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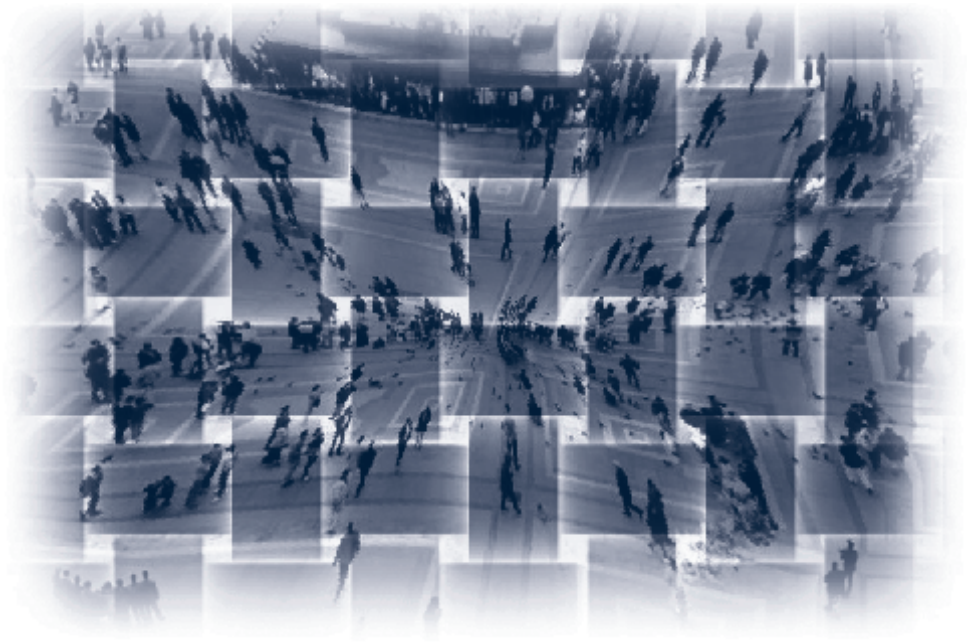

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Academic papers grounded in empirical research or focused on the social realities of Central and Eastern Europe are particularly welcomed.

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CONTENTS

STUDIA UBB SOCIOLOGIA, 65 (LXV), 2, 2020, pp. 5-33
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UNEVEN *EUFICATION*, THE SPATIAL FIX AND THE DOMINANCE OF ECONOMIC OVER SOCIAL POLICIES

ENIKŐ VINCZE[1]

ABSTRACT. I am proposing to use the term *EUfication* to define the process of creating the EU as territory out of the geographical disparities (re)produced across the core and periphery of Europe. The article contends that *EUfication* is a manifestation of the phenomenon of spatial fix. In a first step, it describes the dynamics of territorial unevenness within the EU: on the one hand, by some relevant socio-economic cohesion data compiled from Eurostat indicators, and – on the other hand – through the diagnosis on spatial injustice in different Member States, as it was revealed by a comparative research conducted between 2017-2019. Furthermore, my analysis explains territorial unevenness by reconstructing the well-known historical formation of the union through a less acknowledged perspective, i.e., in the context of the changing regimes of capital accumulation. The article concludes that the theory of spatial fix allows us recognizing: the position and timing, from which and when different countries took part in the process of *EUfication* is a factor leading to the persistence of uneven territorial development among the European core and periphery. My contribution to theorizing on this process consists in bringing together the perspective of the spatial fix with the critical analysis of how is the social dimension paradigm overshadowed by the economic concern of capital accumulation in the socio-economic governance of the European Single Market, including the politics of territorial cohesion.

Key words: spatial fix, uneven *EUfication*, capital accumulation, uneven development

Introduction

According to the thematic Green Paper of the European Commission (2008), territorial cohesion is a condition that "ensures a balanced and sustainable territorial development of the EU as a whole, strengthening its economic competitiveness and capacity for growth while respecting the need to preserve its natural assets and ensuring social cohesion (Medeiros, 2016: 8)." My paper

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aims to have a contribution to the understanding of why, despite such a spatial policy, the EU is characterized by territorial unevenness. For this, I am employing the critical perspective on uneven development (Smith, 1984; Harvey 2005, 2006) and on the spatial fix (Harvey, 2001; Jessop, 2004) as endemic features of capitalism, and as well as on how the economic policies of the EU hindered its social dimension even within the frame of cohesion policy (Marlier et al., 2010; Lang and Görmar, 2019; Vanhercke et al., 2020).

Right after this introduction, the first section of the article outlines the theoretical frames of my analysis. The second section addresses some issues, through which the phenomenon of territorial unevenness might be exposed. For this reason, on the one hand, it appeals to Eurostat data on economic and social cohesion for 11 selected countries: GDP per capita, unemployment rate, income inequality, poverty, social exclusion, and governmental expenditure on social protection. On the other hand, to uncover how neoliberal governance impacts unevenness regardless of the type of administrative-territorial organization of different countries, the analysis makes use of the national reports of RELOCAL research conducted on spatial injustice.[2] The selection of the countries for the statistical comparisons was based on the list of countries covered by these reports, which at its turn carefully combined different welfare regimes and European geographies across North-South and West-East.

After displaying the realities of unevenness across countries, the third section of the article focuses on the understanding of the causes of enduring uneven development in the EU. In this endeavor, I am informed by some critical analysis about divisive integration, Eastern enlargement, and the EU as an empire (Böröcz and Kovács, 2001; Zielonka, 2006; Lehndorff, 2015; Behr and Stivachtis, 2016; Schmidt, 2018; Vincze, 2019). But most importantly, I am relying on a historical and political economy perspective. This enables me to reconstruct from what position and when did the different Member States contribute to the creation of the union as a new territory or the *EUfication* of dispersed geographies. It will be shown that this process began with the creation of an economic community, which – despite enlarging the policy sectors that entered into its interest over time – remained predominantly an economic creation. As a Single Market, since its existence, the EU has elaborated and adopted compulsory economic, fiscal, and monetary policies across the Member States, while on the domain of social policies it limited itself to some recommendations and exchange of good or bad practices among the country leaders.

[2] *RELOCAL. Resituating the Local in Cohesion and Territorial Development* (2017-2021) is a research based on 33 case studies conducted in 11 countries in local contexts. This investigation understands spatial injustice as "an equitable spatial distribution of resources and opportunities, and fairness in the relations of power that shape and transform the social space" (Madanipour et al., 2017: 74).

The article concludes that the spatial fix underlying the process of *EUfication,* alongside the structural tension between the economic and social policies practiced by the European Union, are the explanatory factors of unevenness in the competition union that persists despite the EU's territorial cohesion policy that eventually reproduces the predominance of the Single Market's concerns over the social dimension of Europe.

Theoretical frames for understanding spatial fix and policies

The theory of uneven development (Smith 1984; Harvey 2005, 2006) helps us to critically reveal that the territorial unevenness across the European Union is an endemic feature of capitalism and that a policy – which has to strictly respect the major rules of the Single Market – cannot assure the dreamt balanced development of its Member States and regions. Very simply put: to reproduce itself, capitalism needs and creates uneven development, and the free movement of capital and free trade across borders or territories are political inventions supporting capital accumulation. Viewing the EU as an illustration of how capitalism was restructured geographically after the second world war, or as an example of a shift in the geographical scale at which capitalism is organized, supported by a specific supra-state organizational form, David Harvey (2001) might assist us in this endeavor. Uneven development is a macro-force of capitalism related to the logic of capital investment and accumulation supported by state politics. It is a systematic product and geographical premise of capitalist development: a landscape of developed and less developed spaces of different scales, but also the ground of further capitalist expansion, meaning that uneven development is exploited by capital for further accumulation (Smith, 1984). Differently put, uneven development is an endemic feature of capitalism (Harvey, 2005; 2006) because capitalism depends on the capacity to expand towards territories, sectors, and domains not yet incorporated into the circulation of capital. Capitalism is addicted to geographical extension, says Harvey, i.e., to spatial fix, by the means of which it resolves its inner crisis tendencies in one territory via geographical expansion and geographical restructuring (Harvey, 2001: 24).

Practitioners of policies and policy-makers themselves understand policies as technical solutions to problems supposedly existing out there in themselves. This standpoint is critically addressed by the sociology and anthropology of policy that emphasized why and how policies are not neutral instruments, but tools of political technology and power, informed by dominant ideologies, creating both "the problems" and the acting subjects via governmentality (Shore and Wright, 1997, 2011). Since policies work as instruments of political intervention, they express the interests that politicians consider worth supporting while governing the city, the state, the EU. As will be shown later in the article,

during the *EUfication* process – viewed in the context of changing regimes of capital accumulation – economic policies sustaining the Single Market supported the interests of the capital and they prevailed over the social policies. Supposedly, the latter was invented to counter-balance the inequalities produced by the predominant profit-oriented economic policies, but they are not assumed as compulsory EU policies and at the best are externalized to project-based initiatives, and most importantly they do not act on the structural causes of inequalities.

The theory of spatial fix explaining capital accumulation through territorial expansion and the theory of policies as instruments of power, enable me to consider that the need for new territories for capital accumulation as an engine of *EUfication* led to the creation of possibilities for the free movement of capital, while it relied on the dominance of economic policies over the social ones in the EU as territory. Together, spatial fix serving capital accumulation and the subordination of the social to the economic, are political economy mechanisms that (re)produce territorial unevenness across the EU.

The realities of unevenness in the EU

While territorial cohesion is a political option of the EU for a balanced development across territories, spatial unevenness is a reality created by capitalist political economy, so not only by economic unbalances of turbulent times, but also by *long-duré* neoliberal governance. To describe this state of facts, I am appealing to the already mentioned RELOCAL research. The studied cases represented local situations from different welfare regimes, different types of actions conceived to address diverse forms of spatial injustice, a large palette of top-down and bottom-up actions, diverse territorial governance arrangements, all of these displayed in localities that ranged from small areas, such as a group of villages or urban neighborhoods to larger regions.[3] I have decided to extract from the rich data-sets of RELOCAL some conclusions of the National Reports[4] published on the project's website, which are relevant for the topic of my article. But before doing that, as the first step in this section, I am offering a brief overview, through Eurostat indicators of economic and social cohesion, on the endurance of territorial inequalities in the EU, in particular across the selected 11 countries.

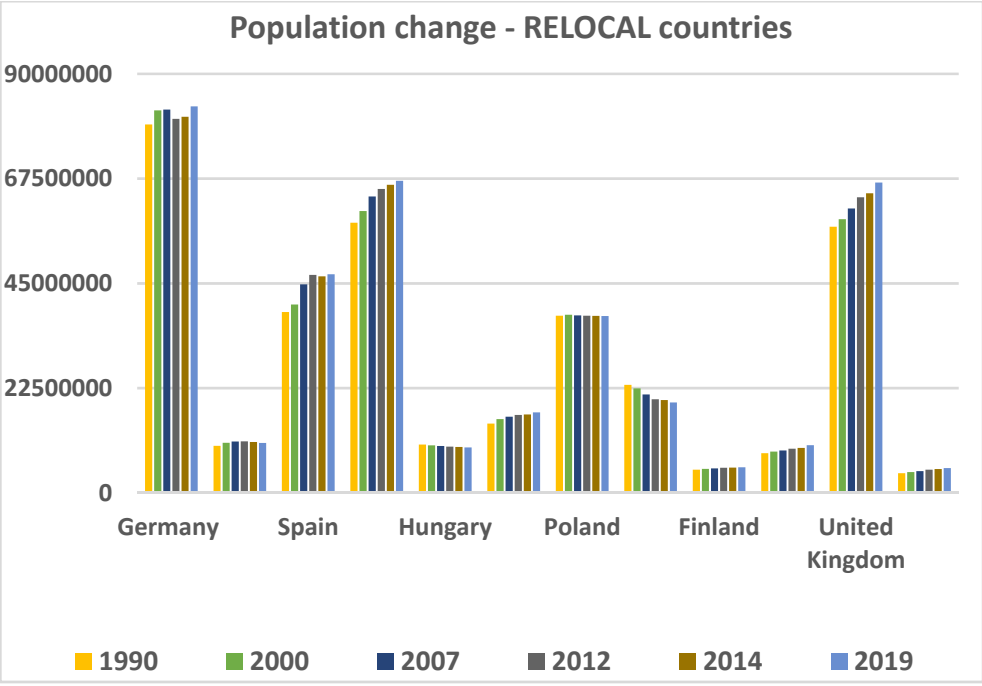
[3] Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development (ILS): *Situating the RELOCAL Cases. Cross-Comparative Analysis of Country Perspectives on Spatial Justice*, Deliverable 6.4 of the project, https://relocal.eu/deliverables/

[4] The ten contextual reports to which I am referring to in my paper (Germany, France, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Spain, Greece, Sweden, Hungary, Poland, Romania), are available on the RELOCAL website - https://relocal.eu/all-cases-2/.

Persistent socio-economic unevenness revealed by statistics

The list of the indicators used to measure the state of socio-economic cohesion in the EU is very extensive (Medeiros, 2016, pp. 13-14). What I am offering here is only a small window through which one may have a look at some general trends of unevenness between the European core and periphery countries.

Figure 1. *Population change in the RELOCAL countries - selected years between 1990-2019*



Source: Eurostat data[5] processed by the author

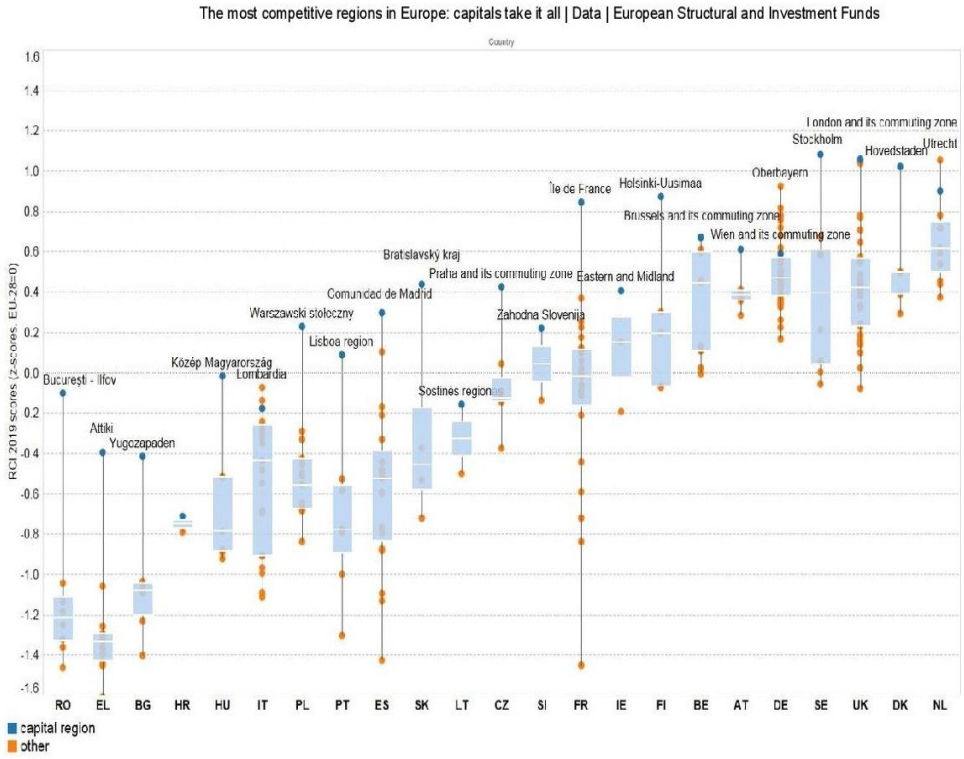
One of the issues recognized by the EU decision-makers as a major fact reflecting spatial unevenness is related to the demographic imbalances across territories at different scales, i.e., to how are some territories depopulating while others become overcrowded. As *Figure 1* shows, the population number

[5] http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=demo_gind

evolved differently between 1990-2019 in the selected countries: in Romania decreased, in Hungary, Poland and Greece stagnated, and in the rest went through an increase to a higher or smaller degree.

At their turn, depopulation or over-crowdedness are also structural reactions to the changing trends of concentration of economic activities in some territories. Due to the latter, the capital cities (and some major second-tier cities) are placed in advantageous positions in the competition for developmental resources, as *Figure 2* reflects.

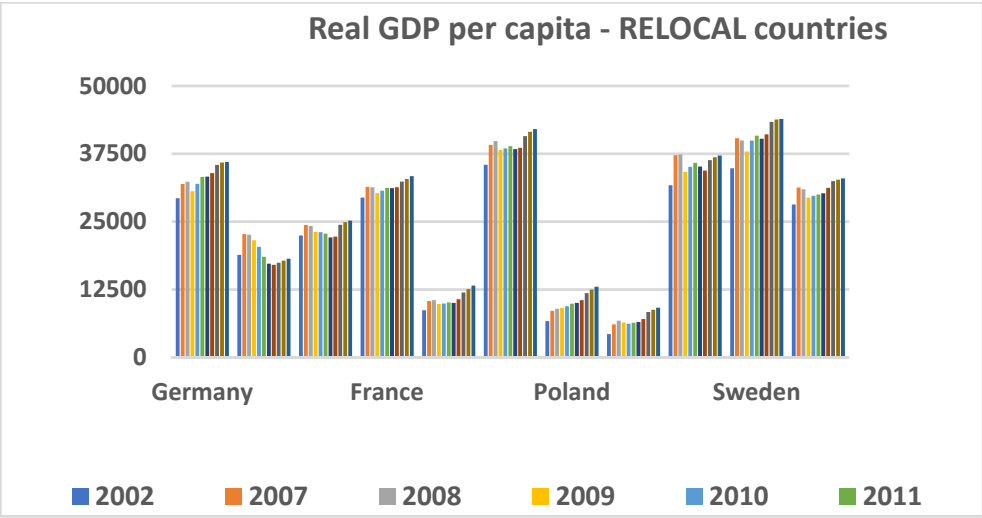
Figure 2. *The most competitive regions in Europe*



Source: https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/stories/s/yt77-f74u

Further on, the country-specific data on GDP per capita, which is used in the EU as an indicator of economic cohesion, reflects the big discrepancies between the selected countries (*Figure 3*).

Figure 3. *The evolution of the real GDP per capita in the RELOCAL countries, 2002-2019*

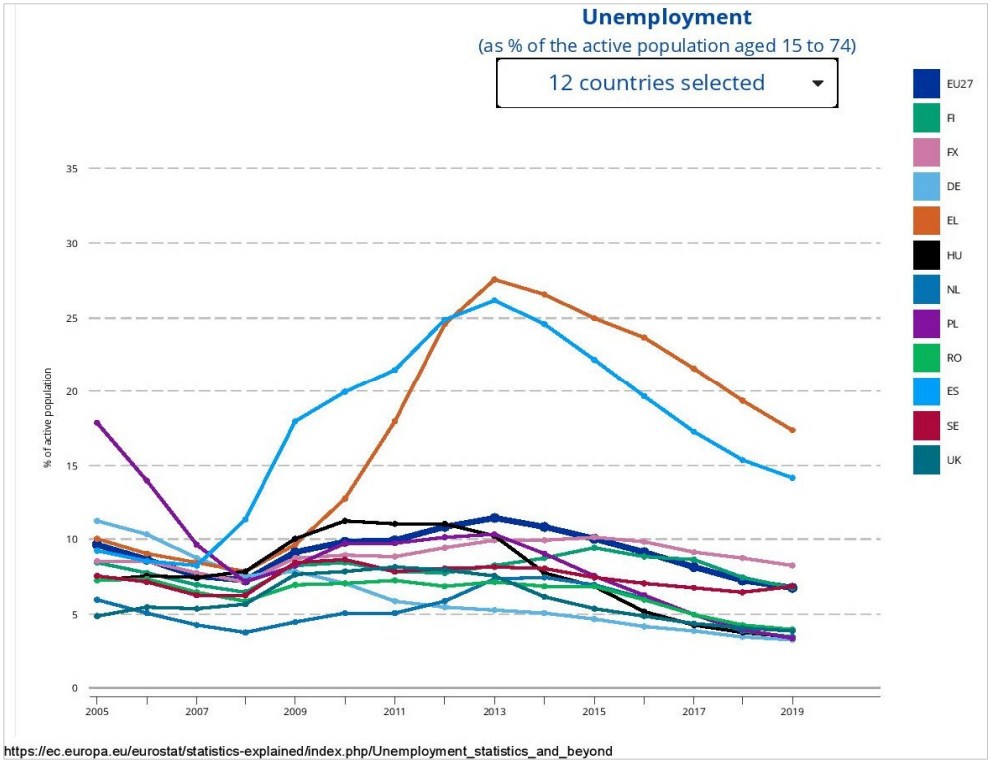


Source: Eurostat,[6] data extracted and processed by the author

Besides the indicators mentioned above, the unemployment rate is also used as a sign of uneven development. *Figure 4* situates the selected countries on the waves of increasing-decreasing unemployment. These numbers, however, might induce some wrong conclusions regarding, for example, the relatively low unemployment rate in Romania. The latter is not owed to an effervescent economic activity across the country, but – even if some major cities slowly recovered from the economic recession of the 1990s and the 2008-2009 financial crisis – the low unemployment rate is mostly due to the very large number of Romanian citizens engaged in labor-migration towards other EU countries or other states. Nevertheless, *Figure 4* reflects that while the unemployment rate for the total population aged 15-74 decreased between 2005 and 2019 by 2.9 percentage points in the EU-27, from 9.6 % to 6.7 %, twenty EU Member States recorded lower, while others displayed increased unemployment rate in this period. Referring to the selected countries, the decrease was largest in Poland (14.5 p.p.), followed by Germany (8.0 p.p.), while, on the other side, the largest increases happened in Greece (7.3 p.p.) and Spain (4.9 p.p.).

6 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/sdg_08_10

Figure 4. *The unemployment rate in selected countries*

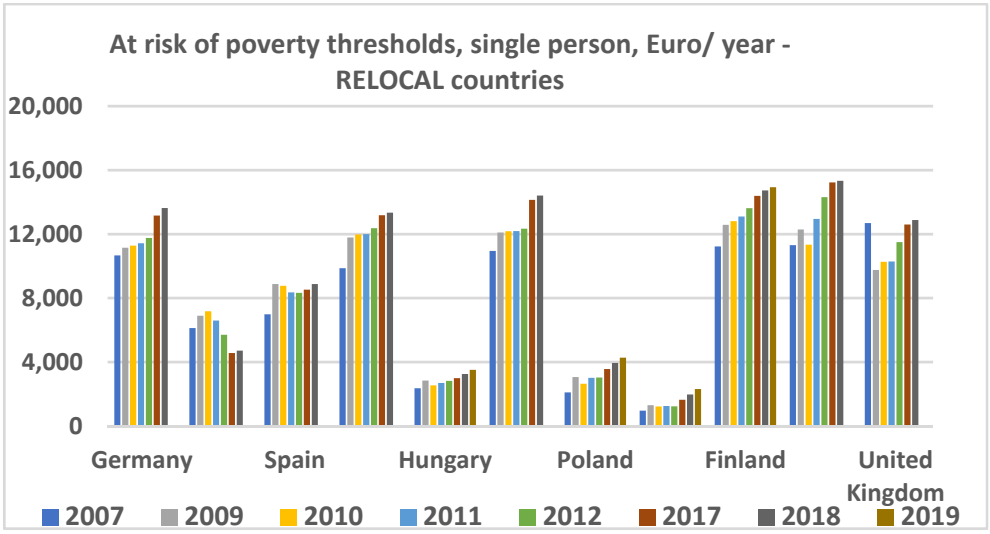


Source: Eurostat data,[7] processed by an interactive line chart

Moreover, the following Figures reflect the persistent unevenness between the EU Members States, in particular between the selected countries in what regards social inequalities, measured by social cohesion indicators such as: at risk of poverty thresholds (*Figure 5*), in-work at risk of poverty rate (*Figure 6)*, income disparities (*Figure 7*), and governmental expenditures on social protection (*Figure 8*). If one picks up the example of Romania from this picture, they may observe how striking is that, while this country knows the highest poverty rates and income inequalities, it has the lowest percentages regarding the amount of public budget spent on social protection. This is how Romania is kept in the status of a semi-periphery country with the cheapest labor force in the EU, fulfilling in this way one of its major roles in the global economy.

