

PREDRAG CVETIČANIN and MIRAN LAVRIČ

## Household Strategies in Southeast European Societies in the Period of Economic Crisis

### Introduction

Household strategies are not a current focus for researchers working in the social sciences. But in our estimation, they will soon be so again. Households mostly gain the attention of researchers when, during periods of social change, economic and social crises or the dissolution of institutional orders, these ‘invisible’ social actors are expected to take on almost the entire burden of ensuring survival. It is only then that these miniature, daily practices—how decisions are made regarding the household and the division of labour within it, the use of various resources with the aim of ensuring the survival, reproduction or improvement of the household, participation in the informal economy and household production to meet the requirements of household members, as well as a reduction in consumption or a change in the manner of consumption—also become topics of interest for researchers dealing with global social processes, and not only those whose main focus is on households.

In her influential article, Claire Wallace convincingly shows how household strategy analysis can be a very useful tool for the analysis of different societies and social groups, in at least three ways. First, household strategy can be used as a concept that takes account of the motivations and agency of actors within society. Second, this approach represents a specific method of analysis that examines the intersection of different economies in terms of household behaviour. Third, it offers a unique perspective by focusing on the household rather than the individual as the unit of analysis.<sup>1</sup>

#### GUEST EDITORS

##### **Predrag Cvetičanin**

is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Niš, Serbia.

##### **Miran Lavrič**

is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Maribor, Slovenia.

---

<sup>1</sup> Claire Wallace, Household Strategies. Their Conceptual Relevance and Analytical Scope in Social Research, *Sociology* 36, no. 2 (2002), 275-292, DOI: 10.1177/0038038502036002003. All internet references were accessed on 16 June 2017.

Wallace also states three conditions under which household strategies may become particularly important. The first is related to the growing inclusion of women in the labour force, which leads to many tasks that had once been performed by women now having to be distributed among other household members, or having to be outsourced. The second condition relates to societies that are subject to rapid social change. In such circumstances, households are exposed to high levels of uncertainty and are forced to become reflexive and draw upon different resources. The third condition under which household strategies are likely to become more important is where large segments of the economy are informal, or are becoming informalised. Under such circumstances, households must draw upon a wide range of different formal and informal resources to manage their economic and social existence.

The four postsocialist states of the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia) subject to analysis in this volume correspond very well to at least the latter two stated conditions. During the last quarter-century they have been exposed to three processes that have given rise to tectonic social changes within them: 1) the dissolution of Yugoslavia during the civil wars of the 1990s; 2) postsocialist transformation; and 3) the 2008 global economic crisis. The civil wars devastated the economic infrastructure, severed mutual economic ties and destroyed previous internal markets. On the other hand, post-socialist transformation simultaneously led to a rise in unemployment and the disappearance of some basic welfare functions that were a staple of socialism. The policy of austerity during the period of economic crisis increased these tendencies. This led to the rise of an informal economy, and greater reliance on households and extended families to provide certain functions, especially those aimed at self-provisioning, as well as particular services that had once been provided by the welfare state.

We should note, however, that the global economic crisis caught the four countries in very different circumstances in terms of postsocialist transition, and at very different levels of economic development. Looking at the GDP per capita, there were already quite substantial differences between the four countries while within the former Yugoslavia. In 1987, for instance, the GDP of Slovenia was 118% above the average for the entire country, while the GDP of Croatia was 37% above this average. Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were both below average, the former by 23% and the latter by 45%. These differences, in essence, persist to the present. In 2014, for instance, Slovenia reached 83% of the average GDP of the EU-28, Croatia was at 59%, Serbia at 37% and Bosnia-Herzegovina at 29%.<sup>2</sup> According to these data, Slovenia and Croatia had strengthened their already relatively stronger economic positions, while

---

<sup>2</sup> Calculations were done on the basis of different sources (Yugoslav Statistical Yearbooks, UNECE Statistical Division Database and World Bank World Development Indicators) by

Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, at least until the onset of the 2008/2009 crisis, had fallen further behind. Quite obviously, this happened not only because of different starting points, but also because of what happened after the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, especially in terms of violent conflict and political instability. Another macroeconomic feature that is relevant for the economic strategies of households is the basic structure of the economy. In this sense Slovenia stands out, with a relatively very high share of services in GDP (91% compared to 70% in Croatia and Serbia and 65% in Bosnia). On the other hand, Serbia stands out with a relatively high prevalence of agriculture (11% compared to 8% in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 5% in Croatia and less than 3% in Slovenia). There are also some meaningful differences between the four countries in terms of the size of the informal (shadow) economy. In 2007, the highest rate of informal economic activity was estimated as Bosnia (33%), Serbia (31%), Croatia (30%) and Slovenia (25%).

