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SOCIAL CAPITAL IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN POLAND AND LITHUANIA

Anna KŁOCZKO-GAJEWSKA, Department of Economics and Economic Policy, Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW, Nowoursynowska 166, 02–787 Warsaw, Poland, anna_kloczko_gajewska@sggw.pl

Poland and Lithuania are neighbouring countries that belonged to socialist block and entered European Union in 2004, and where approximately 1/3 of the population lives in rural areas. The author analysed to what extent social capital, a recognised development factor, is included in Rural Development Programmes (Plans) for these countries between 2004 and 2020. It was revealed that the first plans did not pay too much attention to social issues, as they concentrated mostly on farming and entering the common market. In the Lithuanian plan there was also the LEADER initiative. In the next plans more concern on cooperation appeared. In both of the countries there is more emphasis on creating and supporting rural social capital, than on making use of it, but the proportions begin to change.

Keywords: Lithuania, Poland, Rural Development Programme, social capital.

INTRODUCTION

Poland and Lithuania are neighbouring countries. They belonged to socialist block, regained independence at the turn of 1980s and 1990s, and entered European Union in 2004. In both of them rural areas play an important role. Even though in 2012 both in Poland and in Lithuania agriculture, forestry and fishing contributed to only about 4% of GDP (GUS, 2015a), a significant share of these countries' populations lives in rural areas. According to the national censuses carried out in both countries in 2011, in Lithuania as much as 33 % of the population lived in rural areas (Lietuvos Statistikos, 2013), and in Poland it was 39 % (GUS, 2015b). From this point of view rural development has a significant impact on the development of these societies – both in economic and in social terms.

One of widely recognised factors of development is social capital. Its simplest definition can be as follows: “whereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships. To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is these others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage” (Productivity Commission, 2003, p.7). More formally, “social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1995, p.67).

According to Douglass North, a Nobel Prize laureate, both formal and informal institutions, rules and ways of behaviour have an important impact on economic development of countries (Woolcock, 2002). Similarly, the World Bank recognised the importance of formal and informal networks and institutions; it gave recommendations to take them under consideration while preparing development projects and advisory services for particular countries (Grootaert, 1998). Social capital is said to lower crime rates, improve educational success, increase both individual incomes and economic performance of regions (Productivity Commission, 2003). There is also a significant body of evidence for its influence on rural development. Some of the examples are seen worldwide, such as very promising results of joint management of local environmental resources (such as irrigation systems and common forests) by local societies¹. There are also many examples of its use among farmers in Europe, such as informal joint work or lending equipment to the neighbours and relatives (quite popular in the UK), or special machinery circles offering machines to their members (more popular in Germany) in order to lower the costs of operating. There are also producer groups that jointly sell their products and sometimes buy seeds or fertilisers or jointly use machines (Krzyżanowska, 2003).

Several interesting initiatives taking advantage of social capital for rural development and job creation (not only in farming) in the EU can be found in the report prepared by European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. They include among others: wide debate of local rural development plans in Altmark (Germany);

¹ For example, system of water supply in villages on Ivory Coast became significantly more efficient and cheaper when it was managed by well-organized local societies, and not by central government or disorganized societies (Grootaert, 1998).

information sharing and joint initiatives for rural development prepared by Rural Parliament in Slovakia; job creation through promoting local products under common brand name in North Karelia (Finland), and improving living conditions in rural areas by a local NGO in Poland (European Foundation, 2007).

Slangen et al. (2004) carried out an econometric analysis which revealed that in Central and Eastern European countries (among them Lithuania and Poland) social capital measured as trust in people and in government has a positive influence on the performance of agricultural sector. From this perspective it would be interesting to assess to what extent social capital is taken into account while preparing development plans for rural areas². Within these plans social capital could be used as an important development asset, a factor influencing the scope and level of the implementation of the plan, or as a desired outcome of actions.

Rural development plans contain planned expenditures for measures co-financed by pillar II of the CAP and payments agreed on the basis of the 'Rural Development' provisions in the accession treaties. The plans therefore substantially influence the development of rural areas. Even though not all plans can be fully implemented, "a close look at the design of the various sub-measures, the preparation of the institutional framework, as well as the available funding possibilities shows the priorities and allows for judgments to be made on the possible effects and uptake of different measures and, ultimately, of the RDP in general" (IUCN, 2004, p.5). RDPs are consistent with the common EU strategic guidelines and with each member state's National Strategy Plan. While preparing the plans, each member state makes a choice of measures or priorities from the list given in the EU document to suit the needs of their rural areas.

