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## COMMUNITY CAPACITY, SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL: THE SOCIOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS IN CROATIA AND SERBIA

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### ABSTRACT

*In this paper, we analyze the concepts of community capacity, the psychological sense of community and social capital. They are examined in terms of their contribution to the social capital, both theoretically, as well as empirically. Results of a comprehensive empirical study, conducted in local communities in the Republic of Croatia and Republic of Serbia, are reported and discussed. Those results demonstrate that, in South-East Europe, community capacity can be linked to the collective action, as well as to the development of social capital in local communities.*

**Keywords:** community capacity, community belonging, social capital, Croatia, Serbia

## CAPACITÀ DELLA COMUNITÀ, SENSO DI COMUNITÀ E CAPITALE SOCIALE: LE DIMENSIONI SOCIOLOGICHE ED ECONOMICHE IN CROAZIA E SERBIA

### SINTESI

*In questo lavoro, analizziamo i concetti di capacità della comunità, il senso psicologico di comunità e del capitale sociale. Essi vengono esaminati in termini di contributo al capitale sociale, sia a livello teorico, così come empiricamente. Sono riportati e discussi i risultati di uno studio empirico globale, condotto in comunità locali nella Repubblica di Croazia e la Repubblica di Serbia. Questi risultati dimostrano che, nel Sud-Est Europa, le capacità della comunità possono essere collegate all'azione collettiva, nonché allo sviluppo del capitale sociale nelle comunità locali.*

**Parole chiave:** capacità della comunità, comunità di appartenenza, capitale sociale, Croazia, Serbia

COMMUNITY CAPACITY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL:  
THEORETICAL DETERMINANTS

There are multiple and mutually competing definitions of *community capacity* (for conducting a collective social action). For instance, Goodman et al (1998, 259) believe that community capacity relates to identification of public problems, mobilizing community members to solve them and, finally, addressing these problems, although their entire discussion is placed in the specialized context of public health. A useful literature survey, resulting in a more generic definition of community capacity, has been conducted by Chaskin (2001), who identified several theoretical approaches. They include: a) existence of preconditions (resources, commitment, involved actors' knowledge and skills ...) required to solve shared problems, b) individual participation in the community processes related to solving common issues, c) community competences to create persistent collective action and social cooperation.

Both of these competences require that the individual behavior is directed towards a common goal, which corresponds to a widely accepted definition of (*community*) *leadership* (Bonjean and Olson, 1964; Ricketts and Ladewig, 2008). It can be interpreted as a 'glue', which brings together various forms of communal resources, processes and specific forms of knowledge/skills, being vastly different across the European social landscape (Hautekeur, 2005).

Both, individual determination to direct one's behavior toward collective objectives, as well as the individual motivation to cooperate, depend on the psychological identification to being a member of the community, i.e. on the *sense of community belonging*. This is an established construct in social psychology, with different approaches to its measurement. The most popular seems to be the *Sense of Community Index* (SCI), initially developed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) in an empirical study of a neighborhood, consisting of 1200 adults. It is aimed toward identifying the sense of belonging to a traditional/geography-based community, with the initial studies (Perkins et al., 1990) focusing on urban blocks. The variables employed include: (a) membership and the sense of identification with the community as a collective, (b) influence of community in changing individual behavior and vice versa, (c) needs fulfillment, related to cooperative behavior in the community and (d) emotional support from living in the community (Pretty and McCarthy, 1999). The lengthy SCI questionnaire with open-ended questions (so-called SCI-L), used in these studies, has often been found to be very inconvenient for practical purposes, which has led to the development of a 'short version'. It consists of only 12 items (i.e. three items per each of the four dimensions), phrased as true/false questions. The validity of both the SCI construct and the questionnaire has since been confirmed by the study of other than (physical) communities, such as the

workplace (Pretty and McCarthy, 1991), communities of interest (Obst, Zinkiewicz and Smith, 2002), etc.

The network of efficient relationships among the community members (i.e. *social capital*) should be the result of the interactions among the resources, social systems/mechanisms, individual identification with the community and their motivation to participate in collective action, as well as the capacity of individual leaders. Social structure with positive mutual (re)inforcements among these elements provides beneficial social outcomes due to "*social networks and [...] the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them*" (Putnam, 2000, 19). Therefore, *network is the capital*, either as it bonds homogeneous social groups (such as communities), or *bridges* heterogeneous actors/groups/communities via *weak ties*, i.e. social connections built by individuals belonging simultaneously to multiple social groups (Granovetter, 1983). *The community capacity should, presumably, lead to the development of social capital*.

