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## **SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CADETS OF THE MILITARY ACADEMY<sup>\*\*\*</sup>**

**(Translation in *Extenso*)**

### **Abstract**

The subject of this paper was the research of the socioeconomic characteristics of the Military Academy cadets in an attempt to define them at the individual, family, and regional levels. The aim was to gain insight into the basic socioeconomic characteristics of cadets, their description, and their connection with the broader socioeconomic context. Primary and secondary data were collected. Correlation, factor analysis, and clustering were used in the study. The results show that regional affiliation is a characteristic that can classify respondents into two groups – those who came from developed regions in northern Serbia and the ones coming from the less developed southern regions of the country, that the participation of female members in the cadet population is at the level of developed European countries, that almost 70 percent of cadets come from urban and semi-urban areas, that two-fifths of cadets come

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from the region of Šumadija and Western Serbia, and that more than half of the cadets have a working-class social background, while slightly more than one-fifth have military background. Almost three-quarters of cadets have a Military grammar school or civilian gymnasium as their secondary education, and the success they have achieved in their education so far can be characterized as very good for more than half of the cadets.

**Keywords:** socioeconomic characteristics, socioeconomic status, cadets, Military Academy, Serbia.

## INTRODUCTION

There is almost no phenomenon in the social sciences whose research does not involve the inclusion of socioeconomic characteristics of the research population. These characteristics allow us to get to know the respondents, better describe or explain the most important socioeconomic conditions, and indicate their attitudes, problems, or preferences (Buder et al. 2024; Antonoplis 2023; Manstead 2018; Nichols 2023; Rodriguez-Hernandez et al. 2019; Das et al. 2020).

The very name of these characteristics refers to the two sciences, sociology and economics, which play a key role in their explanation. While sociology explains through the concepts of class, status, prestige, and position, economics insists on the categories of income, wealth, ownership, and income distribution. The common denominator of sociology and economics in defining socioeconomic characteristics concerns socioeconomic inequalities. Moreover, these inequalities can be viewed at three levels – individual, family, and regional (Rodriguez-Hernandez et al. 2019).

The subject of this paper was the study of the socioeconomic characteristics of cadets of the Military Academy in Belgrade, with an attempt to determine them at the individual, family, and regional levels. Several motives determined this definition of the research subject. First, socioeconomic characteristics are one of the most important explanatory factors in the social sciences (Harrison 2023, 6731–6733; Rodriguez-Hernandez et al. 2019). Second, to the knowledge of the authors of this paper, the socioeconomic characteristics of cadets of the Serbian military academy have not been the subject of a systematic

study. In this sense, there are gaps in knowledge that need to be filled. Third, there was also a personal motive of the authors to get to know the population they teach, but also to outline the basic coordinates in which future officers of the Serbian Armed Forces should be observed for the higher education institution in which they work.

The paper aimed to provide insight into the basic socioeconomic characteristics of cadets, their description, and connection with the broader socioeconomic context. The fulfillment of these objectives was to provide an opportunity to highlight several contributions that this paper can have for theory, other researchers, and those who work directly with cadets during their education, and can use the results obtained in this research to improve their work with them. By the above, the purpose of this paper was exploratory and descriptive.

The main research question on which this work is based was: Who makes up the Military Academy cadets today? Over the past quarter of a century, Serbia has changed its political and economic system, which has affected the society and socioeconomic characteristics of its inhabitants (Uvalić 2007; Lazić 2020; Orlović 2011; Manić and Mitrović 2021). Therefore, it is justified to assume that the population of Military academy cadets has also changed, and to verify this, six individual characteristics were researched that related to the structure of cadets by gender, place of birth on the rural-urban continuum, regions from which they come, social background, previous education, and success in school. These characteristics were sought by collecting primary data, and in order to better understand the subject of research and the quality of the analysis, secondary data were also collected.

Besides the introduction, this paper also consists of a literature review on socioeconomic characteristics and socioeconomic status, focusing on how they are measured. The methodology describes the purpose, research design, types and methods of data collection, and methods, techniques, and procedures for their analysis. After presenting the results, the discussion provides several explanations in light of which the results obtained should be interpreted, and a few parallels are drawn with the results of similar studies. The conclusion summarizes the most important results, indicates contributions to theory, other research, society, and the Military academy, and lists a few limitations in light of which this research should be viewed.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the terms socioeconomic status (SES) and socioeconomic characteristics (SEC) are often used, there is no consensus in the literature on their definition, operationalization, and measurement. According to some authors, SES can be defined as the socioeconomic position of an individual or group of people and includes the relationship between biological characteristics and those acquired during life (Harrison 2023, 6731–6733). Others emphasize that SES is a combination of education, occupation, and income, with education rooted in Weber's theory of social status, occupation being the concretization of education in the socioeconomic milieu, and income being the latter's outcome (Baker 2014; Powers 2021). A third group considers that possession of resources and the prestige they bring is the essence of SES, with resources referring to the social, economic, and cultural benefits to which one has access, and prestige determining an individual's inequality in social hierarchy (Krieger et al. 1997).