Among analyses concerning rural development plans one can find paper written by Bułkowska and Chmurzyńska (2011) who analysed the main targets and their implementation in SAPARD, Rural Development Plans 2004–2007 and 2007–2013 and SOP "Agriculture". They indicate that the policy towards rural areas should involve both agricultural and non-agricultural development. According to them, it is important to build social capital, because it will allow for more effective use of the potential of rural areas. However, even though the authors emphasised the importance of social capital in successful implementation of rural development plans, their analyses focused on the competitiveness, labour market, and infrastructure as well as technical and organisational modernisation of farms, giving only some attention to producer groups and general remarks on local communities' activation. Other works dealing with EU policy towards social capital in rural areas concentrate mostly on the LEADER programme (for example see Farrell and Thirion, 2005).

Until now some attention was given to assess the impact of rural development programmes, but very little attention was given to social perspective. In-depth study of measures of development used by member states (Approaches..., 2010) concentrated on economic and ecological issues, such as economic growth, employment creation, labour productivity, reversing biodiversity decline, improvement in water quality, and contributing to combating climate change. These topics were deliberated deeply, but very little attention was given to social measures. Only at the last page of the report 18 other indicators are mentioned without further comments – 8 of them referring to the quality of life in rural areas, and three to the LEADER programme.

RESEARCH METHODS

The object of the research were rural development plans for Poland and Lithuania, analysed from the point of view of mentioning social capital – either as a goal of the plan or as a resource used to impellent the plan. The study was carried out with the use of desk research, mainly analysis of official documents, supported by study of literature. The analysis was based on the following documents for Poland and Lithuania: Rural Development Plans 2004–2006, Rural Development Programmes 2007–2013, and Rural Development Programmes 2014–2020 (in the case of Lithuania this document was inaccessible in English, so only the Factsheet on 2014–2020 Rural Development Programme for Lithuania and presentation by Lithuanian vice-minister of agriculture were analysed). The aim was to observe changes of approach of the decision-makers towards social capital in rural areas in Poland and in Lithuania. If the term "social capital" was not used explicitly, the author looked for information concerning cooperation, social norms, and trust. Moreover, the author tried to find out to what extent general remarks given in the documents on using or strengthening social capital were followed by more detailed descriptions of actions etc.

Social capital in Polish rural development plans

In Polish **Rural Development Plan 2004–2006** term „social capital” was not used explicitly at all. Nevertheless, some of its aspects were mentioned in the document. The authors wrote that economic development of rural areas depended strongly on social activeness of the inhabitants. They saw the need for strengthening vertical and horizontal integration of agricultural producers (including producer groups), which also refers to the relations between actors. In the SWOT analysis of Polish rural areas low level of bottom-up movements was mentioned as one of the weaknesses, but simultaneously recently observed increase of social activeness was seen as strength. Low number of off-farm businesses was seen as a result of, among others, low social activeness. Among actions offered within the plan one could find governmental support for producer groups and their organisations. Moreover, the document mentioned strengthening the inhabitants' participation in decision-making among actions concerning the use of natural resources. No other actions aimed at improving social activeness were suggested.

Unfortunately, the majority of already existing and well-settled institutions (both public and social) dealing with farming and rural areas were not mentioned in the document; experts evaluating the plan saw this as a significant

² The idea of this paper was developed during work in project 'Promoting quality of life in rural Europe' coordinated by European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions in 2006 and 2007.

drawback. (Pilot Program LEADER+ was not included in the Plan, as it was implemented within Sectoral Operational Programme “Restructuring and modernization of food sector and rural development 2004–2006, and not Rural Development Plan).

Rural Development Programme (2007–2013) among expected results mentioned “strengthening of social capital” in rural areas. The fourth axis, “LEADER”, was supposed to strengthen local social capital and improve local management and self-organisation. This means that social capital was seen rather as an expected result than as a resource that can be used for development. There were also several other aspects of social capital mentioned, even if the term was not used explicitly, such as observed changes in social relations as a result of migrations or problems with self-organisation of small-scale producers. Among factors hindering development of microenterprises the authors explicitly mentioned low solidarity between entrepreneurs and their unwillingness to cooperate, leading to the lack of strong organisations representing their interests.

