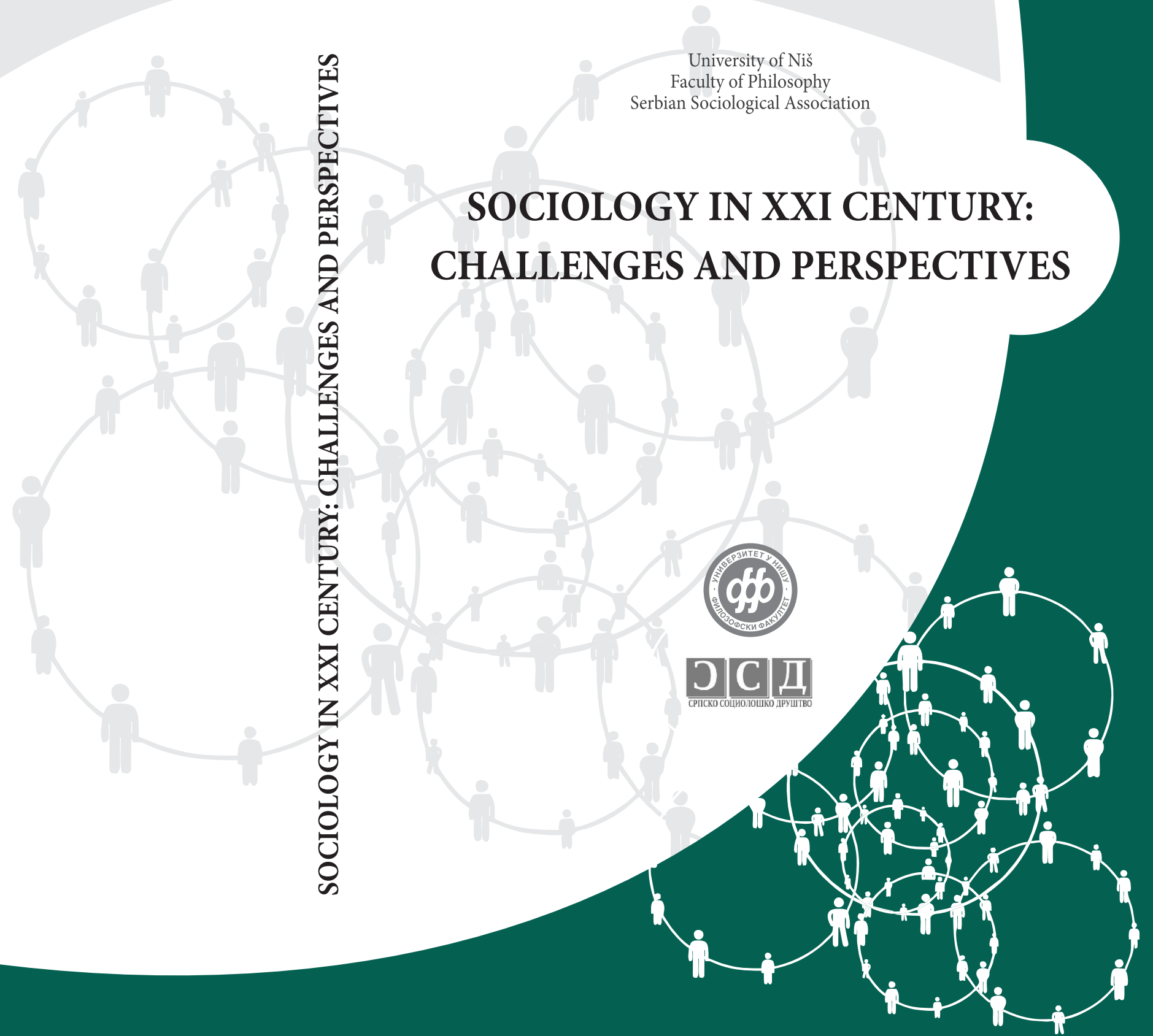


University of Niš
Faculty of Philosophy
Serbian Sociological Association

SOCIOLOGY IN XXI CENTURY: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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UNIVERSITY OF NIŠ
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY
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SOCIOLOGY IN XXI CENTURY: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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INTRAGROUP DIFFERENCES IN THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ELITES IN SERBIA³

