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Enhancing rural prosperity through social capital

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Social capital and prosperity

Social capital refers to societal values such as trust and norms and social networks that people can draw upon to solve common challenges (Ostrom, 2009a). Since the beginning of the 1980s and even more during the 1990s, the notion of social capital has become a focus for research and policy discussions (e.g., European Commission, 2007; Scrivens and Smith 2013). While various forms of social capital and their effects on different social systems have been thoroughly investigated, the links between social capital and economic development have received more attention (e.g., Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1992; Knack and Keefer, 1997; Peiró-Palomino, 2016; Muringani, Fitjar, and Rodríguez-Pose, 2021). Much of the literature generally suggests positive effects of social capital on economic development. While positive links to social inclusion and quality of life are clearly established, it is often overlooked that this happens mostly at the expense of environmental sustainability (Fritz and Koch, 2016). Decline in environmental sustainability creates, in the long run, negative feedback loops that will eventually backfire on society (Ostrom, 2009b; Hull et al., 2015). Research should thus not only focus on the impacts of social capital on economic development but more broadly on prosperity, understood as ecological sustainability, social inclusion, and quality of life at large (Jackson, 2016).

The term prosperity has been associated almost exclusively with economic growth, but evidence has shown that this could only be achieved at the expense of environmental sustainability and that GDP as an indicator falls short on accounting for the general well-being of all humans (Stiglitz et al., 2009). New understandings of prosperity, a more meaningful and less materialistic prosperity, are now more in line with the Latin origin of the word, meaning “doing well”, “according to expectation” or “according to one’s hope”, and this includes much more than economic benefits (Jackson, 2016). In fact, the new understanding of the term prosperity acquires special characteristics that are very much related to people’s way of life and the context

in which they are embedded (Van der Ploeg and Marsden, 2008). Prosperity must include factors such as social cohesion and engagement, achieved through cooperation and trust, environmental sustainability, psychological and physical health, and the knowledge to help people increase their resilience and the general quality of life (Dayton-Johnson, 2001; Easterly et al., 2006). All these factors are supported, powered, and geared by social capital, which is one of the key building blocks of the “social web”—a myriad of encounters, transactions, interactions, and networks that link people, resources, activities, and markets. To achieve prosperity, we need to incorporate economic, social and environmental dimensions and relate them to social capital as a potential driver for improvements in those three dimensions (Rivera et al., 2018).

With this chapter, we would like to enrich the debate about social capital and economic development by drawing the focus on what we think is required to achieve well-being for all members of society, namely economic, social and environmental sustainability. We will do so by presenting eight initiatives in the rural European context that managed to enhance the prosperity of their members, the larger network, and the regions they are embedded in, by building social capital.

The transformation of rural regions

The transformation of European rural regions since the beginning of the 20th century is directly connected to industrialization and globalization. Industrialization and the opening to global markets not only changed agricultural practices throughout Europe and beyond but entirely transformed rural life at large (Krausmann, 2004). One key aspect of this transformation is the shift from biomass to fossil fuels as the primary energy carrier, which resulted in fundamental changes in agriculture, a decline in the demand for human labor, and enabled the unprecedented expansion of urbanized areas with the creation of new businesses and industries and hence, jobs (Haberl et al., 2023). Throughout the centuries, rural regions were always affected by structural reforms and changes in land management, but societies could only slightly improve their access to energy through the expansion of territory and an increase in labor input. Full industrialization of agriculture happened comparatively late after the 1950s in north-western Europe and even later in southern and eastern Europe through the widespread use of petrochemical fertilizers and the broader use of heavy machinery (Gingrich et al., 2013). Transport plays a central role too, as initially, the invention of the train brought new opportunities to rural regions as they could benefit from increasing demand for their products in the growing urban population (Fischer-Kowalski et al., 2004). Still, these transformations initiated a process that eventually led to an increase in outmigration from rural to urban areas (Cheshire, 1995). Initially emigration was compensated through high birth rates. The actual decline in population numbers affecting rural and urban areas in Europe happened later through declining birth rates (Newsham and Rowe, 2023).

On a global scale, the transformation of rural regions is still ongoing and indicated by the continuous decline of small-scale farms and the increasing commercialization

of the agri-food market (Bailey et al., 2009; Rivera et al., 2020; Guzmán et al., 2022). This is also reflected in the share of the economically active population employed in the primary sector. Globally, 200 million jobs in food production have been lost over the last 30 years, and if the trend continues, 120 million jobs will follow by 2030 (Brondizio et al., 2023). While the future decline of rural jobs will mostly affect low- and middle-income countries, employment in the primary sector within the European Union (EU) has been declining steadily since at least 1975. Today, only 4.4% of the economically active population of the EU 27 is employed in agriculture, forestry, and fishing (Eurostat, 2022). This transformation has far-reaching consequences for rural regions at large. Not so long ago, those regions in Europe were mostly self-sufficient, with few products coming from outside and a well-established local market for business and small-scale industries. This situation is entirely different in most European regions today. Subsistence farming declined substantially, people increasingly found work outside their villages, and cars initiated a new era of mobility and flexibility. Globalization brought the availability of a wide range of products at often cheaper prices, for which production has mostly been outsourced, thus affecting regional job markets as well. In the late 20th century, commerce in most small villages and towns closed, and new centers opened in larger towns. The consequence was that lifestyles became a lot more individualistic and less dependent on the villages people grew up and lived in. Today, many rural European regions are confronted with continuous population decline, structural shortcomings, and limited income possibilities. This poses challenges mainly to people, especially the younger generation, who leave these regions to find better education and income opportunities in urban centers. On a smaller scale, contexts differ, and not all regions are affected to the same extent. The resilience to these changes depends strongly on their social capital.