The phenomena of inequality and stratification are central issues in sociology as a science (Grusky and Weisshaar 2014; Nichols 2023; Garner et al. 2017). In Marxism, class and class conflicts between those who control resources and those who are forced to exchange their labor for wages are central to understanding society (Atkinson 2023; Grusky and Weisshaar 2014; Garner et al. 2017). Weber expands the discussion on the concepts of status and power, emphasizing that status is the most important and represents inequality based on differences in the esteem of individuals and groups in society (Grusky and Weisshaar 2014; Guidetti and Rehbein 2017). Durkheim argues that stratification is necessary for the functioning of society and that different roles preserve social order (Durkheim 2023). According to Parsons, the value system is fundamental, and those who are "successful" in social values have higher positions in the social hierarchy (Ormerod 2020).

In economics, there is a dualistic approach to SES and SEO. On the one hand, they are either ignored, minimized, and treated as a given of capitalism, while on the other hand, they are recognized, emphasized, and analyzed as a consequence of the unequal distribution of wealth and income (Zafirovski 2023). While in the first tradition, with its subjective theory of value and methodological individualism, the focus shifts from classes, strata, and groups to the individual, the second tradition focuses on the causes of inequality, and one of the indicators

of SES is an individual's access to public services (Neck 2021; Titmuss 2018; Esping-Andersen 2015). The contemporary debate in economics about wage-led and profit-led regimes, rooted in the macroeconomic theories of Mikhail Kalecki, Nicholas Kaldor, and Luigi Pasinetti, can be interpreted as a confirmation that tensions between different socioeconomic groups in society over the distribution of income are still important and relevant (Lavoie 2017; Lavoie and Stockhammer 2023).

There is disagreement in the literature on how to measure SES. The main challenge is choosing representative indicators for classification and comparison (Harrison 2023, 6731–6733). Some discuss the objective and subjective measurement of SES, whether it is more appropriate to have respondents self-declare their status or to determine it based on indicators such as income or achievements (Tan et al. 2020; Manstead 2018). Others argue for and against measuring with individual or composite indicators (Broer et al. 2019; Sitthiyot and Holasut 2020; Syrovatka and Schlossarek 2019). The third group of authors question whether measuring at the individual or collective level is more appropriate (Yang and Gustafsson 2004; Dickinson and Adelson 2004). The fourth group of authors considers previously stated as secondary, emphasizing that indicators must be consistent with the scientific field, the population researched, and the chosen definition of SES (Harrison 2023, 6731–6733).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research on the SEO of Military academy cadets had an exploratory and descriptive purpose. It is appropriate when it is little known about the phenomenon under study, if the given population has not been previously studied systematically, if there is a need to gain basic insight into the research topic or the research population, and if there is a intention to further understand it (Blaikie and Priest 2019, 70–71; Saunders et al. 2024, 170–171). The quantitative methodology was chosen due to the aspirations for measuring variables, grouping them, comparing results with other studies, and highlighting similarities and differences using a comparative method (Saunders et al. 2024, 168).

The research collected both primary and secondary data to present holistic information about the subject of research (Wilson and Joye 2019). The goal of collecting primary data was to describe

the core SEO of the respondents based on the information they would directly provide, while the purpose of secondary data was to explain further the context and broader perspective of the primary data (Hox and Boeije 2005). A survey collected primary data. The nature of the phenomenon determined this choice under study, simplicity of application, the possibility of collecting a large amount of data in a short time, obtaining clear and consistent responses, and the possibility of comparing the information obtained between multiple groups of research participants (Saunders et al. 2024, 181).

### **Primary data on cadets' SES**

Based on insights from several previous studies on the military academy cadet population, six similar characteristics were selected that were related to SES (Carreiras et al. 2020; Franke 2000; Dziwanowski 2020; Bertram et al. 2018; Caforio and Martinez 2005; Brown 1989).

The first was the gender of the respondents. It was included in the study based on the evidence that gender can cause inequalities in SES (Daly 2020; Altuzarra et al. 2021). The second was the place of origin on the rural-urban continuum. Evidence that differences along the rural-urban continuum are not only an economic, but also a major social issue that shapes human capital development, regional cohesion, and long-term growth and development trends justified the choice of this characteristic (Castillo et al. 2023). It is operationalized by the Eurostat territorial unit nomenclature into three categories: rural, semi-urban, and urban (Eurostat 2019).