Abstract

In the text we examine whether in the period of consolidation of the capitalist order in Serbia there are intragroup differences in the economic position of the economic and political elites. The aim is to determine which factors contribute to the internal economic differentiation of these two strata of the ruling group. The analysis is based on the data collected by the Institute for Sociological Research of the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy in the survey conducted on subsamples of the economic elite in 2012 and the political elite in 2015. Using a multiple linear regression we analyse which factors affect the household income level of the members of the ruling group, as well as the total market value of the property in their ownership. Statistically significant predictors of the household income level of the members of the economic elite are a higher rank of respondent, the private sector of the ownership of an enterprise and the membership in political party, and of the political elite – a best friend on the elite position, higher rank and living in Belgrade. When it comes to the total market value of the property in the ownership of the household, in the case of the economic elite, statistically significant predictors are a higher rank of respondent, the private sector of the ownership of an enterprise, the year of taking the elite position and Belgrade as a place of permanent residence, and in the case of the political elite – only living in the capital city. We conclude that there is an economic differentiation within the ruling group in Serbia.

Key words: economic position, economic elite, political elite, income, property

Introduction

The privileged economic position is one of the basic characteristics by which the ruling group differs from other social classes or strata. Intergroup differences in the economic position of the economic and political elites compared to other social

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classes or strata, as well as changes in the economic position of two strata of the ruling group in the period of system transformation (from 1989 to 2015), were thoroughly analysed in recently published papers (Manić & Mirkov, 2014; 2015; 2016). In this text we strive to examine whether in the period of consolidation of the capitalist order in Serbia there is an internal differentiation of the economic position of the economic and political elites or, in other words, whether there are *intragroup* differences in the economic position of these two strata of the ruling group.

The analysis is based on the data collected by the Institute for Sociological Research of the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy in the survey conducted on subsamples of the economic elite in 2012 and the political elite in 2015. Using the multiple linear regression we analyse which factors affect the household income level of the members of the ruling group, as well as the total market value of the property in their ownership. We are particularly interested in the factors such as the rank of respondents within the economic or political elite, the year of taking the elite position, and the social capital of having a best friend on the elite position. The aim is to show which factors contribute to economic differentiation within the highest social stratum in Serbia.

In the first part of the text, basic terms relevant for the subject of analysis, such as economic and political elites and economic position, were defined. It the change of the basis on which the ruling class (and its strata) is constituted in the capitalist order under the circumstances of system transformation was shortly indicated. Then, the characteristics of the empirical material on which the analysis was based were presented. The next part is devoted to the economic position of the economic and political elites during the consolidation of the capitalist order in Serbia, especially their intergroup differences in the context of change in the economic position of these strata of the ruling group during system transformation. For the content of completeness of insight into their economic position, the findings of comparison the with economic position of other social classes or strata were mentioned in short. In the next section, intragroup differences in the economic position of economic and political parts of the ruling group were analysed using the multiple linear regression for determination which factors affect the household income level of the members of the ruling group and the total market value of the property in their ownership. The results of the analysis were synthesized in the concluding part.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The study of intragroup differences in the economic position of the strata of the ruling group during the consolidation of the capitalist order in Serbia requires a definition of the terms economic and political elites, as well as pointing to the processes which determined their constitution. “System transformation implies a change of the basis on which the ruling class is constituted, as well as every subgroup/strata within it” (Lazić, 2016, p. 10), and its basic characteristics (economic position,

recruitment pattern, value orientations) and the nature of its relation to other social classes or strata. Here, in short, the subject of examination will be only the way the ruling class is constituted, and in the next part the economic position of its strata. For a thorough reading about the basic characteristics of the economic and political elites during the constitution of the capitalist order in Serbia, as well as their relation to other social classes and strata, two studies are available (Lazić, 2014, Lazić, 2016).

