

# Rural households in the stratification system of the Slovak society

## *Vidiecke domácnosti v stratifikačnom systéme slovenskej spoločnosti*

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**Abstract:** This report deals with the problems of the status of rural households in the stratification system of the post-socialist Slovak society. The authors take as the basis the concept of associated classification and knowledge about the trends in the development of the social structure of Slovak society in the transformation period. The processing of empirical data from the survey research of rural households in three districts served as an example to compare the classification of households within the economic and socio-cultural lines by the means of the selected indicators. The analysis refers to the inconsistency of the stratification of rural households according to the economic and income statuses as well as education, population and socioeconomic qualities which are significantly conditioned by the regional position and situation. The representative types of rural households for the individual social strata are characterized in the conclusions. They are characterized with regard to the used criteria.

**Key words:** social stratification, rural households, post-socialist transformation, household position

**Abstrakt:** Táto štúdia sa zaoberá problematikou postavenia vidieckych domácností v stratifikačnom systéme postsocialistickej slovenskej spoločnosti. Autorky vychádzajú z konceptu združenej klasifikácie a poznatkov o trendoch vo vývoji sociálnej štruktúry slovenskej spoločnosti v období transformácie. Na príklade spracovania empirických dát z dotazníkového výskumu vidieckych domácností v troch okresoch je porovnávané zaradenie domácností v rámci materiálnej a sociokultúrnej línie prostredníctvom vybraných indikátorov. Analýza poukazuje na nekonzistentnosť rozvrstvenia vidieckych domácností podľa materiálno-príjmového statusu a podľa ich vzdelanostnej, populačnej a socioeconomickej kvality, ktorá je výrazne podmienená regionálnou polohou a situáciou. V záveroch sú v zmysle použitých kritérií charakterizované reprezentatívne typy vidieckych domácností pre jednotlivé spoločenské vrstvy.

**Kľúčové slová:** sociálna stratifikácia, vidiecke domácnosti, postsocialistická transformácia, pozícia domácností

The stratification of the whole society or individual regional communities, new form of social stratification, reasons of social and economic inequalities among people, the *winners* and *losers* of present transformation processes is often discussed topic especially in post-communist countries. These countries, including Slovakia, found themselves in the confrontation with the principles of market economy, what caused continually the increasing importance of economical capital at the definition of social status of individual and groups and at the process and at the forms of the processes of hierarchy and polarization of these societies, there are clearly participating also "new" phenomena. From the factor of determination

of the form and the results of social differentiation process, the most important task presented: small and big privatization, restitutions, the entry of international companies into the Slovak economy, the vehement development and sharp rise of several branches of service sector, the torpor of several industry branches and agriculture, the development of private entrepreneurship, prices liberalization and partly also the work remuneration, shadow economy, adjustments of pensions and other social rates, the unemployment rise, money devaluation, inflation and other reasons of the macroeconomic development (Sopóci, Džambazovič 2003). The changes in the social structure of society as the whole and in

the frame of its regional or specific rural societies are firstly conditioned by the changes, resp. by the differences in the sector employment. The fact of decreasing working places in the production sector and their increasing in the services means that there is the unequal rise of people in the lower social stratum, the differences among the “rich” and “poor” regions deepen, but at the same time their relatively isolated job markets are linking. The movement of inhabitants in the geographic area into the more stabilized and modern regions caused also the movement in the social area. The introduced changes influence the whole stratum of inhabitants, however, the most evident they are in the middle social strata, which as the whole are losing their boundaries and inside the conflict among their “old” and “new” representatives is more emphasized.

The new trends of social development caused by the global transformation meant for the Slovak countryside in post-communist period not only the significant structural changes, but also the new forms of realistic behaviour of this group of inhabitants. The process of differentiation has deepened, which emphasized on one hand the existence of social areas threatened by the “collapse”, on the other hand the existence of strong regional activate or revitalized interior potential. At a major part of rural inhabitants, there emerged the attitudes of social degradation and the attitudes which understand the poverty as a reason of social injustice (resp. “tax for transformation”), feelings of social decrease and the general mistrust to political elites. There were founded new islands of poverty in the countryside, but there appeared also more collective activities towards the countryside restoring and its step into other socio-economic level, as also the individualized cases of returning of certain persons or socio-demographic groups into the countryside (Buchta 2003). The political and economic changes in the country were fully reflected in the years on the regional level. The most crucial are four trends: firstly, the core periphery trend, which appeared in increasing of the differences among regions in the western and eastern part of Slovakia and among town and rural

areas; secondly, to point up the status of the capital; thirdly, to strengthen the local authorities and the last, non-appreciating of the regional policy importance and giving priority to sector policies opposite to solving of economic problems in the region (Kling 2003).

