

Social construction of local/regional capital – methodology

Sociální konstrukce lokálního/regionálního kapitálu – metoda

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Abstract: The starting point for identifying environmental, social and cultural capitals in rural areas is integrated research based on methodological interconnection between quantitative and qualitative investigation. The sorts of capital are constructed by means of an interactive investigation in cooperation with insiders. In this way, such approach belong to endogenous investigating of reality and to the theory of social constructivism.

Key words: social construction, social capital, cultural capital, environmental capital

Abstrakt: Východiskem identifikace tří základních druhů kapitálu rurálních oblastí – environmentálního, sociálního a kulturního kapitálu – je integrovaný výzkum založený na metodologickém propojení kvantitativního a kvalitativního zkoumání. Druhy kapitálu jsou postupně konstruovány pomocí interaktivního zkoumání respondentů. Tím se tento přístup hlásí k endogennímu zkoumání reality a k teorii sociálního konstruktivismu.

Klíčová slova: sociální konstrukce, sociální kapitál, kulturní kapitál, environmentální kapitál

INTRODUCTION

Social constructivism as a *theoretical* background and a mix of quantitative and qualitative *empirical* approaches (Hubík 2001, 2002) – such is research strategy which was tested in the framework of grant project (Grega 2003) identifying various forms of capital in rural areas and rural communities. Heuristic possibilities of social constructivism and of its later variants are well known but empirical applications are to some extent open. The following text describes methodology, which is a mix of quantitative and qualitative approach to a social space called territory. The aim of this research was to find *strong* and *weak* constructions of social reality. The social *reality* was defined as a content of social space called region or territory, and the *content* was defined as environmental, social and cultural capital.

A territory is a function of a region, because it may be defined and its environmental capital may be identified only with the help of the respective cultural capital. A region is a function of social space as a structure of relations among various types of capital. Instead of these expressions, one can also use such expressions like “potential for development” (Boháčková, Hrabánková 2003: 767). Thus, the development of a specific region depends on the availability of its capital. Availability of capital is related to the cultural capital of a community. To define it, it is not important what capital exists in the territory and region, but what capital in the territory the community really knows about (cultural capital) and to what extent it is able to utilize it (social capital). Anything in

region is a function of cognitive and other activities of communities.

Reduction of constructions of reality depends on the strategic research position. There are three possible strategic research positions: exogenous, endogenous and mixed, to which three research methodologies – quantitative, qualitative and integrated (mixed) are related. The postmodern approach reinforces the respect for cognitive plurality, which means a preference for the mixed strategic research position and an integrated methodology. In subsequent parts of the text, however, I will focus only on the endogenous research position and on the qualitative methodology (Jensen, Jankowski 1993). I begin from the point that the exogenous position and quantitative methodology are generally known as standard and information about them would not bring anything special.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The heuristic possibilities of social constructivism and its later variation have been frequently and persuasively demonstrated logically, less convincingly however empirically. Research from the position of social constructivism leads to unique descriptions, as a rule with a specific individual (or group) linked to the construction of the social reality. This constructs nominalism, with which the theory must align itself. In social constructivism, this occurs with the help of the sophisticated concept of social typification and social types (Schutz,

Luckmann 1973: 229–241). This concept is a theoretical starting point for designing a methodology, whose goal is seeking a powerful construct for social reality and a weak construct for social reality – for example a *strong* and *weak* construction of a region or a construction of regional capital.

By *strong construction*, I understand such a result of investigation, which is divided by a significant number of investigated individuals in the given set and thus is a correlate of the Schutz concept of type (Schutz 1964: 45). For the most part, a strong construction is part of the collective consciousness of the community in the Durkheim sense.

A *weak* construction is understood as such a result of investigation, which does not communicate to a significant number of researched individuals and is not a correlate of the Schutz type. A weak construction is rather accidental and is bound to the consciousness of the individual, not the community.

If I add to this description one more Schutz concept, the concept of social biography (Schutz 1962: 76), then I may say that the *strong* construction is bound with the *social biography* (history) *of the community*, whereas a *weak* construction is bound to the *social (auto) biography of the individual*. In both cases, this concerns an endogenous source of information and knowledge.

