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**Rural Families and Households
in Post-Socialist Transition:
Serbian Experience¹**

Abstract

Rural families and households make a basic framework for understanding the rural way of life. This relation is especially interesting under the recent and difficult post-socialist transition in places such as Serbia. Previous research has shown that the transition and its benefits are not distributed equally. This has induced social and economic disparities, at the expense of the social attractiveness of rural areas. These disparities have influenced characteristics of Serbian rural families and households, their survival strategies and their roles in the reproduction of the rural way of life. We started research with three assumptions: a) depopulation of Serbian rural areas continues under the post-socialist transition, b) transitional risks produce partial retraditionalization of Serbian rural family relationships, and c) characteristics of Serbian regions affect characteristics of rural families and households.

The analysis confirmed rural depopulation. In the decade 2002–2011, there was the most significant decline ever in the number of Serbian rural families. This signified the negative impact of transition on rural areas. Besides this, the research confirmed that contemporary Serbian rural families and households still

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have some traditional features (multiple generations, relics of the role of head of the traditional rural family) which enable them to cope with transitional risks. A third finding proved that characteristics of Serbian rural families and households depend on regional characteristics. Within the regions that are more socially attractive and where the risks of social exclusion are lower, retraditionalization of rural families is less noticeable. It can be concluded that contemporary Serbian rural families and households survive throughout transition periods depending on their characteristics, but also characteristics of their social environment. Stronger social magnetism of a region is manifested in stronger rural social vitality. That is reflected in stronger modernization of rural families and households.

Keywords: rural family, rural household, post-socialist transition, Serbia

Introduction

Modern and postmodern societies brought significant transformation of rural space (Halfacree, 1993; Marsden, 2003), induced both from outside and within rural communities. The end of (relative) self-sufficiency of traditional rural societies and their integration into the global social structures made rural space less homogeneous. In contemporary societies, rural space became public space with numerous social functions. It is not only space of extraction, but also space of consumption *in situ*.

Transformation of rural space induced modifications in rurality and vice versa. Cloke and Godwine (1992) wrote of both economic and cultural rural restructuring. Economic restructuring is the foundation of new rural economy in terms of multifunctionality (van der Ploeg, Roep 2003; Johnson 2001) and diversification (Slee 1987; Shucksmith, Bryden, Rosenthal, Short, Winter 1989; Shucksmith, Winter 1990). Cultural rural restructuring is a quest for a new identity of rural. Hence, it implies the issues of social attractiveness of rural areas (Petrović, Samardžija, Janković 2005) which relies on the prevailing concept of rural development and characteristics of rural social vitality (Čikić 2013).

Integration in global societies caused multiple changes in rural social structure. Along with the transformation of the rural economy, the most prominent are demographic changes. Since the end of the 19th century, rural areas in most of the European societies have been facing depopulation

(Collantes, Pinilla 2011). Its intensity depended on dynamics of global social processes (industrialization, urbanization). Thus, former socialist European societies (such as Serbia) faced rural depopulation later, in the second half of the 20th century, but in a more intensive manner (rural exodus). Rural depopulation is considerably influenced by two major factors: migration and decrease of rural fertility. Forced by pull-push factors (demographic pressure, labour market, characteristics of social infrastructure, quality of life, poverty, social control, lifestyle choices), the selective nature of rural migration induced depopulation, both directly and indirectly. On the other hand, adoption of urban cultural values and erosion of traditional ones lowered the rural norms of biological reproduction. Consequently, the process of rural ageing has become a major rural demographic feature, with considerable social repercussions on the reproduction of rural areas (Burholt, Dobbs 2012).

Even though we speak of integration of rural areas into contemporary global social processes, poverty and social exclusion are the main rural issues. This especially refers to transitional societies (Brown, Schaft 2003; Macours, Swinnen 2006), such as in contemporary Serbia. Rural poverty and social exclusion are causes, but also consequences of rural depopulation and ageing.

All of the presented reflects on rural family life patterns. We, hereby, wrote of rural families and households, but it is very difficult to analyse them as separate entities. They are, as Milić underlined (referred to: Bobić 1999, p. 94), 'two sides of the same phenomenon'. Nevertheless, even though significantly modified by contemporary social structures, rural family (as a primary social group, unity of life) and rural household (as a socio-economic category, unity of consumption) are still major categories in sociological research of rurality. Their analytical importance even rose with the prevalence of the neo-endogenous concept of rural development (Shucksmith 2009; Cloke, Marsden, Mooney 2006; Ray 1999) and emphasis on the role of rural human capital. The number and ratio of rural families and households, their structural and development characteristics, inner relations, etc. are sociological cornerstones in researching models of reproduction of the rural way of life.

