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TRUST AND SOCIAL CAPITAL RESEARCH IN HUNGARIAN ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY, 1995-2012. A LITERATURE REVIEW

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The concepts of social networks, social capital and trust and their impact on the economic arrangements and performance of nascent capitalist economies have raised many research questions in the post-socialist countries of Europe. The following paper is designed to summarize the directions and conclusions of the empirical research which has been carried out in connection with trust and social capital in Hungary between 1995 and 2012. To maintain a clear and narrow focus, this literature review pays attention only to those papers that undertake analysis in the field of economy. This includes such research that is designed to investigate the trust and social capital-related aspects of economic transactions, economic behaviors and attitudes. Correspondingly, papers that discuss issues like trust in democratic institutions (e.g. Boda, Medve-Bálint 2012), the effects of social capital on social inequality (e.g. Lengyel, Bartha, 2000; Bartus, 2001), on efficiency in education (e.g. Fényes, 2008), on wage income (e.g. Sik, 2004; Hermann, Kopasz, 2011) or trust and social capital from the perspective of immigration (e.g. Gödri, 2010; Göncz, Lengyel, Tóth, 2012) are omitted intentionally. I also leave out of consideration the wide range of literature which focuses on corruption (e.g. a recent social capital-related paper by Szántó, Tóth, Varga, 2012). Although the phenomenon of corruption is closely related to the question of trust, relationship networks and social capital and has been intensively researched in post-socialist countries, including Hungary, research about corruption is a distinct literature within economic sociology which is too broad to be discussed substantively in the frame of this paper.

According to an analysis based on Eurobarometer 2004 (Wallace, 2005 in

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Tóth et al., 2005), the general level of trust in Hungary (25%) is below the average of the EU25 (30%), but is above the average of new EU countries (15%). If we classified countries into three groups based on trust, Hungary would be found in the upper segment of the lowest group. Relationship capital is relatively high (at least 31% of respondents answered positively to a question which asked whether they could borrow the equivalent of one month´s salary from a friend if they were in financial difficulty). The average is 22% in the thirteen countries that were researched. However, social capital measured by the most common proxy (membership in civil organizations) proves to be lower than average (30%) (Tóth et al., 2005). By reviewing the latest Hungarian literature on this topic I seek to find answers to the question of whether this general distrust and the low level of social capital are also present in the economic sector. This literature review thus has three sections. The first provides an overview of the research questions used to identify the main fields of interest. The second contains a theoretical overview which focuses on the differences in applied approaches (conceptualization) and their methodological consequences (operationalization). The last section summarizes the most significant findings of the empirical research which was reviewed.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The system change in 1989 in Hungary resulted in the creation of new social and economic institutional settings for entrepreneurs which raised the interest of many economic sociological scholars. Richard Whitley, Jeffrey Henderson, László Czaban and György Lengyel compared the two eras (state-socialism and capitalism) and focused on the concept of trust as a quality of inter-firm networks by analyzing the contractual relationships of ten Hungarian large enterprises before and after the transition (Whitley, Henderson, Czaban and Lengyel, 1996). Another paper written by Lengyel together with Tibor Kuczi discusses trust from the perspective of entrepreneurialism. Institutional trust (trust in banks), problems with coordination and co-operation and the perceived role of relationship networks were the focus of the paper, along with many other factors connected to the career patterns and beliefs of entrepreneurs (Lengyel, Kuczi, 1996). I paid specific attention to investigating this study because it operationalizes social capital (see below).

Instead of trust, Ágnes Czakó and Endre Sik investigate changes in social capital in the frame of a comparative study. They question whether the system change increased the importance of social relationship networks in economic transactions (Czakó, Sik 1995). In a later paper, Sik and Johanna Giczi describe an international research effort which investigated and compared four different indicators of social capital in different European countries (Sik, Giczi 2009).

Trust in economic entities is the focus of Zoltán Csabina, Marianna Kopasz and Magdolna Leveleki. Their empirical research focuses on the sales relationships of Hungarian businesses within the processing industry. The study examined to what extent entrepreneurs can build upon trust relationships. It also provided an explanation for why some companies' partner relations can be characterized by having a high level of trust, while others tend to have low levels of trust in their partnership network (Csabina, Kopasz, Leveleki in Lengyel 2000).