## CONTEXTUAL CHARACTERISTICS AND OUTCOMES OF THE DETERMINATION OF HOUSEHOLD STATUS

The communist society was founded on the egalitarian ideology in the sense in which the wealth lost its legitimacy, the ostentative consumption was denied, the accumulation of economic capital became legal (however, the reality was often different) and the importance of social capital<sup>1</sup> increased (Možný 1991). That was possible to be transformed into economic capital in the form of available contacts and the social network based on clientism. In the regime of so called real socialism, the “not legitimized” wealth and poverty lost their social status (Mareš 1999). The social stratification of our society in the `80s and `90s was determined according to two independent axes: socio-cultural status (education, profession, way of spending of leisure time, etc.) and material status (management position and the value of income). The researches of social structure from that time and later pointed at several specialties of stratification and differentiated processes and referred to these basic tendencies<sup>2</sup>:

- the Slovak society in the post-communist development in the `90s transformed into the “middle class society” through the type of society with socially, economically and politically dominant small upper class, predominantly weakened (by predominance and position) middle class, the part of which has “proletarianised” and at the same time decreased the living level, prestige and social importance of working class, which main part failed into the sub-class (Sopóci 2000);
- the most effective of the new created mobility channels have become the political and public activity

<sup>1</sup> The concept of social capital is used as a framework f.e. by Lošťák (2005).

<sup>2</sup> The social structure research of Slovak society was held in 1991–1992, but it was not compiled as a complex. In 1984 and 1993 SÚ AV ČR in Prague realized the representative research (M. Tuček), the Mikrocensus data later were processed 1997 (I. Radičová) and Median a AISA companies organized the continual survey Slovakia in 1998–2001 (P. Gonda, M. Timoracký). Further project of SO SAS in 2002–2004 *Classes and stratification in social change of Slovakia* (B. Búzik, J. Bunčák, I. Vašečka, K. Strapcová, J. Bonková) was oriented at data re-analyzes of the realized researches and at the theoretical and methodological re-interpretation of stratification and differentiated processes in our society since `90s. In the present times there are two projects solved connected with this topic: *Changing or vanishing classes? Class structure and social stratification in Slovakia at the turn of the century* (2005–2007, coordinator B. Búzik) and *Social inequalities and the question of social cohesion – perspective widening* (2007–2009, coordinator Z. Kusá).

- and entrepreneurship, whereas the highest increase achieved those individuals who combined them; education and qualification always work as the mobility channel – especially in connection with using social network, political and other contacts, favours etc. (Sopóci, Džambazovič 2003);
- the middle classes strengthened until 1993. This process went on afterwards but from the point of view of both statuses, it was characterized mainly by the unbalance: in 1984–1993 there was an increase by 10% in the socio-cultural dimension and by 5.7% in the economic dimension – this referred especially to the teachers, scientists, cultural and social workers; in general those who had an ambition to belong to the middle stratum on the basis of the qualification and lifestyle. However, they did not find the conditions for the corresponding self-realization in the society (Vašečka 2003);
  - in 2002, the report carried out by P. Gonda a M. Timoracký identified a relatively small social distance between the individual social strata in SR with regard to the household conveniences. Approximately 40% of households classified into the lowest socioeconomic classes possessed the household devices and equipment of upper classes and vice versa;
  - the increase of the bigger differentiation of households was assumed as the result of the lowering of the above standard consumer possibilities of households

- placed into the lower social classes and stagnation of households from the upper social classes;
- the sector membership and the number of children were the main factors that influenced the total status of an individual before 1989. In the case of the evaluation of the household status, the main factors were: the membership of the “head” to the social group, his age, number of children and their age, the number of economically productive household members, the position on the job market and so on. Their influence has been preserved but we do not know its measure;
- socio-economic status of households (classified according to the socio-professional classification of partners) was derived from the amount of their income, household conveniences and possession.