The regional affiliation of the respondents was included in the research because Serbia is a country with significant differences that manifest themselves along the north-south line (Molnar 2022; Uvalić and Bartlett 2021; Manić and Mitrović 2021). Living and working conditions in different regions directly determine SES and divide residents according to the opportunities inherent to the living conditions in certain areas (Bathelt et al. 2024; Barrios and Strobl 2009). This feature is operationalized according to the classification of the Statistical Office of Serbia into the regions of Belgrade, Vojvodina, Šumadija and Western Serbia, Southern and Eastern Serbia, and Kosovo and Metohija (Republički zavod za statistiku [RZS] 2023d).

Social origin was important for examining SES because it can indicate the milieu from which respondents come, bearing in the mind

that differences in parents' professions produce differences in family income, determine position in society, and define social attitudes and perceptions (Carchedi 2023; Muntaner et al. 2020; Garner et al. 2017; Starčević 2024). This characteristic was operationalized across six levels, offering choices between agricultural, administrative staff, working-class, entrepreneurial, military, and other social backgrounds.

The fifth characteristic was secondary education. It affects SES by associating higher levels of education with better jobs, working conditions, higher incomes, and well-being (Rodriguez-Hernandez et al. 2019; Gyimahi-Brempong and Gyapong 1991). This characteristic was operationalized across three categories that included Military grammar school, civil gymnasium, and vocational secondary school. The sixth characteristic was the respondent's academic achievement, and it was included in the study because it can influence social prestige and the acquisition of important social and economic resources (Liu et al. 2022; Broer et al. 2019).

### **Secondary data on cadets' SES**

Since the primary data covered individual and family aspects of SES, the task of collecting secondary data was to extract information that would further explain the primary data from the aspect of the territorial units in which the respondents reside. Therefore, data were collected for five regions of Serbia on the total population, average age of the population, population density, natural increase rate, number of illiterates, poverty rate, number of higher education peoples, total income, personal consumption, average salary, amount of investment in working capital, unemployment, and computer literacy. For this purpose, the databases and publications of the Serbian Statistical Office and the corresponding databases and publications of several international organizations were used, as those for the region of Kosovo and Metohija were not available in state statistics, as this part of the territory of Serbia has been under the temporary administration of the United Nations since 1999, based on Resolution 1244.

Overview of collected primary and secondary data

Of the total 268 cadets of the 147<sup>th</sup> and 148<sup>th</sup> classes of the Military academy, 201 responded in the survey, which represents a response rate of 75 percent. It can be considered satisfactory compared to other studies in which the participants were cadets from other countries or students of higher education institutions (Carreiras et al. 2020; Franke 2000; Dziwanowski 2020; Nair et al. 2008). An overview of the surveyed SEOs in the form of frequency distributions and percentages is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. SEC of research participants

Researched SEC	Subcategories of SEC	N = 201	
		f	%
Gender	Male	143	71.1
	Female	58	28.9
Birthplace categorization	Predominantly rural environment	61	30.3
	Semi-urban environment	52	25.9
	Predominantly urban environment	88	43.8
Regional affiliation	Belgrade region	33	16.4
	Vojvodina	28	13.9
	Šumadija and Western Serbia	82	40.8
	Southern and Eastern Serbia	52	25.9
	Kosovo and Metohija	6	3
Social background	Agricultural	12	6
	Working	107	53.2
	Clerical	15	7.5
	Business	14	7
	Military	43	21.4
	Other	10	5
Previous education	Military grammar school	96	47.8
	Gymnasium	49	24.4
	Secondary vocational school	56	27.9
Previous academic success	Excellent	64	31.8
	Very good	108	53.7
	Good	29	14.4

Source: Authors’ analysis

The data in Table 1 indicate that the majority of respondents were male (71.1%), born in urban areas (43.8%), that the majority of respondents were from Šumadija and Western Serbia (40.8%), and that the dominant social background was working-class (53.2%). The most



significant number of respondents attended the Military grammar school (47.8%), and their success in studying at the Military academy can mostly be treated as very good (53.7%). More detailed SEO was collected as secondary data on some of the basic indicators of the regions from which the respondents came, and is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. SEC of the regions from which the respondents originate

SEC of the regions from which respondents originated	Belgrade region	Vojvodina	Šumadija and Western Serbia	Southern and Eastern Serbia	Kosovo and Metohija
Population in millions	1.68	1.74	1.82	1.40	1.58
Average age	42.73	43.64	44.31	44.86	32.55
Population density per km <sup>2</sup>	519.9	80.5	68.7	53.6	49
Natural increase	-3.7	-7.3	-7.6	-9.8	0.7
Illiteracy (%)	0.27	0.69	0.61	1.05	6
Poverty rate (%)	4	5.9	7	11.1	23
Share of highly educated people (%)	27.45	14.37	11.6	12.07	6.2
Income (in RSD)	41,708	33,571	30,956	30,509	14,472
Personal consumption (in RSD)	40,197	34,371	31,482	31,145	14,212
Average salary (in RSD)	130,541	98,165	86,940	89,202	67,260
Investment in working capital (in million euros)	7,965.58	2,955.42	1,435.49	1,716.96	2,533.63
Unemployment (%)	7.2	9.1	10.3	13.2	10.9
Computer literacy (%)	60.08	43.58	39.46	39.56	35

