

National University of Political Studies and Public Administration

DOCTORAL THESIS

- Summary -

**Romanian agriculture and the European funds:
The role of social capital in accessing the financial resources**

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The summary presents the main theoretical and empirical contributions of the doctoral thesis. The first contribution is a theoretical one and addresses the vast research on the concept of *social capital*. Specifically, I argue that Bourdieu's (1986) perspective on social capital is often ignored in the literature, even by sociological studies. This omission is related to the fact that *social capital* was taken over by international organisations (especially World Bank) and transformed into a key variable in the development literature, similar to the concept of human capital. Because it gives a central role to the concepts of inequality, social stratification, or intergenerational reproduction, the theoretical approach proposed by Bourdieu has been removed from the policy and research agenda promoted by international organizations (Harrison 2001; Fine 2010). Therefore, in my PhD thesis I aim at bringing back Bourdieu's perspective to the forefront of the social capital literature. This is achieved through: i) detailing Bourdieu's paradigm for studying social phenomena (in particular the *habitus-capital-field* conceptual triad (Bourdieu 1986; 1990; Thomson 2008; Manton 2008)); ii) describing and exemplifying the empirical contexts in which his framework of analysis is relevant; iii) highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of Bourdieu's (1986) perspective compared to the other theoretical traditions of social capital.

The second contribution concerns the field of *rural sociology* and comes from the empirical research I conducted, in which I analyse the differentiated access of Romanian small-scale farmers to the European agricultural funding resources. The rules for allocating the European funds provide an optimal institutional arrangement to test the theoretical framework proposed by Bourdieu, according to which farmers will try to improve their position in the social field of agriculture by harnessing the resources of economic, cultural and social capital that they already own. The research is embedded in the structural realities of the agricultural sector in Romania, characterized by a very large number of subsistence and semi-subsistence farms and an extreme fragmentation of the land plots. These structural barriers of Romanian agriculture have been shaped in the last three decades, by the political decisions on the privatisation of agricultural land during the post-communist transition, by the lack of political vision for rural development in recent years, and by the inadequacy of European funding mechanisms for small-scale farms. In this context, more than 50% of the total 3.4 million Romanian farms have been excluded from any type of European funding for agriculture. There are thus the premises for a new social stratification process in the Romanian rural areas (of course, on a much smaller scale than the stratification already produced by the land privatisation in the 1990s), increasing inequalities between the households with significant resources of economic, cultural and social capital and those without such resources.

The summary continues with a presentation of how the thesis is structured, including both a general description of each chapter and the detailed table of contents.

I. Theoretical contributions to the social capital literature

Social capital and human capital: the "missing variables" in the development literature

Social capital is one of the most widely spread concepts in the social sciences, and is frequently used not only in academic studies, but also in the politics, public policy and media (Farr 2004; Field 2008). Since the 1980s, four distinct theoretical traditions of social capital have emerged in the literature: (1) Social capital in social stratification: Pierre Bourdieu's perspective (1986); Social capital in rational choice theory: (2) James Coleman's perspective (1988) and (3) Social capital in social network analysis (Lin 2001); (4) Social capital in the political culture tradition: Robert Putnam's perspective (2000; 1995; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1994).

Chronologically, Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) focused on social capital in roughly the same period, but within different theoretical approaches. Bourdieu (1986) uses social capital in the field of social stratification to illustrate that contemporary societies are not stratified solely on the amount of economic capital held by individuals. In his view, cultural capital and social capital represent more subtle but highly effective strategies that social actors use to improve their position in the social field, and subsequently in the processes of intergenerational reproduction. The theoretical approach proposed by Coleman comes from the economic literature and attempts to respond to several points of criticisms targeting the rational choice theory. Specifically, Coleman uses social capital as a "conceptual tool" (1988, S96) in order to explain the cooperation of individuals in situations where, according to the rational choice paradigm, self-interest would be maximised by a non-cooperative behaviour (J. Field 2008, 23-26).

However, the spread of social capital in the academic literature and in the public policy area is mainly associated with the theoretical perspective developed by Putnam (2000, 1995, Putnam et al. 1994). This perspective ignores the theory proposed by Bourdieu and excessively expands Coleman's definition of social capital from an individual to a collective level of analysis (Adam and Roncevic 2003, 161-62; Portes 2000, 3). In their study on the regional differences of institutional performance across Italy, Putnam and his colleagues pointed out that institutions in northern Italy are performing much better than those in southern Italy. The main explanation proposed concerns the inter-regional differences that have accumulated over

centuries, in the levels of social capital, defined as "norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement" (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1994, 167). By attributing the differences in development between northern and southern Italy to the differences in social capital rather than to other structural factors, Putnam's (et al. 1994) study yields a number of advantageous implications for policy makers and organizations working in the development sector. Thus, the responsibility for the success or failure of development projects and the reduction of inequalities is shifted from governmental actors to local communities and the particular context of the associational life in which projects are implemented. Therefore, governments should not develop redistributive mechanisms to support poor communities, but only enable these communities to achieve their own goals through an increasingly wide participation in voluntary associations (Harriss 2001, 6-8).

Not surprisingly, this perspective on social capital has been taken over and extended by the development literature and international organizations, in particular through the studies funded by the World Bank (Harriss 2001; Fine 2010; Grigoraş 2014). More than just including the concept and its operationalizations in earlier empirical models, social capital has been considered in a glorified manner *the missing link* (Grootaert 1998) for the theoretical models on the causes of success or failure of development programs (Harriss 2001, 2). In this context, it is easy to understand why even the same authors within the World Bank later expressed concern about turning social capital into an overly comprehensive concept that would include everything that cannot be encompassed by natural, physical or human capital (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer 2002a, 5) and explain anything that cannot be explained by the other variables included in the empirical models.

