

**HABILITATION THESIS**  
**PRAXIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL**  
**INCLUSION IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**  
**PROCESSES**

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## SUMMARY OF HABILITATION THESIS

The present habilitation thesis synthesizes the author's academic research trajectory over the past twenty years, from obtaining a PhD. in Sociology at Babeş-Bolyai University under the supervision of Professor Traian Rotariu, to the present position as Associate Professor at "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia. The thesis is structured around three major research directions which, although thematically distinct, are unified by a common epistemological perspective, i.e. sociological praxiology and by a sustained concern with the structural mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion within the broader context of social development processes.

The first line of research addresses social inclusion during the third age, a topic of increasing importance in the context of the accelerated demographic ageing experienced by Romania and Europe as a whole. My work in this area began with an analysis of the social representations of ageing, in which I examined how perceptions of the ageing process vary across generations and cultural contexts. This study highlighted both generational discontinuities and the persistence of age-related stereotypes that contribute to the symbolic and material marginalization of older adults.

I subsequently conducted a comparative analysis of the main explanatory models in international gerontological literature with direct focus on active ageing and successful ageing, showing that differences in their explanatory power do not stem from inherent conceptual limitations, but rather from operationalizations that overlook the social and civic dimensions of participation. Social participation and subjective well-being emerged as stronger predictors of positive outcomes in the third age than traditional socioeconomic variables. These findings point to the need for a reconceptualization of public policies targeting older populations, shifting from a *compensatory* logic to an *enabling approach*.

The most significant contribution within this line of research is the monograph devoted to social inclusion during the third age period. The volume proposes a theoretical framework structured across four domains of analysis: economic, social, cultural, and civic. These domains refer to three levels, i.e. the individual level, the community level and the institutional level. It integrates contributions from complementary gerontological and sociological theories and examines the mechanisms through which social structures produce and reproduce the exclusion of older adults.

The theoretical framework defines four distinct domains: the economic domain (access to income, the labor market, and material services), the social domain (networks of relationships and support from family and community), the cultural domain

(recognition, participation in cultural life, and respect for personal dignity), and the civic domain (the exercise of rights, participation in local decision-making, and access to public information). Each of these domains is examined at three levels: the individual level (the resources and capabilities available to the older person), the community level (the networks, services, and local norms that facilitate or hinder participation), and the institutional level (the public policies, legal frameworks, and organizational structures that shape access).

The analytical framework developed in this recent work was anticipated as early as 2003 in the volume *Remaining in Society* and brings together the capability theory, the social capital theory, the recognition theory, and the functional systems theory.

The second research direction focuses on public participation and community development, central to understanding how citizens engage with local decision-making processes and the production of public goods in post-socialist Romania. Through the study of supervision practices in community development projects, I developed a typology based on functional, relational, temporal, and organizational criteria, arguing that supervision oriented towards empowerment and critical reflection yields more effective outcomes than models based on control and compliance. This perspective aligns with the tradition of reflective practice (Schön; Fook and Gardner) and with Flyvbjerg's reinterpretation of Aristotelian *phronesis*, advocating for a form of social science that is engaged with real-world problems and that resists the artificial separation between theory and practice.

The thesis further examines citizen participation and community quality of life through the Local Community Barometer of Alba Iulia, an annual monitoring instrument implemented since 2014, combining representative survey data with qualitative interviews involving local authorities, business actors, and tourists. A longitudinal analysis based on this instrument identifies a persistent thematic asymmetry: citizens mobilize significantly more in relation to urban development and infrastructure than in areas such as social inclusion, education, or public health. This pattern reflects deeper structures of social capital and post-socialist civic culture, where bonding social capital prevails over bridging social capital, limiting the capacity of communities to address complex issues requiring intergroup cooperation and extended public deliberation.

The third research direction examines equity, educational innovation, and gender inclusion, focusing on the mechanisms through which educational systems and labor markets reproduce structural inequalities. A key contribution in this area is an ethnographic study of invisible emotional labor and gender inequality in call centers, published in 2026, which shows that emotional labor, remains largely unrecognized and

uncompensated in the public service sectors. This leads to disproportionate emotional exhaustion among women and contributes to the persistence of gender inequalities in the labor market. Despite their technological sophistication and modern organizational discourse, such workplaces reproduce traditional gender hierarchies, create precarious career paths, and impose significant psychological burdens, particularly on female employees.

My research on curriculum personalization in higher education, including the development of a recommendation system for a personalized engineering curriculum, highlights the tension between the democratizing promise of personalization and the risk of reproducing inequalities through algorithms that reflect and amplify existing distortions. I argue that curriculum personalization must be accompanied by equity-monitoring mechanisms; otherwise, it risks to transform initial differences in cultural capital into divergent educational trajectories, thereby reinforcing rather than reducing social inequality. This perspective is grounded in theories of social justice and capabilities, emphasizing substantive rather than merely formal equality in educational access and outcomes.

Students' attitudes toward artificial intelligence in higher education are analyzed through a recent study showing that, while students recognize the potential benefits of AI, they also express concerns regarding data privacy, the possible dehumanization of pedagogical relationships, and the risk that algorithms may reproduce or intensify existing inequalities. These concerns are consistent with broader international research documenting cases in which AI systems in education have generated systematic discrimination based on gender, race, or socioeconomic status.

The thesis therefore advances several key contributions: a multidimensional framework for analyzing social inclusion during the period of the third age; the identification of thematic asymmetries in citizen mobilization in post-socialist contexts; an intersectional analysis of invisible emotional labor and gender inequality; a critical perspective on educational innovation and inequality reproduction; and the development of methodological tools for monitoring public participation and community well-being.

The thesis also includes a penultimate chapter presenting my experience in research and academic projects throughout my postdoctoral trajectory, as well as the initiatives I have undertaken and the outcomes I have achieved in my academic activity.

The final chapter, *Future Projects*, is devoted to future prospective research directions and is structured around three main priorities. The first concerns the extension of gerontological research through studies designed to track trajectories of social inclusion and exclusion among older adults over multiple years, with particular attention

to differences between urban and rural settings, across socio-professional categories, and to the effects of reforms in the pension and social assistance systems. I also intend to capitalize on the results of major European surveys, such as Cronos 3 (ESS) and SHARE. The second direction focuses on advancing work on inclusive leadership and participation in community-based projects which I intend achieve through a monograph and publications in leading academic journals.

The third direction addresses an in-depth examination of the institutional conditions under which digital technologies may reduce or amplify inequalities in access and educational outcomes, building on previous research on curriculum personalization and attitudes toward artificial intelligence.

Within these future activities, I aim to develop and attract research teams composed of academic staff, students, and doctoral candidates, ensuring that the results are reflected in academic work, conference presentations, and publications with national and international impact, as well as in the development of new study programs and courses aligned with a sociological praxiological perspective.