Local libraries and clubs were described as important elements of social life that should be modernised to support animating local communities. Similarly, local traditions and old-fashioned professions were to be supported. In Poland social and economic management on local level insufficiently makes use of local traditions; however the rising number of local initiatives within the LEADER programme was mentioned in the SWOT analysis as one of opportunities for development.

The actions within this plan were divided into four axes, and three of them included certain aspects of social capital. Axis 1, aiming at improving competitiveness of agriculture and forestry, offered support for producer groups. The authors of the plan decided to continue support offered to the groups within the previous plan, because high individualism of Polish farmers combined with small size of farms was seen as a serious drawback on the market. Axis 3 was supposed to improve living conditions and multifunctionality of rural areas. Within it some financial support was offered to build or renovate public buildings and infrastructure that play a significant role in socio-economic life. The fourth axis, LEADER, was fully devoted to creating social capital through activating the inhabitants. Participation of local action groups was supposed to make the decisions more coherent and strengthen local capital at local scale, as well as encourage innovativeness in searching for proper development solutions. As we can see, the scope of interest in the fields related with social capital was significantly widened in comparison with the previous plan.

Rural Development Programme for 2014–2020 mentioned social capital twice: in the SWOT analysis as one of the strengths (because the LEADER + activities covered 90 % of the country, with 336 Local Action Groups operating in June 2012) and as one of the goals of the LEADER initiative. Some of its aspects were also mentioned indirectly, such as a concern for insufficient cooperation between research and development on one hand and agricultural extension service on the other.

In almost every part of the SWOT analysis there were remarks on some aspects of social capital. As for strengths, it was written that higher specialisation of agricultural production within regions (for example milk production in one of them and cereals in the other one) might encourage cooperation between producers in the future. In other words, potential cooperation between the farmers was seen as a desired state. Similarly, strong social ties within rural communities were seen as a possibility to take advantage of other potentials, such as cultural and environmental resources.

On the other hand, farmers’ unwillingness to cooperate was seen as a serious drawback that could hinder development of the sector, especially that certain level of horizontal cooperation could be the first step to vertical integration with the processing sector. Among weaknesses one could find also insufficiently developed social infrastructure and low level of cooperation between research and development sector on one hand, and extension service and farmers on the other. Actions promoting endogenous potential (including cultural and environmental resources) and activation of rural communities through local development strategies were seen as opportunities. No aspects of social capital were mentioned among threats.

The analysis of current situation was followed by identification of needs. Four out of 12 needs included cooperation or norms. For example, development of small farms and strengthening farmers’ position on the market could be achieved through horizontal integration of farmers, sharing know-how and taking advantage of joint marketing and brand names for products. Higher innovativeness of the agricultural sector also required better cooperation between academics and practitioners. Last but not least, there was a need to activate local communities in order to make use of local (environmental and cultural) potentials, thus creating more off-farm jobs. Strong social ties should be used to plan and undertake actions leading at making people more creative in looking for income opportunities.

In the plan there were five actions that referred to social capital, mainly to encourage cooperation in various dimensions. Not only producer groups and farmers’ cooperatives were to be supported, but also cooperation between farmers and scientific institutions, entrepreneurs, NGOs, and the like. Such cooperation should lead to higher innovativeness, stronger position of the farmers on the market, more possibilities to sell products, etc. Of course, there was also the LEADER initiative, aimed at improving coordination of actions. There would be also some support for building local social infrastructure.

Social capital in Lithuanian rural development plans

Similarly as in Poland, in the Lithuanian **Rural Development Plan 2004–2006** term „social capital” was not used explicitly at all. However, some of its aspects were mentioned in the text. In the description of the current situation, rural libraries and cultural centres were presented as an important part of rural life. According to the text, in 1990–1999 the number of rural libraries and cultural centres steeply diminished. It was emphasised that the support and reinforcement of social life in such centres is of great importance, as it encourages local initiatives that are beneficial for the local rural community and further of the entire rural population. In the following parts of the document “increasing initiatives of

rural communities and self-governance” were mentioned as strengths, and “still not sufficiently developed rural communities, lack of LEADER initiatives” as weaknesses.