The expansion of the concept of social capital can be better understood through a comparison with the history of human capital, a concept equally present in the economic literature and the field of development. Despite contributions by several authors, Theodore Schultz (1959; 1961; 1962) and Gary Becker (1962) are often considered the main promoters of the human capital 'revolution' (Becker 1993; Tan 2014). Human capital entered into the mainstream of economics in the 1960s, also as a *missing variable*, being used to explain differences in development between countries or regions that could no longer be explained by classical economic factors (natural capital, physical capital, labour). From its outset, human capital has been used both in micro-economics, to explain individuals' decisions to pursue further education in order to obtain higher salaries (Becker 1962; 1993; Mincer 1970; 1974; Psacharopoulos 1993; Psacharopoulos and Patrinos 2004; 2018), and in macro-economics (Lucas 1988; Barro 1991; Temple 1999; 2000; Hanushek 2013), cross-country differences in

growth rates being explained by differences in the national 'stocks' of available human resources (Sobel 1978; Savvides and Stengos 2009, 4-5).

Strongly rooted in neoclassical economics, human capital theory assumes that the decisions of individuals to invest in their education are based on a rational calculation between the current costs of pursuing an educational program and the future benefits resulting from higher wage earnings (Tan 2014, Becker 1993). The idea of investment arises precisely because the present actions are motivated by a set of expected future benefits (Blaug 1992). Although micro-economic data from the early 1960s tended to confirm this assumption, the high returns on investment in education were no longer valid when confronted with an "inflation" of college graduates. Thus, the return on investment in education started to fall considerably even for graduates who managed to get employed. Therefore, it seems that individuals' participation in education rather reflects the society-wide aspirations for upward social mobility, prestige, income equality etc., than a rational calculation of the expected future earnings (Sobel 1978, 294-296).

In macroeconomy, the human capital literature has been reinvigorated by Barro's (1991) article. While earlier studies were limited by the lack of comparable indicators across countries, Barro aimed to explain differences in economic growth rates across countries using a data set for 98 states (both developed and developing countries), in which human capital is measured through school enrolment rates at the national level. The data analysed by Barro (1991) showed a strong positive correlation between states' economic growth (GDP per capita) over the period 1960-1985 and the level of human capital initially available (in 1960). A relevant result for governmental actors and international organisations was that, for the period analysed, developing countries only caught up with developed countries if they had a high stock of human capital (Ibid.). Despite these promising results, more detailed analyses have begun to indicate a much lower impact of human capital on economic growth (Pritchett 2001; Hanushek 2013). Indeed, even in Barro's (1991) original article, the data showed that the relationship between human capital and per capita GDP growth did not hold for sub-Saharan African and Latin American countries.

Thus, during the 1990s, authors in the field of development start to question the explanatory power of human capital, while social capital emerges as the new key variable for explaining economic development (Grootaert 1998; Woolcock 1998). In this context, social capital theory is not a rival theory to human capital, but a complementary one. In fact, most empirical studies in the social capital literature use variables on individuals' educational attainment (human capital) as alternative explanatory variables, or as control variables. Thus,

the main idea of the studies using social capital at the aggregate level is that cross-country or cross-regional differences in development can be better explained if, in addition to the differences in the stocks of human capital, the differences in the stocks of social capital (understood as norms, trust in institutions, values, etc.) are taken into account.

A number of **similarities** can be spotted in the way the two concepts have expanded in the literature. First, both human capital and social capital have emerged as a new explanatory factor that had not been considered before. Thus, many authors saw in the two concepts opportunities to solve previously unsolved empirical and theoretical puzzles, leading to a spectacular increase of their usage in academic papers. Second, both human capital and social capital have been rapidly applied in the area of public policy, mostly through their operationalization by international organisations such as the World Bank and the OECD. This has happened precisely because the two concepts offer practical solutions to the kinds of development dilemmas these organisations try to address. Moreover, the proposed solutions resonate with the neoliberal discourse promoted by these organisations (Harriss 2001; Fine 2010), according to which, the responsibility for achieving various national development goals was often placed on individuals and communities in each country. Third, there is confusion created by the usage of the two concepts at the micro and macro levels of analysis. In shifting from one level of analysis to the other, there is a tendency to ignore a number of important theoretical and methodological assumptions, or to generalise results beyond the available empirical evidence. The issue of the different levels of analysis is perhaps best illustrated by the conceptual leap that Putnam (et al. 1994, 1995, 2000) makes when he uses Coleman's (1988) concept of social capital. Aspects that Coleman proposed to be contextualised and measured at the level of small communities (e.g., the level of interpersonal trust and existing norms of reciprocity) are transformed by Putnam into characteristics that can describe entire regions or countries.

The usage of human and social capital by international organisations has also meant a rapid spread of the two concepts in very different geographical contexts. Despite the significant resources invested by these organisations to test the impact that new forms of capital have on the economic development of states and regions (Sobel 1978, Fine 2010), the two concepts have faced serious criticism regarding their definition and operationalisation. In addition, the promotion of human capital and social capital as revolutionary concepts has attracted even more debates about their theoretical and methodological consistency. This is even more evident for social capital, since the multidisciplinary origins of the concept (sociology, economics, political science) have also brought criticism from several academic disciplines.

