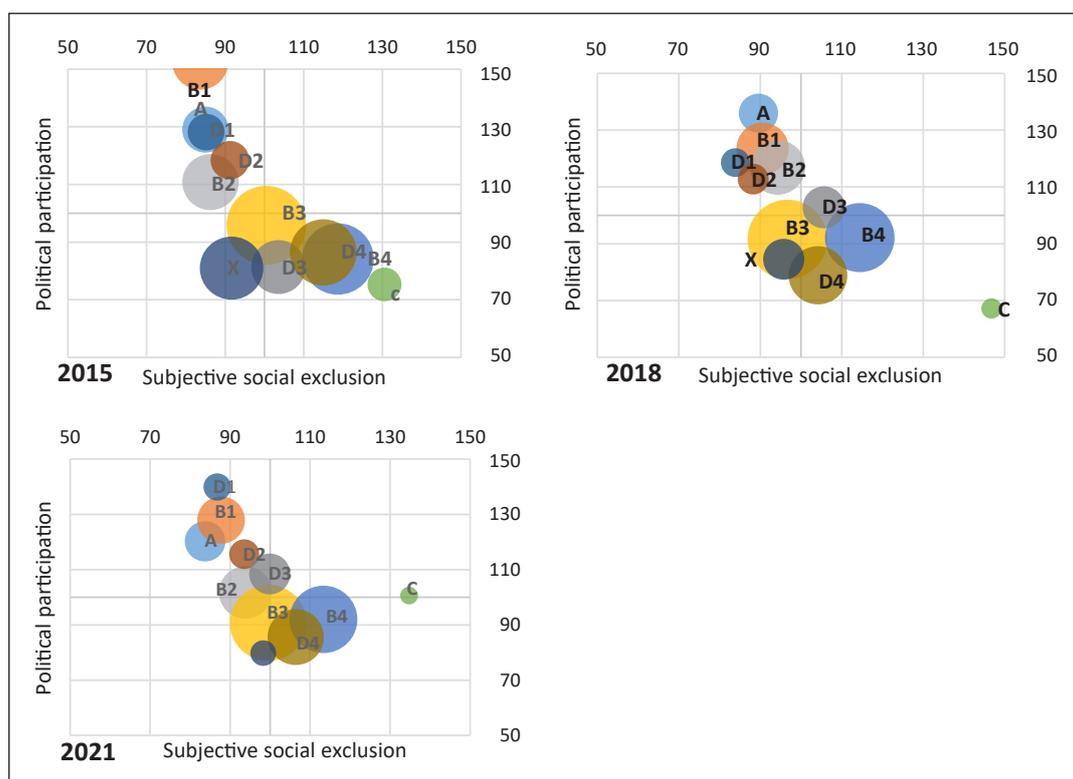


Figure 8 Occupational groups in a space stretched by the perception of social exclusion and political participation (2015, 2018 and 2021)

Source: HAS Excellence Cooperation Programme 'Mobility Research Centre' project.

Here, too, the exceptional group is that of the unemployed (C), who are far from the others because of their subjective sense of exclusion. The other occupational groups appear to be divided into two major groups: blue-collar workers, together with other inactive people, are less politically active. Among them, retirees (D3-4) and semi-skilled and unskilled workers (B4) also feel somewhat excluded. Groups with a higher occupational status (A, B1-2, D1-2), on the other hand, are more politically active and have a weak sense of exclusion.

All three figures above clearly show that the unemployed (C) and retirees who worked as semi-skilled or unskilled workers before retirement (D4) have unfavourable values according to the three mechanisms of the integration model (subjective social exclusion, number of weak ties, and political participation), i.e. they feel more excluded, have a smaller number of weak ties and low political participation. The negative values of the three variables suggest that those with low-status employment positions in the normative-functionalist model may also be considered under-integrated.

4.3 The dimension of norm compliance

Based on Mertonian theory, norm compliance is of particular importance among the analytical aspects addressed in this paper.

