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SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL DIFFERENTIATION

The concept of social capital refers to resources embedded in social ties, networks and groups which, when activated, may generate returns both at the individual and group level.¹ The research on social capital constitutes one of the most rapidly growing branches of social studies. Most analyses concentrate on the benefits of social connectedness, however not all forms of social capital influence the functioning of the whole society in a positive way and they fail to facilitate economic growth.

Like other forms of capital (material, human), social capital is not equally distributed in society. It may reflect social divisions (based on socio-economic status, education, gender, ethnicity) or even increase them, giving certain individuals or groups an advantage in achieving socially-valued resources. Moreover, the distribution of social capital at the societal level may influence (positively or negatively) the socio-economic development of a society as a whole. It may create, for example, a form of society consisting of tightly - knitted groups and decrease the social ability to cooperate for the common good.

This paper presents research findings concerning differences in social trust, associational membership and in social networks composition among various groups and social categories. The emphasis is placed on the relationship between accessed social capital and social inequality.

¹ Compare the following definitions: *resources embedded in social network accessed and used by actors for actions* (N. Lin, *Social Capital. A Theory of Social Structure and Action*, Cambridge 2001, p. 25); *Social Capital refers to the capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures* (A. Portes, *Economic Sociology and the Sociology of Immigration: A Conceptual Overview*, in: A. Portes (ed.), *The Economic Sociology of Immigration. Essays on Networks, Ethnicity, and Entrepreneurship*, New York 1995, p. 12).

1. Theoretical assumptions

There are many different definitions of social capital. Most of them however, comprise (or at least refer indirectly to) two elements: structures of social relations (including participation in groups, associational membership and informal sociability) and norms that define the rules by which social cooperation takes place. In the theory of social capital, the particular role can be assigned to the norm of generalized reciprocity, which refers to *a continuing relationship of exchange that is at any given time unrequited or imbalanced, but that involves mutual expectations that a benefit granted now should be repaid in the future.*² Social cooperation and possibility of achieving common goals (i.e. cooperation for the common good) rely on socially shared norms and values which form the base for the social trust to flourish.

Social capital may be analyzed at two levels: individual and collective. Social capital treated as a private good describes how individual actors through participation in social networks acquire access to certain material or symbolic resources. In contrast to personal or human resources, social resources are not directly in the possession of individuals, and they can be accessed only through social relations and networks in which a particular actor participates. Social resources invested for the expected return constitute social capital.

At the individual level, the indicators of accessed social capital² include: range of social relations (the number of contacts and network heterogeneity in vertical and horizontal dimensions), resources of people in one's social network and strength of ties which corresponds to the probability of receiving support in various situations.³ Network heterogeneity gives access to more differentiated information and provides social support coming from actors occupying different social positions. In achieving instrumental purposes the particular role is assigned to weak ties that transcend social relations based on affinity and friendship. In a study of job search activities, Mark Granovetter has demonstrated that weak ties, connecting people to different social circles, may be more important than strong ones by providing a better access to cru-

² R. Putnam, *Making democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton 1994, p. 172.

³ N. Lin, op. cit., p. 21; A. Giza-Poleszczuk, *Przestrzeń społeczna*, in: A. Giza-Poleszczuk, M. Marody, A. Rychard (ed.), *Strategie i system. Polacy w obliczu zmiany systemowej*, Warszawa 2000, p. 101-102.

cial information.⁴ The homogenous networks, in contrary, are essential for expressive actions and social support. Thus, we may say that different aspects of social networks are relevant in various social situations.

Social capital, treated as a collective good, refers to these *features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions.*⁵ The indicators of so-defined social capital, above all comprise: range of trust (from particularized to generalized), norm of reciprocity (from balanced to diffused), rate of associational membership and scope of informal social relations.

Social trust that constitutes the fundament of social capital may be defined as a mechanism based on the assumption that members of a certain community are characterized by honest and cooperative behavior relying on the shared norms.⁶ Social trust and norms that regulate social behavior influence frequency, range and character of social relations, and those in turn strengthen the normative regulations of social relations. The recollection of past successes or disappointments concerning cooperation with other actors, representatives of particular occupational groups, institutions etc. may influence the range and character of subsequent interactions. According to F. Fukuyama, high-trust societies are characterized by a variety of groups and associations transcending affinity structures.