Social capital as means to strengthen rural areas' resilience

Rural decline is frequently explained in economic terms by unfavorable conditions and by missing resources or support. But this link is not entirely clear and does not apply to all regions. Some particularly remote rural regions with a very sparse population, a lack of policy support, poor economic performance, and unfavorable climatic conditions prove more viable than other regions with more plentiful economic resources and support (Li et al., 2019). As outlined above, the prevailing neoliberal paradigms in the age of industrialization and globalization are challenging traditional rural economies and the social fabric of rural societies. At the same time, traditional socio-cultural patterns frequently impede economic development and entrepreneurial objectives, leading to an economic standstill. Consequently, there are many attempts to address the endogenous potential of the regions and to mobilize intrinsic local human resources. Networks of mutual support and self-empowerment are considered as a remedy against all negative “side-effects” such as impoverishment and outmigration. Simultaneously, these networks should also foster civic engagement and democratic participation on a local or regional level. Rural development programs and initiatives, such as those driven by the EU and other countries, can be listed in this framework. At least, we can observe a unanimous understanding that

endogenous and exogenous means should be combined for a vibrant rural development (Bock, 2016; Goodwin-Hawkins et al., 2021).

Giddens (1990) states that our more ancient nature is embedded as much in geography as in temporality. Simultaneously, there is a process of disembedding between space and time and consequently a loss of special intimacy. Local societies are traditional historical communities, but not stable or inert. There is a continuous process of transformation going on in rural areas, and the means of living, the population structure, and social cohesion are in a state of flux. Yet, territory is more than just a social convention, and rootedness to geographical places is still valued. Some feel a deep empathy with a certain place or territory, others with the local social community, and some with both. New communication means have made location less of a constant in the fashioning of social relationships. However, there is a close relationship amongst people, and long-term individual experience with a territory also enhances social capital. Árnason et al. (2004) and Lee et al. (2005) discussed the concept of social capital in the context of rural development. Also, they maintain that social capital may affect the performance, competitiveness, and social cohesion of a community. Networks can be understood as articulating the flows of information and resources that produce rural development and society more generally. The intangible asset of social capital can be affected by policy, both positively and negatively. Measures that encourage the creation of networks and working modes enhancing cooperation are important elements in the creation of social capital. On the other hand, policies encouraging competition that divide rural inhabitants into winners and losers might be detrimental to the positive development dynamics and could mean a total breakdown of the rural social fabric.

Although the trajectory towards enhanced participation, civic engagement, and self-reliance is considered unanimously positive in the debate, critics of some dark sides are also present. As much as local communities tend to enclose their citizens and assist persons in need, their close ties also account for dynamics of social exclusion of all those who are unable or not willing to cope with the social norms of the local community. Dax and Machold (2003) point out that young people with different lifestyles, persons with different opinions from the majority, and those who do not participate in local associations or religious congregations may experience the dark side of locality. Besides that, local communities have a propensity for hostility towards incomers and thus prevent innovations. Putnam (2000) already conceived these “dark sides” of social capital as “toxic social capital”. The desire to belong to a political environment that has displaced the bonds once associated with neighborhoods, fraternal organizations, and the like can become a force for exclusion. As we self-select communities, those bonds become less meaningful, more transient, less binding, and more self-serving. Brown (2019, p. 111) also reveals a critical view when he states that “the insulation that, both for good and bad, used to mark communities you couldn’t choose, like a tight-knit ethnic group, is now a hallmark of self-selected political coalitions, which can create stage-managed communities that preserve home values, political shibboleths, polite discourse, and social homogeneity. The laudatory appeals to ‘social capital’ as the salve that heals all wounds gloss over the fact that the very act of social

exclusion—defining a community in opposition to an out-group—can drive an increase in measured ‘social capital’.” Putnam (2000, p. 393) himself has admitted that “social capital is often most easily created in opposition to something or someone else”, as any high-school coach getting ready for a big game could tell you.

These contrary effects need to be confronted with foresight and care when it comes to designing policies and initiatives that aim to enhance social capital in rural regions. Muringani et al. (2021) refer to these effects as bonding and bridging social capital and investigate their impact on economic growth. Their results show that bonding social capital hampers economic growth, while regions with lower bonding and the same levels of bridging social capital show better economic performance (Muringani et al., 2021). Especially regions with low human capital benefit strongly from exchange between groups with heterogeneous socioeconomic backgrounds and thus potentially lead to more resilient and prosperous communities at large.