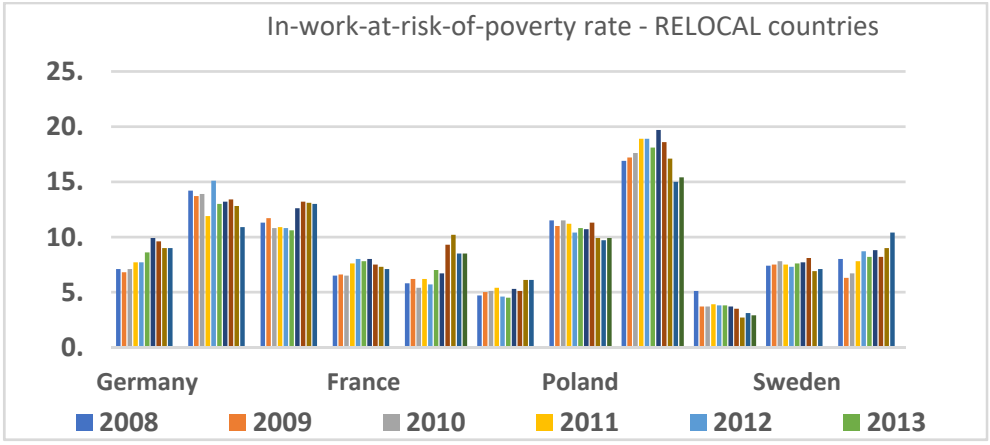
[7] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics_and_beyond#How_has_unemployment_evolved_in_the_last_15_years_.3F

Figure 5. *At-risk-of poverty thresholds in selected countries and years, between 2007-2019*



Source: Eurostat data,[8] processed by the author

Figure 6*. In-work-at-risk of poverty rate in selected countries and years, between 2008-2019*

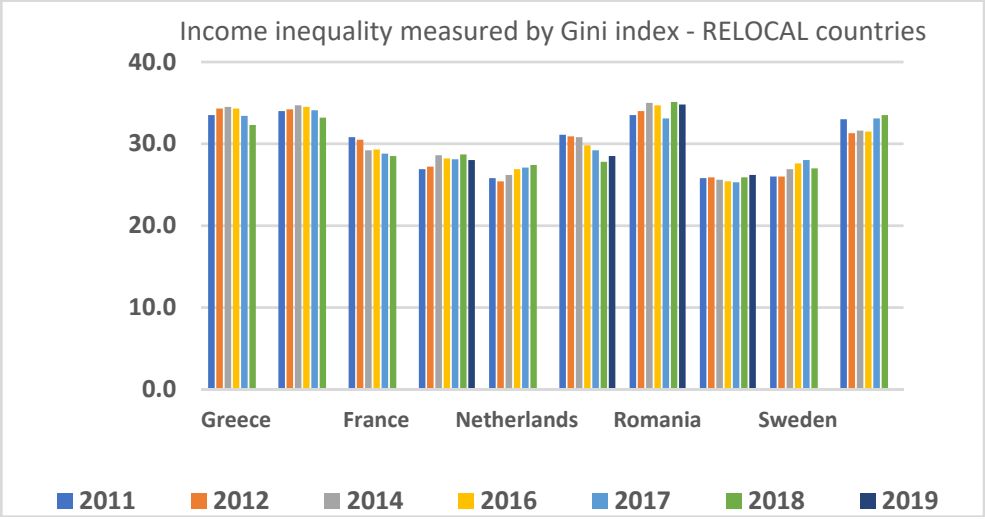


Source: Eurostat data,[9] processed by the author

[8] http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_li01&lang=en

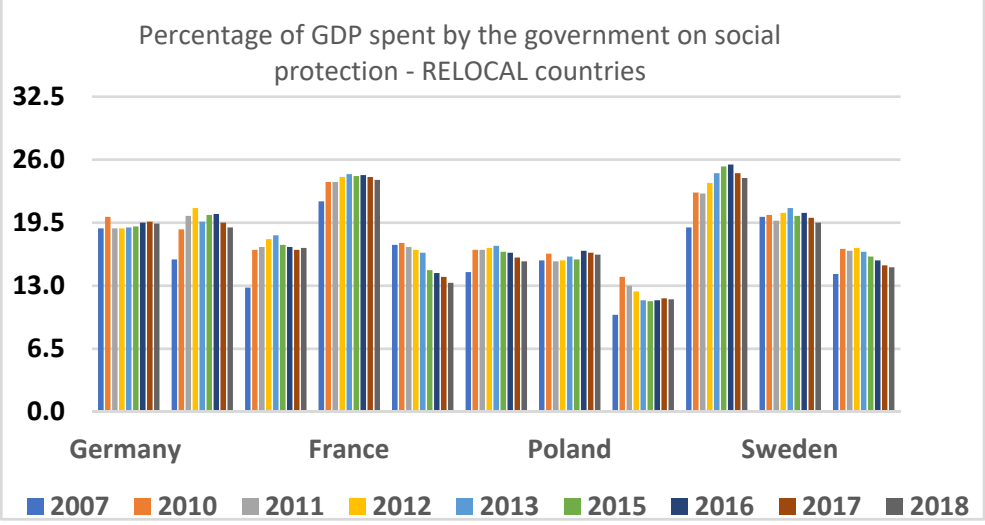
[9] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tespm070&plugin=1

Figure 7. *Income inequality in selected countries and years, between 2011-2019*



Source: Eurostat data,[10] processed by the author

Figure 8. *Percentage of GDP spent on social protection in selected countries and years, between 2007-2019*



Source: Eurostat data,[11] processed by the author

[10] http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc_di12
[11] https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do

The production of unevenness across different forms of administrative-territorial organization through neoliberal governance

Since the *Barca Report* (2009), the EU's Cohesion Policy aimed to reform itself via adopting the territorial perspective and the place-based development approach, which proposed geographically tailored interventions in functional territorial units. But even before this moment, the approval of the *European Spatial Planning Perspective* (1999) meant that the Member States and the European Commission committed themselves to the idea, according to which three fundamental goals should be achieved equally in all the regions of the EU: economic and social cohesion; conservation and management of natural resources and the cultural heritage; more balanced competitiveness of the European territory. Further on, the first version of the *Territorial Agenda of the European Union* was agreed in 2007 by the Ministers responsible for spatial planning and development.

Despite its success story, the concept of territorial cohesion does not have a widely accepted definition nor in the EU documents or academic literature. Going beyond this recognition, some analysts are proposing complex understandings of the concept, which besides the socio-economic dimensions includes other aspects, too, such as environmental sustainability, territorial polycentricity, territorial cooperation, and territorial governance dimension (Medeiros, 2016, pp. 10-19). After focusing in the prior section of the article on the first dimension of territorial unevenness via statistics, in what follows – on the base of some selected RELOCAL National Reports –, I will discuss how neoliberal governance functions in different countries with different types of administrative-territorial organization and how it reproduces similar patterns of in-country inequalities manifested in space.

From the category of core European countries, I have selected for this analysis Germany and France (creators of the first European economic community), the United Kingdom (joining the former in 1973), and Sweden (a latecomer core country, accessing the EU in 1995); and from the Southern and Eastern peripheries, Spain (accessing European communities in the 1980s) and Romania (latecomer MS from 2007). Out of them, France, Sweden, and Romania do have in common that they are defined as unitary states going through a recent process of decentralization, while Germany, the UK, and Spain display a longer history of decentralized administrative-territorial governance.

First, let me recall that rising unemployment rates, persisting long-term unemployment, weak economic infrastructure, low incomes, shrinking cities, and rural areas as a result of de-industrialization and the outmigration of the youth, are issues occurring all over in the countries where the RELOCAL research

was conducted. Meanwhile, government representatives, national, regional, or local, did not consider using the term spatial injustice to uncover inequalities, but they mostly preferred discussing disparities and continued to express an official optimism about the great potential of the EU Funds in tackling them. Nevertheless, as the investigation exposed, people from the deprived or underdeveloped territories and the grassroots-action stakeholders shared a strong sense of injustice expressed through the feeling of being left behind by their states and/or by Europe.

Federalist **Germany**, still sustaining a state-based welfare regime or social state, even if weaker than decades before, as the EU country with the best economic indicators and the largest number of multinationals conquering the economies of the European periphery, displays disparities among its Western and Eastern, and its Northern and Southern territories. We could learn from the RELOCAL case studies how were its remote country-sides looking for innovative connections to the world (through digitalization), and how did the youth from cities going through depopulation try to reinvent local community life through cultural events. The authors of the National Report[12] consider that – under conditions in which recently one may observe a shift of responsibilities to the local level – the German social state should not be eroded and should remain accountable for structural inequalities and territorial disparities. Besides – while appreciating what a social city might do – they consider that it would be good to integrate successful civil initiatives to higher-level structures, nevertheless, it would be also necessary that dispersed grass-roots projects would be coordinated by an overhead structure in public administration.

The centralized republic of **France**, in the past decades of neoliberalism, underwent successive waves of decentralization. Meanwhile, the French ideal of equality did not disappear from the public sphere, but it knew several transformations. The century-old principle of *l'egalite des territories*, which recognized the value of each space due to their specific contribution to the economy as a whole, under conditions of decentralization and de-industrialization is transformed into the idea of competitive regulation of territorial cooperation. The new role of the state in this context is to launch nationally led thematic initiatives to support local development and to provide related financial schemes. The analyzed French cases displayed top-down and bottom-up initiatives. One of them was more focused on improving procedural justice in the metropolitan government, and the other implemented a housing project in a severely declined

[12] https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report_Germany.pdf

region. The authors of the National Report[13] ask if greater autonomy assures or not greater spatial justice. They conclude that under conditions in which the deepened territorial inequalities require committed governmental redistributive measures and the real access of those in need to EU regional policy tools and resources is reduced, the French state should plan and coordinate more top-down appropriate measures, even if bottom-up case-sensitive local projects should also continue to be supported from the public budget.

The centralized governmental regime of the **United Kingdom** started to go through devolution in the 1970s, so the analyzed RELOCAL cases in Scotland and England already were actions affected by the particularities of different national contexts. Nevertheless, after the 2008-2009 crisis, the central government of the UK disbanded the regional levels of government and promoted the distribution of EU funds towards initiatives with a strong business focus. The authors of the National Report[14] note that beyond these changing trends, it is the neoliberal welfare regime and austerity-led reduction in the public sector, which created a huge need in both territories to tackle – via project-based interventions – structural spatial problems. Therefore, the analyzed English local action aimed to stop homelessness under conditions of high rents, insecure tenancies, and insufficient social housing. While the Scottish initiative created a community land trust to empower low-income people from disadvantaged areas.

With a strong central government, **Sweden** displays a society-based welfare regime informed by the value of equality, which has been mostly under social democratic leadership since the second World War. Nevertheless, in the past three decades, large inequalities have grown in Sweden due to neoliberal policies applied after the financial crisis in the late 1980s. In what regards the country's administrative-territorial organization, its 290 municipalities enjoy considerable autonomy, however regional authorities are granted rather limited responsibilities. One of the cases studied by the RELOCAL research was about how increasing access to digital services of citizens, companies, and tourists was considered to have a contribution to the reduction of territorial disparities. The other initiative was more of a socially committed endeavor from the side of city authorities to increase social sustainability understood as the fair distribution of life conditions and well-being among all people. Recently, the Swedish multi-level system of governance is undergoing major changes.

[13] https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/11/RELOCAL-National-Report_France.pdf

[14] https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/10/RELOCAL-National-Report_Scotland-and-England-CHECKED-FINAL.pdf

City districts are transformed into "Regions," and gain responsibilities for regional development, which earlier was a state responsibility carried out via the Counties. The authors of the National Report[15] consider that, since this measure took place only in 2019, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this wave of decentralization on spatial (in)justice.

Since 1978, **Spain** is divided into seventeen autonomous communities and two autonomous cities as a way to recognize the right to self-government of the "nationalities and regions." The autonomous communities have wide legislative and executive autonomy which is acted out through their parliaments and regional governments. The authors of the National Report[16] observe that urban growth happening in Spain between 1960-1975 created several disadvantaged neighborhoods, which were under-urbanized, poorly communicating with the rest of the locality, suffered from an infrastructure deficit, and were socio-spatially segregated. In time, many of these neighborhoods became more and more abandoned and marginalized, and these disadvantages were only partially overcome by people's struggle for the improvement of their conditions. From 1990, the local administrations, pushed by civil society pressure, started to improve the infrastructure and services mostly in declined rural areas to increase the opportunities for regional development. Nevertheless, what has happened ever since, does not seem to be enough, and the targeted rural areas continue to decrease in the number of inhabitants year after year, which at its turn triggers an increase of territorial inequalities across all the autonomous communities. In what regards urban areas, experts agree that one of the most important policy domains to focus on should be housing because difficult access to housing is one of the key factors leading to the increase of social inequality in present days Spain. Housing is also the target of civil society organizations. "Sindicat de Llogaters" in Barcelona fights for fair rents in the city; "Santa Coloma – Renovem els barris" is a project to improve housing stock in a street in the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona; "Habitatges en cessió d'ús" is a project through which the Barcelona City Council facilitates the access to land to be used for housing cooperatives; and "Fundació Hàbitat 3" is a private foundation that manages housing to support social inclusion in Barcelona.

The actions studied by RELOCAL in **Romania** took place in the context of the big transformation that the country went through over the past three decades, i.e., the transformation of actually existing socialism into neoliberal

[15] https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report_Sweden.pdf

[16] https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report_Spain.pdf

capitalism, which aggravated prior forms of unfairness and/or created new ones. Processes of privatization, marketization, formation of the banking sector, and the reduction of social expenditures were conditions for Romania's accession to the European Union and/or for gaining loans from international financial organizations. The author of the National Report[17] observes that the competitive advantage of Romania on the stage of global capitalism is the low cost of its labor force, the country also being a market for imported products, and a territory opened for foreign capital investment. Regarding the territorial distribution of several socio-economic problems, statistical data shows that Romania has entered "the transition" with a relatively low level of regional disparities, compared to other new Member States, but that these disparities have increased rapidly. Territorial planning aims to back up the dominant developmental trends in the country, sustaining the model of polycentric development and agglomeration of economic activities in a few big cities. In this system, the so-called "magnet cities" are competing among each other to attract capital and to demonstrate their entrepreneurial capacities. The administrative-territorial organization of the country remained unchanged after 1990 in the sense that the localities and the counties continue to be the units where decisions are made by the elected deliberative bodies, but the whole system of public administration did undergo a process of decentralization. However, new forms of territorial governance that lack administrative/ political attributes have been formed to absorb EU funds. The four case studies conducted in Romania are highlighting several manifestations of spatial injustice, such as persistent residential segregation of the Roma, informal housing, declining rural areas in former mining territories, and underdevelopment of some urban areas in the capital city.

In all the cases mentioned above, the means of project-based interventions proved to be too weak in the face of the historically formed socio-economic inequalities, accumulated over time in particular territories, i.e., in spaces where economies and people suffered the most from the economic transformations of the past five decades of neoliberalism. Therefore, the actions (projects, strategies, programs) tackling manifestations of spatial injustice could make available more resources to more people during their life-time (filling a bit the deficits created as a result of the collapsing governmental redistribution systems, but as well as by economic congestions and lack of proper incomes); and/ or could create in the actions' participants a sense of increased procedural justice in what regards immediate community life, however ephemeral and formal that was in many cases. Nevertheless, they could not induce structural changes in either form of justice.

[17] https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report_Romania.pdf

The formation of the competition union across changing regimes of capital accumulation and the lacking behind of social Europe

Observing the creation of the "European communities" in the postwar history of capitalism, in this part of my analysis, I am going to refer to the following countries: Germany, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Finland, Sweden, Greece, Spain, Finland, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, and Romania. It will be briefly described when and from what positions they did enter into the process of *EUfication* as a manifestation of the phenomenon of the spatial fix. In parallel, the argument highlights how the EU's social dimension was always lagging as a non-imperative policy chapter and even more, how its neglect became stronger and stronger in time. The section concludes that these are explanatory factors of the persistence of unevenness in the competition union despite the EU's regional policy programs.[18]

The creation of the first economic communities by the Western core: the era of state capitalism

In 1951, the *European Coal and Steel Community* (ECSC) was founded by **France, (West) Germany**, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg as the first of a series of supranational European institutions that aimed at the countries' economic unification. The initiative was inspired by Schuman's views (1950) on the advantages of such a "solidarity in production" or "productive unit" not only from the economic point of view of "the regions which have long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war", but also to "make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible" in the future.

In 1957, these six countries signed the *Treaties of Rome*, which marked the creation of the *European Economic Community* (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), and further, in the 1960s, they agreed to launch further common policies, i.e. on the domain of trade and agriculture. In 1973, the EEC expanded to nine Member States when Denmark, Ireland, and the **United Kingdom** joined the six initiators. The extended EEC introduced more common policies alongside the ones established at the beginning, in particular on social, environmental, and regional development issues.

[18] Resources used for this reconstruction are available here - https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/history/, here - https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/key-achievements/, and here - https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/overview.

As founding members, these countries had the advantage of defining the main frameworks of community policies, programs, and projects in a way that expressed their interests and the needs of their economies. Moreover, they were the countries that could impose the conditions on further candidate states, defining the directions of the economic reform that the latter was expected to go through, including among others the opening up of the borders to free trade and the so-called "sound public finances." As early as in the 1970s, the first leaders recognized that for the creation of a union not only the economic, fiscal and monetary policies need to be harmonized across countries, but also the disparities and differences between and within them, between industrial areas and agricultural regions, and as well as the challenges that declining industrial areas were faced with, had to be reduced. The importance of this objective was reckoned by the creation of the *European Regional Development Fund* in 1975.

In what regards the nation-state's policies during this period, they were framed by a particular regime of capital accumulation, i.e. state capitalism, based on the Keynesian welfare systems and economic policies. The latter put a great role on public investments among others into public services as a means for keeping economic production to work and as well as for assuring social peace and more balanced power relation between the owner classes and the working class. Altogether, I consider that this phase of the European political construction was based on two big pillars: social solidarity within the nation-states; and mutual support among the member states' national economies by ensuring that their businesses have unhindered access to a larger market than their national ones.

The European Single Market and the extension towards South and North: the first two decades of neoliberalization leading to the beginnings of fiscal surveillance

During the 1980s, the EEC was enlarged by the inclusion of some Mediterranean countries, such as **Greece** (in 1981), and **Spain** and Portugal (in 1986), after these countries having been emancipated from dictatorships. It was also this decade when the *Single European Act* was signed (in 1986). Viewing this decade from the angle of the capital accumulation regime, these were the years when neoliberal capitalism started to reshape national social and economic policies, and the role of the state in promoting privatization and marketization, and to facilitate the global circulation of capital in an unregulated manner. Programs such as *Interreg*, *Leader*, and *Resider* were conceived to better connect different regions, assure spatial mobility across Europe, and to revitalize declined rural, but as well as former industrial areas.

Six years later, the member states defined the principles of the *European Single Market* – such as free trade, free movement of capital, people (including labor force), and services –, which made it possible to set up a business or take a job anywhere within the single market. These decisions were inscribed once and for all in the treaty that established later the European Union, i.e., the *Maastricht Treaty* activated in 1993, which also added further schemes of intergovernmental cooperation to the existing community system, in particular in the domain of foreign policy, justice, and internal affairs. The *Committee of the Regions* established in 1994 and the creation of the *Cohesion Fund* in the same year continued to ensure continuously the development of Europe's infrastructure through investments into environmental and transport-related objectives.

In 1995, Austria, **Finland**, and **Sweden** accessed the new EU, which – in the terms of regional policy – meant the addition of a special objective to support their sparsely-populated regions. Otherwise, the integration of the *Structural Funds* into an overarching cohesion policy aimed at adapting the economy of Greece, Spain, and Portugal to the European Single Market to both use them as new markets for Western European companies' products, and to create new jobs on their territories, and, generally speaking, in the poorest and most backward regions of the EU. Motorways, railway infrastructure, small and medium-sized companies, and, additionally, development goals in urban areas benefited from EU funds across all the Member States according to some regionally defined targets.

Meanwhile, a growing emphasis was put on increasing employment rates and people's employability. The latter concerns objectified in 1997 in the elaboration of the *European Employment Strategy* as defined in the *Amsterdam Treaty*. Despite being called a "social period" because compared to the Maastricht Treaty at least it delivered some promises on this domain, the era between 1997-2005 could not enforce more market correcting policies across the Union since all these happened in a context in which the EU did not push for legislative harmonization but, at the most, it aimed at a convergence towards best social policy practices (Pochet, 2020).

In parallel with the Amsterdam Treaty, the 27 Member States signed an agreement called the *Stability and Growth Pact*[19] with the aim "to facilitate and maintain the stability of the *Economic and Monetary Union*." This agreement enabled the fiscal monitoring of members (their debts and deficits) by the

[19] The *Stability and Growth Pact* was elaborated and it is still in use as a set of rules designed for the coordination of the economic and fiscal policies of the Member States, "ensuring that countries in the European Union pursue sound public finances and coordinate their fiscal policies." - https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/stability-and-growth-pact_en.

European Commission and the Council of Ministers, and the issuing of a yearly recommendation for policy actions. The Pact started to make effects via two resolutions: the regulation "on the strengthening of the surveillance of budgetary positions and the surveillance and coordination of economic policies" (1998); and the regulation "on speeding up and clarifying the implementation of the excessive deficit procedure" (1999).

From now on it became obvious, that it was not only the principle of free trade and free movement of capital that the Member States had to respect to secure the functioning of the Single Market but as well as keeping public deficits below 3% and public debt below 60% became compulsory policies on the benefit of the Monetary Union. The submission by the Member States of their National Reform Programs to be evaluated by the European Commission also turned into an obligatory mechanism. Last, but not least, it showed off undoubtfully that the European Union is primordially an economic union and its economic, fiscal, and monetary policies are enforced in all the Member States, while its promises of solidarity are promoted only via soft recommendations regarding national social policies.

The integration of Eastern peripheries as new territories for capital investment: strengthening the competition union

In March 2000, the EU heads of state and government launched the *Lisbon Strategy*, whose aim was to make Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion." Central and East European countries, whose turn for accession to the EU came in the 2000s, went through the same destiny under the frame of Eastern enlargement like their South-European counterparts did two decades earlier. The "Copenhagen criteria" conditioned their accession by the existence of stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, by a functioning market economy endorsed by privatization, and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union, but as well as by the ability to take on the financial obligations of membership.

After the collapse of their socialist economies, **Hungary**, **Poland**, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania in 2004, respectively **Romania** and Bulgaria in 2007, and Croatia in 2013 were transformed into competitors at the peripheries for attracting foreign direct investment from core (European) countries. Especially Romania became the pole of the cheapest labor force from Europe, and – under conditions in which all of its internal production in all

domains was destroyed – nowadays it functions as a market for imported goods, and as an emergent economy with low taxation on income, profit, and capital, but also as a country with natural resources to be exploited almost freely and without no strict environmental norms under very permissive state rules. After the full privatization and almost full bankruptcy of the economies of really existing socialism, it took a long period for CEE countries or for some of their urban regions to recover a bit. Their accession to the European Union meant that the latter's territorial disparities increased both in terms of economic and social indicators. Nevertheless, these so-called emergent economies are huge profit-making opportunities for foreign capital, a state of affairs facilitated and supported by the compulsory EU economic policies, while governmental social policy measures are limited by the obligatory fiscal policies leaving issues of poverty, exclusion, and marginalization on project-based interventions with no structural impact. Altogether, the case of the periphery or of the Southern and Eastern countries that were accessing later and in different waves the union, demonstrates that the cohesion policy aiming to reduce and eliminate economic, social, and territorial disparities cannot fulfill its objective until when the mainstream and compulsory economic policies favoring the maintenance of competition rule are recreating them.

The signing of the *Lisbon Treaty* at the end of 2007 (which was a solution to the failure of creating a stronger union on the base of a European Constitution) amended the neoliberal *Maastricht Treaty*. Redefining the competencies of the EU institutions also established the European Central Bank. Likewise, it re-affirmed that the services of general economic interest are to be provided by the national, regional, and local authorities. The Lisbon Treaty also re-enforced the neoliberal rule according to which the internal market of the Union has to include a system ensuring that competition is not distorted. Paradoxically or not, it entered into force in 2009, with the full outbreak of the financial crisis created by globalized capitalism obsessed with the imperative of permanent growth sustained by any means, among others by the means of growth based on private and public indebtedness.

The above trend was coupled by questioning altogether the importance of EU's social dimension: from the point of view of the EU social policymaking, between 2005-2014 the Barosso Commission led to the deterioration of the European Social Dialogue especially with the onset of the Eurozone crisis in 2009 (Tricart, 2020), and even the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion lost its importance (Vanhercke, 2020). In parallel with this, the predominance of central-right and right-wing governments across the EU Member States favored anti-social austerity measures as a "solution" to the

crisis and, altogether, the socio-economic governance of these times deepened the territorial inequalities in the EU and reinforced the tensions between social and economic policymaking.

The Europe of austerity: recreating unevenness between the Western and Northern core, and the Southern and Eastern peripheries

The *Europe 2020 Strategy* adopted in 2010 took further the neoliberal idea of competition for growth, nevertheless, it softened it with environmental and social concerns. It was set under the slogan of "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth." Yet, since its inception coincided with how the European Commission, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (the Troika) thought to solve the 2008-2009 crisis (by saving the banks and imposing austerity measures on the population), the 2020 strategy put a great emphasis on macro-economic and fiscal surveillance aiming at growth, employment creation and limitation of public spending. The third pillar of this strategy included all the rest of the themes that were supposed to be sustained by the relevant EU Funds, such as innovation and R&D, resource-efficiency, business environment, employment, education, and social inclusion. Social inclusion and poverty eradication measures remained a competence within the Member States' sovereignty, while the control of deficit severely limited the countries' budgets allocated to social and public services. All these under conditions in which, as already shown, a huge difference continued to remain between the Members States' GDPs as a reference point for establishing the percentages of different types of governmental expenditures. The recommendations of the EC towards its Member States to reduce poverty and social exclusion or income inequalities were not taken seriously by the national decision-makers, while the compulsory economic measures continued to increase the severity of these problems. No wonder that the objectives of the EU strategies in this domain were never achieved, while disparities continued to be reproduced within and between the countries. Moreover, since the EU Funds, including those dedicated to combatting poverty and social exclusion, are supposed to be gained as a result of project competitions, the economically less competitive territories with their less entrepreneurial governments continue having fewer chances to attract such funds and acting locally against these problems created by trans-local forces.

As a result of the regulations written into the Maastricht, Amsterdam, and Lisbon Treaties conceived in a neoliberal spirit, the European Union was created as a competition union, or a union of states that compete with one another as if they were enterprises (Troost and Hersel, 2012). This union re-produced the

inequalities between the export and surplus oriented core countries, and the periphery countries dependent to a considerable extent on imports and financed by external credit (Horn et al., 2009). In its turn, the competition union resulted in big imbalances, which manifested brutally after the 2008 financial crisis erupted and the austerity measures were enforced by the core countries (such as Germany) to be severely implemented in the periphery countries (such as Greece). Critics of neoliberal Europe named this type of integration as divisive integration (Lehndorff, 2015). Under this regime, the existing differences in terms of economic performance between the participating states could only increase, instead of diminishing.

Even if discursively the EU is constructed as space where the competition goes hand in hand with solidarity, and also with socio-economic and territorial cohesion, the actual construction of the Single Market shows: ”in the rules, in accordance with which competition takes place, social standards do not have anything like the importance of the free movement of capital” (Lehndorff, 2015: 10). Furthermore, the economic EU governance based on surveillance, alongside fiscal austerity as a response to the debt crisis contradicted the inclusive growth paradigm and particularly its social component (Leschke et al., 2012). The neoliberal adjustment process as a way out of the crisis created even more critical issues. The post-financial crisis developments “rendered Italy and Spain even more vulnerable to the financial markets and made the exit of Greece, Portugal, and Ireland from the crisis even more difficult (Karamessini, 2012: 180). This diagnosis is also relevant for Central and Eastern European Member States. The dangers inherent to the austerity measures proved to be especially worrying for the countries that were by then in receipt of conditional financial assistance from the EU and the IMF (Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Latvia, and Romania) and already had poverty and social exclusion rates above the EU average, and lower levels of total social spending as a share of GDP.

The ongoing tensions within the EU socio-economic governance could not be solved either with the adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights by the Juncker Commission in 2017. This was supposed to relaunch the social dimension of European integration, but this was impossible in the context of strengthening anti-European parties. Moreover, under conditions in which Business Europe refused negotiations on reopening the European Social Dialogue, at the most, the Pillar assessed the risk of lacking social Europe, but could not deliver concrete plans for really socializing EU policies, including the European Semester (Pocket, 2020). Nevertheless, in January 2020 the new von der Leyen Commission announced the need for a "strong social Europe for just transitions" including the transition to climate neutrality, digitalization, and proper policies to handle demographic change (Vanhercke et al., 2020).

And here we are today at the end of 2020, fully facing a new crisis of capitalism (Roberts, 2020; Davis 2020). The economic recession already starting last year, continues to deepen as a consequence of the lockdown measures implemented to deal with Covid-19. In response, to save the economies, the European Commission suspended the strict state aid restrictions in mid-March 2020, allowing the 27 EU states to pump cash into their economies and companies battered by coronavirus, with more than 1.9 trillion euros ($2.1 trillion) worth of national schemes approved so far. This is not an even game, however, as richer or less indebted states have more scope to channel funds. While Germany makes up about a quarter of the EU's gross domestic product (GDP), it accounts for some 52 percent of the total value of the emergency coronavirus state aid cleared so far, European Commission data show. "There is clearly a risk of a breakdown of ... the internal market in Europe," a senior Spanish government official said, since "not all the countries of the internal market have access to this liquidity … Germany has deep pockets and can afford it." The European Commission's competition chief, Margrethe Vestager also recognized that "there are differences in how much member states can spend depending on their fiscal space." Facing these inequalities, again, South European countries demand joint EU financing to spur recovery, otherwise, they fear that not only will they have suffered more severely in the health crisis, but will also take longer to get their economies back on track.[20]

Under these recent conditions, in ETUI's Working Paper from June 2020, the authors wondered "whether the European Green Deal (EGD) constitutes a suitable policy framework to combine environmental and economic objectives with the pursuit of social fairness" (Sabato and Fronteddu, 2020, p.5). The question regarding the capacity of EGD to effectively act, beyond the discourse, as an overarching policy framework to ensure that the transition towards a more environmentally sustainable economic model is also socially fair continues to be relevant as the economic recession continues. This working paper warns that EGD's employability-related policies should not be considered as an alternative to universal social rights. Therefore, it states that EGD should adopt the provisions of the International Labor Organization's Just Transition Framework and the promises of the forgotten European Pillar of Social Rights, which lists a comprehensive number of social rights to be guaranteed to all European citizens and highlights the need to implement broader transition-related social policies with distributional effects.