Namely, an exceptional creation of social capital is ascribed to the activism and other forms of social action and/or social change, which emphasize their "togetherness" through the elements of common identity and shared (practical) goals (Gittel, Ortega-Bustamante and Steffy, 2000). The lack of social capital in the contemporary communities leads to the gloomy images of the "lonely crowd", or the contemporary metaphors of "bowling alone", exemplified by Putnam's (2000) images of the declining social life in American communities. The *economic outcomes* of the developed social capital are compared by the competing images of rural Madras and wealthy Singapore (Woolcock, 1998) and are traced back to creation (or enforcement) of trust and social norms, as well as efficiency of public policies.

In this paper, the study of social capital and its potential linkages will be applied to South-East Europe (SEE), which has its specific features, due to a lack of supporting political and social context during the socialist past, as well as the transition period. The community development practice has, thus, often been viewed in terms of transferring the best practices and tools from the 'more developed' (i.e. Western) communities/context(s), which is exemplified by the civil society handbooks (Pavić-Rogošić, 2004; Škrabalo, Miošić-Lisjak and Papa, 2006). Emergence of community development organisations in the region tended to be helped more by external initiatives and support than by organic effort (Henderson and Vercseg, 2010). At the other hand, there are some crucial obstacles related to following "Western" patterns, in order to achieve social changes initiated and performed by communities in the region. For instance, results of social actions (interventions) performed by local communities and their partners are sometimes "intangible" and therefore not interesting/motivating for potential participants (Bežovan, 2005), which should serve as an additional motivation for this venue of social research.

True = 1

False = 0

- Q1. I think my [block] is a good place for me to live.  
 Q2. People on this [block] do not share the same values.  
 Q3. My [neighbors] and I want the same things from the [block].  
 Q4. I can recognize most of the people who live on my [block].  
 Q5. I feel at home on this [block].  
 Q6. Very few of my [neighbors] know me.  
 Q7. I care about what my [neighbors] think of my actions.  
 Q8. I have no influence over what this [block] is like.  
 Q9. If there is a problem on this [block] people who live here can get it solved.  
 Q10. It is very important to me to live on this particular [block].  
 Q11. People on this [block] generally don't get along with each other.  
 Q12. I expect to live on this [block] for a long time.

Total Sense of Community Index = Total Q1 through Q12

Subscales: Membership = Q4 + Q5 + Q6  
 Influence = Q7 + Q8 + Q9  
 Reinforcement of Needs = Q1 + Q2 + Q3  
 Shared Emotional Connection = Q10 + Q11 + Q12

\*Scores for Q2, Q6, Q8, Q11 need to be reversed before scoring.

**Image 1: A short version of the Sense of Community Index questionnaire, consisting of 12 true/false items (<http://www.communityscience.com/pubs/Sense%20of%20Community%20Index.pdf>)**

## CONSTRUCTS, MEASURES AND METHODS

The measurements of previously described theoretical constructs are based on previous empirical studies. The *community capacity* construct has been created according to the conceptualization of Chaskin (2001), with two survey items measuring the prerequisites and capability for collective action and two item, related the community's ability to identify and involve its members in the problem-solving process. The *social capital* has been conceptualized in line with Becker's (1996, 12) operationalization of "*choices of peers in the relevant network of interactions*". This concept has been converted into two survey items, detecting trust (as the major input) and peer assistance (as the major output of the positive peer choices). This is consistent with the interpretation of social capital as social ties (or networks of ties), which encourage trust, reciprocity and effective penalization of those who oppose the social order produced in such a manner. This is one of two major conceptualizations of social capital, with the alternative

one being the notion of functional norms, serving the interests of a wider social structure (Golubović, 2008).

A comparative research project European Value Study – EVS (Arts, Gelissen and Luijkx, 2003), provides rich empirical evidence of difference among post-communist countries in terms of citizens' values in terms of belonging to "Intermediate" and "Post-totalitarian" clusters. In this study Croatia belongs to Intermediate cluster. There is also empirical evidence of differences between Croatia and Serbia, according to CIVICUS Index of Civil Society project, which give reasons to conclude that two societies are different in terms of charitable giving, collective community actions, level of trust and capacity of civil society organisation to contribute in process of social capital building (Bežovan and Zrinščak, 2007; Milivojević, 2007). Also, empirical European Value Study evidence (Pickel, 2010) on political culture put Croatia and Serbia in two different clusters of countries.

