

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOME ROMANIAN RURAL COMMUNITIES WITH STRONG SOCIAL CAPITAL. THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *The presence of social capital in rural communities is very beneficial, which is why we have to put accent on analyzing the relevant concepts and see the relationship between them, but also to understand their importance and the role they play. This article analyzes two rural areas in which we can observe different types of social capital which lead to a community development. It also shows the importance of these two concepts nowadays.*

Keywords: *Community development, Social capital, Cooperation, Volunteering*

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article consists of providing the necessary literature review in regards to the concept of community development seen as a model of local development, explaining its role and objectives and also the processes that directs it. We provide a definition of the social capital concept, we explain the existing types of social capital, and also the advantages and disadvantages of its usage in the context of community development. In the last section of the literature review we have described the links between the concepts of community development and social capital. Through this research we try to highlight two cases of good practice by analyzing two rural communities and offering these good practice models to other communities. We can say that a community undergoes a high community development process when it develops on economic, social and culture terms, with the condition that all its members are aware of the problems they encounter and are solving them through voluntary work by using internal resources and values and both external where this is possible. Community development has multiple purposes, such as learning to cooperate, motivating community, promoting its members and creating bonds between them, finding the persons who are willing to assume a leader role, improving local democracy which will help the community to develop. As a definition,

community development is implemented with a purpose to create thriving communities based on interpersonal relations.

In order to assist local administration in the implementation of its local development policies, several types of specialist agents who aid community development were proposed. According to Dumitru Sandu (Sandu, 2005) at Romanian level the *community agent* has the role to get involved in society actions and aid communities to go through to the community development process. Another type of agent is the *local promoter* which is defined by Dumitru Sandu. Most of the times this agent is specialized in different areas and their role at community level is to initiate community development activities by establishing local community associations which collaborate with the local public administrations. In the year 2002 Civitas Foundation introduced the *community facilitators* (Balogh, Bosovcki, Dragoş, Hinţea, Hosu, 2003). This type of agent has several characteristics: his involvement is characterized by external actions which means he is not a permanent employee of the local administration, this means he is independent of local institutions. Another type of agent is the *local development agent*, which has higher education in the social science area, and contributes with ideas in the social economic development of the community. This type of agent is included in the local public administration and work with the community from the interior.

Social capital represents the totality of community member bonds and links, the links between various organizations and community members, bonds which are based on mutual trust and respect. Michael Woolcock has proposed a clear distinction between three types of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking. *Bonding* capital can be explained in terms of strong or tight links between family members, friends, church members, which can be characterized by a strong cohesion of the group. *Bridging* capital is characterized by weaker links which are set between different groups which have a common goal. *Linking* capital is characterized by relationships between individuals with different social statuses, for example between poor and the rich.

Referring to the disadvantages of social capital Levi and Putzel have written about the concept of “path dependence” which Robert Putnam has used it only in a metaphoric way and he has not proved the applicability of the concept (Bădescu, 2013). Alejandro Portes and Patricia Landolt have concluded that the most important problem is related to the generality of the social capital concept, which leads not only to circular statements, but also to some recommendation for policies. The concept may be difficult to understand, especially that the first problems arise when we try to operationalize it. Another critique is that the theory emphasizes only the positive effects of high levels of social capital, most literature only observes the fact that high level of social capital is better than a low level of social capital. In regard to the functionality of its definitions, many critics were formulated, as the social capital was defined by many authors thought its functions. These definitions make the delimitation between what is and what it does impossible.

In his book, “Social capital and public participation”, Gabriel Bădescu has presented three negative aspects which most analyses miss out. The first aspect is that although social capital can aid local development, most of the time the development is done with outside help and resources. The second aspect is that in certain situations social capital can also bring disadvantages to communities. The last negative aspect is related to conceptualization. Although horizontal and dense links/ networks help the conceptualization of social capital, there are

situations in which groups characterized by high level of social capital do not manage to transform it into economic advantage and do not increase the democratization of the community bringing wellbeing to all community members.