The aforementioned transformation of rural structure also impacts on contemporary Serbian rural families and households. As a former socialist society, Serbia has been under significant changes for the last three decades,

most intensively in the last decade and a half (from the 2000s). Serbian rural areas entered the post-socialist transition right after the enforced period of the socialist concept of modernization. The previous period of modernization caused massive deagrarianisation. Rural areas have been considered as extraction places – resources such as food / raw materials, labour force and (partially) financial capital from agriculture have been used for development of the industrial and, later, service sector. During the 1960s and in the first half of the 1970s, Serbian rural areas faced the most intensive demographic changes. That was the period of the significant rural depopulation, caused mainly by migration / rural flight and decline of rural fertility rates. Transformation of rural family and household has been at its peak of manifestation. It entails both quantitative and qualitative changes. Thus, along with the decline in number of rural families and households, their ratio in total number of families and their size, transformation of rural families and households comprised changes in partners' relations, gender and generation relations, as well as changes in rural families' and households' functions.

Even though not as radical as in the socialist period, transformation of rural families and households in Serbia continued throughout the period of post-socialist transition. The analysis of these transformations is based on three assumptions. First, rural depopulation in Serbia continues under the post-socialist transition. This process is a result of continuous rural ageing and negative migration rate. It reflects a decline in number of rural families and households. Second, the economic aspect of post-socialist transition caused retraditionalization of social relations. At the family level, it is manifested in preservation of rural families with multiple generations and households with multiple families. This is a model for rural households to provide more social chances for survival. Also, retraditionalization is more common for rural families and households than urban ones because of the greater exposure to poverty and social exclusion. Third, regional context is of great importance in the analysis of Serbian rural families and households' characteristics. In more developed and, thus, more socially attractive regions, number of rural families and households is higher and the modernized type of rural families prevails.

The aim of the analysis is to indicate the characteristics of social vitality of Serbian rural families and households. Social vitality ensures their biological, economic and social reproduction. In addition, it provides

outlines for defining and implementation of different survival and development strategies under the post-socialist transition.

Sociological and Similar Research of Rural Families and Households in Serbian Society

From their very beginnings (end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century), Serbian sociology of family and rural sociology paid much attention to the analyses of rural families and households: their composition and structures, functions, inner relations, changes, family customs, their role in Serbian (rural) society, etc. (Karadžić 1987; Marković 1982; Bogišić 1867, according to: Mitrović 1998; Vukosavljević 1983). After WWII, the work of two authors emerged: R. First (1981) and O. Burić (1968; 1974). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, O. Burić (1968; 1974) analysed transformation of family life by tracking the line of (dis)continuity between traditional joint family (*porodična zadruga*) and modern rural family. Burić also analysed traditional rural values (such as solidarity) and the way they reflected the rural way of life. R. First (1981) researched rural families in relation to rural households and family farms. She paid special attention to the transformation of family functions under modernization, as well as the family life cycle. Next after Burić and First, A. Milić (1981; 1986), who analysed family in general, also researched rural families.

Contemporary sociological and similar research deals with rural families and households in a cultural context (Dragičević-Šešić 1989), motherhood and procreation (Tripković 1988, 1997; Novakov 2010), and (in)equalities in decision-making (Molnar 1989; Babović, Vuković 2008). Also, researchers have been interested in the specifics of family roles (Blagojević 1997; Tomanović 2004), general conceptual and hypothetical outlines for the rural family and household analysis (Stojanov 2004), changes in family life under the post-socialist transition (Milić 2004; Milić, Tomanović 2009; Milić at al. 2010; Miletić-Stepanović 2011), changes in rural family in relation to the position of specific rural social groups (Sokić 2005; Miladinović 2010), rural family and household in the context of social exclusion (Bogdanov 2007), socio-economic strategies of households (Babović 2009), etc.

Rural families are often analysed through their similarities with and differences to the urban ones (First 1981; Bobić 1999). According to First-

Dilić (1973), *production and consumption as functions of rural family and their connections with the nature, surroundings (rural area as a biological and geographical entity) are the basic elements for its social distinction with the urban family. On these two elements, set of different issues regarding rural/agricultural family depends: living conditions, choice of life partner, number of children, children's upbringing and education, professional orientation, age of social maturation, structure of family power, succession system etc.* Nevertheless, insisting on rural–urban family dichotomy can be, sometimes, unproductive or even completely wrong because it can mislead us to a conclusion that transformation of rural family necessarily must track the development of its urban forms. On the other hand, if it is properly handled, dichotomy can be theoretically and methodologically very heuristic since it facilitates learning on specifics of rural families, particularly in relation to rural households and, even more, family farms. This clearly states that the rural family is not to be treated as a monolith phenomenon.

Rural Social Structure in Contemporary Serbian Society Under Post-Socialist Transition

Gradual changes in the structure and way that former Yugoslav society has been functioning began in the middle of the 1980s. They set the foundation for the post-socialist transition of contemporary Serbian society. In the 1980s, the idea of a single-party state, and a socialist, state-planned and controlled economy, showed serious shortcomings. Antonić (2004) argues that Yugoslav/Serbian society, from the '*communist welfare state*' (in the 1970s), in the first half of the 1980s already faced economic and social crisis. Therefore, in the second half of the 1980s, the first, but mostly unsystematic, changes (such as basics of political pluralism, decentralisation of the power between former Yugoslav republics) laid the path for the transition (Popović 1991).