Five types of households<sup>3</sup> were selected in one of the above mentioned researches. The households of lower socioeconomic status prevailed in Slovakia at the turn of the millennium. The lowest and the lower middle class<sup>4</sup> accounted for 62.4% in 2001. There was an unstable tendency to the improvement because in the monitored period more households of lower middle class approached the status of middle class households and did not fall into the lowest social class. This movement was not considered to be of a great importance because it had been known from

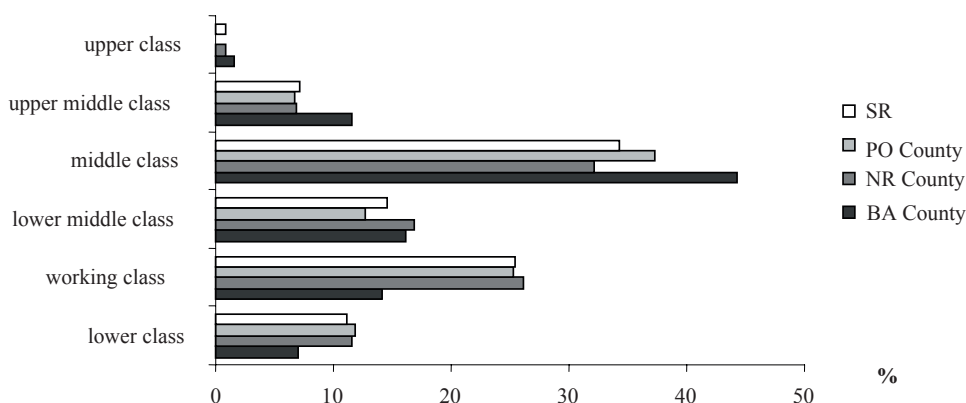


Figure 1. Self-determination into social classes

Source: Institute for Sociology of SAS, October–November 2004

<sup>3</sup> Knowledge about the present state of hierarchy of Slovak households was stated by Gonda and Timoracký (2002). The used classification of socioeconomic status of households was based on the classification of the “head” of the household (a person with the highest income) into the one of the five classes as well as on other variables as the job of the “head” of the household, job position and the highest level of education reached by the “head” of the household.

<sup>4</sup> In 2001, 4.1% of households belonged to the upper class and 8.9% to the upper middle class. The middle class was represented by 24.5% of households; 19.2% of households belonged to the lower middle class and the lowest social class was represented by 43.2% of households in Slovakia.

other sources that low incomes of the households of the lower middle class were nearly the same as the incomes of the households of the lowest social class which received the social benefits.

Another representative research<sup>5</sup> that evaluated regional differences in Slovakia was focused on the status in social hierarchy which was perceived subjectively by respondents. The Figure 1 represents the situation in selected counties to which the monitored districts belong. In the Bratislava County, the share of those who self-determined themselves into the middle and upper middle levels was significantly higher than in the Nitra and Prešov counties. At the same time, the share of respondents who self-determined themselves into two lowest levels was very low in the Bratislava County. Other data from the quoted research point out that the higher social status as well as the awareness of this status is conditioned by such factors as the level of urbanization of the region, quality of education potential and the average income.

Various theoretic approaches are used to determine the socioeconomic household status<sup>6</sup>. The theoretical concept known as *the associated classification* was applied in this report. The associated classification supposes that the lifestyle, standard of living and the status of family households should be derived not only from the status of the “head” of the household or of that household member whose status is higher but the status of both partners<sup>7</sup> should be taken into consideration. Apart from the tendencies in the determination of the household status, we also took into consideration the class understanding of social stratification. Therefore, the classes are not approached as real social groups with clearly set limits. We applied the assumption of Goldthorp and Bourdieu<sup>8</sup> who state that, within not very clear limits of individual classes, it is possible to find social groupings with a clear generation continuity and specific subculture. This is suitable for the analysis of life strategies and life chances. Modernizing and transforming society is characterized by increasing plurality of the forms of life arrangements that can

be seen in the continuous decreasing of limited class social arrangements. Therefore, the classes do not always have to be hierarchically arranged and some representatives of lower stratum can have better life chances than the representative of the middle stratum who is “suffering”. Therefore, in different analyses, the hierarchy was understood as a symbolic and basic background as well as the outcome for the interpretation of differences; in other words, we used the nominalistic approach<sup>9</sup>.

## LINES AND CRITERIA OF RURAL HOUSEHOLD STATUS

The main objective of the report is to refer to the regional non-uniformity in the economic and socio-cultural hierarchy of rural households. Concerning the methodology of determination, we took as the basis the empirical material<sup>10</sup> which was obtained by standard interviews according to the survey in 656 rural households from the districts Topoľčany, Senec and Sabinov in 2001/2002. The selection of stratification criteria respected mainly the findings about the most significant discrepancies between the questioned rural households. When setting the system of stratification criteria for the questioned households, we took into consideration the fact that the expectation of the introduction of the merit principle, qualification adequacy of work done and the possible lifestyle in correspondent economic and income backgrounds in Slovakia has not been fulfilled in the social practice after 1989. The system of criteria according to which we evaluated the total status and compared the partial household statuses was defined in accordance with the associated classification, it means, that the selected indicators represented all members of the questioned households and not only their “heads”. The results are compared and interpreted in the context of the determined knowledge and tendencies in the development of social structure of the transforming Slovak society.