Sources: CEIC 2024a; CEIC 2024b; Earthly Data 2024; Standard Bank Group 2024; Regional Cooperation Council [RCC] 2022; Republički zavod za statistiku [RZS] n.d.; Republički zavod za statistiku [RZS] 2023a; Republički zavod za statistiku [RZS] 2024; Republički zavod za statistiku [RZS] 2025; Trading Economics 2024a; Trading Economics 2024b; Trading Economics 2024c; UNICEF 2021; Vuković and Babović 2022; World Bank Group [WBG] 2024a; World Bank Group [WBG] 2024b;

The region of Šumadija and Western Serbia has the largest population in Serbia. The population's highest average age is in Southern and Eastern Serbia. Positive natural growth is recorded only in Kosovo and Metohija, where there is also the highest percentage of illiterates, the highest rate of absolute poverty, and the lowest share of highly educated people in the total population. On the other hand, the Belgrade region is the most densely populated, has the highest income per capita, the highest personal consumption, average salaries, employment, computer literacy, and the level of investment in working capital.

### **Methods, techniques, and procedures for data processing and analysis**

Numerous methods, techniques, and procedures were applied in data processing and analysis. The computer package was the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS). In addition to descriptive statistics, Kendall's Tau correlation, exploratory factor analysis, cluster analysis, and cross-tabulation were employed.

The aim of correlation analysis was to indicate the dependence or independence of the data (Ho 2018, 147–148). Exploratory factor analysis had a role to check for the existence of a relatively stable data structure, and to determine which variable has the most significant influence (Ruso 2009, 157). Cluster analysis had tasks to group data and form a taxonomy (Hair et al. 2019, 192–201). Primary data for each of the clusters identified by cluster analysis was presented by cross-tabulation.

## **RESULTS**

The results of the correlation analysis are presented in Table 3. Due to the presence of category variables with unequal intervals between their subcategories, the coefficients of the Kendall's Tau correlations  $\tau$  were calculated.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Spearman's characteristic correlation assumes that consecutive characteristics for the trait under investigation are equidistant, while, in contrast, Kendall-Tau correlation does not assume equidistant intervals between two consecutive ranks (Cleff 2025, 113–114).

Table 3. Correlation between the researched SEC

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Gender (1)	$\tau$ (p)	1					
Birthplace categorization (2)	$\tau$ (p)	-0.10 (0.13)	1				
Regional affiliation (3)	$\tau$ (p)	0.11 (0.10)	-0.07 (0.22)	1			
Social background (4)	$\tau$ (p)	0.01 (0.81)	0.32** (0.000)	0.01 (0.82)	1		
Previous education (5)	$\tau$ (p)	-0.17** (0.01)	-0.00 (0.94)	-0.03 (0.67)	0.01 (0.91)	1	
Previous academic success (6)	$\tau$ (p)	-0.22** (0.00)	0.06 (0.32)	-0.13* (0.03)	-0.01 (0.87)	0.03 (0.61)	1

\* Correlation is statistically significant at the level of 0.05; \*\* Correlation is statistically significant at the level of 0.01

Source: Authors' analysis

Four statistically significant correlations were obtained (negative correlation of small strength between respondents' gender and their secondary education,  $\tau = -0.17$ ; negative correlation of small strength between gender and success as the Military academy,  $\tau = -0.22$ ; positive correlation of average strength between urban-rural birth place and regional affiliation,  $\tau = 0.32$ ; negative correlation of small strength between regional affiliation and academic success at the Military academy,  $\tau = -0.13$ ). Based on these results, it was concluded that the researched SEC represents independent factors.

Exploratory factor analysis was intended to group variables measured by different instruments into factors and isolate the one that produces the greatest effect (Hair et al. 2019, 144–147).<sup>2</sup> The obtained results are presented in Table 4.

<sup>2</sup> The exploratory factor analysis was based on the method of chief components, which is more suitable for situations in which summing up numerous diverse variables and oblique rotation is more suitable for situations when it is presumed that the factors listed in the analysis should produce a common effect (Hair et al. 2019, 144–147).

