

SUMMARY

Following the initial enthusiasm for democracy and market economy, the post-socialist reconstruction of capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe brought some of the countries of the Central European „cultural circle“ to a kind of social fatigue. Immense social, political and economic changes in the wake of the collapse of real socialism during the early 1990s could not make all social strata wealthier than under socialism and the principles of social justice and equality did not become the key criteria for the individual and collective attainability of property subject to privatization, educational opportunities, higher incomes, employment and social welfare. For the citizens of the former real-socialist countries, this sense of disappointment with the results of the major social transformations and the behavior of the key social and economic elites was surprisingly broader and deeper than a mere „transitional experience“. Yet after the global financial and economic crisis of 2008, it became clear that the citizens of the developed European countries and the new European democracies share a common attitude toward the key market economy participants in their respective countries, a profound distrust of the old and new economic elites, who are considered to be selfish, socially irresponsible and representatives of narrow material interests that are contrary to the general interests of the imaginary „community“.

The process of the moral delegitimization of the business elites as a latent tendency has been noted by researchers studying the elites on a global scale since the beginning of the previous decade. The Croatian public shares a similar attitude toward the key representatives of the social elites, particularly toward the new economic elites, as evident from the term „tycoonization“. The privatization of formerly socially-owned property is perceived as an unjust process of „tycoonization“, which during the past twenty-five years has spawned „tycoons,“ as opposed to entrepreneurs or socially responsible managers. This general distrust of the „managerial strata“ did not come about overnight, although it should be admitted that the domestic economic crisis and numerous corruption scandals in recent years particularly influenced the growing public distrust toward the key elites in the country. Therefore, already in 2005, considering the relationship between the managerial-entrepreneurial elites and modernization, the question was posed whether they are developmental or rentier elites.

We have attempted to provide part of the answer in this book. The objective is to explore the place of the economic elites in sociology (of the elites) and the process of the socioeconomic evolution of (new) economic elites, which have developed in European countries as a result of the financialization of the global economy and the

collapse of socialism (communism), as well as their connection with entrepreneurial, market and social power.

The first part of the book, „The Sociology of the Elites and the Economic Elites“, consists of ten chapters. After the preliminary determination of elites as categorical entities, the following topics are discussed: Classical Theorists of Elites: Focus on the Political Elites; Functionalist Paradigm: The Economic Elites as Part of the Strategic Elites; Economic Elites as Part of the Power Elites; P. Bourdieu's Understanding of the Economic Elites; Economic Elites in M. Hartmann's Investigations; The Social Origins and Education of the European Corporate Elites; Modern Corporate Elites, Financialization and Corporate Restructuring; Economic Elites and Corporate Governance: Some Empirical Insights; and Economic Elites as a Research Topic: Theories of Elites and Social Reality after the Collapse of Real Socialism.

In the second part of the book, *The Case of Croatia: Economic Elites as Participants in the Capitalist Periphery*, there are eight chapters, which represent separate thematic units, covering the Croatian post-Socialist and cultural context, as follows: The Post-Socialist Economic Elites and Entrepreneurship: A Contribution to the Analysis of the Typology of Entrepreneurs; Types of Entrepreneurs, Strategies and the Perceived Limits to Growth; Habitus, Market and Production of Market Participants: The Case of the Kutjevo Wine Producers; The Wine Growers of Požega-Slavonia County and the challenges of the European Wine Market; Managerial Elites and Some Dimensions of the Socioeconomic Culture in Croatia; Croatian Entrepreneurs and the Market: From Euphoric Growth to Anti-Crisis Strategies; Croatian Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and the Growth Crisis: In Search of New Carriers of Growth?; Without a „Happy Ending“: Who Actually Are the New Croatian Economic Elites? In this part of the book, analytical emphasis is placed on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) because they account for 99% of the companies within the overall structure of the Croatian economy.

The first part of the book is devoted to theoretical approaches to the study of elites, especially economic. In the first six chapters, the concepts, definitions and main arguments of a series of theories are presented. At the beginning of the book, a definition of elites is offered, particularly economic elites. Economic elites, primarily entrepreneurs and managers, are presented from the time when their public and cultural images began to become increasingly tarnished, which occurred even prior to the financial crisis of 2008. Then the ill-reputed economic elites became the focus of media and general social dissatisfaction. However, this process of social and cultural delegitimatization neither led to a decline in their economic reputation nor called their power into question, especially that of a financial nature.