Nevertheless, members, compared to non-members of civic organisations produced in both Croatia and Serbia, do not differ in creation of social capital (Bežovan

**Table 1: Sense of community index item values (Source: Empirical research)**

COMPONENTS & Items FOR THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY INDEX	MEAN	SD
<b>Reinforcement of Needs</b>		
I think my (community) is a good place for me to live.	3.8	1.29
People in this (community) do not share the same values.	3.3	1.40
My (neighbours/fellow citizens) and I want the same thing from the (community).	3.5	1.39
<b>Membership</b>		
I can recognize most of the people who live in this (community).	4.1	1.25
I feel at home in my (community).	4.5	0.99
Very few of my (neighbours/fellow citizens) know me.	2.4	1.51
<b>Influence</b>		
I care what my (neighbours/fellow citizens) think of my actions.	3.4	1.49
I have no influence over what this (community) is like.	3.2	1.42
If there is a problem in this (community), people who live here can get it solved.	2.8	1.45
<b>Shared Emotional Connections</b>		
It is very important to me to live in this particular (community).	3.9	1.43
People in this (community) generally do not get along with each other.	2.8	1.29
I expect to live in this (community) for a long time.	4.1	1.28

Note: Items in italic were reverse scored

and Zrinščak, 2007; Milivojević, 2007). Members of Croatian civic organisations do contribute bit a more to social capital production than it is the case with Serbian organizations. In general, it might be understood for transitional countries as lack of civic engagement (Celichowski, 2004).

Two forms of *community actions/initiatives* were analyzed: formal (initiated by formally established organizations, such as nonprofit organizations, civic associations, etc.) and informal ones (initiated by individuals, as evidenced by providing assistance to neighbours, family, friends and other actors in the community). Formal actions strengthen bridging social capital, while informal is rooted in communities with stronger dependence on family ties, described as ethos of "amoral familism" (Banfield, 1958). This has been done due to an insight from the civil society research, implying that the "post-communist" status might be associated with a high level of distrust in official institutions, including the civil society – both in the SEE region (Bežovan, 2005; Milivojević, 2007), and in the post-socialist context in general (Howard, 2002).

*Sense of community belonging* has been measured by the short version of Sense of Community Index (SCI) ques-

tionnaire, widely accepted as a valid proxy of individual community attachment (Perkins et al., 1990). Its four major components (Membership, Reinforcement of needs and Shared emotional connection) consist of multiple items, measured on standard five-point Likert scales. The component scale scores were computed as linear combinations of items, only for those participants, who answered all the items of which it consists.

The expected relationships among constructs are introduced by the following hypotheses:

*H1. The construct of community capacity (as well as its components, i.e. sense of belonging to a community, communal leadership and access to shared resources) is associated to collective action in communities.*

*H2. Community belonging, community leadership and access to shared resources are positively associated with social capital.*

*H3. Collective action in a community is positively associated with social capital.*

A survey has been created and administered to a probability-based, multi-stage stratified sample of Croa-

**Table 2: Bivariate correlations - community capacity and actions (Source: Empirical research)**

	Formal community action	Informal community action	Community belonging	Shared (community) resources	Community leadership
Formal community action	1	<b>.360**</b>	<b>.175**</b>	<b>.300**</b>	<b>.150**</b>
Informal community action		1	<b>.231**</b>	<b>.372**</b>	<b>.170**</b>
Community belonging			1	<b>.406**</b>	<b>.327**</b>
Community (shared) resources				1	<b>.390**</b>
Community leadership					1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

tian and Serbian households, via the CATI (Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing) software tool. This is a comprehensive automated system for telephone interviewing, fully supported by specialized software. Participants' answers are directly recorder into the computer, which also provides a systematic and sustained control of the interviewers' work and the data quality.

The research population is defined in terms of the general population of Croatia and Serbia. The sample consists of 612 households in both countries. It is probability-based, stratified in two stages and calculated according to the population listing from the previous census data, with counties (regions) and settlement size used as control variables. Random selection of the participants

is guaranteed by the CATI system, since the telephone numbers that are used are randomly generated. These numbers are controlled and filtered by the software according to the control variables used: belonging of a community to an individual Croatian or Serbian county, settlement size, gender, age and completed education of the respondent. Each number that is not answered is redialled five times, increasing the chance of interviewing participants that are rarely at home.

#### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The mean empirical values for individual items of the Sense of Community Index provide an interesting

**Table 3: Bivariate correlations – community capacity and social capital (Source: Empirical research)**

	Community belonging	Social capital	Community leadership	Shared (community) resources
Community belonging	1	<b>.469**</b>	<b>.323**</b>	<b>.417**</b>
Social capital		1	<b>.421**</b>	<b>.413**</b>
Community leadership			1	<b>.390**</b>
Shared (community) resources				1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Table 4: Multiple regression model for the community capacity components as predictors of social capital (Source: Empirical research)**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t statistic	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	-.178	.235		-.756	.450
	Community belonging measured by SCI (5point)	.049	.006	.316	8,322	.000
	Community leadership	.237	.040	.227	5,991	.000
	Community (shared) resources	.194	.040	.191	4,905	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Social capital

introductory 'anchors' for further discussion (see Table 1). It is interesting that *only the community resources/capacity for collective action are perceived to be lower than scale midpoints*, which might be influenced by the low acceptance of formal community actions.

In order to test *Hypothesis H1*, bivariate correlations between the overall construct of community capacity (including its individual components) and the community action have been computed. The empirical results demonstrate the existence of relationships of low to moderate strength among the community capacity (including its individual components) and actual community actions – both at the formal and informal level (see Table 3). Nevertheless, all these correlations indicate highly significant relationship (at 1% level), which justifies further research and the *acceptance of hypothesis H1*.

*Hypothesis H2* is related to the relationship between the community capacity and the resulting social capital. Naturally, community capacity is not the only social factor influencing social capital: so, it can be expected that the empirical relationship between the two variables is statistically significant, but does not have to explain the

entire social capital available. However, if the notion of capacity is correct, each of the components of community capacity is expected to be positively linked to the social capital of the community.

The positive associations of the individual community capacity components to the community's social capital will be examined, in order to indicate if the hypothesis H2 might be accepted. As demonstrated by empirical results in Table 3, there are significant correlations (at 1% of statistical significance), of low to moderate strength, among all the components of community capacity and social capital. This leads to the conclusion that the associations among the variables *ensure that H2 can be accepted*.

Although the causality has not been implied by this hypothesis, it will be assessed by the multiple regression model, explaining the social capital, with the three community capacity components as its predictors. It explains 31.7% of the entire variance in social capital, which is acceptable, due to the influence of other factors. The entire model is significant ( $F=90,673$ ;  $Sig.=0.000$ ), as well as the individual coefficients (see Table 4). Therefore,

**Table 5: Bivariate correlations - (in)formal community actions and social capital (Source: Empirical research)**

	Formal community action	Informal community action	Social capital
Formal community action	1	.360**	.123**
Informal community action		1	.221**
Social capital			1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



**Table 6: Multiple regression model for (in)formal community actions as predictors of social capital (Source: Empirical research)**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.459	.181		13,562	.000
	Formal community action	.021	.018	.050	1,187	.236
	Informal community action	.108	.022	.203	4,792	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Social capital

the *Community capacity* à *Social capital* relationship seems to be confirmed in this case.

*Hypothesis H3* proposes the existence of a relationship between the collective (community) actions and the social capital. Statistical analysis shows a weak, but highly significant correlation (at 1% level) among the collective (community) actions and social capital (see Table 5).

As expected, the relationship between the informal coe causal relationship *Community action* à *Social capital* can not be examined in this case. This leads to the conclusion that the *hypothesis H3 can be also accepted*, although further research in SEE is needed. There may be multiple reasons for such a finding, with the disenchantment both with the "socialist past", as well as with the "democratic present" probably being the most significant one. With a high level of suspicion toward "the system", people may be resorting to building social capital through informal networks, friends and family.

#### ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CROATIAN AND SERBIAN COMMUNITIES

Additional testing has been performed on item and scale level for all the constructs used in the empirical research to assess the **significant differences between the Croatian and the Serbian population, in regards to their perception of local communities and their characteristics**. There are only few significant differences between the two countries. In Serbia, higher scores are achieved for scales of *Membership*, *Motivation* and *Informal community action*, while in Croatia only for the scale of *Influence*. While in Serbia, the feeling of membership in a local community is significantly higher than in Croatia, it is the other way around for the individual sense of influence over what the community is like and what happens with it. In addition, in Serbia, there is a larger reliance on the "informal" community action than in Croatia, i.e. Serbian population seems to be providing more assistance to their neighbours, friends and acquaintances informally. Informal community actions in Serbia

might be a sign of prevalence of bonding social capital, while, in Croatia it can be sign of emergence of bridging social capital.

