

Social Capital and Participatory Action Research: How to Build Cooperation?

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Outline

- ❖ The focus of the research.
- ❖ Theoretical background: social capital (SC) and participatory action research (PAR).
- ❖ Case study: the formation and erosion of social capital in Borsodi Mezőség (Hungary).
- ❖ Analysis: social capital as a prerequisite for cooperation.
- ❖ Discussion: PAR as a tool for building social capital.

Research Focus

- ❖ Cooperatives in Hungary.
- ❖ Social capital and cooperation.
- ❖ Research questions:
 - How was SC formed in the research area?
 - How do existing forms and types of SC influence agricultural cooperation?
 - How is it possible to encourage cooperation through improving SC?
- ❖ Methodology:
 - Micro-level qualitative research – case study based on data from an ongoing PAR process.

Theoretical Background 1.

❖ Social capital:

- Structural and cultural features (Van Deth, 2003).
- Bonding, bridging and linking SC (Woolcock, 2001).
- Negative SC and social traps (Svendsen, 2006).
- Critics: power relations (deFilippis, 2002; Schafft&Brown, 2003).
methodological dilemmas (Van Deth, 2003).

❖ Participatory action research:

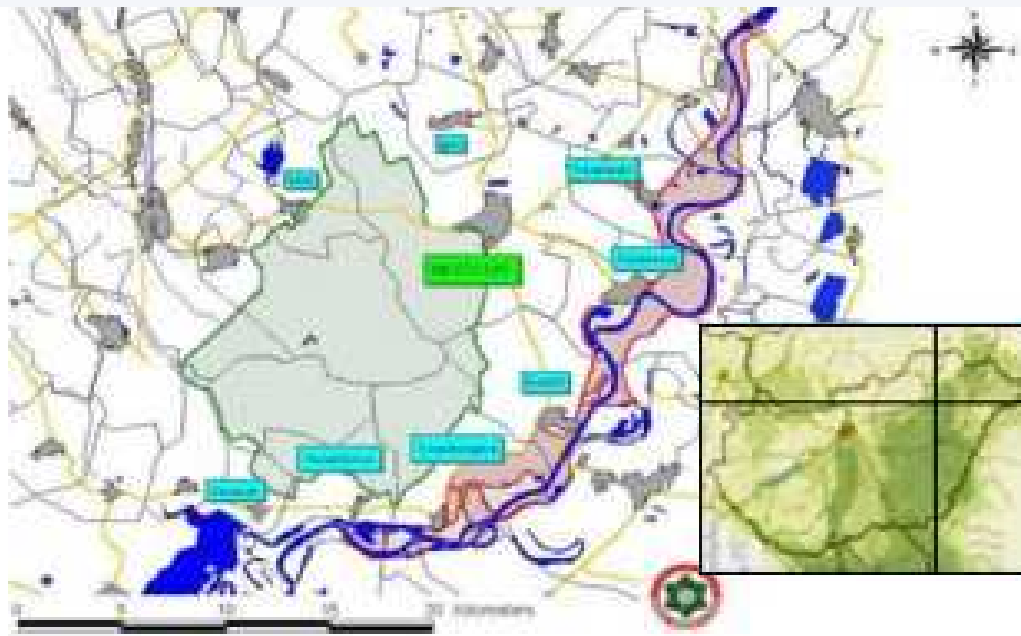
- Knowledge production and empowerment (Reason, 1994).
- Research is a process of mutual learning as well as co-construction (Greenwood&Levin, 1998).
- Communicative space for democratic change (Reason, 2007).

Theoretical Background 2.

PAR in social capital research:

- PAR itself can contribute to the improvement of SC (Schafft&Brown, 2003; Gustavsen, 2003).
- PAR provides direct data on different manifestations of SC.
- PAR is able to grasp SC as a collective phenomenon from a community perspective instead of aggregating individual data.
- PAR approaches the various aspects of SC from the local context.
- PAR is able to handle asymmetric power relations.

Social Capital in Borsodi Mezőség



Social Capital in Borsodi Mezőség

A Historical Perspective:

- Before WW1: rich agricultural area, credit banks, agricultural cooperatives.
- WW1: huge losses but quick recovering thanks to Jewish merchants.
- After WW2: short democratization period.
- Socialist regime: heavy agricultural collectivisation, newly established regional centre.
- After 1990: social and economic depression, conflicts around restitution, minority problems, unemployment.

After the 1940s the rich bonding and bridging SC of the area was transformed into strong informal face-to-face relations, which has served as negative SC.

Recent Attempts for Cooperation

❖ Cötkény Alliance for Regional Development:

- Borsodi Mezőség ESA.
- Farmer's Association.
- *„The manager is an energetic person but he says the same things too many times. This is quibbling.”*

❖ Purchasing and Marketing Cooperative:

- Aiming at marketing collectively the arable crops produced by the members.
- Continuous failures caused by management and organization problems together with social and cultural constraints.
- *„Common horse has scars on his back.”*

Experiences with PAR

❖ Phases of the PAR process:

- Appreciative enquiry interviewing, structured interviewing, agricultural survey.
- Decision-aid report compiled by students.
- Community fora.

❖ Working together:

- Facilitated group work to elaborate future directions of the cooperative.
- Few participants, groups of 2-3.
- Outcome: detailed outline, responsible person, project proposal for funding.



Is There Really a Lack of SC?

- ❖ *„We need strict formal rules in the cooperative to avoid abuse and injustice.“*
- ❖ *„The government wants to brush aside small farmers...“*
- ❖ *„Smallest farmers have no supporter.“*
- ❖ *„Everybody is a dog in the manger.“*
- ❖ *„Everybody works for himself.“*



There are groups of 3-6 farmers sharing work, changing machines or even pieces of land.

Is There Really a Lack of SC?

- ❖ Social trap: strong bonding SC and weak bridging capital as limiting factors for cooperation.
- ❖ Need for exogenous "intervention": mainly outsiders recognize this social trap and invest in building bridging/linking capital.
- ❖ PAR process: one possible way for generating collective investment into local SC.
- ❖ Results: recently some local initiatives are being formed.

Questions to Be Discussed

- ❖ In order to avoid the dominance of existing power asymmetry the research team generated new power relations.
- ❖ How is it possible to reach and involve the poorest, marginal groups?
- ❖ To what extent is it ethical to intervene in local social processes?
- ❖ How long should the research team stay in the area and support the first steps of the initiative?



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