When the economic crisis started, GDP per capita decreased in all four countries in 2009, but by 2014 all of them had recovered. The decline was substantially higher in the more economically developed Slovenia and Croatia. Bosnia-Herzegovina had already surpassed its 2008 GDP per capita by 2010; Serbia managed to do so in 2011, Croatia in 2013 while in Slovenia it was not until 2014.<sup>3</sup> Since the drop in the GDP, with the partial exception of Slovenia, was not dramatic, and since life expectancy and the average level of education continued to rise, the Human Development Index rose slightly in all four countries during the period from 2008 to 2013. In Bosnia, it rose from 0.716 to 0.742, in Croatia from 0.803 to 0.820, in Serbia from 0.754 to 0.771 and in Slovenia from 0.873 to 0.888.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the Human Development Index having increased, and the decline in GDP perhaps not appearing substantial, the global economic crisis did have a strong impact on the social welfare of citizens in the four countries. The unemployment rate, for example, rose substantially after 2008 in all the countries, reaching its peak about 2013. According to data from UNECE Statistical Database<sup>5</sup> for the period from 2008 to 2013, the unemployment rate rose from 23% to 28% in Bosnia-Herzegovina, from 9% to 17% in Croatia, from 14% to

---

Rudi Klanjšek / Ismet Kumalić / Muamer Halilbašić, (Socio)Economic Realities in Four SEE Countries – From Crisis to Crisis, and Beyond (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> UNECE Statistical Division Database, Macroeconomic Overview, in Internationally Comparable Prices, by Country/Region and Year, 14 June 2017, [http://w3.unece.org/PX-Web2015/pxweb/en/STAT/STAT\\_\\_20-ME\\_\\_1-MEOV/01\\_en\\_MECCOverviewY\\_r.px/?rxid=ce-07bc9b-4569-4062-9382-f7cc0edeea5b](http://w3.unece.org/PX-Web2015/pxweb/en/STAT/STAT__20-ME__1-MEOV/01_en_MECCOverviewY_r.px/?rxid=ce-07bc9b-4569-4062-9382-f7cc0edeea5b).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Data 1990-2015 (2016), <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data>.

<sup>5</sup> UNECE Statistical Division Database, Unemployment Rate by Country and Year, 16 June 2017, [http://w3.unece.org/PXWeb2015/pxweb/en/STAT/STAT\\_\\_20-ME\\_\\_3-MELF/40\\_en\\_MEUnRateY\\_r.px/?rxid=a65a677a-3ab4-491f-b8d1-6319f9f04860](http://w3.unece.org/PXWeb2015/pxweb/en/STAT/STAT__20-ME__3-MELF/40_en_MEUnRateY_r.px/?rxid=a65a677a-3ab4-491f-b8d1-6319f9f04860).

22% in Serbia and from 4% to 10% in Slovenia. At the same time, the percentage of the population living below the poverty line increased substantially in all four countries. Combining data from different sources, we can conclude that in Bosnia this percentage grew from 18% to 22% between 2007 and 2013.<sup>6</sup> In the period between 2008 and 2013 it rose from 17% to 20% in Croatia, and from 13% to 15% in Slovenia.<sup>7</sup> In Serbia, the percentage of the population living below the poverty line was over 25% in 2013.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, we were unable to find directly comparable data for Serbia prior to 2009. According to the absolute poverty line—an approach traditionally employed in Serbia—the percentage of poor in Serbia grew from 6% in 2008 to 9% in 2013.<sup>9</sup>

Since the at-risk-of-poverty rate is closely related to income inequality, it is not surprising that similar trends can also be identified in terms of the Gini coefficient, a more generally used measure of income inequality. According to World Bank and Eurostat data, the Gini coefficient in Bosnia-Herzegovina rose from 33.1 in 2007 to 36.2 in 2013. In the period between 2008 and 2013 it also rose in Serbia (from 28.2 to 29.1) and in Slovenia (from 23.4 to 24.4). The only exception is Croatia, where the Gini coefficient decreased during this period, from 33.7 to 30.9.

