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TOWARDS A SPATIALISED AND CIRCULATORY ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL
STRUCTURE

**TOWARDS A SPATIALISED AND CIRCULATORY ANALYSIS OF RURAL
SOCIAL STRUCTURES: EVIDENCE FROM A SOCIOLOGICAL REVISIT IN
NORTH-WEST PORTUGAL.**

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This paper contributes to IRSA 15 by developing a spatialised and explicitly circulatory analysis of social structure, grounded in the early reception and long-term mobilisation of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology in Portugal. Following the democratic revolution of 1974, sociological research in north-western Portugal engaged Bourdieusian concepts to analyse rural transformations in contexts marked by the growing articulation between agricultural, industrial and urban worlds. Early doctoral research combined intensive fieldwork with localised class analysis to document changing habitus among peasant-workers, already revealing the importance of circulation between places, occupations and social positions.

Building on this tradition, the paper draws on a longitudinal research programme developed at the University of Porto that applied a relational and topological framework across urban, industrial and rural settings. Using mixed methods—questionnaire surveys, geometric data analysis, cartography, in-depth interviews and ethnography—this programme analysed social space as structured by the unequal distribution and composition of capital, and by the circulation of individuals and households across spatial scales. Rural areas were thus approached not as bounded territories but as socially differentiated configurations shaped by daily mobility, occupational trajectories and multi-local practices.

A sociological revisit of the original peasant contexts in north-west Portugal that founded this research tradition, conducted three decades later, shows how society has changed significantly, including the process of semi-proletarianisation, declining agricultural centrality, intensified commuting and the reconfiguration of symbolic and spatial boundaries. These dynamics reveal how rural social structures are produced through the flow of labour, resources and symbolic recognition, linking villages, towns and metropolitan centres.

By articulating social space, mobility and circulation, the paper challenges static representations of rurality and contributes to a circulatory, multi-scalar and relational framework that moves beyond the urban–rural divide. In doing so, it advances the spatial analysis of social structure central to the IRSA 15 agenda.

Palavras-chave: rural social structure; social space; mobility and circulation; sociological revisit; bourdieusian sociology.