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SOCIAL CAPITAL IN RURAL AREAS: A RECONSTRUCTION ATTEMPT

Summary

Social capital, even being an ambiguous phenomenon with number of different definitions, is considered as a one of the important factors of local community's development. The author believes that social capital is a kind of feature or resource of a local community that may contribute to the effective activity of both individual and collective social actors. Relying on the recent sociological research (Public Opinion Research Center, Social Diagnosis) the author attempts to assess the capacity of Polish rural areas in terms of social capital. In order to describe the condition of social capital, the indicators referring to trust, solidarity, membership in non-governmental organizations, information, communication, social integration, and subjectivity are used. The data reveals that the level of social capital in rural areas of Poland is low and no increase can be clearly observed. Instead there are reasons to doubt in the fast development of rural social capital in the near future.

Keywords: Social Capital, Rural Areas, Community Development

1. SOCIAL CAPITAL IN RURAL AREAS AND METHODS OF ITS MEASUREMENT

Ever since social capital entered into academic and public discourse in the 1990s, it has been nearly unanimously proclaimed one of the important resources for community and social development. The emergence of this concept largely

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contributed to the diminishing of the paradigm of modernization, while simultaneously altering the social perception of rural areas, created models and predicted mechanisms of its development. As it transpired, an effective and balanced development required not only economic capital but also human, cultural and social ones as well. Throughout the entire second half of the 20th century, rural areas in Poland struggled with inadequate economic capital, which resulted in grave underdevelopment. There was no mention of other forms of capital during that time. At the beginning of the 21st century, with rural areas receiving considerable economic resources which created an opportunity for a profound change. We are making an attempt to investigate whether social resources of rural areas, its social capital, can aid with their optimal application and increase their effectiveness or conversely, whether some of these resources fail to be utilized.

What is the social capital of rural areas in Poland? An assessment of its condition is difficult mainly due to the fluidity of the concept itself, as well as the resulting problems with operationalization of indicators used for measuring thereof. Thus, such an assessment depends on the methodology of measurement as well as the indicators used. This subject has been discussed by Barbara Fedyszak-Radziejowska, who compared advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative methods within this area [Fedyszak-Radziejowska 2006a], and by Zbigniew Zagała [2006] as well. As far as the latest studies of social capital of the rural areas are concerned, chronologically speaking, Barbara Fedyszak-Radziejowska has employed the indicators of generalized trust, including that of neighbors, commune authorities and political parties, as well as a willingness to cooperate and a sense of impact on public matters [Fedyszak-Radziejowska 2006b]. Maciej Frykowski and Paweł Starosta make use of four indicators only: organizational activity, local and supra-local political activity as well as mobilization activity [Frykowski and Starosta 2006], while circles of trust and network categories lead to differentiating the types of social capital among rural residents [Frykowski 2006]. Janusz Czapiński's description of the condition of social capital [2007] involves indicators such as: interpersonal trust, voluntary membership in organizations and performing functions therein, active participation in non-compulsory meetings, voluntary activity for the local community, participation in local government elections and a positive attitude towards democracy.

The results of such investigation are quite consistent: the condition of social capital both in rural areas and in the entire Polish society is rather poor, although one may notice an emerging trend towards diversity in opinions on the subject. The most optimistic judgment has been formulated by Radziejowska, although, by her own admission, it does not result from research but from "observing numer-

ous noticeable symptoms of changes". This optimistic view is further enhanced by a singular decomposition of social capital which she carries out, based on the exclusion of social trust, "Is therefore social capital possible without social trust? It seems that this is the only option for the Polish countryside" [Fedyszak-Radziejowska 2007b: 144]. The role of trust as the key component of social trust has also been undermined by other authors researching this problem [Zagała 2006].

The most reliable empirical diagnosis of the condition of social capital in rural areas and in small towns has been formulated on the basis of the study conducted in 2004 by the University of Łódź [Frykowski and Starosta 2006, Frykowski 2006, Mularska 2006], which included each commune (*gmina*) within the Łódź province (*województwo*). The results suggest that rural social capital within this region is poor. It is characterized by an 'insular' pattern of spatial distribution and its value decreases progressively with the increasing size of the community. The components of social capital are characterized either by independence or by alternative nature of relations, which leads to differentiation of two varieties of social capital: 'local' and 'civic'. This phenomenon (independence of qualities or their alternating relations) has been labeled as the decomposition of social capital qualities; it also further reduces the potential for social co-operation [Frykowski, Starosta 2006]. The study also led to four types of social capital to be differentiated and evaluated in terms of their size. The largest category of rural residents are those in whose case social capital is non-existent (37%), closely followed by those who only have the so-called network capital at their disposal, "which is mainly used for individual purposes since their distrust towards fellow residents reduces the opportunity of employing the network for the local community" [Frykowski 2006]. Bonding (inter-group) capital is present in only one out of ten rural residents, while local (communal) capital and bridging social capital, in 8% of residents each. This is accompanied, as the study also revealed, by a low level of acceptance for such social norms such as: loyalty, reciprocity, subjectivity, trust and truthfulness. It is worth noting that only 1.7% of the studied population accept all social norms; the largest group (36.6%) approves of no more than two [Mularska 2006]. Thus, one can assume that there is little, if any, exaggeration in the theory that moral relativism, progressing permissivism or moral anomie are widespread in rural areas. What is particularly worth noticing is the **moral conditioning of the weakening of social capital**, which so far has not been explored in depth.

