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Catalin-George FEDOR¹

Abstract

In this paper we propose to reconsider the concept of symbolic capital, as presented by Bourdieu and as it is understood today, and to present the results of a study on how social identity is being built, a study conducted on the ground in an ethnic, confessional and cultural community in a period of post-communist transition. The research is a quantitative one. The results highlight the current practical value of the symbolic capital concept, internalized and manifested differently by the different social groups belonging to the same communities. Equally, symbolic capital can be a vector of preserving local identity and the community can rely on it to shape its future.

Keywords: symbolic capital, ethnic community, local identity, future perspective, symbolic capital.

Introduction

Our study focuses on the symbolic capital of members of a community and the aim is to reveal the virtues of the symbolic capital concept and the way people relate to him. Symbolic capital is related to social capital, probably the most important marker of a community development potential (Fedor, 2019a). As we mentioned in a previous paper (Fedor, 2014), we generally perceive local community as a more or less homogenous group made up of people who assert a certain form of identity given by the consciousness of a past or a common origin. This identity (often assimilated to the local specificity) is equally built by members of that community. This fact that we can call consciousness is grounded on some relatively objective criteria, such as the place, institutions or cultural traits containing aspirations and joint projects. It results that community membership seen as consciousness can be defined by the meaning given by the individual to the criteria listed above. In this regard, we propose to see if the members of a community consider the symbolic capital as a criterion of belonging to the community.

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Theoretical aspects

Symbolic capital is widely used in sociology, either in this form or in similar senses, under various labels. The term symbolic capital is generally used with Bourdieu's meaning (1980, 1986), namely as any form of capital used for the purpose of obtaining benefits, thanks not to capital itself but to its representation, the legitimacy it confers on its owner before others. Symbolic capital actually constitutes the capitalization of the prestige conferred to individuals by the possession of other forms of capital valued in that community. For instance, an individual who controls/possesses significant material resources compared to other members of the group/community to which he or she belongs is likely to be also endowed with symbolic capital if he or she uses these material resources so that the group/community can benefit from them (makes a substantial donation to some individuals or the whole group/community, or uses his or her resources to create public assets, etc.). Similarly, an individual with special knowledge (very high human capital), acknowledged as intelligent or endowed by the group/community in which he or she lives, may have a certain symbolic capital consisting of the mere recognition of his or her abilities. The prestige thus acquired may work as a power of control over the actions of others, which individuals endowed with symbolic capital can influence so as to determine them to act in a specific way, for their own benefit. Thus, the reconversion of symbolic capital into other types of capital takes place.

Legitimacy is the most important source of symbolic capital: 'symbolic capital is nothing but another way of designating what Max Weber used to call charisma [...], that is, another name for legitimacy, the product of recognition, non-recognition, of faith «by virtue of which people exercising authority are endowed with prestige»' (1980, 242-243). In an attempt to define symbolic capital, Bourdieu compares it to economic capital and points out that the two forms of capital can be converted into each other. He notes that the major difference consists of the non-recognition of symbolic capital as a form of capital, the denial of the utility included in the actions carrying symbolic capital. Moreover, whereas 'economic capital is generally stable, symbolic capital is more unstable' (*ibidem*, 327), in the sense of its linking to the legitimacy or prestige of a particular individual or of a particular action.

Bourdieu (1986: 255) draws our attention that "symbolic capital, that is to say, capital - in whatever form - insofar as it is represented, i.e., apprehended symbolically, in a relationship of knowledge or, more precisely, of misrecognition and recognition, presupposes the intervention of the habitus, as a socially constituted cognitive capacity. More than that, "it goes without saying that social capital is so totally governed by the logic of knowledge and acknowledgment that it always functions as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986: 257). The concept of symbolic capital is prolific and versatile, being used in various studies. Without claiming it to be an exhaustive review, we will discuss some papers that use this concept. Fuller and Yumiao (2006) show us that the development of symbolic capital, involves public duty, sustainable employment, life philosophy advocacy, business style, environmental morality and educational investment. Some authors (Vázquez and González, 2015) present the strategic relevance for communities