Rural initiatives enhancing prosperity through social capital

The present chapter is one of the outcomes of the Erasmus+ project “Strengthening Social Capital in Rural Communities for Rural Development” initiated by the International Agricultural Training Center of Türkiye (UTEM). One core aim of the project was to investigate eight rural initiatives and their abilities in building social capital. These initiatives are heterogeneous in their structures and visions and are embedded into different socioeconomic and environmental contexts in Austria, Portugal, Spain and Türkiye (Figure 10.1). What connects them is their ability to enhance rural social capital through the creation of networks that are based on long-term cooperation and the building of trust (for detailed information on these initiatives refer to Noll and Rivera, 2023).

In the context of the project, we conducted 25 interviews with key actors of these initiatives (Table 10.1).

For an empirical assessment of the organizational structures of these initiatives and their societal impact, we agreed upon an analytical and conceptual framework based on social capital theory, which provides a way of understanding how social relationships and networks contribute to the development of resources within a community. For this, we established four key elements that helped us understand and analyze the different case studies:

1. Preconditions for developing social capital: Social connections, trust, and norms are key in generating social capital, recognizing that certain conditions, such as shared values, reciprocity, and mutual trust, are essential for the formation and development of social capital (Putnam 1993).
2. Gender: Social networks can have different structures and dynamics for men and women. Here, social norms and gender-specific patterns play an important role in shaping the access, utilization, and development of social capital (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

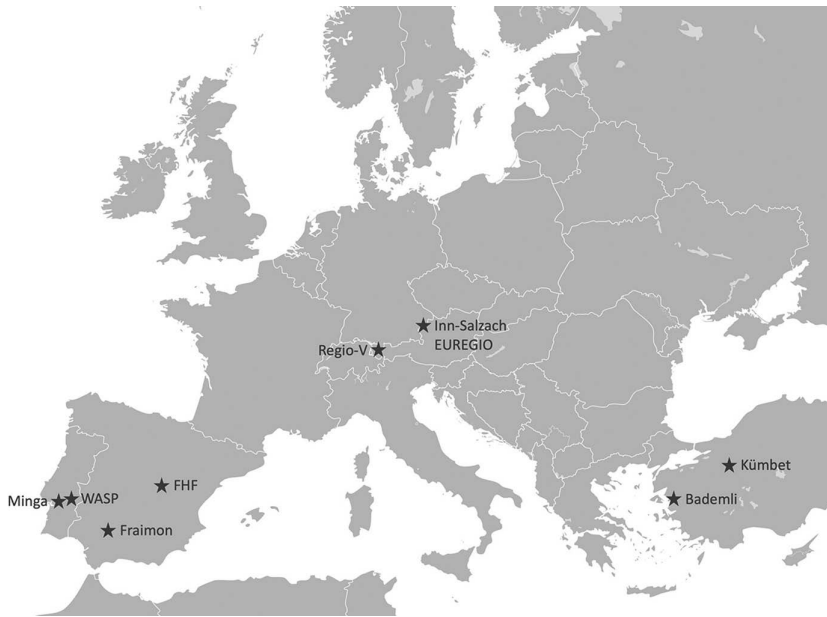


Figure 10.1 Locations of eight rural initiatives featured in this chapter: Regio-V and Inn-Salzach EUREGIO in Austria; Minga Cooperative and Wines of Alentejo Sustainability Programme (WASP) in Portugal; Sat Fraimon Cooperative and Huete Futuro Foundation (FHF) in Spain; Bademli and Kümbet Agricultural Development Cooperatives in Türkiye

3. Governance structures: Social capital theory underscores the role of institutions and governance structures in facilitating or hindering the creation of social capital. It considers how formal and informal rules, as well as the quality of governance, impact the strength and effectiveness of social relationships (Fukuyama, 1996).
4. Networks, cooperation, and trust: Collective action and collaborative efforts are central to the development of social capital. Networks and community-based initiatives are key for fostering cooperation and trust among individuals and groups (Burt, 2005).

Table 10.2 summarizes contributions of the eight case studies along the four identified key elements of social capital. In the following sections, we describe the eight case studies along these key elements in more detail and refer to interviews listed in Table 10.1.

Regional approaches in Austria

Preconditions of SC

Regional approaches involve, right from the beginning, a larger number of people, organizations, or entire municipalities. Both Austrian case studies, the cross-border

Table 10.1 Interviews conducted in the scope of the Erasmus+ project “Strengthening Social Capital in Rural Communities for Rural Development”

Country	Project	Name	Role	Year
Austria	Inn-Salzach-EUREGIO	S. Schwarz	Project manager EUREGIO	2022
-	-	S. Moser	Project manager EUREGIO	2022
-	-	E. Manetzgruber	Manager of food cooperative “Guat”	2022
-	-	M. Gramberger	Chair of Trafos association (Giesserei)	2022
-	-	O. Pointecker	Book printer in Giesserei	2022
-	-	M. Voggenberger	Mayor of Munderfing	2022
-	-	T. Gangl	Chair of “Netzwerkstatt”	2022
-	Regio-V	F. Rűf	Manager of “to be committed”	2022
-	-	D. Thaler	Volunteer coordinator of “to be committed”	2022
-	-	D. Azad	Volunteer and Syrian refugee	2022
-	-	P. Steurer	Manager of local action group (LAG) of Regio-V	2022
Portugal	WASP	J.L. Barroso	Coordinator of Wines of Alentejo Sustainability Programme	2021
-	Minga	J. Gonçalves	Founding member and former president of Minga cooperative	2021
Spain	Huete Futuro Foundation	L. Romero	President of Foundation	2021
-	-	F. Romero	Former mayor of Huete	2021
-	Sat Fraimon Cooperative	F. Santisteban	Founding member	2021