[20] *State aid deepens concerns over EU divisions. Southern European nations fear their richer northern neighbors are undermining competition by bailing out industries*, 2 May 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/state-aid-deepens-concerns-eu-divisions-200501171509547.html.

Conclusions

Uneven development is an endemic feature of capitalism, both a product and a condition for the perpetuation of capital accumulation. On the one hand, it results from the fact that capital always looks for investing in new territories and domains where it might gain more profit. And, on the other hand, as a condition, uneven development facilitates that capitalism solves its inner crises by expanding towards underdeveloped territories with investment opportunities and cheap labor force. This is the process of spatial fix, which, in the case *of EUfication* functioned through the continuous enlargement of the "European communities". An official EU document (European Commission, 2016) explains this in the following terms: the European Union was created to achieve political goals through economic cooperation to ensure economic growth and be able to compete on the world stage with other major economies; decision-makers recognized that the European Single Market (created in 1986) could provide for the European companies a broader base than just their national home market; therefore, the EU endeavored to remove obstacles to trade (European Commission, 2016: 8). Further on, the facilitation of the free movement of capital by the *Treaty on the European Union* "was crucial for the evolutions of neoliberal global capitalism that needed new territories for capital investment, new markets for the surplus product as well as new sources of the cheap, both skilled and unskilled labor force" (Vincze, 2019:141). One of the conclusions of this article is that the position and timing from which and when different countries took part in the process of *EUfication* is a factor responsible for the persistence of uneven territorial development among the European core and periphery.

Unevenness persists despite the spatial policies inscribed in the *European Spatial Planning Perspective* (1999) and the *Territorial Agenda 2020,* which considered that the territorial approach is a key concept for harmonizing different development paradigms such as convergence (solidarity between regions) and regional competitiveness. This optimistic scenario is sustained even though the background documents of the EU's Territorial Agenda are acknowledging "the main territorial structures of Europe," which are: the core-periphery relations, the challenges of the East catching-up, the North-South differences, and the variety of rural-urban relations (*The Territorial State and Perspectives in the European Union*, 2011, p. 50-52). In describing them, this discourse uses concepts such as diversity, disparity, difference, distinctiveness, avoiding concepts such as inequality or injustice. The term "catching-up" is applied to suggest who is advanced and who is lagging from the listed couples of countries. There is no reference in this document to how capitalism creates such divisions, but the socialist heritage is mentioned as a factor that "slowed down the Central-Eastern

European states." When talking about the disparities between the centrally located city regions and peripheral regions within the EU Member States, the document under our scrutiny uses the term polarization (idem, p. 53). Regarding the differences between areas within the urban settlements themselves, it even refers to inequalities, observing that, for example, "social differences between housing areas within a specific city are often bigger than between cities," which, assumedly, "influences negatively the attractiveness, competitiveness of cities" (idem, p.54). While reifying the competition between cities for investments (as a core element of entrepreneurial governance, described by Harvey, 1989; Hubbard and Hall 1998; Brenner and Theodore, 2002, 2005; Vincze, 2015), this understanding of the problem expects that improved collaboration and synergies among the settlements will put an end to polarization and inequalities. However, it is hard to believe that the entrepreneurial city will give up the perceived advantages of some capital investments for the benefit of other localities, with less capital on their doorstep. If competitiveness is expected to be the proper feature of different territories and this means making themselves attractive for capital or profit-making, one cannot imagine that solidarity claims will prevail over competition and competitiveness understood as the source of urban success in the ideology of market fundamentalism.

In my analysis, I have also reflected on the fact that even if the union defined itself as "a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress," since neoliberal governance regulated the relations between the state, the market, and the society, "the tensions between market integration and social objectives continued to characterize the EU as territory" (Mulder, 2019) and the social policy paradigm was permanently overshadowed by market and financial considerations (Vanhercke et al., 2020).

Therefore, the second major conclusion of this article is that the predominance of economic policies over the social one has contributed to the perpetuation of uneven territorial development in the European Union. The way how social policies are conceived as soft recommendations to the Member States, cannot put an end to the unevenness created by the spatial fix looking for the interests of capital. The inequality-producing effects of the compulsory economic rules of the competition union are impossible to be eradicated by the means of recommendations that the EU makes on the behalf of social Europe, or by the seemingly politically neutral project-based interventions funded by EU financial schemes, which, at their turn, are also accessible only via competition mechanisms. The tensions between the market forces favoring the most competitive regions, i.e., those territories where investment for profit is the most promising, and between the social policies conceived to reduce poverty and inequalities, are deeply embedded into the functioning of the neoliberal

union. The unevenness reproduced by the compulsory economic measures of the Single Market cannot be counteracted by the dismantled welfare regimes that outsourced the responsibility of solving the socio-economic and territorial unevenness to the competitive project-based initiatives.

Even more, as a very recent critical overview of the European social policies highlights, the program of Ursula von der Leyen reformulated the Europe 2020 Strategy's aim for a "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" into a digital/smart, green/sustainable, and resilient deal. This shift is not so promising for a progressive social Europe, since while it is strongly focusing on economic sustainability it forgets about inclusiveness as core value, and, instead, it calls for resilience, i.e. for the preparation of the individuals "for adversity and shocks, without counting on the support of others" (Andor, 2020). Nowadays it becomes more and more clear that saving capitalist economy via state aids offered to private companies prevails over public investments into public services and over enforcing policies assuring universal socio-economic rights for all, most importantly to those who suffer the most from the effects of the current epidemiological and economic crisis.

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EPISTEMIC ENCOUNTERS: SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THE RETHINKING OF URBAN PLANNING POLICIES IN THE EARLY 1970S ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT. This article aims to conduct a case study on urban planning models drawn by social scientists in 1970s Romania. It looks at the trans-national channels of knowledge circulation and reconstructs specialists' role in creating new bridges of cooperation between the first and second world. It also analyzes the gradual re-signification of these ideas locally as part of the socialist state development project. More precisely, it wants to answer three intertwined questions: To what extent did the trans-nationalization of knowledge in the late 1960s determine a particular approach to urban planning in Romania? What does this tell us about local professional practices' autonomy? Which was the international relevance of Romanian social sciences' practice? The article contributes to an emerging scholarship on the genealogy of these ideas by placing the transnational debates of the late 1960s and early 1970s consumed under the umbrella of various international organizations, such as the ISA and the UN, in conversation with an intellectual tradition dating back to the interwar period.

Keywords: social sciences; urban planning; transnational; knowledge production; the 1970s Romania

Introduction[2]

The main aim of the Eighth World Congress of Sociology, held in Toronto in 1975, was to analyze "the degree of activism that sociologists must show in their professional practice" (ANIC, fund ASSP-Sociologie, file 6/1972, p. 34). This ambitious goal was tellingly outlined by Congress's central theme: "Science and Revolutions in Contemporary Societies." The event brought together social scientists from around the world, who were keen to debate their

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professional status and the political relevance of their practice. From many points of view, the gathering provided an excellent opportunity for trans-national and trans-ideological professional debates between practicians from the first, the second, and the third world countries. However, it soon became apparent that such a plan was complicated by the large number and the diversity of the participants' intellectual and ideological backgrounds. For example, in a letter sent to Miron Constantinescu in 1974, Reuben Hill, president of the International Sociological Association, expressed his reservations about the Romanian expert's proposal's relevance for the Congress' theme. Entitled "The Role of the Sociologist: Observant or Participant?" Constantinescu's paper looked at social scientists' involvement in Romania's decision-making processes from the 1920s until the 1970s. Although informative from a Marxist viewpoint and somehow aligned with the 1970s international sociology interest in addressing social inequalities and poverty, Constantinescu's contribution allegedly failed to place the Romanian case in conversation with global social shifts. It also lacked theoretical innovation. Hill claimed that the paper eluded the international scientific community's current effort to address social reform as a transnational project relevant for both the developed and developing (semi)global peripheries (ANIC, fund ASSP - Sociologie, file 34/1973, p. 5). In his reply, Constantinescu admitted Hill's critique's rightness and promised to revise and resubmit an improved version of his paper. Unfortunately, Constantinescu died in July 1974 before having the chance of resubmitting his paper. However, the letter exchange between the two is meaningful from at least two points of view. On the one hand, it fleshes out the global dimension of sociological knowledge in the 1970s. On the other hand, it outlines a vast analytical space where the distinct meanings of activism and professional autonomy in various political-ideological contexts came to life.

Significant studies have shown that already by the late 1960s, social scientists' voice was increasingly important in policy-making processes around the world (AONU Geneva, box 2058). After decades when scientific knowledge was used extensively in the ideological confrontation between the two blocs,

> scientists began to try to transcend the Cold War by embracing a transnational, rather than bipolar, view of scientific internationalism, one based on the ideals of science in itself, rather than on geopolitics (Rubinson, 2012: 248).

These trends led to the emergence of new trans-national epistemic contexts, where technocratic thinking became actively involved in improving nation-states' governing acts (Lorenzini, 2004: 90; Jolly et al., 2004: 111-2). Through

such an intellectual effort, researchers highlighted the interconnections between various parts of the globe as manifestations of the late 1960s industrial society's crisis (Ferguson, 2010, 3). Recent research has shown the multitude of ways in which individuals in the West and East perceived generational change, increased consumption, or flexibilization of capital after 1968 (Iriye et al., 2012; Murphy, 2006; Pula, 2018; Mark et al., 2019). However, little is known about the processes of transnational co-production of knowledge and the mechanisms for converting it into public policy in the East-Central European (semi)periphery, and even less about the similarities and differences between East and West regarding the experts' agency and their visibility in policy-making processes.

This article aims to fill this gap by conducting a case study on urban planning models drawn by social scientists in 1970s Romania. It looks at the trans-national channels of knowledge circulation and reconstructs specialists' role in creating new bridges of cooperation between the first and second world. It also analyzes the gradual re-signification of these ideas locally as part of the socialist state development project. More precisely, it wants to answer three intertwined questions: To what extent did the trans-nationalization of knowledge in the late 1960s determine a particular approach to urban planning in Romania? What does this tell us about local professional practices' autonomy? Which was the international relevance of Romanian social sciences' practice?

In Romania, the first reliable studies on urban planning belong to Cincinat Sfinţescu. An engineer by training, he was appointed chief architect of the city of Bucharest in the 1930s. In that capacity, he drew the first systematization plan of the capital city, making a case for social, cultural, and economic integration of rural peripheries into its urban structure. However, his views had only a limited impact on his contemporaries. The national decision-making factors' lack of interest may be an illustration of the country's economic specificity. According to the official data, in 1938, more than 80% of the population lived in villages on the brink of subsistence, making any project of urban development little relevant.

Furthermore, as most researchers noted, the 1930s stood out as a complicated intellectual context; the monographic school of Dimitrie Gusti – that is the intellectual nucleus of modernization in interwar Romania, had imagined sociology as a "scientific discourse" about an eminently rural nation (Rostaş, 2000). After 1948, with the coming to power of the communist regime, Sfinţescu's ideas were re-signified. In the late 1940s, the Ministry of Construction commissioned Henry Stahl and several other sociologists trained in the interwar period to conduct monographic research of the Hunedoara industrial region and draw up a draft for territorial development (Mărginean, 2015). Subsequently, almost two decades later, territorial planning reappeared at the forefront of the public

agenda as soon as political leaders announced a major national-communist development project. These temporal and intellectual interconnections came to life due to Miron Constantinescu and Henry Stahl's vigorous activity, two Marxist sociologists trained at Dimitrie Gusti's Interwar School, who reached their professional maturity after 1945. While the former served as chairman of the State Planning Committee in the early 1950s (Bosomitu, 2015), the letter dedicated most of his professional life to research and higher education (Guga, 2015).

Drawing on documents from the Archives of the United Nations in Geneva and the Romanian National Archives in Bucharest, this article aims to integrate national urban thinking into a broader discussion about city renewal that surfaced in the 1970s international expert community. I premise that unlike diplomatic cooperation between states, which evolved according to geostrategic thought-through procedures, conversations between scientists followed specific paths, being often informal and personal. Moreover, intellectual affinities may have been articulated on generational and ideological grounds, making professionals the main vectors of global scientific knowledge's production and circulation. When considering the letter exchange between Hill and Constantinescu from this angle, one could foresee the multiple possibilities of cross-fertilization of ideas of two experts trained in the interwar period, who happened to get acquainted when the international community reconsidered the social sciences' part in social reform and the global stakes of these processes. Accordingly, despite unquestionable pragmatic implications, the 1970s scientific cooperation between the first, the second, and the third world countries echoes a line of thinking that originated in the interwar period when East-European was considered a laboratory of global development projects. However, as this article will show, the entanglement of these intellectual paths "at the edge" of the international knowledge field also carried ambiguous national outcomes. Although it determined the emergence of a new institutional logic in Romania, it also increased experts' self-awareness as "agents of modernization" every time the socialist state's decision-making process was at stake. Their internationalism channeled and even facilitated national communism (Cotoi, 2011; Hâncu and Karady, 2018). The forms of activism visible in professional circles, especially taking forms of assimilation transposition of allogeneic ideas into vectors of state planning and regulation of the economic activity.

Sociology under state socialism

In many ways, sociological approaches to urban space mirrored the social sciences' status during the communist regime. Cataloged as a bourgeois, reactionary, anti-scientific, and obscurantist discipline by the authorities, sociol-

ogy was banned in 1948 when the Romanian state adopted some legislative initiatives regarding the reorganization of university education. Building on the discursive framework of the Soviet Union, the leaders of Bucharest sought to impose Marxism-Leninism and scientific socialism as an interpretive system of contemporary social realities (Bosomitu, 2014: 334-340).

Similar measures have been taken in the other socialist states. In some countries, such as Bulgaria or Hungary, where sociology had been a minor scientific field in the interwar period, the models outlined by Soviet ideologies could be more easily assimilated. In others, such as Romania, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, however, where the 1930s were very fruitful in terms of sociological research, the post-1948 constraints had not only methodological but also professional implications. In Romania, for example, many of the specialists were imprisoned or went into exile. However, a few continued their activity under the umbrella of other disciplines such as folklore, economics, or statistics (Dobos, 2020).

In the conditions of the ideological thaw produced after Stalin's death, the latter's expertise played an essential role in the discipline's revival. Building on the methodology of monographic research, finalized in the interwar period by Dimitrie Gusti's School, the campaigns carried out by the new institutes of the RPR Academy aimed at analyzing social processes in factories, urban areas, and rural communities. As the number of scientific productions increased, decision-makers' actions to give institutional consistency to sociology became numerous. Political involvement allowed the establishment of the National Council of Sociology in 1959 and the initiation of steps to resume ties with the international community by joining the International Sociological Association in the same year. In 1964, another political act established the re-institutionalization of sociology by setting up research centers in universities and assuming specific national research programs (Bosomitu, 2014: 339).

These measures have allowed an unprecedented development of the profession. During the 1960s, the number of sociological productions increased explosively. This intellectual effervescence was doubled by expanding the research infrastructure in Bucharest and other university centers in the country. The perpetuation of the Gustian tradition had some apparent advantages. Focusing on analyzing reality "as it exists" meant prioritizing empirical research on rural areas and socio-economic regions. The focus was on "classical" sociological processes such as modernization, industrialization, or urbanization. Unlike the so-called socialist sociology practiced in Romanian philosophical circles, especially in the 1950s, the empirical sociology of Gustian inspiration had a critical "atheoretical, predominantly descriptive" dimension (Zamfir & Filipescu, 2015: 118). Equally, because of the new institutional framework in

which the discipline was developed, some methodological adjustments were outlined. The research of the 1960s benefited from students' massive involvement in research campaigns; the analyses were carried out by keeping their interdisciplinary objectives but fruiting almost exclusively the expertise of sociologists.

The paradigm shift mediated the resumption of scientific collaboration with the West by the mid-1960s. On the one hand, Romanian specialists have begun to participate in scientific events abroad and benefit from scholarships and internships at major universities worldwide. On the other hand, an increasing number of sociology degrees were translated into Romanian, while Romanian university libraries made a real effort to expand their Western scientific literature collections. Such intellectual conversations allowed for profound re-evaluations of the directions of social investigation. In a key remarkably close to the Western practice, the Romanian specialists showed some over-specialization tendencies within the discipline; already at the end of the 1960s, areas of expertise regarding urban sociology, youth sociology, labor sociology, etc., were outlined. However, openness to professional communities beyond the Iron Curtain would not have been possible without a favorable international context. As some researchers have recently shown, the intensification of scientific cooperation between the first and second worlds in the late 1960s and early 1970s cannot be read independently of convergence trends in political, economic, and cultural fields. More specifically, cooperation was a two-way street. Given the increasingly shared belief that industrialization produces similar social shifts everywhere, regardless of the political context in which they operate, Western communities of experts have often looked to Eastern European realities to understand their home countries' social dynamics better. This was also fostered by a revival of Marxism in many Western intellectual circles, which favored the shaping of a common intellectual ground where Western and socialist scholars shared a common conceptual language.

The making of a scientific language

In 1974, when Rueben Hill wrote to Miron Constantinescu to inquire about sociological activism types emerging under the Romanian socialist regime, the two were not strangers. While their first encounter circumstances are unclear, their professional relationship had a long history that went back to the early 1970s. Hill was a world-renowned specialist in family sociology who strongly advocated for transnational dialogue and cooperation between experts and decision-making factors for most of his academic career. Being involved in

the activities of various international organizations, he coordinated more than forty research projects worldwide. A leftist since college, he was also known for his genuine interest in the non-Western world.

Furthermore, since the late 1960s, Hill regularly traveled in socialist bloc countries, aiming to set up new collaborative projects with Est-European social scientists and comprehend the local social realities. Such effort proved shortly advantageous. In September 1970, at the World Congress in Varna, Hill was elected president of the International Sociological Association (ISA) because of the support of socialist and third world countries' delegates. In the years to come, cooperation between Hill and Constantinescu further developed through the ISA channels. However, the effectiveness of their professional dialogue varied in time, reflecting at large not only the complicated process through which the socialist experts negotiated their international visibility but also the personal and informal facets that the trans-ideological scientific conversations often took. While Western experts shared a genuine interest in East-European sociological output, seeing multiple possibilities to better comprehend social shifts in emerging industrial societies worldwide, the socialist bloc's ambiguous professional practices often complicated the transnational scientific cooperation. Moreover, knowledge exchange between West and East gained momentum only after socialist experts openly agreed to cooperate with capitalist social scientists.

The World Congress of Sociology in Varna offers an excellent glimpse of the ambivalence of this situation. In 1970, just weeks before the start of the Congress, Eastern European social scientists met to address the forthcoming event's final technical details. The official schedule was diverse, including research methodology, dissemination of results, or future collaborative projects. However, the most notable moment of the meeting was, no doubt, the Soviet representative's request that socialist participants would make a common front against what he called "the assault of the bourgeois sociology upon the socialist sociology." By making this claim, the Soviets echoed an ultra-conservative shift in international relations adopted by the Brezhnev regime in the aftermath of the Prague 1968 events. With the doctrine of non-intervention officially in place, the Soviets dived into a virulent discursive campaign that sparked old ideological tensions between East and West. Under the new circumstances, socialist states were expected to comply with the new regulations and appropriate various scientific thinking models (ANIC, fund ASSP Sociologie, file 1/1970, p. 37-38).

Nevertheless, this claim of the unity of the socialist bloc raised suspicion amongst the Romanian delegates. Just like two years before when Nicolae Ceausescu openly opposed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, in 1970, the

Romanian experts rejected Soviet demands in favor of autonomous scientific international cooperation. Summarizing the discussions, sociologist Virgil Constantinescu warned that, by following the Soviets lead,

> we would leave the impression that there was a sociological bloc that went to meet another sociological bloc, which not only would be unreal, but it would not be useful for the success of the discussions, as it would start from some preconceived formulas and a priori elaborated schemes. (ANIC, fund ASSP Sociologie, file 1/1970, p. 37-38).

The Congress' sessions, nevertheless, placed the Soviets' request in a different light. Despite the massive participation of the socialist delegates, East-Europeans were little successful in carrying out scientific conversations with Western experts, much less in demonstrating the usefulness of Marxism-Leninism in social research. On the contrary, the event unveiled the negative implications of too many years of isolation behind the Iron Curtain. In Osipov's words, the Soviet delegate, the Varna meeting had made it apparent that the Western sociological field was dominated by two theories: post-industrial society and modernization. While the socialist experts were familiarized with the first, being able to participate in the debates combatively, they lacked any knowledge about the second:

> That is why this theory's basic principles fueled the discussions of bourgeois sociologists in those groups. As experience shows, sometimes, we are not aware of different orientations of bourgeois sociology, in general. We know some theories incompletely […] and [only a very few Western] concrete field research. And then an objective difficulty arises. Without knowing these mid-level theories and [capitalist] empirical research, it is tough to evaluate them, to assess them. Thus, it happened that in some conference papers, [in] deliveries of our delegates, we made the theory of bourgeois sociological works that have been obsolete for 10-15 years, [which] have long been a thing of the past. (ANIC, fund ASSP - Sociologie, file 8/1971, p. 70-71).

Occurred in various intellectual contexts worldwide, such professional exchanges often led to the emergence of trans-national and trans-ideological networks to produce and circulate knowledge. Moreover, these new epistemic communities proved effective mediums for critical engagement with social research methodologies. They aggregated alternative scientific discourses about social change, which often eluded the nation-states' dominant ideologies. For the Romanian experts, these statements came in handy. Shortly after the Varna

gathering, their effort to set up collaborative projects beyond the Iron Curtain gained momentum. Somewhat more pragmatic than initially estimated, Romanian specialists sought to aggregate a type of expertise that could have contributed to a better comprehension of the recent shifts in industrial communities worldwide. Particular attention was paid to the housing problem and industrial ventures' territorialization (AONU Geneva, box 2161). The Romanian social scientists began to attend periodically international events and undertake research stays at the most representative world universities, on the one hand. On the other, the national authorities financed comprehensive translation programs of the scientific literature. However, the intellectual mobilization that followed should not be read as the Eastern European champ's engagement into a doctrinal war with the West, and even less as an expression of the confrontation of "grand theories" (ANIC, fund ASSP - Sociologie, file 7/1976). On the contrary, it tellingly fleshes out how the Romanian social scientists complied with the Ceausescu regime's general policy of opening to the West and gradually articulated a new professional agenda independent from the Soviet models.

The International Sociological Association and the UN played a significant part in this process. The two organizations provided a friendly institutional environment where experts jointly chiseled a new scientific language (ANIC, fund ASSP - Sociologie, file 7/1976).[3] For instance, several workshops organized in Washington, Geneva, Rome, Paris, or London brought together experts from both West and East to debate the interplay between city renewal and life quality improvement. Based on sophisticated analyzes of the social dynamics, experts made a case for new housing ownership regulations, stressing the importance of democratizing housing access. Another issue under consideration was the interplay between urban policies and population policies, labor-management, payment regulations, or policies toward vulnerable socio-professional categories such as young people, the elderly, women, and low-skilled staff. As one participant has put it, it was essential to see

> how such rates, female labor, participation rates, the number of working hours per week, work and leisure ethics are inter-related among themselves and, at the same time, linked with the spatial patterns of economics and leisure time activities. (AONU Geneva, box 2161)

[3] By the mid-1970s, there were numerous discussions about the establishment of Interconcept, a European data aggregation center that had to serve the needs of the UN in a first stage, and later of the entire scientific community.

Subsequently, in the second half of the 1970s and early 1980s, a series of meetings held in various European locations brought together Eastern and Western specialists to translate scientific vocabulary into a set of social regulation techniques. For example, the meeting of planning experts, held in Budapest in 1981, discussed several agendas, each based on the participant states' particular modernization priorities. Western countries made a case for considering the social aspects of human settlements (Scandinavian countries) or urban areas (the Netherlands). Socialist countries have expressed interest in "the system of settlements, including questions of national and regional infrastructure, second homes, and settlement development for industrial purposes" (AONU Geneva, box 2161).

As a result of these contacts, transnational cooperation has become more comfortable as the years went by. The European Center for Coordination of Research and Documentation in the Social Sciences, which operated in Vienna between 1962 and 1972, also played an essential part in this process. Open to all nationalities, the center provided the Romanians with a unique opportunity to get involved in several critical projects: assessments of urban development strategies, research on the human-environment, or the cost of urban growth in the industrial world (ANIC, Fond ASSP Sociologie, 6/1970 and 7/1970). Such actions aimed to produce a type of knowledge relevant for comparative analyses in the sociology of development, industrialization, and urbanization by encouraging experts to analyze "socio-economic factors of growth, industries location, or cost urban growth" (ANIC, fund ASSP Sociologie, file 7/1970, p. 114).[4]

By the mid-1970s, the United Nations officially launched several actions by which the international scientific community could have gained access to information about the East-European social sciences' practices. In 1975, ECOSOC surveyed the national organization of the bureaucratic apparatus responsible for urban planning. Several European countries, including Romania, have sent detailed descriptions of the relevant institutional structures. The reports provided definitive information on the bureaucratic mechanisms at the national, regional, and local levels, the management system, funding sources, and the legislative framework underlying their functioning. Around the same time, a group

[4] Or, in the words of Roman Moldovan, vice-president of the ASSP: "The Romanian researcher to be recommended is to deepen theoretical and methodological studies in the field of sociology of development, especially regarding the place and role of human resources in development, economic and social, the optimal conditions for the efficient training and capitalization of the labor force in accordance with the current and perspective requirements of the contemporary scientific-technical and social progress. He would carry out these studies in close correlation with the needs of the development and modernization of the industry." ANIC, fund ASSP - Sociologie, file 7/1970, p. 142.

of researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign proposed to the Ford Foundation a grant project that aimed to deliver a comparative analysis of the regional development strategies in capitalist (Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Italy) and a socialist (Romania) regimes. They aimed to aggregate data and then mobilized the European Economic Commission's financial and human resources to draw up long-term projects that would improve human settlements' quality of life worldwide (AONU Geneva, box 2058; AMAE, Problema 217/B CEPECA, file 3390/1973).