In addition to the methodological limitations characteristic of any research programme, the criticism towards social capital is also directed at the fact that the international organisations (especially the World Bank) have instrumentalised the concept to support the development model promoted by the current global capitalist system (Harriss 2001; Fine 2010). Thus, by setting a specific research agenda and influencing the political discourse, international development organisations succeed in downplaying certain structural problems of capitalism (the increasing inequalities between states and between individuals, the exploitative economic and labour relations towards the global South, the failure of community development programmes to produce long-term effects etc.). And at the same time, they managed to propose as alternative explanations for all these problems the regional or national differences in the stocks of human and social capital available. Moreover, international organisations and their own experts systematically contribute to maintaining the *status quo*. For example, although the United Nations stated in a 2015 report that global poverty and hunger have been reduced in recent decades to the lowest levels in human history, more detailed analyses (Hickel 2016) show that these positive results are only a truncation of reality. Global poverty reduction is achieved by the unjustified inclusion of China in the analysis, as it has not been supported by international organisations (the exclusion of China shows that the number of people living in poverty has remained unchanged), while hunger reduction is achieved by a methodological fallacy, since the daily number of calories needed by an individual is reported for sedentary people and not for active people, who are engaged in labour-intensive activities, as is usually the case for people at risk of poverty. Thus, by presenting positive results even when they do not exist, international organizations encourage economic and government elites to promote the same economic policies for global poverty reduction without considering alternative measures, such as strengthening redistribution mechanisms or abandoning structural adjustment programs promoted by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Hickel 2016, 13-14).

Bourdieu's perspective in the social capital literature

Given the ideological implications of the instrumentalization of social capital by international organisations, it is easy to understand why Bourdieu's (1986) perspective on social capital, which addresses the concepts of inequality, social stratification or intergenerational reproduction, has been mostly ignored in the *mainstream* literature in the field (Harriss 2001; Fine 2010). At the same time, a frequent practice among the studies using social capital is for each author to position themselves exclusively within a particular theoretical tradition, depending on the empirical context studied and their own academic background (Castiglione 2008, 9; Adam and Roncevic 2003, 158), which makes it virtually impossible to unify different approaches to social capital.

In this context, the main theoretical contribution of the thesis is to **highlight the relevance of Bourdieu's perspective in the social capital literature**. This objective is achieved through the following three elements. First, I bring a number of clarifications to the broader framework of analysis used by Bourdieu, based on his conceptual triad *habitus-capital-field* (Bourdieu 1986; 1990; Thomson 2008; Manton 2008). Second, I specify the characteristics of the institutional arrangements in which Bourdieu's perspective on social capital might prove to be more useful compared to other theoretical traditions. At the same time, I highlight a number of empirical contexts, including the context of my own research, in which his research programme proves to be 'progressive' (the criterion used by Lakatos (1976) to assess the relevance of scientific research programmes). Third, I illustrate several dimensions of analysis that could be exchanged between the theoretical traditions of social capital, in the hope of encouraging a dialogue between different research programmes using this concept.

Over the years, **criticism** of Bourdieu's perspective has not necessarily focused on his theory on the forms of capital and his conceptualisation of social capital (1986), but on his general framework of analysis, which includes the concepts of *habitus* and *social field*. A first criticism concerns the fact that, although he succeeds fairly well in explaining the processes of intergenerational reproduction in contemporary societies, his approach ceases to be relevant when analysing a context characterised by significant social changes. In other words, through the central role Bourdieu gives to the concept of *habitus* (individuals' practices being closely linked to their previous experiences), ***his framework of analysis would be static and deterministic*** (Yang 2014; Jenkins 1982). In his more recent work (Bourdieu 2000, 159-63; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1994, 130-31), the French author mentions that this criticism stems

from a misunderstanding of the concept of *habitus*, particularly by proponents of the rational choice paradigm. Habitus is Bourdieu's solution to the wider debate between the role of structures and the role of individuals in generating social practices (*structure vs. agency*). Bourdieu (1990, 53-57) rejects the rational choice model promoted by economists and instead proposes the concept of *habitus* to explain how human behaviours are generated. Habitus includes a set of dispositions and principles that generate practices, which are in turn dependent on individuals' previous experiences or practices and the capital resources they possess. In this sense, social structures do not entirely determine the behaviours of individuals, but only delimit a set of possible practices at a given time. Thus, the habitus of individuals is transformed over time, through the accumulation of new experiences (e.g., by occupying new positions or social roles), but these transformations are not radical, as they depend on previous experiences (Bourdieu 2000, 160-61). In general, Bourdieu considers that there is quite a large overlap between the habitus of actors and the rules operating in a given social field, but nevertheless, the French author does not see societies in a static manner. By introducing the concept of *hysteresis*, Bourdieu describes situations in which, although the conditions in a given social field have changed significantly, individuals delay in adapting their practices to the new social context, precisely because of an inertia imposed by the habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1994, 130). With these clarifications brought to the concept of habitus, it is quite clear that Bourdieu's perspective is also relevant for studying processes of social change. The concept of *hysteresis* explains the delay of the habitus in adapting to changes in social fields, but perhaps more importantly, it captures the fact that *the habitus* of individuals is not static, but gradually reacts and adapts to new social contexts.