Changes in legal framework had an important influence on post-socialist transformation of rural and agricultural structure. After abolishing legal restrictions regarding private property land size (1992), enlargement of the family farms' utilised agricultural areas was enabled. It created conditions for the economic strengthening of Serbian peasantry. On the other hand,

agroindustry (owned and controlled by state mechanisms), which employed quite a share of the rural population, was privatized or put out of business, due to its insolvency.

In the beginning of the 1990s, after the breakdown of former Yugoslav society, the Republic of Serbia emerged, along with the five other countries. The decade of the 1990s completely blocked post-socialist transition, due to the unfavourable internal and external political and economic circumstances. This was the decade of false political democracy, supremacy of illegal economy, monopolistic control of the economy by the political elite, international political isolation of Serbian society, economic sanctions and embargos, internal Kosovo conflicts, NATO intervention (1999) etc. Lazić, Cvejić (2004) called it a period of blocked transition. During the 1990s, Serbian society can be characterized as a destroyed society (Bolčić 1994).

A new window for social changes has been opened at the beginning of the 21st century. After the political demise of Slobodan Milošević's isolation politics and totalitarian regime on the election and general public demonstration (2000), Serbia continued social and economic transformations that began a decade and a half ago. This is why Serbian society is often qualified as a society of late transition (Tripković, Tripković 2008; Lazić, Cvijić 2004). The need for accelerated changes was very much present because of the obvious gap in Serbian development compared to other post-socialist countries. Also, some of the changes missed their (expected) results. In the vortex of transitional changes (and global economic crisis), families and households suffered one of the biggest impacts.

Therefore, we focused our analysis on characteristics of families and households, especially rural ones. One of the characteristics of Serbian late transition is unequal distribution of positive and negative effects of social changes. Economic and social disparities are especially visible in an urban–rural context. In order to understand features of Serbian rural families and households, we must briefly point out some of the main characteristics of Serbian rural social structure. One of its dominant characteristics is rural depopulation. This process is typical for Serbian society in general, but especially for rural areas. Second, rural social infrastructure is underdeveloped which makes it difficult for the rural population to fulfil their needs. In particular, this is a major problem for rural population living in distant and isolated rural areas. Also, rural settlements' network (as well as settlements' network in Serbia overall)

shows serious deficiencies due to its functional centrality. Third, the rural economy is underdeveloped (Prokić, Pavličić 2008) with numerous structural and performance imperfections. The rural population is more often exposed to poverty. Rural women, elderly and youth are particularly vulnerable. Almost 40% of the Serbian rural population is economically active in agriculture. Every fourth household has a family farm. Compared to the previous decade, there is a slight tendency towards enlargement of the agricultural land owned by the family farm. However, the average utilised agricultural area is still very small (5.44 ha per farm: Census 2012 – Book No. 1). There is a strong request for modernization of agriculture. It implies changes in economic mentality of Serbian peasants. It also means development of rural entrepreneurship. The social stratum of peasants is differentiating (Šljukić 2009). Rural youth, even though they have poor chances for employment, more than ever judge agriculture to be very low on the scale of desirable and prestigious occupations. Also, they do not think of rural areas as socially preferable. Agriculture is mostly regarded as a last option for fulfilling existential needs. Fourth, rural culture is trapped between traditionalism and mass culture. A patriarchal system of values is still present with certain modifications, mostly regarding generational roles and relationships and, partially, gender roles and relationships.

Method and Data Resources

Analysis of the main characteristics of Serbian rural families and households is based on empirical data from the censuses of population and households (1971–2011). According to the latest census methodology (Census 2011 – Book No. 12; Census 2011 – Book No. 10), the same definitions of family and households have been applied in censuses since 1953. This also refers to the classification of families according to the type. That makes data comparable in the temporal dimension (Census 2011 – Book No. 12).

However, there is a problem regarding inadequate methodological distinction between types of settlement. Since 1981, census methodology has used urban settlements – other settlements dichotomy (Stanković 1999). Even though we are fully aware that there is no absolute equality between the two concepts, in the absence of a more adequate solution, we hereby identify rural families as families in so-called other settlements. Moreover,

due to the political changes in Serbian society at the end of the 1990s, data for Kosovo and Metohija are not taken into account. In this way, we try to ensure better data comparability and reduce possible errors in calculation.

Does the Trend of Decrease in Number of Serbian Rural Families and Households Under Transition Continue?

We advocate that transformation of rural families and households, initiated by modernization, continues in post-socialist Serbian society. The most obvious is quantitative indicator – persistent decrease in the number of rural families and households, in the absolute and relative value. This process is an outcome of rural depopulation. Rural depopulation in Serbian society is, from a demographic point of view, a consequence of rural ageing (Miladinović, 2010), negative migration rate (Bogdanov, 2007), postponement of marriage and procreation among the rural population in Serbia (Novakov, 2011), etc. According to the last census data, there are 670 000 fewer people in Serbian rural settlements than in 1991 (Radovanović, 1999; Census 2011 – Book No. 10). The ageing index of the rural population is very high (1.404). Other relevant socio-demographic indicators (average age, % of young rural population, % of elderly rural population, ageing index) show that the Serbian rural population is in a stage of the highest demographic being old age. In the last decade, depopulation is registered in more than 80% of rural settlements in Serbia (Statistical Calendar 2013). This statistic undoubtedly indicates that the rural population, and thus Serbian rural families and households, are facing great problems not only considering their biological, but also economic and social reproduction.