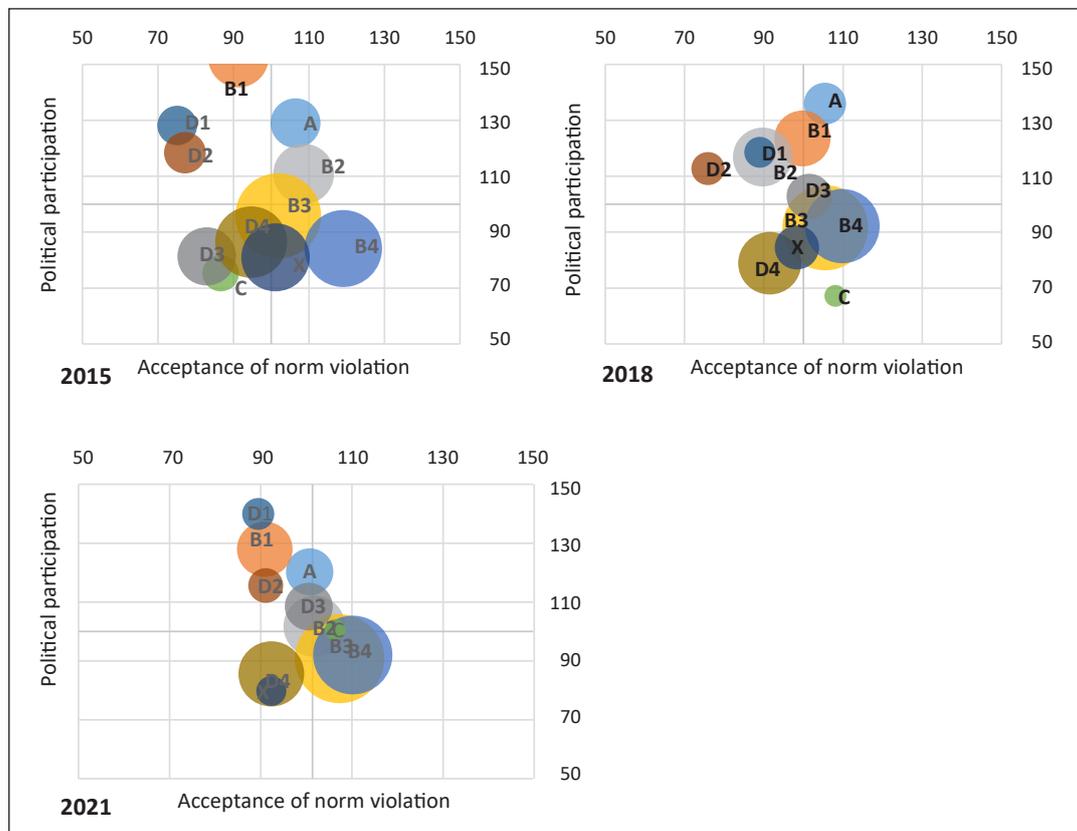


Figure 9 Occupational groups in a space stretched by acceptance of norm violation⁹ and political participation (2015, 2018 and 2021)

Source: HAS Excellence Cooperation Programme 'Mobility Research Centre' project.

⁹ Positive values indicate acceptance of norm violation; negative values indicate its rejection.

Based on Figure 9, we can conclude that greater political activity is usually accompanied by a rejection of the violation of norms. The participation of other white-collar workers (B2), as well as retired managers and professionals (D1), is among the highest, and these individuals firmly reject norm violations. The group of entrepreneurs is special. The highest political participation is recorded for their group, but the violation of norms is considered acceptable by them to one of the greatest extents of any group in 2015 and 2018. In the case of retired semi-skilled and unskilled workers (D4), adherence to norms is associated with low political participation. An important observation is that skilled workers (B3), semi-skilled and unskilled workers (B4) (jointly 41 per cent of all respondents) with low political activity are more tolerant of norm violation. The unemployed (C) behave very similarly to the strata of active workers: low political activity is accompanied by acceptance of the violation of norms. By 2021, the correlation between political participation and acceptance of norm-violation did not change: the most politically active occupational groups rejected norm-breaking the most. The exception is the behaviour of retired skilled workers and other inactive groups, where the least political activity was associated with strongly rejecting norm-breaking. By 2021, the integration gap between active and inactive managers, professionals, entrepreneurs, and workers decreased somewhat but did not disappear. On the other hand, the deviation between the integration values of political participation and the violation of norms between other (lower-level) intellectuals and skilled workers significantly declined.

Figure 10 shows the occupational groups in the space stretched by acceptance of norm violation and subjective exclusion.

