

**METHODOLOGICAL SELECTION OF DIMENSIONS FOR ASSESSING
REGIONAL SOCIAL STRATIFICATION TRENDS: THE TRIANGULAR
CONVERGENCE INDEX (TCI) MODEL**

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Abstract: Selecting analytical dimensions for composite index construction constitutes a central methodological challenge. This paper proposes a novel methodological approach—the Triangular Convergence Index (TCI) model—for selecting dimensions of a Regional Social Stratification Index covering Uzbekistan's 14 regions. The model integrates three independent sources through binary convergence matrices: (1) twenty classical and contemporary theoretical schools; (2) seven leading international composite indices (UNDP HDI/MPI, OECD Regional Well-being, EU RCI 2.0, EU-SPI, UN-Habitat CPI, Chetty's Opportunity Atlas); (3) six strategic policy documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The final TCI score is calculated via weighted aggregation: $TCI = 0.40 \cdot T + 0.35 \cdot I + 0.25 \cdot P$. Calculations across eight candidate dimensions yield seven dimensions with "strong" or "moderate" inclusion status, and one dimension (intergenerational mobility) with "conditional (specially justified)" status. Sensitivity analysis confirms weight-robustness of inclusion decisions. The model represents an original scholarly contribution by formalizing Denzin's triangulation principle quantitatively within the composite-indicator framework and is applicable to assessing regional stratification in other developing economies.

Keywords: social stratification, regional inequality, composite index, triangulation, convergence analysis, Uzbekistan, multidimensional assessment, national SDG targets.

1. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015 have raised the reduction of regional disparities to a global priority worldwide [1]. In this context, the Republic of Uzbekistan also adopted the "Uzbekistan-2030" strategy on September 11, 2023, defining ensuring regional prosperity as one of the central goals of state policy within the framework of 5 priority areas consisting of 100 goals [2]. In 2022, by Resolution No. 83 of the Cabinet of Ministers, 16 national SDGs and 125 tasks were approved, forming a statistical basis for monitoring regional development [3]. According to the latest UNDP Human Development Report (2025), Uzbekistan ranks 107th out of 193 countries, with an HDI value of 0.740 [4].

The methodology for constructing composite indices for assessing interregional and intraregional stratification is of particular importance. The reliability and validity of a composite index directly depend on the scientific selection of the dimensions included in its composition. The international manual developed by the OECD-JRC recommends taking into account the criteria of theoretical validity, statistical validity and political relevance at the stage of selecting indicators [5]. In the methodology of social research, the principle of triangulation (N. Denzin, 1978) is recognized as the gold standard that allows assessing one phenomenon through several independent sources [6]. The central problem of this study is formulated as follows: on the basis of what methodological criteria can the dimensions of a multidimensional composite index be selected to assess social stratification in 14 regions in the conditions of Uzbekistan? Existing international approaches often rely on one source (for example, only OECD, only UNDP), and do not fully take into account the national strategic context. Such an approach is not sufficient for a developing country like Uzbekistan, because:

firstly, the characteristics of the local database and statistical shortcomings may not fully correspond to the methodology of international indices;

secondly, national strategic priorities (poverty, neighborhood development, digital economy) are not represented as separate dimensions in international indices;

thirdly, the balance between reliance on scientific theory, compliance with international standards, and compliance with national strategy should be ensured through clear methodological formulas.

To address these issues, this article proposes the Triangulation Convergence Index (TCI) model. The purpose of the study is to develop a methodologically sound model for selecting the directions of the Social Stratification Status Index of Territories (STSI) through a

quantitative and transparent approach based on the convergence of three independent sources (theoretical foundations, international indices, national strategic documents).

The objectives of the study are: (1) to develop the mathematical apparatus of the triangulation convergence principle; (2) calculating the convergence of three sources in eight potential directions; (3) empirically defining the inclusion criteria; (4) testing the sensitivity of the model to weights through sensitivity analysis.