In this paper we start from a structurally based definition of the term of elite, which directed the collection and interpretation of empirical data about strata of the ruling group. According to M. Lazić, the elite is a social group possessing concentrated control over accumulated resources necessary for the reproduction of basic assumptions underlying the given mode of production of social life, actively participating in the reproduction of these preconditions (Lazić, 2011, p. 43). The strata of this social group differ by type of resources which are inevitable for the mode of social reproduction.

Economic elite is defined as a social group which controls and renews concentrated economic resources necessary for a given mode of social reproduction. In the research of economic strata of the ruling group, the theoretical concept of economic elite is operationalized based on affiliation with management or ownership in public, mixed and private sectors, depending on the amount of business income and size of the enterprise. Therefore, the research from 2012 involved directors of higher and middle rank, as well as large and middle entrepreneurs. Based on the position of respondents and the size of the enterprise, there are members of the economic elite of higher, middle and lower rank. The structure of the sample according to the rank of respondents is approximately corresponding to the real structure of the economic elite in Serbia: 9.8% of higher rank respondents, 26.4% of middle rank and 63.8% of lower rank respondents.

Political elite is a social group which controls and renews concentrated resources within a political subsystem. The study of political strata of the ruling group, the operationalization of the theoretical concept of political elite is done based on one's position in authorities and parliamentary political parties. Hereupon the research from 2015 involved members of executive authorities at the level of the Republic of Serbia and Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, members of executive boards of authorities in large cities in Serbia (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Kragujevac), representatives of republic and autonomous province parliaments, highest officials of parliamentary political parties and members of high courts. According to the political function performed by respondents, they are classified into groups of politicians of higher, middle and lower ranks. The sample included 23.4% of senior politicians, 55.2% of middle and 21.4% of lower rank.

Differentiating the ruling group to the economic and political elites within the framework of the socialist order was conditional because of the monopoly over resources in the economic and political subsystems. Under the conditions of systemic changes there was a division into two strata which control the resources of different types, with the separation process frozen during a blocked postsocialist

transformation (1990–2000), in order to make a conversion of resources concentrated during socialism, and thus preserve the privileged position. The separation of the ruling group into the political and economic elites during postsocialism in Serbia does not mean the absence of their connection. The political elite significantly influences economic processes and the economic elite actively participates in political life.

The economic position implies the disposition of material goods resulting from different roles of social groups in a given mode of social reproduction. “The emphasized and structured inequalities in the distribution of the material wealth of a society are among the most characteristic features of its systemic division” (Lazić, 2011, p. 148).

The analysis of the intragroup differences in the economic position of the strata of the ruling group is based on the survey data, which were realized on the subsamples of the economic and political elites in Serbia. Data were obtained from 163 members of the economic elite in 2012 and from 192 members of the political elite in 2015. The economic position is measured through indicators concerning the income, property and consumption of the household of respondents, on the basis of which a composite index of the economic position was formed, distinguishing higher, higher middle, middle, lower middle and lower economic positions.

Economic position of the economic and political elites in Serbia

The intergroup differences in the economic position of the economic and political elites during the consolidation of the capitalist order in Serbia were analyzed in detail in previously published texts, as well as the changes in their economic position from the end of the socialist order through the accelerated postsocialist transformation to the gradual consolidation of the capitalist order⁴ (Manić & Mirkov, 2014; 2015; 2016). The subject of the analysis was also the comparison of the economic position of the strata of the ruling group with the economic position of other social classes/strata.⁵ Therefore, only the most general findings about the economic position of the economic and political elites will be presented here: the basic dimensions (income, property and consumption) and the overall economic position expressed by the composite index.