There are at least two reasons which contribute to the significance of the distinction of various types of social capital and determining their 'share' within rural communities. These factors draw attention to the fact that social capital may

assume various forms and that in rural society the principal forms of capital are those which do not have to serve the purpose of development. This particular phenomenon has already been discussed in literature. References to Banfield's idea appear in the writings by Frykowski and Starosta¹, the issue was also discussed by Daniel Wicenty [2004], while Krystyna Szafraniec focused in depth on 'bad' or 'negative' capital in her comments on the very same study on which Fedyszak-Radziejowska based her own analyses. "The construction of social capital may result in the strengthening of links between members of the community (which leads to the emergence of an elite group of 'fellow members'), it may also lead to the appearance of social capital which allows the creation of 'bridges', namely, opening to new types of links, new values as well as new – different and 'foreign' cultural resources [...]. These (not necessarily this subtle) terminological distinctions lead to the discovery that there is more to social capital than only one, light aspect, since there is not only a 'good', but also a 'bad' social capital. Although far more doubt is engendered by the type of links which R. Putnam labeled as bonding social capital, bridging capital cannot be excluded from suspicion *a priori*." [Szafraniec 2007: 16].

As evidenced by further study within the framework of „Diagnoza Społeczna” (*Social Diagnosis*) series, social capital of the Polish society is in such poor a condition that it is in opposition to the economic growth rate in the post-reform Polish Republic. Thus, Czapiński has formulated a hypothesis that Poland is in the phase of *molecular growth*, the main source of which is the growth of human capital. Social capital is to become essential in the later phase, namely *community growth*, but the strengthening thereof is much more difficult than that of human capital, as it requires long-term public actions. The third part of this article shall be focused on this issue.

2. SOCIAL CAPITAL OF COUNTRYSIDE IN 2008: DIAGNOSIS ATTEMPT

Basing on the assumption that **social capital constitutes a certain quality, resource and characteristic of a community which encourages effective activity of individual and collective social actors**, here we shall employ numerous

¹ „A pattern in which social activity is locally accompanied with a widespread distrust is evocative of the 'Montegrano ethos', which Banfield describes as an example of social void in local communities with a high rate of local political activity, resulting from clientist-patronage system [Frykowski, Starosta 2006: 91].

latest study results in order to **propose a diagnosis of its condition**. We are taking the antireductionist standpoint, therefore social capital is regarded as a certain ‘**synthetic value**’, **the emergence and existence of which comprises of several concurrent elements**, including cultural ones². The problem stems from the fact that we lack information as to the significance of their impact on the entire social resource or social good in question, while the classic literature on the subject, often in a form of literary metaphors, attributes different values to them.

In reference to the best known concept of the World Bank, Jerzy Bartkowski proposes that social capital be analyzed on the basis of its six dimensions or components. These are as follows: „1) organizational participation and its diversity, character of the organization and the scope of network which they produce, 2) trust and solidarity, 3) co-operation: willingness and scope of action for local community, defining the potential of activity available for social mobilization, 4) information and communication, e.g. the use of press and other sources of information, 5) social integration and inclusion: internal stratification and tensions, the scope of integration of minority and marginal groups, 6) sense of subjectivity – the perceived impact on the surrounding world, particularly on its crucial institutions” [Bartkowski 2007: 88–89]. On the basis of this sequence, with the latest study results at our disposal (*Social Diagnosis 2007*, CBOS [*Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej – Public Opinion Research Center*] studies, et al.), we shall describe the social capital dimensions suggested above. However, as it transpires, each of these dimensions may be described with numerous indicators, which makes the phenomenon even more complex in appearance.

a) Groups and networks

Membership in organizations which in the most general terms are labeled as non-governmental, where the mode of operation of such organizations, as well as the character of involvement in the activity thereof constitute an important and often analyzed indicator of social capital. I suggest that two of its aspects be used to characterize it, including: the involvement of rural residents in non-governmental organizations and the structure of organizations operating within rural environment and of their operating methods.

² This is in reference to a suggestion by Andrzej Sadowski, who proposes (in reference to Merton) that social capital be defined as capital which can be obtained or mobilized by ‘an organized system of social relationships, while cultural capital as a system of such normative values which, when provided for individuals, result from their participation in various social processes. Thus explained social capital does, however, lack the entire normative sphere [Sadowski 2007].

The data concerning rural residents involvement in various organizations are quite consistent as it is low and remains below 20% percent. In a study carried out in several villages in 2002 [Radziejowska 2006: 87] it was concluded that 12% of respondents were members of any organization. *Social Diagnosis 2007* quotes a similar level of organization membership. With the general indicator of 15%, in case of rural areas, this indicator amounted to at least 13% of respondents who perceived their membership as significant enough to declare it during the study. It is also emphasized that the membership rate increases steadily with the size of the respondents' place of residence, their education level and their income. The two latter factors also have a positive impact on performing various functions within the organization [Sulek 2007]. A slightly higher level of involvement in organizations has been found in a study of women in rural areas, conducted in 2007. Here, 15.8% of surveyed women declares their membership in social and political organizations of various kinds [Walczak-Duraj 2008].

The network of non-governmental organizations is also sparser in rural areas than in cities. Furthermore it is 'different' and is characterized by problems specific to rural environment and it is rather difficult to distinguish between formal and informal activity, as well as between economic and strictly social ones. According to the REGON registry (*National Business Registry*) [Herbst 2008] it is estimated that in 2007, there were between 31 500 and 43 000 non-profit organizations operating in rural areas, including entities such as co-operatives, parishes of various denominations and OSPs (*Voluntary Fire Brigades*). Among these were: "nearly 26 000 associations – including 15 000 Voluntary Fire Brigades, almost 700 foundations (from 8 500 in the entire country) 900 so-called other social organizations (mostly hunting associations, but also savings and loans schemes and the few registered social committees), approximately 1 300 units of trade unions, nearly 3 000 professional and economic associations (in particular: agricultural associations, producers' associations, and agricultural industry associations), over 4 000 co-operatives, nearly 8 000 organizational units of the Catholic Church (7 600) and other denominations (over 300)" [Herbst 2008]. Keeping the specific character of rural areas in mind, the above list should be amended with such organizations which are not registered in the REGON system, in particular ordinary associations (mostly entered into district (*powiat*) registries), organizations and initiatives associated with organizational units of the Catholic Church and social committees for the construction of local technical infrastructure, registered in relevant communes. One should also remember that between 10% and 40% of these organizations are no longer active, having ceased to operate.