Early research on social capital focused on formal associations and presented quantitative estimations (high to low social capital) of social resources. However, the current understanding of social capital emphasizes the multidimensional nature of social capital and need for its qualitative evaluation. For example, in reference to long-term trends in social capital, R. Putnam and Goss argue that *because social capital is multidimensional, and some of those dimensions themselves are subject to different understandings, we must take care not to frame questions about change solely in terms of more social capital or less social capital. Rather we must describe the changes in qualitative terms.*⁷

⁴ M. Granovetter, *The Strength of Weak Ties*, „American Journal of Sociology”, 1979, vol. 78, p. 1360 – 1380.

⁵ R. Putnam, op. cit., p. 167.

⁶ F. Fukuyama, *Trust. The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, New York 1995, p. 26.

⁷ R. Putnam, K. Goss, *Introduction*, in: R. Putnam (ed.), *Democracies in Flux. The evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*, Oxford- New York 2002, p. 12.

The authors mentioned above describe the following dimensions of social capital: formal/informal; thick/thin; inward-looking/outward-looking; bonding/bridging. In the context of this paper, the division into bonding and bridging social capital should be emphasized. The former refers to social connections, networks and groups of people similar to one another in terms of socio-demographic characteristics; the latter describes social relations among people who differ from one another in certain aspects.⁸ Some authors differentiate additionally between bridging and linking social capital. This distinction concerns level of heterogeneity in horizontal and vertical dimensions (bridging and linking social capital respectively).

Taking into account the multidimensional nature of social capital is also essential in understanding the differences in access and mobilization of social resources by various social groups. For example, the groups occupying different social positions in a given society may differ in terms of associational membership (i.e. access to formal social capital) or networks heterogeneity (i.e. access to bridging social capital). These disparities in access to different forms of social capital may influence the possibility of achieving various goals by social actors and by society as a whole.

2. Inequality in accessed social capital

According to Nan Lin, we speak about the inequality in social capital when a certain group occupies a low or disadvantaged position in a social structure with a general tendency applying to individuals to associate with social actors of similar group and/or socioeconomic standing. Members of so-defined social groups are embedded in social networks poor in social resources i.e. characterized by relatively poor social capital.⁹ This approach presupposes the following relationship between social position and social resources: *the better the position of origin the more likely the actor will access and use the better social capital.*¹⁰ The basic dimensions of social differentials from which social inequalities arise are: educational credentials, occupational structure, gender, ethnicity and race.

Research shows that social trust is higher among the well-educated, affluent and those having higher occupational position. In contrast, distrust characterizes the less educated and professionally passive: unemployed,

⁸ Ibidem, p. 9-12.

⁹ N. Lin, *Inequality in Social capital*, „Contemporary Sociology”, 2000, vol. 29, no.6, p. 786-787.

¹⁰ N. Lin, *Social Capital...*, p. 64.

housekeepers and pensioners, i.e. those people whose social contacts and relations are strongly limited. Among professionally active people, unskilled workers constitute the most distrustful category.

Research conducted in Great Britain has provided the interesting data on decreasing social trust in society. It was observed that the decline in generalized social trust does not concern all groups and social categories evenly and was relatively higher among the working class.¹¹ Moreover, it was noticed that in the case of the working class, mobility has a greater impact on generalized social trust (i.e. higher decline rates) compared to the middle class. This may be associated with the specificity of social networks of lower classes, which rely mostly on locally limited ties.¹²

Similar differences can be seen and analyzed in relation to ethnic and racial dimensions. In research conducted in the United States 44% of white respondents agreed with the opinion that most people can be trusted, compared to 16% of Blacks, and 27% of respondents representing other races.¹³

This pattern is also reflected in research carried out in Poland, which appears to confirm the strong relationship between social position and declared social trust. In research conducted by CBOS respondents were asked to choose between two opinions: (1) generally speaking most people can be trusted, (2) you can't be too careful in dealing with others.¹⁴ Only 17% of the respondents agreed with the former opinion whereby showing high generalized trust. This result places Poland among low-trust countries. The attitude of distrust was prevailing in all social categories; however it was the most visible in the case of the less educated and those having lower income. The highest distrust was observed among farmers and unskilled workers (only 9% in these categories agreed with the first opinion).¹⁵

Disproportions in the distribution of social capital are even more noticeable when we compare associational membership in different social groups. Like in the case of social trust, rate of participation is relatively greater among people of higher social standing. John Field emphasizes that

¹¹ P. Hall, *Great Britain: The Role of Government and the Distribution of Social Capital*, in: R.D. Putnam (ed.), *Democracies in Flux. The evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*, Oxford- New York 2002, p. 32.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 54.