A complicated reality

In August 1968, when Nicolae Ceausescu announced to an enthusiastic crowd the Bucharest authorities' refusal to join Soviet troops in invading Czechoslovakia, Romania was perceived by the most international community as the rising star of the Socialist bloc. The first actions to assert Romania's autonomy from the Soviet Union were adopted as early as 1958 when socialist leaders formulated an economic development project based on intensive industrialization. Carried out against the USSR's approval, which had campaigned for the coordination of economic programs at the level of the socialist bloc and the development of the Romanian agrarian economy instead, the project aimed at expanding the infrastructure of heavy industry and intensifying urbanization. From a social point of view, the program has contributed to increasing most Romanians' living standards. From a political point of view, the authorities' decision had proved effective in exploiting the general anti-Soviet feeling of the population and converting it into a capital of unprecedented legitimacy. In this regard, by taking this path in 1968, the national leaders aimed to strengthen political and economic bridges with the West as a precondition for further scientific and cultural cooperation beyond the Iron Curtain. In this way, Romania would have secured its access to the latest technologies necessary for industrial development and improved living standard. However, there were also pragmatic arguments at stake. At the time, it became increasingly clear that due to recent years' political and economic global shifts, the Iron Curtain's permeability increased in many ways, which pressured the national decision-making factors to align the regime's redistribution agenda with growing consumer expectations (Cooper, 2010: 44-64; Ban, 2014; Granick, 1975; Hohmann, 1982).

By the late 1960s, the national leaders' main challenge was articulating a new country project without questioning the regime's socialist nature. The CC Plenary of the Romanian Communist Party in June 1968 openly addressed the

issue of affordable housing. In his concluding speech, Nicolae Ceaușescu made a case for reconsidering the housing policies to double the number of finished units in the next decade. More measures followed. After debating the issue during several meetings at the highest level of the state's leadership, Nicolae Ceausescu outlined the future development program's main directions in September 1969 during the 10th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party. Accordingly, the country's leader announced its intention to make massive investments in industrialization and urbanization. In doing so, Ceausescu did not back up his statement with any information that could have illuminated the audience about costs and long-term financial implications, nor did he draft a schedule for the measures' implementation. Instead, he argued that Romania was on the verge of becoming a "multilaterally developed socialist society," making it mandatory to take consistent measures towards successfully diminishing development disparities between rural and urban areas shortly. Meeting such goals meant expanding transport infrastructure, improving housing stock, and modernizing lifestyle (Ceaușescu, 1972).

In many ways, such an agenda was justified. Despite significant investments since the early 1950s, Romania had remained a predominantly underdeveloped economy, with more than 70% of the labor force employed in agriculture. Even so, the level of territorial modernization was uneven. Post-war growth was evident in those areas with a strong industrial tradition since the interwar period. Simultaneously, many rural populations continued to live in precarious conditions (Murgescu, 2010).

However, the Romanian authorities' immediate challenge was hardly about building new factories and modernizing existing urban infrastructures. Much more pressing was the need to comprehend industrialization's social transformations better and, implicitly, convert this type of knowledge into sustainable medium and long-term development projects. Research conducted by the Center for the Study of Youth Problems and the Laboratory of Urban Research of the University of Bucharest by the late 1960s had already unveiled numerous individualization instances within most industrial communities. Due to internal migration, lack of appropriate housing facilities, and increasing daily commuting rates in inappropriate conditions, many of the workforces faced severe difficulties in integrating themselves into the new working environments. According to the official statistics, workers tended to change their workplace periodically, sometimes moving from one locality to another; moreover, their unpredictable professional behavior severely impacted labor productivity and social cohesion (Bădina, 1969; Bădina, 1971; Bădina, 1973; Bădina, 1975). In this respect, it was becoming increasingly clear that there was an organic interdependence between

labor force management and the development of industrial, urban, and transport infrastructure. At the intersection of these plans, the multilaterally developed socialist society project implied foremost articulating a new spatial vision.

The administrative reform of 1968 was the first step in this direction (Stahl, 1969). As was the case with other legislative regulations, the initiative also had strong ideological connotations. The governmental act decided to abandon the administrative system implemented at the end of World War II after the Soviet model (a three-level hierarchical system consisting of regions, districts, and communes) and return to the interwar system consisting of smaller counties, municipalities, and communes. The reorganization aimed at streamlining the decision-making process between the center and the less developed territories; it also aimed at a rational organization of territorial functions through decentralization and local resources mobilization. In drawing up the new national map, decision-makers considered an older administrative tradition and the location of economic objectives and their social infrastructure, the expansion of the transport network, the area of influence of cities on metropolitan areas, or the state's role in this project.

However, a closer look at the main ideas framing the territorial reorganization not only traces numerous similarities with Cincinat Sfintescu's interwar ideas but places Romanian leaders' objectives in conversation with international debates on the concept of regional planning. Originally formulated in the Resolution of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations General Assembly in 1965, the term referred to cities' impact on the expansion and modernization of metropolitan areas of urban agglomerations. It served as a theoretical umbrella for the international expert community's current efforts to draw territorialization models sensitive to social dynamics worldwide (Ellman, 2014).

Systematization as a social project

Despite the decision-making factors' commitment to reconceptualize long-term national urban planning strategies, the early 1970s developments had caused much confusion amongst the Romanian sociologists. Their reservations were fueled by inherent difficulties in translating Western ideas into hands-on national public policies on the one hand, and, on the other, by their limited experience in setting up collaborative actions with experts from outside their profession.

Of course, there were numerous opportunities for expanding scientific cooperation beyond the Iron Curtain in domains like architecture, urban planning, sociology, or demography. Nevertheless, finding common ground at home so that local practitioners would join their efforts and elaborate complex development strategies proved to be a much more difficult task than one could have initially expected. This situation was the outcome of decades-long professional adaptations to central planning mechanisms. Constraint to adapt to all sorts of shortcomings caused by the limited access to resources and pressures from decision-making factors, the Romanian technocracy developed alternative paths to preserve its status and professional autonomy (Verdery, 1996). To this end, guild solidarities took many forms, sometimes leading to questionable responses to other professions' attempts to penetrate their domains of expertise. For instance, in an article published in the journal *Arhitectura RSR*, Gheorghe Chepeş argued that sociologists should not get involved in urban planning since they lacked any knowledge. Moreover, any responsibility should be left with architects and urban planners (Chepeş, 1971: 57).

In response to the current situation, the Romanian leaders tried to develop a knowledge infrastructure that could have facilitated inter- and transdisciplinary cooperation. The newly established Academy of Social and Political Sciences (ASSP) and the Center for Urban Research of the University of Bucharest were probably the first attempts. Designed to serve as a laboratory of social research in urban areas, the organizations aimed to fructify the advantages of the recent re-institutionalization of sociology and mobilize architects, urban planners, and social scientists to comprehend the current social trends better. However, despite good intentions, the process proved lengthy and complicated.

On 10 December 1971, the Academy of Social and Political Sciences initiative to organize in Iasi a debate on the urban sociological area's concept aimed to bring some welcome clarifications in this regard. Led by Henry Stahl, the Sociology Section president, the meeting was held under Miron Constantinescu's patronage. It brought face to face social scientists, urban planners, national and local decision-makers, and party leaders. While such gatherings have been organized many times before, what was exceptional about the Iasi meeting was its agenda. It revolved around two main issues: social scientists' professionalization and social research methodologies in urban areas. Moreover, unlike regular political debates on governmental regulations of urban growth, the Iasi meeting aimed mainly to increase the social sciences knowledge' visibility in the socialist state's developmental project.

In his opening remarks, Stahl abruptly stated that "library sociologists" – that is, those researchers who had invested much time in mastering the "general theories" of foreign social sciences without carrying out a consistent field investigation, were rather unhelpful to the socialist state's new agenda. However, Stahl

was far from rejecting any cooperation with Western experts. On the contrary, well connected to the international scientific community, he was perfectly aware of his colleagues' professional limitations (Rostas, 2000). Suggestive in this regard was his remark that "any foreigner who has [access to] a good library works better than we do" (ANIC, fund ASSP - Sociologie, file 20/1971, f. 47). The problem, in his view, was the inability of the local specialists to convey the massive amount of Western theoretical knowledge into valid models of interpretation of the Romanian realities and then to aggregate statistical series on demographic dynamics, labor market opportunities, housing stock, industrial prospects, or transport infrastructure into effective public policies (ANIC, fund ASSP - Sociologie, file 20/1971). Accordingly, it became essential to train professionals in "a spirit of deep intuition" of the social transformation, which would help experts make the most of the informational potential accessible through various professional channels and convert knowledge into national modernization strategies. Put merely, Stahl made a case for a return to empirical research, a view that echoed his life-long commitment to concrete field investigations. He also argued that local scientists consider research methods previously developed by Western experts when building several European urban databases so that Romanian outputs gain international relevance (ANIC, fund ASSP - Sociologie, file 21/1971).

Proof of his intellectual scope, the idea that local research may contribute to a broader social research agenda raised questions about the 1970s Romanian experience's exceptionality when the international experts' community considered territorial development issues. This principle was further developed during the Iasi meeting through a complicated analysis of the *sociological area* concept (Petrovici, 2017). First formulated during the research campaign on urbanization in the Slatina region, the term referred to

> … realities and territorial units, with specific economic and social characteristics, […] and to the interconnection between all these features and elements within an area, their interdependence, and interaction. (Constantinescu, 1971: 144).

At the time, researchers aimed to assess the relationship between "underdeveloped", "superiorly developed", "stagnant", or "expanding" urban areas. Despite encouraging results, the research campaign in Slatina had opened more questions than provided answers.

In Iasi, Stahl resumed the discussion on the concept. In his address, he problematized possible similitudes between Romanian and Western views. He stated that large cities began to influence the surrounding area due to the previous years' industrialization programs, delimiting various interconnections

between the urban core and its rural perimeter, the so-called hinterland. The new "territorial communities," which emerged at the crossing of labor, food, and raw materials supply networks, would have been characterized by their members' specific lifestyle.

One exciting point belonged to Alexandru Bărbat, professor of sociology at the University of Iași. He began by expressing his reservations about the opportunity of differentiating between urban and rural areas when new visions of the social were at stake. Based on Iasi's example, an old university center with a robust industrial infrastructure, he argued that the large urban cores' cultural and social influence usually was perceivable in a nearby rural area and even in an entire region. Moreover, new "feelings, states, systems or patterns of social life" (ANIC, fund ASSP Sociologie, file 20/1971, p. 14.) would emerge at a smaller or greater distance from the urban core. Instead of focusing on the urban nucleus, Bărbat suggested consistent modernizing rural projects, ensuring an improved daily experience compared to the "tiring urban" of the big industrial cities. Resumed in a text published in the first issue of the review *Viitorul social*, Bărbat's arguments were much more far-reaching than one might first think. More concretely, by paying particular attention to economic decentralization, rural industrialization, or the labor force's flexibilization Bărbat seemed much more concerned with what Rose tellingly defined as "the congruence between the needs of the worker and the needs of the industry." Such ideas were remarkably like the UN vocabulary. Moreover, the international organization

> recommended defining urban agglomeration and any other communal unit as […] a distinct and indivisible population group (called agglomeration, place of residence, center of population, group, etc.), whatever its size, having a recognized name or status and functioning as an integrated social entity. (ANIC, fund ASSP - Sociologie, file 16/1976, p. 29).

In Jiri Musil's terms, socialist urbanization evolved in two main directions, both articulated around the idea of central planning. The first was based on central place theory; it consisted of horizontal development of the localities' network and population's even access to services and social infrastructure. The second, built on polarization theory, proposed a concentration of financial allocations in designated urban nuclei strategically located in areas critical for the national development project (Musil, 1980: 14). In absolute terms, the urbanization processes in Romania followed the lead of the second strategy. However, there was a short interlude in the first half of the 1970s when elements specific to the first strategy surfaced in the urban planning solutions. Accordingly, as this article shows, this shift occurred due to an emerging field of social research

expertise that fructified the global production and circulation of knowledge and was very much indebted to the growing visibility of social scientists in the domestic decision-making processes on urban growth strategies. Such developments are best visible in the Academy of Social and Political Sciences activity in the field of urban planning. Minutes of various meetings held with the broad participation of the decision-making factors addressed urban life and city renewal issues and aimed to sketch feasible strategies of growth. Furthermore, minutes of the Architects Union's early 1970s meetings flesh out bemusement when the political decision-making factors requested hands-on solutions on the central issues at stake. However, this joint involvement of the social scientists and urban planners played a central part in sketching the first version of the national systematization plan.

In 1972, the National Systematization Plan's first draft was adopted at the National Conference of the Romanian Communist Party. Building on the Iasi debate's conclusions, the program aimed to develop the national network of localities, foster trans-regional coordination between industrial and social objectives, organize regional leisure areas, and territorialize economic units based on environmental principles. One of this legislative package's main features was its focus on stimulating labor mobility from the primary to the secondary and tertiary sectors. Such shifts, however, would occur without stimulating rural-urban migration and population concentration in large urban agglomerations. From a theoretical standpoint, the concept of systematization referred to the action of "planning social development" and stimulating "the regenerative function of the countryside." A series of articles later published in the journal *Arhitectura RSR* detailed the basic principles. Scientifically based, the 1972 territorial systematization program described cities as flexible spatial units capable of responding to present and future social needs. Rural areas, in turn, were to polarize economic and social activities independently of large urban centers. The connection between the various human conglomerates was to be ensured by modernizing the communications network and implementing a coherent strategy to stimulate people and goods' movement.

Under the new legislative conditions, significant changes occurred in the specialist's training as well. Since higher education social sciences programs were still in their infancy, training was conducted on alternative channels. Romanian experts' access to Western knowledge was instrumented through the Center for Training the Industrial Managers (CEPECA). Heavily financed by the UN and benefitting from the experience of a cohort of Western, mostly British, experts, CEPECA offered courses in critical areas such as spatial planning, cybernetics, statistical modeling, or forecasting. Beginning with 1973, specialists

involved in urban planning undertook regular training sessions at CEPECA, the center providing an excellent framework for converting transnational knowledge into national policy-making programs (ANIC, fond ASSP Sociologie, file 21/1971, p. 29). Equally important, the UN Regional Economic Commission provided training programs for Eastern European experts. Intra-regional knowledge exchanges between countries facing similar problems was thought to build bridges between national and international epistemic communities (AONU Geneva, box 2158).

These initiatives have been fruitful. Between 1972 and the early 1980s, the Romanian experts regularly participated in international meetings on territorial planning issues. For instance, Miron Constantinescu attended several ISA meetings. There he presented in detail the concept of sociological area and the presumptive part played by social scientists in carrying out these goals. At his suggestion, AIS established an International Committee on Researching the Sociological Areas. Hence Hill's interest in sociologists' activism in the context of the 1975 Eighth World Congress of Sociology.

The transnational professional dialogue's intensification should have forced national authorities to adopt reforms and change governance principles. In Harvey's words,

> the tension between the inflexibility imposed by state regulations and the smooth movement of capital flows ... could be modified by how the state itself allows itself to be disciplined by internal forces and external conditions such as the world economy, exchange rates, capital movement, migration, etc. (Harvey, 1991: 109)

In Romania's case, the events of the 1970s showed that the state was unwilling to give up the regulation of planning as an eminently domestic policy. For a while, urban planning has acted as a vector of mediation between the inflexibility of the decision-making apparatus and the centrifugal forces of sociologists concerned with adjusting the practice of medium- and long-term planning so that national plans recognize and respond effectively to specific global social changes. However, this reality was far from linear, somewhat fragmented, and influenced by what the elites found necessary to legitimize them.

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DEPOLITICIZING THE FIRM: REVISITING EMPLOYABILITY AS A STRATEGY AND A NARRATIVE FOR HIGH-SKILLED AND SKILLED WORKERS IN AN EASTERN EUROPEAN CITY

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ABSTRACT. Our main aim is to unpack the notion of employability as a narrative and as a strategy by contextualising it in an Eastern European setting and by scrutinizing how it is defined and experienced by two different categories of employees: high-skilled and skilled workers. We look at the case of Cluj, a mid-size Romanian town fast developing into an IT hub and a centre of reindustrialization. Drawing on qualitative interviews with employees in the IT and HR sectors, and in medium-sized factories, we argue that personal development and gaining expertise are a successful employability strategy for the high-skilled, but make the skilled workers more vulnerable and at risk of becoming redundant. We argue that the employability discourse draws new lines of divisions between employees. By shifting the lens away from the organization and towards the individual worker's responsibility, the employability discourse depoliticizes the relationship between the employee and the employer.

Key words: employability, narratives of work, personal development, class divisions

Introduction[3]

The employability discourse is a dominant trope that is mobilized at various levels of the labour market from policy, through employers and managers, to the workers themselves. It promises a new type of job security which is tied to being employable in various companies and positions based on the skills

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and expertise that workers build. It is tightly connected to the concept of building one's own career through a series of successive positions. In this paper we aim to unpack the notion of employability by contextualizing it in an Eastern European setting and by scrutinizing how it is defined and experienced by different categories of employees. We have chosen to look specifically at high-skilled workers in the field of IT and HR and at skilled workers in the manufacturing industry. We aim to trace the differences in the employability discourse in these two categories of workers and the consequences for their trajectories and relations with the organization.

We look at the case of Cluj, a mid-size, fast developing Romanian town which has turned into one of the major IT hubs of the county, while also witnessing a wave of reindustrialization in its metropolitan area. We chose to explore how employability is perceived and constructed from the point of view of the employee in two sectors where there is a growing demand for labour - the IT industry and the small production companies. The empirical analysis is based on a series of qualitative interviews with employees conducted in two periods – in 2013 and in 2018-2019. We have focused on various positions in the IT sector – developers and coders, business analysts, and HR recruiters – that we call the 'high-skilled' workers. The other category are technicians of machines in small industrial firms that we call the 'skilled workers'.

We focus more specifically on the relationship between the employee and the firm as a site where employability is mobilized in a series of modes. We argue that the firm has increasingly lost its role as providing a stable working position and the place to develop one's professional trajectory. However, it is framed more and more as offering the setting for individual employees to enhance their own individual employability. The firm becomes part of a professional field in which employees are responsible for their own professional development by gaining skills, experience and establishing networks. The firm is the context in which one's career unfolds, but the employee is the engineer of her career. Being and remaining employable is an individual strategy. We argue that the employability discourse depoliticizes the relationship between the employee and the employer and shifts the lens towards the individual responsibility for success or failure of the worker herself.

While for some categories of workers this seems like a successful strategy, for others it becomes a race to the bottom. By drawing on empirical material on high-skilled and skilled workers in the city of Cluj, we demonstrate how the employability discourse draws new lines of divisions between employees. While for the high-skilled workers in the IT and HR field shifting between companies and positions and thus constantly gaining new skills builds towards their employability, for the skilled workers in the industry experience and skills

make them redundant and practically less employable. By questioning the very assumption that employability is an individual strategy and a one-to-one relationship between employer and employee, we aim to unpack the classless imaginary of the employability discourse and assess the political consequences for the workers.

The employability discourse and its effects

Despite diminishing levels of European aggregate demand for jobs after 2008 (Gros 2019; Picketty *et al.* 2018) and "transitional unemployment" before 2008 (Bell and Mickiewicz 2013) many Central and East European (CEE) cities were able to reposition themselves in the global urban hierarchy (Raźniak, Dorocki, and Winiarczyk-Raźniak 2018; Derudder and Taylor 2016). The expansion of globalization after the 2008 Financial Crisis was enabled by the relocation of corporations' secondary processes to new areas specialized in operations (Oshri *et al.* 2015; Peck 2018). Most of the outsourcing processes are Business Process Outsourcing and Information Technology Outsourcing (Oshri *et al.* 2015). In Europe, most of the outsourcing is in CEE (Peck 2018). The recent round of outsourcing is driven by labour arbitrage and involves skilled and highly qualified labour force (Peck 2018). Along with the repetitive IT activities transferred to the region, there is also a rise in R&D activities. In CEE the "portfolio worker" was welcome as a positive development as the social structure of the city accommodates an expansion of the professional positions (Eurobarometer 2016) at the expense of the blue collar workers relocated in the suburbs and surrounding towns (Nemeškal, Ouředníček, and Pospíšilová 2020; Slaev *et al.* 2018) However, for those in the new job the firm became unreliable in providing a secure position (Bell and Mickiewicz 2013). Instead, the firm came to offer the possibility of enhancing one's employability (Chertkovskaya *et al.* 2013). Employability promises the freedom to choose between successive positions and transform them into learning experience part of a career (deBruin and Dupuis 2008; Iellatchitch, Mayrhofer, and Meyer 2003).

The employability discourse and the idea of building a career-trajectory across firms is rooted in the expansion of the service sector and the changing social stratification of urban CEE (Słomczyński *et al*. 2016). These transformations take place not only in big cities (Sýkora and Bouzarovski, 2012), but also in second-tier cities in the region (Evans, 2015). Such a city is Cluj, a second rank city in Romania with a population of 325 000. The city rescaled itself becoming an important player, successfully repositioning in the financial sector, production services and intensive-knowledge services (Gál, 2014; Petrovici and

Simionca, 2011). The new hero in the public discourse became the creative, self-developing, self-improving, cheap and disciplined subject (Mihály, 2015; Petrovici, 2012; Simionca, 2016; Zincă, 2011). Between 2008 and 2018 the jobs in the service sector grew with 30%, while the numbers of industrial workers decreased with almost 10% in the city, but remained the same in the metropolitan area.

In CEE criticism old Fordist loyalties and the complex bureaucracies of the factories is played out as a critique of "communism" (Ban, 2014; Buden, 2010; Simionca, 2012). The employability agenda has at its centre a particular work ethic sustained by the self-government techniques of the flexible, skilled, and enterprising subject (Chertkovskaya et al., 2013). This work ethic promises a very different subject from the communist or Fordist subject. These discursive formations are not exceptional for Eastern Europe. Much of the current work arrangements in core capitalist countries can be linked exactly to the ability to capture employees' criticism and discontent with the arrangements of the bureaucratic organization (Burawoy, 1985; Sennett, 1998; Bloom, 2013). The strive towards independences and freedom from the heavy bureaucratic machine has been adapted to produce an entrepreneuring self in the confines of the capitalist firm (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005).

Critical scholars have pointed that employability prompts a new dependence to the manager's figure (Cremin, 2010). Arguably employability produces an idealized identification with the manager's desires, found in the hope that the employee's vulnerability in the organization may be overcome by assembling the various managerial needs and job openings into a career (Bloom, 2013). Inside this narrative the burden of organizational flexibility is put on the shoulders of the employee encouraged to improve herself and to find new opportunities, once the organizational milieu is no longer acceptable (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008). Organizational claim making is hindered by continuous individualization and depolitization of the work relations (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2013; Sharone, 2007; Garsten and Jacobsson, 2004). The employee is decoupled from any internal control, except the informal relations developed with supervisors and colleagues, and reoriented towards the career field (Gunz and Peiperl 2007; Iellatchitch *et al.* 2003).

Such critical appraises open new ways to unpack the complex relation in which the employees are made part of and asked to contribute to a firm. Employability does not suspend the conflict-ridden character of the social divisions of work that are in place both in the industrial and post-industrial arrangements. But much of the struggles between labour and capital are deflected as tensions between the working classes, understood as fluid groups formed in the division of labour (Kasmir and Carbonella, 2014). The tension between high-skilled workers and unskilled workers on the shop floor are well documented

(Pittaway, 2007; Burawoy, 1985; Petrovici, 2011), as are the alliances that are formed between the different workers factions against the employer (Ost, 2002; Kalb, 1997). Employability increasingly transfers the burden of being employed on the working subject, on the supply side, rather than on a complex interaction between the labour market, the economic conditions, the social reproduction etc. (McQuaide and Lindsay 2005). Consequently, unemployment, precarious working conditions, working routine, and job estrangement are explained as an individual malaise, the result of a not good enough self-entrepreneurship. The subjects are encouraged to evaluate and position themselves in relation to other workers, but not to challenge the working condition and the employer. Structural transformations in the labour market are transformed in individual employability problems (Peck and Theodore, 2000).

In what follows we explore how the employability discourse reflects class divisions between the two categories of workers. We argue that for the high-skilled the employability discourse leads to a successful career trajectory, while for the skilled workers becoming more skilled is a road towards becoming less employable. By drawing on our empirical material on high-skilled and on skilled workers in the city of Cluj, we demonstrate how the employability discourse draws new lines of divisions between employees. For the high-skilled workers in the IT and HR field shifting between companies and positions allows them to gain new skills, and subsequently raise their employability. For the skilled workers in the industrial sector growing experience and skills on the contrary, makes them less desirable as workers and places them in a precarious position. By questioning the very assumption that employability is an individual strategy and a one-to-one relationship between employer and employee, we aim to unpack the classless imaginary of the employability discourse and assess the political consequences for the workers.

We develop this argument in three parts. We first describe our methodological approach, the professional fields and the main concepts. Second, we focus on how our respondents describe and make sense of the concepts of skill and expertise. We look at the narratives of personal development, self-improvement, and self-education as blocks in the employability narrative. We analyse the different paths and strategies used by the two categories of workers and how they evaluate their success in becoming employable. Finally, we show how employability as a discourse is an individualizing strategy that focuses on the personal qualities of the worker taking away the responsibility from the firm. We show how in this context employability is instrumental in the process of depolitization of labour relations between the employee and the firm and in the creation of a classless imaginary.

Methodology and main concepts

The empirical material was gathered through qualitative interviews with two categories of actors: high-skilled workers in the IT and HR sectors, and skilled workers in industrial settings. The research took part in two stages: the first in late 2013 – early 2014 when we conducted 46 semi-structured interviews, and the second in 2019 when we conducted additional 23 interviews and analysed the most recent statistical data on the development of Cluj and its metropolitan area.

The empirical material was conducted through semi-structured interviews that we conducted with the help of six research assistants. We used our personal connections and the snowball effect. Over the two research stages out of the total of 69 interviews 43 are with high-skilled workers. The median age of highly skilled workers is 28, the gender ratio is 71% men to 29 % women. The average age of schooling is 13 (i.e. high-school and two years of BA level university education). The types of positions they occupied are junior developer, senior developer, tester, team leader, project manager, business developer, IT sales, HR specialist, HR manager.

We have conducted 25 interviews with skilled workers. The positions they held were: warehouse supervisor, storekeeper, technical shift supervisor, electrician, plumber, textile machine operator. Their average years of schooling is 12 (i.e. high school education). Their average age is 48. Clearly there is an age difference in the samples. This is not by accident. The IT and HR sectors are fast developing, dynamic, constantly growing fields in Cluj attracting a big part of the recent university graduates directly into the labour market. At the same time, the small-scale manufacturing companies have mainly low-skilled workers in their labour force with a small number of skilled workers who are generally older. Our sample reflects this reality of age disparity in the different sectors. And it has further implications for the way those employees conceptualize and experience the narrative of employability.

Statistical data was used to assess the transformations in the IT sector in Cluj and the metropolitan area in terms of re-industrialization processes over the last 10 years. This allowed us to also position Cluj as a specific type of town. The professional fields are chosen in light of these developments of Cluj and its metropolitan area over the last decade. Cluj is one of the fast-growing IT hubs in Romania with a constant growing number of companies and employees. The Information technology sector (IT) and Human resources (HR) are two loosely constructed professional fields. The IT sector is the largest in the city with more

than 7500 employees or 7% of the total workforce[4].It is strongly driven by the global fluxes of capital, most of the projects are outsourced by multinational companies. Public university courses at all levels (BA, MA, PHD) offer specialization in IT and hardware development. Private companies also offer more specialized courses. The IT boom and the reindustrialization processes contributed to a growing HR professional field.[5] Public universities in Cluj now offer HR specialization tracks at BA and MA level in addition to a multitude of trainings, courses, and internships, offered by private companies. While in the early employees in IT and H, did not have a particular educational profile or even a tertiary degree, now specialized higher education profiles are growing in importance alongside specialized internships, trainings and workshops (Simionca and Al Ariss, 2011).

