

DOI: 10.17626/dBEM.ICoM.P00.2015.p049

SHARING THE COMMON GOOD IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FLOW OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

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Summary: Interest in social capital in various teachings, as a consequence, boils down to an analysis of the benefits to individuals and communities and related interpersonal relationship and institutional networks. The literature used indicates that social capital is a common good, not private or public, regardless of whether it is located in the communities of organizations or community nature. It is treated as a resource in addition, anchored in the network, from which they can benefit people with access to the network. The aim of this article is to attempt to answer a number of questions regarding the sharing of social capital, taking into account an interdisciplinary approach to issues.

Keywords: common good, social capital, social networks

1. Introduction

Possession of goods is one of the basic motivations of a human being; it especially motivates human economic activity. Such approach refers to the issue of economic capital; nevertheless the notion of a good may be also referred to social capital. It is significant that according to the idea of social capital, the access to the common goods is considered in the context of their position within the network of social relationships. The members of the networks of interpersonal relationships activate capital accumulated within these networks, at the same time they become beneficiaries of the goods located in the network.

The idea of network became popular in the texts from the field of social sciences together with the development of digital technologies and the Internet. The precursory research methodology concerning social networks was initiated in a form of sociometry by Moreno in the first half of the 20th century (Bendyk, 2004,). Whereas advanced network analysis has been developed since the 1970s (Turner, 2004,). Średnicka, following Tapscott (1996) claims that the first decade of the 21st century initiates the era of networked intelligence, which may lead to creation of new economic structures and new society (Średnicka, 2011). On the other hand, Słocińska (2012), while characterizing the scientific approach to the organized forms of human activity, links logic of networking to performative approach. According to this approach, for functioning of collective entities, people and their behaviours are more important than structures and features of an organization.

2. Participation and interpersonal relationships within social networks

Highlighting positive character of creating new society and new structures is an approach as old as sociology itself, which nominal founder is a positivist conceptualist, Comte. Nevertheless, social and structural changes cannot be belittled. The catalyst for the above-mentioned changes is rapid development of digital technologies. Because of that, the structures themselves cannot be neglected by adopting only humanistic approach. It seems that scientific division into humanistic (social) and natural aspects is relevant only for the representatives of social sciences (Berghe, 2006).

Social capital, the basis of which is a network of social relationships, is created on the basis of mutual trust as well as mutual obligations (Stelmaszczyk, 2011). They foster creation of the information- flow networks. Paradoxically, network structure in particular cases is being created from the group of people not aiming to create such a network. An example of such a structure may be a group of people joining the network of Multi Level Marketing, initially as consumers (Bazan-Bulanda, 2014). Structures of MLM created by the system of registration of individuals in the Internet portal become exclusive towards people digitally excluded. Analysing network organizations in the broad context, some authors even claim, that trust in such organizations is short-term and depersonalized (Bylok, 2014). It may be concluded that a long-reaching consequence of network openness may cause loss of trust. Stelmaszczyk (2011) proves that trust noticeable while expressing oneself is dependent on the circumstances and the strength of ties within the network. Nevertheless, Słocińska (2012) advocated that in the networks there is no space for people characterized by Machiavellianism. People showing such type of behaviours, especially blocking the flow of information, are rejected. Therefore, it may be assumed that social groups organized in a form of a network are able to deal with the „free riders”, whose actions could lead to loss of trust. Hence, trust cannot be a short-term phenomenon in case of opening of a network. It should be rather presumed, that maintaining trust with simultaneous opening of the network requires existence of a permanent root. An effect of this is „crystallization” (stiffening) of a social network (Skolik, 2014).

According to Stelmaszczyk (2011), in order to have the relationships among partners existing, including trust, they have to be attractive for each other, and the type of attractiveness is dependent on similarities in various dimensions. It seems, that the position of Średnicka (2011) is similar. The author claims that networking leads to increase in the frequency of relationships „ad hoc” (taking into account not necessary attractive „strangers”), and through this, to tensions and uncertainty. From this point of view, the implicit network has not structuralized form. Every new user of the network is a potential rival in the access to the goods. Assuming, that the network has its permanent root (the most active and relatively the longest functioning members in a given network), every new member is treated the same way, and their different values may be potential assets for social capital. What is more, rather for people joining the group, created relationships in the network may seem to be full of tensions and ambiguities. It would be also difficult to agree that with the risk arising from interdependence of many networks, members involved in the networks every single time have to discuss the matters concerning binding decisions (Średnicka, 2011). Sometimes the loss of access to the assets of the social capital may be the lower cost than the use of energy and psychological costs connected with the decision making process.