Societal stratification of households was evaluated by three indicators within the economic and socio-

<sup>5</sup> Faltán et al. (2005).

<sup>6</sup> They are described in details f.e. by Maříková (2000) and Šanderová (1999).

<sup>7</sup> In the case of questioned rural households, we spread this approach and we took into consideration the status of all adult members of the family.

<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu (1984) dealt with *classes on the paper*.

<sup>9</sup> There exist two approaches to the social class in modern sociology: realistic and nominalistic. The former considers the classes to be real social groups and the latter considers them to be analytical categories created for cognitive goals which were set up by the selection of people with the same or similar incomes, property, job, power, prestige, etc. The supporters of nominalistic approach talk about strata instead of classes. (Sopóci, Búzik 1999)

<sup>10</sup> The selection of surveyed households is described in details by Moravčíková and Hanová (2005).

cultural statuses. The household was given a certain number of points for each indicator. This classified it into one of the social strata<sup>11</sup>. *The economic status* expressed the inequality in incomes, conveniences and life conditions of households. The following were the selected indicators:

- the total income of the household<sup>12</sup> was understood as the reflection of financial possibilities or limits of individual households; its amount<sup>13</sup> was partially conditioned by the nature of the work and sector as well as by the number and multiplicity of sources which individual sums of the total income came from;
- two selected indicators of household conveniences – cable or satellite televisions and PC whose ownership, according to the research findings, presented a certain level of economic background and the level of household “modernization” in terms of the ability of the members of the household to use these household devices<sup>14</sup>. We also took into consideration the findings of the quoted researches which pointed to the importance of the computer ownership because of the possibly better and faster access to the information. This is considered to be the factor that differentiates the present society more than the income or social status;
- average area of living space per one member of the household<sup>15</sup> which pointed to the lower or higher standard of living and in this way to the living conditions of the members of households. This indicator is used in the statistical practice as

one of the evaluating indicators to determine and compare standards of living or the poverty.

*The socio-cultural status* represented empirically derived structure which consisted of the education level, socioeconomic status and the population quality of the individual households. The education<sup>16</sup> symbolized the cultural capital of households. It could be seen that the respondents perceived it as an essential value and part of their life strategies especially in relation to their children and future visions. At the same time, there was a big non-uniformity (or inequality) in its achieved level in the monitored regions.

The socioeconomic status of household members<sup>17</sup> is naturally connected with the life in the region. It is one of the determinants of vertical organization of its social space and it is the social capital of households as well. Its status was not considered only from the point of view of the amount of financial remuneration which was often insufficient or not big enough to esteem the social contribution. It was also connected with the particular possibilities in the job market, contacts in local social nets as well as outside of them which can be used in favour of the households. They enable the transition of social capital into the economic or cultural (e.g. education of children, starting the new business, etc.). On the other hand, it may become the discrimination factor in the hierarchy processes of the local community as well (e.g. in relation with age).

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<sup>11</sup> Stratification of household statuses is done by their classification into five corresponding intervals (equidistant intervals) so that the result of this research could be compared with the stratification outline of Slovak households into five classes.

<sup>12</sup> Household income up to 10 000 SKK – 1 point; up to 20 000 SKK – 2 points; up to 30 000 SKK – 3 points and over 30 000 SKK – 4 points. This scale was selected considering the amount of household income stated by the respondents.

<sup>13</sup> *Mikrocensus domácností 2003* introduced that the average net income per one person in the household in Bratislava County was 7 988 SKK when the average number of members of one household was 2.44. In Nitra County, the average net income was 5 842 SKK and the average number of members of one household was 2.71. In Prešov County, the average net income was 6 038 SKK when the average number of members per one household was 3.23. Available at <http://www.statistics.sk/>.

<sup>14</sup> Each household possessing satellite or cable TV was given 1 point and for the ownership of PC 2 points. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic stated in one of its informative reports carried out in 2005 that 90% of Slovak household possessed the television-satellite TV 27.1% and cable TV 45.1%; 38.5 of households owned the PC. Available at <http://www.statistics.sk/>.