Country	Project	Name	Role	Year
-	-	J.L. García	President of cooperative	2021
-	-	M. Durán	Member	2021
-	-	R. Durán	Founding member	2021
-	-	D. Rodríguez	Technical advisor	2021
-	-	J.L. Murica	Manager of irrigation community	2021
-	-	M. Cruz	Manager of fertilization service	2021
-	-	J.M. Juarranz	Manager of Lasarte (distribution company)	2021
Türkiye	Bademli Cooperative	S. Bilgi	President of the cooperative	2022
-	Kümbet Cooperative	S. Ay	President of the cooperative	2022

Source: Authors' own.

region Inn-Salzach-EUREGIO¹ and Regio-V² represent regional approaches that utilized UN Agenda 21 and EU LEADER programs to steadily build up social capital and create, in this way, the preconditions for numerous projects and initiatives. Inn-Salzach-EUREGIO was established in 1994 to foster cross-border cooperation between respective regions in Austria and Germany and aims at developing a competitive and attractive region with a high quality of life (Table 10.1: S. Schwarz 2022). Regio-V was founded in 2001 and represents a local action group (LAG) of LEADER in western Austria, which has been struggling with outmigration, especially of young people, and a lack of skilled workers (Table 10.1: P. Steurer 2022). Thanks to these initiatives, preconditions of social capital improved substantially in both regions (Table 10.1: F. Rüb 2022; S. Schwarz 2022).

Role of gender

In both case studies, women are involved in the decision making. Seven out of twenty-eight representatives with voting rights in the Inn-Salzach-EUREGIO and ten out of twenty-five members of the local action group in Regio-V are women (Table 10.1: F. Rüb 2022; S. Schwarz 2022). Both regions have projects and initiatives that actively engage with disadvantages in regard to gender roles. Inn-Salzach-EUREGIO facilitates a project named “Rollen im Wandel” (gender roles in transition)³ in which numerous projects and initiatives aim at breaking up traditional role models that disadvantage women above all. The “Verein Frauennetzwerk³” (women’s network association)⁴ was

Table 10.2 Summary of key elements of featured rural initiatives regarding points (1–4)

	Initiative	1. Preconditions of social capital	2. Role of gender	3. Governance structures	4. Networks, cooperation, and trust
Austria	Inn-Salzburg EUREGIO	Medium—Regional approach for building social capital	7 out of 28 representatives with voting rights are women	28 representatives from the municipalities, district authorities, interest groups, political parties, and regions	Political and institutional multi-level system between top-down requirements and bottom-up networking
Austria	Regio-V	Medium—Regional approach for building social capital	10 of 25 members of the local action group are women	25 people from public and civil organizations operate on a multi-level system	More than 850 people in 110 initiatives could be mobilized for volunteer work
Portugal	Wines of Alentejo Sustainability Programme (WASP)	High—Could benefit from the social capital of wine growers commission (CVRA)	50% of member companies are led or managed by women; the manager of CVRA was a woman	One project coordinator from CVRA is moving the process forward based on objectives set at the beginning	Collaboration between CVRA, members, and universities as a core element for self-evaluation
Portugal	Minga Integral Cooperative (Minga)	Medium—Could build up on existing social capital from municipal development program	5 out of 10 people who represent the governing boards are women	Board of the general meeting, board of vice president, and board of fiscal council	Provides network for individuals and businesses with its own currency and support structures

	Initiative	1. Preconditions of social capital	2. Role of gender	3. Governance structures	4. Networks, cooperation, and trust
Spain	Sat Fraimon Cooperative	Low—Could make use of a small network of acquaintances	Share of female farmers within the cooperative higher than in region	General assembly, governing board, and president	Promoting in parallel sharing of challenges and keeping individualist structures
Spain	Huete Futuro Foundation (FHF)	Low—Regional approach for building social capital. Could benefit from a strong cultural and historic background	Role of women is essential for revitalization of Huete, and their inclusion is one of the main objectives of the foundation	Municipality's city council, group of associative entities and inhabitants	56% of the inhabitants detect positive changes in social relationships. Involvement of people originally from Huete but who emigrated
Türkiye	Kümbet Cooperative	High—Needed to overcome mistrust in cooperatives	Only 3 out of 198 members are women	3 members of steering committee and 3 members of supervisory board	75% of the village are members, and 50% of active members come from outside Kümbet
Türkiye	Bademli Cooperative	High—Needed to overcome mistrust in cooperatives	No specific attention to gender. Only 3 members are female	3 members of steering committee and 3 members of supervisory board	Well established R&D department that communicates with universities

Source: Authors' own.

initiated in 2005 as part of Regio-V and provides guidance and support for women in the region.