Rural organizations are relatively small in terms of the number of their members as one in two of them is comprised of fewer than 35 members, two thirds of them with fewer than 60. The total number of members of various associations and foundations amounts to 750-80 thousands and 600-700 thousands in case of OSPs. In 2007, various types of services provided by social organizations were used by 23% of rural residents. These organizations are characterized by a relatively limited spatial range of operation as 70% operate locally, chiefly for individual persons. The areas of their activity are also specific. As many as 55% of associations and foundations are sports clubs. Aside from sport, there are organizations dealing with areas such as education, social care, local development and culture. A diverse profile has been found in the OSPs, as regulated by applicable law. They operate mostly on the field of fire safety and environmental protection as well as education, sports, cultural activity and local development. The activity of rural organizations based predominantly on social work and voluntary involvement is to a degree far higher than it is the case with urban organizations.

If organizations of various types are to be considered as an important component of social capital which creates these social networks of such significance, one should also focus on the way in which these organizations operate. An important aspect of their characteristics seems to be the values chosen by them as crucial for their functioning. According to their leaders, the values which are the cornerstones of the organizations' activity are: honesty (69% responses), care for the common good (43%), enthusiasm and contribution (39%), efficiency (38%), trust (33%). A slightly different profile of values has been found in the OSPs. In their case, efficiency, trust, honesty, solidarity and care for the common good are important [Herbst 2008].

As far as rural non-governmental organizations are concerned, social and professional organizations of farmers as well as their trade unions occupy a special position. The former ones have a long-standing tradition but their current condition, with the exception of agricultural industry associations, is rather poor. Although at the headquarters of the National Union of Farmers and Farming Clubs and Organizations (KZRKiOR), it is estimated that there are 22500 farming clubs, in the National Court Register at the beginning of 2008. However, only 3300 of such registered organizations can be found. It is also not true that 850 thousand women belong to the farmers' wives associations (the exact number of which is difficult to estimate). At most, one fourth of that is more plausible³. According to the National Court Register, union organizations of farming clubs, such as the

³ Detailed estimations based on representative studies – cf.: Halamska [2008].

Commune Union of Farmers and Farming Clubs and Organizations (*GZRKiOR*), operate in 244 rather than 1700 communes. There are only rudimentary field and local structures of the Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union and the Solidarity of Individual Farmers (*NSZZ Solidarność RI*). The rally held after 12 years in 2007 proved that there are traces of this organization's structures in 18 out of 49 of former provinces. Any characteristic of the structures of farmers' union Self-Defense (*Samoobrona*) is practically impossible, as no information pertaining to this subject has ever surfaced. The number of its supporters can only be estimated basing on the votes received by the political party by the same name: in 2007 it amounted to approximately 250 000 votes in the entire country. The importance of agricultural socio-professional organizations, which used to be a significant aspect of rural social life, has clearly diminished as of today, if not disappeared entirely, leaving only appearances of such organizations.

Other networks are created within parishes, which also constitute territorial communities. Their number within the rural areas is three times larger than that of communes. They are, therefore, small populations, within which various church organizations can be formed, Catholic or otherwise. The most commonly found parish microstructures include the following: the Living Rosary Club, Pastoral Council, Economic Council, Charity Team, altar boys, Ministers of the Altar or the structures of the Caritas charity. Not all such structures are present in every parish; pastoral or economic councils are found relatively rarely. According to the statistics of the Catholic Church, there are 340 various religious groups with approximately 2.5 million members involved. Many of these people, the so-called parish activists, are involved with several structures. According to the CBOS study, 7% of residents are active in various religious communities. The bond with a parish is not a 'large density bond' [Rogaczewska 2008], nor does a parish constitute a civic community as only 15% feel that they have an impact on the parish life, while as much as 70% does not want this impact to increase [CBOS 2005]. In rural parishes (as well as in metropolitan ones) the activity of various organizations is weaker than it is the case in medium-sized cities. One of the indicators can be charity and is found in 90% of the urban parishes and 62% of the rural ones. Nevertheless, a rural parish performs different functions which should be taken into consideration while analyzing its network-creating functions. After Maria Rogaczewska [2008], the following examples can be listed: "1) mobilization (a rural parish is a convenient venue for meetings, gatherings – not only for religious purposes – and commencement of local actions; 2) distribution of information concerning events in the village and its region; 3) integration of community by publicly visible rituals and festivity gatherings; 4) self-help and

therapeutic function (crucial in case of persons who are elderly, unwell and out of contact with their families)”.

The profile of organizations comprising these networks, which are so significant for social capital, is a little obscure. There are formal organizations which are partially inactive, and informal organizations which operate in one way or another, as well as apparent organizations. A somewhat synthesizing outline emerges from the low indicator of membership in these organizations as well as from sense of bonds and identification with them. The latter indicator is even lower than the former with no sense of any bond whatsoever with social organizations as declared by 88% of Poles, while strong bonds by 8% [CBOS 2008/24].

b) Trust and solidarity

Poland is not a country where the culture of trust would prevail. According to European comparison data, Polish people for many years have been receiving the lowest ratings and the so-called generalized trust is three times lower than the EU average and six times lower than in the countries with the highest scores. According to *Social Diagnosis 2007*, this value of this factor amounts to nearly 13% in rural areas, with a slightly lower score found in cities. More optimistic data can be found in the CBOS report: 26% of respondents thinks that the majority of people can be trusted. In relation to the study conducted two years ago an increase of seven percentage points has been registered. What is also worth recording is another result: almost 2/5 of respondents spoke of trust towards strangers met under various circumstances, which also shows an increase in comparison to previous results. Poles distinguish various circles of trust, trusting the most: their closest families (99%), relatives (90%), friends (88%), neighbors (76%), their parson (71%), although in all these circles with the exception of family the dominating type of trust is limited [CBOS 2008/30]. Local authorities are trusted far less. Full or significant trust is extended by 31% of rural residents while the same result is lower by six percentage points in urbane areas. Every second rural resident trusts banks but only 28% have declared that they the Social Insurance Company (*ZUS*) [*Diagnosis... 2007*].