The main benefit of social capital is the sharing of information as it allows individuals access to information about opportunities in the community. This is very important because it enhances community mobilization in order to achieve certain goals, but also increases socialization, cooperation and other aspects of community life. According to Adler and Kwon, influence, control and power are also products of existing social capital. The power, of a community which can be political, can benefit local actors and confer them certain rights. It can be translated into the influence it puts on political actors and the accountability it exerts over political figures, institutions and organizations (Adler and Kwon, 2002). The same authors point out that solidarity between community members is another effect of social capital because it is based on the existence of strong links and beliefs between community members which encourage the adherence to local traditions and norm, which can lead to a lower need for formal control (Adler and Kwon, 2002).

Tristan Clardidge's book points out that studies agree that social capital is omnipresent and offers examples in regards to its political, social and economic influence. The author suggests that the concept of social capital brings together sociological concepts such as social support, integration and social cohesion, which is seen by some authors as a "rare characteristic in social sciences". The author presents a series of beneficial effects of social capital as it were proposed by several authors: contributes to the efficient function of economy, stabilizes liberal democracy (Fukuyama 2001; Kenwothy 1997), and shapes some models of regional development (Lyon 2000).

As we can observe, social capital is present in all communities, in one form or another, and it contributes to the development of these communities. Although it can be difficult to measure or operationalize, it is not impossible as we can understand it in terms of effects and results, as it can be observed by the multiple theories regarding the positive and negative effects of it.

Between the social capital and local development and community development we can find numerous links. For example, in the United Kingdom, the consolidation of social capital is considered advantage in regards to the development of social enterprises as it is based on the volunteer trust and engagement and on the strong community member links, which aim to develop their community (Neguț, 2013). Local development requires a high level of community social capital as it allows members to cooperate in order to attain the common objective, which in the most cases is the improvement of the community. It should be noted that the presence of social capital is not a solution to solving community problems, but rather an advantage which can be used with other forms of capital (financial, material), which leads to the development of the community. Members of the community have the best image of their interest and problems and it is important that they have a role in the decision making process. The opportunity to participate encourages individuals to take part in collective actions, leading to increased interactions and intensity of relationships (Tu Chi Nguyen and Matthias Rieger, 2017). The authors believe that the local development process influences the social capital; as community members observe that their community is thriving, they will want to get involved in order to aid the development process. So, local development can stimulate individual willingness to be part

of a group, to create links with others, with the desire to facilitate the provision of public goods and services. On the long term, a high social capital will facilitate the local development process. The conclusions we can draw based on the literature review we can state that local development influences social capital and vice versa. In order to attain common objectives through voluntary participation, individuals need to form collective groups which are characterized by mutual trust and help, cooperation and collaboration. In this way, community members become aware that in order to reach common objective they need the help of others, and most important, that collective work makes possible the productions of effects which cannot be achieved individually.

METHODOLOGY

In order to identify empirical evidence and analyze rural communities and to determine the link between the concept of local development and social capital, we opted for two methods of research: quantitative and qualitative. We used the citizen survey in order to analyze the collective perception of villagers towards the local development process. Also, interviews were taken throw using the focus-group method with the objective to collect information from the citizen`s perspective about the community that they live in.

In the quantitative research we used an acknowledged survey which was developed by CAMPP foundation. In Jebucu village the survey was applied using the face to face method. 35 valid answers were collected, which represents 13.47% of the total inhabitants of Jebucu village. In Camar village the total number of respondents was 137, representing 7.75% from total number of Camar`s population.

In regards to the qualitative research, the interview was used through the focus-group method. We selected relevant members of the communities which have a role in local development as participants. We did one focus-group for each community, the interview guide consists on nine questions, and for both focus-groups we used the intended sampling technique.