Table 4. Results of exploratory factor analysis

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure for sampling adequacy and Bartlett test of sphericity					
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure for sampling adequacy				0.62	
Bartlett test of sphericity			$\chi^2$	51.65	
			df	15	
			$p$	0.00	
Total variance explained					
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings	
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	1.46	24.40	24.40	24.40	24.40
2	1.29	21.45	45.85	21.45	45.85
3	1.01	16.84	62.69	16.84	62.69
4	0.87	14.57	77.26		
5	0.74	12.28	89.55		
6	0.63	10.45	100.00		
Factors loading					
				Initial	Extracted
Gender				1.00	0.57
Birthplace categorization				1.00	0.68
Regional affiliation				1.00	0.81
Social background				1.00	0.69
Previous education				1.00	0.51
Previous academic success				1.00	0.49
Extraction method: Principal component analysis Rotation method: oblique					

Source: Authors’ analysis

According to the data from Table 4 the value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin indicator was 0.624 at the level of  $p < 0.05$ , and the value of the Bartlett test of sphericity was  $\chi^2 (15, n = 201) = 51.65, p = 0.00$ , which confirmed the appropriateness of the analyzed data for exploratory factor analysis. Cattell’s criterion of the elbow in the plot and comparison with the Horn parallel analysis procedure results in a Monte Carlo simulation that showed that three factors could be extracted with a total percentage of explained variance of 62.69 percent. The regional affiliation of the respondents was researched using SEO with the highest factor loading,  $p = 0.81$ , and it was taken as the basis for cluster analysis. First, the optimal number of clusters was determined, and then the secondary data on SEC served as the criterion for setting each of the five regions into the appropriate cluster.<sup>3</sup> These results are presented in Table 5.

<sup>3</sup> The cluster analysis was conducted by the two-step and k-means analyses, which algorithms automatically define the optimal number of clusters, and then affiliate

Table 5. Cluster analysis results

Model summary						
Number of input variables		Number of extracted clusters		Average measure of cohesion and disjunction		
6		2		0.35		
Cluster Membership						
Case number	Variable			Cluster	Distance	
1	Belgrade region			1	17129.32	
2	Vojvodina			1	17129.32	
3	Šumadija and Western Serbia			2	10010.88	
4	Southern and Eastern Serbia			2	11078.54	
5	Kosovo and Metohija			2	20985.57	
ANOVA						
	Cluster		Error		<i>F</i> statistics	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>df</i>	<i>M</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>df</i>		
Population	0.01	1	0.03	3	0.48	0.54
Average age	8.18	1	32.37	3	0.25	0.65
Population density	53256.53	1	33853.56	3	1.57	0.30
Natural increase	0.00	1	23.88	3	0.00	0.99
Illiteracy	5.63	1	5.72	3	0.98	0.39
Poverty rate	90.13	1	46.89	3	1.92	0.26
Share of highly educated people	132.30	1	36.17	3	3.66	0.15
Income	182350845.63	1	69824843.06	3	2.61	0.20
Personal consumption	163454689.20	1	70667374.67	3	2.31	0.23
Average salary	1324202353.20	1	271797608.00	3	4.87	0.11
Investments in working capital	15252267.86	1	4400515.72	3	3.47	0.16
Unemployment	13.33	1	2.22	3	6.00	0.09
Computer literacy	320.13	1	72.22	3	4.43	0.13

Source: Authors' analysis

Correspondingly to the data presented in Table 5, two clusters are formed, the first, the northern one, including the Belgrade and Vojvodina regions, and the second, southern cluster, including the regions of Šumadija and Western Serbia, Southern and Eastern Serbia, and Kosovo and Metohija. The highest impact on forming clusters had the following variables: unemployment,  $F = 6.00$ , average salary,  $F = 4.87$ , computer literacy,  $F = 4.43$ , and the share of highly educated people,  $F = 3.66$ .<sup>4</sup>

each data to some cluster based on the Euclidean distance, minimizing the sum of the squared distances between data points and suitable cluster centers (Hair et al. 2019, 218).

<sup>4</sup> Robustness, i.e., validity cluster analysis, was examined via logistic regression with primary data. The aim was to examine to what extent the basic SEC explain the regional division of respondents into two clusters. The model of logistical regression, based on the results of the omnibus test  $\chi^2 32.18$  (13,  $N = 201$ ),  $p = 0.00$  and the Hosmer-Lemeshow test  $\chi^2 = 9.13$  (8),  $p = 0.33$ , can be considered valid, i.e., that it explains 69.2 percent of the variance, thus confirming the validity of results of the cluster analysis.

To get direct insight into the distribution of the researched SEC and their subcategories into clusters, Table 6 was formed through cross-tabulation.