The so-called generalized trust rate is still low, although both *Social Diagnosis 2007* and the CBOS studies conducted systematically after 2002 have registered a slight increase thereof. Rural areas are not an exception in this respect. What provides an explanation for such a deficit of social trust in Poland is the country's unique dramatic history, including the stigmatizing period of the Soviet domination during the People's Republic of Poland (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*, PRL)

as well as the current decisions of public authorities⁴. In case of rural areas there are other contributing factors, such as the traumatic impact of collectivization as well as the repeated attempts to nationalize agriculture [Perepeczko 2003]. Also worth considering are the peasant qualities of the society, common in the rural areas. In peasant culture a clear dividing line is drawn between two distinct worlds: the inner and familiar as well as the outer, foreign one – *orbis interior* and *orbis exterior*. Rural residents trust those who belong to the inner, subjectively defined world. In my opinion, however, the main reason of the lowered trust rate lies in the atrophy of moral norms, as Lucjan Kocik noticed [Kocik 2002]. The first offense is the amoral familism which stems from the described division into the familiar ('our people, fellow residents') and the foreign. However, norms such as honesty, loyalty and reciprocity are also breached. This phenomenon has been illustrated in a study conducted by a team from University of Łódź in rural areas of the Łódź province. Monika Mularska used this study in her analysis of the following norms: loyalty, reciprocity, subjectivity, trust and truthfulness. As she states, the norms are mutually linked, which means that acceptance of one of them encourages the acceptance of the other ones, although "most of the studied respondents (36.6%) approve of no more than two of the studied social norms, while some of them do not accept any of the norms (2.3%). Only a minimal number of respondents expressed their acceptance for the norms of subjectivity, loyalty, trust, truthfulness and reciprocity (1.7%). The general rate of the acceptance of norms is therefore low, which also confirms the thesis of relativization of moral norms, since what for some people constitutes a norm is not necessary one for others. "Relativization of social norms entails the principle of contextual obligatoriness, which means that there are certain rules which define the circumstances when a given norm is obligatory and when it can – or even should – be breached" [Mularska 2008: 7–8]. With such widespread moral relativism one can hardly be surprised that the trust rate is so low and even within the closest environment (excluding immediate family) it is chiefly conditional in character. Finally, the results of *Social Diagnosis 2007* bring the conclusion that the state of matters is not even noticed. Sixty-nine percent of rural residents declare that they are satisfied with the functioning of moral norms in their environment.

Group solidarity is "the function of two independent factors: the scope of collective obligations within a group and the extent to which individual members

⁴ Sztompka [2007] lists four contributing traumas: *homo sovieticus*, system reforms with their side-effects, the weakness of political elites who are either unfit for governing or cynically manipulative and finally the traumatic period of the IV Republic of Poland.

comply with such obligations” [Hetcher 1987; in: Starosta 2007: 114]. The norm of reciprocity, as both Kocik and Mularska point out, is still quite widely accepted in rural areas. It is confirmed by the fact that 68% of rural residents agrees with the opinion that” people like me, working together with others can help those who are in need or find solution to certain problems within their own environment ...” (since 2002 the rate has increased by 22 percentage points) [CBOS 2008/14]. Moreover, two thirds of Poles are of the opinion that nowadays one should be more sensitive and willing to help others. Such a pro-social attitude has demonstrated an increase since 2004. Practically speaking, solidarity applies mostly to friends and family. Thirty-seven percent of households use the help of family and neighbors (one in two single-person households, 2/5 single parent households and one in three multi-children families). Financial and material help is a much rarer occurrence. In 2007, 15% of families were the recipients thereof [CBOS 2008/24]. Such popular manifestations and declarations of social solidarity should be confronted with other indicators, which illustrate the attitude towards the common good, which indirectly should also be included in the social solidarity manifestations spectrum. In order for the common good to be created, the costs should be jointly distributed; in order for it to be beneficial for everyone one should restrain oneself from individual egoism and abuse [cf. Czapiński 2007:235]. According to *Social Diagnosis 2007*, rural residents’ attitude towards the following issues is as follows:

- 34% were bothered by the fact that someone paid insufficient taxes;
- 33% were bothered by the fact that someone used public transport without paying;
- 39% were bothered by the fact that someone did not pay for electricity;
- 43% were bothered by the fact that someone received unemployment benefit to which they are not entitled;
- 33% were bothered by the fact that someone did not pay rent;
- 27% were bothered by the fact that someone did not pay appropriate customs duty.

Undoubtedly then, such a low rate of interest has been affected by the principle of contextual obligatoriness, as mentioned above. It is also worth noting that all these indicators are lower or much lower in rural areas than their equivalents observed in cities. “Both in 2005 and in 2007 the lowest sensitivity was noted among the poorest and least educated rural residents”. Furthermore, in comparison with the 2005 study, the rates have demonstrated a significant decrease. “The differences are statistically significant and rather dramatic. After 18 years of working on the country’s free-market and democratic structures, the value of one of the

foundations of democracy: namely, of creating and using public good which had been generated jointly, falls within two years!” [Czapiński 2007: 236].

