

Paweł Chmieliński

ROLE OF LEADER PROGRAMME IN THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL ACCUMULATION IN RURAL AREAS

ROLA PROGRAMU LEADER W PROCESIE AKUMULACJI KAPITAŁU SPOŁECZNEGO NA OBSZARACH WIEJSKICH

Department of Social and Regional Policy, Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics – National Research Institute
Świętokrzyska Str. 20, 00-002 Warszawa, Poland, e-mail: chmielinski@ierigz.waw.pl

Summary. Paper aims in assessment the level of social capital of members of the local action groups in order to determine whether and to what extent the LEADER program has succeeded in accumulation the current social capital at the local level. Study is based on comparison of data of own survey conducted among 102 local action groups' (LAG) members and data from Social Diagnosis. The survey conducted confirms that the level of social capital among the persons actively involved in LAG activity can be considered higher than in population from control group. Also selected features of social capital were described.

Key words: LEADER, local action group, rural development programme, social capital.

Słowa kluczowe: kapitał społeczny, LEADER, lokalne grupy działania, program rozwoju obszarów wiejskich

INTRODUCTION

In the years 2007–2013 LEADER programme constitutes a separate axis of the Polish Rural Development Programme (RDP). Oriented towards including local action groups (LAG) in the local development management system, it aims at building social capital through residents' activation, which will contribute to the creation of new jobs in rural areas and to a more efficient management of local resources (MARD 2007). The reference to the concept of social capital results from the need to decentralise the management over local development, and to include local communities in this process.

The success of local development policies depends, to a large extent, on the level of residents' participation in the socio-economic life, which entails the necessity to build social capital. As defined by Putnam et al. (1999) and Fukuyama (1995), this is the capital whose value is based on the mutual social relations and personal trust, which help an individual to achieve more benefits, in both social and economic terms. Individual social capital, based on personal benefits flowing from the activity undertaken as part of interpersonal relations, comes to play a critical role in building such relations (Bourdieu 1986).

The level of interpersonal trust is viewed as one of the social capital foundations (Fukuyama 1995, Coleman 1988). For several years, Poland has been classified among the countries with the lowest level of trust in the international surveys. This finds confirmation in

the results obtained from the countries covered by the European Social Survey¹ and in the data based on Social Diagnosis (2009). According to the latter, only 10.5% of the Polish people in 2003 and 2005, and only 11.5% in 2007, agreed with the statement that “most people can be trusted”. In ESS 2004 only 11.3% agreed with this statement, i.e. six times less than in Norway which in the most recent rating was classified first among 177 countries (Social Diagnosis 2009).

When drawing conclusions from this observation, it must be borne in mind that the way of formulating the question in the trust level survey has a tremendous impact on the response provided, depending on the socio-demographic and spatial features of the population surveyed. Responses to the questions about the so-called generalised trust can, to a various extent, reflect the views of respondents in different parts of the world. This may be influenced by language and cultural diversities (values and social standards), as well as by the education structure or by the common attitude to democracy (diversities resulting, *inter alia*, from the political and economic transformation experience of central and eastern European countries). Therefore, a more comprehensive image of the social capital level among the reference group can be obtained by focusing on an extended set of features describing the civic attitude, social activeness and the level of trust.

In the paper, those features were used to construct a synthetic measure of social capital, in order to determine whether and to what extent the LEADER program has succeeded in accumulation the current social capital at the local level (understood as bringing together persons with high level of social capital).

A synthetic measure of social capital was developed using the multidimensional scaling, (MDS) a statistical technique, the purpose of which is to detect the hidden variables which allow for clarifying the similarities and differences between the entities surveyed, as well as to reduce the dimensions and to transfer them into a two- or three-dimensional space (Solaro 2010, Maaten et al. 2009).

The basis for the analysis is provided by the results of own survey conducted in 2010 on the purposive sample of 102 individuals closely connected with the functioning of different local action groups (LAG) in Poland (irrespective of their position and function within the group). On the basis of questionnaire data a synthetic indicator of social capital was developed using MDS. It allowed to measure and compare the level of social capital in the test group (LAG) with the corresponding results of the survey conducted among the control group, composed of the population of 649 respondents surveyed in 2009 as part of Social Diagnosis (2009) by the Social Monitoring Council. Such a sample selection method allowed to identify the differences in the social capital level in the groups in question. Afterwards, an attempt was made to determine some selected respondent features which could

¹ The European Social Survey (ESS), conducted in the European countries by the Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University (in cooperation with other research centres). The methodology, questionnaires and survey description are available at www.europeansocialsurvey.org. In ESS 2008 Poland was classified at the last but one position (before Bulgaria) according to the level of interpersonal trust.

interfere with the level of social capital. The correlations were done using the Spearman's and Kendall's coefficient methods.

