I. The Past and Present of Humour in Slovakia

As mentioned before, there are voices pointing out a change in original Slovak humour. Even if not described in terms of good and bad humour, there is an obvious and noticeable shift in what the media offer. The era of socialist Czechoslovakia can best be described as a time of the emergence of political satire. The humour of that time was founded in the untold, the understatement and hidden hints to the political and social reality of the time (Vološčuková, 2004). The element of the untold was introduced to some extent as a necessity, due to the criminalization of criticism towards the system. The now-legendary duo Lasica and Satinský made the best and most popular humour of that time. Literary critic and humour historian Kornel Földvári believes that after 1968, they presented answers for a whole generation. They gave people the will to live and optimism. They used humour as a personal philosophy and people attended their cabaret shows looking for a remedy for their depression after the Russian invasion (Uličianska, 2009). Despite the intellectually demanding quality of their humour, they managed to find a very wide audience. Földvári believes that the reason is the multi-layeredness of their humour, where one person laughs at the obvious comedy of their dialogue and other at the subtle literary innuendo it incorporates (Kopcsay, 2010). These two are not the only representatives of the same type of entertainment. Zdeněk Svěrák and Ladislav Smoljak used the same type of humour in their plays. This era is connected with such qualifiers as civilized, fair and non-insulting (Letko, 2006).

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989 and the abolition of Communism, the dimension of political satire became increasingly predominant in entertainment, which is evidenced by the many television shows featuring these themes.¹ Such names as Noga, Skrúcaný, Piško, Radič are well-known for their political parodies. Here also, the topic has its raison d'être, as Communism was replaced by another –ism, the now so-called Mečiarism. Despite the difference in period, there were parallels between the two – Mečiarism functioned as a totalitarian system, featuring the cult of personality of the leader of the governing party, Vladimír Mečiar (Galický, 2009).

¹ The emergence of first commercial television stations allowed for political satire to be broadcast on television, as opposed to previous decades, where such display of civil disobediences was limited to the theatre, due to the state controlling all mass media.
No matter how popular these shows were, with Mečiar gone in 1998, they did not survive. The names behind this type of humour have been trying to adapt but six years ago, the last politically-themed satire shows have been cancelled. Piško believes that political satire is out of fashion, mainly due to its over-abundance in the past (Kopcsayová, 2009). Földvári characterizes current television humour as a utility form, an old type of situational humour made up of schemes passed on through generations – a humour in inverted commas – about mothers-in-law, drunken husbands (Uličianska, 2009). Television gives entertainment precedence over humour. Adriana Kronerová, the dramaturgist of one of the most popular entertainment shows today – Uragán, stated that she knows that television viewers criticize current entertainment programmes for their lack of quality literary humour, dominant in the sixties, but that today’s entertainment is commercial, meaning majority-based. She adds that it is not a problem of creative abilities of the authors but a problem of the audience. Commercial television stations need to address the widest audience possible (Vološčuková, 2004). This means that it is not just that televisions give people what they want to see but also that they do not give them what they might want to see.

A case in point here is also the fact the airing time of shows featuring the personas of classical Slovak humour. Re-runs of these shows are scheduled for non-prime time hours (even on public television) and Sedem (formerly Sedem s.r.o.), the only show regularly featuring these classics is aired late at night. A similar example is the sitcom Frasier. Even though it is a US sitcom, the constant rescheduling illustrated how much it was appreciated by the majority audience. Initially aired on workdays during summer at 10:30 pm, it was later moved to 7:30 pm, but did not last long, before it was moved again, to 11:30 am, then to Sunday at 1 am (Krasko, 2008). Frasier is full of cultural and literary allusions, which were apparently not compatible with the expected commercial success of the series in Slovakia. This does not however mean that it did not find its audience.

The situation as described above apparently does not only pertain to original on-screen humour. Popular demand similarly influences what type of entertainment is purchased from abroad. Rakúsová (2010) laments the fact that while there are quality-programmes (not just in the category of “humour”) being produced in the world, domestic viewers do not know them from Slovak television screens. Those US-
produced comedy programmes that are aired in Slovakia are only rarely critically acclaimed, with British production being almost non-present, despite the fact that UK-produced shows like *The Office* have been successful worldwide. The presented research suggests that even those foreign television shows which have been popular in Slovakia, are not fully incorporated into the cultural logic of domestic audiences. The Simpsons have been aired in Slovakia for over a decade now, but still did not manage to become a part of ‘mainstream’, probably due to the nature of their humour, being heavily based in US culture.

A fact remains that, with a few exceptions, award-winning foreign television humour is not aired in Slovakia, as the commerce-driven broadcasting networks need to satisfy the majority-customer. The minority-customer is thus forced to use different media, especially the Internet, to come after their humour needs.

The director, screenplay writer and aphorist Marek Orel summarizes the situation on Slovak television as follows: “The creators are subject to the majority audience instead of raising the bar of their taste and appreciation. Fart, burp, shit, women with moustaches, Hungarian gibberish – those are the guns Slovak humorists keep firing on a regular basis” (Vološčuková, 2004). Indeed, the topics covered are in no way similar to those of the past decades. Not only did political satire disappear, but so did the non-insulting and thoughtful humour, full of optimism. Guaranteed to provoke laughter are references to ethnic minorities, sex, relationships and cross-dressing (ibid).

The creator of Uragán and some other very popular original Slovak sitcoms, Andy Kraus, proposes an interesting question – that of who should be the audience of “elitist humour” (ibid). In an interview he stated that during the filming of Uragán, which is a stage cabaret show, there are chiefs of hospitals, psychologists, people from the government and even athletes present in the audience. Based solely on this limited empirical proof, it might be assumed that there is no connection between humour preference and social class or education, income or gender. If Uragán is widely popular and, apparently, even highly educated people from higher classes attend the filming of the show, it must therefore appeal to a wide spectrum of viewers, thus suggesting that
taste in humour is a very subjective taste, specific to each individual. This would, however, be a foregone conclusion.