Governance structures

The governing board of the Inn-Salzach EUREGIO consists of 28 representatives from the 144 municipalities, district authorities, interest groups, political parties, and LEADER regions (Table 10.1: S. Schwarz 2022). The operative implementation of the tasks of the Inn-Salzach EUREGIO is ensured by the Regional Management Hausruck-Innviertel (RM). As an intermediary institution, RM plays a key role at the interface between planning, politics, management, and regional steering of participatory processes (Table 10.1: S. Schwarz and M. Voggenberger 2022). In Regio-V, the local action group (LAG) is organized as a cooperative and consists of public and civil organizations represented by 25 people. As an intermediary institution, the LEADER management of Regio-V plays a key role at the interface between planning, politics, management, and regional steering of participatory processes. They operate in a political and institutional multi-level system between top-down requirements and bottom-up networking (Table 10.1: P. Steurer 2022).

Networks, cooperation, and trust

The Inn-Salzach-EUREGIO is characterized by multiple initiatives that actively encourage citizen participation and create communal meeting places with the common purpose of promoting social cohesion and civic engagement (Table 10.1: E. Manetzgruber, M. Gramberger, O. Pointecker and T. Gangl 2022). Special attention is also given to “multilocality” through which rural regions can benefit from residents who have a strong, professional or private connection to urban regions (Table 10.1: S. Moser 2022). Similarly, Regio-V actively promotes civic engagement and volunteering with the primary objective of encouraging increased interaction, social exchange, and mutual appreciation among residents while fostering a positive culture of relationships (Table 10.1: D. Thaler and D. Azad 2022).

A sustainability program and an integral cooperative in Portugal

Preconditions of SC

In Portugal, the Wines of Alentejo Sustainability Programme (WASP) was developed by the Alentejo Regional Wine Growing Commission (CVRA), a well-situated private institution that has been working with wine farmers and producers of Alentejo since 1989.⁵ CVRA has access to high levels of expertise in the public, academic, and private sectors and could thus build on the social capital of an already well-established institution (Table 10.1: J.L. Barroso 2021). The integral cooperative Minga⁶ was founded by a group of people who came to Montemor-o-Novo in 2014, after the years of recession triggered by the global financial crisis. Despite decades of outmigration, the municipality of Montemor-o-Novo implemented in the 1990s a diverse local development strategy which created more favorable conditions for single initiatives. Minga could thus build on social capital present in the region but has been further enhancing social capital within its network and beyond (Table 10.1: J. Gonçalves 2021).

Role of gender

In WASP, women were, from the beginning, an integral part of the program, and their participation resulted in relatively balanced gender roles. The previous president of the Alentejo Regional Wine Growing Commission (CVRA) was a woman and played an important role in the foundation of WASP. Also, there is an increase in women taking over wine production activities and leadership roles in Alentejan wine companies. As of now, 50% of the participating companies are either led by women or have women in top management positions (Table 10.1: J.L. Barroso 2021). The integral cooperative Minga always paid attention to balanced gender roles. Today, five out of ten people who represent the governing board are women, among them the current president and vice-president of the cooperative.⁶

Governance structures

The project coordinator at CVRA plays a central role by establishing connections with various organizations, revitalizing prior efforts that were not fulfilled or continue to be successful, and addressing tasks that have not yet been undertaken but hold potential importance (Table 10.1: J.L. Barroso 2021). The program places a strong emphasis on equality, ensuring that all members, regardless of the scale of their wine production or their political leanings, have equal rights and opportunities within the program's objectives (Muñoz-Rojas et al., 2022). Minga cooperative is governed by the board of the general meeting, the board of directors, treasurers and members, and the fiscal council. It is central for the management of the cooperative to be transparent and act in a bottom-up fashion. Minga is organized democratically and aims at giving every coworker room to participate, contribute, and take ownership of their own projects. The cooperative itself has no objectives but to facilitate an exchange between people and enable them to achieve their goals (Table 10.1: J. Gonçalves 2021).

Networks, cooperation, and trust

WASP was developed in collaboration with researchers from the University of Évora, regional vineyard farmers and wine producers, and the Technical Association of Wine Producers of Alentejo (Muñoz-Rojas et al., 2022). The program has changed the practices and behaviors of wine producers and has helped to create an environment of trust and collaboration among people who were competitors before (Table 10.1: J.L. Barroso 2021). Minga attracts locals to become members by developing their own business and using the cooperative as a network and means for starting it up. As members are encouraged to provide services and products through the cooperative while at the same time consuming products and services within the cooperative, they act as “prosumers”, which makes the economy much more personal as it is also built on trust and values (Gonçalves, 2016). Gaining the trust of the local community, and especially from farmers, was and remains a challenge. The cooperative has established a variety of meeting spaces and events, which are an important precondition to building trust and solving conflicts before they arise (Table 10.1: J. Gonçalves 2021).