ANALYZED COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

JEBUCU VILLAGE, ALMASU COMMUNE, SALAJ COUNTY

Jebucu village is a part of Almasu commune, which is made up of nine villages: Almasu, which is the commune seat, situated 51 km from Zalau city. The first reference to the village dates back to 1490, when the Catholic Church, built in the village in the XII century is reoffered to the church disappeared in XVII century. In 1681, the population was converted to reformed belief, and the construction of a new church began which received its bells in 1792 and respectively 1803 and the tower was added in 1840. The pipe organ was added to the church in the 1819, but because of a fire which took place in 1876, only the walls remained, while all the interior objects were destroyed. In 1879, the community organized to repair the church and since than it is restored by the villagers whenever this is needed (<http://enciclopediaromaniei.ro/wiki/Jebucu>).

The village uniqueness is ensured by its inhabitants, their mutual cooperation and trust. The community organized itself and has worked together to build a road to the rail station because they had to cross a difficult and long path to get there. By joining forces villagers had

managed to satisfy their common interest through teamwork and cooperation. The village was at the brink of depopulation, when in 1991 a church priest together with her family moved in the village to ensure the continuation of church service. Because nobody wanted to hold service in a small village with few inhabitants, Irma Molnar decided to be the priest for the villagers. At first, the villagers were reluctant, especially older people, to the fact that she was a woman priest. With patience she managed to be accepted in the community even more, now she is seen as an important peer of the community. Molnar family has managed to attract people from other countries which have visited and became donors for the village development process. The donors which were attracted were profoundly impressed by the beauty of the places, the village story and the united community, which made them want to be a part of the development process. A priest from Germany, which visited the village has proposed a mechanism in order to raise funds for the development initiative. He asked the women in the village to sew traditional table cloths, which he would sell in Germany and the money obtained will be used to refurbish the church which was affected by the fire. In this way, through voluntary work, the women in the village have managed to make their church welcoming again. The same mechanism was used in order to construct a children`s center in the village and also to improve the road to the train station, that they build some decades ago. The result is that the community has managed to save their village and to improve their living conditions by voluntary work and cooperation. The village hosts a placement center for orphan children. It was founded and built by the community with the purpose of bringing children in the village and offering an opportunity for them to remain there. The placement center was opened in 1994 and it hosted an initial number of 36 children and in present it hosts 52 children. The placement center has developed, adding a small animal farm (pigs and sheep), greenhouses and a lab which prepares milk based products which provides a source of nutrients for the children. The center also has a house which is used as a home for over eighteen year old children, who leave the center and are encouraged to remain in the village. Also, the youth in the center is encouraged to integrate and to enroll in professional schools in order to learn skills and abilities needed in order to prepare for life. There are also surroundings workshops which have an oven for baking the ceramics. There are two ladies, one from Switzerland and one from the neighboring city from Huedin which alternatively teach the children how to paint and to make ceramics. Annually, the center organizes a creation camp for artists from all over the world. The participants are hosted in the placement center and they donated over 250 paintings as a gratitude symbol. The village has formed partnerships with other European communities under the sister city concept with communities from Germany (Murr), Switzerland and Hungary (Paty). These partnerships ensure the transfer of good practices and models of development. This kind of transversal links most of the times ensure even financial and material support for local development projects. For example, the village has took a loan which helped it to build a new 2.4 km road through which the village is now connected to the Cluj-Oradea, DN1/E60 European Road, which proves the intelligence of the community. Besides the sister city partnerships the village has created links with various NGO-s, cultural groups which hold painting camps and other activities and also with the faculty of Reform Theology, from Babes-Bolyai University, from Cluj-Napoca.

At the moment, Jebucu village has 260 inhabitants, all of them being Hungarian ethnics. In 2016, there were over a 100 persons permanently employed of which 47 work in the village in the placement center and the connected social enterprises (agricultural association, flour mill,

bakery and the milk lab). The main occupation of the village inhabitants are in the field of agriculture, crafting and animal herding. In the village there are approximately 14-15 cows which belong to the village and 41 which belong to the placement center, around 150 sheep of which 40 belong to the villagers. Also, the villagers have around 150 pigs, and the placement center has 50. The local agricultural association has various crops mainly consisting of: oat, corn, potatoes.