**I.1 Audience and Theories of Taste**

To understand why it appears that it is rather hard to identify a target audience for ‘elitist’ humour, it is important to understand what role the category of taste plays here. Ollivier and Fridman (2001) define taste as

> [o]ne component of symbolic systems of classification whose content and structure both reflect and shape particular states of social relations. Taste is part of the process by which social actors construct meaning about their social world, classifying people, practices, and things into categories of unequal value. It is displayed in conversation, habits, manners, and in the possession of goods, which signal co-membership into communities of wealth or knowledge. Taste serves as an identity and status marker.

As all the discussions presented above deal in terms of good vs. bad humour, dependant on taste, and taste being a status marker, it may be presumed that taste in humour will be a form of status demarcation, or at least be in some form connected to certain social variables making up or identifying specific social groups.

From an aesthetic point of view, an important question would be that of what constitutes good and bad taste, i.e. the universality of aesthetic categories. In one of the first modern accounts on taste, Montesquieu (1970) sees it as the ability to discern how aesthetically pleasing an object should be for a person. On one hand, it means that taste is a faculty specific to each individual and, on the other, it presupposes the existence of universal categories of beauty, founded in some intrinsic beauty of objects. As there is no general consensus as to whether such universals exist, social sciences prefer to rather deal with the aspect of interrelations between taste(s) and society, suggesting that these universals may be socially-determined and prone to change in the light of other social changes, moving from one universal set of values to a multitude of tastes, each comprised of its own set. This shift of paradigms creates a possibility to think about tastes not just diachronically, but also synchronically, as existing side by side at the same time. The most important question, then, is that of how these tastes are co-related.
From a synchronic point of view, this relationship has been treated in two elementary ways – either in terms of conflict or toleration. The most influential account on the conflict model has been proposed by Bourdieu in *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (1979), who sees tastes as competing and in constant conflict. These tastes create and shape taste cultures – entities, which combine similar values and standards. In this environment of competition, taste is used as a means of creating a distinction between classes. If the appropriation of material and non-material (cultural) wealth sets social classes apart, a good taste in humour may be considered as a part of this cultural capital. Higher classes, not being limited by material needs, may turn to abstract concerns like art, philosophy or music to distinguish their lifestyle from lower classes, which are preoccupied with their material needs. The dominant class, then, by force of this very dominance, may impose these values onto the social reality and in such way define *good taste*. Hence, it needs to be learned or acquired by members of lower classes, whereas to higher class-members, it comes more naturally (Ollivier and Fridman, 2001). This perception of taste cultures creates a hierarchy of tastes, whereby they are ascribed to social classes, which are similarly hierarchically-structured. High culture is thus harder accessible for lower classes, it is often expensive, making it exclusive, which fosters class distinctions. Popular or low culture is then associated with popular taste.

The highbrow/lowbrow model, as proposed by Bourdieu, has come under severe criticism, especially in recent years, as society is considered less differentiated and stratified than in the past. This clash has produced the so-called ‘mass culture’, associated with an emerging social group in a new social reality, oriented to consumption and profit. (Horkheimer 1986) and (MacDonald 1964) argue that such a development is socially dangerous, as the most influential social actor today is the industry, with the ability to threaten and eventually destroy taste, built on individual autonomy and judgement. Gans (1974) proposed a new theory of taste cultures, based on this new reality, presenting a view of pluralism, where equal value is ascribed to all taste cultures, eradicating a hierarchical ordering of tastes. He sees taste cultures as connected to taste publics, sharing similar preferences values. A logical continuation of such reasoning may be the emergence of the mainstream vs. marginal culture.
To go even further, recent research indicates that taste cultures may be disappearing as such. Peterson and Kern (1996) paint an image of higher classes becoming omnivores, partaking in the broadest-possible range of activities and expressing a similarly broad preference in terms of culture. The reason for this evolution may be the very era of globalisation, i.e. “high levels of geographic mobility, made possible by the development of means of transportation and communication; the declining significance of physical place and the concurrent extension of loose networks associated with the new communication technologies; high levels of intragenerational and horizontal occupational mobility under the joint effect of technological change and economic globalization; greater accessibility to higher education beyond the restricted circles of traditional elites; and the extraordinary increase in the amount and diversity of information in circulation, as print and electronic media” (Ollivier and Fridman, 2009). One could go even so far as to say that today, taste is purely based on individual preference (Lipovetsky, 1983).

To return to the initial question of who the audience for “elitist” humour should be, this brief account on taste may aid in understanding, why the filming of Uragán is attended (and appreciated) by such a variety of people from different social classes. In terms of a post-modern definition of taste, the upper classes may well have become cultural omnivores and so is Uragán not appreciated by a specific taste public, but by individuals, with discrete tastes in humour. On the other hand, if we were to accept the taste plurality model, it would be hard to explain the lack of what has been so far called good humour on television in Slovakia. Apparently, this category is being ostracised at the expense of popular humour, which may be even called mass entertainment, referring back to Horkheimer and MacDonald. Television stations are, after all, profit-oriented.

What may further aid in understanding the situation are the terms in which the contemporary Slovak society is defined. Not having a long history as a free and independent country, Slovakia has been experiencing enormous class mobility. The sociologist Stanislav Matulay believes that Slovakia does not have a stable middle class and he is not the only one to share this view, as it is supported by research conducted by the SAV (The Slovak Academy of Sciences) (Sibyla, 2010). Matulay asserts that after the fall of the Communist regime, a class of rich and even richer was created, whereby mobility between all classes, specially from lower classes to upper class, was very
common (Lászlóová, 2010). Although globally, the middle class is seen as being in decline or even in a crisis (Chan, 2010; Poulter, 2009; Ensinger, 2010), so far, Slovakia did not have a chance to even establish one. Whereas in 1992, 36.9% of Slovaks believed the best social stratification would be one with most of the members of society belonging to higher classes with high income (even though the reality of that time was the exact opposite), today most Slovaks would prefer a strong middle class.