#### CONCLUSION

The community capacity concept, described in the "Western" social context by Chaskin (1999, 2001), consisting of the factors which describe belonging to a community, communal leadership and access to shared resources, served as a starting point for this study. Both the sociological and the economic theoretical consideration would imply the following chain of causal relationships: *Community capacity* à *Collective (community) action* à *Social capital*.

In this study, the hypotheses were set in a "modest" way, i.e. by assuming only the existence of mutual relationships (and not the causality). The empirical research results have indicated a range of interesting findings:

1. A "virtuous circle" exists, even in the SEE social/community context, which seems to be troubled with multiple problems. Namely, there is a *synergetic overall result: enhancement of one of the capacity components has a synergetic effect to the entire community capacity for action, due to the high interdependence among the individual components*;
2. The *expected positive relationship between the underlying components of the community capacity and the (resulting) social capital is established* in the analyzed SEE societies (Croatia and Serbia). It was also possible to demonstrate that each of the proposed components of community capacity contributes to the increase of social capital in studied SEE communities. It is still not clear whether some of the more "parochial" characteristics of the region actually *help its communities to overcome the problems characteristic for the developed society*: this needs to be confirmed by future research;

3. The existence of a relationship between the community actions and the resulting social capital would complete the hypothesized cycle, linking community capacity to collective (community) actions to social capital. This might be a perfectly logical proposition in a developed social context, although specific characteristics of SEE communities could undermine such a logic, which would be a significant implication for the community development practice. This is the reason why the research design differentiated the "institutionalized" and "uninstitutionalized" community action. The empirical research has

confirmed these, initially hypothesized forms of collective action, since it has been demonstrated that *the "full circle" of community capacity, leading to action, leading to the development of social capital, can not be empirically confirmed (although the informal community action is much stronger than the informal one and contributes more to the creation of social capital).*

The authors believe that the presented findings represent an interesting starting point for further research in the SEE region and that they might be useful to community and other nonprofit organizations, active in this area.



## POTENCIAL SKUPNOSTI, SMISEL ZA SKUPNOST IN SOCIALNI KAPITAL: SOCIOLOŠKA IN EKONOMSKA DIMENZIJA NA HRVAŠKEM IN V SRBIJI

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### POVZETEK

*Prispevek analizira uveljavljene koncepte potenciala skupnosti, psihološkega smisla za skupnost in socialnega kapitala ter predstavlja njihova teoretična in empirična razmerja na primeru Hrvaških in Srbskih lokalnih skupnosti. V prispevku predpostavljamo, da potencial skupnosti in vse njegove komponente (tj. psihološki občutek pripadnosti skupnosti, lokalno vodstvo in dostop do skupnih virov), vodijo v kolektivne akcije, ki predstavljajo vir socialnega kapitala. Empirični rezultati kažejo na obstoj povezave med potencialom skupnosti in kolektivnimi akcijami v lokalnih skupnostih, kakor tudi med kolektivnimi akcijami in socialnim kapitalom. Empirična raziskava je bila izvedena na vzorcu dveh držav in vključuje 612 odgovorov hrvaških in srbskih gospodinjstev. Odgovore smo pridobili s pomočjo računalniško podprtega telefonskega anketiranja (ang. CATI). CATI je avtomatiziran sistem za izvedbo telefonskega anketiranja, ki na temelju uporabe javnega telefonskega imenika omogoča raziskovalcem oblikovanje naključnega vzorca, klicanje telefonskih števil potencialnih anketirancev ter podporo pri zastavljanju vprašanj in vnosu podatkov v predlogo, ki je ustrezna za nadaljnjo statistično analizo.*

*Celotno verigo hipotetiziranih povezav med konstrukti lahko empirično potrdimo (potencial skupnosti à kolektivne akcije à socialni kapital), vendar v skladu z izbranimi omejitvami. Tako je razvidno, da so neformalne kolektivne akcije (na temelju prijateljstva, pripadnosti družini, itn.) verjetno precej močnejši socialna sila, kot formalne kolektivne akcije, ki temeljijo na pripadnosti organizacijam civilne družbe. Predstavljena spoznanja nato nadalje obravnavamo glede na razlike med hrvaškimi in srbskimi skupnostmi. Pričakujemo, da bodo predstavljena spoznanja služila kot temeljno izhodišče za nadaljnje študije na tem področju, kakor tudi nudila empirične informacije potrebne regionalnim skupnostim in drugim neprofitnim organizacijam.*

**Ključne besede:** potencial skupnosti, pripadnost skupnosti, socialni kapital, Hrvatska, Srbija

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