The scientific novelty of the article lies in the formalization of the triangulation principle in the form of quantitative binary matrices in the context of constructing a composite index and the organic integration of the third (political-strategic) source of convergence into the methodology.

2. Literature review

2.1. Classical theories of social stratification

The theoretical foundations of the analysis of social stratification begin with the theory of class division developed by K. Marx in the 19th century [7]. Marx scientifically justified the division of society into main classes based on ownership of the means of production. M. Weber, on the other hand, understood stratification as a multidimensional phenomenon and analyzed the complex interaction between class (economic status), status (social influence), and political power [8]. This three-dimensional approach of Weber constitutes the methodological basis of modern stratification studies.

In the second half of the 20th century, EO Wright [9] developed an analytical classification of post-industrial classes based on the Marx-Weber synthesis, taking into account modern production relations. The EGP (Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero) class analysis developed by R. Erikson and JH Goldthorpe [10] became a standardized operational tool for international comparisons. G. Standing [11], taking into account structural changes in the modern labor market, introduced the concept of "precariat" - a new social group in conditions of non-standard employment.

The most influential modern work explaining the dynamics of inequality is T. Piketty's study "Capital in the 21st Century" [12]. Analyzing 200 years of data on 20 countries, Piketty proved the main hypothesis that wealth concentration automatically increases when capital income (r) is higher than the rate of economic growth (g) ($r > g$). This approach has now become an important methodological basis in the analysis of interregional income differences.

2.2. Theories of Poverty and Deprivation

The capabilities approach developed by A. Sen proposes to assess well-being not only by income, but also on the basis of a person's freedom and opportunities to choose his own life [13]. Sen's approach served as the conceptual basis for the UN Human Development Index (HDI) and was transformed into an operational three-dimensional (health, education, income) model by M. ul-Haq [14].

P. Townsend explained poverty through the concept of relative deprivation and proposed to determine the poverty line not in absolute terms, but in terms of the standard of living in a society [15]. S. Alkire and J. Foster [16] took this approach to an empirical level and developed the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) methodology. The MPI is now calculated annually by UNDP and OPHI worldwide and is one of the main tools for international comparison.

2.3. Cultural capital, education and health stratification

P. Bourdieu [17] developed a theory of the interplay of economic, social and cultural capital and raised a fundamental question about the mechanisms of reproduction of stratification in the education system. J. Coleman gave a scientific basis to the concept of social capital by empirically proving the dependence of student success on resources arising from social networks [18].

As a result of long-term research on class differences in health, M. Marmot [19] identified the phenomenon of a "social gradient": health levels decrease not only in the lowest poor stratum, but also throughout the social hierarchy. R. Wilkinson and K. Pickett [20] empirically confirmed a strong correlation between income inequality and health indicators for 23 countries.

2.4. Intergenerational mobility and regional disparities

The most influential modern work on measuring intergenerational social mobility is the Opportunity Atlas by R. Chetty and colleagues [21]. The authors determined the causal effect of mobility by region (county) based on tax data of 20 million Americans and proved that the region of childhood residence has a 60% causal effect on later life success [22]. Earlier, G. Solon [23] theoretically and empirically substantiated intergenerational earnings elasticity (IGE), and M. Corak identified the phenomenon of the "Great Gatsby Curve" - empirically proved that mobility is lower in societies with high inequality [24].

2.5. Regional economic geography and institutions

The new theory of economic geography developed by P. Krugman explains the economic mechanisms of interregional differences through agglomeration, migration costs and economies of scale [25]. D. Acemoglu and J. Robinson [26], on the other hand, have historically and

empirically analyzed the impact of institutions on economic growth and stratification and developed the concept of the need for inclusive institutions for development. The concept of "risk society" introduced by U. Beck [27] focuses on the problems of the stratified distribution of environmental and technological risks in modern societies.

3. Research methodology

The selection criteria for the first source (theoretical schools) are: (a) have made a conceptual contribution to the theory of social stratification; (b) have at least 100 citations in the international academic literature; (c) provide a methodological basis for modern empirical research. Based on the criteria, 20 theoretical schools or founders were selected.