A town's rehabilitation and a farmer's cooperative in Spain

Preconditions of SC

In the Spanish town of Huete, socioeconomic difficulties and outmigration in combination with social problems have left the town with low levels of social capital and led to the disintegration of large parts of the town's architectural and cultural heritage (Quintana et al., 2022). The Huete Future Foundation (FHF)⁷ is a private non-profit organization that has been implemented to counteract these conditions by integrating different sectors of the community for the development and needs of the municipality. Similarly, Peñafior has been characterized by a low level of collaborative interaction between citizens and thus low social capital. The lack of willingness to cooperate with others, mistrust, individualism, paternalism, and conservatism stand out as the region's main problems. Some cooperative relationships, however, have been maintained between small groups of farmers. It was these bonds and interest in sharing some specialized agricultural equipment and knowledge that helped form the Sat Fraimon Cooperative.⁸

Role of gender

The statutes of FHF state that the foundation's activities are indeterminately directed towards society. Any person, natural or legal, can be a beneficiary of the foundation's services and benefits, without any discrimination whatsoever. FHF has promoted women by encouraging their participation in the foundation through three pillars: a) being part of the schools that make up the Board of Trustees; b) actively participating in the activities promoted by the foundation in the municipality; and c) being part of the Friends of the Foundation. In the Sat Fraimon cooperative, gender roles are not as balanced, but this is related to the traditional gender roles in agriculture in the region, and numbers show that the cooperative had, in this respect a positive impact. While in the census of Peñafior, women account for 24% of ownership of agricultural holdings, within the Sat Fraimon cooperative, the rate is about 32.5% and women were part of the founding members (Table 10.1: F. Santisteban and R. Durán 2021).

Governance structures

FHF is a private, non-profit organization of a foundational nature, with its assets permanently allocated to serve general interest purposes. The Board of Trustees, responsible for approving the budget and making essential decisions, comprises the Huete City Council (a public institutional group consisting of individuals from the administrative and political personnel of the municipality), representatives from associative entities (participate in planning and executing activities in collaboration with the FHF), and a representative group of inhabitants (Table 10.1: L. Romero and F. Romero 2021). Sat Fraimon's governance structure consists of the General Assembly, the governing board, and the president. From its inception, Sat Fraimon has aimed to integrate not only the owners of agricultural holdings, which has grown to currently about 60 members, but also all the stakeholders involved in the value chain of oranges from production to marketing (Table 10.1: J.L. García, D. Rodriguez, J.M. Juarranz, and M. Cruz 2021).

Networks, cooperation, and trust

The main successful practice for FHF was to strive for short-term and tangible results, which stimulated the continuous participation of residents (Table 10.1: L. Romero 2021). The creation of opportunities for the larger community was a side consequence of the heritage restoration process. It generates social inclusion, construction of interaction networks, and empowerment of society. Fifty-six percent of the inhabitants detect positive changes in social relationships, and 80% have indicated that FHF stimulated the co-construction of knowledge within the local population (Quintana et al., 2022). Sat Fraimon managed to build up a new network by initially promoting in parallel the two contrasting features of sharing and individualism (Quintana et al., 2022). The founding group of six small-scale farmers started with sharing their anxieties, discouragement, and disorientation, which helped them to better cope with and better understand their current challenges. In an environment of mistrust, it was also important to keep the individuality of each farmer within the association. At first, this feature seems contrary to the idea of collaboration, but in this case, it has been necessary and helpful for the process of building social capital.

Two agricultural development cooperatives in Türkiye

Preconditions of SC

In Türkiye, we feature two agricultural development cooperatives (ADCs) that had difficulties in some regions due to negative experiences and perceptions with cooperatives in the past. Despite this, both regions have good social capital and thus offer a good climate for formally established cooperatives. Bademli has a multicultural history that, in combination with the traditional management of natural resources, creates a solid basis for social capital. Also, Kümbet's inhabitants have always collaborated, even if this has never been very intense or formally structured. Both cooperatives could thus benefit from relatively well-developed social capital in their regions.

Role of gender

Kümbet Cooperative and Bademli Cooperative both have a relatively low number of female members, which, as in many agricultural cooperatives, is owed to the fact that in Türkiye, agriculture is traditionally male-dominated. While the visibility of women in the Kümbet Cooperative is low, many women have had professions and been employed thanks to the opportunities provided by the Bademli Cooperative (Table 10.1: S. Bilgi 2022).

Governance structures

Democratic structures within the governing body of cooperatives are central to the success of programs enhancing social capital. ADCs have a management body of several people and are required to hold an election or a non-elective financial assembly meeting every year. At Bademli Cooperative, the managers have the possibility to be elected for as many years as they want (Table 10.1: S. Bilgi 2022). In addition to this formal governance structure, the Kümbet Cooperative informally involves all members and peasants in the cooperative governance, which is possible thanks to successful

social capital building and distinguishes it from other similar types of cooperatives (Table 10.1: S. Ay 2022). They do not hold only mandatory meetings, but also informal meetings with members through coffee gatherings and various social events, which are part of the cooperative's governance arrangements.