Even though the middle class has not yet formed, based on the above, it may be hypothesized that there is an upper class, which should traditionally fulfil the function of the protector of high culture. But as has been put forward, this upper class has been marked by a high degree of class mobility, especially upward mobility, whereby some aspects of popular culture may have moved upwards as well. As good taste is an acquired taste, it does not come automatically with class progress. If such mobility had been limited, the traditional good or high taste might have remained intact, but as this happened suddenly and involved many individuals, there may have been some change as to what is now considered good taste, as preserved and maintained by the upper class. This theory sheds new light onto why it is even members of high society, who are willing and able to appreciate popular humour or entertainment for the masses. Not only is there no stable middle class, but there is a very young upper class of mixed origin, with a mixed class background, embracing rather distinct values.

If Andy Kraus asks, who the audience of ‘elitist’ humour should be and how it should look like, the answer then should not put this type of humour on the same level with upper classes, as to a significant extent, this social class is more akin to what Gans calls the “rich middlebrow” class, who goes to the opera just to be seen, and falls asleep as soon as the performance starts (Lamont - Fournier, 1992), with the difference that besides attending the opera in this fashion, it sees no problem or social constrain to attend lowbrow events as well. Naturally, this does not concern the upper class in its entirety and such generalizations should be avoided. What can be asserted, though, is that based on the political and economical history of Slovakia, the social structure is not stable, with a much diverse upper class, a weak middle class and a very strong working class. All of these factors may in the end have an influence on what kind of entertainment is offered to the audience. Earlier on, the fact was mentioned that in the USA as well as in the UK, humour is being produced which appeals to an intellectual
and elitist audience. What needs to be taken into account, though, is that the USA are a much bigger country than Slovakia, with 50+ television stations (not including various terrestrial stations), Slovakia only has 4 nation-wide stations not requiring cable or satellite receivers (which are becoming common, but are not yet matter-of-course). The USA may be best described in terms of taste fragmentation, where mainstream disappears and “many different taste groups [emerge] that are not fixed but rather based on fleeting alliances” (Kuipers, 2006a).

As it appears now, the crisis of humour in Slovakia may not be a crisis after all but merely a necessary shift in taste, caused by social, cultural and economic changes. On the background of recent research in taste, suggesting a plurality of tastes and a gradual disappearing of a hierarchical structuring, as well as taking into account the social changes and situation in Slovakia, it may be assumed that there is no discernible distinction between highbrow/lowbrow culture. However, a research conducted by Giseline Kuipers (2006b), based on the same premise and looking into the Dutch taste in humour showed that there actually is a form of distinction discernible, which is best described in terms of highbrow/lowbrow.

The presented research is based on the principles and methodology of a research conducted by Giseline Kuipers in 1999, inquiring into the Dutch sense of humour. Contrary to recent theories of taste, a rather evident highbrow/lowbrow distinction was discerned. The Dutch research identified 4 distinct humour clusters – Highbrow, Lowbrow, Oldtimers and Celebrities, labelled based on the style of humour of the items making up these clusters. Having sampled these groups based on the social background of the respondents, Kuipers found out that the relationship between the Lowbrow and Highbrow cluster is indeed hierarchical, i.e. higher educated respondents tended not to know nor to appreciate lowbrow humour, whereas the knowledge of highbrow humour was significantly positively correlated with education, proposing that respondents with a lower education were to a large extent not even familiar with highbrow humour, hence not being able to express judgements as to its appreciation. This finding suggests an exclusivity of highbrow humour, which is inaccessible to lower classes, thus supporting

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2The methodology of Kuipers' research is identical to that of the presented research and will be described in more detail later.
the function of taste as a device for creating distinction. Contrary to recent theories proposing an omnivore model for taste of higher educated people, their taste was proven to be rather selective, but in terms of knowledge, they did have a broader knowledge of humour in general.

Moreover, her research suggests that there is a mainstream/subculture relationship between humour of older and younger people, whereas Oldtimer humour appears to be akin to subculture. Older respondents had a better knowledge of a specific group of shows and entertainers, but their knowledge of all items exhibited an opposite correlation.

Concerning gender-based preferences, the only significant result Kuipers noted was the appreciation of the Celebrity cluster, which was liked more by men. The presented research, on the other hand, uncovered such male preference in several clusters. The results of Kuipers' original research will be compared to the present data in more detail later on.

1.2 Tastes and Taste Publics of Slovak Humour

At this point, the presented research tries to identify, whether there is any discernible division or distinction of tastes in humour present with the Slovak audience; whether it is one audience with a variety of preferences and without one delimited taste, or whether it is possible to talk about a multitude of audiences, whereby their tastes are mutually exclusive. To this end 273 Slovaks were asked to fill in a questionnaire, comprised of 53 names of humorous television shows, sitcoms, entertainers, humorists, actors and celebrities and of 16 jokes. The respondents were asked to rate the 53 personae based on the extent to which they consider them humorous on a 5-point Likert scale, whereby a sixth option was added for the respondents to mark, when they did not know the persona or if they were not familiar with the humour associated with it. The reason behind this choice is that, for the sake of establishing a preference, knowing about liking or disliking of a specific show or humorist is not enough. Knowledge of certain shows and the humour they offer may also indicate, whether certain tastes are exclusive, i.e. if there is a highbrow/lowbrow distinction, it should manifest itself not
just in terms of liking or disliking but also in terms of familiarity with specific items. If highbrow tastes were exclusive, a lowbrow audience would not be familiar with them to begin with, whereas marking something ‘not humorous’ indicates familiarity and lack of exclusiveness. The same is true for a possible highbrow audience not knowing (or intentionally choosing not to know) lowbrow humour for the sake of distinction. To identify the required social parameters, the respondents have been sampled by age, gender, education and employment.

