THE FAMILY AS A CAPITAL ASSET

Porodica kao kapitalno dobro


KLJUČNE REČI proširena porodica, vertikalno proširenje, horizontalno proširenje, patrijarhat, modernizacija, blokirana i odložena društvena transformacija

ABSTRACT A representative sample survey of families/households in Serbia at the beginning of the third millennium (2003), carried out by the Institute for Sociological Research, has shown the percentage of extended families to be unexpectedly high (30%). Earlier surveys, however, led to the belief that they were almost disappearing as a model and part of the reality of family life. Further analysis of data has convinced us that a revival of a family type, which emerged as a result of the transformation of the traditional zadruga or...
joint family, is underway. Throughout the socialist period, characterized by the
discouragement of agricultural development and industrialization, this family type survived
and took the form of a hybrid or mixed household consisting of farmers-workers, which has
been on a steady decline since the mid 1960s.

In contemporary circumstances, marked by a decade-long social crisis and economic
decline, an expansion of the extended family model takes place. It is distinguished by
completely new morphological, structural, socioeconomic and functional features, which
indicate the existence of strategies applied by individual families with the aim of adapting to
the blocked, postponed and belated socioeconomic transformation, namely, avoiding the
risks it brings.

On the basis of the produced empirical evidence, the existence of two types of extension
have been determined: horizontally (lateral descent) and vertically extended family type
(blood relationship, patrilinearity). It has also been determined that these two types differ in
the ways of their emergence and maintenance, as well as in essential inner relations.
Vertically extended families are characterized by the elements of the traditional patriarchal
order, while horizontal extension is a result of modernizing trends that have never fully
developed (especially as far as the relationship between spouses is concerned).

KEY WORDS extended family, vertical extension, horizontal extension, patriarchy,
modernization, blocked and postponed social transformation

Postmodernist zeal for the deconstruction of the family and search for
individual identities has left sociology with almost blotted memories of the not so
distant past when the family was regarded as something valuable and important,
both by the society as a whole and its individual members. From today’s
perspective, we could say that it represented a capital asset in every respect (in terms
of the economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital). An individual without a
family was an outcast. It must be emphasized, however, that the very meaning of the
family, its form and functioning differed widely in the past in Western, Central,
Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, namely, the Balkans - the region we are
primarily concerned with.

On the basis of extensive anthropological, historical and sociological
empirical evidence, we can conclude that a family and kinship pattern, established
back in the time of the clan system, existed and was widespread throughout the
common past of the Balkan peoples until the end of the 19th century. (Bogišić,
1874). In English and American sources, this family type is known by its original
name of “Zadruga” (Mosley, 1976; Hammel, 1972; Halpern and Kerewski Halpern,
1972, 1986) or the term “joint family” – an approximate translation from Serbian.

1 In his latest study of this family system, which he believes to be unique in the European setting,
Austrian historian Karl Kaser advocates the use of the term “Balkan family household” instead of
socijalnu istoriju, Beograd.
Despite the fact that the zadruga was essentially a rural phenomenon, its functional efficiency, reputation in the society and ideological value were recognized at all levels and structural layers of Serbian society throughout the 19th century. A young man who had no property of his own and moved from his village to a city, met with open doors when it came to social advancement (be it through schooling, apprenticeship, getting a job, entering into marriage or obtaining a loan) on the basis of his background and being a member of a zadruga of high repute. He brought with him material and moral guarantees of his zadruga. The logic behind this was that the zadruga offered its support to him to take steps towards achieving independence expecting that, in turn, he would not disgrace it by his bad behaviour. Therefore, he was regarded as a trustworthy person.

However, as early as the last decades of the 19th century and especially since the beginning of the 20th century, this family form started becoming significantly less frequent. After the Second World War in Serbia, radical and fast industrialization, led to rapid disintegration of the remnants of the traditional agricultural family zadruga system and its disappearance from the fabric of society. Nuclearization of the family appeared not only in the fast growing urban areas but also in rural communities. Using ideology, as well as practical measures, the socialist regime did everything in its power to suppress and destroy the values of family capital (in the moral, material and even symbolic sense) by stimulating individual achievements through educational, work and party mobility.