It should be added that all the indicators had mostly improved/changed only slightly by 2015, when the data for the articles in this volume were gathered. Thus, it seems safe to conclude that these data were gathered approximately at the end of the period of major impact of the global economic crisis.

Of the five texts that make up this special edition, 'Typology of Household Strategies of Action in Four Countries of Southeastern Europe in a Period of Economic Crisis' by Predrag Cvetičanin and Miran Lavrič, 'Thriving and Surviving Activities of Households During the Crisis Period. Empirical Evidence from Southeastern Europe' by Adnan Efendić, Predrag Cvetičanin, and Ismet Kumalić and 'Small Farmers in Four Southeast European Countries. A Qualitative Analysis of Life-Strategies in 25 Agricultural Households' by Nemanja

<sup>6</sup> Data for 2007 were retrieved from: The World Bank, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 10 June 2017, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/bosnia-and-herzegovina>. Data for 2013 were calculated on the basis of the World Bank data by Klanjšek / Kumalić / Halilbašić, (Socio)Economic Realities in Four SEE Countries – From Crisis to Crisis, and Beyond.

<sup>7</sup> Data for 2008 were retrieved from: Nada Karaman Aksentijević / Zoran Ježić, Tendencies of Poverty in the Republic of Croatia and the EU Countries (2014), [https://bib.irb.hr/datoteka/730633.TENDENCIES\\_OF\\_POVERTY\\_IN\\_THE\\_REPUBLIC\\_OF\\_CROATIA\\_AND\\_THE\\_EU\\_COUNTRIES.pdf](https://bib.irb.hr/datoteka/730633.TENDENCIES_OF_POVERTY_IN_THE_REPUBLIC_OF_CROATIA_AND_THE_EU_COUNTRIES.pdf). Data for 2013 were retrieved from the official Eurostat web page, 11 June 2017, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/europe-2020-indicators/europe-2020-strategy/main-tables>.

<sup>8</sup> The World Bank, Serbia, 16 June 2017, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/serbia>.

<sup>9</sup> Data for 2006 were retrieved from: Mijat Lakićević, Siromaštvo, *Peščanik*, 13 April 2017, <http://pescanik.net/siromastvo/>. Data for 2013 were retrieved from: Index Mundi, Historical Data Graphs per Year, 16 June 2017, <http://www.indexmundi.com/g/g.aspx?v=69&c=ri&l=en>.

Krstić, Augustin Derado, Andrej Naterer and Ismet Kumalić are all part of the project 'Life-Strategies and Survival Strategies of Households and Individuals in Southeast European Societies in the Times of Crisis'. This project was realised within the SCOPES programme from 2014 to 2016, with funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation. It was carried out by: the Department of Sociology, University of Zurich; the Centre for Empirical Cultural Studies of Southeastern Europe (Serbia); the Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences, regional branch in Split (Croatia); the Department of Sociology, University of Maribor (Slovenia); and a team of researchers from the Economic Institute, Sarajevo (Bosnia-Herzegovina). The two remaining texts, 'Coping Strategies of Economically (Partially) Inactive Households: The Case of Croatia' by Dragan Bagić, Ivana Dobrotić, Jasminka Lažnjak, Petra Rodik, and Tanja Vučković Juroš and 'Making Ends Meet: How Roma Families Living in Poverty Cope' by Lynette Šikić-Mičanović were presented at the international conference 'Freedom and Necessity. Lifestyles and Coping Strategies in the Times of Economic Crisis' held 3-4 October 2015 in Split, Croatia, also as part of the project 'Life-Strategies and Survival Strategies of Households and Individuals in Southeast European Societies in the Times of Crisis'.

All these articles explore household practices in times of economic crisis by building on the already established research tradition in this area. In doing so, they all apply the concept of household strategy, which emerged from empirical research in the 1960s and 1970s, in an attempt to understand and explain the survival mechanisms of vulnerable social groups. It was first used in studies of poor groups in third-world countries, focusing on their informal economic activities.<sup>10</sup> Its application was then transferred to studies of marginal social positions (immigrants, small farmers, entrepreneurs, etc.) in advanced industrial countries. The key step in the development of this research paradigm was taken when, in the mid-1980s, Ray Pahl and Jonathan Gershuny applied the concept to all households. Their focus was mainly on work as an aspect of household strategies.<sup>11</sup> Later, the concept of household strategy was successfully used in studies of informal work activities and flexible forms of work in the period

