

## Summary

### Who thrives and who survives?

### Life strategies in post-transitional Croatia

Life strategies refer to the various patterns of practices through which social agents (individuals and households) strive to maintain or improve their living conditions. This study represents the first qualitative research in Croatia that examines the life strategies of social agents with diverse sociodemographic characteristics. Its primary goal was to build a typology and understanding of these strategies, describing the capitals, resources, and practices on which they are based, as well as to contribute to the discussion on inequalities and social development in post-transitional Croatia.

The theoretical framework of the book draws on the tradition of household strategies research, viewed from the developmental perspective, and on Bourdieu's approach to strategies as the logic of practice. The key ideas and concepts from the theory of practice are adapted to examine the strategies within the Croatian context of transformation, post-transition, and economic crisis that led to a combination of crony and neoliberal types of capitalism.

The research methodology is based on the relational approach, interpretive constructivist structuralism, and the multiple case study method. Data were collected in 2015 through thirty semi-structured interviews, along with associated micro-ethnographic notes and data on household capitals. Through analytical procedures of categorization and connecting, five general types of life strategies were identified: (1) life strategies of social advancement; (2) life strategies of maintaining social position; (3) life strategies of compensation; (4) life strategies of getting by; and (5) life strategies of survival, along with their associated subtypes and elements.

Life strategies of advancement are patterns of long-term improvement in living conditions based on high volumes of capital (stocks of power),

synergies, and investments, which enabled overcoming obstacles, advancing careers, and pursuing entrepreneurial projects. Maintaining social position was marked by steady income but also smaller amounts of capital and fewer investments in structural contexts of limited opportunities. With compensation strategies, agents aimed to recover the living conditions lost due to unfavourable structural changes by changing their practices and redefining their aspirations. Strategies of getting by were characterized by fragmented work trajectories, devalued cultural capitals, and unstable living conditions, with the normalization of precariousness and reliance on resources and dispositions. Finally, survival strategies were identified in extremely unfavourable structural circumstances as patterns of practice aimed at survival with low, devalued, or deactivated capitals, a radical narrowing of the horizon of needs, and a strong reliance on food self-provisioning and solidarity-based relationships.

Research on life strategies in Croatia highlights significant social inequalities and enables their better understanding. In contrast to the work and capitals enabling advancement and preservation of the position, the unfavourable survival conditions of many households stand out, a consequence of the damage caused during the transition and the subsequent economic recession. These processes have been linked to the deactivation and reduction of capital and investments (including in education), emigration, and withdrawal into self-provisioning and reliance on family support.

At the same time, agents with capitals valuable within clientelist structures were able to maintain their status and even advance during periods of crisis. The results indicate that social polarization during and after the economic crisis needs to be considered not only in terms of material deprivation but also in differences in capital and resources, as well as the increasing prevalence of precariousness. The legacy of „crony capitalism” and neoliberalization resulted in uneven development in Croatia, characterized by disparities in life strategies, challenges in preserving social position amid insecurity and relatively low incomes, and reduced chances for success in less developed regions and local areas.