Moreover, they were asked to rate 4 cartoons and 12 jokes, ranging from absurd jokes and obscene jokes to intellectual jokes, as to their humorousness and appropriateness, again on 5-point Likert scales. The rating of jokes and their appropriateness/offensiveness should be a means not just for clarification of the ratings from the first part of the questionnaire but also for determining what the preferred/popular topics for humour are and whether there is a continual or discontinual proportion between appropriateness and humorousness of jokes. Lastly, the respondents rated the potential humorousness and offensiveness of seven areas humour tends to be constructed around, namely politics, religion, minorities, ethnicity, gender, sexual topics and physical harm. These results were compared to the ratings of particular jokes as well as television shows and personae from the first part and used to verify the respective findings.

### I.3 Identifying Humour Styles

The items analysed in the first part of the research consisted of an array of domestic and foreign humorous television shows, sitcoms, entertainers, actors known for comedic performances, cartoonists and joke-tellers. In terms of non-domestic items, the selection included shows or people who regularly appeared or still appear on Slovak television but also some which do not, to account for those respondents who look for humour which would suit their preference via media different than domestic television.

The first step in the analysis was to look for clusters of the items rated that may be described as humour styles. To this end, the items from the questionnaire were coded
into nominal variables and analysed via the CATPCA (categorical principle component analysis) module in SPSS. This function reduces a set of categorical variables to a smaller set of uncorrelated components, whereas these components account for most of the information of the original variables. Categorical principle component analysis is a form of non-linear principle component analysis and was used instead of standard PCA due to the fact that standard PCA does not take into account possible non-linear correlations between variables.

After all variables have been put through CATPCA, the result was plotted as follows:

![Centroid plot of all variables](image.png)

The variables have been previously scanned for outlier cases as well as outlier variables, which were not used in the final analysis, for the sake of producing a result as comprehensible and analysable as possible. The centroid plot in Figure 1 already hints towards a possible clustering, with the variables forming a “butterfly” pattern. The next step consisted in removing those variables, which had a component loading of less than .35, thus not being reliable members of any cluster. This way, 17 out of the

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3 Although the items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, the sixth ‘do not know’ option did not make it possible to treat them as ordered variables. In this case, ‘do not know’ is not a middle/neutral rating but a rating outside the used Likert scale.
analysed 53 variables have been removed. Surprisingly, as many as 7 out of the 12 non-Czechoslovak entries had a too low loading to include them in further analyses. This fact requires the issue of foreign entertainment import to be addressed separately later on. Without these variables, the clusters become even more evident:

What becomes apparent in this plot is the positioning of the variables across Dimension 1, whereby the formed clusters are marked by the age of the persons or the era in which the programmes were produced. On the left, all of the variables represent the older generation and the right-hand side cluster consists of rather recent shows and personae. This result may serve as proof of the change in humour, as addressed in the beginning. As it seems, those respondents who appreciate items from the right-hand cluster do not appreciate items from the left-hand cluster and vice versa. This interpretation seems rather straightforward, but as will be evident from correlations of the data with social variables later on, it is not purely age-related, as older audiences, which are fond of older humour do appreciate current shows and entertainers. To be able to interpret these clusters in mode detail, each of them has been plotted individually, to determine, whether they are homogeneous, or whether there is some additional internal clustering present, which is not apparent in this form but which may
be appropriate to be considered and which can be rationalised and supported by further analysis.

The plot of the right-hand cluster showed an internal clustering, which makes it easier to interpret the result:

![Fig. 3 – Plot of the left-hand cluster from Fig. 2](image)

Plotting the left-hand cluster separately results in two smaller clusters, which may serve as final clusters for further analysis. Despite all variables in this plot being marked by the age of the personae or era of their production, this division may be interpreted in a rather straightforward manner. The right-hand side cluster from Fig. 3 may be best described as ‘Highbrow Classics’. This cluster consists of Radošinské Naivné Divadlo, which is a theatre ensemble performing satirical naive plays, filled with criticism and irony; Ktosi je za Dverami, a cabaret featuring the duo Lasica and Satinský, which have been cited before for their highbrow humour. Moreover, the show regularly featured guests also to be found in this cluster like; Boris Filan is a traveller, book author and talk show host; Milan Markovič is a former member of the Radošinské Naivné Divadlo, known for his sense of sarcasm and irony and who has been hosting a political talk show, ‘grilling’ politicians; Sedem s.r.o. is the only current show in this cluster still being aired. The reason for this is that its regulars are most of the above-mentioned persons. The only non-domestic item in this cluster is the US series M*A*S*H, which is known for its ironical, dark humour, critical of war and society.
Apart from Satisnký, all of the featured are still alive, although only scarcely seen on television.

The left-hand cluster may be dubbed ‘Oldimers’, as it consists of three back-and-white comedy era performers – Laurel and Hardy, Jan Werich and Vlasta Burian, all of whom are deceased. Moreover, it contains the late Ivan Krajiček – a well-know host of an oldtimer song show; the late Viktor Kuba – a cartoonist and author of several animated series; the late Benny Hill of the Benny Hill Show and Zdeněk Svěrák and his project - Divadlo Járy Cimrmana, which are in style akin to Lasica and Satisnký, although their humour may be characterized as more nonsensical. With the exception of Zdeněk Svěrák, all of the featured are already deceased.