Trust and solidarity constitute basic components of social capital. People in Poland trust mostly their own immediate families. This is their primary circle of trust. The trust of people in general is very low. The reason is first and foremost the attitude towards moral norms, many of which are not observed, and even if they are, they are usually adapted for situational context. In consequence, we never know with any certainty whether in a particular situation a given norm is going to be observed. Such situational contextuality of norms affects the attitude towards the common good and is further reinforced by the division into private and public morality, which remains firmly in place.

c) Collective activity and co-operation

Rural areas have been the field of numerous collective activities for a long time. In times of the People’s Republic, these were the infamous *quasi*-voluntary community work (*‘czyn społeczny’*). After the 1990 reform, numerous infrastructure elements as well as other objects were implemented owing to the involvement of residents and their co-operation with local authorities. As the CBOS studies demonstrate, since 2002 there has been an rise in belief that working jointly creates an opportunity to help many people in need as well as to find solution to certain problems pertaining to the environment. As referenced above, 65% of rural residents agree with this viewpoint. The same study [CBOS 2008/14] revealed that 57% of rural residents have an experience with voluntary unpaid work for their own environment. It is a larger number than in the city, although it is markedly lower (by 7 percentage points) than in 2004. The real participation in effects and effectiveness, as documented in the systematically conducted CBOS studies.

Table.1. Involvement in community service in 2007

Type of social activity	Rural areas		Farmers	
	2004	2008	2004	2008
1. Persons involved in community service for their own environment and people in need	33	27	51	39
2. persons involved in civic organizations	23	19	22	21
3. total activity rate	39	38	53	47

Source: CBOS 2008/20

According to the CBOS study, in 2007, 27% of rural residents worked for their local community or people in need, while 19% were involved in various civic organizations⁵. In general, the total activity rate among rural residents amounts to 38%, which means that 2/5 rural residents have performed community service. This activity rate is higher than the Polish average, which amounts to 31%. As the studies suggest the involvement depends on previous experience with community service, contact with other social activists as well as willingness to work alongside others.

Unfortunately, other studies do not confirm such high rates of social activity. In *Social Diagnosis 2007* 16% of rural residents and 25% of farmers give an affirmative answer to the question pertain to activity for local community within the previous two years (14% for the society in general). These rates seem more plausible, especially with the measurement of social capital, here measured on the basis of collective activity and co-operation. Further support is provided by the participation rate in another collective enterprise, namely signing petitions. Within the previous two years 9% of Polish residents and 5,8% of rural residents signed any petition. Thus, it should be noted that even with the same indicators from the same studies it is difficult to compare social capital of two segments of society, namely of the countryside and the city, since each of them seems to possess unique forms of its expression.

Farmers have demonstrated exceptional activity; according to the total activity rate in 2007 one in two Polish farmer performed community service, while *Diagnosis...* gives their number as one in four. What is their ability to co-operate within a group? Unfortunately, it is not overly impressive, as confirmed by examples from the past and the present. It was still the People's Republic times when the idea of machines in teams was spontaneously rejected, although there were numerous small groups who would obtain such machines. Nowadays another initiative is becoming increasingly problematic. The Agriculture Producer Groups, an idea and institution which proved successful in the European Union, which allows small-scale producers to control specific product markets. After the act was passed in 2000 which regulates the issue, 753 such groups were created within one year with intensive assistance from agricultural consultancy. However, only 58 lasted until the end of 2004, as farmers for various reasons did not trust

⁵ Such high rates of social activity are probably result from the method of posing questions where two categories were combined: activity for the community and persons in need, which could be treated very broadly by respondents. Also, according to *Social Diagnosis 2007*, 13% of rural residents belong to organizations. This would mean that non-members are involved in organizations' work which, while theoretically possible, is in fact highly unlikely...

their operations. At the moment the groups are slowly regenerating – in mid-2007 there were approximately 200 of them.

The rural residents and farmers are open to the idea of participation in collective activities, ideally organized by somebody such as local authorities, village representative or a special committee⁶. Their readiness to participate is greater if in doing so they are given an opportunity to increase the by implementing the following collective living standards including waterworks, a sewage system and treatment plant or a gas pipeline. This stems from the rural tradition, in which the community service were rooted; the very same tradition became the basis for the local self-government bodies, which returned in 1990. The continuity of this tradition has not been questioned by the democratic Republic of Poland. It was not the case with group co-operation where one's own interests and resources are concerned. Here, the idea of such co-operation, often in combination with self-help, has been discredited by 'socialist co-operatives'. Considering the low rate of trust in people and in law as well as the attitude towards moral norms, the return of institutionalized forms of co-operation is hindered by many obstacles.

d) The condition of information and communication networks

Rural communities are gradually losing their *sociétés interconnaissances* character [Mendras 1976], where everybody used to know everything about one another an information was passed *de bouche a l'oreille*, from mouth to ear. In the Information Society, communications networks are the basic source for obtaining information, collective actions and co-operation. The connection to the so-called global society is achieved through universal access to the radio and television, the possession of which has ceased to be a differentiating factor in social studies; perhaps not entirely rightly, as it should be correlated with ability to understand the communicated message or the scale of the so-called functional analphabetism.

A particular place in the information and communication system is reserved for local press. Except its informative function it serves numerous different purposes, which support the construction of social capital: it encourages the local environment integration, it shapes the local public opinion and has an educational effect which is conducive for the strengthening of local identity. Such press is largely varied and it can be published by political, economic, cultural and religious insti-

⁶ According to *Social Diagnosis 2003* the organizers of collective activities in rural areas were: members of local authorities – 57,7%, pries or parish – 41,8%, teachers or school – 29,3%, social organizations or associations – 14,5%, respondents themselves – 8,1%. [Bartkowski 2005: 177].

tutions. Rapid development of local press occurred after 1989; as Marian Gierula estimates in 2004 the maximum number of all local periodical amounted to 3000, which constituted approximately one half of the total number newspapers and magazines in circulation in Poland [Gierula 2005: 25]. As far as the range of local press in rural areas is concerned, a local publication is available in 27% of rural communes and in 1 in 2 cities (especially in smaller ones). If the average number of publications per 10 000 residents is 0.63 in Poland, it ranges from 0.46 in the Łódź province to 0.86 in the Lesser Poland (Małopolska) province. These local periodicals vary greatly, both in terms of circulation and the frequency of editions. As regards to local publications with a reach extending beyond the district and meeting the criterion of real information and communication (published daily and weekly), their number is 0,79 per district, while sub-local publications available in one district only are published in 42% of communes. Another important characteristic is the fact that these are titles published monthly or more rarely, thus their informative function is negligible. As studies have demonstrated [Gierula 2005], the condition of knowledge about local issues is perceived by people as unsatisfactory. Thus, developing local communication encourages making public information which might prove conducive for common enterprises and the growth of local communities.