As shown in Figure 10, not surprisingly, subjective social exclusion and acceptance of norm violation tend to correlate strongly (see Table 2 in Appendix). Those who consider their exclusion strong are much more accepting of violating norms. The active workers' strata, with the exception of a larger group of skilled workers (B3), feel excluded, and a large part of them accept norm violations. The weaker degree of social exclusion felt by active and inactive white-collar occupational groups is always associated with a rejection of norm violations. Entrepreneurs (A) do not feel excluded but more readily accept norm violations. The sense of social exclusion among the unemployed (C) and their acceptance of norm violations are extremely strong. Retired semi-skilled and unskilled workers (D4) feel excluded but do not accept norm violations.

Figure 11 shows the occupational groups in the space stretched by acceptance of norm violation and the number of weak ties. Managers and professionals (D1) have the weakest ties among those belonging to the upper social strata (A, B1, B2) and among retirees, managers and professionals; however, the norm compliance of these strata is different. As we have repeatedly indicated, entrepreneurs (A) tended to accept norm violations in 2015 and 2018, while other white-collar workers (B2), as well as retired managers and professionals (D1), tended to be norm conformist. Compared to active skilled workers (B3) and semi-skilled and unskilled workers (B4), the retired strata of workers (D3-4) consistently had fewer weak ties, while at the same time, the violation of norms was judged differently. While active blue-collar workers (B3-4) and retired skilled workers (D3) accepted, retired semi-skilled and unskilled workers (D4) rejected norm violation. Finally, the unemployed (C) are completely isolated from the other strata because of their fewest weak ties coupled with one of the strongest acceptances of norm violation.

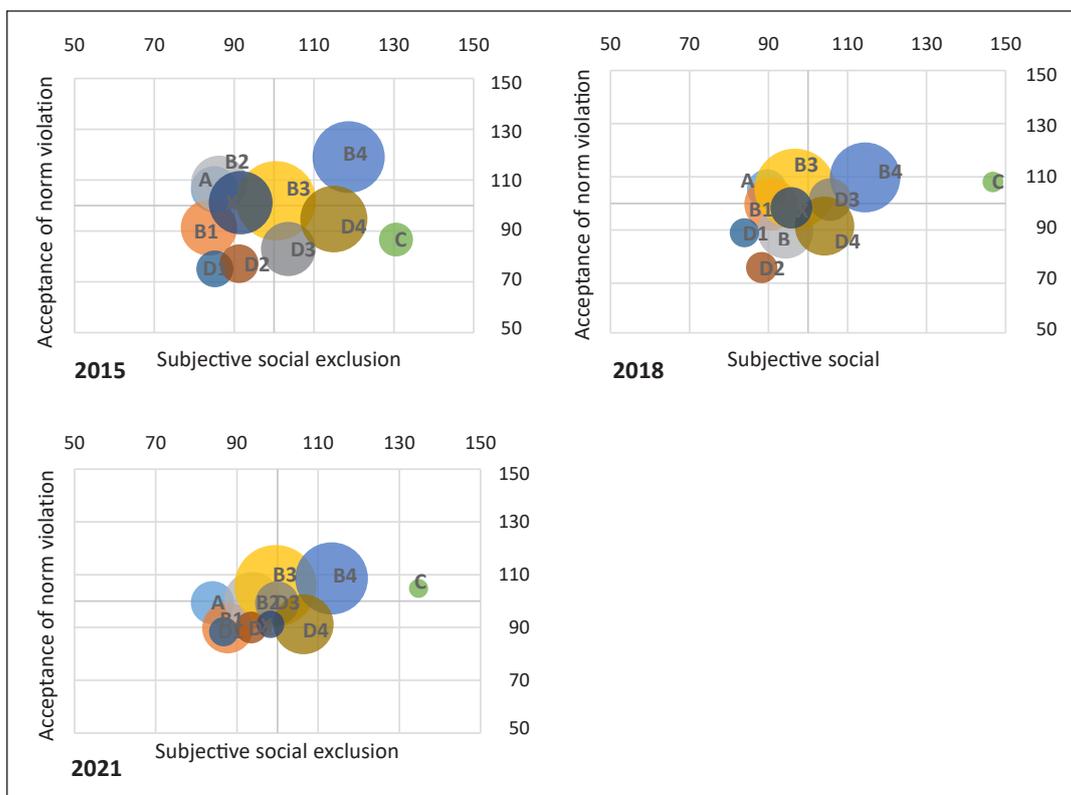


Figure 10 Occupational groups in the space stretched by acceptance of norm violation and subjective exclusion (2015, 2018 and 2021)

Source: HAS Excellence Cooperation Programme “Mobility Research Centre” project.