The right-hand cluster from Fig.2 was similarly plotted separately from the right-hand cluster, resulting in two distinct clusters, which are again well suited for further analysis.

The top cluster is best characterized as ‘Lowbrow’. It contains two folk-music centred shows (Senzi Senzus and Drišťakoviny), a folk-entertainer known for joke-telling (Ander z Košíc), a feature film consisting entirely of jokes (Kameňák), a cheesy parody/adaptation of the Police Academy franchise (Byl jednou jeden polda) and three shows hosted by Oliver Andrášzy and Elena Vacvalová (Dereš, Čo dokáže ulica, Aj můdry schybí), all of which are based on making fun of random passers-by – either
asking them elementary questions, playing pranks on them or having them ask their guests (politicians or humorists) diverse questions.

The bottom cluster is by far the biggest cluster of the four. Its common denominator is ‘Prime-time Entertainment’. All of the featured items can or could until recently have been seen in prime-time airing slots. It contains Andy Kraus, currently the busiest screenplay writer and producer of sitcoms in Slovakia and three of his creations, Slovakia’s got talent and several other entertainers as well as the Bill Cosby show, which is one of the very first sitcoms ever to air in Slovakia.

The items not related to any of these four clusters need to be addressed also. First, what is of interest to the research at hand is that, as mentioned earlier, only few non-domestic shows fit into the identified humour styles. Most of them, even thought they have been rated quite high, are not appreciated in terms of these styles. The American sitcom Friends, for example, has received only 52 negative or neutral votes (ratings of 1, 2 and 3) and 211 positive votes (ratings of 4 and 5) and only 3 people claimed not to know the show. Nonetheless, it is not significantly related to any of the clusters. This means that it is liked or disliked by people belonging to different clusters alike. Only those foreign shows which have been for a longer time a part Slovak culture (with the exception of M*A*S*H, which apparently found its highbrow audience) have been integrated into its cultural logic.

Similarly not fitting into any of the clusters are such people as Adela Banášová and Sajfá. Both young, both originally radio MCs, they are considered witty and sarcastic, but their transfer to television and involvement with popular entertainment shows may have cost them a position in the highbrow cluster.

**1.4 Social Background and Humour**

By means of principal constituent analysis it was established that in terms of humour, Slovak audiences are marked by their preference of four distinct humour styles. As the next step in understanding the logic behind the formation of these styles, it is necessary to determine, whether they are linked in some way to certain social variables – to the social background of the audiences. To this end, the recognized humour style

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4 This gives a total of just 266 votes, as not all respondents rated all items.
clusters were correlated with selected social variables like age, education and gender of the respondents to have filled in the questionnaire. Each of these variables was correlated with the particular clusters in terms of appreciation and knowledge. The appreciation of the clusters was calculated as the mean appreciation of all items in this cluster (on a five-point scale). Knowledge was measured on a scale from 0 to 1, whereby a rating of 0 meant the respondent did not know any of the items and a rating of 1 meant that they knew all of the items in the cluster.

Table 1 features the results of this correlation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Correlation with Education</th>
<th>Correlation with Age</th>
<th>Gender difference</th>
<th>Cronbach's α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All items</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprec.</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>m&gt;f</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowl.</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>m&gt;f</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oldtimers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprec.</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>m&gt;f</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowl.</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>m&gt;f</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prime-time entertainment</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprec.</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowl.</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lowbrow</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprec.</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>m&gt;f</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowl.</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>m&gt;f</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highbrow Classics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprec.</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowl.</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bold:** p<0.01  
**Bold italics:** p<0.05
Besides the particular correlation coefficients, the table further gives additional information on the clusters. For each cluster, it gives the mean appreciation and knowledge, the standard deviation and Cronbach's $\alpha$.

Cronbach's $\alpha$ is a standard test to assess internal consistency of a set of items and is often treated as a reliability indicator. Garson (1998) believes that an Alpha of at least .70 is required to reflect a sufficient consistency. For the Oldtimer, Lowbrow and Prime-time clusters, Cronbach's $\alpha$ is above .80, which signals a high reliability. The Highbrow cluster only has an Alpha of .66, which is still fairly high, considering that this cluster only contains six items, and according to Cortina (1993), even a lower Alpha may still indicate high reliability. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that reliability does not imply validity, as stated, among others, by Trochim (2006). Moreover, a high Alpha does not imply unidimensionality. The Alpha for all items of the questionnaire is equally above .70, even though it becomes evident that the items are intercorrelated in different ways.

The Oldtimer cluster has the highest mean appreciation rating (3.53) but the lowest mean knowledge (.60). This means that those respondents who claimed to be familiar with the items from this group tended to rate them rather high. On the other hand, this group contained the most items which were not known to the respondents. Despite the representatives of this cluster having been around for a long time, they currently lack media presence and especially younger audiences are not familiar with them, which is supported by the strong positive correlation with age (.58, p<0.01). Similarly, the appreciation of this cluster correlates strongly with age as well (.43, p<0.01). It is not surprising that it is older people who know and appreciate the humour of a generation they are a part of.

A significant (p<0.05) positive correlation with knowledge of .15 was also proven with respect to the education of the respondents. Higher educated respondents tended to be more familiar with these personae than those with a lower education. Remarkable though is the strong negative correlation of education and the appreciation of this group (-.35), which suggests a tendency of higher-educated people to dislike the humour style represented by this cluster. It was lower-educated individuals who rated the items higher. Higher educated people may know these items but do not appreciate
the humour they offer. This feature sets the Oldtimer cluster apart from the Highbrow group.