Household income of the members of the economic and political elites have significantly increased during the period of consolidation of the capitalist order compared to the beginning of the accelerated postsocialist transformation, regardless

⁴ In addition to the results of the research on the economic elite in 2012 and the political elite in 2015, the data were collected in 1989, in a research organized by the Consortium of the Institute of Social Sciences of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, on the sample of 231 members of the economic and 219 members of the political elite. The data from 2003 were also used, when the sample included 205 members of the economic and 206 members of the political elite, as a part of the research *The Southeast European Social Survey Project*.

⁵ The data were collected in 2012 in the survey on a representative sample of 2,557 inhabitants of Serbia, within the project *Challenges of New Social Integration in Serbia: Concepts and Actors*, realised by the Institute for Sociological Research of the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy.

of the consequences of the global economic crisis, with the economically dominant group having higher income in both periods observed. The most common total monthly household income of the members of the economic elite in 2003 was from 1,000 to 1,999 euros (44.2%), and in 2012 from 2,000 to 9,999 euros (48%). In 2003, the majority of households among the members of the political elite were in the category of income from 500 to 999 euros (45.4%), and in 2015 from 1,000 to 1,999 euros (59.9%). Based on the index of income, the existence of a marked economic differentiation of the population was found, revealing statistically significant differences between social classes/strata.

The property held by households of the economic and political parts of the ruling group has also been increased in the analyzed period. The housing situation has improved, the acquisition of flats/houses of high market value (90000–200000 euros and more), but this tendency is more pronounced in the economic part of the ruling group. Between 2003 and 2012, the share of households of members of the economic elite who possess high-value residential properties increased from 43.7% to 62%, and between 2003 and 2015 from 22.4% to 40.1% regarding the political elite. In terms of the index of property, a statistically significant difference between social classes/strata is also noticed, although less pronounced than in income.

In the domain of consumption, it is also evident that the economic position of the members of the two strata of the ruling group has improved, but the members of the economic elite, in all three periods studied, go on holidays more frequently, compared to the members of the political elite. The number of those respondents and/or their household members who can afford it has been constantly increasing. Statistically significant differences between social classes/strata on the index of consumption scale were also observed.

The overall economic position of the members of the economic and political elites has improved during the consolidation of capitalist order in Serbia (Table 1). In 2012, 93.9% of the members of the economic elite had higher economic positions (39% in 1989, and 73.2% in 2003), as well as 82.3% of the members of the political elite (31.1% in 1989, and 48.5% in 2003). The two strata of the ruling group not only strengthened their economic positions, but became even more homogeneous. Nevertheless, there were also discernible intergroup differences, since the economic position of the economic elite was higher and more homogeneous than economic position of the political elite. The indexes of income, property and consumption, as well as the composite index of the economic position expressed differences between social classes/strata. Members of the economic and political elites, in terms of their economic position, regardless of intergroup differences, are distinguished from other social classes/strata, positioning themselves at the top of the social ladder.

Table 1. Economic position of the economic and political elites in 1989, 2003 and 2012/2015, in %

Index of the economic position	Economic elite			Political elite		
	1989	2003	2012	1989	2003	2015
Higher	39.0	73.2	93.9	31.1	48.5	82.3
Higher middle	40.3	21.5	6.1	40.2	38.8	15.6
Middle	16.9	4.9	–	25.1	11.7	2.1
Lower middle	3.9	0.5	–	3.7	1.0	–
Lower	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Intragroup differences in the economic position of the economic and political elites in Serbia