Table 6. Distribution of fundamental socioeconomic characteristics into clusters

Categories of SEC	Subcategories of SEC	Cluster 1 $n_1 = 61$ (30.3%)	Cluster 2 $n_2 = 140$ (69.7%)
Gender	Male, $n = 143$	35.7%	64.3%
	% in the cluster, $n = 58$	83.6%	65.7%
	Female	17.2%	82.8%
Birthplace categorization	% in the cluster	16.4%	34.3%
	Predominantly rural, $n = 61$	26.2%	73.8%
	% in the cluster	26.2%	32.1%
	Semi-urban, $n = 52$	23.1%	76.9%
	% in the cluster	19.7%	28.6%
	Predominantly urban, $n = 88$	37.5%	62.5%
	% in the cluster	54.1%	39.3%
Social background	Agricultural, $n = 12$	25.0%	75.0%
	% in the cluster	4.9%	6.4%
	Worker, $n = 12$	28.0%	72.0%
	% in the cluster	49.2%	55.0%
	Clerical, $n = 15$	40.0%	60.0%
	% in the cluster	9.8%	6.4%
	Business, $n = 14$	35.7%	64.3%
	% in the cluster	8.2%	6.4%
	Military, $n = 43$	34.9%	65.1%
	% in the cluster	24.6%	20.0%
	Other, $n = 10$	20.0%	80.0%
Previous education	% in the cluster	3.3%	5.7%
	Military grammar school, $n = 96$	28.1%	71.9%
	% in the cluster	44.3%	49.3%
	Gymnasium, $n = 49$	28.6%	71.4%
	% in the cluster	23.0%	25.0%
	Secondary vocational school, $n = 56$	35.7%	64.3%
Previous academic success	% in the cluster	32.8%	25.7%
	Excellent, $n = 64$	25.00	75.00
	% in the cluster	26.20	34.30
	Very good, $n = 108$	29.6%	70.4%
	% in the cluster	52.5%	54.3%
	Good, $n = 29$	44.8%	55.2%
	% in the cluster	21.3%	11.4%

Source: Authors' analysis

Based on the data in Table 6, it is noticeable that the participation of female respondents was twice as high in the southern cluster compared to the northern cluster, that the northern cluster had a higher participation of respondents from urban areas as well as those with a military background and respondent coming from secondary vocational schools. On the other hand, the southern cluster had a higher participation of cadets who had achieved excellent success in their previous education.

## **DISCUSSION**

The analysis of primary data showed that the majority of the Military Academy cadet population is male, with a significant participation of girls, that almost 70 percent of cadets come from urban and semi-urban areas, that two-fifths of cadets come from Šumadija and Western Serbia alone, and that over half of the cadets have a working-class background, while about one-fifth have a military. Almost three-quarters of cadets have a high school education at a Military grammar school or a civic gymnasium, and their success at the Military Academy can be described as very good for over half of them. By including secondary data in the analysis, it was shown that the regional affiliation of the respondents is a variable that affects their division into two clusters. The first, northern cluster includes cadets originating from the Belgrade region and Vojvodina, which are the most developed parts of Serbia in terms of numerous SECs, from the unemployment rate, average salaries, to the number of computer-literate people and the share of highly educated people. The second, southern cluster includes cadets from Šumadija and Western Serbia, Southern and Eastern Serbia, and Kosovo and Metohija. In order to interpret these results, it is necessary to highlight several observations from the broader socioeconomic context.

First, the regions of the southern cluster lag behind the northern ones in overall development. The north-south divide in Serbia has deepened over the past quarter century of privatization, liberalization, and deregulation, and is currently one of the highest in Europe (Uvalić and Bartlett 2021; Manić and Mitrović 2021; Molnar 2022). Monocentric development has led to the northern cluster, which accounts for about a third of Serbia, generating more than two-thirds of the gross domestic product, and having the most investments, especially those focused on knowledge and innovation (Molnar 2022). The regions of the southern

cluster find themselves in what development economics called a “vicious circle of inequality” back in the middle of the last century.

Secondly, the southern cluster has a highly unfavorable demographic-migration trend, reflected in the mass abandonment of rural and semi-urban environments by the younger and more educated population (Jandrić et al. 2024; Sauer et al. 2019). The Šumadija and Western Serbia lose around 3,500 inhabitants annually. Southern and Eastern Serbia lose around 3,000 inhabitants, while the Belgrade region increases its population by around 5,500 annually, and the Vojvodina by around 1,000 (Republički zavod za statistiku [RZS] 2023c).

Third, the unfavorable trends are also linked to the decline of the share of the rural population in all regions of Serbia. Thus, since 2000, their number has reduced to over 700,000 inhabitants (Macrotrends 2025). However, the sustainability of rural environments of the southern cluster is far more threatened than those in the northern cluster (Drobnjaković et al. 2022).

Fourth, in both clusters, the working-class background is highly represented. It should be borne in mind that, according to available data, industrial production in Serbia is still half of what it was in 1989, that over 800,000 jobs in industry were lost during the transition, that the liberalization of labor legislation has reduced social security of employee to a minimum, that manufacturing industry has been destroyed and deprived of the opportunity to become a sector leading economic recovery once again because its share in the national gross domestic product has been reduced to 13.5 percent (Uvalić 2021; Arsić 2013; Republički zavod za statistiku [RZS] 2023b).