3. Structure of networks versus hierarchy

The key elements of the networks are the nodes, defining their spatial structure. According to Słocińska, the modern analogy to the system of roads, at the crossroads of which the transfer of knowledge occurs, is cyberspace (Słocińska, 2012). The notion of nodes in the context of analysis of relationships of an individual with the space of activities is much older. It was used in the 1960s by Lynch (1990) for analyses of cognitive maps. As far as for Lynch the nodes referred to space, in the texts concerning information society, the term means the key members of the networks (Castells, 2007, pp. 412-413), creating „the root of the network”. Further elements of the network structure are the connections between the nodes, which in the context of social capital lead to an effect of synergy. According to Bartkowski, these connections are based on the values, models, atmosphere of cooperation and trust, sense of belonging, loyalty, cooperative approach, readiness for cooperation for community (Bartkowski 2007, pp. 84-85). Dyduch (2011) claimed that failure to build the relationships

between the participants of the network might stop the development of innovation and initiative. It is worth considering, to what extent the strength of the ties (intensity of involvement and frequency of relationships), would be optimal for innovative activities. In accordance with the ideas referring to the problem of social deviations, innovations are the main deviations towards conformist activities (Merton, 2002). Whereas conformism may be considered as an effect of creating strong relationships and avoiding risky (innovative) behaviours.

Apart from the above mentioned elements of the network structure in the description the following elements are also taken into account: network density, size, centralization, heterogeneity (Bylok, 2013). In the network analysis, it is important to focus on the elements such as: links, equivalence, bridges and number of links, reciprocation, transitivity and power (Turner 2002, pp. 605-613). Besides the structural dimension of social capital presented this way, there are also discussed cognitive approaches referring to the organizational culture and relational approach – connected with the rules and trust (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Dependently on the configuration, network may have more egalitarian, or more hierarchical form. In case formal organizations, hierarchical networks are characterized by lower density, and a manager is a clear, central node. In case of egalitarian networks there are not any clear nodes – there is no center, and managers are relatively more distanced towards personnel (Bylok 2013). Such forms may be analysed methodologically as ideal types, from which the intermediate models may be constructed. If, thanks to the development of modern technologies, the space became shrunken and caused progressive thickening of the network structure (Słocińska, 2012), it may be concluded, that such phenomenon would lead to gradual equalization of social networks in the organizations.

According to Średnicka „[at] the level of a country and organization various networks intersect and it is not possible to have them organized in a form of a hierarchical structure” (Średnicka 2011, p. 101). It would be hard to say whether in fact the size of a network and dissemination of networking could lead to simultaneous disappearance of hierarchical structure. Even in the network environment of a cyberspace, which is not orderly, locally emerge and strengthen hierarchies (Skolik, 2012).

4. Access to the common goods within networks of social capital

The essence of functioning of social networks is potential identified with social capital (Bartkowski, 2007), where interpersonal relationships generate connections between the assets. They are activated and „socialized” within the networks of social capital (Bartkowski 2007, p. 84). According to scientific literature, activating of the assets is connected with the issue of diffusion of networking, e.g. from the countries of Western Europe to the Central European area (Średnicka, 2011). It would mean that social capital was created together with development of democratic, free-market societies (Przybysz and Sauś, 2004). Nevertheless, it has to be assumed that network structures had been existing much earlier – in the period of development of inquisition (Bendyk, 2004).

Creating of the network structures secondarily contribute to the phenomenon of intercepting the assets located in the social relationships (Pogonowska, 2004). The profits from the network are mostly earned by the communities creating common goods, but it may be also of some benefit for people, who to some smaller extent contribute to the production of social capital as well. Besides, the networks are created as a result of the need for joint creation of profits (Lin, 2002). From the neoliberal point of view, common goods are prone to be destroyed, or damaged, if they are not privatized. According to the „New institutionalism” common goods are not stored, or destroyed, if the communities using them: designate the borders for the place in which the goods will be located; adjust the rules to the local needs, but

the rules may also be modified by the members of the communities; sanctions are graded and there is the possibility to monitor actions of individuals (Hofmokl, 2009, pp. 40-41). Manufactured economic goods may be replaceable by other forms of capital, including social capital (Bartkowski, 2007). Transactions, therefore, transformations of various forms of capital into other forms, are connected with different costs that can limit the loose of action. At the same time, some of the costs may be borne in order to protect the rules of mutuality (Bartkowski 2007).

5. Conclusions

If cooperation reduces risk, it is not because of elimination of deviant behaviours, but because of limited tolerance. Existing rules are not reified, but constantly socially negotiated. Otherwise, it would cause closing the communities in the state of lack of trust and ostracism against the new members. If the models of cooperation are cultural matrix, it does not mean that they are „monoliths”. In the network environment, the models have greater chance to survive, the effect of what is maintenance and enriching of the assets. If the social capital enables innovations, it happens thanks to the possibility of using common goods, including knowledge about mistakes. For survival of the network of assets of social capital there should be kept greater balance between chaos of deviations, and stagnation of normative order.

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