Most of the new industrial jobs are in the metropolitan area, while the IT jobs are in the city centre. BOSCH opened a factory for 3,000 workers in a nearby village and an R&D Center for 700 people in the city. Similarly, Tenaris has a factory in a nearby smaller town, while their regional and global shared service center is in Cluj. In 2018 in Cluj and its metropolitan area there were 43675 jobs in manufacturing, representing 18% of the total number of employees in the area.

The two categories we delineate here – high-skilled and skilled workers – are analytical constructs that describe different types of positions and experiences in the grid of professions and the specifics of the labour market in Eastern Europe. We acknowledge that 'skill' is a constructed and flexible concept and the categorization of workers along the spectrum of skill is a dynamic process. For the sake of clarity, we have chosen to call high-skilled workers those of our interviewees who work in the IT sector and in HR, most of them with higher education degrees. By skilled workers we mean different categories of technicians and machine operators engaged in the manufacturing sector. The skilled workers are people with tertiary education, working in small manufacturing companies as operators of machines. The differences between the two categories of workers are not only based on how their skills are categorized, but also on the sectors, the dynamic of labour relations and the type of production in

[4] At the 2011 census there were 6,441 employees in the IT field at all organizational levels, from managers to data operators, representing 13.25% from the total service employees in Cluj city. In 2018 there were 22.102 employees working in IT, that is 20% of the total employees in the service sector and 11% of the total number of employees in the city of Cluj.

[5] At the 2011 census there were 1282 employees in the HR field at all organizational levels, representing 2.64% from the total number service employees in Cluj city. The number of employees in HR did not grew per se in the last years, since the profession changed substantively, became part of the growing field of the Business Support Services that amassed by 2018 11,177 employees.

which they are engaged. In what follows we aim to show how these constructed differences are rooted in the different sectors and in the value that is attached to these sectors and types of jobs available.

Skills, expertise, and personal development: becoming more employable or falling into redundancy

Historically, an unintended effect of planned economies was that the whole system became dependent on the collaboration and flexibility of direct producers (Pittaway, 2007; Petrovici, 2011). As a reaction to the dependence on the willingness of workers to informally mobilize for fast and concentrated production stints, the socialist management tried to hold a grip on the production processes by inventing continuous new rules and hierarchies (Pasti, 1997). The decision-making process was very long, precisely because there was a whole layer of highly skilled workers simultaneously in charge and responsibilities were unclear. In the first post-socialist decade much of the criticism voiced by the socialist highly skilled workers went into producing a counter-organizational discourse against the socialist factory's impossibility of real control, lack of bureaucratic creativity, and rigidity.

In Cluj, most of the contemporary large firms emerge in the second part of the 1990s and were run by these young high-skilled workers (Petrovici and Simionca, 2011). The language of flexibility and creativity became a tool to refashion the new organizational milieu (Zincă, 2011; Simionca, 2012). Most of the business literature and business contacts encouraged reframing this genuine criticism into neoliberal parlance. Since the new local business scene was just emerging, the socialist highly skilled workers had the chance to put critical concepts to test, while reinventing themselves and the business milieu. By the early 2000s the trope of creativity, venture and self-development became the lens through which this social group saw the economy and the world. However, for the new generation of high-skilled workers entering the labour market, the discourse was already of a naturalized flexible subject (Zincă, 2011). And by extension, an anti-communist discourse framed their criticism of the planned, large-scale industrial Taylorism (Simionca, 2012). "Capitalism" is often read, with the active help of public intellectuals, as a political-ethical project that aims not only to politically design markets, but also to enact a moral transformation: to get rid of the old communist habits and practices.

In the next two subsections we show how the employability narrative and the strategies to secure it is experienced and conceptualized by the two categories of workers. Developing new skills and expertise in a certain field is

interpreted differently by the two categories. For the high-skilled, the new skills are part of a chain that forms their professional development. Acquiring skills in different spheres, on different positions, is part of a quest towards a successful career. New positions bring new skills – technical, administrative, managerial, or interpersonal (soft skills). Thus, changing positions is part of building a career. For the skilled workers, on the other hand, developing better skills as such often work in the opposite direction making them more expensive for the employer, with higher requirements. Experience, paradoxically, is a hindrance and in some cases leads to redundancy and being exchanged with a less experienced worker. Careers among the skilled workers are rather flat and the main aim is to keep one's job, rather than develop or grow in the hierarchy. In what follows we develop these two lines of interpreting the concepts of skill, professional development, and career trajectories in the context of the structural differences of the two sectors.

The high-skilled: professional fields and personal development in the quest to employability

The high-skilled workers' narratives echo the discourse where creativity, self-development and self-improvement are at the centre of being a good employee and an accomplished modern subject. The two major themes in our interviews are the quest for personal development and the process of discovering and constituting a professional field. The quest constitutes of acquiring new skills, improving the ones that one already has, but also moving between different positions. This results in a professional trajectory that one might call a successful career. The main responsibility is of the individual and her efforts to construct a professional self through her personal efforts and choices.

The other main theme is establishing expertise in a professional field. The expertise is built on improving and developing skills and on the variety of positions held. The professional field is key for unfolding one's expertise. It develops in a field that is often considered as constructed and dynamic. Some professional fields already exist like coding, business intelligence or machine learning expert, but have been further developed to fit the needs of the concrete market niche by the employees themselves. Contributing towards establishing a field or a subfield is considered a sign of being a good professional. Changing positions within the same company or expanding the tasks within a position contributes to establishing new frontiers of a professional field or laying the ground for field partitioning (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2019). In this sense, there is a dynamic relation between the individual career of an employee and

the professional field. Employability for the high-skilled means both building a good resume by improving and multiplying one's skills, and positioning oneself as an expert in a particular professional field. Those two are part of the quest for improvement and development that ultimately make one more employable.

There is a complex dynamic between the individual efforts that each employee is supposed to make into their own professional development and the role of the firm. The firm plays a major role in this quest, as an enabling milieu for professional development and for identifying and constructing the professional field. However, the firm can also pose barriers on the personal development, experience acquisition and the sense of dignity that is needed to an enabling environment conducive to self-improvement. The firms are evaluated and classified according to their capacity to facilitate or hinder one's development.

Practical knowledge and skills are assembled into new positions that could grow into professional fields or subfields. Fields are described by employees as flexible and with blurred boundaries. The head of the HR in an IT company with 700 employees recollects that initially she was working in business development. Meanwhile, she also started working with employees directing them into career paths inside the company. She combined her knowledge of the business side of the company with her HR background to develop a position of career manager (or lead in other companies) who creates and directs career tracks, invents incentives, and sets up teams for specific jobs. The HR development unit became real when professionals start practicing these activities and naming them with a particular label. This field is confirmed through similar positions in different firms. What is more, the field is actively produced by the efforts of the individual workers to discover a meaningful and inspiring sphere of activities by moving between companies. The perfect professional field to be active in is described by our respondents as an area of expertise wide enough to be recognized as legitimate by a multitude of firms, yet specific enough to be still rare on the labour market. Firms alone cannot provide the needed expertise for establishing and legitimizing a professional field. As one respondent working in HR says:

> HR is a new domain here in Romania and the company where I worked was a bit clueless on what tasks to give to the HR team, except hiring. But there are meetings with other people working in HR, recently there are more and more people who actually graduated from this degree, there are job-fairs, and conferences. So, then you mix with other colleagues, learn new things. Our team is now doing many activities, because of this constant exchange of experience. (I., 32, HR)

In the field of HR the parallel knowledge networks that include universities, academic research teams, training organizations that provide certification are particularly important for establishing the professional field and its subfields in Cluj. In addition, there are state institutions (Work Inspectorate, Workforce County Agency) that offer qualifications, standards and supervise the labour laws application. The corporate responsibility programs and volunteering projects also offer HR practitioner spaces to exercise new ways of holding together a team through motivational strategies. All these are expanding and deepening the expertise of a (sub)field and sustain its reality outside of the concrete firm.

The term "experience" codes the ability to navigate expertise in the networks of firms. Experience is the basic measuring unit that our respondents used to describe advancing in their careers. Future jobs, better pay, growing in the hierarchy depend on having experience. Experience, ideally, does not limit the worker to one particular firm. Experience in a field is what makes one employable in different firms and at different positions. Our respondents explained that building up experience is primarily an individual strategy. It is the desire, efforts and determination of the worker to keep developing professionally by acquiring new skills.

Even when the firm is involved in this narrative of building experience, our respondents addressed it in a non-organizational way. The IT companies often have a position of a 'lead' named differently in the different companies, who mentors the employees through their trajectory, discussing with them the type of projects that they are willing to take. The career of a developer, for example, is constructed based on the interests and desires, but also the personal skills of an employee that are discussed together with the 'lead'. While the company provides this position, it is concentrated on the specific ambitions of each employee.

Second, there is the personal responsibility for acquiring experience, in spite of any organizational drawbacks. As an IT employee jokingly puts it, when talking of scarcity of training programs, the firms still offers someone the possibility to become a "google engineer". That is, when one is assigned a new task that can only be solved through individual research in search engines. The disadvantage of not providing institutional training is reinterpreted as an advantage for the employee who becomes indispensable by self-training. Similarly, in the HR field, the individual efforts that go beyond what is required by the position, are considered investing simultaneously in one own's professional development and at the same time in the establishing of the firm (see more on knowledge appropriation and resistance in Kamoche 2011). One of our respondents, a mid-level HR Specialist with six years of experience in recruiting

explained how she invested in her own professional development, beyond what was required by her firm, and in that way became a more valuable asset for the firm:

> I did human resources courses at individual psychology offices, there I did the recruiting, job analysis, selection, evaluation, training, coaching and so on. I have also been involved in the research at the Faculty [of Psychology] and I have been involved in EU funded projects, especially on corporate social responsibility… I got involved in all kinds of trainings, courses ... I went to a lot of workshops. Now, I want to attend as many human resource conferences as I can, since it is very important to expand your social network because you work with both clients and state agencies You work a lot with the labour code, at least from my position, and it is very important to know, to ask, to receive answers. (F, 25, HR Specialist, IT firm)

To sum up, employability as a discourse among the high-skilled is oriented towards personal and professional development. It includes becoming an expert, by building up experience through acquiring new and various skills. An employee becomes more employable if the experience and expertise are directed towards constructing a professional field in which one is an indispensable expert able to navigate between various firms. This is an individual enterprise, even though the firm is expected to provide an enabling environment.

Experience and skills as barriers to employability: the skilled workers

For those with tertiary education (above high-school) there is evidence in the literature that can certify the global character of the personal development narrative (Valenzuela, 2013; Fejes, 2010). But this narrative is also increasingly documented among those with secondary education. A new wave of studies have shown that various programs of enhancing the employability of long term unemployed (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2013), socially marginalized (Simionca, 2013), or people with disabilities (Elraz, 2013), measure success in terms of the capacity of the trainee to adopt the discourse of self-improvement. A major part of the structural funds available at EU level are targeting explicitly the enhancement of human capital through instruments of raising the quality of human resources across national states. Through these programs (e.g. European Social Fund, Operational Programme for Human Resources Development, European Globalisation Adjustment Fund) a new generation of projects for training the labour force have emerged also in Romania, devised explicitly to promote self-enterprising selves, self-development and self-betterment of the

employees (Pavel, 2011; Simionca, 2013). The firms themselves are accessing directly these programs and are providing for their employees a variety of media and trainings that put forward narratives of the enterprising worker (Zincă, 2011).

For our respondents, the theme of employability is highly ambivalent. On one hand, the themes of the importance of formal-education, self-education and personal development were also key issues raised by the skilled workers engaged in manual jobs as technicians and operators of machines. As was the case with the high-skilled workers, the manual workers are also invited to use these narratives through the practices of CV writing, self-presentation during the job interviews, or for organizational claims making. However, in most of the cases, these points came up in an opposition to the reality of their working lives. Our respondents described this employability narrative as empty efforts on a policy level (the Ministry of Employment, the Labour bureaus etc.), rather than an actual successful strategy for remaining employed or finding a new job. Their practice showed that skill, experience and expertise do not necessarily make the skilled workers more employable. On the contrary, many of our respondents reported that they had fewer chances of keeping a job or getting a new one if they were in the category of experienced middle-age workers.

There are four ways in which their claims based on qualification, skills and experience have been blocked by the employer. First, skilled workers with experience and a wider set of skills were often replaced by younger inexperienced workers, looking for an entry position. In this sense, skill is not valued and does not bring job security or make a skilled worker easily employable at a different company. On the contrary, the firms are actively engaged in undermining such a fantasy through arbitrarily dismissals, reducing the numbers of the high-earners among the skilled workers, and understaffing while constantly threatening with the available reserve army of workers.

The second employer's strategy is preferring employees looking for extra income: pensioners or commuters with a rural household and subsistence farming. These workers are usually cheaper than the experienced skilled workers. We illustrate this with the excerpt from the interview with a skilled worker, currently holding a supervising position in a high-tech logistic company in Cluj. He explained how he was fired from his previous manufacturing job and replaced by younger unskilled workers and pensioners.

> You send your CV and they see that you are in your 40s, and they employ someone in their 20s. "This one is an old worker, for sure he'll have pretensions for higher salary. A junior does not talk back". Instead of taking a good craftsman, who is retiring in 4-5 years, employers prefer younger and cheaper employees, who know nothing. They employ them and

> qualify them for 2-3 years, but pay them cheap. The boss where I worked had very good craftsmen who knew all the products. He closed the factory [in Cluj], dismissed everyone and opened a factory in Bucharest. He hired pensioners who had nothing to do with carpentry. And he took also some youngsters. He preferred to qualify them, even though his products already had a standard. (B, 40, warehouseman).

A third strategy to limit the number of skilled workers is through technological improvements. The skilled manual operator is made redundant by technological upgrades and sometimes replaced by unskilled operators. Therefore, there is always the spectre of being unemployed, regardless of the skills, experience and expertise that one might have. In the case of the manual workers, qualification does not add up in a transferable skill that can be relocated to another job, as in the case of the highly skilled workers. The skills one learns in operating a particular machine, in a specific industry, is most of the times limited to that specific company.

Throughout the twentieth century the mechanical automation economically devaluated the skillsets and practical knowledge of the trained workers, parallel with the valuation of the new skills of white collar workers and engineers (Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1985; Vallor, 2014). The narratives of our respondents can be framed within this greater trend. Yet, what is different is the way work is embedded in the discourse of self-improvement. The promise of employability is packed for the skilled workers as a promise for a career between firms for the few selected: for the strongly disciplined, accepting lower wages, and skilled enough to tailor customized products. A skilled worker who works in a paper mill explained how the technological upgrading of the company lead to several waves of dismissals. He kept his job by switching to providing handmade customized services.

> And they brought new tools. What we were doing manually now is done with automatic machines... the machine took most of our work. We [the employees] do now only personalized envelopes, for small orders. If there are orders, there is work; if there is no demand, there is no work. Slowly they started laying off people. There were three waves, or so. People were asking “why me, why not the other? Why exactly me?” Yeah… so there is this norm, it is specified in the contract that if you do not accomplish the norm.... You are out if you are on red.... “Who should I kick out?” Well, they kicked out those who were on red repeatedly. You can’t lay off the hard-working ones. (B, 50, paper mill worker, secondary education)

In this quote we also see the fourth strategy of employers to undermine qualifications based claims – emphasis on transforming self-discipline into a skill. A move that is also deeply gendered. Most of the women among the skilled workers we interviewed report that they can find work easier than men. That is not surprising, given that some key routine manual labour markets are feminized (manufacturing in multinationals, hospitality, restaurants and coffee shops, retailing, the health system, education). An illustration of this point, is an interview with a family where both spouses, in their forties, where employed in the same firm. He was made redundant, while she kept her job. During the interview she talked with pride about her ease to work with anybody, her capacity to be part of any collective, and the fact that she had not lost any job until then. A major source of dignity comes from her diligence and willingness to work under any condition. She noticed that while for her is very easy to find new jobs, for her husband it is a toil finding work. She attributed her ability in keeping jobs exactly to her industriousness. Her husband was unemployed. To explain his situation, he mobilized the argument of the undesirability of more experienced male workers as 'trouble makers', who always negotiate and question labour conditions. Women or inexperienced younger men are preferred, because they work hard and ask no questions, he said. This type of reading of the labour market by the subjects themselves can be easily seen as a way to problematize, through the lens of gender roles, that discipline is preferred to skills in the manual sectors. Industriousness and willingness to accept any conditions to keep a job are actually recurrent themes that appear in the interviews with skilled workers, regardless of their gender.

Therefore, the ambivalence of the skilled workers with regard to the theme of professionalization and acquiring abilities is linked to the particular way in which they are embedded in the firms, offering such jobs. Employability in this case means becoming more willing to accept contexts of discipline, overtime, small wages, and no transferable skillsets. As other authors have observed, contemporary deskilling is not anymore a pressure on the work content through routinization by means of automation, in the classical sense of (Braverman, 1974). It is rather linked to the fact that jobs lost through the introduction of information and communication technologies are putting pressure on the not yet dismissed employees to comply (Baccini and Cioni, 2010). Second, acquiring skills are decreasingly imagined by the workers themselves as resource for long time employment in a firm or a resource that enhances employability between firms (Vallor, 2014), given the potential threat of relocating production-related occupations. The way this is narrativized by the Cluj skilled interviewees is through the theme of the "willing employee". Industriousness and self-discipline become skills.

Employability and the depolitization of the employee-firm relationship

While firms are evaluated and held accountable for providing an adequate environment for personal development, our respondents proposed a more complex narrative about the barriers to personal development. The high-skilled employees in the IT sector emphasized the organizational structure: the hierarchical character of decision making, the lack of information sharing of managerial strategies, the incomprehensive character of introducing rules and regulations, little control over the terms of the contracts signed with the clients, little control over the personal retention policies, the burden to train the new colleagues without any reduction of the current tasks, over-burdening with responsibilities if competences are shown. Interestingly, all these points are rarely labelled as critique towards the firm itself. In most of the interviews, these critiques surfaced while discussing the personal character of the colleagues and supervisors or about the organizational skills of managers and owners.

The skilled workers have a different take on the structural problems. In their narratives, it is not about the particular company, but about the systemic problem of socialism versus capitalism. Communism is described as a system of equality and fairness, where all workers benefitted from the industrialization and development. "*There is no more that middle layer, now there are either poor or wealthy. Before [in communist times] there were all…in the middle. There is no middle class anymore"* (M, 40, skilled worker, secondary education). This type of narrative is hardly specific to Cluj. The workers in core capitalist countries are also nostalgic for the security offered by the Fordist arrangements. But what is specific here is that the old factory security is equated with socialism, and the new flexible contracts with their precariousness are equated with capitalism. The interviewees superimpose on the socialist factory the fond memories of solidarity and steady jobs, and consider the contemporary capitalist reality as harsh uncaring environment. What we see here is a clear class and generational divide between the high-skilled and the skilled workers that offer different interpretations of their working lives.

Yet, for both categories the firm itself is not the main locus of responsibility. The individual worker carries the main responsibility for work success or failure. The employability discourse, paired with a focus on the personality of the manager, shift the lens from the firm and the structural conditions to the personal character of the individual and their own abilities to produce a successful working subject. In this sense, job security claims are transformed into issues pertaining to the subject's worth. They depoliticize the employee's relation with the firm by politicizing the relation of the subject with herself and with the other workers, occupying various positions in the social division of labour.

For the high-skilled the inability to get or keep a job is above all a personal failure. Three types of anti-heroes emerged in the interviews: the lazy, the unwise skill entrepreneur, and the communist. The first anti-hero, the lazy, has difficulties finding and keeping a job simply because of unwillingness to work. It is the person who did not transformed her pleasures of doing something into a job. "I *have faculty colleagues who are still not working. Some are too lazy. There are enough places with shortage for staff. If they wanted to work, they would have found a job until now."* (M, 25, IT, tertiary education)." Not working is a personal failure of not making enough efforts.

The second anti-hero did not invest wise enough to acquire the right skillsets. "*Take Delia's example. She did not find a job, because she did not use her connections with friends and former colleagues, and also because her background is only in logistics"* (M, 30, Sell support engineer, tertiary education). Delia had a lot of experience in managing the logistic of a firm. But this limited her field of expertise to only a few potential employers. Then her only chance was to mobilize her networks. This echoes the trope of diversifying one's skills to become an expert in a wider professional field, rather than limiting oneself to one position. Failure to do so is simply an individual predicament outside of the realm of labour relations with the organization.

The third anti-hero is the "communist". The communist is the unwilling worker to learn and to adapt, is the beholder of "old communist mentalities" (see also Petrovici, 2010; Simionca, 2012). No one is exempted from this type of disease, of not being flexible enough. The managers themselves, the supposedly new capitalist figure, cannot be really exempted of this suspicion, even those working in the multinationals: *"I can say that also in the multinationals is the same deal as in the small firms. Yes… the managers have the same style of doing stuff: the communist way"* (M, 30, IT, tertiary education). Those who do not conform to the requirement of employability are consistently reproached for doing things 'the old way:

> I have not lived in the communist era, but all my teachers had lived in the communist period, our parents lived in the communist era, all those in charge now, they lived in the communist period. During the transition from communism to capitalism, many people failed. What I mean is that in capitalism you have to change quickly your whole mentality. You have to change often and very quickly your job, your location very quickly. In communism your job was guaranteed, for life, so you did not have to develop. (Male, 26, IT, secondary education)

In this sense, the anti-communist discourse is intimately linked with the employability narrative. The communist worker becomes the epitome of the employee in search for the stable contract, while the capitalist worker stands

for the flexible subject. For the skilled workers, while the system is often blamed for their current insecure and unfavourable position, the firm remains out of their radar. It is then either the individual character of the worker or the personality and skills of the manager. The lazy is the main anti-hero in this category. The major filter through which a person's dignity is evaluated is that of his or her industriousness. If someone loses their job, often the explanation is that she was not working hard enough. As we showed in the previous section – industriousness and diligence are considered highly important qualities for the skilled workers. Much more so than experience and skill. The other locus where the skilled workers attribute their work misfortunes is the manager. The employer's quest to devaluate their skills are attributed to the moral flaws of the manager or the owner. Laziness and immoral managers are the two main issues highlighted in our interviews. The firm as such does not enter this relationship of dependency, even in the otherwise insightful analysis of how the employability discourse does not work for the skilled workers.

In conclusion, while the employability narrative depoliticizes the relation between the employer and employee, it politicizes the relationship between employees and the labour market. Claims toward job security, a stable position and sharing the burden of flexibility become increasingly hard to articulate at an organizational level. Getting and keeping a job are a task of the individual and can be achieved through willingness to work and self-improvement. While these are discursive invitations, the surprising effect is that these criteria are used for classificatory purposes by the employees themselves, to assess their own worthiness and worthiness of the others. The employability narrative becomes a lens through which the workers assess themselves and the other workers. It becomes a narrative that politicizes the relation between workers. Yet, not by providing solidarity, but by dividing them in on a scale of worthiness. The struggle between the employer and employees are deflected into tension between the various factions of the working class.

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HEALTHY AND SOMEWHAT WEALTHY: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SUCCESSFUL AGING

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ABSTRACT. The idea of being active, healthy, happy and independent as long as is possible is strongly promoted in public discourse and in aging policies. Starting from the idea of investigating the serious leisure practices of the elderly, I sought to develop a qualitative research that captures perceptions and normative attitudes regarding the perceived and lived experience of aging. The study offers insights into the socially constructed nature of successful aging, by critically exploring the relation between the practice of Tai-Chi, considered a serious leisure activity among older adults, and the neoliberal ideology. During my fieldwork I conducted 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews and I have analyzed a specific typology of subjects - 'healthy and somewhat wealthy' as one of the respondents described himself - motivated by the fact that this category of the elderly is much more likely to internalize and promote neoliberal ideology. The goal of my fieldwork research was to determine how seniors operationalize the concept of successful aging and what strategies they use in order to ensure their experience matches their expectations. I also chose to focus on the way elders embrace a serious leisure perspective, which promises to give them a sense of purpose and progress. As shown by the accounts of the participants in the study, the need to be active, independent, healthy, and cheerful determine individuals to work with their own self and seek to engage in serious leisure activities.

Keywords: successful aging, active aging, serious leisure

Introduction

In the coming years, the percentage of people over 65 will increase from 29.6% in 2016 to 51.2% in 2070 (EU Aging Report: 2018). The growing percentage of the elderly has already produced major changes in the perception of the organization and administration of personal care that are reflected in the politics of aging. For example, *Active Aging: A Policy Framework* developed by the

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World Health Organization (2002) encourages a lifestyle specific to the middle class that involves: an active life, independent and as healthy as possible; encourages spending as much time as possible on productive or meaningful recreation or volunteering (that means serious leisure). The current trend, as aging to become more of an individual risk and less of a collective responsibility (Rudman, 2015), means that increasing numbers of people are compelled to care for themselves, whether economically or physically, as they age. As I will try to present, the involvement in serious leisure activities contributes to this (personal and societal) plan. These changes are relevant to a biopolitical consideration of aging because they shift the parameters within which people experience the trajectories and transitions that punctuate their lives (Neilson, 2012).

Starting from the investigation of serious leisure practices among the elderly, I sought to develop a qualitative research that captures perceptions about how aging should be perceived and lived. I have contextualized Tai-Chi practice (considered a serious leisure activity) among older adults by critically exploring it in relation to the neoliberal context of life. More clearly, the study offers insights into the socially constructed nature of successful aging through leisure under neoliberalism. During my fieldwork I have analysed a specific typology of subjects – 'healthy and somewhat wealthy' as one of the respondents described himself – that can clearly illustrate how some of the prerogatives of neoliberal ideology are transmitted to the elderly and internalized by them. As I will try to show, the need to be active, independent, healthy and if possible cheerful, determines individuals to work with their own self and seek to engage in serious leisure activities.

The concepts of "serious leisure" (Stebbins, 1982) and "successful aging" (Roke and Kahn, 1987) will be discussed in this text. The two have been developed somewhat in the same climate and started from a common ground: that of promoting an active lifestyle, engaging in productive activities, developing the ability to cope (alone) with difficult situations in life, independence and a healthier life (both physically and mentally). Both visions can be applied to a specific population that benefits from decent living conditions, good health and lives in a certain social and cultural climate. Therefore, the application of the concepts can work only in the analysis undertaken on the existing middle class in capitalist societies, highly industrialized and technological developed (Rudman, 2015), in which the family dependency ties are already weakened. Neither perspective discusses at all about precarious individuals, marginalized people or those who have not already adopted a lifestyle specific to the logic of developed capitalism. As I will try to show, the two perspectives, very often embraced in the development of policies for the elderly are somewhat superficial, trying to highlight the benefits of an active, productive and independent lifestyle, omitting explanations of the contexts in which people's lives take place and the inequalities between individuals.