Networks, cooperation, and trust

For the founders of the Bademli Cooperative, social capital was not a priority when it was founded in 1968 with 20 members. It developed step by step through learning by doing. Informal relations were there, but a willingness to work together came through the success of cooperation in economic development. The cooperative also conducts R&D work to produce virus-free saplings in biotechnology laboratories and to develop genotypes that are resistant to stress factors with the effects of climate change. In this context, the cooperative took a step towards cooperation with researchers in universities, aiming to create an education model that incorporates research and practice (Table 10.1: S. Bilgi 2022). The Kümbet Cooperative has been slowly building up a social network through a bottom-up process (Table 10.1: S. Ay 2022). When the founding members intended to establish a cooperative, they believed that they should collaborate to overcome financial and marketing problems. However, the concept of “togetherness” was not clear, nor were they aware of social capital building. It was not even the intended purpose. Their specific goal was to solve their financial problems by marketing their own milk and preventing being scammed by traders. Members wanted to organize an agricultural credit cooperative because it is the easiest one. Today, about 75% of the population of the village are members of the cooperative, and half of the active members even come from outside Kümbet (Table 10.1: S. Ay 2022).

Social capital beyond its impact on economic development

In the introduction, we have argued that social capital is at the very core of the social web (Van der Ploeg and Marsden, 2008) and thus a precondition for prosperity, as argued by Rivera et al. (2018), especially in the rural context, where it enhances the potential of projects and initiatives to create and/or foster social, economic, and environmental sustainability. The eight selected case studies have different foci and a diverse network of actors embedded into different regional contexts and landscapes. Still, all these examples integrate the three dimensions of sustainability and thus follow an integrative approach for enhancing rural prosperity, understood as environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and quality of life at large (Dayton-Johnson, 2001; Easterly et al., 2006; Jackson, 2016). The contribution of social capital to rural prosperity goes therefore far beyond economic measures, which in our understanding is rooted in the very nature of the challenges these initiatives aim to overcome. The economic difficulties of the regions into which the case studies are embedded are key drivers for their foundation, but all of them successfully and purposefully incorporate social and environmental dimensions. Our case studies vividly show that this is even a necessity as these dimensions are closely interlinked and the sole focus on economic development would undermine efforts for achieving real rural prosperity.

According to Bourdieu (1986) and Putnam (2000), social capital involves the effective functioning of social groups through interpersonal relationships, a shared sense of identity, a shared understanding, shared norms and values, trust, cooperation, and reciprocity. Hartmut Rosa (2020) states that for the quality of the human-world relationship, it is crucial that subjects dare to master challenges, influence the environment in a controlled manner, and thus be able to make a planned impact. People depend on the desire for resonance relationships. The spheres of professional and volunteer work, family, but also of art, religion, and nature, can serve as modern resonance spaces. One of the most important challenges stated by all featured initiatives is the lack of trust within rural communities. This often stems from negative previous experiences with cooperatives or associations, fears of the unknown or new ideas. It often fosters individualism and prevents the generation of social networks. The second-most mentioned categories were the lack of financial support and lack of commitment. They are mostly interrelated, as the lack of financial means in many cases demoralizes people and increases the demand for voluntary contributions in terms of time and money. Both can be seen as limited resources, and if an initiative cannot relatively quickly generate positive results, individual motivation to commit diminishes. Commitment is also shaped by power relations and social inclusion, which have been named as other key challenges. If certain groups feel that they are not sufficiently represented, they might feel demotivated to engage. It was thus essential for all portrayed initiatives to provide the social space required to build and enhance social capital. Their approaches and circumstances might differ, but their impact on members and larger communities is in all cases recognizable.

Across all case studies, we can identify potential solutions and ideas for current environmental challenges. In order to achieve a more circular use of resources, it is required to implement measures that replace non-renewable materials with renewable ones for energy provision and material use and more effectively utilize side streams (Wiedenhofer et al., 2023). Inn-Salzach-EUREGIO, Regio-V and WASP all have programs and measures that aim at more sustainable resource use within their networks. WASP was founded primarily on the idea of creating environmental sustainability standards in wine production, and socioeconomic benefits were a desirable side effect of this. By focusing on the better utilization of existing floor space, Inn-Salzach-EUREGIO aims at preventing the transformation of natural or agricultural land to building land, thus aiming at slowing land consumption (Salvati et al., 2018). Regio-V presents the preservation of cultural, natural, and wilderness areas as a core element in their program by highlighting that these areas deliver important ecosystem services for recreational purposes but also physical and mental health. Indirectly, FHF contributes to more sustainable construction practices by preserving existing buildings and infrastructure, thus reducing the need for additional floor space on non-urban land. The idea of a circular economy is one of the foundational principles of Minga, and all practices are dedicated to this goal (Table 10.1: J. Gonçalves 2021). Minga is exploring possibilities to better utilize existing floor space for people in need and is promoting sustainable building techniques by helping with personnel and expertise in using natural materials in construction. Sat Fraimon was also founded due to the increasing problems with water shortages in the region. The cooperative facilitated the

installation of modern drip-irrigation systems powered by photovoltaic arrays (Table 10.1: F. Santisteban and J.L. Murica 2021). Smallholder farms are important providers of food on a global scale and often represent an environmentally more sustainable form of agriculture, which could correspond faster to demands in regard to climate change (Nature Editorial, 2020). Minga, the food cooperative “Guat” as part of Inn-Salzach-EUREGIO, Sat Fraimon, and the two agricultural development cooperatives in Türkiye all support this small-scale form of agriculture and strengthen regional value chains. The biotechnology laboratories and fruit breeding staff at the Bademli Cooperative are developing plants that are more resistant to stress factors induced through climate change (Table 10.1: S. Bilgi 2022).