The local villagers are warm, peaceful and simple, which can be translated in a low level of crime rate, due to strong social control. The villagers help each other in agricultural activities, building new household appendix and even in organizing events like weddings, christening, funerals or birthdays. There is also a village monthly tradition for which the persons who had their birthday in the last month to organize birthday parties at the local community center. The celebrating event starts in the morning with some village beautification community activities (cleaning the water ditches, cleaning the street, grooming trees). Meanwhile the ladies clean up the community center, prepare food for the party, and plant flowers in the village. The day finishes with a party were the local youth music club holds a concert.

CAMAR VILLAGE, SALAJ COUNTY

Camar village is situated 56 km away from Zalau municipality, which is the county seat of Salaj County. Camar is actually a commune which in the past was formed of two villages, meanwhile one of them has disappeared through depopulation. The first documented reference of the village dates back on June 19th, 1349, under the name of Kemer. Mid-15th century it was a commercial center of the area, the village used to hold weekly fairs. The status of fair lasted for long time, the village reaching its largest population in the 18th century, also being one of the most populated settlement in the area. At the beginning the village was inhabited only by Hungarian ethnics and slowly Romanian ethnics settled there, the first reference of Romanians being dated in 1720 (Strategic Development Plan for Camar commune). According to the National Institute of Statistics Data, the village population at 1st of January 2016, was 1702 inhabitants, most of them being Hungarian ethnics. In 2016, 320 villagers were employed, in different fields such as agriculture, commerce, construction, education, public administration. The economy of the village is based on agriculture (mainly grains) and horticulture (orchards and vineyard). Out of the plum harvest 400.000 liters of spirits (traditional Transylvanian drink, called *Palinca*) are produced every year. The element which sets Camar apart from other communities is the confessional structure of its population, Reformists, Baptist, Evangelist, Adventists, Greek-Catholics, Orthodox and Pentecostals live in the village. In total, seven confessions are present in the village and each of them has a different church. The analysis and observations we made in the village, show that the presence of so many confessions rather than producing cleavages in the community, has raised the interethnic and interconfessional tolerance levels, and the level of civic engagement places the community among active communities. This title of active community is due to a high number of community structures, the inherent relationships between them, and the levels of empowerment in these groups.

Camar Village Days, also known as Ramson Festival (*Ramson* which is a plant known popularly as wild garlic) is a festival which villagers organize together with other communities from Romania and Hungary, represent occasions where local culture, cuisine, drinks, fruits are

displayed, sampled and are appreciated by experts and tourists. A small concert held by the ecumenical choir and organized by the Baptists, brings together villagers from all confessions. The local music band and football or Ping-Pong teams compete with the visiting teams. The transversal relationships which the village has managed to build in time with communities from Hungary (Mesztegyo, Soponya and others) and also with neighboring communities, have determined cultural exchanges which are most visible in the annually events organized in Camar. The inhabitants are more and more aware of the possibility to capitalize the local products and local culture through tourism activities. Also, a few years ago, a guesthouse was established in a local vinery. It has a wine cellar in which wine samplings are organized, and is becoming more and more well-known. The local tourist information center is involved in charting all the local culture and values (traditional costumes, traditions and customs, local cuisine). High levels of social capital have permitted cooperation between villagers which has led to merger of agricultural plots on which local investors has started a Christmas tree plantation of over 500 hectares and also construction teams of Camar are well-known and demanded in the area.

RESULTS OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The perception of *present quality of life* in the context of local cultural values their standards and aspirations were tested through a 1-10 scale, where 1 means totally unhappy and 10 means totally happy, in both communities their appreciation towards present quality of life tend to be similar, the largest percentages of grades being 7 and 8, which means that the inhabitants are happy about their quality of life. We can observe that in Jebucu village there is a percentage of 8.82%, which ranked the lowest on the quality of life, while in Camar the percentage is very low (0.78%).