Fifth, 60 percent of the employed are concentrated in the northern cluster, and in the southern cluster, which makes up two-thirds of the territory of Serbia, a total of 40 percent. So, of the total number of employees in Serbia, 35.6 percent work in the Belgrade region, around 25.1 percent in the Vojvodina, 22.7 percent in the Šumadija and Western Serbia, and only 16.6 percent in the Southern and Eastern Serbia (Republički zavod za statistiku [RZS] n.d.).

One of the few similar previous studies was conducted for the needs of the Yugoslav People's Army more than half a century ago (Pajević et al. 1974). A total of 5,839 high school seniors were surveyed, of whom 14.3 percent from the narrow area of Serbia, 22 percent from Kosovo, and 10.3 percent from Vojvodina, wanted to enroll in the Military academy. The rural population and those from towns with



up to 50,000 inhabitants were the ones who decided to enroll in the Military academy. In second place were respondents of working-class origin, and only those of administrative staff origin.

If we compare the research conducted among the Military academy cadets with a few available studies from other countries, also conducted among the cadet population, several similarities and differences can be pointed out.

First, by comparing gender data, we conclude that almost the exact percentages of young men and women make up the cadet population in developed European countries (Bertram et al. 2018). This shows that, regarding this SEC, the Serbian Military Academy follows the trends in developed European countries and that the percentage of girls among the cadets of the Military academy in Belgrade is even higher than in some other European countries, in which traditional values prevail, such as Portugal, where the number of girls among cadets is 14.7 percent (Carreiras et al. 2020; Starčević 2024).

Secondly, when categorizing the birthplace of Serbian cadets on the rural-urban environment continuum, the results are similar to those in developed European countries. A total of 43.8 percent of the population of Serbian cadets, compared to 50% of the cadet population in developed European countries, such as France, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, come from urban environments (Caforio and Martinez 2005; Carreiras et al. 2020). This number significantly differs from the one obtained from research conducted in some countries of Eastern Europe or the Middle East, in which the cadets of military academies usually originate from rural environments (Brown 1989; Caforio and Martinez 2005). Moreover, when examined by clusters, in the northern one, we register 54.1 percent, and in the southern 39.3 percent of participants originated from predominantly urban environments.

Thirdly, regarding the regional affiliation of cadets, we have concluded that up to two-thirds of the Military Academy in Belgrade cadets come from two regions, the Šumadija and Western Serbia, and the Southern and Eastern Serbia. This information is similar to the information obtained from the research conducted among the Turkish cadets, where around 60 percent of the cadet population originates from the Anatolia and Black Sea region, which can be compared to the aforementioned regions in Serbia, to some of the basic SEC (Brown 1989).

Fourth, over half of the cadets at the Serbian military academy come from working-class families. In this sense, there is a similarity

with the situation in the Czech Republic and Poland, where around 60 percent of cadets have the same social background. There is a significant difference compared to other countries such as Spain, Sweden, and Turkey, where the military background of the cadets is dominant (Caforio and Martinez 2005; Dziwanowski 2020; Brown 1989). The second largest social group from which Serbian cadets come is the group of families with a military tradition, and in this respect, the research conducted is most similar to that conducted among Portuguese and Polish cadets (Carreiras et al. 2020; Caforio and Martinez 2005; Dziwanowski 2020; Brown 1989).

Fifth, almost half of Serbian cadets are graduates of the Military grammar school, and a quarter are former students of civilian gymnasiums. This result differs significantly from research among cadets in Poland, where 90 percent of cadets have a Military grammar school as their previous education. Only 10 percent have a secondary vocational school, while in Turkey, the cadet population consists of 63.83 percent of those who graduated from military vocational secondary schools and 36.17 percent of those who graduated from civilian secondary schools (Dziwanowski 2020; Brown 1989).

## CONCLUSION

The conducted research was guided by the question of what the SEC of the cadets of the Serbian military academy is like. The purpose of the research was to gain insight into them and describe them. In terms of gender, the majority of cadets are male, with a significant participation of girls, which is around the average in developed European countries. About 70 percent of cadets come from urban areas, and two-fifths come from Šumadija and Western Serbia. More than half of the cadets have a working-class background, and about 20 percent have military backgrounds. About 75 percent of cadets have completed a Military grammar school or a civilian gymnasium, and more than half have had outstanding education success so far. The basis for dividing cadets into clusters is their belonging to the northern or southern cluster, which coincides with the division of Serbia into a developed north and a less developed south.

The main contribution of the conducted research is the systematic presentation of the SEC of cadets of the Serbian military academy. The obtained results confirm the thesis from the research on cadets of

military academies of other countries, that in modern conditions, the composition of military academies has changed and that it is mainly made up of young people whose social background does not offer the possibility of excessive social mobility when it comes to status and prestige. About research on the cadet population in other countries, the conducted research simultaneously included more SEC. It used primary and secondary data, both in order to gain a more detailed insight into the phenomenon under study. In addition, the conducted research once again confirmed the division of Serbia into the developed north and the underdeveloped south.