In this part of the paper, we strive to determine to what extent certain features represent significant factors of differentiation of the economic position of the strata of the ruling group in Serbia, determining their intragroup differences. Using the multiple linear regression, it was examined how much different predictors affect the income level of the households of members of the economic and political elites, as well as the total market value of the properties they own. It should be noted that the questions about income and property were related to the household, not to the members of the economic or political elite themselves, so we do not have data about their personal income and property. The data on the total amount of household income were collected by asking the question about annual income from the following sources: regular employment; sale of agricultural products; pension and disability insurance in the country; other social benefits: scholarships and the like; income from abroad: salaries, pensions; financial assistance from relatives and/or friends living abroad; financial assistance from friends and/or relatives living in Serbia; income from renting a residential or business space; interests, dividends and the like; income from a sale of property (if not reinvested immediately); other additional income from regular or occasional jobs. The total market value of property owned by the household is formed on the basis of the market value of the apartment or house in which they live, additional housing units and business premises. The influence of various factors was analyzed taking into account the specificity of the strata of the ruling group (control of economic or political resources), as well as of the observed indicators of two dimensions of the economic position (the amount of household income and the total market value of property).

First, the results of the analysis related to the income of the economic elite in 2012 and the political elite in 2015 will be presented, and in both models the dependent variable would be the total amount of their annual household income per household member who contributes to the home budget. We analyzed the impact

of the following factors on the level of household income of the members of the economic elite: the settlement of the permanent residence of respondents, their rank according to the position occupied in the enterprise, the ownership sector of the enterprise, best friends on elite positions, membership in a political party.⁶

Table 2. Regression model with indicators of household income level of the members of the economic elite, per household member who contributes to the home budget

Indicator	Standardized Beta coefficient	Sig.
(Constant)		0.034
Inhabitant of Belgrade	0.127	0.102
Middle rank	0.085	0.277
Higher rank	0.363	0.000
Private sector	0.270	0.001
A best friend on an elite position	0.042	0.584
Member of political party	0.176	0.034
Coefficient of determination (R Square): 0.230		

The combined effect of the indicators studied in the regression model explains 23% of the variance of the household income level of members of the economically dominant group (Table 2). There are three statistically significant predictors: a higher rank of the respondent, private sector of the enterprise⁷ and membership in a political party⁸. More income is generated by the households of those members of the economic elite who occupy the highest positions in enterprises, especially if they work in the private sector, and additionally if they are members of any political party. The findings are expected for the following reasons. The higher rank category of the economic elite consists of the top management of the most successful enterprises (majority owners, chief executive officers and presidents of management boards), who have the highest income level due to their authority to manage the whole enterprise and responsibility for taking business decisions in order to make a profit. The top management of privately-owned enterprises are in an even better position due to the accumulated resources and autonomy of the private sector, which involves the disposal and appropriation of profits in accordance with their market success and without much external restrictions. The effect of membership in a political party on the income level of the members of the economic elite confirms a previously perceived

⁶ Reference categories are as follows: settlement of permanent residence – not living in Belgrade; position in the enterprise – lower rank; ownership sector of the enterprise – state and mixed sector; social capital – the best friend on a non-elite position; membership in a political party – not member of any political party.

⁷ The ownership sector of the enterprises is predominantly private (72.4%). In the state sector, it worked 20.2%, and in the mixed sector 7.4%, which due to a small number of cases for the purpose of the analysis were merged with the state sector.

⁸ Most of the surveyed members of the economic elite were not formally party-affiliated (84.7%), i.e. 14.1% of respondents expressed their membership to any political party, while 1.2% did not want to answer the question.

connection between the economic and political parts of the ruling group in Serbia. The leading businessmen have influence on political parties and sometimes they take high positions and functions within political organizations (Vuletić, 2013, p. 184). Between the economic and political elites there is a specific exchange of resources and even an inevitable clientelistic relation which guarantees business security and political support (Stanojević, Gundogan, & Babović, 2016; Cvejić, 2016). Bearing in mind that membership in a political party is expressed by 1/7 of the economic elite in the 2012 survey, it was not possible to do a more detailed analysis which would reveal the difference of belonging to the political parties in power or in the opposition.