Twenty years after the transition the increase in entrepreneurship and the number of small and middle-sized businesses, their economic weight and spatial distribution and their critical success factors are still important factors in understanding economic growth and employment. Lengyel investigates contractual trust and the role of relationship networks from the perspective of the perception of success (Lengyel, 2000) and uses social capital as an explanatory variable of the prosperity of small enterprises (Lengyel 2002). Marianna Kopasz examines a similar but slightly different question: the relationship between social capital and entrepreneurial potential. She provides arguments and empirical evidence which prove that networks of social relationships are able to foster entrepreneurship through numerous mechanisms (Kopasz, 2005).

Lilla Tóth executed a number of pieces of research about local entrepreneurs from the late nineties onwards. Here I focus on her qualitative research about entrepreneurs who live in a rural Hungarian town. She investigated three aspects of trust: 1) the use of written records in entrepreneurial contracts; 2) the interdependency of networks and trust; and, 3) the attitudes of small entrepreneurs towards banks (Tóth, 2005). In her most recent paper, Tóth and Kuczi generate empirical evidence about the cooperative patterns of economic actors within the building industry and query how they are coping with the economic depression by utilizing their relationship networks (Kuczi, Tóth 2012).

Boldizsár Megyesi and his colleagues also focus on social networks in their study, but their aim is to unveil structural patterns of social capital and investigate how successfully farmers co-operate. Based on case studies about two collective farmers´ marketing initiatives from Austria and Hungary they investigated the dynamics of social capital (Megyesi et al. 2010).

In his descriptive study Gábor Hajdu analyzed ESS and EVS[2] data for the years between 1982 and 2011 which is related to trust, normative behavior, and participation in social interaction and civic discussions (as the main indicators of the value structure that is relevant from the perspective of social integration). He found that a low level of trust can be connected to violations of norms and a low level of public participation, which in turn results in self-interest in regard to (economic) behavior and corruption (Hajdu 2012).

THEORETICAL APPROACHES – CONCEPTIONS AND MEASUREMENT

Within sociological studies there is no consensual definition of 'social capital' or 'trust', and nor is the relationship between ´trust´ and ´social capital´ clearly delineated. As this circumstance has significant effects on operationalization and measurement, in the following I provide an overview of the concepts as they are utilized.

General trust appears usually at two levels: the individual (interpersonal trust) and the macro (institutional trust). Institutional trust relates not only to trust in a certain institution (such as a government or a market) but also relates to a role-specific perspective: people tend to behave according to their roles within organizations in a predictable way. Most of the literatures discussed hereafter do not make clear distinctions between these two categories but rather use variables which relate to both levels of trust.

The concept of economic sociological trust assumes the existence of a sense of uncertainty or risk to some extent. Uncertainty and risk can originate from situations when there is imperfect information and a time element (delay-action). From this perspective, trust can be thought of as a way for economic actors to cope with uncertainty or the risks of transactional relationships. The second common characteristic of trust theories is the presumed existence of interdependence between the trust provider and the trustee. This assumes that actors will be ready to become vulnerable and mutually independent during a period when risk and trust-relations coexist in the expectation that neither party will take advantage of the situation. Another component of trust is the existence of freedom, meaning that the set of possibilities available to actors is

2 The European Social Survey (ESS) focuses on changes in patterns in attitude, behaviour and opinions in Europe. Data from the 2002 European Values Study provides insights into the ideas, beliefs, preferences, attitudes, values and opinions of citizens across Europe. Data are available from as far back as 1981.

not rigorously restricted. Under these circumstances trust plays an important role in decision making (Csabina, Kopasz, Leveleki, 2000).

Sociological literature describes the three basic approaches to understanding trust as the following: a psychological approach (examining the propensity to trust as a personality characteristic), a cultural approach (understanding trust as a shared asset of community members), and finally, understanding trust as the quality of social relationships (Sztompka, 1999 in Csabina, Kopasz, Leveleki, 2000). Economic sociological research usually defines trust using the last two approaches. The relationship approach is usually related to understanding social capital.