A second criticism is rather implicit and concerns the fact ***that Bourdieu's perspective does not delimit in any way the types of phenomena and social contexts he aims to analyse and explain***. Through the original approach he proposes, Bourdieu attempts to solve a number of important debates in sociology and social sciences at large: *structure vs. agency*, *objectivity vs. subjectivity*, *macro-level analysis vs. micro-level analysis*, *theorizing vs. empirical data*, *quantitative methods vs. qualitative methods*, etc. Bourdieu considers that all these distinctions are in fact false dichotomies and proposes a *sociological method* by which they are embedded and addressed in actual research practice (Ibid., 1-59). In terms of a paradigmatic classification, Bourdieu's perspective comes closest to the structuralist and ethnomethodological paradigms (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1994, 7-14). In order to understand the social world, Bourdieu considers it is first of all necessary to describe the 'objective' social structures, i.e., how resources (forms of capital) are distributed and the rules that guide this distribution. Secondly,

similar to constructivist approaches, Bourdieu's sociological method focuses on explaining the relationships behind social structures, the mental representations and subjective meanings that individuals attribute to them, or in other words, explaining the unwritten rules of the 'game'. It is this relationship of determination between 'objective' structures and mental structures that also explains why social structures are relatively stable over time and reproduce themselves inter-generationally, since power relations, or relations of domination between social groups, are generated and expressed through mental structures. In the case of modern societies, the best example of this process is the educational system, which facilitates the transmission and reproduction of the cultural capital specific to privileged social classes (Ibid.). In this context, the conceptual triad *habitus-capital-field* (Bourdieu 1986; 1990; Thomson 2008; Manton 2008) is central to Bourdieu's sociology. The three concepts are not only used to describe or explain a particular phenomenon under study, but are the tools Bourdieu uses to understand the determining relations between social structures and mental representations, regardless of the social context under investigation. Thus, the absence of a delimitation regarding the empirical contexts and phenomena that Bourdieu's perspective can explain often stems from a superficial reading of Bourdieu, ignoring the paradigmatic nature of the approach proposed by the French author.

Compared to other theoretical traditions of social capital, Bourdieu's perspective becomes particularly relevant when the research contexts are described by the following two institutional arrangements. First, Bourdieu's approach can be used when the phenomenon under study involves a **competition for resources between individual actors**. Thus, his perspective is less useful for explaining collective actions, management of common goods or cooperation for implementing community development initiatives. This competition also implies unequal access of individual actors to resources, both through the unequal distribution of resources called into question by the very phenomenon under study, and through the prior accumulation of capital and its intergenerational transmission. Second, Bourdieu's perspective on social capital proves to be extremely fruitful in **contexts that examine important changes in the social field**, meaning the emergence of new opportunities or new rules of the institutional arrangements. When significant social changes take place, we no longer witness a discrete conversion of cultural capital resources into economic capital (as is the case of intergenerational reproduction through the educational system (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990)), but a direct competition between individual actors to improve or preserve their position in a given social field. Thus, individuals will use all the resources at their disposal: economic, cultural and social capital. In such a context, the contribution of the different forms

of capital (including social capital resources) becomes more visible within the various social mobility strategies adopted by individuals. In Bourdieu's view, important changes in the social contexts coincide with the emergence of the *hysteresis* phenomenon, a situation in which individuals' practices are lagging to adapt to the new social context, precisely because of the influence imposed by habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1994, 130). In a language closer to economics and political science, for example the language of the new institutionalism in sociology (Nee 2001), changes in social contexts coincide with the emergence of **new institutional arrangements, or weak institutional arrangements, characterised by the fact that the rules are not yet known by all individuals, or it is difficult to sanction instances of non-compliance to these rules.**

In my thesis, I argued that the European funds for agriculture (in particular through the funding provided for investment projects) represent a new institutional arrangement in the agricultural sector and the Romanian rural areas, in which individual farms have been placed in a competition for accessing the new funding opportunities. Despite the initial resistance imposed by habitus, manifested by the reluctance of some farmers to apply for these funds, households began to use different strategies to improve their position in the agricultural social field. Of course, resources of economic capital (land, machinery, labour resources in the household, etc.) and cultural capital (previous experience of working in agriculture) are very important in the process of accessing European funding. However, the complexity of the new institutional arrangement has also made it necessary to use resources of social capital: reliable recommendations for the consultancy firm that can take care of writing the investment project and information about other households' experiences with implementing such projects.

I have also shown how Bourdieu's perspective on social capital has been used successfully **in other empirical contexts**. For example, in the field of agriculture, Bourdieu's framework of analysis was also used to explain the professional trajectories that former managers of agricultural cooperatives in Hungary had during the early years of the post-socialist transition (Lampland 2003). Compared to other rural farmers, cooperative managers were more successful in establishing successful farms, benefiting from important resources of cultural capital and social capital, which could be harnessed in the new context of post-socialist transition. At the macro level, Bourdieu's theory on the forms of capital has been included in the analysis of the formation of the national capitalist class in Central and Eastern European countries in the early years of the post-communist transition (Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley 2000; Stoica 2004). The different trajectories of communist elites in Central Europe (Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland) and Eastern Europe (Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Belarus) (Eyal et al.

2000, 166) show that beyond the strategies pursued by individual actors in their competition for resources, the new rules within the institutional arrangements are also very important. In this case, the European/ global economic context and national policy decisions regarding the transition to a market economy have been decisive. Or, to use Bourdieu's terms, the capacity of individuals to improve their positions in a social field depends not only on how they convert and use the different forms of capital they possess, but also on the rules at the level of the social field, and in particular the rules at the level of the social field of power. Social capital is also widely used in the migration literature, within two main research streams: explaining individual actors' decision to migrate using transnational migration networks (Massey et al. 1993; Filiz Garip 2008; Haug 2008); and the integration of migrants into destination societies (Erel 2010; Ryan et al. 2008). In terms of the decision to migrate, the approaches based on the rational choice theory (Haug 2008) could very easily be replaced by Bourdieu's framework of analysis using the *habitus-capital-field* triad (Bourdieu 1986; 1990; Thomson 2008; Manton 2008). In this perspective, individuals' previous experiences and practices (*habitus*), existing opportunities in the country of origin and the country of destination (social field), as well as the human and social capital resources held (e.g., language proficiency, professional skills, reliable information about employment opportunities) will contribute together to the migration decision. Regarding the integration of migrants in the destination country, it has been reported that authorities often treat migrant communities as homogeneous communities, which will develop a specific social capital, and thus solve most of their integration needs (Erel 2010). However, a more detailed analysis, using Bourdieu's approach, shows that even among migrants with the same country of origin a process of differentiation takes place, based on criteria such as ethnicity or socio-economic background (Ibid.).