In regards to the *evolution of life quality in the last 4 years*, in both communities the perceptions are rather positive and the majority of the community members considered that their quality of life increased in the last 4 years.

Concerning the *intention to leave the community* in which they live, the respondents are firm about not changing their place of living. In Camar village there is a slightly higher percentage which shows the intention of leaving the community, especially in the case of young people which are orienting themselves toward opportunities, to continue their studies or to move urban areas with different development perspectives.

When asked to identify the *three main problems* of their communities, the inhabitants of Jebucu have pointed out the lack of drinking water and sewage, road infrastructure and methane gas. Also, the villagers have identified the lack of public transport, the lack of mobile signal and tourist. Although the lack of tourists was identified by some respondents as a problem, most of the villagers are quite reluctant to receiving strangers in the community. This is observable with the tourist that visit the placement center and parochial house, their activities being very well programmed and structured as not to interfere with the community way of living. This way of receiving strangers offers the villagers some sort of security in regards to theirs lives and villages. Regarding the problems identified by the inhabitants of Camar village the main problems are the lack of jobs, poor infrastructure and public transport services, problems which directly affect the quality of life.

When asked to identify the *main three strengths* or advantages of the village the inhabitants of Jebucu have identified the following: the civilized attitude and the unity of the villagers, the perseverance that characterize them and the opportunity to have a job in the village. Other identified strengths are the presence of the placement center, the cleanliness of the village and the involvement of the foreign individuals and groups in the development of the community. In the Camar village the main three strengths are the existence of water resources and the presence of drinking water network in a large number of households, the presence of sewage services and the solidarity of the inhabitants. In both villages the inhabitants show an enhanced awareness about their community, the present community relationships which they appreciate as one of the main strengths.

We also asked both communities about the *obstacles in the development process*. In Jebucu these obstacles identified by the villagers are: the lack of investors, the poor quality of infrastructure and the difficulty of accessing European funds. The perceived solution for the low economic activity is the attraction of investors which could accelerate the development even more. In Camar village the main perceived obstacles are also the lack of investors, the weak accessing of European Funds, the emigration of youth and the difficulty to access different markets for different products. We can observe that both communities perceived that the low capacity of accessing the European funds represent an important obstacle in the local development community process.

The areas in which Jebucu village has the *largest development potential* as identified by the respondents are: agricultural activities, animal herding, and crafting activities. Unfortunately, the agricultural fields around the village aren't very fertile, but the inhabitants work them together through an agricultural association, which was donated to the church. Through this association the villagers are more efficient and they cultivate crops of potatoes, corn and grains. The main idea of the association is to help people get the most out of their fields as they do not possess the necessary machineries for optimal use of land. Animal herding and agricultural are two fields which have a close link as animal herding, brings a superior capitalization of the agricultural production. Crafting activities represent another field for development. The villagers recollected the times in which every household had a customized fence build by local carpenters, which had a design with multiple significations. This tradition has been lost in time, but the villagers think that with the help of local crafters this tradition could be revived. Also, the rebuilding work for the church, the community center, the placement center or even local households and other places outside the community have been done by local crafters. This kind of work can bring a good name to the village and also financial resources which could be used in the local development process. In Camar community, the largest development potential as identified by the respondents are: in the field on animal herding, agriculture, producing local goods and local crafts. There are also an animal herding association and foresting association in the village. In both communities we identified the same development perspectives through development of the agriculture and animal herding sectors.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS RESULTS

We held focus-groups in both communities. As the *main characteristic of the community*, the inhabitants of Camar have pointed out the dynamic of development – the raising number of

local businesses is perceived as positive and sustained at local level, and the religious diversity. The main characteristic of Jebucu village is the inhabitant community conscious and the homogenous mental religious and ethnic perspective.