In a methodological sense, the paper illustrated how primary and secondary data, with the application of numerous techniques and procedures of statistical analysis, can produce detailed information that will reveal the SEC of a population. Given that the research population was only the population of Military Academy cadets, the results obtained cannot be generalized. However, for other researchers, especially those investigating the SEO of young people or students of civilian universities, it can represent a reference point for comparison and a guide to the levels of analysis.

Regardless of its exploratory and descriptive character, this paper is one of the important attempts to point out the SEC of cadets in Serbia, as similar research has been rare since the establishment of the Military Academy. Moreover, when ones interpreting its results, it should be mainly borne in mind that military academies differ from other higher education institutions because they offer full scholarships to their students, i.e. they effectively remove the financial barrier to further education, which leads to a broader spectrum of cadets' SEC compared to civilian faculties where tuition and housing costs can be a limiting factor.

Besides the contribution to theory and other researchers, this research has several practical contributions. Data obtained from secondary sources show three things. First, depopulation is most significant in the regions where the largest cadets come. Second, there is a trend of migration from rural and semi-urban areas, from which more than half of the cadets originate. Third, there is a pronounced tendency towards reduction of social classes from which more than half of cadets come due to the deindustrialization of the economy and the reduction in the number of personnel in the Serbian Army. All of the above indicates that the problem of filling the Military

academy could be more pronounced in the future. A possible solution is comprehensive measures to improve the SES of officers, which would not consist only of increasing monthly salaries, so that military conscription would attract more young people whose social background is not only working-class or military. Implementing broader measures could positively impact the military draft of a larger number of those with higher success and those who graduated from more prestigious secondary schools. This task, which from the aspect of implementation surpasses the Military academy and the University of Defense, and from the aspect of the methods of the marketing activities that have been forced so far, should start from the fact that the high reputation of the army in society, based on tradition, is not a guarantee of sufficient and high-quality personnel.

As each study is the result of trade-offs that researchers have to make at a given time, the results of this research should be viewed in light of several limitations. First, the number of surveyed SECs collected through a survey was six, and 13 are from secondary data. Second, only two out of four classes of cadets of the Serbian military academy were included in the research, and the cadets were not classified according to the study programs they attended. Third, the presented results are part of a broader research project, and the purpose of this paper was exploratory and descriptive, so it did not include the exploration of causal relationships. Fourth, the expression of SEC in collecting primary data was subjectively based and left to the respondents. Fifth, in the comparative analysis, the results obtained were compared only with those from a few available previous studies published in English. Sixth, the analyzed data were cross-sectional, and all future studies that claim to have an explanatory character and offer insight into trends should be longitudinally based.

Regardless of the previously mentioned, the authors of this paper believe that it represents a good starting point for all further and deeper research. Therefore, future research can expand the number of studied SECs, include both initial and final year cadets, regardless of the huge differences in their socialization with the conditions of living, studying and working at the Military academy, use some of the composite measures or already tested scales for assessing SES, include data based on which the social, economic and cultural capital of the families from which the cadets come can be more precisely assessed, and consider the question of how all this is reflected in their personal

value orientations, attitudes they have towards the society and economic environment in which they live and in which they decided to become a military vocation.

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## **СОЦИОЕКОНОМСКЕ ОДЛИКЕ КАДЕТА ВОЈНЕ АКАДЕМИЈЕ\*\*\***

### **Резиме**

Предмет овог рада било је истраживање социоекономских одлика кадета Војне академије и покушај да се он дефинише на индивидуалном, породичном и регионалном нивоу. Циљ је био стицање увида у основне социоекономске одлике кадета, њихов опис и повезивање са ширим социоекономским контекстом. Прикупљени су примарни и секундарни подаци, а у анализи су коришћене корелациона, факторска и кластер анализа, и унакрсно табелирање. Утврђено је да регионална припадност сврстава кадета у две групе – оне који потичу из развијених региона на северу Србије и мање развијених јужних региона земље, да је учешће припадника женског пола у кадетској популацији на нивоу развијених европских земљама, да готово 70 одсто кадета потиче из урбаних и полуурбаних средина, да само из региона Шумадије и Западне Србије потиче две петине кадета, и да је надполовично социјално пореко кадета радничко, док војно чини нешто више од једне петине. Скоро три четвртине кадета као средњошколско образовање има Војну или цивилну гимназију, а успех који су

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остварили у досадашњем школовању се за надполовичан број кадета може окарактерисати као врло добар.

**Кључне речи:** социоекономске одлике, социоекономски статус, кадети, Војна академија, Србија.

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