According to the latest census data, there are 954 020 rural households in Serbia. Compared to 1971 (the end of the post-war modernization phase), the number of rural households in the Republic has decreased by more than 196 000 households or -4.68‰ per year. According to Bobić (1999), in 1971, 55.4% of all households in the Republic were rural. Nowadays, only 38.3% households in Serbia are rural (Census 2011 – Book No. 10). In the same period, the number of urban households increased by more than 600 000 or 12.7‰ per year. Under transition (1991–2011), the number of urban households increased by 5‰ per year. Today, urban households in Serbia make 61.7% of all households.

During the transitional period (1991–2011), the number of rural households in the Republic decreased by more than 75 000 or 7.4%. It confirms our hypothesis of continuous socio-demographic trend. Nevertheless, there have been changes in dynamics of rural households' number decrease. Thus, the annual rate of change of the number of rural households was higher in the pre-transitional period (1971–1991; -5‰ per year) than in the transitional one (1991–2011; -3.8‰ per year). Such a difference can be explained by at least two reasons. First, one regards socio-demographic characteristics of rural population in 1971–1981. Rural population continued to be forced out of agriculture. As it was the end of post-war modernization of Serbian societies, the 1970s are the period of the first signs of weaknesses of the socialist economy / mostly industry that could not employ any more rural population escaping from agriculture. Along with long-term rural–urban migration, the rural population in Serbia participated in long-term rural migration into West European countries (Germany, France etc.), as a result of the flexible external migration policy of the former Yugoslavia. Inner and external rural migrations influenced the reduction in the number of rural households. The second explanation of lower annual rate of change of rural households in Serbia during the 1990s is in conflicts between former Yugoslav republics. The population from the war zones in the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina migrated to Serbia. Most of the migratory population founded their new homes in rural areas, where they had relatives who migrated to Serbia (especially in Vojvodina, its northern part) after WWII (under the state-controlled and organized colonisation) or where they practised farming as an income source.

However, while observing census data, we have noticed that the highest annual rate of change of number of rural households (-9.5‰) corresponded to the period of the most intensive social and economic changes in Serbian society (2002–2011). It signified that after blocked post-socialist transition, Serbian rural areas were not seen as socially preferable communities to live in. It also showed that rural areas (still) did not benefit from the transitional changes.

We also have noticed that the decrease in number of rural households matches the rate of rural depopulation (1971–2011). The annual rate of change of rural depopulation (-8.6‰) is slightly higher than the annual rate of change of number of rural households. That explains the high ratio

of single-person households among Serbian rural households. Also, there is high and significant correlation (0.926, $p < 0.001$) between changes in the number of rural households and rural depopulation.

Data also showed the decrease in average number of members per rural household. According to the latest census (2011), the average rural household has three members (Census 2011 – Book No. 13). Thus, if we observe two major social and spatial regions in Serbia (Vojvodina and Central Serbia), we notice that, compared to 1991, the average number of rural households' members decreases by 13.5% (in Central Serbia) and 4.6% (in Vojvodina) (Bobić 1999; Census 2002 – Book No. 18; Census 2011 – Book No. 13). In Vojvodina, the decrease in average number of rural household members is more evident in the pre-transitional phase (1971–1991). The most noticeable change in average number of rural household members is characteristic for Central Serbia in the period 1991–2002 (-10.8%).

The decrease in average number of rural household members is a result of low rural birth rate and negative rural migration rate. In contrast with contemporary households, traditional Serbian rural household members were numerous. *Porodična zadruga*, as a specific traditional family, but also consumption unit, had several dozens of household members, sometimes almost 100. However, modernization brought up modifications in everyday rural life which have been reflected in the reduced number of household members. The acceptance of the low reproductive norms typical for the urban population, extended education, increase of economic activity outside the family farm (especially for women), changes in the patriarchal system of values etc. induced postponing procreation and a reduction in the number of rural childbirths. Besides, agricultural modernization, improvement of housing conditions, modification of the role and position of children and youth in rural family etc. also had an impact on the reduction of the number of rural household members. This tendency continues in transition.

Major quantitative indicators of contemporary Serbian rural families showed them to have similar features to rural households. According to the last census (2011), 40.8% of Serbian families are rural. The number of rural families continues to decrease. From the beginning of the post-socialist transition (1991), the number of rural families has declined by 220 000 (Census 1991 – Book No. 16; Census 2011 – Book No. 12) or 20%. The annual rate of change in the number of Serbian rural families is -11.1%.