¹³ J. Field, *Social Capital*, London - New York 2003, p. 75.

¹⁴ Zaufanie w sferze publicznej i prywatnej, 2004. Komunikat z badań. BS/39/2004, oprac. Bogna Wciórka. Dokument elektroniczny. Tryb dostępu: <http://www.cbos.pl>

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 1-2.

even those organizations that act to represent the disenfranchised frequently recruit their members from those relatively better skilled or affluent.¹⁶

Moreover, the data shows that differentiations in membership in some societies seem to increase with time. For example, comparing the changes in associational membership in the United States in the years 1974-1991, the highest decline in participation was seen among respondents whose education was lower than high school (in this group percentage of people declaring participation in at least one group has fallen from 65 in 1974 to 53 in 1991). With regard to race differences, among non-white respondents there was a 17% decrease in membership compared to a 5% decline among white respondents.¹⁷

In the view of Robert Wuthnow, this decrease in associational membership may be associated with the increasing exclusiveness of social arrangements. Certain groups may feel unwelcome in associations and other forms of social cooperation, or they may lack personal and cultural resources necessary to participate in them. In other words, the cause may lie in certain expectations of prospective members, concerning knowledge, qualifications and social competences. The author emphasizes that: *considerable cultural capital is needed to participate in most organizations, and this capital depends greatly on what people bring with them, rather than simply being learned once they arrive. Leadership skills, the ability to speak comfortably in medium- size groups, familiarity with organizational rules, and the capacity to make small talk about the right subjects are all examples of such capital. The rise in levels of education that has taken place over the past half century is but one important development that may have established implicit norms in organizations that inadvertently exclude potential members who do not have this kinds of cultural capital that is associated with higher education.*¹⁸

To properly evaluate the social resources acquired through associational membership, we must take into account not only participation in quantitative terms but also its quality, first of all the type of organizations. For example, research findings show that women typically belong to smaller, more peripheral organizations, mainly concerned with traditional household affairs (par-

¹⁶ J. Field, op. cit., p. 76.

¹⁷ R. Wuthnow, *The United States: Bridging the Privileged and the Marginalized*, in: R.D. Putnam (ed.), *Democracies in Flux. The evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*, Oxford - New York 2002, p. 81.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 80-81.

ent's committees, custody).¹⁹ This pattern states that organizational membership may represent worse social resources for achieving instrumental purposes for women compared to men.

Similar findings exist in reference to informal sociability. Socially disadvantaged individuals and groups seem to have worse social contacts, especially in terms of their usefulness for instrumental actions. Under the assumption stated earlier, network heterogeneity constitutes an important feature of social capital. Research shows that networks of people with lower social positions are locally limited and relatively more homogenous. Intra-group ties are very important in terms of social support, however since they do not exceed particular group or local community and do not reach different social circles and actors occupying different (higher) social positions, their ability in achieving socially valued resources is strongly limited. Research shows that in the case of socially disadvantaged these inter- group ties, called weak ties or bridges, are rather the exception.²⁰

3. Social capital and ethnicity

The resources generated and used by ethnic communities constitute an interesting aspect of social capital. Strongly tied minority groups may base their actions and transactions on intra-community social resources, thus creating mechanisms of promoting or supporting the co-ethnics. In the case of immigrant communities, social capital may compensate for the lack of human resources (for example low communication skills, lack of educational qualifications etc.) and low material capital.

In the literature of the subject there are many descriptions and analyses of economic cooperation embedded in ethnic-based networks. Among them, the most well-known examples are: *economic enclaves* and *occupational niches*. The term economic enclave refers to the spatial concentration of entrepreneurs owned by the members of a particular ethnic group, that provide services and products to their co- ethnics. Ethnic enclaves emerge in the immediate vicinity of ethnic communities and usually last no longer than two or three generations. On the other hand, the occupational niches describe the concentration of a particular ethnic group in a given sector of economy.