But since peasant’s farms had not been collectivised and having in mind the fact that the tradition and ideology of the “big and harmonious zadruga” had not been destroyed, but perhaps just marginalized, a spontaneous transition from the zadruga to the extended family followed in Serbian rural areas. This family type meant that only one male descendent inherited the family estate and continued its reproduction (even under the socialist laws guaranteeing full equality of all heirs, regardless of their age and sex). Such a form of patriarchal family has been known in the European sociology ever since Le Play as *famille souche* or stem family and throughout the 19th century, conservative theoreticians considered it to be the guarantee of social stability and peace. (Zimmerman, 1947).

Leaving aside the historical perspective, I will very briefly point out to some of the key elements of my research into this family type during the socialist

2 Nowadays, there are numerous sources internationally, focusing on the reasons for the disappearance of this family form in the Balkans. Two latest examples are M. M. Todorova (1990) and Karl Kazer (2002).

3 In the first post-revolutionary phase, this applied to the family in general and the elimination of its contribution to the social position of an individual. Later on, the communists took great care to secure their own high social positions in society, so family and kinship capitals were used in order to fulfill social reproduction.

Extended family was a family form typical of rural areas. If it existed in towns as was indeed the case, it took the form of a transitional family structure useful until young couples gained independence and had their housing problem solved through the firm where they worked.

In rural areas, for economic reasons, the family often took the form of a mixed household whose members worked on their own farm, but at the same time were full-time employees of state-owned firms. Most frequently, labour was divided in the following way: the oldest family members (grandfathers and grandmothers) worked on the farm, middle-aged ones (the son and daughter-in-law) had jobs in the neighbouring town or even in the same community in production or service companies, while the youngest (grandchildren) went to school and their permanent goal was to move to cities.

From the structural point of view, extended families, namely, mixed households were not found in the richest or even middle classes of the rural population (according to the criteria of farm land size and agricultural production), but among very poor families living in the regions where farm land is scarce (mountainous country or underdeveloped agricultural areas in the lowlands).

In the beginning, kinship-based structure had been the key factor making it possible for these families to survive and later improve their social and economic position, as family members found regular jobs. This was subsequently replaced by immigration into European countries in search for work. As a result, many of the families that had belonged to poor and marginalized groups in the 1970s and 1980s managed to move up the social ladder and, as early as the 1990s, form the richest rural class thanks to family capital and work. That class sought validation of its newly achieved position through excessive consumption – organizing expensive weddings, patron saint’s day celebrations, building huge, ostentatious and non-functional residences, and buying luxury furnishings, state-of-the-art agricultural equipment and the most expensive cars. In this case, we are dealing with the family transformation that occurred in only one generational interval. Namely, thanks to a division of labour between members of different generations within a family, poor and modest rural households and families which barely managed to make ends meet underwent such a radical transformation, that resulted from increased economic power and capital. However, unlike old zadrugas, these families lack social, cultural

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4 The Karić family is one of the classic examples of this kind of transformation. This is the richest family in Serbia today and it has now entered the competition to win political power. Besides, in this case, the zadruga has been readily put to successful use as a tool for acquiring wealth, as well as securing, holding and preserving a prominent social position. Furthermore, family relations are
and symbolic capital. Consequently, excessive “kitsch” consumption serves as a substitute for all these capitals.

The analysis of the shift of extended families and households in the former Yugoslavia and Serbia, namely, their share in the total number of households, indicates a gradual and steady downward trend. The latest reliable census data obtained during the above-mentioned period showed that their percentage had been 25% of rural and 8% of non-rural households and this downward trend continued throughout the 1980s. The third generation members of these families did not want to return to their farm land. They stayed either in towns in the country, or abroad in the countries where their parents had immigrated.

According to the representative sample survey conducted by the Institute for Sociological Research at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade in 2003, it appears that we are witnessing a revival of the extended family phenomenon, but this time its social and functional characteristics are quite different from those typical of the transformation undergone in the socialist period. Namely, data obtained in this survey show that the number of extended families has been on the rise since the 1990s. The percentage of these families has reached one third of the total number of households while, at the same time, there has been a sharp decrease in the number of nuclear families (two thirds of families used to belong to the nuclear type, but their share has fallen to one third). A simultaneous transformation of all the key features of this family type, that were typical throughout the socialist period, has also taken place.