Another indication as to the condition of information and communication network is the Internet accessibility. One in three residents of rural areas (and one in four farmers) make active use of the computer and Internet access, with total average time spent on-line amounting to eight hours weekly. The Internet is used for many different purposes, although 42% of rural residents employs to in search of information while 29% uses it to contact other people. Thirty one percent contact their families, while 28% contact friends and acquaintances and 22% to other people whom they meet via the Internet. The Internet users, aside from contacting people already known to them, may employ this medium in order to make new acquaintances which prevents the sense of loneliness in remote rural areas. It can also be used for contacting various institutions as one can download a form, search for information public institutions websites as well as reading newspapers (29% of rural Internet users) [*Diagnosis 2007*]. The Internet also brings the strengthening of communication and information flow on the local scale. In theory, every commune has its own website, although not all of them function as they should. The websites which are properly maintained contain not only information concerning the history of the commune and the geographical location thereof or the work of the commune office and services but also development plans, the composition of collective bodies, calls for tenders,

etc. Furthermore, numerous parishes have their own websites and so do certain social organizations.

It does not mean, however, that conventional methods of communication and information, such as a gathering, are vanishing. One in four rural residents took part in a gathering of one type or another, while one in two spoke during such a meeting. Parishes are also common venues for exchange of information, as are meetings of parishioners after or before the mass.

Upon a closer inspection, opportunities for communication and information exchange in rural environment seem rather varied. Moreover, specific networks of information exchange assemble a considerable number of rural residents. One should, however, keep in mind that in all probability there is an overlap in case of a large portion of the participants in particular networks, while a significant part of rural communities do not belong to any of these local networks (perhaps with the exception of parish).

e) Social coherence

To what an extent does a rural local community constitute a social entirety? It was this question that Maria Wieruszewska [1991] asked many years ago. It is all the more relevant now as the pace of the changes in rural areas has clearly increased, consequently altering the character of social bonds and of rural community membership. There are reasons to formulate a thesis that the rural areas can still be treated as a highly coherent social structure. What supports this standpoint is the fact that in spite of the recently observed wave of migration to rural areas, the countryside is still an abode of 'locals' ('people from here'). In 2007, 88% of rural inhabitants had lived for the previous 14 years in the same place or within 20 km from it. The same proportion (88%) declared that they were satisfied with living in their village, while 71% were not afraid of crime, drug addiction and vandalism. Such social coherence should be further reinforced by stronger and more frequently practiced religiosity and relatively low propensity for conflicts: nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents declared that they had never experienced problems with neighbors [*Social Diagnosis 2007*]. Moreover, a sense of attachment to one's own locality was declared by nearly $\frac{4}{5}$ of Poles [CBOS 2008/24].

There are, however, reasons which seem to support the opposite theory that rural communities characterized by numerous dividing lines and a certain portion of residents have been affected by the process of social exclusion. The first aspect which should be discussed is the socio-professional structure of the countryside, as we are actually witnessing its significant recomposition. There

are three mechanisms which are crucial for this issue. Firstly, the vanishing of farmers-laborers (*chłop-robotnik*), who used to be a unique social-professional group, prevailing for a long time in the social structure of rural areas. According to Andrzej Kaleta's estimations, in 1975 there were 30% of farmers-laborers (performing two professions), while in 2002, only 5%; the process of disappearance of this category was particularly strong during the transformation period [Kaleta 2005]. Simultaneously, another mechanism has emerged: namely, that of multi-professionalism which consists in pursuing additional sources of income, both by farmers and non-farmers. This stems from the so-called multi-functional development of rural areas (location of small manufacturing enterprises and services) as well as multi-functionality of agriculture, the function of which is supposed to extend beyond production as well. The third mechanism of highly significant consequences is the decreasing number of farmers. There are two dimensions of this phenomenon including the physical one, manifested as the decrease in absolute and relative input into the social structure, as well as the symbolic, as farmers, deprived of their mythical national 'bread-provider' aspect, are no longer central figures of the countryside. To put in short, a time has come when rural areas are no longer defined by agriculture and farmers. All these processes, with the temporary exclusion of financial migration abroad, have significantly affected the previous social structure of rural areas and the existing hierarchies. The new form of social structure is still being forged, which must be accompanied by a sense of uncertainty and rupture.

Another important aspect, which violates social coherence is the rapidly changing rate of education among rural population. There is a swiftly growing group of people with secondary and higher education. Although primary education is still the most prevalent (nearly 2/5 of rural residents), soon one in three rural residents is going to obtain secondary school diploma or higher. Since education has a strong influence on opinions, attitudes and behavior, new norms and standards are going to emerge in opposition to the former, rural ones. Such violation of coherence is further strengthened as the division according to education level overlaps with generation division: it is the young people who obtain education.