The changes in the four integration mechanisms and the normative-functionalist occupational class model between 2015 and 2021 represent the essential elements of the social integration of the period, which can be summarised as follows, based on Figures 6 to 11:

Based on all figures, it can be seen that the disintegration of occupational classes that accumulated labour market disadvantages (regarding activity, prestige, income, and working conditions) – the unemployed, semi-skilled and unskilled workers, retired semi-skilled and unskilled workers from other groups in society – had become strong by 2018, according to the interconnection of mechanisms relevant to integration. In particular, the disintegration of the unemployed has led to significant social distance. Interestingly, the ‘objective’ position of this group has not changed much between 2015 and 2021. There were no significant changes in the means of any of the four integration mechanisms (see Tables 3 and 4 in the Appendix). However, their relative position worsened in the sense that their social distance from other groups increased due to the improving social integration of the others.

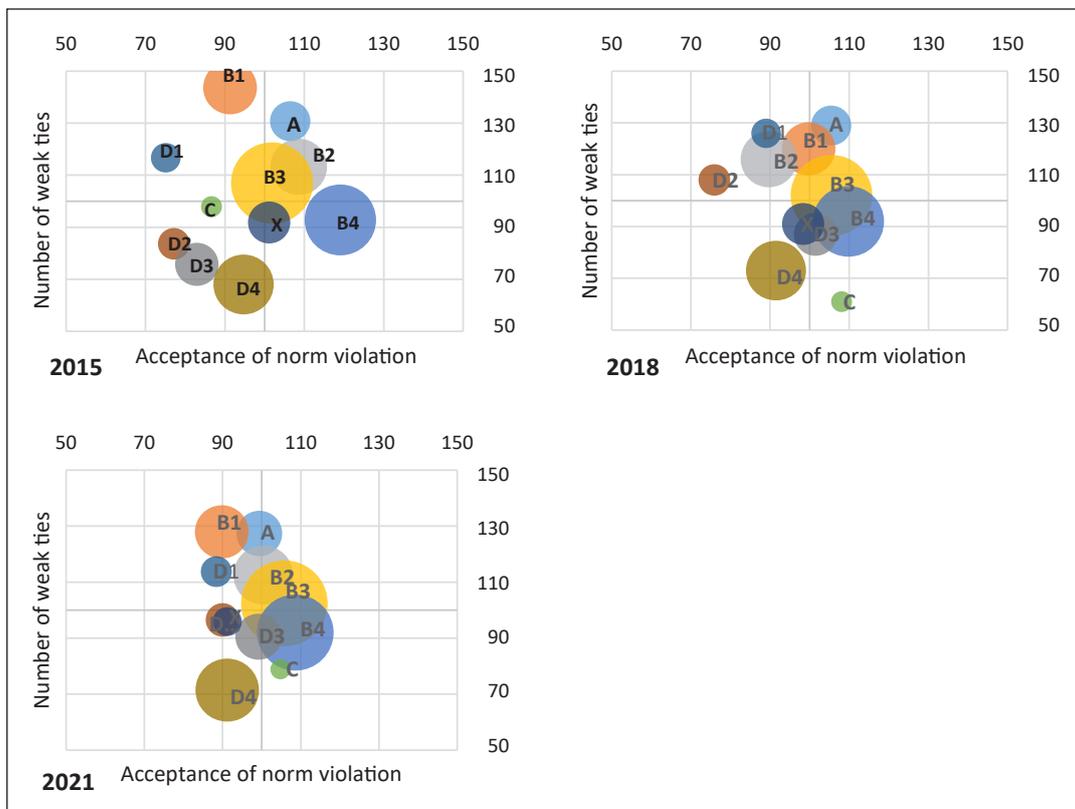


Figure 11 Occupational groups in the space stretched by acceptance of norm violation and number of weak ties (relationships) (2015, 2018 and 2021)

Source: HAS Excellence Cooperation Programme “Mobility Research Centre” project

While in 2015, the occupational group of managers and professionals was at a greater integration distance from general society, by 2018, their place had been taken over by the entrepreneurs, who considered norm violation as acceptable as those belonging to the most disadvantaged occupational groups. In 2021, neither of these two occupational groups was very distant from the other strata of society according to the integration indicators. Regarding social integration, from 2015 to 2021, the upper segments of skilled workers became more similar to managers, professionals, and other white-collar workers.