---

<sup>10</sup> Alejandro Portes / Manuel Castells / Lauren A. Benton, eds, *The Informal Economy. Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries*, Baltimore 1989; Mercedes Gonzalez de la Rocha / Agustín Escobar, eds, *Social Responses to Mexico's Economic Crisis of the 1980s*, San Diego 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Ray E. Pahl, *Employment, Work and the Domestic Division of Labour*, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 4, no.1 (1980), 1-20, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716287493001004>; Ray E. Pahl, *Divisions of Labour*, Oxford 1984; Claire Wallace / Ray E. Pahl, *Polarisation, Unemployment and All Forms of Work*, in: S. Allen / A. Waton / K. Purcell and S. Wood, eds, *The Experience of Unemployment*, London 1986, 116-133.

of postfordist transformations<sup>12</sup> and studies on coping with the processes of postsocialist transformation in the societies of Central and Eastern Europe in the last decade of the 20th century.<sup>13</sup>

The common characteristics of the approaches included in this research tradition are that they focus on social agents and their practices (agency) and that they, consequently, follow a 'bottom-up' logic. An important commonality of these studies is also that the household is usually treated as the unit of analysis, and that practices in the informal and the social economy are also studied.

The dominant tradition within this research perspective relies on rational-choice theories.<sup>14</sup> Within these approaches, strategies include the presence of conscious and rational decisions involving a long-term perspective.<sup>15</sup> Strategies are thus understood as plans of action, which sometimes leads to the conclusion that only wealthier households have enough resources to plan and choose between various options, and thus that only they can have strategies.<sup>16</sup> Contrary to this 'strong' definition of a strategy, Alan Warde<sup>17</sup> suggests a 'weak' definition, according to which a household strategy can be inferred subsequently from the course of action and outcomes achieved, irrespective of whether it was con-

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Gershuny, *After Industrial Society. The Emerging Self-Service Economy*, London 1979; Jonathan Gershuny / Ray E. Pahl, *Work Outside Employment. Some Preliminary Speculations*, *New Universities Quarterly* 34 (1979), 120-135, DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2273.1979.tb01252.x; Enzo Mingione, *Life Strategies and Social Economies in the Postfordist Age*, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 18, no. 1 (1994), 24-45, DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2427.1994.tb00249.x; Margaret K. Nelson / Joan Smith, *Working Hard and Making Do. Surviving in Small Town America*, Berkley et al. 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Rose / Christian W. Haerpfer, *Between State and Market*, Strathclyde 1992; Jiří Večerník, *Markets and People. The Czech Reform Experience in a Comparative Perspective*, Aldershot / Brookfield 1996; George Kolankiewicz, *Social Capital and Social Change*, *British Journal of Sociology* 47, no. 3 (1996), 427-441, DOI: 10.2307/591361; Timo Piirainen, *Towards a New Social Order in Russia. Transforming Structures and Everyday Life*, Aldershot 1997; Sue Bridger / Frances Pine, eds, *Surviving Post-Socialism. Local Strategies in Regional Responses in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, London 1998; Simon Clarke, *New Forms of Employment and Household Survival Strategies in Russia*, Coventry / Moscow 1999; Marija Babović, *Post-socijalistička transformacija i socio-ekonomske strategije domaćinstava i pojedinaca u Srbiji*, Beograd 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Jon Elster, ed, *Rational Choice*, Oxford 1986. The description and analysis of these approaches was given by Graham Crow in the influential article: *The Use of the Concept of 'Strategy' in Recent Sociological Literature*, *Sociology* 23, no. 1 (1989), 1-24, DOI: 10.1177/0038038589023001002.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Wood and Kelly claim that the concept of strategy 'has connotations of comprehensiveness, coherence, long-term perspectives and consciousness' Cf. Stephen Wood / John Kelly, *Taylorism, Responsible Autonomy and Management Strategy*, in: Stephen Wood, ed, *The Degradation of Work*, London 1982, 74-89.

<sup>16</sup> See for example: Michael Anderson / Frank Bechhofer / Jonathan Gershuny, eds, *The Social and Political Economy of the Household*, Oxford 1994.