According to the average number of members, Serbian rural families are not different from urban ones. Nonetheless, what sets them apart is the characteristics of their structures by type (family composition). The main difference between Serbian rural and urban families regards the proportion of married couples with no children. This family type is much more present among rural families (almost $\frac{1}{3}$ of all Serbian rural families compared to $\frac{1}{4}$ of all Serbian urban families). Greater presence of this family type among rural families is a result of rural ageing and rural depopulation. Rural families with no children are not young married couples postponing childbirth, but elderly rural married couples, in most cases, struggling to survive. In addition to this, rural and urban Serbian transitional families are differentiated by a lower proportion of single-parent families among rural ones. This especially relates to families that consist only of a single mother and children (10.5% among rural families).

This shows two important features of Serbian transitional rural families. The first one indicates a still present traditional pattern of family life where single mothers are not acceptable members of rural communities, especially in less developed regions. Also, this pattern means that after divorce or a husband's death, women are often coming back to live with their parents'/brothers' family. The second feature is a direct consequence of post-socialist transition. Rural women in Serbia took a great deal of the burden of transitional changes. The lower proportion of single-mother families among rural ones is a result of the lower economic power of rural women which makes it difficult for them to provide solely for their families. The low financial capital of Serbian rural women also reflects in the lower divorce ratio (Census 2002 – Book No. 12) and persistence of traditional patterns of rural family life and family relations.

Retraditionalization of Serbian rural family relations under transition

In the pre-transitional period there have been some significant modifications in Serbian rural families and households. The first and the most important one was that Serbian rural families and households, in the second half of the 20th century, underwent major structural and functional transformations as a result of changes in agriculture and rural social structure. In the beginning

of the 20th century, traditional joint families (*porodične zadruge*) were typical for Serbia / the Balkans (Kaser 2012). Modernization reduced traditional joint families to the level of families of smaller scale, mostly consisting of two or three generations living together. Family functions also underwent some changes. Due to the modernization, rural families have transferred part of their functions to modern social institutions and organizations (e.g. education, partial production). Thus, Serbian rural sociologists spoke of partial reduction of rural family functions.

The question we wish to ask and hopefully answer is whether the post-socialist transition continues an already established course of changes in Serbian rural families and households. We argue that specific transitional social, economic and political changes brought about retraditionalization of Serbian rural families' relations. Retraditionalization is hereby regarded as a response to social crisis. It is a reaction to the failure of the institutional and organizational system during the period of blocked post-socialist transition in the 1990s. Retraditionalization also means (partial) social shutdown of rural families and households in order to minimize or avoid negative impacts of post-socialist transitional changes. From a socio-demographic point of view, this means that Serbian rural families (more than urban ones) have preserved typical traditional characteristics of multi-generational family composition. Furthermore, we argue that retraditionalization of Serbian rural households reflects in a greater proportion of households that consist of two or more families and a greater share of households with an elderly household owner.

There is no doubt that pre-transitional changes caused nuclearization of Serbian rural families. However, recent sociological researches (Miletić-Stepanović, 2011) confirmed that among contemporary Serbian rural families there are still very much present extended families, based on the wider group of relatives. This means that among Serbian rural families there are more multi-generational families (than among urban ones), as well as ones based on lateral kinship (Milić 2004).

Retraditionalization of rural family relations reflects on the composition of rural households. Every sixth Serbian rural household consists of two or more family units. Apart from this, Serbian urban families showed a greater level of individualization in family relations. This resulted in a greater number of urban non-family households (24.8%) and lower number of urban multi-family households (8.6%) (Census 2013 – Book

No. 13). Besides, there are more Serbian rural households with five or more members than urban ones. That indicates multi-family households where members are joined by vertical and lateral kinship.

Also, retraditionalization of family relations means the presence of authority of a household owner which has roots in the institution of head of the traditional rural joint family (*porodični starešina*), typical for the traditional rural Serbian/Balkan joint family (Kaser 2012). The head of a traditional rural joint family governed the household, on the behalf of all other family members. Usually, but not necessarily, he was the oldest family member. He had the power and the authority to manage family assets. Some researchers argue that the power of the head of the traditional rural joint family was not absolute, like it was in the case of the head of the Western European civil family (which originated in the institution of *pater familias* of the Roman family). Therefore, Emile Sicard (according to: Mitrović, 1998) spoke of patriarchal democracy as one of the main features of the traditional Serbian/Balkan rural joint family. On the other hand, Karadžić (1987) and Rihtman-Auguštin (1988) wrote of not so democratic and harmonious traditional rural family relations as a result of the dominant patriarchal system of values and social norms.