5 Conclusions

For our paper, we assumed that mechanisms of social integration differ significantly according to positions in the social structure. We believe this assumption is similar to Merton's understanding of the position occupied in the social structure. Namely, Merton discusses

the relationship between social integration and social structure, even if not entirely in the form used by Kovách and his co-authors since 2016. In Merton's theory, deviance and social problems appear primarily when large groups in society are excluded from the goals, norms and values accepted by all or a large part of society, most notably regarding material success.

Our paper examined the relationship between four of the seven mechanisms of the integration model (Kovách et al., 2016) and the normative-functionalist class model (Huszár, 2013). This occupational class model builds primarily on individuals' economic activity, occupation, and other labour market characteristics. The four integration mechanisms were the subjective perception of social exclusion, the number of weak ties, political participation, and acceptance of norm violation. All four mechanisms can be firmly linked to Merton's theory.

Our research found that there is an interpretable correlation between the occupational groups and the examined integration mechanisms. The 11 strata of the normative-functionalist model create a characteristic pattern based on subjective social exclusion, the number of weak ties, political participation, and acceptance of norm violation. Irrespective of the data collection wave (whether in 2015, 2018 or 2021), the upper strata of the class model (mostly entrepreneurs, managers and professionals, and other white-collar workers) consistently reported significantly more weak ties, a weaker sense of social exclusion, and greater political participation. We also found consistent yet opposing results for the lower strata of the occupational class model, mainly among the unemployed and unskilled and semi-skilled workers linked to lower qualifications. One of the most interesting results (which is independent of the date of data collection) is that leaving the labour market (more precisely, entering retirement age and having current retirement status) does not significantly change the integrational advantages and disadvantages associated with the economically active period (Albert, 2016). The measured values of retired managers, professionals and other white-collar workers were much more similar to those of active managers, professionals and other white-collar workers than those of retired skilled workers, especially semi-skilled and unskilled workers.

The distribution of the four integration mechanisms clearly showed the actual differences and inequalities between occupational groups. When we depicted each layer of the normative-functionalist class model in the space stretched by integration mechanisms, social inequalities became even more plastic. Referring back to Merton's theory, we conclude that the weak ties that embody social norms and values are those that reinforce the maintenance of one's position in the hierarchy in the long run.

Groups at the bottom of the hierarchy of the normative-functionalist model, such as the unemployed and retirees who were semi-skilled workers and unskilled workers in their earlier lives, were markedly separate in the space stretched by the partial cross-effects of the four dimensions that created the integration model. The differences between the strata were particularly evident in all the figures showing subjective social exclusion, the number of weak ties, the level of political participation, and the acceptance of norm violation. Retirees who used to work in lower prestige jobs, but mainly those excluded from the labour market, were disconnected from the other occupational groups of society. The situation of the unemployed has not worsened per se. However, it has not kept pace with the improvement in the situation of other occupational classes in this period of economic recovery.

The normative-functionalist class model indicates a weaker relationship between political participation and the number of weak ties, yet it is clear that these two integration mechanisms move together. The classic theories that deal with political participation make it clear that political participation involves collective action, and the participation of those who join through networks is the most active type (Hirschman, 1970; Jenkins & Klandermans, 1995; Kriesi, 1992). In essence, the wider one's network of relationships, the more likely one is to have an acquaintance who perceives participation as a norm and value and who facilitates the participation of others. Research in Hungary has shown that participants of political protests usually go to company events and join events through their acquaintances (Mikecz & Szabó, 2017).

We found that, in terms of social integration, class hierarchy is relatively stable over time. While there were some significant changes in the mechanisms of social integration between 2015 and 2018, the class hierarchy of social integration did not change much between 2018 and 2021. The only exception is the number of weak ties. We can only make assumptions about the possible effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on this dimension of social integration.

Overall, the combined treatment of the traditional, occupational-based normative-functionalist model and the four important dimensions of the integration model is able to present the manifestations of social inequalities in a much more nuanced way, indicating the disturbances in social integration and the resulting conflict.

All this suggests two issues for future research. One is addressing the question of to what extent the stabilisation of the integration system means strengthening social integration – or is it no more than a sign of the effectiveness of political integration, which can effectively mask and eliminate (political) interests linked to occupational class position? The other research task is checking whether the occupational stratification model(s) are suitable for the analysis of the complex issue of social integration and inequality or whether there are social changes underway, the understanding of which requires further development of the model.