<sup>17</sup> Alan Warde, *Household Work Strategies and Forms of Labour. Conceptual and Empirical Issues*, *Work Employment Society* 4 (1990), 495-515, DOI: 10.1177/0950017090004004002.

sciously planned or not. Thus, household strategies are understood as relatively coherent and stable combinations of production and consumption practices of households. The authors of all five studies in this volume, more or less explicitly, depart from such an understanding of household strategies, and work within the framework of theories of practice, which is probably best outlined in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Ann Swidler, Charles Taylor and Theodor Schatzki.

Building on the described starting points, Cvetičanin and Lavrič look to identify basic strategies that households use in order to cope with challenges in times of economic crisis. In the first and theoretical step, they rely on practice theories to try and bridge the strong tensions between research traditions that place emphasis on agency and sociological approaches that emphasise social structure and its influence on the practices of individuals and social groups. In exploring patterns of household production and consumption practices they use the Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) and Two-Steps Cluster Analysis (TCA) to identify basic household strategies and to link those strategies to the position of households in the social structure. The analyses yield five general household strategies and eleven more detailed and specific sub-strategies across the four countries. More importantly, the authors show that there is a relatively strong connection between these (sub)strategies of action and the position of households in the social structure of these societies. In other words, the findings indicate relatively typical everyday practices for certain social classes and class fractions. For example: 'Formal market strategies' (multiple full-time jobs, investing in business, etc.) are relatively typical of the upper-tier middle class; 'Moonlighting strategies' (insufficient/low regular incomes combined with supplementary economic activities, etc.) are more concentrated within the lower-tier middle class; while 'Reduce-Sell-Borrow strategies' and 'Self-Provisioning strategies' are most typical of the urban and rural poor. An effective presentation of the connection between the position of households in the social structure and their everyday practices can be seen as the main achievement of this article. As an exploratory endeavour, this study offers a starting point for more serious attempts to bridge the theoretical gap between structure and agency, one of the major issues in contemporary sociology.

Departing from a similar understanding of household strategies, Bagić, Dobrotić, Lažnjak, Rodik and Vučković Juroš use data from a 2014 mixed-methods study, 'Typology of Survival Strategies and Sources of Income of Economically (partially) Inactive Households'. Based on a survey of 453 households and 37 semi-structured interviews, the authors attempt to establish how households with inactive or unemployed members face growing risks and uncertainty. Based on the variables they used in a K-means cluster analysis, the authors identify six household strategies: 1) *struggle for independence* (occasional work, help from the family, regular income, savings); 2) *strenuous self-reliance* (regular income,

social transfers); 3) *successful pooling of resources* (income from agriculture, low housing costs, regular income); 4) *reliance on social transfers* (social transfers, low housing costs); 5) *reliance on consumer debt* (regular income, consumer debt); and 6) *low monetisation* (low housing costs). The authors also found similar patterns when analysing the qualitative interview data, so these data were used for a more in-depth presentation of the interview case considered representative of a certain group.

Although this study was conducted in one of the countries included in the study presented in the previous article by Cvetičanin and Lavrič, the two typologies of strategies seem to differ quite significantly. This is not surprising if one considers the fact that Bagić and collaborators focused their analysis on a very specific sub-population, namely inactive households. Another important reason for the discrepancy is that different indicators were used in the two studies. For instance, Cvetičanin and Lavrič put a lot of emphasis on consumption cuts during times of crisis (2010-2015), which is virtually absent from the approach taken by Bagić and collaborators. On the other hand, the first study does not take into account the level of consumer debt, which is one of the crucial indicators in the second study. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to discern some parallels between the two approaches. Based on the descriptions of existing clusters, it seems obvious that, for instance, all six strategies found among the Croatian inactive households are well matched with the strategies of the capital-poor social classes from the Cvetičanin and Lavrič study.

In the third article of this volume, Efendić, Cvetičanin and Kumalić use survey data from the project 'Life-Strategies and Survival Strategies of Households and Individuals in Southeast European Societies in the Times of Crisis' in order to investigate determinants of practices of households in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia. The authors are mainly interested in activities that can be viewed as a response of households to the latest global economic crisis. From this point of view, they distinguish between thriving activities (investing, increasing savings, decreasing debt and buying real estate and cars) and surviving activities (selling property out of necessity, spending savings or borrowing money). Unlike most authors, who distinguish between households that rely on offensive (thriving) strategies and households that use defensive (surviving) strategies, the authors focus on those households that in their daily practices combine two, albeit superficially, mutually opposing group activities. In their main analysis, they use a 'seemingly unrelated bivariate probit model' (SUBPM) to assess the relations between different characteristics of households on the one hand, and thriving and surviving household activities on the other. Their initial finding is that thriving and surviving activities are mutually endogenous strategies and are joint outcomes of a wider system of influence. The most important factor affecting whether households were more engaged

in thriving or surviving activities appeared to be the economic performance of households. While these two findings might not be very surprising or revealing, a more interesting finding is that the level of social trust plays an important role in the model. Both at the macro (generalised and institutional trust) and the micro (informal networks existing on the ground) level, social trust is positively linked more with thriving and less with surviving activities.