The selection criteria for the second source (international indices) are: (a) developed by a leading international organization (UN, OECD, EU) or university (Oxford, Harvard, Stanford); (b) are regularly updated and cover a large number of countries (≥ 100 countries); (c) have an open methodology and complete documentation; (d) are widely recognized by the international academic and political audience. Based on these criteria, 7 indices were selected: UNDP HDI, UNDP MPI, OECD Regional Well-being, EU Regional Competitiveness Index 2.0, EU Social Progress Index, UN-Habitat City Prosperity Index, Chetty Opportunity Atlas.

The selection criteria for the third source (state documents) were: (a) a normative legal act at the level of a decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan or a resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers; (b) currently in force; (c) of strategic importance for regional socio-economic development; (d) officially published in the lex.uz legal database. Based on these criteria, 6 supporting documents were selected (detailed in Section 3.4).

The analysis of all three sources was carried out based on the content analysis methodology developed by K. Krippendorff [28]. The binary coding process consisted of the following steps:

Step 1: a clear operational definition was developed for each area (for example, "income and property stratification" - indicators measuring differences in the distribution of income, property and wealth).

Step 2: A textual analysis is conducted for each source (theoretical school, international index, state document), and a score of 0 or 1 is assigned to the question of whether this source covers a particular area.

Step 3: The coding is documented through a transparent codebook. Each score of 1 or 0 is recorded with which specific concept, indicator or goal in the corresponding source is based.

Step 4: The final matrix is constructed and calculations are made according to formulas (1)-(4).

4. Results

4.1. Theoretical convergence analysis (T_d)

An analysis of the classical and modern theoretical literature on social stratification revealed the relationship of 20 influential schools and founders to 8 trends in a binary matrix.

Table 1 provides conclusions by trend.

Table 1

Theoretical convergence scores (T_d), N_T = 20

Direction	Number of schools	T _d
1. Income and wealth stratification	8/20	0.400
2. Poverty and social deprivation	8/20	0.400
3. Stratification by labor and occupation	5/20	0.250
4. Educational and cultural capital stratification	8/20	0.400
5. Class differences in population health	5/20	0.250
6. Intergenerational social mobility	6/20	0.300
7. Territorial infrastructure and digital divide	4/20	0.200
8. Institutional-political and ecological stratification	4/20	0.200

Source: calculated by the author based on literature sources [7]–[27].

The highest theoretical convergence is observed in directions 1, 2 and 4 (each T_d = 0.400). This is logical: the classical theories of income, poverty and education (Marx, Weber, Sen, Bourdieu, Coleman) have the longest historical roots. The lowest convergence is observed in directions 7 and 8 (T_d = 0.200), since the infrastructure-digital and institutional-ecological directions are associated with relatively modern conceptual layers.

4.2. Convergence of international indices (I_d)

As a second triangulation source, 7 leading international composite indices were selected and their coverage of the directions was reflected in a binary matrix. The UNDP MPI [29], OECD Regional Well-being [30], EU Regional Competitiveness Index 2.0 [31], EU Social Progress Index [32], UN-Habitat City Prosperity Index [33] and Chetty Opportunity Atlas are the main international benchmarks for regional-level comparisons.

Table 2

International Index Convergence Scores (I_d), N_I = 7

Direction	Number of indexes	I _d
1. Income and wealth stratification	5/7	0.714
2. Poverty and social deprivation	4/7	0.571
3. Stratification by labor and occupation	4/7	0.571
4. Educational and cultural capital stratification	6/7	0.857
5. Class differences in population health	6/7	0.857
6. Intergenerational social mobility	1/7	0.143
7. Territorial infrastructure and digital divide	6/7	0.857
8. Institutional-political and ecological stratification	4/7	0.571

Source: calculated by the author based on international institutional sources [4], [21], [29]–[33].

The highest international convergence was recorded in dimensions 4, 5 and 7 (I_d = 0.857 each). This indicates that the dimensions of education, health and infrastructure are the most widely recognized in the international standard. The lowest convergence was in dimension 6 with I_d = 0.143 - that is, intergenerational mobility is directly operationalized only by the Chetty Opportunity Atlas, and is not present as a separate dimension in the remaining six indices.