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Appendix

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of integration mechanisms per year

2015	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Number of weak ties	2662	,00	21,00	8,5167	5,01041
Subjective social exclusion	2483	1,00	5,00	2,0633	,86824
Political participation	2455	,00	2,00	,7997	,78003
Acceptance of norm violation (zscore)	2567	–,92835	1,81938	,0000000	1,00000000
2018	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Number of weak ties	2668	,00	21,00	11,1625	5,36987
Subjective social exclusion	2621	1,00	5,00	1,9492	,97761
Political participation	2630	,00	2,00	,6316	,76321
Acceptance of norm violation (zscore)	2608	–,90836	1,36035	,0000000	1,00000000
2021	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Number of weak ties	4976	,00	21,00	9,7469	5,33264
Subjective social exclusion	4921	1,00	5,00	1,9606	1,04542
Political participation	4975	,00	2,00	,6342	,74782
Acceptance of norm violation (zscore)	4909	–,72241	1,85203	,0000000	1,00000000

Table 2 Bivariate correlations between integration mechanisms per years

2015		Number of weak ties	Subjective social exclusion	Political participation	Acceptance of norm violation
Number of weak ties	Pearson Correlation	1	-,080**	,232**	,011
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,000	,586
	N	2662	2467	2438	2547
Subjective social exclusion	Pearson Correlation	-,080**	1	-,080**	,208**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,000	,000
	N	2467	2483	2301	2412
Political participation	Pearson Correlation	,232**	-,080**	1	-,033
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000		,112
	N	2438	2301	2455	2371
Acceptance of norm violation	Pearson Correlation	,011	,208**	-,033	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,586	,000	,112	
	N	2547	2412	2371	2567
2018		Number of weak ties	Subjective social exclusion	Political participation	Acceptance of norm violation
Number of weak ties	Pearson Correlation	1	-,087**	,208**	-,042*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,000	,033
	N	2668	2591	2607	2583
Subjective social exclusion	Pearson Correlation	-,087**	1	-,054**	,318**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,006	,000
	N	2591	2621	2560	2548
Political participation	Pearson Correlation	,208**	-,054**	1	,013
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,006		,518
	N	2607	2560	2630	2553
Acceptance of norm violation	Pearson Correlation	-,042*	,318**	,013	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,033	,000	,518	
	N	2583	2548	2553	2608

Table 2 (continued)

2021		Number of weak ties	Subjective social exclusion	Political participation	Acceptance of norm violation
Number of weak ties	Pearson Correlation	1	-,150**	,202**	-,169**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,000	,000
	N	4976	4901	4952	4885
Subjective social exclusion	Pearson Correlation	-,150**	1	-,012	,345**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,385	,000
	N	4901	4921	4897	4845
Political participation	Pearson Correlation	,202**	-,012	1	-,054**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,385		,000
	N	4952	4897	4975	4884
Acceptance of norm violation	Pearson Correlation	-,169**	,345**	-,054**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	
	N	4885	4845	4884	4909

Table 3 Summary of significant changes of integration mechanisms in occupational classes between 2015 and 2018 (based on ANOVA reports)

Occupational class	Integration mechanisms	Occupational class	Integration mechanisms
Entrepreneurs	number of weak ties** political participation*		
B1. Managers and professionals	number of weak ties** political participation**	D1. Retired managers and professionals	number of weak ties** political participation**
B2. Other white-collar workers	number of weak ties** political participation** acceptance of norm violation**	D2. Retired other white-collar workers	number of weak ties** political participation**
B3. Skilled workers	number of weak ties** political participation** subjective social exclusion**	D3. Retired skilled workers	number of weak ties** acceptance of norm violation**
B4. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers	number of weak ties** political participation* subjective social exclusion**	D4. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers	number of weak ties** political participation** subjective social exclusion**
Unemployed	–	X. Other inactive	number of weak ties**

*p<0.1 **p<0.05

Table 4 Summary of significant changes of integration mechanisms in occupational classes between 2018 and 2021 (based on ANOVA reports)

Occupational class	Integration mechanisms	Occupational class	Integration mechanisms
Entrepreneurs	number of weak ties**		
B1. Managers and professionals	number of weak ties** acceptance of norm violation*	D1. Retired managers and professionals	number of weak ties**
B2. Other white-collar workers	number of weak ties** acceptance of norm violation*	D2. Retired other white-collar workers	number of weak ties**
B3. Skilled workers	number of weak ties**	D3. Retired skilled workers	number of weak ties*
B4. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers	number of weak ties**	D4. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers	number of weak ties**
C. Unemployed	–	X. Other inactive	number of weak ties*

*p<0.1 **p<0.05