SOCIAL CAPITAL LEVEL AMONG LAG MEMBERS

The essence of social capital can be viewed as the features of an individual, resulting from the impact of the closest surrounding (family, local environment, values and social standards) and from the qualities acquired in the education and development process (social and political views, and trust), which both constitute an individual resource, allowing for building and consolidating interpersonal relations (Bourdieu 1986, Putnam 1999). These are reflected in a network of formal connections (e.g. the membership of various organisations) and the informal ones (e.g. with acquaintances, friends and neighbours), which translate themselves into personal benefits of an individual cooperating with the group (the synergy effect), and into a widely-understood credit (perceived as trust, prestige and unselfish assistance).

The conducted survey made use of the set of features which are commonly used in the social capital analysis. The set of features used to construct the social capital indicator was following²:

- participation in the previous general election;
- level of interpersonal trust;
- voluntary activity for the benefit of local communities;
- active participation in non-compulsory public meetings – exchange of opinions and views, participation in the discussion;
- active participation in the organisation of community meetings, other than those resulting from the obligations imposed as part of employment (in LAGs or NGOs);
- positive attitude to democracy which creates the most favourable grounds to the social capital development;
- voluntary membership of various organisations, associations, political parties, councils, religious groups, unions or circles;
- formal function in various organisations, associations, political parties, councils, religious groups, unions or interest circles.

Based on the analysis of the selected set of topics, together with the corresponding questions, it can be inferred that the features used to construct the social capital measure are represented either as ordinal questions or as binary ones. This means that the reference features are quality oriented (contrary to the measurable quantity-oriented features). This finding determines the selection of a taxonomic technique used to establish an aggregate measure. For this purpose, non-metric multidimensional scaling was applied, which allowed for clarifying the similarities and differences between the entities (individuals) surveyed, as well as to reduce the dimensions and to transfer them into a two-dimensional system.

² The reference set of features provides the basis to constructing the social capital indicator in the surveys conducted under the supervision of J. Czapiński and T. Panek, see the Social Monitoring Council (2009 a).

The analysis covered the set of combinations of the responses provided by 102 individuals connected with the functioning of local action groups (test group) and by 649 respondents surveyed (control group), according to an identical set of questions as part of the Social Diagnosis (SD)³.

As a result of placing the individual responses (aggregated) in a two-dimensional coordinate system, an attempt was made at establishing a uniform measure of social capital in the form of linear point distances from the pattern. The pattern combination is understood as a point reflecting the set of responses corresponding to the theoretical exemplary distribution of features described above, typical of people with the highest level of social capital.

These distances allow us to assess to what extent a given respondent or a group of respondents represent the attitude which is the resultant of the indicators defined and used during the social capital analysis. For this purpose, the use was made of the formula of the Euclidean distance value between two points in the space, i.e. the length of the AB section joining these points. Each of 751 respondents in the both analysed groups was assigned the pattern measure that reflects the intensity of its social capital. Both measures are non-nominated values so that the growing distance from the pattern indicates a decreasing social capital, whereas higher values reflect a growth in the synthetic measure of social capital.

With a view to facilitating further analysis of the measures, they were divided into three ranges up to 0.3, (0.3, 0.6>, over 0.6, to which the corresponding numerical values were assigned. The distance of the indicator point to the pattern lower than 0.3 was considered as high level of social capital. This allowed to compare the level of social capital in the surveyed group whose members are connected with local action groups with the control group of respondents to the Social Diagnosis survey.

The results indicate that nearly 62% of the LAG sample, against 40% of the SD population, fell within the range of the lowest distance from the pattern adopted (up to 0.3). Less than 25% of the population connected with LAG and nearly 39% of the DSP population fell within the middle range. Finally, the range representing the highest distance from the pattern comprised less than 14% of the LAG population, against over 21% of the control group. Considerable concentration of points describing social capital level of the LAG population in the lowest distance from the pattern adopted testifies to the high level of social capital in the LAG respondent group analysed. The location of responses of nearly 8% of this group (and none of DS population) corresponded exactly to the theoretical point (pattern) reflecting a set of responses corresponding to the theoretical exemplary distribution of features, typical of people with the highest level of social capital.

Statement that LAG members have higher level of social capital than in the whole population finds confirmation also in the analysis of the averaged distance of points for particular groups of respondents. In the entire sample (including Social Diagnosis and LAG populations) distance from the pattern amounted to 0.399. The average distance from the pattern for the group surveyed as part of Social Diagnosis amounted to 0.417 and is considerably higher than in the case of LAG, where the distance was 0.279.

³ Data was derived from the generally-accessible base of responses (Social Monitoring Council 2009 b).

The survey conducted confirms that the level of social capital among the persons actively involved in LAG activity can be considered higher than in population surveyed in Social Diagnosis. Therefore, in the process of establishing LAG, the accumulation of social capital takes place at the local level, bringing together those people who display an active attitude towards their own community.

SOME DETERMINANTS TO THE LEVEL OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

At the following stage of the analysis, an attempt was made to define the underlying determinants to the level of social capital in the LAGs. For this purpose, a set of questions, common for both surveys (LAG and SD) was used.