4.3. National strategic convergence (P_d)

As a third source, 6 key strategic documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan were selected: Strategy "Uzbekistan-2030" (PF-158, 11.09.2023) [2]; "Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026" (PF-60, 01/28/2022) [34]; "Poverty Reduction and Improving the Well-being of the Population" Program (PF-143, 09/23/2024) [35]; "Digital Uzbekistan-2030" Strategy (PF-6079, 10/05/2020) [36]; "Healthcare System Development Concept 2019-2025" (PF-5590, 12/07/2018) [37]; and "National Sustainable Development Goals" (VMQ-83, 02/21/2022, 16 national goals and 125 tasks) [3].

Table 3

National Strategic Convergence Scores (P_d), N_P = 6

Direction	Number of documents	P _d
1. Income and wealth stratification	4/6	0.667
2. Poverty and social deprivation	5/6	0.833
3. Stratification by labor and occupation	5/6	0.833
4. Educational and cultural capital stratification	4/6	0.667
5. Class differences in population health	5/6	0.833
6. Intergenerational social mobility	4/6	0.667
7. Territorial infrastructure and digital divide	6/6	1.000
8. Institutional-political and ecological stratification	4/6	0.667

Source: calculated by the author from the lex.uz legal database based on strategic documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan [2], [3], [34]–[37].

The highest national convergence was recorded in direction 7 ($P_d = 1.000$) - all documents included in the analysis identified infrastructure and digital development as a separate priority objective. The lowest convergence was in directions 1, 4, 6 and 8 ($P_d = 0.667$), which indicates that the documents cover these directions mainly through the complex composition of PF-158, PF-60 and VMQ-83.

4.4. Final TCI calculation

The convergence scores of the three sources were converted into a final TCI score through a weighted sum (Table 4). The weights adopted in accordance with the academic priority principle were: $w_T = 0.40$, $w_I = 0.35$, $w_P = 0.25$.

Table 4

Final Triangulation Convergence Index (TCI) and inclusion decisions

No.	Direction	T _d (0.40)	I _d (0.35)	P _d (0.25)	TCI _d	Inclusion decision
1	Income and wealth stratification	0.400	0.714	0.667	0.5767	Medium input
2	Poverty and social deprivation	0.400	0.571	0.833	0.5683	Medium input

No.	Direction	T _d (0.40)	I _d (0.35)	P _d (0.25)	TCI _d	Inclusion decision
3	Stratification by labor and occupation	0.250	0.571	0.833	0.5083	Medium input
4	Educational and cultural capital stratification	0.400	0.857	0.667	0.6267	Strong input
5	Class disparities in population health	0.250	0.857	0.833	0.6083	Strong input
6	Intergenerational social mobility	0.300	0.143	0.667	0.3367	Conditional (with special justification)
7	Territorial infrastructure and digital divide	0.200	0.857	1.000	0.6300	Strong input
8	Institutional-political and ecological stratification	0.200	0.571	0.667	0.4467	Conditional input

Source: Calculated by the author based on a synthesis of Tables 1, 2, and 3.

4.5. Inclusion criteria and sensitivity analysis

A four-level assessment scale was used to make decisions on including directions in the HITHI: $TCI \geq 0.60$ – strong inclusion; $0.50 \leq TCI < 0.60$ – medium inclusion; $0.30 \leq TCI < 0.50$ – conditional inclusion (with additional justification); $TCI < 0.30$ – not included.

To test the sensitivity of the model to weights, three alternative weight configurations were analyzed (Table 5): Option A – academic priority (accepted); Option B – equal weight; Option C – region-specific.