to adequately manage collective symbolic capital, emphasizing the ability of communities to control the appropriation of the value of their productions. Cultural producers may turn their success on the market into a form of symbolic capital, i.e. a series of distinctive moral values with symbolic boundaries (Varriale, 2015). Even in a digitalized world, as our world, symbolic capital (literally) plays an important role. It is associated with the player's focus on achievements and social orientations (Korkeila & Hamari, 2020). Collective symbolic capital can make its mark on a city, a place or a neighborhood. In other words, it can be created and even marketed (Avdikos, 2015). Employing a social constructivist approach in an interdisciplinary perspective of multiple-destinations research, Michelson and Paadam (2016) attempt to understand how destination branding as a social phenomenon intrinsically draws on the symbolic value of urban heritage and how this connectedness is reinforced by socioeconomic activities located in the heritage space.

Starting from Bourdieu's theory of the three main forms of capital and their symbolic representation, Gilleard (2020) examines various potential ways to illustrate how forms of capital may be gained throughout an individual's life, with an emphasis on old age, and the role they may play in determining social stratification. Symbolic capital influences health vulnerabilities, due to social status, through mechanisms that operate from institutional to interpersonal levels (Stoebenau, 2009). Transgenerational transmission of material assets is often accompanied by a transmission of symbolic capital, and some authors (Conway, McDonagh, Farrell, & Kinsella, 2016) point out that effective strategies are needed in this process to address the emotional well-being of the elderly. For Glover (2013), symbolic capital is the accumulation of all other forms of capital. If they are aware of it, families manage to preserve their assets and business for several generations. Benn and Jones (2009) show that in the corporate environment the emphasis is on building and maintaining identity and symbolic capital, at the expense of active cooperation to solve delicate issues involving stakeholders. Even within a family, conflicts may arise as expressions of identity and symbolic power (Nilep, 2009). In relation to individual careers, symbolic capital reflects both internal and external recognition of one's skills, knowledge and experiences. Individuals develop career capital such as skills and networks which will increase their visibility helping them to gain symbolic capital such as status and power within an organisation (Yao, 2013).

Methodology

Thus, we propose to carry out an evaluation of how symbolic capital can be manifested in an ethnic, confessional and cultural community in a period of post-communist transition. We conducted our research in Săbăoani, a rural community from Moldova, Romania.

Quantitative research

Starting from various forms of capital suggested by Bourdieu (1986), we used a simplified tool for capturing social representations of social capital of studied group. We used a two-item scale (“Being from my community (what I learned here) has been helpful in my life” and “The others respect me precisely because I am from my community”).

Short presentation of studied community

Săbăoani village is located at the Eastern border of the Iași County, on a superior plateau between the rivers Siret-Moldova, north of city of Roman. Most inhabitants based on their own declaration Romanians (95.73%). For 4.21% of the population, the ethnic belonging is not known. Concerning religion, most inhabitants are Roman Catholics (93.61%), with an Orthodox minority (1.89%). For 4.23% of the population, religious belonging is not known (<http://statistici.INSSE.ro>).

Demographic data

Sample distribution on grounds of gender status reveals that over half of the participants in our research, i.e. 58.5%, are female and 41.5% are male. As concerns sample distribution based on age, most respondents were aged 30 to 64 (82.3%). They were followed by elderly respondents (13.3%). Only 4.4% of them had up to 29 years of age. Sample distribution based on the latest graduated school shows that most respondents were high school graduates (32.2%). The next category included respondents who claimed in our research that they completed 10 grades (24.7%). College is the latest school graduated by 14.8% of respondents. 12.3% of respondents said that their latest graduated school was higher education. 9.9% of the surveyed population only completed junior high school (5-8 grades). 3.7% of them said that they only completed primary education (1-4 grades). The lowest share, i.e. 1.2%, is represented by respondents with no education and by those with postgraduate studies respectively.

