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Social Capital and the Adaptation to Systemic Changes: The Case of the Katowice Voivodship, Poland

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1. Introduction

Physical, technological and human resources are widely regarded as the decisive factors smoothing the process of adaptation to social changes. This is indisputable. Deposits of marketable, easily accessed and cheap natural resources, up-to-date machinery, ability to withstand skyrocketing pace of technological competition, functionally literate work-force, widely dispersed entrepreneurial attitude, heightened educational aspirations – all these enhance accommodation to the changing environment. Definitely: oil and price shocks, market collapses, technological unemployment, stagflation, adverse effects of market reforms, downsizings or outsourcings are easier to cope with, if adversely affected communities possess some of these advantages; the more of them, the better.

Recently, a new idea is becoming introduced into the debate on the foundations of economic and social development – namely the concept of *social capital* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970; Coleman, 1990). This resource is inseparable with particular community; its basic forms – trust, obligations, shared expectations, norms of reciprocity, voluntary associations – are embedded on social relations. Tight network of informal ties allows a community to build up human capital and improves its quality (Coleman, 1988: 95-120). Social capital makes it easier to overcome collective action problems (*tragedies of the commons, prisoner's dilemmas*) and enhances provision of public goods. Trust and reciprocity reduce transaction costs. No wonder, that erosion of social capital is noticed with dread (Putnam, 1995: 65-78; Putnam, 1996). Social capital may be examined from different angles, for instance as a variable speeding up economic development (Fukuyama, 1995) or as a factor improving effectiveness of public institutions and enhancing civic engagement (Putnam, 1993).

In this paper, social capital perspective is applied to the analysis of adaptation to social changes. Specifically, we discuss positive and normative aspects of social changes in the biggest Poland's old industrial region, situated in the Katowice Voivodship.¹



Fig. 1. Poland – an administrative division in the period 1975–1998

2. Social capital and the challenges of modernization

The region, until recently overwhelmingly dependent on hard coal-mining, as well as on iron and steel metallurgy, has been severely disadvantaged by post-1989 institutional, technological and structural changes in Poland's economy. Operation of market mechanisms, diffusion of more efficient, energy-conserving, technologies, change of governments' policy goals, dispersion and deepening of ecological awareness – all these have been contributing to gradual diminution of the bargaining power of these industries *vis a vis* the Polish economy and society. Despite the fact that Poland has already regained pre-transition GDP level, annual extraction of hard coal reaches ca. 70% of the 1980s level (136 million tones instead of 190-192 million tones).

¹ For detailed characteristics of the Katowice Voivodship (especially its Upper Silesian part) refer to: Błasiak, Nawrocki and Szczepański (1994); Szczepański (1997: 205–221); Nawrocki and Szczepański (1997: 74–84).

True, slowed down restructuring of mining and metallurgy² exemplifies that there is too early to say that the power of the regional heavy industrial lobby has been broken definitely, but, on the other hand, it is no longer able to influence solely and decisively the selection of goals of macroeconomic and industrial policy at the national level. Consequently, lethal for the traditional sector developments in its economic, social and political environment are unstoppable and irreversible; at worst, changes may be slowed down. Miners' trade unions can postpone closure of unprofitable mines – but cannot halt dispersion of energy-conserving technologies outside mining industry. The management of mining and metallurgy is able to water down institutional changes which would eventually introduce market discipline in these industries – but is unable to stop the extension of competencies of local governments, whose interests are often at odds with the interests of mining and metallurgy. Similarly, management and trade unions may postpone privatization – but institutions of liberal democracy, enhancing articulation of environmental interests (as well as the interests of local communities, adversely affected by heavy industry operations) are out of its reach. At the regional level, the heavy industrial lobby is still a giant in comparison with infant non-heavy industrial ones (e.g. business associations) – but it is a dwarf *vis a vis* the European Commission or the World Trade Organisation. All in all, heavy industrial special interests may postpone necessary changes – but not forever.

Sooner or later, changes in the economic, social and political environment will force radical downsizing of the traditional sector. The emergence of an alternative economic structure, based on high-tech industries and on the service sector, is essential for the diminution of social adverse effects of this development. Quantitative accumulation and qualitative improvement of the regional community's human capital, still unsuited for the requirements of postindustrial economy, is a necessary prerequisite of the enhancement of modernization. Expansion of entrepreneurship and new individualism is essential as well (Cybula and Szczepański, 1997: 74-84). Last but not least, the importance of industrial and social policies, creating institutional and financial conditions allowing and smoothing restructuring, needs to be stressed.