<sup>15</sup> The average living area of the flat/house per one member of the household: up to 20 m<sup>2</sup> – 1 point, up to 40 m<sup>2</sup> – 2 points, up to 60 m<sup>2</sup> – 3 points and over 60 m<sup>2</sup> – 4 points. This scale is based on the data in the survey about the area of flats per houses which the questioned households live in.

<sup>16</sup> The household was given 1 point for every household member who reached the basic level of education and 2 points for every household member who finished vocational school. The household was given 3 points for every household member who finished secondary grammar school and 4 points for every household member with university level of education.

<sup>17</sup> There was the following evaluation of individual socioeconomic statuses which were marked in the surveys by respondents within the total point score: unemployed – 1 point, student, retiree, woman on maternity leave and soldier – 2 points, employee – 3 points, businessman – 4 points.



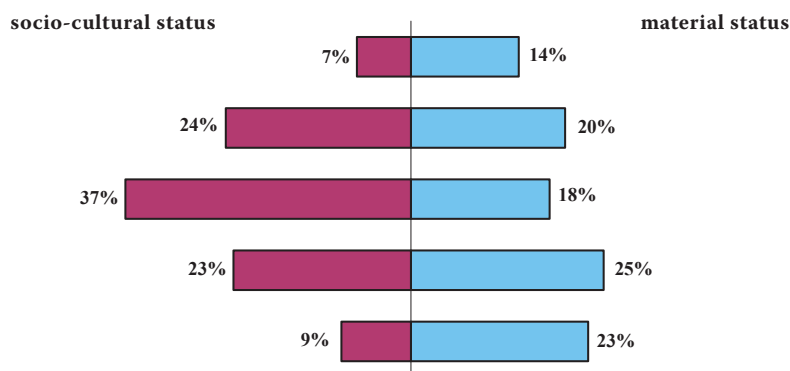


Figure 2. Stratification model of the rural household sample

The population quality of questioned households was evaluated by the share of persons under the 18 years of age<sup>18</sup>. The analysis and comparison of age structure of household members referred to the differentiated importance of this indicator. Children and youth represent not only the statistically important indicator<sup>19</sup> for households and local communities but they have a multidimensional “psychological” effect as well. They function as a sort of “animation” of the ordinary life especially for older members of rural households and can embody “the bridge” to new information. They fulfil the task of the motivation factor for different social activities as well. Therefore, they represent an important potential for the local community. Of course, their higher share in households is the result of traditional family and the reproduction behaviour in the region or area or it can be the result of the natural effort to survive. When dealing with the problematic of household stratification, we considered this group of household members to be a very important category that represents the cultural, economic and social capital of the household.

The evaluation of group stratification of the regional household samples by the selected indicators

highlighted the regional disparities that were founded on the macro-structural level. The highest total point score was given to the households in the district of Senec. The group of households from the district of Topolčany reached the level of 85.2% and the group of households from the district of Sabinov reached 83.7% of the highest point score. The partial values of statuses pointed to the more significant inner differentiation of the status of regional groups of the questioned households in relation to the economic and socio-cultural criteria. Concerning the economic status<sup>20</sup>, the difference between the highest point score of household from Senec and the households from Sabinov and Topolčany ranged among 20% and 27%. The differences in socio-cultural status were only 6% and 10%.

The Figure 2 representing the stratification level and intensity in both monitored lines showed a more uniform household distribution in the whole sample according to the indicators of economic status. When comparing the share of households classified according to the economic status, the biggest difference was presented within the middle classes. In the upper middle class, there were more households classified according to the socio-cultural status than

<sup>18</sup> The household was given 1 point for every household member up to the 18 years of age.

<sup>19</sup> They are sources of social benefits on the household level. They are one of the criteria used in the division of state financial support to the local budget.

<sup>20</sup> Table 1. Data to calculate the value of the economic status of the groups of household samples

% of household	Income (in SKK)				Cable/satellite TV	PC	Average living area of the house/flat per 1 household member			
	up to 10 000	up to 20 000	up to 30 000	over 30 000			up 20 m <sup>2</sup>	up 40 m <sup>2</sup>	up 60 m <sup>2</sup>	over 60 m <sup>2</sup>
Topolčany	30.1	48.7	14.7	6.5	31.3	23.8	48.0	33.8	12.6	5.6
Sabinov	33.3	50.0	15.5	1.2	33.3	19.2	54.5	34.8	10.2	0.5
Senec	50.0	22.2	18.1	9.7	54.9	52.5	21.0	51.4	15.7	11.9