¹⁹ N. Lin, *Inequality...*, p. 787-788.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 787.

Within them appropriate training and employment may be secured to those having common ethnic descent, while restraining the inflow of outsiders.²¹

Ethnic cooperation may even transcend the state boundaries and in this way it creates some kind of trans - border cooperation. An interesting example of this pattern is presented in the article by Claire Wallace, *Investing in social capital: the case of small - scale, cross - border traders in post- communist central Europe*.²² The article concerns the first years of systematic transformation and presents the strategies used by small- scale traders to minimize the risk associated with transactions. In the situation characterized by the lack of formal regulations the common strategy was to invest in social networks whereby constituting and strengthening informal control. Of all respondents, 73% in Poland, 38% in Slovakia and 21% in Hungary reported using ethnic and national ties in their trading journeys and activities.²³

Alejandro Portes and Julia Sensenbrenner in their analysis concerning social capital of immigrant communities distinguish four types of *economically relevant expectations*. In the dimension of instrumental motivation, the expectations include: *reciprocity transactions* (expectations based on the norm of reciprocity and concerning benefits deriving from previous exchanges and services) and *enforceable trust* (long-term benefits associated with participation in a given group). In the case of expressive (altruistic) motivation, the expectations concern: *value introjection* (norms and values acquired through socialization) and *bounded solidarity* (reaction to a common threat).²⁴

Two of the aforementioned types deserve emphasis in this paper: the bounded solidarity and enforceable trust. The former is shaped by situational factors associated with the feeling of threat, and the degree of cultural differences from the host population; the latter concerns intra-group social control, i.e. certain sanctions associated with being a member of a particular group. The person who violates group expectations and breaks the contracts exposes

²¹ A. Portes, op. cit, p. 27-28.

²² C. Wallace, *Investing in social capital: the case of small - scale, cross - border traders in post- communist central Europe*, „Journal of Urban and Regional Research”, 1999, vol. 23, no 4, p. 751-770.

²³ Ibidem, p. 763.

²⁴ A. Portes, J. Sensenbrenner, *Embeddedness and Immigration: Notes on the Social Determinants of Economic Action*, „American Journal of Sociology”, 1993, vol. 98, no 6, p. 1322-1327.

oneself to the danger of exclusion from the community, or at least from future transactions.²⁵

Participation in ethnic community gives access to certain material and symbolic goods which may be inaccessible for outsiders. It may give priority to the co-ethnic in economic transactions, employment practices and in access to information. On the other hand, ethnic-based social capital may impede the further development through certain expectations towards individuals as community members. It follows the rule: *The greater the social capital produced by bounded solidarity and community controls, then the greater the particularistic demands placed on successful entrepreneurs and the more extensive the restrictions on individual expression.*²⁶ Moreover, individual mobility of the co-ethnics may be limited through certain leveling pressures as a fear of the outflow of prosperous members. The last negative effect refers mostly to those ethnic communities which have faced for a long time certain restrictions concerning upward mobility: *The longer the economic mobility of a group has been blocked by coercive nonmarket means, then the more likely the emergence of a bounded solidarity that negates the possibility of advancement through fair market competition and that opposes individual efforts in this direction.*²⁷

The ethnic-based social networks and the associated norms may limit the inter-group relations whereby decreasing the quality of the accessed social resources. The significance of inter-groups relations for achieving instrumental goals is associated with the socio-economic status of a given ethnic group. Research conducted in Canada by Emi Ooka and Barry Wellman concerning five different ethnic groups confirms that in the case of the job search the members of the group occupying relatively lower social position achieve better outcomes (i.e. better-paid jobs) when they use social contacts exceeding their own cultural community. The opposite relation (priority of intra-group ties) refers to the ethnic groups of high status in a given social structure.²⁸

The research outcomes seem to be consistent with the aforementioned division into bonding and bridging social capital. Social capital based on

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 1324-1325.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 1341.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 1344.