Two authors have distinguished themselves as the most significant for the modern understanding of the elites, the economic elites in particular: P. Bourdieu and M. Hartmann. Hartmann is the most persuasive as a consistent critic of functionalist theory, the key shortcomings of which he explains in detail. For him, in the author's opinion, it is most significant that he supplements his critique of functionalism with proposals that habitus (in Bourdieu's sense) and family origin are more important in the analysis (formation) of elites than their sector positions (in the sense of the functionalist theory of the division of labor in society). Moreover, the author also accepts Hartmann's opinion that the business, political, administrative and judicial elites are the most important in modern societies, again not from the standpoint of „usefulness“ or functionality. Furthermore, there is particular emphasis on the similarity between Hartmann's concept of the elites and later Bourdieu's concept of „fields of power“, which, according to Hartmann, represents a shift from the concept of the ruling class to the articulation of the concept of the elites in order to describe the cream of the society. Unlike Hartmann, however, according to the author the shift in Bourdieu's thinking did not occur due to logical or theoretical inconsistency but owing to „maturation in his understanding of the source and structure of power in modern society and the empirical observation that in various sectors of society there are parallel power plays occurring in which there is no permanently guaranteed dominant position“.

The first part of the book concludes with two important insights. First, the economic elites are an integral part of the governing elites. Second, due to the manner of the development of capitalism during the past hundred years, the importance the economic elites has grown, in relation to the others. Nevertheless, the question of which of the four main theoretical orientations, that which is based on the elite-mass dichotomy system, functionalist/sectoral theory, class theory or the theory of the elites in the light of the sociocultural changes of the information age (capitalism), is suitable or relatively the most appropriate for the study of the post-socialist elites in Croatia, remains open to debate.

The second part of the book has a greater scope and presents a series of the author's empirical case studies of economic elites in past years. A total of eight chapters begins with the typology of entrepreneurs and concludes by noting that the formation of the new Croatian economic elites, in the broader social sense, does not need to have a „happy ending“. To the question of who, therefore, are the Croatian economic elites, the following answer is given: they are still a conglomerate of the owners and managers of the small, medium-sized and large enterprises that in the past twenty some years have grown too slowly in order to become free of the weight of politics (owners of the general business conditions and the lords of the local markets

and predatory networks), but deal as equals with foreign competition on the domestic and foreign markets. Although at the national level they are not economically strong enough, they are condemned to cooperate with influential political figures, and to that which often ends with the dividing of the spoils via the „enslavement of the state“ and control of its key resources. With the political elites, they share a disdain for the common man (politicians toward their constituents, employers toward employees) but also toward the „idle“ scientific and cultural elites (who anyway do not understand their problems, especially the „laws of the market“). In any case, one and the other avoid serious cooperation with the scientific and cultural elites, which would obligate them to make more serious long-term investments in the scientific and cultural sectors of the society (with honorable exceptions!). They avoid any serious dialogue with these elites concerning their long-term obligations toward the building of the integrity of the relevant institutions (despite direct economic interests), promotion of the value of work and creativity as nationally binding orientations of public activity or toward the reconstructing of the society that has been completely destroyed by the detritus of political capitalism.

Pressed by the crisis, in recent years individual representatives of the economic elites have occasionally offered the general public certain models for the rational organization of the government administration and successful management, expecting the political elites and their public services to operationalize them. However, these appeals for the initiation of serious reforms, discussion of the actual problems of the country or changes in behavior have fallen on deaf ears. If the economic elites continue to speak (only by themselves) with the key representatives of the „political sector“, they will not be taken seriously. That is how it will be until the tone, style and demands of the economic elites change, or until there is a complete economic and social collapse of the institutional system of the state and society. This could only be followed by chaos and street protests. We can just think about where that would lead us.

It is up to sociology to record all the aforementioned processes of the Croatian version of „proto-capitalism“ using theoretical and research-analytical tools. When it comes to the final assessment of the socioeconomic impact of the newly emerged Croatian elites thus far, everything that has been done until now merely represents the beginning of a new and systematic investigation, which, in the opinion of the author, requires not only theoretical and analytical comprehensiveness but also scientific passion in order for the newly emerged social processes and relationships to be also recorded on the basis of the direct experiences of the participants/actors. If we want to follow the transformation of the current elites in the direction of their taking and reproducing the top social positions, a class approach to the study of the elites

and the formation of the new ruling class would be useful. If we want to study the domestic economic elites as potential participants/actors in a system of meritocracy, which should offer certain answers to the problems in the society owing to „political capitalism“ and global „fields of power“, according to Bourdieu’s concepts of „fields of power“, the appropriate development of a neofunctionalist approach to the elites would also be useful.

Which approach, therefore, should be followed in the analysis of the recent development of the Croatian elites: the first, second or an entirely new one? This begins a whole new conversation, to which I hope, the aforementioned will contribute.