This abrupt and radical structural shift in the family sphere is analysed in this paper with special emphasis on the following aspects:

Providing a description of the basic social, demographic, anthropological and economic characteristics of extended families during the period of post-socialist transformation of Serbia.

Spotlighting certain attitudes, expectations and satisfaction of members of these families in comparison to other contemporary family types (nuclear, one-parent and all other types).

Setting up a hypothetical framework for explaining the revival and expansion of the extended family model throughout the period of post-socialist transformation of the society in Serbia. In this case, we will try to apply the theoretical paradigm of social capital in order to examine the behaviour of families in the atmosphere of social crisis and decline.
	nowadays still essentially and ideologically based on the preservation and extolment of traditional patriarchal values (the head of the household, harmony unity etc).
The basic social and demographic characteristics and types of contemporary extended families

The existence of two types of extended families was determined in the sample. Families are grouped into these categories according to their kinship structure:

Horizontally extended families – lateral descent

Vertically extended families – a typical patriarchal family pattern where extension follows a vertical line of blood relationship based on patrilinearity and patrilocality i.e. from the male ancestor to the closest male descendent.

It is interesting to note that both subtypes are equally represented in the sample (15% each) which makes up 30%, compared to the total number of surveyed households. This fact deserves our full attention, since it proves that kinship relations have fundamentally shifted from rule of patrilinearity and patrilocality towards bilinear structures of kinship. This is a sign that kinship, but not family structures have been modernized, because now both lines of kinship are used as social capital.

Considering the described structural characteristics of the two subtypes, we expect that they will differ considerably in other objective and especially relational features typical of the patriarchal model of family relations.

Family size

As expected, extended families have more members than families belonging to other types. Their position along the size continuum is such that the number of members ranges from four to eleven, although families as big as these appear in the rest of the sample as well. The proof of difference is the fact that around 80% of extended families have seven members, while only 6% percent of other families have that many members.

Among extended families, vertically extended families have a larger number of members, while horizontally extended families are only slightly larger than other families. Therefore, only vertically extended families can be defined as representing the traditional complex family form known from the past.

Marital status

In this study, marital status refers only to that of the respondent who provided information about the household as a whole, not to marital status of all household members. That is why this indicator is not necessarily reliable when it comes to
analysing marital, family and kinship structures of the household. It does point to a number of things, though. The data show that the majority of households of both types consist of spouses, their children and other relatives. But there is an important difference between horizontally extended families, where this kind of structure is present in 62.4 cases and vertically extended ones where it is far more frequent almost 80 percent (78.1%).

In short, marital/partner structure of vertically extended families is much more monolithic than is the case with the other family type. One crucial difference is discernible right away. In horizontally extended families, marital condition known as the consensual union with children is a lot more frequent (15.6%) than in vertically extended households (as little as 2.2%).

And finally, there is one more very conspicuous, huge difference – 20 percent of horizontally extended families are one-parent families, while only 4.8 percent of vertically extended families belong to that category. Briefly, these details point to the conclusion that horizontally extended families are more open to alternative partner choices. Vertically extended families, on the other hand, prove their dominantly patriarchal and patrilinear structure.

The number of children in the family

Extended structure and therefore a larger number of members, in the case of extended families, is mainly due to a more ramified kinship structure of the family household. However, traditional extended families had more members than other families, primarily nuclear ones, because of a larger number of children in the household – higher birth rate i.e. fertility of women living in these households. Is this the case now?

The higher number of children turns out to be a feature present in contemporary extended families as well (Table 1). Within the families without underage children, 84% belong to other than extended families while only 16% are extended families. On the contrary, families with five children derive in 80% from extended family type, and only 20% from all other family types.