²⁸ E. Ooka, B. Wellman, *Does Social Capital Pay Off More Within or Between Ethnic Groups? Analyzing Job Searchers in Five Toronto Ethnic Groups*, 2003, p. 17. [Dokument elektroniczny]. Tryb dostępu: <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~wellman>

strong affinity ties and cultural resemblance constitutes the essential source of social support and the means of achieving expressive goals. It also plays the essential role during the first years of adaptation. The bridging social capital on the other hand, encourages personal and social development, permits wider information access and opens new possibilities and prospects³. In the case of many minority groups occupying lower social position the bridging social capital may represent an effective development strategy.

At the community level the existing findings suggest the negative relationship between socio-cultural differentiation and overall social capital level. For example, the states of the USA more diversified in terms of ethnic and racial composition are said to have relatively lower social resources compared to more homogenous ones. Moreover, it is also argued that this relationship holds good for cross-national differences in social capital between heterogeneous and homogenous societies, giving priority to the latter.²⁹

While explaining the given relationship at least several issues mentioned in the literature of the subject are worth citing:

the principle of homophily: the cooperation is easier among people and groups similar to one another, trust is higher among people culturally similar etc.

cultural explanation: not all cultural communities possess values and norms functional for social cooperation and social development; the *radius of trust* differs in various cultures;³⁰

the socioeconomic argument: differences in socioeconomic standing between the minority groups and the host society play crucial role in accessing social resources and influence an overall level of social capital significantly.

Natalia Letki notices the apparent contradiction between the research outcomes on social cohesion, cultural heterogeneity and inter-ethnic relations. On one hand the analyses stress the negative impact that heterogeneity has on social capital at the community level, on the other hand the research shows that the residents of more heterogeneous neighborhoods are relatively more open towards other cultures and races than those living in more homogenous ones. The author further accentuates: *to properly assess the effect of racial diversity on social capital neighborhood status needs to be taken into account simultaneously, as poverty and disorder tend to be highly correlated with*

²⁹ E. Glaeser, *The Formation of Social capital*, „Canadian Journal of Policy Research”, 2001, vol. 2, no 1, p. 40.

³⁰ F. Fukuyama, op. cit.

*racial diversity. The results show that when the effect of diversity and neighborhood deprivation on social capital are modeled simultaneously, and the relationship between neighborhood status and racial diversity is accounted for, diversity does not have a negative effect on any of the four dimensions of social capital. It is the low socioeconomic status of a neighborhood that is the main factor undermining interactions and positive attitudes among neighbors. According to Natalia Letki placing emphasis on the heterogeneity without taking into account the issue of inequality leads to improper diagnosis of social problems.*³¹

Similar approach is presented by Jack Knight. While quoting the works by H. D. Forbes and T. Pettigrew he remarks: *More generally, the research on contact suggests that the negative effects of interaction on social beliefs increase as the degree of inequality between the groups increases, as the degree of conflict of interest increases, and as the level of support for positive interactions between authorities and other elites declines.*³² Thus, under the findings presented above, one should not analyze the issue of social capital across ethnic dimensions without taking into account the socio-economic differences between various cultural groups in a certain community or society.

³¹ N. Letki, *Does Diversity Erode Social Cohesion? Social Capital and Race in British Neighbourhoods*, 2005, p. 3, 4. [Dokument elektroniczny]. Tryb dostępu: www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/Politics/papers

³² J. Knight, *Social Norms and the Rule of Law: Fostering Trust in a Socially Diverse Society*, in: K.S. Cook (ed.), *Trust in Society*, New York 2001, p. 367.

Conclusion

The social exclusion based on cultural and/or socioeconomic factors constitutes one of the most important problems of contemporary societies. The research findings confirm that while evaluating the social capital as an important development factor, one should not limit the analysis to the qualitative estimation (high to low social capital). The socio-economic position, educational credentials and status in the occupational structure seem to differentiate strongly the access to social resources.

Thus, it is worth asking following questions while estimating social capital at the community or society level:

to what degree does the distribution of social capital in a certain community reflect existing social divisions?

which dimensions of differentiation mostly determine the access to social resources or define their quality?

what forms of social capital prevail in a given society?

how does it affect society as a whole?

The significant differences in the distribution of social capital across various groups may impede long-term development. That is way, while speaking about the benefits stemming from social capital towards a whole community or society, we should emphasize the role played by inter-group connections and generalized trust that go beyond the family, class or ethnic ties and divisions.