The questions referred, *inter alia*, to the place of residence, the intensity of social bonds (measured as the number of friends and acquaintances), and the demographic characteristics, such as age, sex and education. The subjective sense of happiness, expressed by respondents (Table 1) was also considered.

Table 1. The set of test features used to define the underlying determinants to social capital in the groups analysed

Feature code	Feature description
x_1	assessment of the financial aspect of the respondent's life
x_2	life satisfaction of the surveyed
$x_{3.1}$	assessment of the public authorities' impact on the quality of respondent's life
$x_{3.2}$	assessment of respondent's own impact on the quality of his/her life
$x_{3.3}$	assessment of other people's impact on the quality of life
$x_{3.4}$	assessment of the impact exerted by fortuitous events/"force majeure" on the quality of life
x_4	place of residence/migrations
x_5	number of friends

Source: own study.

Since the measure of distance from the pattern and the responses to the questionnaire, according to Table 2, were converted into an ordinal form, it was possible to determine the statistical correlation between them. This was done using the Spearman's and Kendall's rank correlation methods. The survey focused on the correlations between the level of social capital measured as the distance from the pattern (for the purpose of simplicity, expressed in the range coding units: up to 0.3, (0.3, 0.6>, over 0.6 and the selected respondent features described in Table 1.

The test result analysis leads to the inference that, among the selected respondent features, extended social bonds (measured as the number of persons treated as friends) characterise people with high levels of social capital. The connection of this feature with the value of the social capital indicator is the closest from among the variables identified, which is reflected in the high degree of correlation with a marked statistical significance (Table 2). This can be related to the fact that a relatively high correlation was observed between the

level of social capital and the conviction that other people play a crucial role in respondents' life, and much depends on them (in a broad sense). Another interaction examined refers to the subjective sense of happiness. There is a positive correlation between the assessment of the financial aspect of life with social capital, though the correlation value is rather minor in this case.

Table 2. The correlation between the level of social capital and the selected respondent-specific features

Feature code	Spearman-rho	Kendall-tau
X ₁	0.128**	0.148**
X ₂	0.311***	0.325***
X _{3.1}	-0.015	-0.016
X _{3.2}	0.094***	0.101***
X _{3.3}	0.354**	0.411**
X _{3.4}	-0.059*	-0.062*
X ₄	-0.082**	-0.90**
X ₅	0.60*	0.67*

See Table 1 for the description of the features.

The correlations for the entire population under analysis (n=751); ***, **, * statistical significance at the level of $p = 1\%$, 5% , 10% .

Source: own study.

The survey has also revealed that the higher the level of social capital, the higher the satisfaction from the activity for the benefit of other people⁴. The satisfaction drawn from such activity can be viewed as an additional incentive to civic activity and to active work for the local community. At the same time, the importance of non-financial determinants to social capital is emphasised by the fact that there are no correlations between the distance of the synthetic indicator from the assumed pattern and the investment activity, or the tendency to save up money among the surveyed group.

Therefore, we may expect that people with high levels of social capital assess their quality of life in a more positive way, due to their active participation in social life, both at the occupational and private level.

As regards the idea of locally-bound social capital, the lack of connection between social capital and the long-term residence in a given area seems thought-provoking. It means that the level of social capital is not influenced by the fact that the respondents grew up in the locality where they settled down for permanent residence. One could expect that this fact would be of essence, at least on account of family bonds or friendship. However, based on the survey results, it can be assumed that social capital, in individual terms, is not related to the place of residence.

⁴ This is reflected in the positive correlation between the distance of the measure from the pattern adopted and the conviction that much or very much good has been done for other people for the last year.

CONCLUSIONS

The LEADER programme is based on an innovative approach to the local development policy, where local communities may have an impact on establishing and implementing local development strategies. Its principal aim, as described in RDP, was to establish social capital in rural areas. The study proves that the programme contributes to integrating and accumulating the current social capital in rural areas, attracting and bringing together the persons with high levels of social capital among the community.

One should notice, that the term “social capital” in the RDP document is understood and used rather declaratively than literally, and is not based on the theory and literature on the subject matter. This is reflected in the lack of indicators to monitor the programme implementation progress, which would refer to the common set of features (forms) of social capital. In consequence, the measures employed to analyse the programme implementation status are mostly quantitative, making it difficult to examine the progress in implementing the principal objective of Axis IV.

Based on the results, it can be inferred that, along with the commonly stressed level of trust, the importance attached to interpersonal relations, i.e. the conscious need to establish formal and, in particular, informal interpersonal bonds (the number of persons treated as friends or acquaintances), is one of the fundamental features of social capital. It can also contribute (even though the correlation value shown was rather minor) to improving the quality of life, exerting a special impact on the subjective sense of happiness and, in certain cases, have a positive influence on assessing the financial aspect of life. The lack of connection between social capital and the long-term residence of individual rises a question for future research, if people with high level of social capital are capable of adapting to new living conditions more easily than others (e.g. to a different place of residence), and to what extent the high level of social capital allows them to establish positive interpersonal relations, as well as to get actively involved in the activity for the local community.

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