Nevertheless, we cannot conclude with certainty that there is a revival of traditional fertility pattern in extended families, as we do not have data on their composition (number of couples/women with children). What we do know for sure is that the vertical extended families, under the existing conditions in Serbia, offer more reliable support for child rearing.
Table 1. Vertical extended families according to the number of children, in %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The number of children</th>
<th>Vertical extended families</th>
<th>Other than extended families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>25,3</td>
<td>69,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>27,9</td>
<td>14,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>38,9</td>
<td>13,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5,6</td>
<td>2,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,9</td>
<td>0,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0,4</td>
<td>0,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dwelling units – overcrowding conditions

In view of the fact that they have a larger number of members, it seems reasonable to expect that extended families live in larger dwelling units that suit their needs, namely, that they have more dwelling space per family member compared to other families. However, the situation is quite different. As illustrated in Table 2, the majority of extended families lack dwelling space. Later on, we will see that lack of dwelling space, namely the impossibility of solving the housing problem is, in a significant number of cases, the main reason for the appearance and persistence of these complex family forms today. But this is just one of many reasons. If vertically extended families are singled out, a regular inverse relationship regarding dwelling unit surface area per family member becomes obvious. This relationship exists between extended and all other families, which means that they belong to the category having housing problems.

Table 2. Vertical extended families according to square meter per family member, in %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Square metres per member</th>
<th>Vertical extended families</th>
<th>Other than extended families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>17,6</td>
<td>5,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>31,1</td>
<td>12,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>27,2</td>
<td>17,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>15,9</td>
<td>28,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>8,3</td>
<td>36,3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Locality characteristics (regional and differences between villages and towns)

Extended families are not typical of big cities. Only one fourth of the families surveyed in Belgrade and 63% of those living in the rest of Serbia belong to this category. No region stands out regarding this feature. There is no big difference in their number in central Serbia and Vojvodina. Likewise, these families are no longer typical of rural areas, which used to be the case in the past. 48% of extended families live in villages, while more than a half live in urban centres.

In short, on the basis of their spatial distribution, compared to other families, we can say that extended families are more frequent in the suburbs of Belgrade than in the city centre and in bigger or smaller provincial towns than in rural areas. Therefore, the conclusion is that there has been a radical change concerning the place of residence of extended families. They are no longer exclusively, or even predominantly an agricultural or rural phenomenon. But they are not a modern urban phenomenon either. They are, in fact, as we will see more clearly later on, part of the structures from the recent past marked by the socialist transformation.

Extended families according to the occupation of the surveyed family member

When compared to other families according to the occupation of the respondent, extended families reveal some characteristic similarities between one another in that their members belong to the same social strata and practice the same occupations. Namely, workers, farmers and dependants most frequently live in extended families. Nevertheless, extended families are most often farmer families (44.2%), but since their number does not exceed 50%, they cannot be regarded as a phenomenon that belongs to the still backward way of life of peasants and rural communities. Moreover, as many as one third of such families are found among executives or businessmen of higher or lower economic status. The cases of technicians and clerks living in extended families are somewhat rare, while the cases of professionals and pensioners living in this way are the rarest (one fifth).

In a nutshell, on the basis of the above-mentioned data, we could establish the fact that population that belongs to mixed households of workers- farmers and people who have full-time jobs but, at the same time, work their own farms, as well as those belonging to the marginal group consisting of non-active individuals, live more in extended families. Thus these families are, after all, a remnant of the previous socialist model of transformational transition from rural to urban communities, from agricultural to industrial production. Nowadays, this model is in increase, but from other causes.

But let us see whether some differences between the two types of extended families can be detected, as far as the occupation of surveyed family members are
These two family types show divergent distributions. Incidences of horizontally extended families are more frequent among executives and professionals of lower economic status (they are twice as frequent among professionals (14%) than vertically extended families (7.8%)).

The vertical type is more frequent among businessmen of higher economic status and especially farmers, while the same lower incidences of vertically extended families are found among technicians, clerks, workers, pensioners and dependants.

At first sight, these differences do not tell us anything specific about the differences between the two types of extended families, but combined with some other features they become more important. We will come back to that later.