In the text suggesting utilization of strengths, active participation of the local residents was mentioned explicitly as a crucial development factor. Among generally passive rural population one could find local action groups organized within the LEADER + programme, that began to take initiatives and should be supported in the future. Maintaining and developing rural physical and social structures was supposed to create a positive atmosphere and encourage entrepreneurship, leading to diversified activities in rural areas. On the other hand, there was no reference to social capital in the subchapter “preventing the weaknesses”, even though not sufficiently developed rural communities and lack of LEADER initiatives were mentioned among the weaknesses. While describing plans to deal with problems related to social factors, the main focus was on low income and infrastructure (water supply, etc.), and not social development. Among utilization of opportunities, one could find hopes that thanks to participation in EU-founded programmes the rural population would become more socially active; this should help to increase the economic viability in rural areas.

In the **Rural Development Programme for 2007–2013** the term “social capital” was mentioned only once while describing desired outcomes of the LEADER programme within axis 4. However, there were many places when its components were taken into consideration. The first remarks on cooperation, trust, or social norms appeared in the description of the current situation in Lithuanian rural areas; establishing cooperatives and producer groups was seen as a method to strengthen market position of small scale farmers. However, there were problems with persuading farmers to join them due to Soviet cooperative experiences. The authors expressed a need for promoting such types of cooperation, to improve quality of the products and ensure bigger volumes of production, leading to better prices.

While presenting existing advisory systems, the authors paid some attention not only to traditional production methods, farm economy and accountancy, but saw the need for, among others, specialised consultations and training in community development and partnership (especially as a support for LEADER-type actions). Moreover, lack of cooperation between small scale farmers was seen as one of key factors hindering competitive development of agricultural sector. Similarly, cooperation between all players down the food chain was seen as an important factor improving competitiveness of the sector in the future.

Similarly as in the RDP 2004–2006, rural libraries and cultural centres were mentioned as important institutions that are active in organizing leisure time for adults and children in rural areas. Their preservation and renewal were seen as important for the attractiveness of rural areas.

According to the text, between 2000 and 2006 the involvement of rural stakeholders has risen significantly, including creation of local action groups (LAGs) within the LEADER + programme. It was described in more details and the need to support such movements was emphasized. Even though more and more municipalities recognised the importance of participatory actions, there were still cases when local government didn't trust local communities. Further development of the LAGs was in need of strengthening cooperation within the LAGs and among them.

In the summary of chapter describing most important features of Lithuanian rural areas, there was a table presenting briefly challenges for rural development. When we look for issues related to social capital, in Axis I (The economic situation and competitiveness of the agrifood sector) one could find lack of cooperation among farmers. Needs and problems referring to Axis III (the general socioeconomic situation) contained lack of skills and local initiatives in rural areas and insufficient social and physical infrastructure. Within Axis IV (Local partnership and Development) one can find the following problems: a need to strengthen local governance and democracy in the rural areas including building trust and partnerships between municipalities and local communities; lack of financial sources to run local organisations. In general, while describing current situation in Lithuanian rural areas, the authors recognized social capital as an important development factor. There was particular emphasis on the need to strengthen it.

However, even though certain aspects of social capital were recognised as important while describing current situation and future needs in rural areas, the authors of the programme had a lot less to say when it came to planning actions within SWOT analysis. For example, among weaknesses the authors recognized the lack of cooperation between farmers and the lack of appropriate producer organizations. They added to this list still not sufficiently developed rural communities, the lack of LEADER initiatives, weak local governance, and not enough trust and partnerships between municipalities and local communities. But in the part called “preventing weaknesses” there was not even a word written on cooperation or trust, as if these weaknesses were not going to be challenged. In further parts of the document, while proposing utilization of strengths, the authors planned to continue involving rural residents in local governance and actions within LEADER + programme. They understood that maintaining and developing rural environment create a positive atmosphere in the villages, encourage entrepreneurship and help to prevent the threat of mental paralysis of the population. Again, in the part concerning preparations for threats, there was nothing to be found about cooperation – either its low level or using social capital to deal with the threats. What is interesting is that in the text it is said: “Although the local partnership, bottom-up initiatives in the rural areas are at a very early stage of development, the evidently growing attention to such initiatives of rural communities and self-governance in rural areas is considered a very important strength together with the even rural – urban distribution of population”. This sentence explains why social activeness can be found among weaknesses and at the same time among strengths. Among the latter a reader can find increasing attention to initiatives of rural communities and self-governance.