In the light of the above positive and normative statements, adaptation to changes, brought about by transition, should be regarded in two steps: The first step is a set of activities of numerous social actors – individuals, firms, public institutions, neighbourhood circles, peer groups, local communities, voluntary associations, etc. – resulting in 20-30 years long perspective in the creation of postindustrial economic and social structure. In the second step all enumerated actors should address adverse effects of their own activities. (Division of these two steps is purely analytical; in reality they are interlinked.) For instance, shutting down an inefficient coal-mine is an adaptation to changed economic conditions, but policies enabling redeployment, retraining or earlier retirement, should come along. Closure of basic vocational

² For details of the policy towards coal-mining in the period 1990–1996, refer to Szczepański (1997).

schools training in non-prospective professions will make youngsters and their parents modify their educational attitudes. Changed educational expectations, in turn, are to be met by changed structure of the education system. Pay schemes rewarding intellectual work rather than physical one will trigger social unrest unless certain norms of traditional culture disappear.

Social capital may enhance the adaptation in the following ways:

- First, by contributing to the creation of human capital. For instance, in integrated local communities civic engagement resulting in new schools or colleges is more frequent, diffusion of up-to-date educational attitudes is smoother, mutual help in retraining is more likely to appear.
- Second, by relaxing the shock brought about by unemployment. Made redundant miner or metallurgist entangled in a web of relations of trust might find new job easier, might be persuaded to retrain by one of his trustees, might evade mental depression and find new points of reference in reinforcing self-esteem, etc.
- Third, by overcoming collective action and free rider problems in the provision of public goods enhancing adaptation, such as new schools, colleges, updated curricula, improved ecological conditions, associations articulating interests of local communities or entrepreneurs, elaborated programmes of local development, effective promotion of particular town resulting in an inflow of capital, improvement of economic condition in particular locality, reduced level of anomie, etc.

3. Social capital in the Katowice Voivodship

The Katowice Voivodship (and especially its Upper Silesian part) has *long-lasting* tradition of cultural norms conveniently associated with social capital. Industrial culture of work³ enhances reciprocity and trust in working teams. The institution of family plays an important role in Silesian workers' communities; strong family ties and a sense of loyalty towards relatives are often cited as important traits of Upper Silesian culture. One can also note a hundred years long tradition of voluntary associations (such as sports clubs and choral societies), contributing to the integration of local communities – apart from Roman Catholic parishes (in some localities Protestant ones as well). Nevertheless, for three reasons the regional social capital is both weak and incongruent with the requirements of the adaptation to change:

- First, cultural norms do not enhance entrepreneurship and elasticity. A person socialized in traditional workers' culture is quite reliable in strictly defined en-

³ For the description of the Silesian industrial culture of work, see Błasiak (1993: 91–98).

vironment – but is unprepared to handle rapidly changing circumstances. Performs excellently if told, what to do – but is hardly no entrepreneur. Moreover, the culture lacks norms rewarding intellectual and highly qualified work. True, one can find examples of integrated communities in the region – but norms observed by these communities may inhibit adaptation rather, than enhance it.

- Second, during Communist rules, command economy and undemocratic political system contributed decisively to the weakening of social ties at the grassroots level. For the sake of effectiveness of total control, the civil society was to great extent demolished. For the same reason, entrepreneurial attitudes were discouraged. In introducing changes authorities relied solely on top-down approach – ignoring citizens' interests and abilities.
- Third, in the period 1945–1989, apart from (semi)totalitarianism, inflow of migrants into the region additionally weakened Upper Silesian communities. New-comers, attracted by high wages and privileges associated with the employment in heavy industry, were often unwilling to integrate with existing local communities and needed time to establish their own ones. Consequently, the Katowice Voivodship is now ethnic and cultural mix, where one can find both examples of integration and anomie.

As one can see, weakness of the regional social capital, as well as its incongruence with the requirements of adaptation to change, is a consequence of (1) universal characteristics of heavy industrial development, which in the Katowice region may be traced back up to the beginning of the 19th century, and (2) the legacy of Communism. The culture of industrial workers is similar all over the world. Each rapidly developing heavy industrial region attracts migrants – and the adverse effect of its inflow is usually anomie. Only the consequences of central planning and (semi)totalitarianism are specific for the region examined in this paper.