Of course, modernization of Serbian society brought a decline in rigidity of the patriarchal value system. However, it does not mean that the patriarchal system totally disappeared from rural family relations. Continuity in values is a line of connection between traditional and contemporary Serbian rural family. It only gets stronger under crises and periods of social uncertainty. In this context, we chose age of household owner as one of the indicators of retraditionalization of Serbian rural families. It indicates a patriarchal model of rural families and household arrangements. The average age of Serbian rural household owners is high – between 50 and 64 (Census 2011 – Book No. 13). On the other hand, Serbian urban families are governed by much younger household owners (average age between 30 and 49; Census 2011 – Book No. 13). The oldest are the owners of single-person rural households, with an average age of 61. One-third of those households are ones with owners older than 75. We also have noticed that retraditionalization is more present in rural multi-family households. The average age of owners of these households is about 55 years. Households with owners who are older than 50 years make 87% of all households in this group. These are the households with no succession

in household management, even though the successors are grown up and, probably, have started a family of their own. The prevalence of elderly rural household owners signifies the presence of a traditional, patriarchal pattern. According to it, the authority of the elderly is unquestionable. Family relations (both generational and gender) are authoritative. In practice, the patriarchal pattern of rural household management gives power to the household owner to govern insofar as they consider necessary. Also, the patriarchal model of rural household government can be regarded as imposed by the lower social opportunities of young rural adults to be economically independent. Their economic dependency on their family of origin puts them into a position of lower social power and, consequently, under the 'rule' of their parents.

Retraditionalization of family relations (manifested in presence of multi-generational rural families and multi-family rural households) actually indicates low individual capital of their members. The post-socialist Serbian transition considerably changed available and preferable mechanisms for fulfilling individual needs. Under the transitional changes, lower social strata (typical for rural areas) often turn to family as a form of strengthening social and financial capital.

Presented data indicated that rural family relations are only partially modified. This more relates to generational rather than gender family relations. This conclusion raises an interesting question. We ask if and in what manner retraditionalization of Serbian rural families influenced emancipation of rural women. We argue that retraditionalization contributed to blocking of emancipation. One of the most obvious indicators of blocked emancipation and retraditionalization of gender relations is the presence of rural women among household owners. Only 23.6% of Serbian rural households are those governed by females. Additionally, 34.3% Serbian urban households are owned by women. Women are not exclusive household owners, even in cases of incomplete family consisting of mother and children. Women are household owners in 91.4% of those families in urban areas and 72.8% of rural families (Census 2011 – Book No. 13). In fact, the contemporary Serbian rural family is a typical example of reinforcement of patriarchal authority under the post-socialist transitional uncertainty. As an essential characteristic of retraditionalization, this authority is *reinforced by massive employment loss among women and their return to unpaid housing jobs, reappearance of extended families and reaffirmation of traditional*

gender roles under the situation of economic collapse and raising ethno-nationalistic populism and religious fundamentalism (retraditionalization and clericalization) (Vujadinović 2009). Thus, we can agree with Milić's conclusion (2004) that, regardless of certain transformation towards modern values, in contemporary Serbian family in general (and in rural, as well) modified authoritative patterns are still present.

Regional Context and Serbian Rural Families' and Households' Characteristics Under Transition

Contemporary Serbian society deals with the issue of uneven regional development. It is most obvious when speaking of uneven distribution of wealth between the regions and uneven exposure to the risk of social exclusion. Therefore, the third hypothesis regards the influence of regional characteristics on Serbian transitional rural families and households. Regionally influenced differences in characteristics of rural families and households reflect on the level of social exclusion of the rural population. Data on rural poverty as one of the dimensions of social exclusion backed up previous evidence. According to the *Study of human development of Serbia* (Cvejić et al. 2011), the rural Serbian population is much more exposed to poverty (27.6%) than total (18%) or urban (9.8%). Rural poverty is a progressive process. According to the *Study of life standard* (2007), the ratio of poor rural population in Serbia increased from 55% (2002) to 61% (2007). Additionally, the study (*Study of life standard* 2007) also showed that risk of poverty among the elderly rural population (which makes 27.5% of the total rural population in Serbia) is more than 40% greater than among the total population. The findings match HDI measures (Cvejić et al. 2011) which showed that, besides the elderly rural population, rural youth and rural women are the most vulnerable to the risk of social exclusion. Also, Cvejić et al. (2011) argue that 38.6% of rural households in Serbia are exposed to financial poverty, while every fourth rural household is vulnerable to material poverty.

The Serbian late transition produced social polarization which has manifested itself in all dimensions of social structure. If the effects of transition are observed in the spatial dimension, we can detect that positive and more intense effects are typical for the socially vital regions,

with adequate (social, human, financial, cultural etc.) capital closer to the centres of social power. On the other hand, rural areas (as mostly part of social (semi)periphery) are late in transitional changes and not so much exposed to positive transitional effects. Therefore, we argue that retraditionalization of Serbian rural families is not a regionally even process. Traditional characteristics of rural families and households are more noticeable in the less socially vital or underdeveloped regions. On the contrary, modernization of rural families (mainly manifested as family nuclearization) is more evident in the regions with large urban centre(s), higher income *per capita*, higher employment ratio and higher rural women employment ratio, lower illiterate ratio of rural population, lower risk of social exclusion etc.