The Highbrow cluster similarly exhibits a significant, although weaker positive correlation of knowledge (.12) and appreciation (.27) with age. It is older audiences who appreciate the humour of this group more than younger ones and they are more familiar with the items that make it up, although not to such an extent as seen in the Oldtimer cluster. On the other hand, there is a significant positive correlation with education in terms of appreciation (.17), which the Oldtimer cluster lacks. This fact validates the initial decision about treating these two clusters separately. The humour style represented in them varies, despite them both containing older items. Moreover, whereas in the Oldtimer cluster, men tended to know and like the items contained more, in the Highbrow cluster, such relation is not significant.

A significant negative correlation of knowledge (-.35) and appreciation (-.19) with the Lowbrow cluster suggests that not only do audiences with a higher education not appreciate lowbrow humour as much as lower-educated respondents, they are also not as familiar with it. This positive correlation of knowledge and appreciation with lower education suggests that higher educated audiences either make a conscious choices and refuse to acquaint themselves with lowbrow humour or that they find it inaccessible. Whereas due to the rather distinct nature of highbrow humour, inaccessibility would be an option if we were to treat lower educated audiences in this way, it is not probable that higher educated people do not understand the mechanics of lowbrow humour. They rather choose not to follow the items in this group, due to their dislike. As this cluster features several items which are similar in certain respects (share common hosts, topics or format), due to a negative experience with some, higher educated audiences assess similar items to be of equal comedic value and choose not to watch such shows. In principle, this is a form of inaccessibility, but not caused by incomprehension. This also explains why education correlates more strongly with knowledge than with appreciation, as to be able to judge an item, one needs to be acquainted with it first.

Similarly on the other hand, the positive correlation of knowledge and appreciation of the Highbrow cluster with education points towards an inaccessibility of this cluster for lower educated audiences. The degrees of correlation are not inverse to
those of the Lowbrow cluster, though. Especially knowledge does not correlate as strongly with education in this cluster as it does in the lowbrow cluster. This may be caused by the fact that the Highbrow items are not very current (older shows and people), which gave even lower-educated audiences (especially older ones) enough time to acquaint themselves with these items.

The Primetime entertainment cluster exhibits a feature none of the previous three does – in terms of this cluster, knowledge and appreciation correlate only weakly and not significantly with age (both .12). Apparently, this group of items is known and liked by audiences irrespective of age, which would fit the purpose of the shows in this cluster – to address the broadest-possible audience. On the other hand, just as identified in the lowbrow cluster, education correlates significantly negatively with both knowledge (-.16) and appreciation(-.17). In terms of knowledge, people with a higher education have a somewhat better knowledge of the Primetime cluster than they have of the Lowbrow cluster, but the appreciation for both of them is almost equally negatively correlated to their education. This brings Primetime entertainment closer to lowbrow tastes.

The exclusiveness of highbrow humour is evidenced by the fact that in three of the four clusters, education correlates negatively with appreciation and only correlates positively in the Highbrow cluster. A similar trend is noticeable when looking at knowledge, whereby it is positively correlated with education only in the Oldtimer and Highbrow cluster. As stated before, this points towards a tendency of higher educated individuals to distance themselves from lowbrow culture, be it in terms of lack of appreciation of lowbrow and popular entertainment or in terms of even refusing to familiarize themselves with it.

The age factor plays a significant role when assessing humour preference in Slovakia. The primetime cluster lacks significant correlations with age, mainly due to the nature of the included items, i.e. created to address a broad audience. The Oldtimer cluster correlates strongly with age both in appreciation and knowledge, as the type of humour older people can associate with and appreciate is the one they grew up with. A similar yet weaker correlation with age can be found in the Highbrow cluster, as all six items it consists of are older, as highbrow humour appears to have been pushed out from Slovak television, only being limited to a small number of programmes.
As is apparent from these findings, age seems to be a rather dominant factor in terms of both knowledge and appreciation. It is interesting to note that in all but one clusters, the correlation with age is positive, meaning that it is older people who appreciate the given style more than young audiences. It is therefore worthwhile to look for those items, which would be preferred by these younger viewers. Here, items which were not included in any of the formed clusters managed to provide some helpful insight.

1.5 The Relationship of Age and Humour Outside Clusters

When correlating the appreciation of all of the items from the questionnaire with the respondents' age, it is surprising to see that 26 correlate positively with age, in 19 cases, such correlation is not significant and in just 8 cases, these items are appreciated significantly more by younger audiences. Moreover, none of them is connected to any of the four identified humour style clusters. Table 2 shows how these items correlate with social variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Adela Banasova</th>
<th>Juraj Mokry</th>
<th>Safa</th>
<th>SOS</th>
<th>Red Dwarf</th>
<th>Monty Python</th>
<th>Simpsons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-0.409**</td>
<td>-0.214**</td>
<td>-0.160*</td>
<td>-0.135*</td>
<td>-0.157*</td>
<td>-0.120</td>
<td>-0.249</td>
<td>-0.288**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.442</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.262**</td>
<td>0.279**</td>
<td>0.315*</td>
<td>0.134*</td>
<td>0.272</td>
<td>0.182</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.560</td>
<td>0.122</td>
<td>0.905</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
<td>0.160*</td>
<td>-0.135*</td>
<td>-0.237</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.189**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.565</td>
<td>0.096</td>
<td>0.848</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>1.050</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
A possible explanation for this may be that out of all the 53 questionnaire entries, few represent young entertainers or shows specifically for young people. Adela Banášová, Juraj Mokrý and Sajfa are by far the youngest entertainers included, being 29, 31 and 33 years old and all three of them are connected to shows which are aimed at a rather young audience. On the other hand, both Monty Python and Red Dwarf are not very recent, but the humour of these shows is more likely to be appreciated by younger viewers, as it requires a certain amount of cultural competence, which the older generation lacks. During the Communist era, Slovakia has been exposed to the western world only limitedly and even after the fall of Communism, little British television humour managed to find its way to Slovakia, with most of the import being US-produced shows. The strong correlation of young age and appreciation of Friends is not surprising. What is surprising though is the result for The Simpsons.