We asked *what works well in the community*, the participants from Camar village have referred to the good communication between the people, the high level of volunteering and the water and sewage services. In Jebucu village, the participants have identified the high level of volunteering, the involvement of inhabitants in community activities, and the cooperation in cultural, economic and social fields.

We can observe a total differentiation when it comes to *local problems*. In Jebucu the main problems are the lack of communication infrastructure, the lack of water and sewage services, the lack of some services (e.g. hairdresser), the low level of new administrative projects, lack of jobs for young persons, the lack of new people in the village who could fulfill some needed jobs in the placement center (e.g. speech therapist, supervisors). In Camar the main problems are need to beautify the village, the lack of sufficient jobs, deficiencies in the health department, the depopulation and the aging population, depopulation of schools, the migration of youth leaving for other countries or urban areas in Romania, lack of investors, the low number of children in primary school, especially in the Romanian section, the relocation of young couples after they get married, the incapacity of the community to solve its own problems, the reducing level of light industry, the fact that there are inhabitants who do not participate in community activities and the lack of local product promoting.

The present *development directions* perceived in Camar are in the field of agricultural activities due to high quality fields present in the area: grains, fruit-growing (apples, plumb, and grapes), animal herding and beekeeping. In Jebucu, the participant have pointed out to agriculture, animal herding, their small crafting industry and the social-economics association and the placement center.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on our observations and field research and on the literature review that we undergone we managed to identify and describe local community development process based on community cooperation, intra and extra group social capital. The inhabitants of both communities have managed to substantially improve the indicators of life quality through voluntary cooperation and involvement and also through external community connections which have provided aid, empowerment and models of cooperation and development. These processes have been facilitated by the local level leadership capacity which some community members have assumed.

The competitive advantages that both communities hold, are strong social capital relationships which although have different explanations and characteristics, have led to levels of social-economic cooperation and local culture with enhanced potential to generate development. In Jebucu the social capital is built on similitudes between community members, homogeneity and shared values of all the members. In Camar, social-capital is built on cultural and ethnical similitudes, but also on multiconfesional differentiation, strong cooperation between the different religious groups which contribute a lot in the development of social capital. Local traditions, customs and cuisine could represent sources of competitive advantage only if the communities

understand to capitalize on them, through local events and tourism. Also, the innovation in traditional areas (the real estate heritage makes Jebucu into a living museum or the success exploration of new agriculture fields – Christmas trees plantation and wine production in Camar) represent clear competitive advantages.

Community involvement is a cumulative learning process. Local participation is favored by the existence of some structures such as church, school, various associations, formal or informal cultural or sport groups, local institutions. It is also important that local leadership is assumed, which means that certain persons are aware of their qualities and assume their community role.

Communication and information sharing between citizens are facilitated by the high levels of social capital. The intra or extra group social capital relationships represent an important vector for free, open and honest communication. The informing of inhabitants is favored by the existing functional structures, the meeting up, socialization and cooperation opportunities.

Local economy innovation is influenced by both types of social capital. Agricultural production or local tourism cooperation implies trust on one side and collective decisions and action on the other side (association, merger of agricultural fields, and cooperation in development of new local tourism products). Intra group social capital may facilitate cooperation which means that we need to stimulate its development when its level is low. When the intra group social capital is very high it is possible that the adoption of innovative local development models to encounter group opposition due to changes that this models bring in the community. In this case the development based on social capital can show some limits, for example the development of tourism in Jebucu is not a solution which could be favored by the villagers because they are reluctant as these kind of activities could change their way of life.

Extra group social capital is very important and it has a determinant role in the adoption of innovation in local development. This kind of social capital favors the sharing of good practices, new development models and sometimes the cooperation and resources needed for development from other communities or countries, from the academia or nongovernmental sector. Both communities have unique stories based on particular characteristics and development processes. They can offer a model of good practices for other communities from the perspective of utilization of social capital in local development and particularly in those communities which hold latent resources which aid community development.

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