All these examples illustrate the elegance of the explanatory models produced by Bourdieu's paradigm, in empirical contexts studying new institutional arrangements characterized by an explicit or implicit competition for resources between individuals.

The theoretical traditions of social capital originate in research programmes that hardly communicate with each other. In addition, the different academic background and research experiences leads social scientist to prefer by default one theoretical approach on social capital over another. This is why it is currently impossible to formulate a unifying approach in the social capital literature. However, a relevant issue remains the initiation of an inter-paradigmatic dialogue aimed at identifying the dimensions of analysis that could be exchanged between the different research programmes. The main limitation of Bourdieu's perspective is the difficulty of explaining collective action phenomena, especially in situations where

individuals cooperate for the management of common goods. Being focused on describing and understanding phenomena such as social stratification, unequal access of individuals to resources, or intergenerational reproduction, Bourdieu's (1986) theory on the forms of capital is less useful for explaining the cooperation between individuals from small communities, similar to those studied by Ostrom (2007). By assuming that individual actors are in a constant competition to improve their position in the social field, Bourdieu's perspective fails to provide a satisfactory explanation of how certain institutions for the management of common goods emerge and continue to function. It is precisely for this reason that understanding the operational rules of these institutional arrangements is the main direction in which Bourdieu's perspective on social capital could be developed in the future.

As for the other approaches to social capital (the theoretical traditions launched by Coleman (1988), Putnam (1995; 2000) and Lin (2001)), their main limitation is that they ignore or underestimate the problem of unequal access to resources. In the case of Putnam's (et al. 1994) perspective and its subsequent usage in the development literature by the World Bank (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer 2002b), social capital is seen as a collective resource, which can explain why local development initiatives are successful in some social contexts while failing in others. Thus, this approach assumes that high stocks of social capital in localities or regions produce a range of positive effects that are more or less equally enjoyed by all members of a community. However, several authors have warned that community members will not benefit equally from the outcomes of local initiatives, and it is common risk that local elites will capture the new resources (Platteau 2004; Dasgupta and Beard 2007). Elites are able to influence the local development processes and gain a number of personal benefits by holding asymmetric positions of power compared to other community members: they benefit from larger stocks of economic capital (financial resources), cultural capital (literacy, knowledge about the implementation of local development projects and initiatives) and social capital (reciprocal relationships built in professional contexts or based on kinship ties). The same critique applies to the rational choice approach to social capital (Coleman 1988) and its specific application to issues of collective action and the management of common goods (Ostrom 2007; Ahn and Ostrom 2008). Although Coleman (1988, S105-S108) attempts to limit the benefits of social capital at the level of closed social networks (e.g., small communities where relationships exist among all members), his perspective treats social capital as a public good, bringing positive effects to all members of a community (Ibid., S116-S118). Even if this approach sometimes raises issues related to inequalities, they focus on the elements that make it difficult for individuals to cooperate in the first place and solve the collective action

problems: the *free-riding* phenomenon or the lack of homogeneity of individuals in a community in terms of the assets they own (Ostrom 2005). Thus, this perspective also ignores how institutional arrangements can produce long-term inequalities between individuals, and does not tackle the risk that local elites might gain a larger share of the resources. While for Bourdieu, asymmetric power relations between individuals are present in all social fields, the other approaches to social capital avoid altogether addressing the issue of socio-economic inequalities. This is why, analysing the current distribution of resources among individuals for each research context is a necessary addition to these research programmes. In the long term, studies under these theoretical traditions could analyse not only the success or failure of local development initiatives, i.e., the management of common goods, but also the structural inequalities that may arise within the new institutional arrangements.

So far, it is quite clear that I do not argue in my thesis that Bourdieu's perspective on social capital is superior to the other theoretical traditions. Rather, my main theoretical contributions were to make explicit the characteristics of the institutional arrangements in which Bourdieu's perspective on social capital is relevant and to illustrate how the theory of the forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986) is used alongside the concepts of *habitus* and *field* for a deeper understanding of social phenomena. At the same time, I have shown that Bourdieu's perspective has been unjustly ignored in the social capital literature, even by sociologists, precisely because it did not overlap with the research agenda promoted by international development organisations. Therefore, I argue for a reconciliation, according to which the use of one of the four theoretical traditions of social capital should depend only on the characteristics of the institutional arrangement under study. The dogmatic use of the concept of social capital within a particular paradigm, regardless of the nature of the phenomenon being studied, should be replaced by an informed decision on the most relevant theoretical perspective for each particular empirical context.