Rural areas have always been very varied in terms of financial status. It is still the case, although the difference is first of all observed between the city and the countryside: average income in rural areas correspond to 2/3 of average income in the city. In this perspective we present the income diversity of rural areas in 2007. According to *Social Diagnosis 2007*, the net income per rural household, amounted to 2195 PLN, income per capita of 677 PLN. The income diversity within a village was rather wide: a high proportion of 5.15 between the ninth

and first decile was observed, with a higher result found in cities with population > 500 000. Also worth noting is the wide (the widest among the specified socio-professional groups) diversity of income found among farmers, the rate of which reached 7.62, while the average income per household was higher by 300 PLN than the average income in rural areas. Such an increasing diversity (in 2005 it was 3.40) must provoke disapproval at least from a portion of rural residents, 74% out of whom supports in a more or less definite form the idea that income should be made equal. What is worth adding, is that 64% of rural residents perceives themselves as poor [Panek 2007: 292].

One of the frequently applied synthetic measures of the lack of social coherence is the scope of social exclusion. Janusz Czapiński lists three types of social exclusion including structural, physical and normative. Particularly interesting is the one which also lasts the longest, namely the structural exclusion, defined by factors such as “place of residence (rural), low level of education (one’s own and one’s father), as well as the correlated – and likely dependant on these variables – income per capita below the poverty line” [Czapiński 2007: 316–319]. Thus, the rural areas linked with social exclusion practically by definition, which is first and foremost based on factors of education and income. The group of the excluded, defined on the basis of all three factors: structural, physical and normative, is not a very large portion of Polish society (10.7%); decidedly more people fall into the category of those in risk of exclusion (31.7%). The rate of social exclusion and the risk of exclusion seem much higher in rural areas⁷, which results from the social structure thereof as well as the significant share of groups particularly at risk of exclusion: persons receiving disability pensions (54.9% at risk of exclusion and 23.3% excluded), persons with non-profit means of support (54.8% and 23.8%), pensioners (39.3% and 13.6), farmers (46.1% and 7.6%), laborers cultivating agricultural farms (42.2% and 9.4%).

Thus, in spite of manifestations of coherence, the rural areas are not a coherent social entity, which results from the on-going recomposition of its social structure, growing diversity of income and a large proportion of groups which are excluded or at risk of exclusion.

f) Subjectivity and potential of political activity

In the analysis of this social capital component numerous indicators can be applied, as discussed below. I will begin my analysis of the aspect in question

⁷ The author does not quote (neither in 2007 nor 2005) distribution according to place of residence.

with an indicator, which in my opinion, is basic: faith in democracy which at least in theory, provides such subjectivity and influence on public issues. As *Social Diagnosis 2007* demonstrates, 17% of rural residents expresses their belief in democracy as the best form of government, with 24% in the entire society in general. It is this very information, meaningful enough on its own for any comment to be redundant, should be the filter for other partial indicators quoted herein. In the context of the lack of faith in democracy the sense of influence on public issues does not seem so low at all. In 2008, 23% of rural residents spoke of their own sense of influence on the national matters (in relation to 30% nationwide), while 2/5 declared their sense of influence on local matters [CBOS 2008/15].

The basic mechanism of influence in democratic systems is the participation in elections, both for the Parliament and for local self-governing bodies. Here, we are presenting the participation rate of rural residents in the last two elections for the Parliament and local authorities. In the 2005 parliamentary election the rural turnout was 36.2% (with 43% in cities), resulting in populist parties winning within the rural areas Samoobrona [Self-Defense], Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe [Polish People's Party] and Liga Polskich Rodzin [The League of Polish Families], having received 45% of the votes. In the 2007 election, the rural turnout amounted to 45.3% (with 58.8% in cities). In the local self-government election the turnout in constituencies with population up to 20 000 (thus mainly the rural ones) amounted to 52.6% in 2002 and 45.9% in 2006. Since 1990, rural residents participation rate in local self-government elections has always been higher than in case of parliamentary elections, in accordance with the more common sense of influence on local issues. Thus, in spite of the general lack of faith in democracy a significant portion of rural residents feels obliged to participate in democratic election procedures, while a large part of those who fail to participate is unwilling to disclose that fact as 66% of rural residents gave an affirmative answer to the question asking them whether they voted in the latest local self-government election [*Diagnosis ... 2007*]. Such discrepancy is often found in social studies. In this case I propose to interpret it also as an expression of the emerging sense of civic duty.

The essence of the democratic order consists in its distinctive institutions and the mode of their operation. As noted in the CBOS studies [CBOS 2008/30], the trust rate in the public sphere (for various institutions) is high, although in relation to particular institution it may be very varied. A constant and high trust rate (85%–79%) is observed in case of charities including the *WOŚP* (The Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity), Caritas and *PCK* (Polish Red Cross). The same rate is high and increasing (73%–68%) in case of international organizations

such as the EU, the UN, the NATO. The results were also high for the following institutions: the army (84%), the Catholic Church (70%) and the police (75%, recently increased). At the very end of the trust spectrum, with the prevalence of distrust, basic institutions of the democratic order are found: both houses of the Parliament (the *Sejm* and the *Senat*) and political parties. To a large extent they probably deserved such a harsh opinion in the eyes of the public, however, it is my belief that another contributing factor was the logic of their functioning, based on disputes, debates and painfully achieved compromise. What confirms this hypothesis are the organizations which the public opinion invests with the highest level of trust, which are strictly public (excluding charities and international bodies): neither the army, the police nor the Catholic Church base their functioning on the democratic order. Instead, they are hierarchical entities within which there is no inner debate; even if there is, it is very limited. In the light of the quoted opinions on democracy as a political system it is hardly surprising.

The assessment of the condition of this component is quite unambiguous, as it is clear that the rate of political participation is low; it is further diminished by the tendency to vote for populist parties and a poor sense of political subjectivity, which in turn can be explained by the low opinion on democracy as a political system.