Regarding the determinants of the household income of the members of the political elite, we studied the impact of the following factors: the settlement of the permanent residence of respondents, rank according to the position in the political hierarchy, a best friend on an elite position, membership in a political party in power.⁹ Three indicators showed statistical significance as predictors of the household income level of the members of the political elite, explaining 11.5% of the variance of the dependent variable (Table 3). Similarly to the economic elite, the rank of a representative of the political elite is significant, in this case as a public official or as a leader of a parliamentary political party. Interestingly, the social capital of the political elite is a significant predictor of the income level, which points to the importance of networking, while membership in the ruling political parties is not crucial. Since the political elite is spatially dispersed to a greater extent than the economic elite,¹⁰ there is a noticeable effect of the place of permanent residence on the income level, certainly in the favour of those who are residing in Belgrade.

Table 3. Regression model with indicators of the household income level of the members of the political elite, per household member who contributes to the home budget

Indicator	Standardized Beta coefficient	Sig.
(Constant)		0.000
Inhabitant of Belgrade	0.155	0.035
Middle rank	0.145	0.117
Higher rank	0.206	0.026
A best friend on an elite position	0.235	0.001
Membership in the ruling political parties	-0.114	0.110
Coefficient of determination (R Square): 0.115		

The subject of the analysis were also the determinants of the total market value of the immovable property of the households of the members of the two strata of the ruling group, which is a dependent variable in next two regression models. In

⁹ Reference categories are as follows: settlement of permanent residence – not living in Belgrade; rank in political hierarchy – lower rank; social capital – a best friend on a non-elite position; membership in a political party – not a member of the political party in power.

¹⁰ Belgrade is a permanent place of residence for less than half of the polled members of the political elite (46.9%) and nearly ¼ of the respondents of the economic elite (71.6%), which is expected because successful and large enterprises are mainly concentrated in Belgrade.

the households of members of the economic elite, the influence of the following factors was studied: the settlement of the permanent residence of respondents, rank according to the position occupied in the enterprise, the ownership sector of the enterprise, the year in which the respondent reached the elite position for the first time, having a best friend on an elite position and membership in a political party.

The indicators studied explain 18.5% of the variance of the total market value of the household property of the members of the economically dominant group (Table 4). Beside the place of residence which determines the market value of the property due to the location, three factors stand out as statistically significant predictors: the higher rank of respondent, the private sector of the enterprise ownership, and the year of taking the elite position. The most important factor is the higher rank in the enterprise. Namely, the households of the higher rank respondents, compared to the lower rank ones, possess property of higher market value. A similar situation exists with the members of the economic elite who work in privately owned enterprises, in relation to those employed in an enterprise in state or mixed ownership. The year of taking the elite position for the first time is also a significant predictor. Households of respondents who reached elite positions earlier own property of higher market value. This finding is interesting since it resonates the fact that the very top of the social hierarchy in Serbia remained mostly unchanged after the collapse of socialism (Sekelj, 1998).

Table 4. Regression model with indicators of the total market value of household property of the members of the economic elite

Indicator	Standardized Beta coefficient	Sig.
(Constant)		0.036
Inhabitant of Belgrade	0.165	0.035
Middle rank	0.134	0.096
Higher rank	0.258	0.002
Private sector	0.206	0.014
Year of taking the elite position	-0.173	0.035
A best friend on an elite position	0.020	0.793
Member of political party	0.043	0.596
Coefficient of determination (R Square): 0.185		

Regarding the total market value of the property of the households of the political elite, the influence of the following factors was analyzed: the settlement of the permanent residence of respondents, rank according to the position taken in the political hierarchy, the year in which the respondent achieved the elite position for the first time, having a best friend on an elite position and membership in political parties in power.

The indicators studied in the regression model explain only 5.3% of the variance of the total market value of the household property of members of the politically

dominant group (Table 5). Only one factor has shown statistical significance and this is the place of residence. Residents of Belgrade own property of higher market value than residents of other urban and rural settlements in Serbia.