II. Romanian agriculture and the European funds

The decision to use the concept of social capital, and subsequently Bourdieu's (1986) theoretical perspective, gradually took shape during my doctoral research. After a systematic review of the different theoretical traditions on social capital, I argued that Bourdieu's perspective is the most relevant for the phenomenon under study, i.e., the **differentiated access of Romanian rural households to European financial resources for agriculture**. This decision was taken after a detailed analysis of the formal rules for accessing European funds for agriculture, highlighting the characteristics of this new institutional arrangement. The eligibility criteria suggest the premises for a competition between small scale farmers for the EU funds, with around 54% of all agricultural households being excluded from funding in the case of the subsidies provided by APIA¹ and 85% of households in the case of the investment budgets granted by AFIR². Moreover, almost all funding mechanisms do not encourage cooperation between farmers in any way, rather promoting the rapid transformation of subsistence and semi-subsistence farms into agricultural micro-enterprises. Also, the complexity of the process required to access European funds (especially in the case of the amounts granted by AFIR) provides a new institutional arrangement for farms, with rules totally different from their previous practices and experiences. In this context, it becomes quite clear that the theoretical perspective proposed by Bourdieu becomes particularly relevant. Through a comprehensive analysis of the resources held by individual farmers and their households (economic capital, cultural capital, social capital), this approach allows a good understanding of the different strategies used by farmers to access European funding and improve their position in the social field of agriculture.

Structural barriers of the agricultural sector in Romania

In order to better explain individual farmers' strategies, it is also necessary to understand the macro-level rules that structure the social field of the Romanian rural areas. For that purpose, I present in my thesis the huge gaps between Romanian and European agriculture and I argue that these gaps have been accumulated by ignoring the development needs for the rural areas during all the transitions Romania has gone through in the last century, and

¹ Agency for Payments and Intervention in Agriculture (the official Romanian name of the institution is *Agenția de Plăți și Intervenție pentru Agricultură*)

² Agency for Financing Rural Investments (the official Romanian name of the institution is *Agenția pentru Finanțarea Investițiilor Rurale*)

especially, by the failure of the post-communist transition for the Romanian countryside (Pasti 2006). At the same time, I argue that by ignoring the needs of subsistence and semi-subsistence farms, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) fails to reduce these gaps (Scriciu 2011, 140-41).

The available data for 2016 showed significant differences between Romanian agriculture and the agricultural sectors in other European countries (both from Western Europe or Central and Eastern Europe). Romania ranks last in the European Union for all the indicators measuring the efficiency of the agricultural sector. The main structural problems of Romanian agriculture are related to excessive land fragmentation, small economic size of the farms, high percentage of population employed in subsistence and semi-subsistence farming and a reduced labour productivity. For example, even though it accounts for almost a third of the total labour force of the European agriculture, Romania provides only 3.6% of the total EU agricultural output (Eurostat 2019a, b). Although much older historical causes can be observed, these gaps have been accentuated in particular by the failure of the privatisation of Romanian agriculture in the post-communist transition (Verdery 2003; Pasti 2006; Scriciu 2011). In the early 2000s, more than 50% of all farms in Romania (i.e., 2.3 million households) worked land areas of less than 1 hectare (RGA 2010). With a sharp devaluation of the work in agriculture (Verdery 2003), subsistence farming has not been a reliable source of income for these households and they were increasingly exposed to the risk of poverty.

After joining the EU, European funds for agriculture and rural development were often seen as the much-needed solution for the Romanian countryside. Between 2007 and 2020, almost €30 billion has been allocated to Romania through the funding mechanisms of the Common Agricultural Policy. Some of these financial resources were also accessed by small farms, managing to postpone, at least for a while, the socio-economic problems of the Romanian countryside. Despite the considerable sums allocated through the EU budget, European funds have failed to address the structural problems of the Romanian agriculture. Data from the 2016 Agricultural Structural Survey (ASA 2016a, b) shows that, after almost ten years of European investments, the structure of the agricultural sector in Romania is very similar to that of 2002: a very large number of subsistence farms, exploiting small areas of land, usually fragmented into several plots. One of the main reasons why the expected impact of these financial resources has not been achieved is that the rural development paradigm implemented at EU level (focusing on large, technologized farms) does not address the needs of small farms in Romania and other Central and Eastern European countries (Scriciu 2011, 140-141).

In the context of a highly fragmented agricultural sector that differs from the European model, national political elites had to take decisions about the distribution of these new funding resources for agriculture. Specifically, they had to decide which types of farms are eligible for EU funds and which farms are excluded from funding. At the same time, they had to determine the amounts allocated and the ways in which the financial resources will be distributed to farmers. Agricultural households in Romania were able to access EU funds either through the subsidy mechanisms (amounting to around €100/hectare) or through non-reimbursable funding for their own agricultural investment projects (amounting up to €50.000). Although there are more than 3.4 million farms in Romania, only approximately 1 million households receive the annual subsidies for the land and animals on their farm, and only 100,000 households have received EU funding for investment projects. While subsidies often manage to cover only a part of farmers' production costs, the funding for investment projects represents significant sums for farms, exceeding their revenues for several years. This is why the amounts received for investment in agriculture could bring visible changes to the farms that access these resources. On the other hand, since the funds are allocated through a selective process, this funding mechanism could also lead to a new stratification of the households in Romania's countryside. Therefore, the emergence of these new funding opportunities represents an optimal institutional arrangement to study the strategies adopted by rural actors to access the new available resources and to illustrate the role of social capital in this process.

Research methodology

Anchored in Bourdieu's (1986) theory on the forms of capital, the research carried out in my thesis starts from the assumption that farmers will use all resources of capital that they possess (economic, cultural and social capital) in order to obtain European funds and improve their position in the social field. Therefore, the **main objective of the research** is to explain the different strategies that farmers use for accessing these new funding opportunities. Given the complexity of the bureaucratic process for the AFIR funding and the types of close-knit relationships that can be usually found in rural areas, an important dimension of the research has been to understand the role that social capital has in the process of accessing European funding for agriculture.