Results and discussions

Sample distribution depending on the answers to the statement “Being from my community (what I learned here) has been helpful in my life” is shown in table no. 1. According to sample distribution depending on the answers to the statement “Being from my community (what I learned here) has been helpful in my life”, we found that most respondents agreed with this statement to a great extent and to a very great extent, respectively. The lowest percentage was noted among the respondents found at the other end of the spectrum as concerns the abovementioned statement (8%).

Table 1. Being from my community (what I learned here) has been helpful in my life

Not at all	8%
To a small extent	11.5%
So-so	17.2%
To a great extent	41.5%
To a very great extent	21.8%
Total	100.0%

**Source of data: personal processing*

Sample distribution based on the answers to the statement “Being from my community (what I learned here) has been helpful in my life” and gender status are shown in table no. 2. 25.3% of the female respondents in our research claim that everything they learned in community has helped them to a great extent. According to the data in table no. 2, the share of male respondents who claim that what they learned in this community has not been helpful at all in their lives (5.1%) is higher than the share of female respondents who have the same opinion (2.5%).

Table 2. Being from my community ... and gender status

Being from my community (what I learned here) has been helpful in my life	Respondent's gender	
	Male	Female
Not at all	5.1%	2.5%
To a small extent	2.5%	8.9%
So-so	7.6%	8.9%
To a great extent	16.5%	25.3%
To a very great extent	10.1%	12.7%

Sample distribution based on the answers to the statement “Being from my community (what I learned here) has been helpful in my life” and age distribution are shown in table no. 3. Almost 40% of the respondents aged between 30 and 64 years declared in their questionnaires that being from this community has helped them in their lives to a great extent.

Table 3. Being from my community ... and age distribution

Being from my community (what I learned here) has been helpful in my life	Age categories		
	0-29 years	30-64 years	65-X years
Not at all	--	6.9%	1.1%
To a small extent	1.1%	9.2%	1.1%
So-so	1.1%	11.5%	4.6%
To a great extent	1.1%	39.1%	1.1%
To a very great extent	1.1%	14.9%	5.7%

** Source of data: personal processing*

Sample distribution based on the answers to the statement “Being from my community (what I learned here) has been helpful in my life” and the latest graduated school may be seen in table no. 4. According to sample distribution based on the answers to the statement “Being from my community (what I learned here) has been helpful in my life” and on the latest graduated school, we found that 9% of the respondents who had completed ten grades agreed with this statement to a great extent.

Table 4. Being from my community ... and latest graduated school

Latest graduated school	Being from my community (what I learned here) has been helpful in my life				
	Not at all	To a small extent	So-so	To a great extent	To a very great extent
No school	--	--	--	--	1.3%
Primary school (1-4 grades)	--	1.3%	1.3%	--	1.3%
Junior high school (5-8 grades)	1.3%	--	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%
10 grades	--	3.8%	3.8%	12.8%	5.1%
High school	2.6%	5.1%	3.8%	12.8%	6.4%
College	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	9%	2.6%
University	1.3%	--	3.8%	6.4%	1.3%
Graduate school	--	--	--	--	1.3%

* Source of data: personal processing

Sample distribution based on the answers to the statement “The others respect me precisely because I am from my community” is shown in table no. 5. According to sample distribution based on the answers to the statement “The others respect me precisely because I am from my community”, one may notice that the highest percentage (29.1%) was represented by those who agreed with this statement to a great extent. The lowest share is that of respondents who considered that the others respect me precisely because they are from this community to a very great extent (7%).