4. Creation and conversion of social capital: Normative recommendations

The revival of integrated local communities and lower-level grassroots social groups is a key factor in triggering the process of accumulation of social capital. Networks of trust and reciprocity, voluntary associations, schools, parishes, neighbourhood circles, peer groups, etc., may allow mobilization of local communities to collective actions addressing problems brought about by modernization. Nevertheless, accumulated social capital will be incongruent with emerging postindustrial order, unless traditional regional culture converts in a way securing compatibility of traditional values with the requirements of modernity. However, the “right” proportion between traditionalism and modernity could not be imposed “from above” – first

of all, because nobody knows yet, how that proportion should look like. It is only involved individuals, groups, associations and communities, which might solve this puzzle – by trial and error, so to speak. Accumulated social capital might make such an effort more effective.

A family is the key socialising institution, introducing new generations into the complexities of social life, influencing and transmitting patterns of professional and social mobility – not to mention systems of social norms. It cannot be disregarded, however, that some scholars engaged in research on social capital stress problems brought about by the mix of a strong family and disintegrated family's social environment: E. C. Banfield identifies a phenomenon of *amoral familism* (Banfield, 1958); F. Fukuyama insists that too strict family ties make it more difficult to set up a modern corporation – the step essential for mobilising greater amount of economic resources than possible in a family firm. Nevertheless, if *familism* is entangled in a wider web of “weak” social relations of trust and reciprocity, these dangers may diminish.

The biggest problem with Upper Silesian family is its close relation with industrial culture of work. Consequently, it often transmits into new generations values, which are incongruent with the emerging *postindustrial* environment. For instance, there is a long-lasting tradition of the inheritance of parents' professions by children; a son takes up the job of miner or metallurgist, whereas daughter is socialised as a housewife. Emergence of what might be called “renewed work ethics”, melting together traditional respect for hard work with modern patterns of professional career (e.g. software designer, manager, financier, scientist) is thereby essential for the elimination of this drawback of intra-family socialisation.

In an industrial worker's family housewife plays by no means unimportant role. True, husband/father is unquestionable breadwinner. Nevertheless, wife/mother is usually a coordinator of family's everyday life, a keeper of family's financial resources, an inspirer of family's decisions with respect to consumption. Definitely, male miners and metallurgists are not the only ones interested in the content of modernization processes. Their wives should be kept informed as well. This need to be taken into account in public relations campaigns, accustoming the regional community with the essence and consequences of changes.

The revival of integrated local communities is strictly related with the emergence of civic journalism. Majority of citizens are interested mostly with news and problems concerning their closest environment: town, district, commune. Therefore, local newspapers or radios, regional TV, may play undeniable role in mentioned public relations campaigns. It is, however, essential to keep the messages and argumentation at the complexity level matching average functional literacy and symbolic competencies. All over the world, excellently elaborated reform packages often fail due to poor communication with affected communities.

Leadership should not be disregarded as a factor smoothing adaptation to change. The role of a leader is not only to mobilize and organize particular group – though

by no means it is unimportant. It is an individual, who as the first comes across a solution to particular problem; only later that solution spills over. The greater is respect for that individual, the greater are his/her leadership skills, the stronger and tighter are relations of trust in particular community – the quicker the new pattern diffuses and, consequently, the adaptation is smoother.

5. Conclusion

The reader has surely noticed that recommended accumulation and conversion of the regional social capital is contingent on the presence of ... converted social capital. This chicken-and-egg problem we suggest to address in a way proposed by R. D. Putnam for Southern Italy: Institutional reforms, empowering individuals, groups, local and regional communities with substantial competencies at the expense of higher level authorities, might in time result in the accumulation of social capital.

From the perspective of an individual, civic engagement or entrepreneurship makes sense only if effects of individual or collective actions are sensible. A person might take responsibility for himself/herself only if allowed to do so. In post-1989 Poland, elimination of institutional and legal barriers to the development of private sector resulted in the expansion of entrepreneurship. Similarly, institutional reform enabling establishment of local self-governments, introduced in 1990, resulted in numerous examples of local initiatives: educational, entrepreneurial, cultural, developmental and others. These two developments exemplify that if persons, groups and communities are allowed to address problems – sooner or later solutions are found somewhere.

Further institutional reforms, resulting in extended freedom of action for individuals and communities, are therefore strongly recommended. True, freedom of action does not guarantee that proper solutions to problems would be found in each case. Freedom is often abused or misunderstood. Errors are made. Sense of responsibility for the consequences of one's own actions (or non-actions) is often weak. Taking into account such adverse effects of deregulation and decentralization, one could not, however, suggest an even worse cure; one-sided reliance on top-down approach. Extended competencies and freedom of action give a chance – *dirigisme* offers only an excuse and destroys already existing social capital. Even if in the deregulated and decentralised environment some individuals and communities fail to exploit emerging opportunities properly – it will be to great extent their own fault.

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