In the US, they attract a rather broad audience of all age categories (Brewer, 2007), although originally, children were discouraged to watch the show by their parents (Strum, 1998). Still, the significantly strong negative correlation of the show with age identified here points towards a very different audience than that outside of Slovakia, which indicates that The Simpsons may actually not be understood in terms of the many social, political and cultural references, certainly not by the younger, lower-educated majority audience. Kuipers (2008) suggests that the world-wide success of this show is connected to it being deeply rooted in US culture as represented in the media, not as it actually is and as this picture of the USA is what most non-Americans following these media grew up with, they are rather familiar with the environment The Simpsons take place in. Needless to say, it is mostly the younger generation of Slovak audiences who actually grew up with America-filled media and that is also why this is the audience that is most likely to appreciate the show. Moreover, a severe misunderstanding of the format becomes evident when browsing the many internet discussion where The Simpsons are a topic. In a majority of cases the show is referred to as “rozprávka”, which is the equivalent of “fairy tale”. There is also a rather significant number of complaints to be found online addressed to the broadcasting company airing The Simpsons, which mostly follow the same patter:
Dear board of editors and director of STV,
I would like to react to the fairy tale The Simpsons which you air. I think that from a moral and ethical point of view is the fairy tale you air not at all suitable for forming the young generation, not to mention our children, who watch it a lot. […] Moreover, this fairy tale seems very unsuitable and rude. I therefore ask you remove the fairy tale The Simpsons from your programme. I believe we have more than enough other fairy tales with a better moral, e.g. Mat'ko a Kubko, Lolek a Bolek, …
Thank you in advance for a positive response to my request.

All of the mentioned alternatives are actual fairy tales aimed exclusively at children, which The Simpsons are not. Apparently this viewer, and many others like him, does not understand that the target audience is very different here. It appears that this multi-layered imported humour does not work well in the Slovak environment, which puts forward the question, to that extent foreign humour is appreciated by Slovak audiences in the way it is by the audience of its culture of origin.

Another point which may be addressed here is the prevalence of appreciation by female viewers. When considering all of the questionnaire items, items which are favoured more by women than by men are only found in the Prime-time Entertainment cluster (4) and in items which are not connected to any cluster (6). This preference may be linked to the 'kinder' nature of the humour represented here. More attention to the issue of gender-specific appreciation of humour is paid in the second part of the work, dealing with the appreciation of jokes.

It has been mentioned earlier that safe for a few older shows, imported television humour was not found in any of the identified clusters representing humour style/taste. As such, these items represent a somewhat broad spectrum of humour styles and topics, ranging from mostly non-verbal slapstick of Mr. Bean, through the cultural reference-packed Simpsons, to the British classic farce of Monty Python. Inspecting the appreciation and knowledge of all these imported shows on the background of age, however, reveals what they all share. Tables 3 and 4 show the knowledge and appreciation of these items.
Irrespective of education, younger audiences seem to have a far better knowledge of foreign television humour (4 out of 7) and also appreciate it more (4 out of 7). A noteworthy exception is Mr. Bean, who does not fit this image. Interestingly, whereas in the cases of Monty Python and Red Dwarf, knowledge is not as strongly linked with lower age, appreciation is. As mentioned earlier, the specific cultural proficiency required to appreciate British humour seems to be more prominent in the younger generation. The opposite is true about Frasier and Monk (and MASH, although it belongs to the Highbrow cluster). All three are US-produced and deal with topics which are more adult in nature. This factor is also supported by the stronger positive correlation with education, indicating that a more educated audience is required to
appreciate this type of humour. Nonetheless, the sphere of foreign television comedy is marked by a significant correlation with young age of the audience, which is not present in any of the identified humour style clusters, and only in one individual item belonging to a cluster.

Overall, the results of the survey paint a picture different than that of a omnivorous society where its members behave in a way that they choose from a large array of individual items representing different styles and types of humour, considering them of equal value. Contemporary theories of taste which talk about such a disappearing of taste cultures may still be valid in some respects but apparently, Bourdieu's distinction model has not become entirely obsolete yet. The present research has shown a significant dependence of education and humour appreciation and knowledge. It seems that in the specific media environment of Slovakia, a rather distinct audience exists which exhibits a dislike and even lack of knowledge of lowbrow and popular mainstream entertainment. This audience is generally higher educated and older. On the other hand, the lower-educated audience dislikes highbrow comedy but does have a fair knowledge of it, as these shows have been around for a long time and there is hardly any current highbrow humour present on Slovak television. The little highbrow humour that is to be found is generally that of imported shows, especially from the US. As has been shown, these programmes still present a problem for Slovak audiences. They do not reach their audience. Foreign television programming is largely correlated with young age, indicating that older audiences find these inaccessible.

It seems therefore that in terms of humour, there still is a certain exclusivity present. Even when the media make an attempt to target a very broad public with their programmes, as for example those in the Primetime entertainment cluster identified here, there is still a group of viewers who will not respond positively to these efforts. Moreover, the Slovak media environment is not the only one to exhibit such traits.

I.6 Comparing Results

As mentioned before, this research is modelled on a research conducted by Giselinde Kuipers, which analysed in a similar manner the humour preference in the

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5 It needs to be noted that there are very little foreign non-US-produced humorous television programmes present on television.
Netherlands. The results of her research are comparable to those of the presented research. Kuipers found out that the taste in humour in the Netherlands is determined by education and age, and not significantly dependent on gender. Both the presented research and that of Kuipers identified four distinct clusters representing humour styles, three of which (Highbrow, Lowbrow and Oldtimers) are shared by both researches. The fourth clusters differ in that in the Dutch survey, the fourth cluster consisted of Celebrities and in the presented work, it was a group made up of Prime-time entertainment shows.