In a paper based on research findings from a wider research project entitled 'Roma Early Childhood Inclusion+ (RECI+), Croatia Report', Lynette Šikić-Mićanović sets out to explore the coping strategies of different Roma populations in Croatia. Data referring to 135 Roma households were collected through interviews with Roma parents and community leaders, as well as with representatives of non-governmental organisations, social workers and local officials. Field notes referring to each researcher's observations and impressions were also collected.

After thoroughly presenting the very difficult economic situation of the vast majority of Roma households, the author presents the main everyday practices that are being used by the households to cope with poverty. These practices are categorised into four groups, which the author understands as strategies: household-based, work-based, kin-based and aid-based strategies. Household strategies are, thus, in this paper understood as sets of practices within specific areas of everyday life. In this aspect, Šikić-Mićanović differs somewhat from the other authors in this volume, who understand household strategies as empirically most common combinations of practices from different areas of life. However, the author is conscious of the difference and explains that, in more general terms, strategies of Roma households could generally be classified as 'individualistic reactive strategies', a term coined by Cvetičanin, Spasić and Gavrilović.<sup>18</sup> These strategies are typical of households with a low level of (economic, social and cultural) capital and are characterised by short-term reactions to life's challenges using whatever is available at that moment. Šikić-Mićanović concludes that, due to severe material deprivation and poverty, Roma households predominantly employ an extreme version of these strategies, focusing almost exclusively on day-to-day survival. Probably the most interesting contribution of this paper is the thorough presentation of different concrete practices that are being used by Roma households and are presented within four main strategies as defined by the author.

Building on an extended Bourdieusian theoretical framework, Krstić, Derado, Naterer and Kumalić present an explorative study of life-strategies in agricultural households. The data were gathered through 25 group interviews

---

<sup>18</sup> Predrag Cvetičanin / Ivana Spasić / Danijela Gavrilović, Strategies and Tactics in Social Space. The Case of Serbia, *Social Science Information* 53, no. 2 (2014), 224, DOI: 10.1177/0539018413517182.

held in small farmer households within the project 'Life-Strategies and Survival Strategies of Households and Individuals in Southeast European Societies in the Times of Crisis'. The authors are particularly interested in the question of how structural conditions of households relate to their participation in two 'fields of play': the field of formal economy and the field of informal economy. Their findings indicate that, due to various structural limitations, most small farmers are relatively unsuccessful playing in the formal field in terms of, for example, selling their products on the formal market, applying for subsidies and grants, or finding employment. This appears to be the main reason why their focus usually turns to self-provisioning and to practices in the informal field, mostly selling in the informal economy and relying on solidarity within informal networks.

The authors also touch on the question of structure and agency. A very interesting finding is that high levels of activity in the informal field do not suffice for success in the formal field. Only households with members who had been relatively deeply immersed in the formal economic field (e.g., through employment in a more urban setting and/or higher levels of education, which also relates to residing in urban areas for longer periods of time) were able to become successful players in the formal field (as well). Such households are understood as ones with a 'multiply-layered habitus', i.e., a habitus combining traditional agricultural elements with more modernistic/urban elements. Such a habitus is closely related to 'reflexive agency', understood as '[...] a reflexive and innovative action which stems from capitals and habitus while modifying them at the same time'. In more general terms, these results suggest that high levels of agency can have a tangible impact on the structural position of a small-farm household only if they are successfully combined with the exposure of some household members to the habitus of a structurally different field, or in other words, with the growth of the cultural capital of the household.

We hope that the texts making up this special issue of the *Südosteuropa* journal not only offer valid insight into the household strategies used in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia during the period of economic crisis in the mid-2010s, but that they also, by operating outside the dominant tradition in studying household strategies, introduce certain theoretical innovations and new methodological solutions. Thus, we expect that they will prove to be interesting to the readers and inspirational to those interested in studying households and their practices.