The analysis of social capital in rural areas, although it is based on numerous indicators, confirms the results of a number of previous analyses based on empirical studies of varied range: namely, social capital of rural areas in Poland is small. This statement gains a particular appeal in the context of the lack of faith in democracy, its procedures and institutions, which discourages from harboring hopes for its rapid recovery. If, after Frykowski and Starosta, we were to assume that there is a 'local capital' and a 'civic capital', then social capital of rural areas has more local qualities, while being civic to a far lesser extent. One of the most significant factors for the condition of social capital is trust. A low trust rate, resulting from numerous unfavorable circumstances has no support not only in the permanent structures and procedures but also in moral norms which regulate social life and which have a different power regulating one's behavior towards familiar people and strangers. As Poles and as rural residents we trust our families and to an extent our neighbors because we know that they are going to be honest, loyal and that we can rely on their reciprocity and help. We often do not trust strangers, as we are not certain of their honesty, loyalty or reciprocity. It likely means that we also feel that when dealing with strangers we do not need to observe these norms. We find this situation quite satisfactory, which is both so much and only so much. This is related to another quality of rural social capital: the relative power of bonding capital, directed inside the group; the countryside

trusts its family and fellow residents ('its own'), there is a strong social bond local solidarity and collaboration as well as formal and informal structures of co-operation. However, such social capital can be easily transformed into negative capital, as many researchers have pointed out, also in Poland. Such capital can be very helpful for the functioning of a small group while being harmful for the development of the entire social system. A certain part of such limited rural social resources is characterized by such negative qualities.

Each of the analyzed herein components of social capital is more or less varied in terms of region. As far as non-governmental organizations are concerned, their dividing lines still run along the former partition borders: the region of the former Congress Kingdom of Poland is the area of the lowest rates for 'classic' NGOs (7–9 NGOs per 10 000 inhabitants); on the other hand, OSPs are a relatively common occurrence. The West Land and the North Land regions, as well as the Greater Poland (*Wielkopolska*), Pomerania (*Pomorze*) and Lesser Poland (*Małopolska*) are the regions of higher rates for NGOs of a new type (10 or more). It seems that it is closely related with a given region's agricultural level, although it also reflects the diverse social and political culture. The one listed first is, according to Herbst, the 'farming Poland', while the other is 'civic activity Poland'. Unfortunately, the distance between these two formulas remains unchanged, as indicated by the pace with which new organizations emerge: they are usually founded in the north and west of Poland. Is there, therefore, as Bartkowski asks [2007], one or multiple social capitals?

3. On tendencies and opportunities of change

What is the condition of the dynamic of such a multi-faceted social capital of rural areas? It can be reconstructed for the previous 4–6 years by tracing, wherever possible, the dynamic of the components thereof. As far as membership in organizations is concerned, there has been a small but steady increase noted since 2003. In the nationwide scale it amounted to approximately three percentage points [Sułek 2007: 250]. The situation is similar in case of NGOs of the new type: associations and foundations. As far as the so-called old rural social organizations are concerned, such as the OSPs, they seem quite active; the crisis did reach, however, traditional socio-professional organizations of farmers. Trust towards strangers and the so-called generalized trust is still low, although it very slowly increases. Its further growth is also going to be slow, since its main obstacle is the relativism of moral norms, which as those who study this phenomenon have observed, tends to deepen. In recent years there has been an

increase in pro-social attitude; the belief in the necessity of helping others has strengthened. Although at the same time, as found in the *Diagnosis* series and CBOS studies, there has been reduction in the number of persons involved in social activity. There is another dangerous trend related to this decrease in social, civic, non-profit activity for others and for the environment. Furthermore, the attitude towards the common good becomes more and more indifferent.

Rural areas have now more varied communication and information exchange networks at their disposal: along with the common access to mass media there is also local and regional press, while the increasingly frequent Internet access significantly expands the range of communication network. The diversification of communication networks is partially related to the phenomenon of heterogenization of rural areas which no longer constitute a coherent system of social norms and most decidedly do not constitute a community (the frequency with which this term is used is in my opinion a manipulation). Rural populations are split by numerous and systematically deepening dividing lines, its agricultural identity is disintegrating and more and more groups of people excluded or at risk of exclusion are emerging (according to *Social Diagnosis*, their number increased between 2005 and 2007). This is accompanied by a very low (albeit with an growing tendency) democracy acceptance rate as well as an unstable political involvement with populist proclivities. It is, therefore, difficult to draw a single clear tendency of the past several years, as the particular components of social capital are evolving in different directions.

Is it possible to predict the direction which the evolution of social capital in rural areas is going to take? Optimistically, one could expect an improvement in its condition due to the increase of human capital through the so-called conversion of capitals, that the assisted organization development is going to generate and reinforce network capital and that the stable democratic institutions are going to engender structural trust framework, etc... Zygmunt Serega, however, doubts that such circumstances are ever going to occur and I happen to share his apprehension, at least partially. He doubts "whether the community of residents, created and strengthened through acts of self-organization is in fact comprised of the components and qualities of social bonds which we call social capital" [Serega 2006 : 110], and the role of social capital in constructing of local democracy and prosperity is in his opinion debatable at best. In his argumentation he points at the limited abilities of capital conversion in diverse social communities with bonds of clientelistic provenance, revaluation of democratic self-governing institutions and turning them into unique institution based on clientelism and patronage, with local elites as patrons, as well as the atrophy of trust and norms.

In order to demonstrate how long and strenuous the process of constructing social capital in rural areas is going to be, one must consult the sources thereof. The concept of the World Bank (quoted herein) lists six types of sources of social capital: families, local/neighbor communities, institutionalized and accumulated forms of action, such as economic organizations, civic society, as it gives everyone the access to influence, public sector or the public authorities and national, regional and local institutions as well as ethnic bonds (shared values and social culture) [Bartkowski 2007 : 88]. This illustrates how many factors contribute to the nature of social capital as well as how many broad areas of interaction can be utilized.

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