Table 5. Regression model with indicators of the total market value of household property of the members of the political elite

Indicator	Standardized Beta coefficient	Sig.
(Constant)		0.567
Inhabitant of Belgrade	0.193	0.011
Middle rank	0.056	0.559
Higher rank	0.144	0.134
Year of taking the elite position	0.047	0.543
A best friend on an elite position	0.080	0.277
Membership in any of the ruling political parties	0.015	0.843
Coefficient of determination (R Square): 0.053		

Conclusion

In this paper, using the multiple linear regression it was examined which factors influence the income level of households of the members of the ruling group and the total market value of the property in their ownership. Based on the results we can conclude that there are intragroup differences in the economic position of members of the economic and political elites in Serbia during the period of consolidation of the capitalist order.

A higher rank within the ruling stratum, as a rule, implies more income, as well as a more valuable property among the households of members of the economic elite. In the latter stratum, the private sector of the enterprise is also a factor, which also affects the income level and the market value of immovable property. The findings are not surprising because “ideal-typically, economic position in the economic subsystem is ensured by success in the market competition and the right to appropriate and use the profits without external restrictions, while the income of the holders of positions within the state apparatus are determined (limited) by public acts (positive legislation)” (Lazić, 2016a, p. 12). Membership in the political party, which confirms the interconnection between the economic and political strata of the ruling group, is also significant for the income of the economic elite. In the case of the political elite, regardless which political party they belong to, social capital of having a best friend on the elite position is an important factor contributing to higher income. The year of taking the elite position is significant when it comes to property owned by the economic elite, while this is not the case with the political elite. The earlier the members of the economic elite came to elite positions, the higher market value of the property owned by their households is. Belgrade has proved to be one of the factors

of a better economic position of both groups of the ruling stratum. Housing in the capital city is significant for higher income of the political elite, as well as for the more valuable property of both strata of the ruling group.

Although the analysis has determined the intragroup differences in the economic position of the economic and political elites in Serbia, in the case of the political elite they are not so clearly identified as with the economic one. We assume that this is the result of a greater fluctuation within the ranks of the political elite in the past few years. The conclusion suggests the previously established intergroup differences between the economic and political elites in terms of the economic position. Although these strata of the ruling group are distinguished by their economic position in relation to other social classes/strata and are at the top of the social hierarchy, the economic elite has a higher and more homogeneous economic position than the political one.

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УНУТАРГРУПНЕ РАЗЛИКЕ МАТЕРИЈАЛНОГ ПОЛОЖАЈА ЕКОНОМСКЕ И ПОЛИТИЧКЕ ЕЛИТЕ У СРБИЈИ

Сажетак

У тексту испитујемо да ли у периоду консолидације капиталистичког поретка у Србији постоје унутаргрупне разлике у материјалном положају економске и политичке елите. Циљ је да утврдимо који фактори доприносе унутрашњој економској диференцијацији ових двају слојева владајуће групације. Анализа се заснива на подацима које је прикупио Институт за социолошка истраживања Филозофског факултета Универзитета у Београду у оквиру анкетног истраживања реализованог на подзорку економске елите 2012. године, а затим и политичке елите 2015. године. Применом вишеструке линеарне регресије анализирано је који фактори утичу на висину прихода домаћинстава припадника владајуће групације, као и на укупну тржишну вредност некретнина у њиховом власништву. Статистички значајни предиктори висине прихода домаћинстава припадника економске елите су виши ранг испитаника, приватни сектор власништва фирме и чланство у политичкој странци, а политичке елите – најбољи пријатељ на елитном положају, виши ранг и становање у Београду. Када је реч о укупној тржишној вредности некретнина у власништву домаћинства, код економске елите су статистички значајни предиктори виши ранг испитаника, приватни сектор власништва фирме, година доспевања на елитни положај и Београд као стално место боравка, а код политичке елите само становање у главном граду. Закључујемо да унутар владајуће групације у Србији постоји економска диференцијација.

Кључне речи: материјални положај, економска елита, политичка елита, приходи, некретнине

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