There are four major theoretical schools, cited often in Hungarian literature, which address the field of social capital. Bourdieu declares that social capital at the individual level is a resource which is based on belonging to a social group. He defines three types of capital, economic, cultural and social, and emphasizes the importance of maintaining the interactions between them. Putnam generally mixes the concepts of trust and network relations in the term social capital and concentrates on the notion of reciprocity. He notes that social capital is a collective criterion and a cultural phenomenon. Coleman´s network-oriented conception of social capital integrates the context of education. Although the emphasis is on social ties and social networks, this definition has a focus not on the collective level but on micro elements and puts emphasis on the character of individual resources. Burt, Lin and Flap take a similar approach, pointing out that those entrepreneurs or mediators who bridge the 'structural holes' within social networks can gain individual advantages that can be considered to be forms of social capital. The fourth most referred-to scholar in this field, Fukuyama, defines social capital as a set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group. Co-operation and mobilization of resources are at the center of his understanding of the term.[3]

3 Annamária Orbán and Zoltán Szántó provide a comprehensive overview of the historical changes in the conception of 'social capital' which includes the latest definitions by the World Bank, the European Commission and Narayan. The study discusses the mechanisms, effects and origins of social capital, the opportunities for and constraints against its increase, and suggests variables for its measurement. The first group of variables is based on the number of social groups and the size of their membership (and involves such analytical indicators of network group cohesion as 'radius of trust') while the other group is based on the extension of civil organizations, measuring trust in economic, legal, social and religious institutions, political knowledge, tolerance, political performance, citizens' activity, and their involvement in volunteer organizations (Orbán, Szántó, 2005).

These major theoretical approaches to social capital are followed in empirical research undertakings which results in variation in the methodology which is used.

Hajdu analyses the micro and macro levels of social trust separately as he distinguishes between general trust (trusting each other) and institutional trust (trust in institutions such as parliament, the legal system, the press, public administration and the police). He considers trust to be an important element of social integration and the economy and a factor which can influence subjective well-being (Hajdu 2012).

Csabina, Kopasz and Leveleki define trust as a quality of social relationships, based on two assumptions. The first is that there must be interdependency between agents (trusting relations) and the second is that trust should create the chance to cope with the uncertainty and risk that are typical of exchange relations (Csabina, Kopasz, Leveleki 2000).

Tóth uses the same definition of trust but elaborates more deeply the relationship between trust and social capital. She connects trust with social capital through the concepts of risk and uncertainty. Referring to the conception of Coleman, Tóth considers social capital, on the one hand, to be as a system of obligations and expectations. The more reliable the environment and the higher the level of unfulfilled obligations (or "unpaid bills"), the more social capital can be employed. On the other hand, she also considers social capital to be the information potential that is offered by social relations. Closeness and exclusivity are the main characteristics of a social structure which supports social capital (Tóth, 2005). In a later paper written together with Kuczi, Tóth discusses an interesting trust mechanism which is able to boost social capital. This is so-called microselection, which refers to the choosing of transactional partners based on the same moral and mutual levels of trust, which in turn leads to the homogenization of relationship networks. The basic idea behind microselection is that individuals can gain experience about their business partners on an ongoing basis and modify their relationship networks gradually based on these experiences. This process results in an emerging and strengthening level of trust which is transferable to other fields of economic transactions (e.g. microselection processes which occur during a series of mutual favors or barter transactions can lead to a strengthening of trust which can transferred to traditional market transactions).[4] This reinforced social

4 This mechanism was earlier described by Kuczi in the frame of empirical research executed in the 90´s in villages along the river Galga in Hungary. The main conclusion of the study was that mutually-executed, non-monetary based worker networks (i.e. pre-selected social networks) prove to be useful resources for newly-established enterprises (Kuczi, 2000).

capital is especially well appreciated when risks increase — e.g. after an economic downturn (Kuczi, Tóth 2012).