Similar problems can be found in the part describing objectives, axis and priorities for Rural Development in Lithuania. Even though in Axis III there is a priority titled “Improvement of social and physical infrastructure, protection and enhancement of rural heritage”, in detailed description of the priority there was no sign of social infrastructure. There was only a vague desire to invest in “human potential” and to finance projects in “village renewal and development actions

within rural areas”, without further details. Obviously, there was much more about certain aspects of social capital in the Axis IV (LEADER +). Its objective was to promote rural development through local initiatives and partnership. Among five key problems mentioned, two referred to social capital: lack of local governance, trust and partnership between municipalities and rural communities; lack of necessary capacities at local level. The programme was supposed to encourage rural population to act together and strengthen social capital. This should lead to coherence of the decisions made at the local level and consequently to improving the quality of life in rural areas.

In one of the final parts of the document, justification of the priorities chosen, it was written explicitly that establishing partnerships among the rural populations and implementation of the “bottom up approach” were of key importance to ensure that local initiatives develop and prosper. Even though in some municipalities local activities were visibly supported, there was still a need to increase trust and cooperation between the key players.

To sum up, in comparison with the previous plan, there were significantly more remarks referring to social capital. Perhaps there were two main reasons for that. Firstly, few years after EU accession other problems (such as fulfilling quality and environmental requirements for agricultural production) were not as urgent as during pre-accession period. Secondly, social capital became more widely recognized as an important factor of development.

Unfortunately, English version of **Rural Development Programme (2014–2020)** for Lithuania was inaccessible, so further analysis was based on the Factsheet on 2014–2020 Rural Development Programme for Lithuania and presentation by Lithuanian vice-minister of Agriculture (Kuklierius, 2013). Obviously, some details written in the original document will not be included in the analysis.

According to these documents agricultural sector in Lithuania suffered from the lack of cooperation, despite successful implementation of the LEADER approach (covering 99 % of the countryside). Thus the rural development plan was supposed to pay special attention to promoting cooperation, including actions within LEADER (implementing local development strategies). Similarly as in Poland, innovativeness were to be supported, among others, through encouraging cooperation. Support for producer groups and other cooperation projects would also be financed. There were plans for investment in small scale rural infrastructure, among others refurbishment of public spaces.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Rural development plans for 2004–2006 both in Poland and Lithuania concentrated mostly on tangible issues, such as the quality of the agrifood products and fulfilling agri-environmental norms. The reason for that might be rapid changes that were to be faced by the farmers after entering the common market. In fact, Poland and Lithuania planned to spend as much money as possible (20% of the funds) within the first pillar (which is the highest share among 8 CEE countries that prepared the plan) and use most of the remainder for measures aimed at “restructuring and modernisation” of their farming sector (IUCN, 2004). In Poland social capital was practically ignored. Lithuanian plan for 2004–2006 included many softer, social aspects of development, than the Polish one, and a LEADER initiative that supported social participation.

In the RDP 2007–2013 for Poland some aspects of cooperation appeared as a thing worth developing (such as producer groups and Local Action Groups). In the Plan for 2014–2020 more actions referred to cooperation, and they went beyond pure farming or marketing – the support for interbranch cooperation was offered. The RDP 2007–2013 for Lithuania included many more aspects of cooperation than the previous one – similarly, as the Polish one. It is difficult to say anything about the third plan, but surely it intended to promote cooperation in rural areas.

In both of the countries there was more emphasis on creating and supporting rural social capital, than for making use of it – probably because of its initially low level, as in many post-socialist countries – but the proportions begin to change. In the RDP 2014–2020 (at least in Poland) there are first attempts to make use of the social capital not only among farmers or rural inhabitants, but also between various branches. In all of the plans the policy-makers referred more often to cooperation, than to cognitive social capital, such as trust or norms. Only in the last plans cultural potentials and traditions were visibly taken into consideration. In both countries the LEADER initiative was mentioned much earlier than other forms of using social capital, which goes in line with the statement of Kovach (2006) that the LEADER programme is an important prerequisite of social participation in some rural areas.

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