The link between Successful Aging and Serious Leisure

Over the last half century, several theories have attempted to capture the essence of what it means to age well. As we know, aging and especially aging well are socially constructed phenomenon. Our perception on aging is influenced by societal expectations, culture and personal experiences. The concept of "old age" has historically been defined through governmental policies. In this respect, concepts such as "active aging" (World Health Organization, 2002) and "successful aging" (Havighurst, 1961; Rowe & Kahn, 1987, 1997) have begun to be taken seriously and to replace the older paradigms such as disengagement theory, that looked at the negative aspects (such as disease, degradation, marginalization).

Policy agendas have come to dominate in the current global environment of disinvestment in pensions, health services and so on (Neilson, 2012). More clearly, policy agendas emphasize the need for individuals and communities to supplement, or even to replace, government efforts to support aging costs. This contributes to a social atmosphere in which individual investments in health and well-being are encouraged. One of the directions of political agendas advocates for independent living and assumes that older people have the opportunity (and are urged) to live and manage themselves (Ney, 2005) in optimal conditions. Another political provision discusses non-discrimination of people in the labor market and supports the involvement of the elderly in paid work for as long as possible (idem); if paid work is not a feasible option, older people are encouraged to get involved in volunteering (which is classified as serious leisure). The list of examples can go on, but what is essential to remember is that these aging policies cannot be universally adopted and are valid for a fairly small niche of individuals - healthy, who work for pleasure or for maintaining occupational prestige, who do not they have other duties such as caring for extended family members, and who do not have a severely impaired state of health. For this research, I talked exactly with those people who fit perfectly with the profile described, to show how this paradigm has been incorporated.

As I mentioned before, there is a wide global variation in terms used to encapsulate the notion of "aging well". Successful aging and active aging are the most popular and also ubiquitous concepts in social research and public policy (Sao Jose et al., 2017) that are linked to this notion. Both concepts derive from the same scientific root, the activity perspective and sometimes, the two terms are strongly used as synonyms (Foster and Walker, 2014). The concept of successful aging is multidimensional and has begun to be important for researchers interested in describing the quality of life of the elderly. The term was first introduced by Robert Havighurst in 1961 and has its roots in the Activity Theory. It began to be popular in the field of gerontology, in public discussions and later in political

agendas (Lamb, 2014). Then it gained even more popularity after being taken over by John Rowe and Robert Kahn, initially at a seminar held in 1987 and then in the book "Successful Aging" published in 1988. The book focuses on the analysis of the results of the study MacArthur Foundation Study of Aging in America aimed at identifying the factors that contribute to maintaining the physical and mental vitality of the elderly. The authors argue that the golden age involves both loss and gain, but individuals must look to those that involve active engagement with life. The two make a clear distinction between usual and successful aging, both referring only to those elderly people who do not show severe pathologies. Following the popularity, but also the criticism received over a decade, in 1997, the two authors published a new article in which they seek to clarify, once again, their vision of what successful aging means:

> We hoped that the distinction between two groups of non-diseased older persons — usual (non-pathologic but high risk) and successful (low risk and high function) — would help to correct those tendencies, stimulate research on the criteria and determinants of successful aging, and identify proper targets for interventions with "normal" elderly (1997:433).

For Rowe and Kahn (1987, 1988, 1997, 2015), successful aging includes three essential components: low probability of disease and disease-related disability, high cognitive and physical functional capacity, and active engagement with life. There is a hierarchy between the three components, and successful aging cannot include only one or the first two, but refers to the relationship between all three.

Successful aging theory is so popular due to the change of vision on the problematization of theories about the elderly from disease and decline, to a discipline that emphasizes health, workforce and a pro-active attitude. Although it has received (and continues to receive) much appreciation, successful aging theory still has its share of criticism and controversy. A first criticism was that it cannot be applied universally and that those elderly people who face certain problems (health, material, social) are not included in it (Neilson, 2012; Nimrod and Shrira, 2014; de Sao Jose et al., 2017). Simultaneously with this critique, a large number of studies have been developed and have shown that, despite the fact that certain characteristics are seen among the elderly may suggest that successful aging theory does not stand, successful aging may be achieved (Hochhalter et al., 2011). In other words, successful aging theory cannot be regarded as a theoretical model (Hartley et al., 2018) and it is more suitable to understand that it places more emphasis on the results (Rowe and Kahn, 2015).

Another critique of this theory refers to the fact that the definition of the concept of "successful aging" lacks the perspective (or voice) of the elderly. Theter and Chonody (2019) mention that successful aging was developed "without the input of older adults 'views and experiences or an evaluation of the extent to which the theory's principles and premises adequately depict the lived" (p. 3). The same authors justify their position by presenting several previous studies, in which researchers predefined the factors instead of giving the elderly the opportunity to define what successful aging means for them. Therefore, many of the research results that have been mentioned have inaccurate or questionable results, and this leads Theter and Chonody to say that there is a need for a revision of the working methodology and to give significantly greater power to the perceptions of the elderly. Moreover, elderly groups cannot be understood as homogeneous groups, with people with similar characteristics, but social, cultural, health status, even gender or degree of religiosity must be understood. The perception of successful aging, strongly imbued with the prerogatives of capitalist societies, cannot be universally valid. The promotion of autonomy, interdependence and active life cannot be universally understood as central values that define well-being everywhere in the world (not even among all the elderly in countries with a developed economy). Most often, successful aging is defined not simply by the low probability of disease and high physical and cognitive function, but also by the active psychological ability to engage with life in ways that appear unrelated to social position or status (Katz, 2013). In conclusion, the concept of successful aging has brought great challenges to researchers who have tried to theorize it and include it in analyses. The inconsistency of conceptualization and existing modes of measurement between studies (Katz, Calasanti, 2015), along with the absence of the perspective of the elderly, makes this term quite controversial, giving rise to disagreements over the validity of research (Depp and Jeste, 2006).

I will shortly discuss the concept of "active aging" because is stronger related to the policy framework of Europe. Unlike successful aging, which is primarily a theoretical concept (Timonen, 2016) very popular in the USA, active aging is "primarily a policy concept" (Lassen & Moreira, 2014: 33 in de Sao Jose et al., 2017) used in response to the aging population in Europe (Timonen, 2016). The World Health Organization (2002) developed this concept as a policy framework to assist governments in promoting and supporting active aging. This policy framework has been dominated by a narrow economic and productivistic perspective that prioritizes the extension of working life, or at least active life (Foster and Walker, 2014). It focuses on the connection of health and activity through six determinants: health and social services; physical; personal; behavioral; social; and economic, with cross-cutting determinants of gender and culture. World Health Organization (2002) defined active aging as:

> the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. (…) It allows people to realize their potential for physical, social, and mental well-being throughout the life course and to participate in society according to their needs, desires and capacities, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they require assistance (WHO, 2002: 12).

A strong critique of the concept of active aging and the policies that include it – to which I adhere – was produced by Virpi Timonen (2016). It starts from the finding that scientists and policy makers often see the elderly as a homogeneous category (with concerns, living conditions and similar statuses) and superficially treats the differences between genders, social classes, religious orientations, ethnicities, etc. She mainly accuses policy makers of asking people to be active and in control of their own lives, while being perceived as individuals who lack agency. So, the critique of active aging is in fact the same as the critique of neoliberalism.

Although the concept is more oriented towards the course of life than successful aging, it still remains defined from an economic and production perspective, underlying the development of European (but also global) policies on aging (de Sao Jose, 2017; Timonen, 2016). Policy agendas have come to dominate in the current global environment of disinvestment in pensions, health services and so on (Neilson, 2012). More clearly, policy agendas emphasize the need for individuals and communities to supplement, or even to replace, government efforts to support aging costs. This contributes to a social atmosphere in which individual investments in health and well-being are encouraged. One of the directions of political agendas advocates for independent living and assumes that older people have the opportunity (and are urged) to live and manage themselves (Ney, 2005) in optimal conditions.

As I said before, in this study I am interested in discussing what the elderly understand by "successful aging" and how it is closely related to serious leisure (including here Tai Chi practice). Before moving on, I think it is necessary to explain the concept of serious leisure, starting from Robert Stebbins' view point. Stebbins' role in structuring the research approach is undeniable; the distinction that the sociologist makes between the concepts of serious leisure and casual leisure can bring additional clarifications regarding the current vision on leisure and makes it easier to understand the presence of leisure forms that contribute to self-rebuilding. Robert Stebbins became interested in leisure analysis in the early 1970s, and most of his work was based on the results of his ethnographic research, interviews, and participatory observations. For Stebbins, leisure can range from occasional, temporary commitments to

intensive short-term projects to more serious lifelong commitments that require a lot of time, money and energy. He developed a theoretical framework that includes three types of leisure as follows: "casual leisure", "project based leisure" and "serious leisure" (Stebbins, 1982). The last type of leisure is the one that gives the name of the famous Serious Leisure Paradigm (SLP).

Casual leisure is fundamentally focused on hedonism and refers to relatively short or spontaneous activities that bring intrinsic rewards and do not require special training in advance to bring satisfaction to the individual (Stebbins, 1997). Here can be included, for example, watching TV, going out for socializing, but also practices classified as deviant at some point in a society (Rojek, 2005). As it is easy to understand, casual leisure, compared to serious leisure, is considered to be substantially less valued by individuals.

Project based leisure refers to those forms of leisure practiced on a relatively short or occasional term. It tends to be a creative undertaking carried out in free time that involves considerable planning, effort, and sometimes skill or knowledge. Examples of project-based leisure can be: sports events, arts festivals, religious holidays, individual birthdays and national holidays (Stebbins 2006).

The importance of practicing a leisure activity in the category of serious leisure began to be presented through a neoliberal lens by specialists in leisure studies, psychologists, company managers, trainers or pedagogues amid the change of vision on how it would it is desirable that "respectable" individuals should spend their free time for the purpose of "continuous development" and a much clearer defining of the "self". Stebbins describes this as a leisure activity involving knowledge, experience, and specific skills that are opposite to casual leisure. Serious leisure is highly interesting, important and fulfilling to the participant for whom it "embodies such qualities as earnestness, sincerity, importance, and carefulness" (Elkington and Stebbins 2014: 16). According to Stebbins (1982, 1997), six characteristics differentiate serious leisure from casual leisure. These characteristics are: 1) the need to persevere in the respective activity; 2) willingness to develop a career in the field; 3) the need to make an effort to gain knowledge and skills; 4) by practicing this form of leisure, the individual obtains special benefits; 5) acquiring a unique ethos in society; 6) the development of an attractive personal and social identity (Stebbins, 1982).

The fact that serious leisure represents a significant factor of successful aging was developed in a series of writings (Eakman, Carlson, & Clark, 2010; Ferri, James, & Pruchno, 2009; Heo et al., 2013; Menec, 2003). Most of them resort to a positivist approach and most often a causal relationship emerged between practicing activities considered serious leisure and their benefits on the subjects. A significant part of the studies came to the following conclusion: "The involvement of older adults in serious leisure activities may serve to facilitate

successful aging" (Heo et al., 2013: 18). I have not found any research to compare two different samples, or even more importantly, to investigate how easy or difficult it is to get involved in serious leisure activities for elderly populations with different socio-demographic characteristics, marginalized people or people in precarious conditions of life. All the studies I have identified are aimed at a rather niche audience – belonging to a middle-high socioeconomic status – that`s why it is rather inappropriate to generalize the analysis to the entire population.

All the changes in the way the elderly should be perceived are due to a combination of factors related to the de-responsibilization of states towards individuals, the change of responsibilities between states and markets, global migration and the development of geriatric medicine (Sao Jose et al., 2017). This new vision of old age has been successfully embraced by a specific typology of the elderly - who do not face a precarious financial situation or a weakened state of health - and tends to become a pattern that is intended to be universally imposed. As Nikolas Rose describes in "The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century" (2007), biomedicine came to view the notion of health as a personal social-ethical imperative. Thus, we come to meet branches of the silver industry, specialized leisure programs, fiction, wellness that focus on the continuous concern of individuals for their own self. This also creates an increasing responsibility for one's own health, for the maintenance and optimization of the body and mind, throughout life. Although aging can involve (and often does involve) the emergence of disabilities that restrict participation in the circuit of capitalist valorization, individuals are encouraged to contribute through voluntary work, charity, and self-practice to a style of active and independent life, which burdens neither the other members of the family, nor the state. In this context, self-control – promoted by successful aging paradigm and serious leisure perspective - becomes an important tool linked to the economic sector and political rules.

Both concepts - serious leisure and successful aging - are strongly imbued with a neoliberal logic. Neoliberalism refers not only to the idea of controlling and disciplining individuals, but also to the idea of making subjects more efficient, docile, entrepreneurial, happier, fulfilled, and confident (Rose, 1999). This new form of government involves power structures through which the government rallies to the abilities, skills and personal visions of individuals and manages to create a sense of freedom, relying precisely on the self-responsibility of subjects. In this context, individuals develop a strong self-control, out of the desire to succeed and the appreciation of others, trying to be more efficient and responsible for their own lives, without looking for possible culprits outside their own person (Miller and Rose, 2008). Neoliberalism involves subtle forms of control, much more effective compared to the forms of classical liberalism governmentality, which can be understood as a system of imposing authority from top to bottom (Freeman, 2007; Hefner, 2010).

For the present paper, it is important to understand that "successful aging" and "serious leisure" concepts as biopolitics (de Sao Jose et al., 2017: 49). In a very simplified understanding of the term, biopolitics refers to the style of government that regulates populations through "biopower" (Foucault, 1988), that means the application and impact of political power on all aspects of human life. Biopower emphasizes how our life abilities and qualities (e.g. the ability to manage independent, volunteering, the involvement in outdoor activities) are key objects of exploitation – particularly under neoliberalism (Fleming, 2014). In addition to the fact that the two discourses – successful aging and active aging – promote certain disciplinary practices, they also guide certain technologies – technologies of the self[2] – through which individuals act on their own lives and bodies, setting new standards for what "aging well" means.

The emergence of new strategies of activation and responsibilization of individuals are increasingly obvious; certain conceptions of subjectivity from psychology are now central and act in the name of the idea of independence and happiness (Binkley, 2014). To be considered a "successful aging" person, you have to be independent, involved in the community (volunteering or working) in a good health position (that can be improved through active leisure activities). These demands are invading the public speeches and are reflected in policies that strategically target areas of intervention that are identified and monitored using specific technological measures, like: rates of illness or disability, prevention measures (Osborne, 1997). The contemporary tendency is that ageing to become more of an individual risk and less of a collective responsibility. This means that increasing numbers of people are compelled to care for themselves, whether economically or physically, as they age. These changes are relevant to a biopolitical consideration of ageing because they shift the parameters within which people experience the trajectories and transitions that punctuate their lives (Neilson, 2012:45).

Methodology

For this research, I focused my attention on two relevant topics that emerged from fieldwork data: 1) what do seniors understand by successful aging and what strategies do they use in order to age well?; and 2) the way the elders embrace a serious leisure perspective. During the last year, I have

[2] [Technologies of the self] permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault, 1988:18).

conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 14 participants. The first three participants were recommended by the manager of a day center for elderly; after this first step, I used de snow ball method of sampling and the respondents put me in contact with other people. Their ages ranged from 69 to 88 years. A first criterion according to which the interviews that are part of this research were selected was that the elderly declare that they are satisfied or very satisfied with their current life. The other criteria according to which the respondents were chosen included the following: all had residency in the urban environment, all had a non-manual profession / trade that required at least secondary educational training (i.e. at least high school graduates) and all visited at least once one of the existing day centers for the elderly in their locality. They were asked to provide background demographic information on their marital status, living conditions, education, years from retirement, their former profession, their current health status. Of the 14 people selected, 9 were widows (8 women and one man) and 5 lived with their partner. None of them shared the home with other extended family members, such as children, grandchildren, or other relatives (except the partner, where applicable). In addition to the interviews I conducted, I was engaged in more informal participant observation research with several older persons gardening near the building and other daily life events. The interviews (but also some informal discussions) focused on the subjects' life story, on daily practices and social relations, on their experiences and attitudes regarding leisure, and their own visions of what successful aging and active aging would entail.

The meaning of successful aging through the lens of 'healthy and somewhat wealthy' adults

Starting from the newest directions of study, which discusses a change of vision on the meanings given to leisure[3], I started a fieldwork research on leisure practices among older people. As I mentioned in the methodological section, through the fieldwork I have undertaken over the last year, I tried to understand the perception of the elderly on the concept of successful aging. The biggest challenge I faced was finding the most appropriate terms to use in the interviews so that I would be as impartial as possible and avoid labelling. I realized

[3] Leisure is seen as time and space for the acquisition of personal pleasures and for the cultivation of the self and is strongly links with the area of positive psychology. Starting from Csikszentmihalyi (1997) the definition of leisure places a very strong emphasis on motivations, beliefs and perceptions at the individual level and loses sight of the social, historical or cultural context.

that it is incredibly difficult to use a term that refers to the population over the age of 65 without any connotations, such as the terms "elderly", "senior citizen", not to mention the term "old man". Although for this choice I can be easily criticized from a methodological point of view, I decided to avoid a very clear wording when referring to my study population and to be very careful about the terminology used by the person I was talking to.

I would like to mention once again, all the people I talked to were people who live alone or with their partner, manage to move freely and provide everything they need, and are not financially dependent. I intentionally selected these so-called people representative for the successful aging model, but not in the idea of supporting the perspective, but to illustrate how it was incorporated into the daily routine of 14 people over 65 in Romania. With the exception of two ladies, all the other people had a very well-established daily routine, which included in the first part of the day doing household chores (several mentions were related to helping the extended family: children, grandchildren). All the activities related to personal care and home care are exclusively the concern of these people, which makes the daily schedule quite demanding (but natural and necessary from their perspective). What came out strong in all the interviews was a strong desire to preserve dignity and integrity, associated with a high self-esteem, a strong sense of meritocracy, accompanied by the idea of self-realization by personal efforts:

> In my condition, healthy and somewhat wealthy, is important to maintain an active life. That keeps me alive. I worked constantly all my life with my mind, with my soul and with my body to have my current lifestyle […] I am sure that everyone deserves a peaceful elderly but most have not built it in time. I know that I am a lucky person but I started to work for my luck in the 90's when I was still young [he was an artist and after 1990 he collaborated with various theaters in Europe and mastered another way of thinking] (Liviu, 76, artist).

> Since I retired, I've been doing what I love most of the time. My family is all set up. I have arranged my life since I was still in power. In fact, I still am, but I use my powers to do what I like. I taught my children to be independent and that is the claim I have from myself. I don't want to become a burden to them, because they weren't for us either and from the age of 18-20 they managed on their own. What are you supposed to do?! That means a good start, ma'am! (Peter, 74, former engineer).

In general, the concept of successful aging has been associated with personal independence. Six of the respondents discussed the fact that from a certain age, success is measured in the ability to still be able to achieve everything necessary for the self and not to be responsible (anymore) for others life.

Independence, so strongly valued and internalized in the case of the people who participated in this research, is a relatively recent feature encountered in Romanian society, which is characterized rather by close relations of intergenerational solidarity. The report of the Population Policy Acceptance survey (2006) shows that Romanians rely heavily on family support, both descending (from parents to children) and ascending (from children to parents) (Hărăguș, 2016: 53). A feature of neoliberal ideology, also encountered in theorizing the concept of successful aging, is to move the concern from caring for others to self-care in the first place. This fact brings a very strong self-responsibility and at the same time a de-responsibility of the everyone towards others. The thought of helplessness is the most torturous for most respondents.

> Modesty is nonsense! I am proud of myself that I have aged successfully (laughs). I am 80 and I can take care of myself, I don't take pills and I can afford some vacations. After my husband died, I thought I wouldn't go anywhere alone because I had never been alone somewhere. And my daughter took me on a vacation, but we have different expectations and it was uncomfortable for both. Then I said for myself: I have to find a way to travel, to fill confortable and to socialize. Then I discovered a travel agency and since then I have made over 20 trips in the country and abroad [in the 6 years with a group of elderly people] (Ana, 80, former beautician).

> […] No one expects anything of me anymore. I've done so much in life that now there's no need for anyone to expect me to. I don't have any expectations from others either. You will see, but only after you grow old, that if you want to do well, you give up expectations. I think I still have an expectation or maybe just a desire for my grandchildren to call me at least once a week. It usually happens even more often. I never call them so as not to disturb them (Steliana, 79, former engineer).

Successful aging also represents in the vision of the interlocutors, beyond independence, a balanced life without health problems. Disease avoidance is the direct concern of the subject whose task it is to constantly monitor and take the necessary measures in time. As some of the respondents said, no one else is responsible for the personal life and health conditions (with the exception of genes).

> If you know your medical history, not only yours, but that of the whole family and you know what pathologies you can face, you can face the health problems head-on, but as early as possible. The care taken from youth, to old age and temperance, make old age easy to bear. (Gela, 78, former teacher).

In addition to regular medical check-ups, one of the solutions to maintain a healthy life, as it emerged from the interviews, is to practice physical activities and a "moderate" active lifestyle. The preoccupation of individuals with their own state of health, physical and mental, facilitated the performance of some forms of serious leisure. These practices are used by most seniors as strategies for aging well and represent a good proof of self-care. Among these practices were mentioned in interviews: Tai Chi, yoga, meditation, gardening (plant care), photography classes, theater classes or pottery. It is easy to notice that the range of activities is very rich, so I decided to focus only on Tai Chi, included in the category of "positive spirituality".

Tai Chi is a recreational practice, in the category of serious leisure and often recommended for a better tonus and health not only in the eastern part of the earth, where the tradition comes from, but also in western countries (Lee, 2017). A tradition of these practices has existed in Western Europe for about two or three decades, but it has been embraced for at least 8 years, among the offers addressed to day centers for the elderly in Romania. Therefore, Tai Chi is frequently presented as a suitable social leisure activity and also a training exercise for elderly adults (Li, 2019; Yao, 2015). But the purpose of this text is not to make a value judgment on this practice, but to understand how Tai Chi practitioners (or those of other serious leisure activities) articulate a strong discourse imbued with the idealized vision of the elderly, found in Successful Aging Theory, and which supports the neoliberal ideology.

In selecting the people for this research, I used the snowball method which, of course, led me to people with a certain profile and with somewhat similar recreational practices. I talked to 8 people from two groups of Tai Chi. One of the groups is a formal one, relatively well known in town and it is frequented by people of all ages. The other group has no any formal character, but represents a sort of community for the members. All the respondents stated that they show the benefits of Tai Chi from the beginning and wanted to deepen their theoretical and practical knowledge as soon as possible. Most valuable aspects of practicing Tai Chi that were mentioned by them can be summarize as: a better tonus and a visible health improvement without exterior contribution (like pills or medical procedures); a new way of thinking about what is important in life (a stronger focus on improving issues that can be directly addressed by the respondent); a way to gain self-satisfaction and self-appreciation (acquiring a state of well-being through interior resources); a way to fill time in a pleasant way or "the most pleasant time to be active"; assists them in coping with the new realities of being a retiree.

> I tell you concretely that since I do Tai Chi, my cholesterol level has dropped. It's logical because I'm active, active again! And you know… I'm in peace with my age. I know I'm doing well [by practicing Tai Chi] and I find a purpose in life […] After a life on the move, on the road, when I retired I realized that I lost my purposes. It was awful (Sanda, 73, former secretary).

Half of the respondents have their first contact with Tai Chi seven years ago, at the center for elderly. The manager of the institution invited a Tai Chi master for one of the socialization and leisure services. During that period there were sufficient funds within the center and also initiatives to propose a wide range of activities, which aimed, among other things, to identify the most attractive activities for beneficiaries. Until the elderly took part in the physical activity, the Tai Chi master gave a lecture and informed the participants about this practice. Few of them have decided to continue and find out more details. As one of the interviewees stated, Tai Chi did not necessarily enjoy popularity because it is a practice that involves a certain level of "knowledge and depth, which was not possible for everyone" and because of this the program was canceled. What was also been mentioned is that some of the acquaintances did not understand the practice and considered it "sectarian". After a few meetings, the center stopped the collaboration and some of the elderly decided to continue these exercises and contacted the Tai Chi suppliers directly. According to one of the respondents, 7 of those who first came into contact with this practice at the day center, decided to contact the master directly and then attend Tai Chi, inside a specialized institution (a center for personal and spiritual development). Some of them decided to put an end to this practice after a few months, and two ladies joined another informal Tai Chi group. From this group, I selected 5 of them for the interviews.

In addition to those who first made contact with Tai Chi at the day center, others were attracted by this practice because of their friends, either in the formal or informal group. The informal group consists exclusively of women, although they did not want to be a gendered group. The initiators of the group came off from one of the formal groups and decided to self-organize and practice these activities by the river. Among the practitioners, some have in-depth knowledge of yoga and Tai Chi, and have studied in spiritual development centers (one of them managed to attend an internship in France), others have been influenced by friends or neighbours and are interested in physical movement, without necessarily wanting to deepen the technique. Unlike the formal centers where this activity can be practiced for a fee and with the support of an initiated master (most often with internships in China or other Asian countries), the

group who meets on the river bank is informal. There is no proper hierarchy here, there are no participation fees and there is no need for an acceptance process; anyone can join the group, regardless of age, training or gender. Beyond the fact that these meetings are seen as an important source of vitality and strengthening of the body, soul and mind, they are also seen as a form of therapy. The members socialize outside these meetings and discuss aspects related to daily life and as one of them said:

> We support each other in a new process, in which we mainly fight to change our mentality. You can see many gray, sad, grumpy old women on the street. In my youth I disliked it deeply, now even more. We don't want to be like that! We want our well-being first, and then to our families. One should know that a smiling face can make your day more beautiful! Do you know the Latin proverb 'mens sana in corpore sano'?! We move, we laugh, we talk, and then everyone goes to their houses, to their families, but with a good mood. (Ica, 75, former chemist).

Unlike the riverside activities, those who practice Tai Chi inside the center of spiritual development are regimented in a hierarchical scheme. In addition to the practical sessions - offered during the pandemic on a virtual platform - the masters frequently explain the personal benefits of Tai Chi. At the discursive level, any of the practitioners has the opportunity to become a professional with a lot of work to which are added certain accreditations. To participate in these activities, members pay some fees (50 lei or more) so they also become customers. The relationship between master and practitioner captures the market economy logic, in which one is the provider and the other one is the beneficiary of the service. In order to be a valued good, the set price is very important. Therefore, the quality of the service is also highlighted by its financial side.

During my fieldwork I found that there is a close connection between Tai Chi practice and the elderly's concern for their own well-being. All Tai Chi practitioners have a clear vision of the benefits of practicing this activity and are persevering in trying to maintain a routine. The fact that a large part of those who are part of the group shows constancy makes this practice receive an additional connotation, that of a community. The effects of this practice are felt by the interviewed practitioners both on the physical (higher mobility, increased tone) and on the psyche - a unique ethos in society (Stebbins, 1982; 1997) - by finding a so-called inner peace.

> […] Worries, concerns, seem far away. I am encapsulated in a waterproof bubble [during Tai Chi practice]. I get the power to take things differently, much easier, as they come. […] I had to do something to become again

> who I was before [my husband's death] and realize for the first time in my life that I was on my own. We are part of another generation where from the care of parents, you end up sharing everything with your husband. I learned the lesson of loneliness, but also to be on my own, only after 67 years. […] You gain the power to take things around you as they come and learn to regain balance. (Sanda, 73, former secretary).