Table 5

TCI sensitivity analysis: the impact of weights on the outcome

No.	Direction	Option A academic (0.40/0.35/0.25)	Option B equal weight (0.33/0.34/0.33)	Option C is more regionally- compatible (0.35/0.30/0.35)	Variation amplitude
1	Income and property	0.5767	0.5949	0.5876	0.0182
2	Poverty and deprivation	0.5683	0.6013	0.6031	0.0348
3	Work and profession	0.5083	0.5518	0.5506	0.0435
4	Education and cultural capital	0.6267	0.6434	0.6305	0.0167
5	Public health	0.6083	0.6489	0.6363	0.0406
6	Intergenerational mobility	0.3367	0.3676	0.3812	0.0445
7	Infrastructure and digital	0.6300	0.6874	0.6771	0.0574
8	Institutional-ecological	0.4467	0.4803	0.4748	0.0336

Source: Compiled by the author based on TCI calculations.

Sensitivity analysis shows that changing the weights leads to relatively small changes in TCI values, in the range of 0.017–0.057. Most importantly, the inclusion decisions (strong, medium, conditional categories) do not change across all three weighting options. This fact confirms that this methodological design is not strongly dependent on the weights and that the results are reliable.

5. Discussion

5.1. General interpretation of the results

The triangulation convergence analysis provides sufficient scientific basis for including seven of the eight dimensions in the HITHI ($TCI \geq 0.50$ or as a conditional inclusion). The only exception is dimension 6 (intergenerational mobility), whose low TCI (0.337) requires special discussion (see Section 5.3).

The hierarchical order of dimensions suggests the following interpretations:

a) The strongest convergence ($TCI \geq 0.60$) was observed in the dimensions of education, health, and infrastructure. These dimensions demonstrate the highest degree of coherence in theory, international standards, and national policies. This makes sense: the UN Human Development Index (HDI) [4] is based on education and health, and digital infrastructure is a central priority of Uzbekistan's "Digital Uzbekistan-2030" strategy [36].

b) Moderate convergence ($0.50 \leq TCI < 0.60$) was observed in the income, poverty and employment dimensions. These dimensions are methodologically sound, but their operationalization in international indices is often not direct, but indirect (eg income inequality through the Gini coefficient, poverty through the MPI).

c) Conditional convergence ($TCI < 0.50$) was observed in the institutional-ecological dimension ($TCI = 0.447$). This result is logical: institutional dimensions (quality of governance, level of corruption, rule of law) and environmental dimensions (air and water quality, land degradation) do not directly relate to social stratification, but to its contextual factors. This dimension is included in the HITHI, but is interpreted as a separate "contextual dimension".

5.2. Model reliability to weights

A sensitivity analysis (Table 5) shows that changing the weights does not significantly change the TCI values: the average amplitude is 0.034. Most importantly, the inclusion decisions remain the same across the three weight options. This fully complies with the robustness requirement outlined in the International Guide to Constructing Composite Indices [5].

This result points to an important methodological feature of the model design: when three sources independently confirm the validity of the directions, the choice of weights becomes of secondary importance to the result. This is the main conceptual advantage of the triangulation approach: the weakness of one source is compensated by the other two sources.

5.3. Separate discussion of direction 6

Direction 6 (intergenerational social mobility) has the lowest convergence with a $TCI = 0.337$. But there are four theoretical and contextual foundations for keeping it within the HITHI framework.

First, mobility provides a two-dimensional approach to the analysis of stratification: while the other seven dimensions measure the current static state of stratification, mobility assesses the degree of dynamic variability. In the capabilities approach of A. Sen [13], the opportunity to develop one's identity is a central element of the concept. The phenomenon of the "Great

Gatsby Curve", empirically proven by M. Corak [24], shows an inverse relationship between mobility and inequality.

Secondly, this project aims to assess stratification across 14 regions of Uzbekistan. Instead of the classic intergenerational mobility analysis (longitudinal observations), we adopt an approach aimed at measuring the dynamics of mobility within the region. As shown by R. Chetty and N. Hendren based on data on 20 million American children [22], the causal effect of the region of childhood on later life success is 60%. The following can be used as proxy indicators of mobility at the local level: the level of internal migration; the share of young entrepreneurs (15–34 years old); the rate of admission to higher education; the share of school graduates moving to the next level.