My methodological approach is based on a qualitative research design. This decision was also supported by the results of several regression analyses in which I tried to explain the variation in the number of investment projects in agriculture in each Romanian rural locality

by a number of local factors concerning the structure of the agricultural sector (total agricultural land used, proportion of the labour force employed in agriculture, number of machinery and equipment used etc.). The results showed that the differences between rural localities in terms of accessing European funds for agriculture cannot be explained solely by the agricultural resources of the localities. Therefore, I decided to use a qualitative methodology, combining *micro* and *meso* levels of analysis. Thus, the forms of capital mobilised by agricultural households for obtaining the funds are analysed both at the individual level and in the local context of the agricultural sector.

Through in-depth interviews and ethnographic research, I documented in my thesis the experiences related to farming and accessing EU funds of households from three communes in the Dâmbovița County: Lunca, Satu Nou and Runc³. The communes were selected in order to provide information as "rich" as possible for my research (Patton 2002, 230). All three communes have a long history of land and/or livestock farming. The specificity of Lunca is given by its large vegetable crops (both outdoors and in greenhouses), being one of the localities that produces the largest quantities of vegetables at the county level. In the Satu Nou commune, cereal production and raising livestock are the main agricultural activities, and in recent years, more and more households started growing vegetable crops. Runc is a mountain commune, with animal husbandry and fodder production being the main agricultural activities. Unlike Lunca and Satu Nou, Runc is defined by an increasing devaluation of farming and the overall decline of the agricultural sector.

The role of social capital in accessing funds for investment in agriculture

The findings indicate that, in addition to economic capital resources (land, labour, financial resources to start a production cycle) and embodied cultural capital (practical agricultural knowledge and skills), small-scale farmers also use significant social capital resources in the process of accessing European funds. Specifically, agricultural households make use of the *relationships with representatives of consultancy firms* that they can contract in order to write their project proposal, and the *experiences of other similar households* in obtaining the funds.

³ The names of the localities mentioned above are fictitious. Throughout the paper I decided not to mention the real names of the localities included in the study, in order to ensure confidentiality regarding the identity of the respondents (Kaiser 2009). This is particularly necessary because some of the information obtained is sensitive and may place the farmers I interviewed in an unfavourable light, or could have negative consequences for them.

The complexity and technical nature of the documents required in the application file compel farmers to use the services of a consultancy firm. This observation applies to all the households in my research that applied for agricultural investment projects. At the same time, the supply of consultancy services at the county level is rather low. Under these conditions, the firms specialised in project writing are in an advantageous position in relation to the farmers and build their own strategies to select clients and maximise their profits. Thus, small-scale farmers resort to two main strategies for contracting consultancy services. The first strategy involves exploiting the social capital resources, which consist of reciprocal relationships with representatives of consultancy firms. These are based either on kinship or on previous collaboration in agriculture. In both cases, these relationships represent social capital resources because they were built for purposes other than the current contractual relationship and have been maintained over time. The second strategy involves harnessing symbolic capital resources. In their initial discussions with the representatives of consultancy firms, a farmer provides a range of information that helps the firms decide on the farmer's chances of success in the process of accessing and implementing an European funded investment project. This information operates as symbolic capital, both at the household level (through information on the total area of land owned, the number of livestock, the types of crops grown, the machinery owned etc.) and at the local level (information on the commune in which the farm is located and the history of farming in that commune). My findings suggest that in order to contract the services of consultancy firm, the symbolic capital of the locality is much more important than the symbolic capital of the farm.

The second type of social capital resources used to obtain European funds are the experiences of other similar farmers in their endeavours of accessing and implementing an agricultural investment project. Because the information on European funding uses a technical language, (while farmers do not have the embedded cultural capital needed to understand this information and properly assess the risks and benefits of accessing EU funds), farmers often 'translate' this information using their social capital, through the experiences of other farmers from their social field. In doing so, farmers make use of their previously built reciprocity relationships with other farmers. If in a household's network of relationships there are farmers who have successfully accessed European funds, that household is encouraged in its decision to apply for these funding resources. If, on the other hand, in a household's network the experiences of other farmers are predominantly negative, a household's chances of applying for this type of funding are considerably reduced. Thus, farmers' social capital can function as both a positive and a negative resource in the process of accessing EU funds. The findings

suggest that two conditions are necessary for social capital to produce positive externalities. First, farmers must be in a functional mutual relationship, built through frequent "material and/or symbolic exchanges" (Bourdieu 1986). The mere information that another household in the locality has obtained European funds, should not represent social capital. Second, social capital functions as a resource that brings positive outcomes only when the successful experiences in obtaining funding come from farmers occupying relatively similar positions in the social field. If information on the successful experiences come only from households perceived to be positioned much higher in the social field, they will function as a negative form of social capital and may discourage a particular household in its decision to apply for EU agricultural funds.

Recommendations for Romania's rural development

Throughout my thesis I have questioned the ability of the current system of distributing the EU funds to significantly restructure the agricultural sector in Romania and to solve the socio-economic problems in the Romanian countryside. Simply importing the European model for financing the agriculture will not lead to reducing the gaps between Romanian farms and Western European farms, but it actually has the potential to accentuate these gaps. And that is because, compared to small and fragmented farms in Romania, large farms in the West can make much better use of the financial resources they receive in the form of subsidies or investment projects, taking advantage of the economy of scale. In the case of agricultural holdings in Romania, the subsidy system often perpetuates subsistence and semi-subsistence farming, while the amounts allocated for investment projects are far too small in order to even dare to compete with Western European farms. Moreover, the extremely restrictive⁴ nature of the funding measures for investments in agriculture can contribute to increasing the inequalities between households in rural Romania. The main beneficiaries of this financial support are a number of agricultural households that already benefit from significant resources (land, machinery, etc.), without any redistribution of resources towards other rural households.