What is notable is that in both cases, education plays a similar role in terms of highbrow and lowbrow humour. In both cases, the appreciation and knowledge of lowbrow humour is linked to lower education and highbrow humour to higher education. Nonetheless, there is a difference between these cases. In the Dutch survey, lower-educated respondents have proven to have a weaker knowledge of highbrow comedy (a correlation of .35 with higher education), thus proving highbrow humour inaccessible to them and on the other hand, they have proven to be well aware of lowbrow humour (-.19). In the presented survey, the situation is turned around, with a stronger correlation of lower education and knowledge of lowbrow humour (-.35) and a weaker correlation of higher education and knowledge of highbrow humour (.12). This still proves that these two humour tastes are mutually exclusive, but unlike in the Netherlands, lower-educated Slovaks do know highbrow comedy (due to its age) and higher-educated Slovaks do not know (or refuse to know) lowbrow comedy. In Slovakia, there appears to be a situation of educated people looking down on lowbrow comedy and in this way, creating a distinction from the top, whereby it is created from the bottom by lower educated Dutch. The result is still the same for both situations – a hierarchical ordering and exclusiveness of tastes.

Education did not play any role in any of the remaining two clusters in the Dutch research. On the other hand, the present research indicates that educated audiences have a better knowledge of older comedy (the Oldtimer cluster) but they also rate it much lower than lower-educated respondents. The lack of appreciation of classical black and white era comedy from the part of educated audiences may partly be explained by the lack of highbrow qualities of this type of comedy. Although the remaining two clusters are somewhat different in both surveys, the Dutch Celebrities cluster was equally not
correlated with education, whereas the Slovak Prime-time cluster (which also contains numerous items which may be regarded as Slovak celebrities) was. Here as well, educated audiences have proven a dislike of the items in the cluster, knowing them slightly better than those in the Lowbrow cluster but disliking them almost equally. This fact may point towards a very exclusive highbrow audience, which is even more exclusive in its taste than the highbrow audience in the Netherlands. This finding further proves the mentioned distinction from the top – a conscious refusal of non-highbrow humour by educated audiences.

Age plays a significant role in both researches, but in different ways. They are both very similar in terms of the Oldtimer cluster, where knowledge and appreciation is linked to an older age. Unlike the Dutch survey, however, older age is strongly correlated to other clusters, as well. While highbrow comedy in the Dutch survey consists of a large number of diverse items, the Slovak one contains only six. Moreover, while in the Netherlands, the audience is slightly younger, in Slovakia, this type of humour is appreciated and known by rather old people. The make-up of the two clusters indicates that highbrow humour is much more prominent in the Netherlands than it is in Slovakia. Popular demand dictates what is being produced and intelligent humour seems not to be requested by a large enough audience. This makes highbrow comedy a subculture, which fits well with the social reality of Slovakia, with a very strong working class and weak middle class.

If age of lowbrow humour audience is concerned, both Slovak and Dutch are older, whereby low age is a factor in the knowledge of Dutch lowbrow comedy. This is not the case in Slovakia, where young audiences are not too well acquainted with this humour style. The Celebrity cluster in the Dutch survey is liked especially by young audiences, though. This means that there exists a specific category of entertainment older people cannot appreciate. In the Slovak Prime-time cluster, on the other hand, such connection is not present. Here, age has hardly any significance. The shows are marked more by merriness than by humour, managing to engage audiences of all age groups. The „celebrities“ in this group are equally known by young and old. Kuipers has shown that young people dislike old people's humour, while old people dislike young people's humour. A similar conclusion is problematic to arrive at in the case of Slovak youths. None of the identified humour styles was marked by appreciation of young
audiences, indicating that there is not a specific type of humour they prefer. Items that were liked significantly more by young audiences are only found outside of the identified humour styles. This is in fact a result opposite to that of the Dutch research. Whereas in the Netherlands, mainstream is associated with young audiences and their taste, putting humour appreciated by older people in the position of a subculture, Slovak mainstream (prime time) entertainment is not significantly marked by age and those few instances of humour actually appreciated by young audiences are not linked to any cluster, putting young people's humour in the position of a subculture.

While looking into the reception of The Simpsons, the visited discussion boards and internet websites featured discussions or ratings of other television shows liked by audiences who also liked The Simpsons. It was not very surprising to find these people liking foreign shows which are not broadcast on Slovak television (Family Guy, Futurama, The Big Bang Theory, Black Books, The IT Crowd, etc.) and were therefore not included in the survey. This audiences is looking for suitable entertainment and amusement in other media than domestic television, mostly internet streaming and downloading these shows.

The last factor analysed by both researches is gender difference. In Kuipers' analysis, it was only the appreciation of the Celebrity cluster where men were shown to appreciate it more than women. On the other hand in Slovakia, such distinction is more apparent. It is men (both in appreciation and knowledge), who mostly make up the audience of lowbrow and oldtimer comedy. In fact, most (but not all) of the identified oldtimers are in fact close to lowbrow, which indicates a tendency of women to go in for a more subtle, milder and more civilized type of humour, which will be further supported in the next part of the work.

On the whole, Slovakia and the Netherlands both exhibit traits of distinction in terms of humour preference, which is akin to a highbrow/lowbrow dichotomy. What these two culture/countries differ in is the position of the specific taste cultures. Whereas in the Netherlands, highbrow humour is well established and popular, in Slovakia it is pushed aside by middlebrow and lowbrow entertainment. Similarly, Slovak television is dominated by programming liked by older viewers, pushing aside young audiences, who are forced to look for entertainment elsewhere.