However, it is important to note that using case studies as a tool for investigating social capital comes with limitations and potential problems related to generalizability, which can be challenging when extrapolating the results to broader contexts; subjectivity, due to limited control of cause-and-effect relationships which may result in alternative explanations for observed outcomes; and data collection challenges, among others, especially in the context of rural regions that are continuously undergoing transformative processes. When planning the analysis, researchers should be aware of these limitations and take steps to mitigate them. When used appropriately, case studies offer a rich and in-depth understanding of local dynamics, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the creation, sustenance, or rebuilding of social capital in these rural settings.

Conclusions

In the age of globalization or post-modernity, rural areas are subject to various transformation processes that reshape socioeconomic patterns, and the way humans interact with their environment. Society’s increasing demand for resources puts pressure on rural regions and brings them to a difficult position that stands between economic development and preservation needs. The globalization of markets connects remote regions directly with the global economy. This increases the availability of products in these regions but also results in a downward pressure on prices for domestic products and thus threatens regional and local economies. Many of these processes have a negative impact on civic engagement. People have less time to voluntarily participate in local associations. Television, mass communication, and the internet produce a kind of virtual neighborhood. There is no need for networking to gain all necessary goods, entertainment, and information. But the loss of local infrastructures, shops, pubs, etc., coincides also with the loss of opportunities for social linkage and human connectedness.

Social capital thrives more easily under sound economic, socio-cultural, and environmental conditions. As Putnam (2000, p. 17) announced, “a well-connected individual in a poorly connected society is not as productive as a well-connected individual in a well-connected society. And even a poorly connected individual may derive some of the spillover benefits from living in a well-connected community.” This indicates

thoroughly the limits and restrictions of social capital as a tool for rural development. Where preconditions are poor, mischief is likely to occur, and social capital could hardly compensate, or at least extraordinary efforts are needed. Simultaneously, social capital is a precious asset. A “connected society” that is rich in social capital may promote rural development more easily. Social capital thus requires foundational elements for thriving, such as the recognition of individuals as autonomous entities with equal rights, good governance, a stable legal framework, and planned, sustainable actions. Achieving rural integration within the evolving paradigm of development requires treating social capital like a software package installed in the hardware of functional infrastructures and services, essential for successful rural development (Wiesinger, 2007).

With the selected empirical case studies, we aimed to provide diverse examples of successful initiatives in the rural context that thrive thanks to their ability to enhance social capital. These case studies are exemplary for thousands of initiatives worldwide that aim to increase rural prosperity. From our observations, we can conclude that for these initiatives to succeed, institutional support is crucial, and policies should encourage cooperation, foster learning opportunities, and build trust among local actors. However, ill-conceived policies can undermine social capital, as seen when closing public services disrupts community ties. Social capital is dynamic, adapting to new challenges, and its structure must evolve.

In the context of envisioning the future trajectory of social capital research, it is crucial to underscore the transformative role of women in creating and sustaining social capital within rural communities. As we have observed in our case studies, women play a central and yet sometimes overlooked role in fostering social connections and community resilience. Their contributions span various domains, including community organizing, education, healthcare, and economic activities. Despite facing unique challenges, such as limited access to resources and entrenched gender norms, women emerge as key agents in nurturing the social fabric of rural areas. Recognizing and amplifying the voices of women in social capital initiatives is vital for ensuring the holistic development and sustainability of rural communities.

Additionally, future research on social capital must look beyond economic development and involve understanding and addressing policy structures hindering rural integration in a more regionalized state system. Thus, redirecting the focus of social capital research toward sustainable rather than mere economic development is imperative. Investigating how social capital contributes to sustainable development entails examining its role in environmental protection, socio-cultural preservation, and the overall well-being of rural communities. This shift in focus aligns with the global need for holistic development approaches that prioritize long-term viability over short-term gains.

In essence, as we contemplate the future of social capital research, it becomes clear that a comprehensive understanding requires a re-evaluation of the elements contributing to the (re)creation of social capital in rural regions. This, coupled with a shift

towards sustainable development, will pave the way for a more inclusive and forward-looking research agenda in the realm of social capital.

Notes

1. <https://inn-salzach-euregio.at/> (accessed 17 January, 2024)
2. <https://www.regio-v.at/> (accessed 17 January, 2024)
3. <https://www.regio-v.at/rollen-im-wandel/neuigkeiten> (accessed 17 January, 2024)
4. <https://www.frauennetzwerk3.at/> (accessed 17 January, 2024)
5. <https://sustentabilidade.vinhosdoalentejo.pt/en/wines-of-alentejo-sustainability-programme> (accessed 17 January, 2024)
6. <https://mingamontemor.pt/> (accessed 17 January, 2024)
7. <https://www.huete futuro.org/> (accessed 17 January, 2024)
8. <https://liaison2020.eu/ambassadors/fraimon/> (accessed 17 January, 2024)

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