**Educational status**

As to the educational status of the surveyed members of extended families, they are more frequently in the middle of the educational ladder than at the extreme ends of the spectrum. The majority of these families are found among respondents who received primary (fourth/eighth grade) education (40%), a somewhat smaller number of them (one third) are found among people with secondary education and the smallest number among university graduates (one fifth). Therefore, we could conclude that extended families are a phenomenon found at all levels of society. However, they are clearly most often found among people on the lower and middle rungs of the educational ladder – 66.5%. In other words, two thirds of respondents living in extended families have these two types of educational qualifications. It is interesting that there is virtually no difference between the subtypes of extended families as far as educational status of respondents is concerned.

**Household economic position**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic position</th>
<th>Vertically extended families</th>
<th>Extended families</th>
<th>Other than extended families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6,7</td>
<td>9,9</td>
<td>14,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower medium</td>
<td>35,3</td>
<td>48,1</td>
<td>45,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>35,9</td>
<td>27,2</td>
<td>22,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher medium</td>
<td>15,6</td>
<td>9,9</td>
<td>11,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>6,5</td>
<td>5,0</td>
<td>6,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The distribution of extended families according to household economic position is, to some extent, different from the distribution of other families.

Extended families are quite rare at the extreme ends of this spectrum. They are most commonly seen in the lower middle and middle part of the spectrum (over 70%). We could again confirm that extended families, as a rule, do not belong either to the lowest or the highest economic classes, but are concentrated in the middle, closer to lower material position. If we try to compare the two subtypes we will discover a significant difference. Vertically extended families differ noticeably, both from all other and all extended families in that their incidence is distinctly higher on the medium and somewhat higher on higher medium rung of the ladder, while it is visibly lower at the lower medium and low level. In other words, vertically extended families are among more affluent households. This is not only a very interesting but also socially significant characteristic of this family subtype.

Class-based position

In the end, we can also take a look at the synthetic indicator of class position and see how the surveyed extended families are ranked.

Table 4. Extended families according class stratification, in %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strata</th>
<th>Vertically extended families</th>
<th>Extended families</th>
<th>Other than extended families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurs</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks/technicians</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled workers</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-skilled workers</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underclass</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this case too, it is apparent that this family type is very rare at the polar ends of the class spectrum, namely in the elite and underclass, but because of the fact that these two strata are underrepresented in the sample, the data on them cannot be considered to be fully reliable. However, the trend detected in the beginning remains discernible – extended families are most frequently found among skilled and non-skilled workers, clerks/technicians and farmers. Namely, these families are
typical of the middle and lower middle classes. All higher strata account for as little as 10%. But more importantly, there is an overall tendency for the stratification of all families in the sample not to differ significantly from the stratification of extended families, which proves the assumption that, proportionate to their number, extended families are present at all levels of the contemporary Serbian society. They have become a ubiquitous social phenomenon and that coincides with their exponential growth in the last decade of the 20th century.

There is one more interesting thing – in this case, no differences between the two types of extended families have been detected in their stratification, although previous observations showed that, in some cases, there were considerable differences in the distribution according to profession and material position and these are the features that make up the complex indicator of structural position. In all likelihood, these differences are not so big or have been mutually neutralized in the complex indicator used for stratification of families and households.

**Subjective attitudes and satisfaction**

When subjective evaluation of the family by its members and their attitudes towards it are compared, there are certain differences in the answers given by the respondents living in extended families and all other respondents.

As regards expressing their views on the importance of the family, the following difference stands out as the most significant one: no respondents living in extended families chose the answer “it is not important at all”, while 87% of them said that it was very important. On the other hand, 68% of respondents living in other families said the same thing. It is obvious that for people coming from extended families, the family much more often has a discriminative value and is regarded as an achievement, which is not the case among people coming from the families belonging to all other types. For them, the family no longer has this sacred value.

In line with previous findings, 68% of respondents from other families said that the family was always a source of satisfaction for them, while 80% of people from extended families said the same thing. As to the claim that the family is mainly felt and considered to be a burden, the difference is not expressed in terms of percentage, but there is a difference in the direction of responses. Namely, over 64% of respondents living in other families and less than 60% of people coming from extended families did not agree with this. However, as many as 22% of respondents from horizontally extended families compared to 8.8% of those from vertically extended families shared that opinion. This indicates an essential difference in the way of appearance and nature of relations in the two types of extended families.
This, in fact, suggests that in spite of the general acceptance of this lifestyle among the members of horizontally extended families, they inwardly feel the life in these family unions to be something that oppresses, limits and frustrates them.