Source: Household Survey 2001/2002

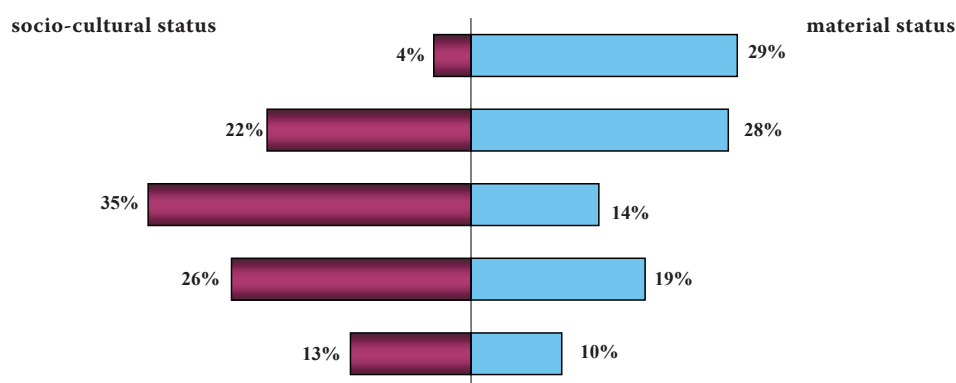


Figure 3. Stratification model of Senec

according to the economic status. The difference was 4.1%. Within the middle middle class, the difference was 19.2%. The total difference was 23.3%. This difference was lowered because of the situation in the categories of lower middle and lowest social classes (it has been mentioned that they are very similar) where there were more households classified at the expense of the socio-cultural status (15.9%). Therefore, the differences in the middle and lower parts of the stratification system were predominantly of the “decreasing” character; in other words, socio-cultural households classified into the middle middle and lower middle strata were economically placed into the lower middle and lowest social strata. The households classified according to the socio-cultural status slightly prevailed in the upper middle class. The share of households placed into the upper social class according to their economic status was two times bigger than the share of households that were classified into this social class according to their socio-cultural quality<sup>21</sup>.

## REGIONAL STRATIFICATION MODELS

The inconsistency of both the socio-cultural and economic statuses was very different and varied on the level of regional samples. This is graphically demonstrated by the individual regional stratification

models. The sample of rural households from the district Senec (Figure 3) was the only one in which the economic part of the stratification model reached the features of so called “up-side-down pyramid”. The exception was the levels of middle middle strata. The model had a deltoid shape from the socio-cultural point of view. In the case of this district, the socio-cultural predominance of the middle strata was mainly understood as the reflection and result of a better quality structure of the socioeconomic position and education level of their members in comparison with other monitored districts. This caused the better economic condition and classification of households from Senec because of the higher financial work remuneration of their members as well as because of the higher level of civilization, of literacy and more modern household conveniences. Of course, this situation cannot be perceived only as the reason of individual “skilfulness” but also as the reason of maturity and level of the region standard of living in which the members of these households live. The economic status of rural households did not increase nor decrease in a significant dependence on the number of household members. The predominant size category of the household with three and four members presented good economic and financial backgrounds because approximately 60% of these households were classified into the upper and upper middle social strata. As we have mentioned before,

<sup>21</sup> Table 2. Data to calculate the value of socio-cultural status of the groups of household samples

% of households	Score for the education (points)				Share of persons up to the 18 years of age	Score for the economic status (points)			
	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
Topolčany	13.0	49.8	33.8	3.4	31.2	1.0	32.9	62.8	3.4
Sabinov	12.9	50.5	32.2	2.5	55.0	1.5	24.5	72.5	1.5
Senec	6.4	23.7	52.2	17.7	25.4	0.4	25.7	69.9	4.0