To practice Tai Chi, the elderly must persevere, to make an effort to gain skills and knowledge, these being specific features of the serious leisure perspective. The justification for choosing the practice of Tai Chi is given by the well-being that this practice produces on those involved - the 5th characteristic of serious leisure. Beyond the well-being and the development of a toned body - the 4th characteristic of serious leisure -, the discussions that develop between the participants continue, sometimes, in other spaces (cafes, personal visits) - the 6th characteristic of serious leisure. Tai Chi becomes more than just a recreational practice, but it is the determinant of a new lifestyle (at least for some of those interviewed). These changes favor the development of a new vision of the life and condition of the elderly, accompanied by a strong sense of belonging, not of indebtedness.

What I think needs to be understood is the fact that only a niche population in Romania can be involved in recreational activities such as Tai Chi. Impediments are on the one hand of a logistical nature (inability to contact a master directly), of a cultural and social nature, of a medical nature, but also of an economic nature. Although the practice of Tai Chi does not necessary involve direct financial costs (the case of riverside practitioners), the people involved must show a high degree of availability, but also openness to a new and untraditional lifestyle. In order to be able to participate in these activities on a daily basis, people must have the necessary time, energy and a good health condition (and also money).

Although Tai Chi can be practiced by both women and men, this practice is strongly gendered in Romania. Women show a much greater availability towards these practices compared to men. Being a highly gendered activity, we must also pay attention to one aspect, that of the fact that, again, only a niche population can be engaged, because many of the women in Romania, who are still able-bodied, are burdened by household chores and extended family care. To this aspect is added the traditional vision on the role of women which also covers clothing (wearing pants being in some situations viewed with maximum restraint). So, when we discuss the practice of Tai Chi, as well as other serious leisure activities, it is necessary to understand that the ways of spending free time are conditioned by a set of constraints related to the individual and the

environment in which he lives, the opportunities that exist in various contexts of life, structural and contextual factors and significant ideologies at the time. Tai Chi practitioners represent the privileged elderly, representatives of the middle class, pioneers in the field, as they may have been in their youth.

> I always set the trend. When I was young, I set the trend in fashion. I was getting fabrics, I was getting magazines from the West. I could also have certain freedoms. Those who did an important job, who were someone, I would say we stayed like that today. Of course, I have to have some decency and compare myself to those of my generation. But among the large pile of senile old people, I am by far very good! [Laughs] That's why I'm still alone. It is too difficult to find an old man with a young spirit in Romania. We still have to learn as a nation what it means to be old, but to stay alive. In our country it seems shameful to say that you are fine. We remained fools, as we were before [in communism], locked in and envious of the success of others (Neli, 74, former accountant).

Conclusion

During my analyses I have tried to show how elements of neoliberal ideology have already been internalized by the privileged categories of the elderly. Following the fieldwork on the "healthy and wealthy" elderly, it was revealed that at least they have already moved away from the traditional model that involved the increased responsibility of younger family members for the elderly. The need to be active, independent, healthy and if possible cheerful, is now a personal responsibility and determines individuals to work with their own self and seek to engage in serious leisure activities.

The way the elders embrace a serious leisure perspective show us what are their expectations regarding leisure seen as time and space to be fruitful for their own development. The importance of practicing a leisure activity in the category of serious leisure began to be presented through a neoliberal lens by specialists in leisure studies, psychologists, company managers, trainers or pedagogues amid the change of vision on how it would be it is desirable that "respectable" individuals should spend their free time for the purpose of continuous development and a much clearer definition of the self. Activities that do not require effort to obtain knowledge, skills and then benefits, which do not have a certain consistency, begin to be strongly devalued, primarily because they do not provide the subject with the necessary development to achieve success. At the same time, there are new demands that require individuals to use their time wisely and conscientiously, and involvement in activities that do

not benefit the self is perceived almost as a loss, as a waste of a non-renewable resource that is time. The practice of Tai Chi is successfully embraced precisely because it can satisfy all these requirements, being eminently focused on the holistic development of the self.

From my point of view, when conducting research similar to the one presented here, we must not forget that the data are strictly relevant for a population whose standard of living, pre-retirement lifestyle and health, are not, in general, representative for the elderly population in Romania. The fact that this privileged category of the elderly encourages a new lifestyle, precisely through the power of their own example, puts additional pressure on those who fail to meet these requirements. Through a strong meritocratic discourse, seen to an overwhelming extent in the interviews, the "healthy and somewhat wealthy" elderly people justify their current state, both physically and mentally. In their view, one's own well-being is the direct responsibility of the individual, and the importance of structural factors is greatly diminished. Those who fail to meet aging well standards seem to be the ones who have not made sustained efforts in time in order to maintain a decent life and who, at the moment, fail to be active and independent. The reasons for the so-called failure, as the data analyzed have shown, often seem irrelevant or at least blurred.

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LAND REFORM AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE. A SOCIO-HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE IMPACT OF 1950'S ITALIAN LAND REFORM ON PROPERTY RELATIONS AND CLASS FORMATION IN THE *MEZZOGIORNO*

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ABSTRACT. This paper retraces the historical, structural, socioeconomic and political conditions of the Italian land reform, from the 1950's, with a particular interest in the dynamic of class formation and property relations reconfiguration before and in the aftermath of the agrarian reform. We particularly discuss the class reconfiguration processes that ensued after the reform, displaying a particular interest in analysing the transformation of the class of absentee lords (latifundists) into a capitalist proprietary or entrepreneurial class, while rural landless or poor laborers - the new small owners - suffered further deterioration of their socioeconomic condition under the generalization of capitalist property forms, dissemination of market constraints and imperatives into Southern agriculture and the reconfiguration of social relations within the capitalist mode of production.

Key words: land reform, property relations, land redistribution, *questione meridionale,* social history

Introduction[2]

By the end of the sixties, the academic interests regarding the impact of the Italian land reform of the 1950's seemed to have dissipated, and only recently, and quite sporadically, academic scholarship from such diverse fields as social history, political economy or (agrarian) sociology, have renewed their interest in the matter. The reasons for such a recovery of the socioeconomic and

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political legacy of the Italian land reform are multiple, but we can list here some of the most significant: the study, backed by empirical data, of the socioeconomic real impact of the reform taking into consideration the *longue durée*, the long and lasting political consequences of those reforms and their weight on the party-power balance of the Italian Second Republic; then, the necessity of mapping the gradual transformation of the social structure in terms of class relations and property relations, in the aftermath of what was dubbed at that time an "important case of redistribution of wealth and productive capacities in a society" (Bonanno, 1988:132); and finally, the discussion, in ampler and with transnational implications, of the state-supervised process of class reconfiguration under both economic regional pressure and internal concurential political pressure.

This article aims to become a contribution in the field of social history, focusing on the issue of social transformation, with a special emphasis on the process of class formation and the dynamic of property relations. Our discussion of the impact of the Italian land reform from 1950 will touch several aspects: first, the specific socio-politic dynamic surrounding the land reform, namely the political confrontation between the Christian Democrat party government rule and the Communist party pressure coming from below, as leftist politics got a stronger hold over laboring industrial and agrarian classes; and second, on the contradictory nature of the social outcomes of a reform that distributed land with the goal of creating a new and "genuine entrepreneurial class of small proprietors" (Mariuzzo, 2013) in the deep Italian South, and failed to do so, whilst strengthening further the political and market power of large landowners and rural oligarchies of various types. Framing the problems in such terms moves the debate from the "difficulty of replacing semi-feudal relationships of dependence (between peasants and latifundists) by market regulated relationships" (Mariuzzo, 2013) to the structural laundering of (semi)feudal property forms and social relations of economics-political dependence into pure capitalist economic relations and proprietary forms. This in the context on an already, pre-reform, ante and interwar, asymmetric market-power of feudal landed elites, prime beneficiaries of (semi)feudal extractive and exploitative relations of production in Southern agriculture, where a high concentration of landed property "resulted in their owner being relevant agents in the considered market" (Martinelli, 2012:2), whilst landless or poor peasants struggled socioeconomically under seigneurial drudgeries.

We will show that simple land redistribution/property-transfer to landless or poor peasants, in the context of prior and ongoing politic and economic control of the process of production exercised by large landowners through Demo-Christian political support and market leverages, cannot bring about the desirable transformation of property and production relations in the

benefit of rural labourers, nor a favourable modernisation of the agricultural production for labouring classes, and this necessarily so, given its anchorage into the generalisation of capitalist property forms and constraints. Moreover, the accepted compromise of partial efficiency of land redistribution by the rural poor, in the Italian South, further insulated the latter from State institutions and political support of radical leftist parties, whilst the process of the "disaggregation of the agricultural landscape" (Sereni, 1961:355) unfolded further under elite control for more than four decades past the date of the land reform in 1950.

Concisely put, we hold that the land reform was a process of capitalist transformation and accommodation of the feudal landed class to new conditions of production and property, while small newly propertied rural poor were left economically and politically exposed after 'trading' leftist support and actions of land seizure for formal contracts of property over pieces of land, some of inferior production capacity or too small even for the sustainment of individual households. Moreover, peasants' ulterior inability to hold the property claims over their newly distributed land, led to a further process of land concentration and acquisition by third parties, such as Northern industrialists, city-based bourgeois, state employees and administrators, mobsters, former rural labour-supervisors or bailiffs and others, whom together formed a new strata of rural elites, adding yet another heterogenous layer to the chain of peasant labour exploitation in Southern Italy.

To the two classic versions of feudal landlord tenure dissolution: compete defeat of the *Ancien Regime* and transfer of property to rural labourers, and the English textbook case of elimination of customary rights of the cultivators in favour of feudal landlords turned agrarian capitalists (Boserup, 1965:79), the land reforms of the twentieth century seem to offer a third way. In the case of the Italian Land Reform, as we will see later, we have a strange combination, a so-called "hard fought hybrid solution" (Berardi, 2006:349), of the two paths described by Boserup: a clear loss of land by the latifundial class in the favour of landless or poor rural workers, on the short run, but also, paradoxically, a transformation of feudal rights into modern/capitalist property rights and the creation of a capitalist landed bourgeoisie, on the medium and long run. With this second outcome, the social conflict between propertied and dominant classes versus working rural class started anew, but this time, with all the economical and political capitalist advantages on the side of (old) new rural elites. The dissolution of large/manorial estates, under condition of capitalist globalization, governed by feudal conditions of property, entails the transition of agriculture towards a market-capitalist system of production, governed by different property rights and built upon a different set of social and production relations.

Preliminary remarks: ruling elites juggling class politics

A few preliminary remarks are still necessary, starting from a question: What is the purpose of land reforms or major land redistribution, beyond the first intended effect, namely the process of land redistribution towards landless peasants? Although responses to this question diverge, they gravitate around the issue of political support or class power balance recalibration. On the one hand, it has been argued that the objective is to create long term political support or generation of "lasting political returns" (Acemoglu, 2001; Galli, 1993; Zucco Jr., 2013), on the other hand, precisely regarding the case of Italian Land reform, that it represented a cumuli of state policies which were instrumental in the political battle between Democrazia Cristiana party (DC) and Partito Communista Italiano (PCI), the former "redistributing land in an effort to halt the rise of Communism in the countryside" (Caprettini, B et all, 2019:1). Moreover, the land reforms undertaken in 1950, have shaped the inter-parties power balance, in the favour of the Christian Democrat party, a political victory spanning over the entire duration of the Italian Second Republic, until the political crisis of 1993-94, when DC, and the Italian Socialist Party collapsed and disappeared altogether from the Italian political scene in the context of an astounding scandal involving charges of corruption, collusion with the Mafia, embezzlement - the *Tangentopoli* affair (Anderson, 2005).

There is also another point worth considering, namely the relationship between land reforms and bridging socioeconomic inequality, on the one hand, and the response of (un)democratic elites to such processes of asset redistribution, on the other hand. The discussion of this issue serves as a context for the political implications of the Italian case already briefly outlined above. Land redistribution is usually the tool of young democracies in search of a rapid solution for structural economic and political imbalances, and "this preference is the main reason why landowners are less prone to being in favour of democratic transitions and are more willing to use force to preserve non-democracy" (Percoco, 2019: 3). There are different sets of rationales regarding the different parties involved in this process: the State aims for a viable scheme of assets redistribution, such as to generate a viable source of state income; the large landowners class aims for a halting of this process as the redistribution of their properties is bound to create a reduction of wealth and power; finally, the rural workers, poor or landless, struggle for land in its capacity as a crucial resource.

Finally, and this is yet another argument for the study of the Italian land reform, as historically and socially anchored case-study, namely because it brings into the discussion the "socio-historical formation of modern Italy" (Bonanno, 1988: 132), transitioning from an agricultural based economy to an industrial

one, in the context of a structural dualism manifested as the contrast between a highly industrialized North (all Italian regions north of the Po river), with a performant agricultural production and the industrial desertification of the South/*Mezzogiorno* (Sicily, Apulia, Calabria, Campania, Molise), with low rates of productivity and profitability of the agricultural production. Between them, a settentrional belt (Tuscany, Umbria, Liguria, Lazio, Le Marche, etc.) of high economic efficiency of small and middle size farms and firms serves as a buffer between the two antipodes. Thus, the study of such reforms, in Italy, or somewhere else, also brings into discussion the state's role in the reproduction of the conditions and contradictions of modern capitalism. And this, in turn, is highly relevant because this state support for capitalism begets the question of the class nature of the state itself, and consequently, the class character of land reforms. There are various theories regarding the class nature of the state, two of particular interest for our argument: the theory that "State is a class state, bound by capitalist relations of production, yet not in itself capitalist production" (Poulantzas cited by Bonanno, 1988: 134); and that "the State is interested in reproducing the rules and social relationships which are presupposed by the class rule of the capitalistic class" (Offe and Ronge cited by Bonnano, 1988:135). In the case of the role of the Italian state in the implementation of the land reform seems to warrant both these views, given that the Italian state ceded to social pressures from below and above, finally settling for institutional, political and economic support for new and old landed elites in the detriment of new small rural proprietors.

Summarizing, we will show how the land reform, in spite of its stated purpose of land redistribution in the favour of poor or landless peasants, became a state-sponsored process of capitalist transformation of production and property forms and relations in the favour of former feudalists, turned agrarian capitalist or proprietors, similar types of state-sponsorships applying also to other kinds of landed elites. As for the new small rural proprietors, they indeed shacked off the restraints of feudalist dependency, but only to be locked-in in the new hierarchy of capitalist production, where uneven market competition quickly dissolved the economic value of their new properties, while the price of labour plummeted down in the *Mezzogiorno*, on the medium and long run, as the Southern labor marked contracted in the absence of a functional industrial sector or a productive agriculture, thus maintaining the monpsonist labour-market conditions working in favour of landed, rentier and commercial elites. In the next sections, we will address the content of the law, the context in which the land reform was made, and lastly we will discuss the impact of the reform, with an emphasis on the argument of this article.

The Land Reform: The Sila, Stralcio and Sicillian Laws

Three laws make up for the Italian Land Reform of the 1950's. On the 12th of May 1950, Sila Law was passed, while on the 28th of October of the same year, the Stralcio Law passed also, followed in December of 1950, by a third and final law, regarding the land redistribution in all the territory of Sicily. These laws targeted large areas to fall under the incidence of the reform, a surface comprising of around 29% of the country's land. The areas in question were: Delta Padano, Maremma, Fucino, Campania, Molise, Puglia, Lucania, Sila, Sicilly and Sardinia (both "strongholds of latifundists"; Elazar, 1996: 240), with an almost immediate result of "latifundia domains reduced by 762.000 hectares, mostly assigned to 109.000 families of *braccianti* and to poor peasants" (Sereni, 1961: 351).

There were three steps for the implementation of the laws: "expropriation of the land; allocation of the new land to the peasants, and development; organization and maintenance of the peasant holding so formed" (Bandini, 1955: 18). The land expropriation and land redistributions laws focused on large inefficient and unproductive farms, owned mostly by absentee landlords, while other large agricultural estates will follow the same fate, according to two parliamentary imposed criteria, size and productivity. According to the Sila law, private estates larger than 300 acres, unimproved, were subjected to expropriation. The expropriated landowners were to receive compensation for the lost land in the form of 25-years fixed-rate government bonds, yielding 5% interest per year.

As for rural workers, they had to apply for land, through a local or regional public body, set up specifically for reform implementation, paying for the land with the help of a 30-years loan, with an interest of 3,5% per year. No land could be sold before the loan was repaid and no loan could be repaid in advance. Ex-landowners were under a different constraint, the interdiction of land purchase for a period of six years. The criteria for obtaining redistributed land were the following:

> landless residing in the town; agricultural workers working under sharecropping contracts residing in the towns; all agricultural workers (or landless) residing in other towns of the treated area, but who have been working in the towns for the last three years; all agricultural workers (or landless) residing on town on the border of treated areas; sharecropper with low income; owners of small land plots with low income. (list compiled by Percoco, 2017, p. 5).

Two types of new land properties were created: "the *podere*, or small farm, designed for those who previously had owned no land at all; and the *quota*, to supplement the small holdings of the poorer peasants" (Ginsborg, 1990: 132). The state-support schemes at the disposal of the newly created farms were the following: technical assistance and advisory work, organization of farm co-operatives, grants and funds for improvement, production programs and agricultural credit.

The reforms proceeded with a quick pace and all land was expropriated in the first trimester of 1953 (Russo, 1955), 13% of agricultural land in the South and 18% in the North (Marciani, 1966: 38). Between 1950 and 1951, approximately 800.000 hectares of land were redistributed, this situation significantly changing the landscape of land ownership, and, over time, the total surface of the land distributed amounted to 8,6 million ha.

Although both Sila and Stralcio Law, together with the third Law regulating Sicilly, are the constitutive acts of the Italian land reform of 1950, the Stralcio law is the one that was truly in effect, being the work Antonio Segni, Minister of Agriculture between 1946 and 1951. We will quote here at length some of the articles of this law, because they reveal interesting aspects, namely the conditions in which redistribution of the land is to take place, while also indicating the legal loopholes regarding how large landowners could actually keep their land secured from redistribution. We argue, that in the body of this law, the compromise between landowners and DC is inscribed and made law. The legal provisions of interest are the following:

> The landowners are entitled to retain one-third of the land which might be expropriated from them, provided they undertake to carry out intensive farming and radical improvements of it. Once he carried out these improvements, the owner can keep half of the one-third in question but must give up the other half to the reform Agency, against repayment of the expenditure which he has incurred through the improvements. c) Under Article 10 of the Law, certain lands are excluded from expropriation if they are well organized and efficient model farms. Some of the criteria used for determining this are: the existence of stable tenure relations, crop yields at least 40% above the average for the district, an average labor input of no less than 0.30 man-units per hectare, superior economic and social conditions for the workers; sanitary conditions of the workers 'or tenants' dwellings. (Bandini, 1955: 17)

Although the reform formally aimed at levelling the economic game-field between the socioeconomic power of latifundists and peasants, in fact pre-existent advantages in terms of both capital and assets could be capitalised as

exemptions from the law, under productivity and improvement clauses, clearly advantageous to the large landowner class. Moreover, through work-extensive procedures of farming, characteristic for the economic work-model of manorial estates, the rates of productivity per hectare could be raised through high labour exploitation practices to match those considered economically viable of technologically-intensive farming. Moreover, these law articles represent a clear sign of things to come regarding the importance of productivity and improvement clauses that will become crucial in the selection farms that were to become the beneficiaries of State and regional sustenance schemes, while other will be excluded from such types of State support. These clauses will have drawn the line between productive and unproductive farming production units in the following decades, becoming also units of measure and exclusion from the market and the profit game of poor rural proprietors, the latter lacking the capital and the institutional support for improving their new lands or competing on the market with more productive farms from Central and Northern Italy or from Europe. Only very large Southern estates could sustain this competition benefiting from the exploitation of a large pool of cheap local agricultural labour force and flooding of the market with cheap agricultural products.

Land reform in context. Sealing the fate of the Mezzogiorno

The socioeconomic premises of the reform were dire. Post-war Southern Italian agriculture was backward and unproductive, and most rural laborers did not own any land, in the context of widespread sharecropping and tenant contracts. The Italian regions that will become the focus, but never a stronghold, of the Communist Party interest and ground organization for social actions, such as land occupations and protests, were, for example, in 1948, the home of 2,5 million landless rural workers and another 1,7 million peasant owing small plots, insufficient for the entire household subsistence (Gullo, 1950).

The measures of land redistribution did not start only after the Second World war, but much earlier, when, after the unification of Italy, in 1861, but also in 1867, large portions of estates and lands belonging to the church were being expropriated. In 1917, *Opera Nazionale Combattenti* was created – an institution meant to organize the redistribution of land from large estates to landless war veterans, but only 40.000 ha were redistributed (Prinzi, 1956). In 1946, after the war, with the passing of the new constitution, the discussion about land equality and land ownership came up again on the public agenda.

There were two articles in the constitution that are of particular interest for the matter, articles 42 and 44, both emphasising "the social role of agriculture and land ownership; and the establishment (through art. 44) that agricultural contracts had to be fair" (Percoco, 2017: 4). This will become the constitutional framework that will warrant such reforms, added also to the provision of the first article of the Italian Constitution from 1946, which stated that the Italian Republic is based on the right to labor, such as all citizens should have to possibility of working and living under modern and dignified conditions.

A second issue speeded up the urgency of land reform matter, the reigniting, after the Second World War, of the debate around the *Questione Meridionale* - the problem of the structural poverty, backwardness, widespread unemployment and economic and industrial underdevelopment of the Italian South in relation to the North. Together, these circumstances became the prime causes for what was dubbed "the massive wave of emigration for the Mezzogiorno" (Mack Smith, 1997: 585), when over 5 million Italian southerners migrated in the 50's and 60's towards the Americas, Europe and Northern Italy. The exploitation of the Southern peasants by large landowners was endemic and burdensome. Regarding the Meridional issue and the exploitation of the peasants and the function it serves in the larger framework of the Italian capitalism, a few Gramscian lines, worth quoting at length, describe the conservative elite political consensus, rooted outside of Southern Italy, whose economic and political interests depended on the maintaining of the socioeconomic underdevelopment of Southern Italy. Moreover, the Gramscian position also sheds light on the position and power of agrarian and industrial elites towards improvements of the Southern agriculture, merely relegated to a subordinate position towards the fast-developing Northern industrial and agrarian capitalism.

> The Italian peasant is tied to the great landowner. This type of organisation is the most common one in Mezzogiorno and Sicilly. This creates a monstrous agrarian blockade that functions as an intermediary and supervisor of and for the Central (Italian) capitalism and the big banks. Its only purpose is to conserve the status quo. In its interior there is no intellectual light, no programme, no push for emancipation and progress. If some ideas or programmes have been presented, they originated outside of the Mezzogiorno, namely from the political groups of conservative agrarians, mostly from Tuscany, that in the Parliament were allies of the conservatives of the agrarian meridional group. (Gramsci, 1926/published 1991: 34)

Corroborating Gramsci's dire perspective about the condition of Southern peasants and the underdeveloped stage of Southern agriculture, Bandini (1955) also drew attention to the lack of innovation in Southern agriculture of

technology and mode of cultivation. The nature of social relations between landlord and peasant was pre-modern, anchored in feudal relations of production, "farm laborers, although by law free and emancipated, were in fact still in a state of economic subjection" (Bandini, 1955: 1), with "distinct forms of landlord domination and different state politics leverages of agrarian capitalists and latifundists" (Elazar, 1996: 233). In Mezzogiorno, a form of almost complete insulation from the State and popular politics of Southern labouring masses was pervasive. The absence of the State empowered landed elites, while rendering "servile the peasant population' that lived in 'conditions of absolute economic and personal subjugation" (Elazar, 1996: 233, 244).

The discussion of land reform in relation to the structural issues of the Mezzogiorno can be framed as a constitutive and structurally embedded dualism of the Italian agriculture before 1950. This structural dualism refers also to the uneven distribution of land into a majority of small farms, a minority of large farms, and a consequent relative absence of middle sized farms:

> Farms of 20 hectares or less constitute 92,2% of all farms, but occupy only 37% of all land; large farms (larger than 50 hectares), in contrast, represent only 1,2% of all farms, but occupy almost half of all agricultural land in the country (Bonanno, 1989: 91).

Regionally, this dualism meant a high concentration of small and unproductive farms in the South, while larger and more productive farms were located in the North. Middle-size productive and efficient farms seem to be wide-spread in the central regions of Italy. Over time, even with the land reforms, unfortunately, this dualism will only augment in text context of the integration of Italian agricultural production in the global chains of production and distribution, and the subsequent support of the European Community for productive and technologically innovative middle-sized and large farms. However, it is undeniable that even before the reform, there was an "unstoppable decline of great southern estates" (Barone, 1984: 335-336), and thus a State-sponsored program for the "improvement of underdeveloped areas" (Barone, 1986: 45) was justified both in social, but mostly economic terms.

Of course, such dire socioeconomic conditions in the South were prone to be the breeding grounds for various waves of social unrest. The period between 1948 and 1951 was marred by land occupations, social unrest and violent clashes between peasants, backed by the PCI, and large landowners, backed by the police and other elements of control of the repressive State apparatus. As land inequality was particularly high in the South, Mezzogiorno witnessed frequent violent riots and actions of land occupation since the

unification of Italy in 1861, the massacre from the Melissa village being a case in point for the violent repression of collective land-occupation attempted by peasants. The change introduced in his social trend of unrest by the Communist Party was the endowment of these collective, spontaneous acts of social unrest with an organized and coordinated aspect. The turning point from uncoordinated to party-led social action took place around 1943-44, when also leftist workers' unions began supporting peasants' riots (Tarrow, 1981).

There is a clear correlation (Percoco, 2019: 12), backed by empirical research, between the frequency and apparition of 'land invasions 'in regions, towns and villages where PCI was stronger, the fight against land inequality becoming in these particular instances instrumental for political consensus consolidation. Moreover, empirical research backed also the hypothesis that "land reform was more intense where land invasions took place" (Percoco, 2019: 15). The involvement of Communist ideology in the struggle for land, we argue, has represented a notable mutation, because of the danger such ideology represented for conservative elites in both South and North, industrial capitalists in the North and the rule of the DC Party. In this sense, the creation of a strong rural entrepreneurial class of (small) proprietors became a political stake for the DC, hoping that such a class would form a "anti-communist social barrier" (Cottam, Brand and Sullam, 1940). However, the dissemination of communist ideology in the South would also erode the pervading Italian culture of *family amoralism* (Ginsborg, 1990), creating a class unity of struggle between the units of family, community and collectively aiming for a more equal and just cartography of property relations, land ownership and productive relations quilting the three elements together:

> Communism was an especially dangerous form of mysticism, it was to be applied to existing property relations; an extraordinary and exalted *fede publica* (Ginsborg, 1990:126).

In this context, the DC party decided to pursue a politics of land redistribution, carefully treading such as not to completely alienate the support of local large landowners' class, well represented in the DC's management structures, where said class tried to resist the infringement rights of their property. On the other hand, the DC fought to gain the support of the peasants, while pulling them away from concentrating and organizing around the PCI. Basically, DC opted for an apparent "extension of the (political) franchise" (Acemoglu, 2001), a quite typical elite response to social unrest.