Table 5. The others respect me precisely because I am from my community

Not at all	11.6%
To a small extent	24.4%
So-so	27.9%
To a great extent	29.1%
To a very great extent	7%
Total	100.0%

* Source of data: personal processing

Sample distribution based on the answers to the statement “The others respect me precisely because I am from my community” and gender status are shown in table no. 6. Most of the respondents involved in this survey were female and

considered to a great extent that the others respected them precisely because they were from this community (16.7%). Only female respondents considered to a very great extent that the others treated them with respect precisely because they were from this community, their share amounting to 3.8%. The same percentage, i.e. 3.8%, was recorded among male respondents who are not at all convinced that the others treat them with respect precisely because they are from this community.

Table 6. The others respect me... and gender status

The others respect me precisely because I am from my community	Respondent's gender	
	Male	Female
Not at all	3.8%	7.7%
To a small extent	10.3%	14.1%
So-so	14.1%	15.4%
To a great extent	14.1%	16.7%
To a very great extent	--	3.8%

* Source of data: personal processing

Sample distribution based on the answers to the statement “The others respect me precisely because I am from my community” and age distribution are shown in table no. 7. Based on sample distribution according to the answers to the statement “The others respect me precisely because I am from my community” and to the respondents’ ages, we found the highest percentage, i.e. 24.4%, among the participants to the survey aged between 30 and 64 years, whose answer to this statement was so-so.

Table 7. The others respect me... and age

The others respect me precisely because I am from my community	Age groups		
	0-29 years	30-64 years	65-X years
Not at all	2.3%	8.1%	1.2%
To a small extent	--	23.3%	1.2%
So-so	1.2%	24.4%	2.3%
To a great extent	1.2%	19.8%	8.1%
To a very great extent	--	5.8%	1.2%

* Source of data: personal processing

Sample distribution based on the answers to the statement “The others respect me precisely because I am from my community” and the latest graduated school may be seen in table no. 8. The same percentage, i.e. 9.1%, was found among respondents who were high school graduates and answered so-so to this statement, and among respondents who had completed 10 grades and considered to a great extent that the others respected them precisely because they are from this community.

Table 8. The others respect me... and the latest graduated school

Latest graduated school	The others respect me precisely because I am from my community				
	Not at all	To a small extent	So-so	To a great extent	To a very great extent
No school	--	--	1.3%	--	--
Primary school (1-4 grades)	--	--	--	3.9%	--
Junior high school (5-8 grades)	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	5.2%	--
10 grades	1.3%	5.2%	6.5%	9.1%	2.6%
High school	7.8%	7.8%	9.1%	3.9%	2.6%
College	1.3%	6.5%	3.9%	3.9%	--
University	--	2.6%	5.2%	5.2%	--
Graduate school	--	--	1.3%	--	--

* *Source of data: personal processing*

Conclusion

Thus, we note great confidence in the own resources gained by originating in the community of most respondents included in our study (41.5% to a large extent and 21.8% to a very large extent). Especially those of working age (adults) show this confidence, regardless of their education level (from 10 grades to higher education). This confidence is supported by the answers to the mutual statement regarding “the respect shown to me by others, as I am from my community”.

In this regard, symbolic capital can be used in the field of community development and social economy (Fedor, 2016a). The main benefit for the community is the expected change in behaviour, attitude and identity (Fedor, 2016b), but for a deeper nuance of the results, it is necessary to correlate them with results obtained in different other communities (cultural, ethnic, confessional, degree of development etc.).

The results of the current study meet and confirm the results of the two previous studies conducted in the same community, but focused on social and cultural capital (Fedor, 2019b; Fedor, 2020). In this regard, the symbolic capital may be included in a comprehensive definition of community. The notion of community refers not only to the idea of locality and particular or social kinship networks. It also has many subjective meanings that people attach to the place itself, to the social relations that they are part of and to the social group that they relate to. In terms of such meanings, the community may be recognized by the symbolic capital of its members.

As well as social and cultural capital, symbolic capital reveals its paradigmatic value and can be successfully used in the traditional community’s analysis. If it is transmitted, it can also be used as a predictive indicator for the community future trajectory.

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