**Family achievement**

Although they are not statistically significant, the differences that emerge when choosing certain kinds of achievement point to some differences in the tendencies shown by the subtypes of extended families. For example, members of horizontally extended families (52.3%) cited inner ties characterized by collaboration and unity as the greatest achievement. The situation in vertically extended families is similar; the only difference being that the percentage is lower (45%) and it is much the same in the case of all other families (47%).

But members of vertically extended families were the ones who most frequently chose answers incorporating achievements such as order and authority, which is a sign of their orientation towards more traditional values (as many as 14.3% and that is two times more than in horizontally extended and all other families). Similarly, people living in vertically extended families chose material achievements more often than others (11.4%). Only 5% of respondents from horizontally extended families and 7.5% of people coming from other families made this choice.

On the basis of this insight, we could conclude that vertically extended families have a more clearly and concretely defined value system and attitude to the form and way of family life. Here, more than in other surveyed families, the complex family unit is regarded as a value in itself, but in everyday life it is expected to function as a tool for achieving long term family aims – above all material success and social prestige.

**Satisfaction with the life in multifamily unions**

From all respondents living in multifamily unions 70% answered this question. We may ask why 30% others did not respond? Looking at the whole, 90% of people who answered this question had a positive attitude towards the life in a complex family unit, while only 10% of them were dissatisfied. On the basis of this, we can claim beyond doubt that the lifestyle conditioned by this complex family type is certainly accepted and regarded as successful by the vast majority of members of such families.

But, on the other hand, some significant variations appear and they are a signal that, in some cases, this family type and the corresponding lifestyle prove to be less successful, namely, less acceptable as far as some of the observed social and
group relations are concerned. Let’s take a look at just a few of the most distinctive differences.

When examining household economic position of extended families, we find that the percentage of those dissatisfied with it is very high. It reaches 20.6% in the families whose household economic position is the worst; while it tends to be much lower (between 5 and 10 percent) on other rungs of this ladder. The lowest percentage (less than 5%) is found at the top of the scale. On the whole, we could conclude that extended family does not perform well in the situations of extreme poverty. That only strengthens previous findings indicating that the greatest number of these families is not concentrated on the lower rungs of the ladder, but in the middle class that aspires to rise to the next higher rung.

The analysis of the answers classified according to professions of respondents yielded considerable differences. For example, no respondents, living in the households of businessmen and directors of higher economic status, expressed dissatisfaction with the life in such unions (regardless of the fact that this group was underrepresented in the sample as a whole), while in the families of entrepreneurs and directors of lower economic status, the percentage of the dissatisfied is highest (even 30%). It is obvious that here we have a situation characterized by stalled economic growth and rapid impoverishment, which affects relations within these families. The above-mentioned percentage drops to 13% among professionals and then drops further to 10% in all other groups (farmers, pensioners and dependants).

Dis/satisfaction with the life in multifamily unions varies depending on educational levels of respondents. The higher the educational level the higher the dissatisfaction. Moreover, dis/satisfaction also varies proportionate to the age of respondents: younger people are dissatisfied more often (10.8%) than middle-aged and older participants in the survey (4.9%). It is very interesting that there are almost no differences based on sex regarding subjective attitudes of respondents to the family unions in which they live, despite the obvious fact that sex/gender relations in the families in the country are not balanced. Can a higher level of agreement between spouses on traditional values explain the absence of greater dissatisfaction of women from extended families?

An attempt of interpretation – extended family as a capital asset and risk

The data presented here show that this family form is proportionally present at all levels of the contemporary Serbian society. Therefore, we can say that it is a universal structural phenomenon, which points to the fact that family modernization in Serbia has been essentially stalled i.e. that a general trend of re-traditionalization of Serbian society is omnipresent.
However, in spite of the widespreadness of this phenomenon across the society, its expansion is still dominantly to be found in the lower middle classes of the contemporary Serbian society. These classes were established and became widespread throughout the process of socialist industrialization and transformation. They are comprised of the working class and people belonging to the lower middle class of non-manual workers (technicians and clerks). In their case, social advancement and upward mobility has been stalled over the last two decades. Namely, their social position has even deteriorated.