Some aspects become illuminated by this bundle of circumstances: that the reform was taken in a highly volatile political *millieu*, with social uprisings threatening the post-war republican victory of the DC - a party sympathetic and dependent on the landed elites' votes; and that redistribution was only secondarily a process aimed at the betterment of the peasants 'life conditions, being primarily an elaborated process of social transformation, state-led, of converting, on the medium and long run, the feudal class of large landowners into a more suited, for the Italian economic path of capitalist development, class of landed entrepreneurial bourgeoisie. Moreover, as was already noted at that time, the restructuring of Italian Southern agriculture on capitalist basis will prove favourable and will be conjoined with the development of a capitalist landed bourgeoisie, a process that, in time, will have widened even more the socioeconomic wealth gap between peasants and other types of land workers and large land proprietors and capitalist farmers, whilst strengthening the DC rule, politically hegemonic for almost 5 decades.

Finally, we can state that the reasons behind the implementation of land reform can be classified into three large categories: economic, social and political (Bandini, 1955). From an economic point of view, the question of the system of land ownership was the most striking, because the large estates where mostly owned by absentee landowners[3], who had no intention of improving the land and the manner in which it was cultivated, and this in turn led to stagnant or even decreasing rates of land and agriculture productivity. From a social point of view, the question of high level of poverty and unemployment among landless and poor rural workers ranks as first. The lack of stable life and work conditions for rural workers in turn affects the rates of labour productivity, a factor that weighs in negatively on the entire Italian economy. The need to assure continuous work, places of residence and sources of sustenance for the peasants brings us to the political reasons behind the land

[3] The classical description of absentee landlords, and the most suited one for the purposes of this articles, is the one that links the feudal system of production with the practice of estate management in the conditions of landlord's absence: "the absentee landlord is a wealthy landowner who always lives from his holdings and know nobody except his ignorant and unreliable administrator. In fact, almost all wealthy latifundists do not know their properties, preferring the great cities where they enjoy their rents in idleness and pleasure" (Snowden, 1986: 14). In this contact, of feudal labour brokerage, the labourer lived in a sort of agro-city dwelling, mediating his contact with the landowner being the 'gabolettos', intermediaries working for the landowner, de facto in charge of the labor process. Apparently, the rural worker was cut off of both the State and popular leftist representation, the official presence of the Communist party in the South being rather scarce, such as a state of 'relative isolation from national politics' (Elazar, 1996: 244) ensued, exogenously increasing the dependence relations between peasant and landlord.

reform, namely, the constant fears of the dominant classes of social unrest and protests that had the potential to disrupt the political consensus built around the DC government.

Concluding, the restructuring of Italian economy and agriculture in the period following the Second World War, was evident not only looking at the Land Reform, but also at the cohort of measures and agreements signed by the Italian state, as a part of a larger socioeconomic process of capitalist restructuring. We will give here only a few examples, such as the malaria eradication program (1947-1951), the Marshall Plan (1948-1951), the creation of the Cassa del Mezzogiorno (1950-1984), the Home Plan (1949-1963), the signing of the General Agreement on tariffs and Trade (1950), joining of the European Coal and Steel Community (1951) (enumeration compiled by Caprettini et all, 2019:14). Moreover, there is a modern capitalistic tendency at play also, behind the implementation of the land reform, namely the splitting of landed property such as "to do away with the restrictions that hinder its transfer" (Bandini, 1955:1) and the emancipation of feudal relations from production of rural labourers under conditions of capitalist relations of production.

Land reform and the class (trans)formations. Proprietors and prisoners of property

Usually the assessment of land reforms takes into consideration the correlated action of three factors: "whether the system was a landlord estate or a hacienda system, whether it was gradualist with compensation or took place all at once, whether the it took place in a market or socialist economy" (Binswanger et all, 1995: 2685). In the case of Italy, we are dealing with the redistribution of landlord estates (*demesne*/large lands in repose, owned by absentee landowners), a gradualist, albeit quite fast, redistribution in terms of compensation, that took place in a market economy. The reform aimed the modernization, in capitalist terms (higher productivity of land and labour, higher product output, technological innovation, and capitalist relations of production geared for profit accumulation and surplus-value extraction), of Italian agriculture from the model of extensive farming to that of intensive farming.

Regarding the impact and the success of the land reform, one of the first major impact was the substantial reduction of the surface of the land in repose in relation to all cultivable Italian land to a significant degree, already to 8,2% in 1958, a figure down to 4,1% in 1956:

> Lands that have yielded, in the hands of the owners of latifundia, a mean gross marketable product certainly much below 71.000 lire per hectare in 1953, in the hands of the new cultivators rose to 95.000 lire in 1956 and 115.000 lire in 1958. (Sereni, 1997: 351).

However, the success of the agrarian measures was initially overestimated. In 1950, the authors of the reform predicted that it would lead to an increase of 90 million workdays per year in employment, but the real effect was lesser, amounting to a "total increase of 23 million workdays per year" (King, 1970: 7). The underwhelming economic impact of the land reform has been noted also by other authors (De Leo, 2008; Percoco, 2010), both arguing that from a qualitative perspective, reform was only 'mildly effective 'in triggering development in the treated areas. However, some positive impacts are to be noted as a direct result of the reduction of the number of large estates and a weakening of the sociopolitical power of the elite incumbent in these estates. Firstly, on the short term, an increase in wages was observed as a result of the reduction of the monopsonist power of the landed elites, and this in turn triggered an increase of the living standards of households, with positive spill-over effects upon the level of education and level of private entrepreneurship. Second, "the policy was accompanied with a credit line characterized by low interest rates" (Percoco, 2017: 11) and a subsequent reduction of credit market imperfections.

Aside from these reports of (in)adequacy of the reform, other substantial critiques of the real impact of the reform were formulated almost immediately regarding the loopholes in the law. Prevailing themselves of the 'unimproved ' clause in the Laws, and trying to avoid expropriation, many landowners argued that they have in fact improved the land, in some cases the law permitting even the construction of a rudimentary shed to count as improvement. Secondly, many landowners have divided their estates among family members, such as to go around the clause of the 300 acres. When this was not possible, the landowners allowed for the expropriation of a poor quality land, such as at the end, for example, the Sicilian case where out of "74.290 hectares distributed, 95% was classified as inferior and marginal, while only 0,4% well-irrigated" (Ginsborg, 1990: 132). Another negative consequence of the land reform was the rise of land price, this action being triggered by the land put on the market for selling, by the latifundists themselves, even before the implementation of the reform, Southern landowners speculating financially in their favour "the land hunger of peasants" (Sereni, 1961: 354).

Furthermore, after the laws passed, the nascent bourgeoisie of capitalist farmer-tenants (selected from the ranks of the *gabolettos*, state functionaries, mobsters, medium size entrepreneurs, etc…), owing already some capital,

immediately bought this land, of a superior quality than the one redistributed, this action leading to the creation of a new landed Southern bourgeoisie, another unmatched economic competitor for the poor rural masses. Other Southern and Northern industrialist also speculated on the reform, buying property with the profits extracted in Northern industry, adding to the ranks and files of various elite groups that together profited from the "systematic pillaging of the agriculture" (Sereni, 1961: 357).

Then, the credit lines, initially favourable to peasants, and the only viable solution for the landless and rural poor, started malfunctioning, while other "reform centres became the target of repeated blows" (Sereni, 1961: 353) weakening further the economic frailty of new small farms and proprietors. Basically, the State lifted its protection of vulnerable economic actors, already indebted and struggling to make the monthly payments:

> Many peasants did not make the regular payments, and the board's services were regarded as a form of welfare hand-out. However, in the agriculture year of 1957-58, a sudden change of policy took place. Credit was offered on a much harsher terms and all those who were in debt with the board were refused further concessions. (Ginsborg, 1990: 135)

There was at work what we call a process of socioeconomic and political reversion, from the progressive feature imposed by the struggle of the peasants for land that pressured the government into passing the land reform to a subsequent prevailing influence of "agents of capitalist restoration and monopolistic expansion" (Sereni, 1997: 353). This phenomenon spelled the "subordination of agriculture to the new superpowers of industrial, commercial, and financial monopolists" (Sereni, 1997: 356) and the definitive exclusion of many new small proprietors from profitable agricultural production altogether. It was, in fact, a sort of state-sponsored capitalist monopoly, given that the resources and the levers of power were handed to hegemonic landed classes by their representative political elite, the 'dominant and clerical' DC party and its acolytes. The war against the newly formed class of peasants-land proprietors was waged through the imposition of a sole criteria for warranting public and private investment, namely profit and productivity, two accounts on which the new rural working class was failing, due to economic and social vulnerability, such as "only a small portion of the farms created by the land reform remained in business for an extended period of time" (Bonanno, 1989: 95). In short, the transfer of property through redistribution also led to the enshrinement of property augmentation capitalist clauses, such as profitability, productivity and amelioration standards impossible to meet by the small and struggling new

proprietors, whom inadvertently became prisoners in and of the new relations of property, such as they previously were prisoners of seigneurial relations of productions.

The expropriated landowners ʾfate was much better: first they received a higher value in money from the expropriation of their lands than the real value of those lands; second, some landowners improved technologically they farms with the help of the reform itself (one of the provisions of article 10 of the Stralcio Law); thirdly, some of them divested money from agriculture and land toward the booming real-estate and construction industry, thus converting themselves into industrialists or urban entrepreneurs, in short, transforming themselves into (industrial) capitalists. It is as situation mirroring inversely the one of the poor rural laborers: the latifundists, through the reconfiguration of the form of property and a property transfer mechanism that ultimately worked in their favour, were liberated from the property prison that used to be their vast lands in repose, rendering almost no profits and anchoring them in outdated relations of production. The new form of capitalist property and new capitalist social relations made property ownership work again in the favour of old rural hegemons, turned into entrepreneurs of modernisation virtually overnight, while the clouds of social unrest dissipated at the horizon.

Furthermore, again on the side of the peasants, the defeats were multiple and on different fronts: the peasant movement was weakened and the small farms created proved inefficient, thus they could not become instruments of economic growth or accumulation of capital for their new owners. New small farms "were isolated in the market with inadequate supporting infrastructures" (Bonanno, 1988:141) and they did not survive enough to shape the (productive) agricultural landscape on the long term in their favour.

Aside from this process of class reconfiguration and the transformation of property relations, from a macro point of view, the Italian agriculture, after the land reform, has also undergone a process of decrease, especially in the South, in the two decades following the reform, in terms of farm number (from 4,2 million to 3,6 million), reduction of productive land (3,5 million hectares), "a decrease in the agricultural portion of the GNP from 23% in 1961 to 9% in 1971" (Bonanno, 1989:96) and a reduction of the rural workforce by 2 million spanning over the 1960's, with no regional industrial infrastructure capable of absorbing this living labour surplus. Unfortunately, this situation had only augmented further the circumstances of Italian dualism, large farms growing steady in numbers, while small and medium farms decreased, symptom of capitalist concentration and accumulation of both capital and property in the hands of capitalist dominant classes.

Conclusions

In our article we have tried to offer a comprehensive tableau of the circumstances surrounding the Italian Land Reform of 1950, looking at structural, historical, socioeconomic and political aspects, discussing each from the perspective of its relevance in terms of the transformation of relations of property and production in the South, in the aftermath of the reform. We also discussed the class process that ensued after the reform, displaying a particular interest in retracing the conditions of the transformation of the class of absentee lords (a pre-capitalist formation) into an entrepreneurial class, while on the side of the rural working class, on the medium and long term, the tendencies of proletarianization and pauperization prevailed, as the condition of structural dualism and economic underdevelopment persisted over time.

Moreover, from the loopholes of the laws to the support on medium and long term granted to the class of Southern large landowners, the Italian State revealed its class allegiances, while using land-transfer as a mechanism for controlling rural social unrest rooted in the discontents over land ownership. Although initially the ruling Christian-Democrat political elite opted for an 'extension of the franchise' through land redistribution from absentee landlords to poor or landless peasants, on the medium and long term it became impossible form small farmers and proprietors to compete on the market, falling both in terms of productivity and profitability, such as their new acquired landed property did not turn into an economic entrepreneurship, nor did it offer a reliable source for household subsistence. As the project of Southern Italian agricultural modernisation seemed to have been successful only partially, with the creation of few productive and profitable large farms, the capitalist transformation of property and social relations was achieved. Most feudal hegemons became agrarian capitalists, venture capitalists, capitalist rentiers, real estate magnates, owners of industry, etc.

Looking at the consequences of the land reform, we can say that indeed, on the medium and long term, it has benefited the latifundists, while also converting them into a class more suited for the requirements of Italian capitalist economy. Our conclusion formulated on the basis of the literature survey on the impact of Italian Land Reform is supported also by Bonanno, who makes a similar argument, arguing that the land reform served primarily the economic interests of the bourgeoisie rather than those of rural laborers. Moreover, the dissolution of traditional property forms and their replacement with capitalist forms of property served the purpose of "accelerating the process of transformation of the absentee lords from a pre-capitalist group into an entrepreneurial class" (Bonanno, 1988:143).

Our argument complements Bonanno's findings through a closer look at the nexus property-social relations, describing how in the logic of capitalist property forms and the corresponding social relations of production, such process of class reconfigurations described by Bonanno are made possible, while State class allegiances are rendered even more visible and explicable, both in terms of intra-class elite frictions and alliances, but also of inter-class conflicts articulated politically as the confrontation between DC and PCI. Moreover, the entire process of Italian post-war capitalist modernisation of agriculture was bound to reproduce the constitutive social class conflict between proprietors of land and capital and (rural) workers, the latter temporarily empowered by a transfer of land in their ownership, but debilitated over time by the capitalist alliance between politics and economy.

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Critical Reviews

Editorial Note:

This section provides reviews and critical reflections upon recent evolutions in social research, with focus on changing societies and current dilemmas.

STUDIA UBB SOCIOLOGIA, 65 (LXV), 2, 2020, pp. 119-123
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BOOK REVIEW

***Noile subiectivități ale capitalismului global. Spiritualitate, dezvoltare personală și transformări neoliberale în România (The New Subjectivities of Global capitalism. Spirituality, Personal Development and Neoliberal Transformations in Romania)*, Sorin Gog and Anca Simionca (eds.), Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2020, 206 pages.**

CIPRIAN BOGDAN[1]

A growing number of Western studies have tried in the last decades to critically reflect upon the social, political and cultural factors behind the rapid expansion of self-help industry, a highly lucrative business with an eclectic offer which ranges from exotic *spiritual* world-views to more down-to-earth and psychologically informed narratives addressing *personal development*. According to many of these studies, societal changes brought by neoliberal policies favouring market forces against state regulations or collective interferences can be related with the explosion of a self-help industry often promising to deliver the tools that would allow individuals to adapt to the pressures of a highly competitive environment. Although post-communist Romania is no exception going through the same process of a booming self-help industry and harsh neoliberal policies, very few studies have tried to address this phenomenon. The present book is the first systematic attempt to focus on the Romanian context through the critical lenses provided by this (relatively) new and rapidly expanding field of research.

The fundamental sociological problem that the book tries to address is what kind of subject is required by the neoliberal economic and social transformations and which are the concrete forms and techniques of subjectivation that can be detected in the field of spirituality and personal development (Gog and Simionca, 2020: 18). Such an approach explicitly rejects the attempt to reduce spirituality and other cultural ideas activated by individuals to an economic base (Marxism). In the spirit of critical sociology, the authors believe that far from being mere puppets controlled by impersonal structural processes individuals actively and reflexively react to them. Consequently, the studies oscillate between two main approaches, one inspired by Foucault's analysis of neoliberal governmentality and another informed by researches focused on the

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emergence of new cultural formations which shape our understanding of the self (Gog and Simionca, 2020: 22). Because of the ubiquitous while also subjective nature of their topic, the authors use a qualitative method which combines discourse analysis (targeting Romanian books, podcasts, blogs etc. dedicated to spirituality and personal development), participant observation (workshops, courses, spiritual retreats etc.) and semi-structured or unstructured interviews (80 interviews were taken in two major Romanian cities: Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca to participants and professional providers of psychological or spiritual services). While in processing the empirical data, the authors try to supplement the standard critical analysis of various scripts or normative texts with one that registers and interprets the reactions of the participants to them.

As Gog and Simionca rightly observe, starting with 1996, Romania has gone through a painful social process triggered by the implementation of one of the most aggressive neoliberal programs from Central and Eastern Europe in which large privatizations went hand in hand with deregulations of the labour market (Gog and Simionca, 2020: 10). This has also created incentives for significant foreign investments paving the way for the emergence of a new middle class often with jobs in Romania's services sector. Because of this highly competitive environment, new narratives of coping with the pressure have been offered to individuals whether by companies themselves through new management strategies or by other providers. Promising both practical and philosophical advices of how individuals can become more flexible, creative, resilient, productive etc., the basic imperative, however, underlying these narratives is that of an individual who holds the entire responsibility for changing himself/herself for the better. Though, as the authors rightly emphasize, the social function of celebrating personal responsibility is mostly to legitimize capitalist economic processes oriented towards dismantling any possible form of collective resistance to profit-making.

Once the larger social and cultural context is settled, the studies can focus on the two major types of discourses centred on the self: (1) *spirituality* and (2) *personal development*. This analysis is, undoubtedly, the most original part of the book.

(1) In his study, Sorin Got usefully identifies several features of a "neoliberal spirituality" spreading after the financial crisis from 2008-2009: (a) an active subject being defined not as a member of a community (like in traditional religions or even in spiritual movements from 1990's), but as someone who can single-handedly change his/her life; (b) a focus on the present moment (Eckhart Tolle) as an expression of a radically immanent approach uninterested in future salvation or emancipation; (c) the rapid implementation of spiritual techniques (through workshops, retreats etc.) which undercuts the traditional highly

ritualistic socialization processes; (d) the focus on personal wellbeing and authenticity which goes not only against the rigors of traditional moral codes, but also their tendency to bring societal changes; (e) an anti-dogmatic approach favouring the eclectic combination of ideas which fits well with the tendency of urban middle-class of rejecting traditional dogmatism (Gog, 2020: 44-57). In her analysis, Cristine Palaga concentrates on the concept of "inner strength" defined as the ability of the self to access his/her inner material, psychological and spiritual resources in order to overcome external obstacles (Palaga, 2020: 100-101). While the activation of spiritual resources means, among other things, to become aware that the self is the only creator of his/her own world. Andrei Herţa starts by noticing that while the emergence of early Western capitalism is related to a process of "disenchantment" (Max Weber), contemporary capitalism might well be understood as going through a process of "re-enchantment" considering its impressive appetite for spiritual narratives that usually mirror and legitimize working requirements (flexibility, autonomy, creativity etc.) driven by profit-making. Andrada Tobias turns her attention towards the problem of leisure in order to shed a new light on spiritual discourses emerging in the 2000's. By using the distinction between "casual" and "serious leisure" (Robert T. Stebbins), Tobias underlines an important social change: while in the 1990's leisure time was usually related with pleasurable and short term activities (casual leisure), the rising of a new middle class in the 2000's has generated a shift towards spiritual activities which, basically, constitute a new type of work operating on the individual himself/herself in order to be better adapted to capitalist processes (serious leisure).

(2) Alongside spiritual narratives, there is, however, a plethora of discourses focusing on *personal development*. After briefly presenting the recent history of these narratives in post-communist Romania, Elena Trifan turns to the concept of "psycho-governmentality" (Nikolas Rose) to capture the underlying neoliberal assumptions operating in the field of personal development (Trifan, 2020: 73). For instance, behind the promise of these narratives that the individual can reach happiness once he/she has access to the right philosophy (full personal responsibility, the believe in the capacity to influence external reality through the mind etc.) and techniques (active listening, assertive communication etc.), the basic presuppositions is that of an individual understood as being cut off from society who should not be interested in addressing systemic problems. In her analysis of "inner strength", Cristine Palaga also looks at narratives related to personal development by pointing out that they often emphasize a self whose authenticity can be tested through the capacity to connect the will to change with action, a clear sign of the pervasive impact of the neoliberal rhetoric of self-government within such discourses (Palaga, 2020: 108). In the last study of the

book, Delia Petrea addresses the subjectivation process in multi-level marketing companies in which wages do not depend on an internal hierarchy, but on the level of sales realized by each employee. Despite the supposedly meritocratic feature of these companies, the cold profit-making logic might still be unsettling for employees and potential customers who need to be convinced that the ultimate goal is to help people to flourish (Petrea, 2020: 187-189). Thus, the organizational culture of these companies implies an entire spectrum of practices and discourses centred on personal development ranging from ritualization processes in which individuals are taught how to talk and behave to a more "philosophical" rebranding in which selling products to clients becomes a way to spread the good news of how to be healthy, or in which the company turns out to be a community generously allowing employees and clients to develop at both physical and spiritual level (the famous holistic approach).

Although all the studies emphasize the pervasive tendency of these spiritual and personal development narratives to legitimize capitalist processes whether by downplaying social issues and ties, inhibiting criticism or by eroding the distinction between private and public, to name only a few, Sorin Gog and Andrei Herţa explicitly acknowledge that not all these narratives are automatically pro-capitalist since many of them also contain, as Herţa points out, values (like selflessness, forgiveness, love etc.) that might collide with a competition-based environment (Herţa, 2020: 136-137). But such an analysis is beyond the scope of the present book.

Still, if we are to look for a possible alternative take on the issue, we might notice, first of all, that it is not entirely clear where lies the fundamental difference between more traditional approaches to ideology which is understood as a more global phenomenon (we can think of here of Marxism, early Critical Theory etc.) and that of legitimizing neoliberal capitalism through local narratives addressing, in this case, spiritual and personal development. In spite of being the result of reflexive and individualized reactions to capitalist processes, what remains striking in these narratives, as the book aptly and convincingly emphasizes, is still the high degree of similarity between their core ideas. Secondly, we believe that the analysis might have become even more convincing by using and interpreting additional sociological and ethnographic material in order to avoid what in some cases might be perceived as a shortcut between the micro level of local reactions and the macro level of larger social changes. However, these should in no way diminish the importance and relevance of the book. While addressing a widespread social phenomenon which is mostly ignored by local critical scholars, this book is more than simply an attempt to fill the void of local research on the topic, it constitutes a landmark for all the work that, hopefully, will be done in the future.

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BOOK REVIEW

***Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev,* by Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 293 pages.**

ZOLTAN MIHALY[1]

Red Globalization depicts the economic globalization of the Soviet Union. The primary merit of the book, I argue, lies in emphasis and counteraction of numerous misconceptions regarding economic policies of Eastern European socialist countries that followed the USSR's model. Presented in a temporal manner, the sequence of events is globally embedded at every turn, a timely and necessary act of historical contextualization that ultimately demonstrates international economic dependencies.

Starting from the early onset of industrialization, the book focuses on the struggles of re-structuring an existing reality via the consolidation of a new economic and social foundation. Prompted by agricultural mechanization, Soviet industrialization efforts were initially financed by grain exports, spurred by expanding rail infrastructure inland. In the post-war era, despite the Cold War's premise of equality between the two powers, the resource allocation necessary for economic reconstruction originated largely from the former and targeted the USSR among many other war-torn countries. Soviet leadership actively pursued US credit necessary for the import of goods and raw materials in a period when exports were absent. Trade steadily resumed with eastern bloc countries, and, despite the backdrop of military occupation, commercial exchanges were equitable, as numerous countries resisted Soviet domination.

Posited against isolationist perspectives, Sanchez-Sibony's writing underlines the diverse steps taken by Soviet planners in order to integrate domestic products into global value chains. In this regard, the USSR's export tendencies counteract the autarchic discourse voiced worldwide

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(including their elites). The author eloquently shows how eastern self-sufficiency was a product of the Cold War: a totalitarian, far-flung and ideologically opposed significant other on the one hand and capitalist imperial expansionism on the other. However, in economic terms, socialist countries posited comparable levels of foreign trade with western countries. Contrary to ideas of Soviet autarchic obtusity (Kornai, 1980, 1992; Turnock, 2006), Soviet planners actively sought western supply routes, importing certain products and offering significant concessions to obtain them. For example, following the Bretton Woods agreement, dollars – obtainable only via western trade – became increasingly sought after. Long-term trade agreements were maintained in diplomatic terms: government delegations established the exchange details and domestic producers on both sides fulfilled the required quotas.

In the Kruschev era, besides further agricultural modernization, the construction and chemical industries started receiving significant investments. Planners initiated renewed housing projects designed for increased comfort, a general desire to increase consumption ensued, all while the country's foreign trade volume surged. The previously established notion of industrial expansion funding via foreign trade was a recurrent event in socialist countries during the 1960's. Soviet trade consisted of western productive machinery imports in exchange for raw materials. Yet again, Sanchez-Sibony skilfully underlines the effects these agreements had on COMECON countries. Although, posited as a mutual aid act, Soviet trade with its socialist neighbours paled in comparison with western exchanges. On the upside, the latter did partially overcome these circumstances by exporting machinery and importing favourably priced raw materials.

Another pointedly remarkable facet of the USSR's trade practices lies in its ideology, or rather, the lack of it. In a lengthy passage, the author highlights the distinctly non-political role Soviet negotiators held in foreign agreements. Stemming from a position of inferiority induced by economic dependence, commercial policies inherently adhered to material pursuits. When ideological implications did exist – the case of West Germany involving the release of prisoners of war as part of commercial agreements – Soviet officials kept their composure.

In the third and final chapter, the focus shifts to a compelling intrigue: how Soviet products were integrated into global supply chains given their currency inconvertibility? The answer resides in the adaptation toward, and imitation of capitalist economic systems, despite these inconsistencies. Chief among these developments were product quality improvements and the mirroring global export trends. Numerous state decrees – exemplifying foreign corporate practices and research initiatives – were passed with the intent of rivalling western quality standards (especially for oil products). Imitating western export procedures meant that domestic products were shipped in opportune time frames. For example, the author mentions seasonal potato exports that maximized revenue and the re-allocation of surplus timber stocks initially destined for internal consumption. The mentioned monetary incompatibility was solved by offering convertible roubles, correlated with dollar exchange rates.

The USSR's economic relations with socialist countries, namely Cuba and Egypt, strayed from the structural advantage precondition, partly due to reduced interest when compared to western alliances. Cuba, on the one hand, largely disregarded export quantities, shipping significantly less than the agreed amounts. Soviet credit was provided in exchange, resources subsequently utilized to purchase other goods from fellow socialist states. Egypt, on the other hand, balanced its relationship both with the west and the east in a complex convolution of global affairs. On numerous occasions, Soviet trade agreements materialized only as a consequence of failed deals with the west.

As mentioned, the accentuation of socialist and capitalist trade dynamics is important for the re-conceptualization of the entire eastern bloc in terms of economic dependency and development models. Therefore, it enables numerous scientific inquiries of pre-existing socialist dynamics devoid of purely ideological normative limitations. For example, Romania's case mainly followed a path similar to the USSR in terms of foreign trade relations. Unlike autarchic perspectives, the country's path to industrialization was financed by western exports, with the dollar as the most coveted currency. Romanian planners imported significant amounts of fixed capital from western states, constantly expanding existing production capacities and founding numerous novel industries in a period known as the second wave of socialist industrialization (Ban, 2012).

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STUDIA UBB SOCIOLOGIA, 65 (LXV), 2, 2020, pp. 129-130

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CONTENTS

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