In the analysis of transitional effects on regional characteristics of Serbian rural families and households, we focused on two main regions (Serbia-North and Serbia-South) and four sub-regions (Serbia-North: a) Belgrade region and b) the region of Vojvodina; Serbia-South: a) the region of Šumadija and Western Serbia and b) the region of Southern and Eastern Serbia). The Belgrade region and Vojvodina are considered to be more socially developed. This is confirmed by a higher employment ratio, higher average income, higher rural women employment ratio, higher ratio of population with college and university education etc. The most underdeveloped is the region of Southern and Eastern Serbia. Cvejić et al. (2011) and Bogdanov et al. (2011) showed that the rural population in Southern and Eastern Serbia is the one with the greatest risk of poverty.

Census data showed significant differences between analysed regions. Modernization of rural families is most evident in the Belgrade region and Vojvodina. Those regions are characterised by the higher ratio of nuclear rural families (couples with their children) and single-family rural households. Additionally, there is also a higher ratio of rural families of a single mother with children, as well as rural households with a young household owner (15–29 years). In those regions, there is also a higher ratio of rural households with female household owners.

Table 1. Characteristics of rural families and rural households in the Republic of Serbia, by region

Characteristic	Belgrade region	Region of Vojvodina	Region of Šumadija and West Serbia	Region of Southern and Eastern Serbia
% married rural couples with children	54.4	52.5	51.3	46.0
% single-family rural households	84.5	88.9	80.9	79.4
% young rural household owners (15–29)	3.3	3.4	2.2	2.0
% rural mothers with children	11.7	12.6	9.8	8.9
% female-owned rural households	23	27	21	24
% rural households with four members	19.7	18.0	16.1	14.5
average number of rural household members	3.16	2.88	3.15	3.05
% multi-family rural households	15.5	10.6	19.1	20.6
% elderly rural household owners (65+)	28.8	30.8	37.4	41.9
average age of household owner	50.8	51.3	53.9	55.3
% rural households with six or more members	9.8	6.7	12.3	11.8
% single-person rural households	18.2	22.6	21.1	22.3
% married rural couples without children	30.1	31.1	35.4	41.2

Source: Census 2011; authors' calculations

On the other hand, retraditionalization of rural family relations and characteristics in underdeveloped regions (the region of Šumadija and Western Serbia and especially the region of Southern and Eastern Serbia) implies: higher average age of rural household owners, higher ratio of multi-family rural households, higher ratio of male-owned rural households etc.

Furthermore, a higher ratio of single-person rural households and elderly rural households plus a higher ratio of rural families consisting only of married (mostly elderly) couples without children is typical for those regions. Such features are a direct consequence of rural depopulation and ageing, which are caused by continuous decline of social magnetism of those regions.

The illustrated distribution of modernized and traditional features of Serbian rural families and households under transition is confirmed by the relations of those characteristics with some development indicators. (Under)development is hereby detected by eight selected indicators: number of employed per 1000 persons, income, average UUA (ha), ratio of agricultural population in rural active population, number of urban areas over 250 000 inhabitants, rural illiteracy ratio, ratio of rural population with college and university education, and rural women employment ratio. Those indicators represent the level of economic vitality, processes of emancipation and social chances of population as a means of reducing rural poverty risk.

Regional disparities between Serbian rural families' and households' characteristics have been analysed as dependent variables of those indicators. We suggest that regional social differences shaped two main types of rural families in Serbia: modernized and traditional. The first type is characteristic of the more socially vital regions. It comprises mostly families with reduced composition (mainly two-generational or parent–children dyad) and, therefore, reduced household composition to a single family. Also, this type of rural family relation entails transfer of household government to the younger generation. The traditional rural family type is characterised by extended family composition, extended household composition and lack of transfer of household government to the younger generation. Thus, we advocate that in socially developed regions, the modernized type of rural families prevails. It is indicated by the higher ratio of rural households with four members, higher ratio of single-family rural households and higher ratio of young rural household owners. On the other hand, in less socially developed regions, there will be more multiple-family rural households, a higher ratio of elderly rural household owners and a higher ratio of rural households with six or more members, which indicates the traditional rural family type.

Table 2. Correlations between characteristics of traditional and modern Serbian rural family under transition and selected indicators (correlation matrix extract)

Indicator	Traditional rural family type			Modern rural family type		
	Multiple-family households	Elderly household owners	Households with six or more members	Single-family households	Young household owners	Households with four members
rural illiterate ratio	0.740	0.983*	0.670	-0.758	-0.944	-0.992**
rural women employment ratio	-0.735	-0.969*	-0.682	0.735	0.945	0.980*
average UUA per AH (ha)	-0.902	-0.483	-0.920	0.889	0.658	0.325
ratio of rural population with high education	-0.504	-0.894	-0.435	0.528	0.806	0.955*
income	-0.440	-0.825	-0.406	0.463	0.761	0.898
ratio of agricultural population	0.517	0.834	0.508	-0.538	-0.809	-0.889
ratio of rural population employment	-0.006	-0.409	0.213	0.024	0.159	0.465

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: Census 2011; authors' calculations

The analysis showed statistically significant strong positive correlation between two indicators of regional social development (rural women employment ratio and ratio of rural population with high education) and reduced composition of rural families. Also, statistically significant strong positive correlation exists between the rural illiterate ratio (as an indicator of regional social underdevelopment) and the ratio of elderly rural household owners (as a characteristic of the traditional rural family). The

same indicator of underdevelopment has the opposite effect on reduced, two-generational composition of rural families. There is statistically significant and strong but negative correlation between the ratio of illiterate rural population and ratio of households with four members. Data also showed that the greater the ratio of rural women employment is, the lower the ratio of elderly rural household owners (0.969, $p < 0.05$).