That happened in a huge number of families that moved to the cities, whose members found jobs there and lived in state-owned apartments or built their own houses. This was typical of the period of socialist industrialization when these people enjoyed an urban standard of living much higher than the one present in their communities of origin. Thus, in one generation, they achieved a high level of social mobility and promotion. Nevertheless, very soon, in the next generation, during contemporary transition, their descendents lost regular jobs, found irregular sources of income or were left without any income whatsoever and without the possibility of finding an apartment not just at this moment, but in the foreseeable future. They were condemned to live in cramped and already deteriorated dwelling units in the neighbourhoods where the standard of everyday life became very low. In a nutshell, my previous findings show that in the current phase of transition, these social status groups are big losers (Milić, 1995, 2002). The majority of them are exposed to the risk of losing jobs, regular source of income, social security, healthcare and educational benefits and old age insurance. They are forced to accept all the risks of making a living through “grey” economy and even criminal activities.

But as was already suggested by empirical evidence, not all the families forming these social classes submitted to this regressive trend. It may be quite reasonable to suppose that some of them cope better with this general situation, while others are worse in coping and are, consequently, less successful. As far as these more than significant differences are concerned, it would be useful to highlight the existence of two types of extended families, which differ in numerous morphological, structural and subjective psychological characteristics. With regard to that, two scenarios can be imagined.

Vertically extended families adopted the traditional family strategy of joint life so as to make full use of the existing material and social resources at their disposal. In their case, life in complex family units is not exclusively regarded as a solution imposed by circumstances beyond their control. No matter whether it was planned in advance or subsequently tacitly accepted, this family unit is equally accepted by both generations (ancestors and descendents – the parents and their adult children). With regard to that, the data indicate that generational differences in the choice of spouses and expectations from married and family life are not
significant, or if they had existed in nuce (for example, among younger female members, they were suppressed in favour of more utilitarian aims (a higher standard of living) and the need to survive. Basically, the unchanged traditional value system of family members focusing on patrilineal ties and trust has been used in the new circumstances, marked by uncertainty and risks, as a strategy applied in order to preserve existent and create new material resources and social capital. Briefly put, this scenario involves a deliberate choice of family members who accept the new family union and view it as a profitable social association. It is no coincidence that the vertically extended family type is more frequent not only in the middle but also in higher social classes. In the current circumstances, such a union both lowers the risks for individuals and enables its members to make profit.

Apparently, in the case of horizontally extended families, the appearance and preservation of these unions follows a completely different pattern. We believe that, in most cases, this is a forced, transitional or temporary solution that has been turned into a permanent way of survival both of the oldest, middle and the youngest generation of family members. This happened due to social blockade and personal deprivation. The main reason for the formation of extended unions was, presumably, the impossibility of finding a solution to the problem of how to afford a separate dwelling for the newly established families or partners who begin an informal relationship. Throughout almost two decades of social crisis and the changes in life cycles of individuals and family groups of both generations (the parents and their adult children), a functional cooperation has been established. That kind of cooperation no longer allows separation. If spouses divorce or one of the spouses dies, a permanent coexistence between the oldest, middle and the youngest generations is established. The oldest generation financially supports members of the middle generation, shares the dwelling with them and takes care of the youngest family members. Members of the middle generation, in turn, take it upon themselves to look after old, sick and disabled parents.

In the case of vertical extension, joint life is explicitly or tacitly regarded as an accepted and fulfilled norm. On the other hand, in the case of a number of horizontally extended units, the above-mentioned agreement on values, or full consent, does not exist. This results in a higher level of dissatisfaction and frustration when describing the life in these families. Consequently, we can suppose that in the everyday life of their members there are more conflicts and misunderstandings.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that the data obtained up to now give grounds for formulating only initial assumptions for the interpretation of the appearance, persistence and effects of the existence of extended unions at the beginning of the third millennium in Serbia. However, only an in-depth research
based on qualitative data could yield reliable results necessary for understanding the extended family phenomenon in this century.

References