Source: Household survey 2001/2002

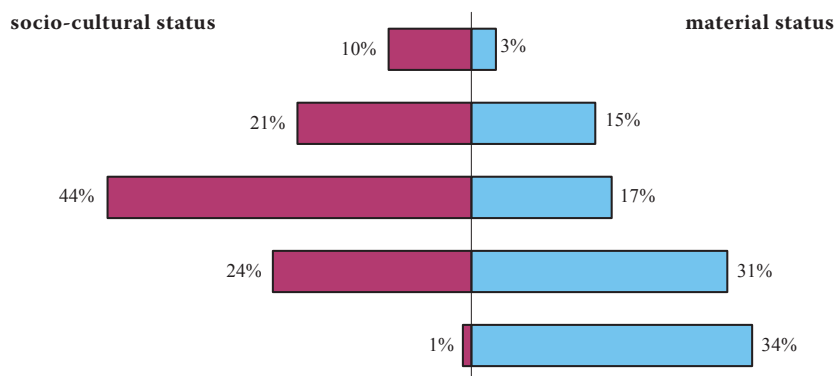


Figure 4. Stratification model of Sabinov

this situation was predominantly conditioned by the education structure of better quality, higher employment, more intensive business activities and by the higher adaptability in general. Socio-culturally, these households mainly belonged to the middle middle class (61.8 %), upper middle and the upper social classes (23.6%). According to the socio-cultural criteria, the households with one and two members were placed in the lower part of the stratification model – in the lower middle stratum 58.2 % and the lowest social stratum 40.5%. The low number of household members did not influence their good economic status. Mainly retirees were taken into consideration. They had inherited good conditions from the past and were able to benefit from them thanks to the attractions of the region or they had other sources of income from their supplementary economic activities.

The stratification model of the sample of rural households in the district Sabinov was unequivocally pyramidal from the point of view of the economic dimension (Figure 4). It was unequivocally deltoid from the point of view of the socio-cultural dimension. Its upper part was predominantly occupied by the households classified according to the socio-cultural criteria (at the expense of economic criteria). There was a contrary situation in its lower part where the economic classification of households prevailed (at the expense of socio-cultural criteria). This model reached the most sloping shapes by the quantification of the selected criteria. These shapes highlighted the problematics, unbalance and non-uniformity of the situation in the marginal region of the marginal county. 60% of the questioned rural households in the district Sabinov lived in the below average economic conditions. Another significant discrepancy was the fact that, according to the socio-cultural status, the

middle middle class was formed by 2.6-times more households than according to the economic status. Taking into consideration the data about the conveniences, income and the structure of socioeconomic statuses of household members together with other contextual data about the region, it could be said that in the case of the district Sabinov, the statement about the functioning of the penalty principle<sup>22</sup> was valid.

The sample of rural households from Sabinov also indicated a significant indirect proportion between the number of household members and the level of its economic and financial conditions. 91.7% of households with one and two members socio-culturally belonged to the lower middle class and the rest of them to the lowest social class, but their economic and financial situation after the decade of transformation seemed to be better and more stabilized when comparing with young families. This was because predominantly retirees lived in these households. They lived most of their economically productive life during the communism in which “the protective hand of the state” provided the basic social securities and enabled people to work and earn some money as well. On the other hand, many representatives of the older generation “invested” their capital into the younger generation by the means of co-existing in the common households. Although they disadvantaged in some way their individual situation (worse economic classification of households with five and more members), according to their visions, dreams or planned activities connected with the younger generation, they did not consider this model of existence to be only the need, but they also perceived it as a “trustworthy and paying back” investment. Because of their socio-cultural value, the households with five

<sup>22</sup> Economic activity seems to be the main factor that enables people to escape and leave the risk of poverty. It is difficult to see poverty as the result of the individual’s failure, if we know that his/her possibilities to escape the poverty by means of his own activity are minimal (Štrápcová 2005).



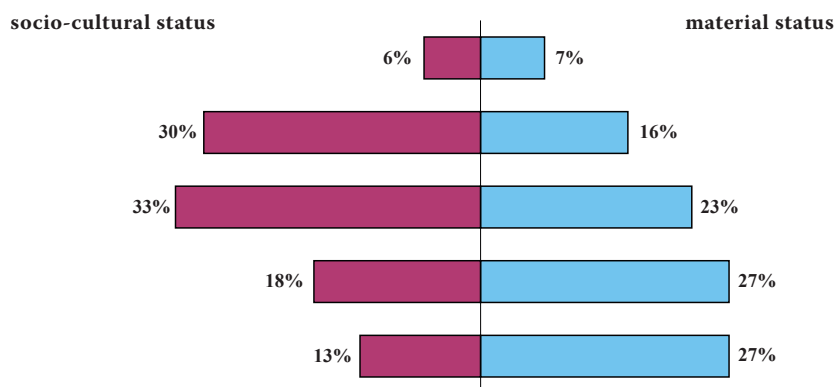


Figure 5. Stratification model of Topoľčany

and more members were mainly classified into the middle classes<sup>23</sup> within the stratification system.

In the district Topoľčany (Figure 5), the differences in the classification were evident mainly on the level of the upper middle and the lowest social strata. In general, it was assumed that the questioned rural households did not reach the economic status which would correspond to their economic evaluation according to the used methodology. Although the stratification model of the sample of rural households from the district Topoľčany was similar in shape to the stratification model of the sample of rural households from the district Sabinov, the “sharpness” of the pyramid contours on one side and the deltoid ones on the other side was not so marked. According to the economic status, the lower part of the model based on the more uniform distribution of households into the individual social classes was rounded in comparison with the model of the district Sabinov. In comparison with the model of the district Senec, it visually appeared as its horizontal mirror picture.