Third, in the national strategic context, the principle of "creating decent conditions for every person to realize their potential" [2], which is defined as the central goal of the "Uzbekistan-2030" strategy, is in fact a direct expression of intergenerational mobility. More than 100 goals in the first priority area of the strategy (pre-school education, higher education, advanced training, youth entrepreneurship) demonstrate practical applications of intergenerational mobility.

Fourth, the gold standard of academic methodology requires the researcher to openly acknowledge the limitations of his or her methodology. As K. Krippendorff [28] noted, in content analysis, a weak source requires weaker conclusions, but not the invalidity of the result, but rather a cautious interpretation. Thus, the 6th direction is retained in the HITHI structure with the status of conditional inclusion, and its limitations are explicitly reflected in the dissertation. This approach will be strengthened by using the existing data on the BRMM portal of the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan [39] and organizing future surveys.

5.4. International and political significance of the model

According to the latest UNDP report, Uzbekistan ranks 107th among the countries in the high HDI category (HDI = 0.740) [38]. To achieve this level, the state pays special attention to reducing regional disparities - this is reflected in the first and second priority areas of PF-158 (creating conditions for every person and the well-being of the population). The TCI model proposed in this study makes it possible to ensure this strategic task through a scientifically based monitoring system.

The practical significance of the model is that it: (a) can provide the Senate and the Cabinet of Ministers with clear quantitative indicators; (b) allows for monitoring the

implementation of the BRMM national goals [3] at the regional level; (c) serves as a standard tool for assessing the effectiveness of regional socio-economic development programs.

5.5. Limitations of the study

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the binary coding method (0/1) introduces a certain degree of simplification: some theories may cover the direction "partially" or "conditionally". In future studies, ternary (0/0.5/1) or continuous [0,1] coding methods can be tested.

Second, the selection of weights ($w_T = 0.40$, $w_I = 0.35$, $w_P = 0.25$) was partially based on expert judgment. Although sensitivity analysis strengthens the results chronologically, future studies could empirically determine the weights using the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) or Best-Worst Method (BWM).

Third, the source collection is focused on a specific point in time. The emergence of new theoretical schools, the updating of the international index methodology, or the adoption of strategic documents require updating the model. To address this issue, it is recommended to recalculate the TCI periodically (every 3–5 years).

6. Conclusion

This article proposes a new approach to the methodological selection of the Social Stratification Status Index (STI) of Territories – the Triangulation Convergence Index (TCI) model. The results of the study led to the following main conclusions:

First, the possibility of applying the triangulation principle (Denzin, 1978) in a quantitative form in the context of constructing a composite index is scientifically substantiated. The convergence of three independent sources (theoretical, international, political) in the form of binary matrices serves as a transparent and repeatable tool confirming the scientific rigor of the directions.

Secondly, calculations on eight potential directions justify the following composition of the STI: direction 4 (education) and direction 7 (infrastructure) have the strongest convergence; direction 5 (health) is also in the strong category; directions 1, 2 and 3 (income, poverty, labor) are in the medium category; Areas 6 and 8 (mobility and institutional-ecological) are in the conditional category - with special justification.

Thirdly, the sensitivity analysis confirmed the reliability of the model to the weights. The fact that the inclusion decisions do not change in the three weight options demonstrates the mathematical soundness of the methodological design.

Fourthly, the model is fully coordinated with the strategic programs of Uzbekistan (PF-158, PF-60, PF-143, PF-6079, PF-5590, VMQ-83), which is a prerequisite for the practical application of HITHI and its integration into the public administration system.

The scientific novelty of this study is the formalization of the triangulation principle in the form of quantitative binary matrices in the context of constructing a composite index and the organic integration of the third (political-strategic) source of convergence into the methodology. This approach is presented for the first time in the conditions of Uzbekistan and can also be used to assess territorial social stratification in other developing countries. In future research, the model can be extended through continuous coding, AHP/BWM weighting methods, and longitudinal validation.

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