While Tóth's paper defines social capital qualitatively, Lengyel measures it quantitatively; an undertaking which requires precise operationalization. Based on Colman's theory, several forms of social capital can be distinguished and Lengyel operationalizes two of them: obligations and norms. Obligations are quantifiable as the extent of formal and informal relations (official connections, interest-based personal connections and solidarity-based personal connections) and norms are measured through identification of the nature of hard work, norm-violating behaviors and opinions about norms. Although Lengyel considers information capital (a third form of social capital emphasized by Coleman) to be important, he does not address it separately from a methodological perspective (Lengyel, 2002).

Several pieces of literature which investigate trust and social capital and its relation to economic transactions refer to the methodology of Mari Sako and her research on Japanese enterprises. Here, the author distinguishes between two ideal types of contracting relationships: ´ACR´ or Arms'-length Contractual Relations, and ´OCR´, or Obligational Contractual Relations. ACR occur when there is a lower level of mutual dependence of firms, shorter contractual terms and detailed, written contracts, a focus on prices during transactional negotiations (i.e. orders are not initiated before agreements are made about prices) and a low level of technology and risk-sharing. The state has less of a role in regulating economic relations and there is a low level of inter-firm trust. OCR, in contrast, can be characterized by great transactional dependence on trading partners, longer (estimated) terms of trading, a greater willingness to accept or make orders before price negotiations start, more reliance on oral agreements, a greater willingness to start production prior to the writing of contracts, less frequent oversight of the quality of delivered goods and a high degree of technology and risk sharing (Sako, 1993). Sako´s conception of institutional trust is thus revealed as the expectations of business partners that their partners will behave in a calculable and mutually-acceptable way. She differentiates between three further forms of trust: 'contractual trust', based on common norms of trustworthiness and engagement; 'competence trust', based on the expectation that the business partner possesses the necessary technical and management competency; and 'goodwill trust', which relates to mutual expectations about mutual commitments (Sako 1992, 2000 in Csabina, Kopasz, Leveleki, 2000). Identifying the different characteristics of contractual relations is thus one way to measure social capital. An indicator of another type of social capital is the use of solidarity-based relations in the running of the firm such as the employment of relatives. Lengyel investigates how social capital as 'social resource' can influence an individual´s perception of security in tandem with the effects of material and cultural capital (Lengyel, 2005).

Ágnes Czakó and Endre Sik conceptualize social capital as being relationship capital (a system of mutual commitments and services). This so-called 'network capital' is based on the utilization of commonly-shared norms, rules and sanctions in economic transactions. The main characteristic of network capital is its secrecy: norms, rules and sanctions are recorded and acted on only by members of the network and remain hidden to the public (Czakó, Sik 1995). Sik argues that the role of network capital is increasing in the modern economy. A later study conducted by Sik and Johanna Giczi investigated three aspects of social capital: trust (general trust, trust towards political institutions and specific instances of trust), social norms and civic activity (Giczi, Sik 2009).

Kopasz also claims that social capital is a synonym for 'relationship networks'. As a resource which resides in social networks that can be utilized by actors, however, she states that trust is not equivalent to social capital and is not even a necessary element of it. Based on Putnam´s theory she employs two 'classic' proxies for social capital: the number of civil organizations and the size of membership of such civil organizations. She also points out the deficiencies of these proxies: first, they are unable to measure social capital in small strata where there are no civil organizations at all, and second, that making judgments based on the distribution of organizational membership may be misleading if most national organizations are registered in bigger cities (Kopasz 2005).

Boldizsár Megyesi and his colleagues use also a strong network approach in their research and focus on 'bonding', 'bridging' and 'linking' social capital. The first concept refers to horizontal, face-to-face relationships in homogenous groups, the second to bridging distances between people who are only distantly connected through which external resources can be mobilized, while the third refers to vertical inter-community ties (Woolock, 2001 in Megyesi et al. 2010).