Results of the statistical analysis indicate that education and rural women's employment are the factors of major impact on modernization of rural family and household life patterns. Education, in terms of prolonged schooling of rural young population, postpones their entering marriage and procreation, which results in lower fertility. Also, education of the young rural population majorly influences changes in cultural norms that shape family relations, fulfilment of family roles, personal expectation of marriage and family life. On the other hand, an increase in rural women's employment significantly reduces their fertility rate. The rural labour force market is very harsh to rural women. They are considered to have lower social opportunities (compared to urban women), in terms of education, financial and social capital, etc. Results of research confirmed Karadžić's idea of the role of rural women in transformation of traditional rural family where they were the centre of formation of nuclear family unit.

Unfortunately, due to the differences in census methodology, there is no sufficient data for detailed comparison of the changes in the number of rural families and households by (sub)regions in the pre-transitional/transitional period. However, data from the last census decade (2002–2011) showed differences in the changes of Serbian rural families and household number by region. A decrease in number of rural families in the period 2002–2011 is noticeable in two underdeveloped regions (region of Šumadija and Western Serbia, and region of Southern and Eastern Serbia). In the region of Southern and Eastern Serbia (the most underdeveloped region of all), this decline was more noticeable (chain index: 0.872; annual rate of change: -15.1‰). On the contrary, in two developed regions (Belgrade region and region of Vojvodina) there was a positive change in number of rural families. This change is more present in the Belgrade region which is considered to be the most socially attractive (chain index: 1.144; annual rate of change: 15.05‰). In the last transitional decade, the region of Southern and Eastern Serbia witnessed a decrease in the number of married couples without children (chain index: 0.765) and married couples with children

(chain index: 0.804) as well as an increase in the ratio of incomplete rural families (single mother/father with children).

Conclusions

The analysis of Serbian rural families and households under the post-socialist transition has confirmed previous hypotheses. Data showed a continuous trend in decline of total number of rural families and households in Serbia, especially in the last decade (2002–2011) which was the period of most intensive transitional changes. Besides, data confirmed the hypothesis on retraditionalization of Serbian rural family relations under transition. Thereby, we argue of forced retraditionalization (Tripković, Tripković 2008). According to Olson`s (1983) idea of family under stress, retraditionalization represents a mechanism for reduction of social uncertainties and negative outcomes of transition. Rural areas are especially vulnerable to such negative outcomes (unemployment, poverty risk, non-functioning of social institutions for child / elderly / ill people`s care etc.). However, according to Blagojević (1997), the post-socialist transition produced reprivatisation of Serbian society in general. It also influenced a revival of traditional family relations as a survival mechanism. Miletić-Stepanović (2011) wrote that almost 40% of all Serbian families are extended families. She also spoke of an urban pattern of Serbian family transformation. Our research has also confirmed a third hypothesis regarding regional determination of characteristics of rural families and households in transitional Serbia. Statistical analysis showed that socially attractive or more developed regions worked as a magnet for the rural population. Those are the regions with no decline in number of rural families or households. Modernization of family is more noticeable in those regions. On the other hand, the lower social magnetism of the region correlates with traditional characteristics of rural families and households.

Changes in contemporary Serbian rural families and households can be explained by the concept of the second demographic transition. Some Serbian authors, like Bobić (2006), ask whether this transition even started in contemporary Serbian society. The second demographic transition has its own specifics in Serbian society. The Serbian rural population is characterised by some features of the second demographic transition (continued decrease in birth rate, postponement of marriage, decline in

nuptiality rate, growth of divorce rate). Nevertheless, in making the final conclusion about this process we should be very careful because studies showed *very slow ideational change in our society* (Bobić, Vukelić 2011). At the same time, the researchers pointed out that *the families and households remain the main generators of patriarchal orientation* (Bobić, Vukelić 2011; Pešić 2006).

Historical experience taught us that the Serbian rural family and household are resilient institutions, always at the very foundation of this society. Nevertheless, changes in rural families and households under post-socialist transition are inevitable and significant. So, the question is whether transition will 'eat its own children'? To rephrase it, the question is whether transition will polarise Serbian rural families in two significantly different modes (traditional and modern), based on regional context and availability of transitional benefits. While we wait and anticipate the outcome of analysed changes, we can only underline that Serbian rural families and households are not premodern forms of urban ones. They are distinct and specific entities, determined by the specifics of the rural social structure.

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