The number of members of rural households in the district Topoľčany influenced essentially their economic and financial situations. This indirect proportion was naturally the most significant within the distribution of households with five and more members. The households with one and two members, which were in this district represented mainly by the retirees, were placed in all types of middle classes. Similarly to the situation in the district Sabinov, their members had various sources of income. The part of

their sources dated back to the period of socialism. This was mainly the result of the higher industrial employment in monitored areas which in the past provided many advantages for those who worked in this sector. The industrial employment was connected with the important companies that were considered to be the main representatives of the modern industrial socialist sector (boot and shoe industry, brewery, etc.). At the same time, this employment feature caused that the majority of the questioned households with three and four members were introduced both economically (approximately 70%) and socio-culturally (approximately 80%) into the middle middle, lower middle and the lowest social strata<sup>24</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

The data analysis from the research of rural households confirmed that the post-socialist transformation in Slovakia highlighted the differences between regions and that it resulted into the different attitudes and perceptions<sup>25</sup> of “that already experienced”. Economic, socio-demographic and socioeconomic differences between the questioned rural households and projected into selected indicators of compared status lines were emphasized in the different inner hierarchy arrangement of regional samples. This was framed by the total existing development and changes in the nature of the stratification system of Slovak society. The regional stratification models outlined that the classification of households according to the criteria

<sup>23</sup> Socio-culturally 42.1% belonged to the middle class; 36.4% to the upper middle class and 2.8% to the lower middle class.

<sup>24</sup> This fact was also influenced by the education potential of rural households in Topoľčany. This was because for the majority of work positions which were in the industrial field occupied by members of questioned households, it was enough to finish the secondary grammar school or the vocational school. The status of working class was over-evaluated during the socialism. Therefore, nowadays, these factors may have a predominantly opposite influence.

<sup>25</sup> The stated findings assert Moravčíková (2003) and Moravčíková, Hanová (2005).

of the economic status (income, household conveniences, the spatial living conditions) does not copy their classification according to the selected indicators of the socio-cultural status (the education level and structure of socioeconomic positions of household members, the population quality). The economic and income differences between household samples from the monitored districts ranged from 20–27% and socio-cultural differences ranged only from 6% to 10%. Therefore, the process of differentiation of rural households cannot be perceived only as the reflection of the varied structure of its members but predominantly as being dependent on the urban and spatial and socioeconomic situation of the region.

The aim of the description of regional stratification models was not only their comparison but in the case of the district Topoľčany, also the “formation” of particular representative types of rural households for the individual social classes in relation to the following qualitative research<sup>26</sup>. According to the results of stratification analysis of rural households in the district Topoľčany, the upper social stratum was represented by two generation households with three, four, five or more members. The parents in productive age had higher than vocational education, ran successfully their business, had high standard of living and above average incomes<sup>27</sup>. The upper middle class approached to the upper social stratum with regard to the type of households it consisted of. However, the households with five and more members classified into this social class embodied families in which both parents in productive age were employed or they ran their own business; they had one or two small children, they had higher standard of living and incomes from various sources. They lived in the common household with their parents who were retirees and took care of their grandchildren. The typical representative of the middle middle stratum was the household with two members – sporadically it was a retired couple. More often it was represented by a couple in productive age (a parent with a child as well) with higher than vocational education. Both of them were employed or one of them was a sole trader with the standard economic level and financial background. From time to time, they used their savings as supplementary sources for bigger investments or they used them to support their adult children. The lower middle middle stratum and the lowest

social stratum approached each other with regard to the type of households and their members who represented these social strata. They mainly consisted of the retired households with one or two members together with households with five and more members where there were three and more small children. The grandparents – retirees as well as the parents in the productive age-achieved mainly basic, vocational or even full secondary education. One of them was unemployed for a longer period of time. Women were often on maternity leave. They had lower standard of living which was compensated by the self-supply. The representatives of the lowest social stratum received social benefits from the state and used different forms of support from local institutions.

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<sup>26</sup> The qualitative research that followed was carried out in two villages in the district Topoľčany (one of them had the nature of town). It focused on their post-socialist transformation interpreted by life experiences, opinions and attitudes of the main representatives of rural households from different social strata.

<sup>27</sup> The term above average incomes we understand values of the income level with regard to the declared scale of incomes which resulted from the date of analysed survey research of households.

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