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS – TRUST AND SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE HUNGARIAN ECONOMY

In one of the most recent pieces of research, Hajdu finds that the level of institutional trust was low in Hungary after the change of the system, just as it was in other Eastern European countries. From 2009, trust increased, which lead to Hungary being placed in the second group of three (mainly

Eastern European) countries for trust in 2010 and 2011 (lagging behind the Nordic countries). As for the level of general trust, the greatest decrease was experienced between 1982 and 1991 and the decline continued until the next decade when it stagnated. When compared to other European countries for levels of general trust, Hungary could be placed in the lower half of the second group of three, among the other Eastern European countries. The top group in 2011 was comprised of Western European countries. This low level of trust in Hungary is combined with a feeling of self-righteousness and low level of civic participation and voluntarism, according to Hajdu. Based on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Hungary ranked 54th from 182 nations in 2011 (Hajdu 2012).

A more economic transaction-related feature of trust was unveiled by Whitley and his colleagues in their (previously-mentioned) study, for which they employed the Sakoian methodological conception of trust. The general managers of ten large companies were asked (in the frame of in-depth interviews) about the three types of trust (contractual, competence and goodwill trust). Their results show that state socialism was dominated by OCR but not in the same way that Sako defines OCR based on Japanese companies. Before the socioeconomic transition there existed an asymmetrical, vertical dependence on the state, a general distrust of formal institutions and a set of regulations about economic transactions that changed only gradually after the transition occurred. Under the newly-established capitalist system market uncertainty created competition for political support and for short-term advantage (Whitley, Henderson, Czaban and Lengyel, 1996). In this context social capital took the form of long-term cooperative and contractual relations. Written contracts and the screening of transactions were not thought to be able to reduce the insecurity of business transactions; they were weak resources (Lengyel, 2005).

In studying trust in small enterprises, Csabina, Kopasz and Leveleki also use this typology which they extend with Karl Dieter Opp´s model which describes cooperative business behaviors[5] (Csabina, Kopasz, Leveleki,

5 In his entrepreneurial micro-macro model Opp defines parameters such as co-operation norms, sanctioning possibilities, the utility of cooperative behavior and the lack of cooperative behavior and the prior co-operation of the other party. Prior co-operation is more likely if cohesion between the actors is stronger, the behavior of the actors can be observed and the volume, frequency and density of interactions are higher. Thus, the size and the structure of the market (concentration) are important factors from the perspective of co-operation (Opp, 1996 in Csabina, Kopasz, Leveleki, 2000).

2000). They found that the type of product, the ownership structure and uncertainty in the economic environment have significant effects on trust relations. Trust has a more powerful role in business transactions when it is applied to services, tailor-made products or products manufactured in small amounts. Not surprisingly, economic stability has a positive impact on trust and company social capital. On the other hand, market concentration, a company's regional location[6], expectations about changes in the company's market position, company size do not correlate with trust and social capital. Moreover, normative behavior in partnerships does not affect the level of trust between the parties significantly, thus this variable does not explain trust relationships.

To answer the question of why trust and social capital is important, Tóth investigates the relationship between social networks and transactional behavior. Her empirical results show that the extension of a social network is able to affect economic transactional attitudes among local entrepreneurs: they generally prefer not to work for or work with strangers. They have low levels of trust in institutions (such as banks, multinational organizations or legal bodies) and the functional replacement of banks is based on inter-firm trust. Additionally, the research proved that business actors can also utilize the social capital which is generated by civil society: appropriate social organizations (even churches) are able to provide support for economic relations at least until their membership reaches some threshold (Tóth, 2005).

However, these important, slowly-changing relationship networks start to work differently after an economic shock. In a current paper Lilla Tóth and Tibor Kuczi find that the relationship networks in the Hungarian construction sector (which has been significantly affected by the latest financial crises) have been changed by the economic downturn: entrepreneurs are forced to work with or work for strangers more than ever, while breaches of trust are showing up within the tight relationship networks with relatives and friends. Additionally, the size of the networks has also changed, due to the exit of some actors who have moved abroad (Kuczi Tóth 2012).