Therefore, the rural development model promoted by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) hardly meets the needs of small-scale farms in Romania and other Central and Eastern European countries (Scrieciu 2011). This is why Romania's rural development model for the next decades should be based on a political vision for the agricultural sector, complementary

⁴ Around 85% of farms in Romania do not meet the criterion of the economic size of the farm required to apply for these funding measures.

to the model promoted at European level. In the context of the CAP 2021-2027, Romania will continue to benefit from several billion euros in European funds for agriculture. However, in the absence of a long-term vision, adapted to the realities of the Romanian countryside, these funds will only perpetuate the practice of subsistence farming, accentuate the gaps between households and, in general, postpone the socio-economic problems of the rural areas for another seven years, as happened in both 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 multiannual financial frameworks.

In my thesis I suggest three types of **recommendations** that could guide such a political vision: **land consolidation; improving the market position of small producers; and diversifying the economic activities in rural areas.**

Given the excessive fragmentation of agricultural land in Romania, the only option for land consolidation that also preserves the very large number of people employed in agriculture is the voluntary association of small-scale farmers. Irrespective of the specific measures adopted, the ultimate aim of these measures should be for agricultural households to jointly work their land in order to benefit from the higher productivity associated with large-scale farming. Of course, the specific institutional design of such measures should also address the historical problem of rural population's distrust towards associative forms, inherited during the forced collectivisations of the communist regime (Scriciu 2011, 151-157).

Alongside the association of households in order to increase the sustainability of the farms, a complementary direction should be to improve the position of small farmers in the agricultural products markets. The recommendation fits within the debate at European level on supporting alternative supply chains, as an important element in the rural development of vulnerable areas (Renting, Marsden, and Banks 2003). This could be achieved both through legislative change to gradually increase the proportion of booths allocated to farmers in agri-food markets⁵ and through a better monitoring of the activity of intermediary sellers of agricultural products.

With around two million people employed in agriculture and a further four million working occasionally in the agricultural households, the need to support the diversification of economic activities in rural areas is self-evident. Thus, measures from previous rounds of European funding for investment in non-agricultural activities should be continued. However, an important change would be to abandon model of the individual entrepreneur (promoted in European policies) and replace it with a model that supports the capitalization on the local

⁵ Currently, this percentage is set at only 40% by Law 145/2014.

economic potential and the creation of jobs at the locality level. These measures should not only help the rural households from the upper class to diversify their income, but should also aim at redirecting as many people as possible from subsistence farming towards non-agricultural areas of activity.

A final set of recommendations included in the thesis aims to improve the current financing mechanisms for small farms. These proposals refer to: (1) changing the criteria for allocating the funds in the sense of quantifying not only the land owned by a household, but also the labour resources available in the agricultural households; (2) improving the monitoring procedures for the already funded projects, by checking in the field the actual activity of a farm and not only the compliance with the formal rules; (3) increasing the level of information provided to the households on the advantages and disadvantages of accessing an EU funded investment project for agriculture, by organising exchange meetings between farmers at local or county level.

III. Structure of the thesis

In the first chapter of the thesis, I review the main theoretical traditions of social capital, formulated by Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), Lin (2001) and Putnam (1995; 2000). I also illustrate the similarities between how human capital and social capital have been introduced and used in the development literature. The aim of this chapter is to provide a systematic description of the different perspectives on social capital available in the literature and to make an informed decision about the theoretical perspective used in my own research. Thus, I argue that Bourdieu's (1986) perspective provides the best analytical framework for explaining the different strategies used by agricultural households in accessing European funds.

In the second chapter, I discuss the gaps between Romania and other European countries in terms of their agriculture, and I provide a systematic overview of the agricultural sector in Romania. The chapter continues with a contextualization of the main paradigms of rural development reflected in the Common Agricultural Policy (production-oriented agriculture vs. multifunctional agriculture) and a description on how they are translated into the two financial mechanisms for Romanian agriculture: APIA subsidies and AFIR funds. Finally, I argue that AFIR funds have a much greater potential to produce a restructuring among small farms and I explain my decision to restrict the thesis to studying the access to these funding measures.

In the third chapter, I detail Bourdieu's framework of analysis based on the *habitus-capital-field* triad (Thomson 2008; Manton 2008) and I explain how I use this conceptual apparatus in studying small-scale farmers' access to European funds. The chapter also includes an analysis of the relationship between the agricultural resources of localities and the number of funded projects in each locality. The results suggest that the chances of an agricultural household to access EU funds depends both on the local context in which it is placed and the individual strategies it uses.

The paper continues with a description of the methodology used for the field research (Chapter IV). The adopted design is qualitative, highly structured, and comparative. In all the three localities included in the study, the strategies used by farmers for accessing European funds were documented through in-depth interviews and ethnographic research.

In Chapter V, I present the main findings of the research. After a detailed description of the three local contexts, the focus of the chapter shifts towards explaining the forms of capital that facilitate or hinder a household's access to AFIR funding, with a special focus on social capital. At the end of the chapter, I also discuss the important role played by consultancy firms in the overall process.

In Chapter VI, I present the main conclusions of the thesis. In the first part, I reiterate the specific contexts in which social capital operates as positive or negative factor in accessing European funds for agriculture. Subsequently, I discuss the limitations of the European agricultural funding mechanisms, this time drawn from the direct experiences of the farmers participating in the research. I also propose a series of recommendations on the strategic directions for rural development in Romania. In the last subchapter, I discuss the theoretical contribution of my PhD thesis, by highlighting the relevance of Pierre Bourdieu's perspective in the social capital literature.

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