Case studies by Megyesi and his colleagues also find evidence to support the importance of social networks and elaborate how social capital influences economic success by improving the mobilization of financial, material and human capital assets. They also conclude that the different negative elements of social capital (internal conflicts, the marginalization of certain groups of actors, or reductions in the transparency of organizations) can result from

6 A stronger relationship between location and trust is only found outside Budapest (urban/countryside distinction).

an unbalanced mixture of bonding, bridging and linking social capital. The role of social capital and trust in business prosperity is elaborated further by György Lengyel in panel research (1993-96, 1998, 2000 and 2003) that focuses on examining the explanatory variables behind economic success and chances of economic survival. Lengyel identifies two conceptions of success: a financial/market interpretation which include measures of success such as profits, liquidity and turnover and a natural-technological interpretation of success which employs terminology such as business relations, professional standards, capacity utilization and extension (Lengyel, 2004). How business leaders perceive their company's success depends also on their trust in the business environment (among other variables). In 2000, Lengyel found that the tightness of business relations and the level of business trust (measured by a 'contractual trust' variable; namely how often production starts based only following oral agreements) have a negative relationship with perceptions of success which are interpreted in financial/market terms. The effects of contractual trust and relationship networks on profitability (the most influential parameter in terms of perceptions of success) are also discussed in the study. The frequency that production commences based on oral agreements alone has a negative effect on profit, while the number of employees who are employed because of their old relationships with the business leader has a slightly positive impact on profit. The number of relatives who are employed at the business has no significant effect (Lengyel, 2000).[7]

Perceptions of success indicate the capability of the company to adopt the patterns typical of market economies and prove to be good predictors for the survival of companies (Janky, Lengyel, 2004). Addressing the strategies of enterprises leads us further away from the issue of social capital towards the topic of cultural resources. Lengyel's empirical results indicate that cultural and social resources play an important role in decreasing perceived uncertainty, while material resources weakly impact it (Lengyel 2005).

7 The effect of family structure and family norms on market co-operation and trust is a perennial social economic question. There is a substantial difference between Western and Eastern countries in the market role of family enterprises which hire and/or are owned by family members. The growth and innovation potential of such businesses is usually restricted. Janky analysed Hungarian panel data and identified some closed, stability-oriented industries which are dominated by family enterprises in Hungary, but did not find a dimension or a set of dimensions (such as trust-related factors) that would serve to characterise and differentiate typical family firms from classic capitalist enterprises (Janky 2000).

CONCLUSION

This literature review is far from exhaustive but provides an examination of the most well-researched features of trust and social capital which emerged in business transactions after the transition in Hungary. This period is characterized by the emergence of new institutional environments and rapid changes and correspondingly high levels of uncertainty and business insecurity. Additionally, a weak civil society and a lack of adequate market institutions and material capital are determining features of young post-socialist Hungarian capitalism. Under these circumstances the role of trust and social capital becomes salient.

Trust and social capital have been conceptualized and operationalized in several ways by Hungarian scholars and results are mainly consistent with each other (or at least they do not suffer from major inconsistencies). Insofar as the above-discussed research focuses on economic issues, contractual and institutional trust concepts dominate interpersonal trust-relationships. Interpretations of social capital are, however, more diverse and utilize co-operation and the network approach, civil organizational membership, obligations and norms as their bases for measurement. Low levels of trust and social capital are generally not the focus of the research but the reasons and consequences for this situation are primarily the subject of empirical research, so explanatory studies outnumber descriptive ones. Trust and social capital are in some cases dependent variables when economic preconditions (e.g. economic stability) or business characteristics (e.g. employment/ownership) are being researched. In other cases trust and social capital are considered to be independent variables which can be used to explain the chances of survival of a business, the success of enterprises and their perceived challenges. These types of studies are designed to help define the role of trust and social networks in economic transactions and also provide a tentative prognosis about the consequences of decreases or increases in levels of trust or social capital over time. The empirical research shows that the role of trust is variable in different industries (e.g. the service industry requires a higher level of trust) and that the economic downturn has affected not only general trust but the functioning of trust networks too (breaches in trust are evolving and strengthening the role of external actors). Levels of trust and the extension of social capital influence entrepreneurial patterns, contractual relations and transactional attitudes significantly. Although there is a generally low level of institutional trust, inter-firm trust is able to compensate for this (for example, banking services could be replaced or substituted). Additionally, the literature indicates that business actors also can utilize the social capital which is generated by civil society.

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