The following brief overview of theoretical sources introduces the principles on which the concept of social construction is built. Also, the overview points out the fundamental theoretical ideas and their possible implications for empirical research. Even though the overview is clearly focused on the fields of sociology and social economics, it corresponds with analogous analyses carried out in the field of the theory of regional economy (Terluin 2001).

Theory of social constructivism

The reality is a social construction of individuals. Meanings ascribed to this construction and its interpretation depend both on institutionalized types of communication and the social biography of an individual, an important feature of which is his or her cultural distance from the community (Schutz, Luckmann 1973: 76). Individuals of similar social biography and similar social distance from the community build up similar or identical parts of the reality. Weak and strong elements of the social construction of the reality may be identified while the strong elements of the construction set up the social objectivity of the constructed reality (Berger, Luckmann 1991: 78).

Research implications. Natural, social and cultural reality of a community is a social construction of its participants. Development of a community depends on creating strong elements of the social construction of the reality, because, with their help, the resources of further development of the community may be identified.

Theory of social cartography

The description of the reality is de facto a description of a social construction perceived as the objective reality (Berger, Luckmann 1991: 195). The reality may be described either from outside by means of an external language and without any empirical understanding of the reality, or from inside by means of an internal language and empiricism of the respective community. Social cartography describes the reality in correspondence with social constructions designed by the community (Paulston, Liebman 1994: 223) because such constructs are unique and may not be substituted by any methodological means that have no links to the respective community.

Research implications. The research into the given state and preconditions for community development must undergo a social cartography stage to find out what the community itself considers as objectively existing and attainable. On a secondary basis, social cartography may be supplemented with standard scientific procedures.

Theory of environmental, social, cultural capital

Social relations, knowledge, skills and symbols may be exchanged either for similar relations, knowledge, skills and symbols or for economic capital (Bourdieu 1984: 114). Social capital represents relations of social clientele and protection dependent on other types of capital or on the individual's status (Bourdieu 1984: 122). Cultural capital represents education, skills, memory and their materialized forms. Environmental capital represents immobile, namely natural, resources. If there is capital of the three above-mentioned types in an available form, it may be traded in the market of goods, services and symbols (Terluin 2001: 77–80).

Research implications. Environmental, social and cultural capital of a community is the basis for creating economic capital. Identification, development and exchange of the three types of capital with social and economic subjects outside the community are the preconditions for the mobilization of community resources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The social cartography theory draws upon the idea that most features of a territory, region and/or community cannot be described from outside only: without direct experience of life in the territory and without direct experience of individual or group strategies in the respective region. The territory, region and community are linked by social space, which, from the perspective of the theory of social cartography, thus becomes a fundamental research category (Paulston, Liebman 1994: 228).

Concerning the aims of the given research project, social space is defined by three features (see below), one

of them being the sum of the community's and region's capital (economic, social, cultural and environmental). Thus, the category of social space also becomes a fundamental research category in the theory of capital.

Identification of these constructions has been conducted with the help of interactive research techniques, the basis of which is a semi-standardized interview. Standardization rests in two matters – in the necessity in each interview to use and repeatedly draw from a precisely established vocabulary and the necessity to place the component on a prepared scale representing the researched constructions. Use of a vocabulary ensures the first goal of each qualitative investigation (Jensen, Janowski 1993: 32–34), which is comprehension. Use of scales ensures the possibility for measuring, which is the sense of every quantitative research. Use of a vocabulary is interactive – the interviewer stimulates the communicative interaction of the respondent to the use of such a vocabulary. The use of the scale is fully in the hands of the interviewer.

In the described interaction, the researcher has a relatively difficult task – he/she must assess whether and to what degree he/she concurs with the respondent on the identification of the component with the sought after-researched construction (for example environmental capital), and finally he/she must end at a certain phase of the interview and to decide where to place the identified component of the sought after-research construction on the scale.

The following examples illustrate research tools and the method of analysis for source data, which was acquired by these means. Collection and analysis of data was conducted by the agency *Sociotrends* Olomouc) and I present here the first examples of identification scales, with the help of which the interviewer, together with the respondent, gradually identifies the components of the investigated construction, and subsequently demonstrates the method for identification of strong and weak constructions (Loučková 2003: 11ff).

A. Social construction of a community – example:

Perception of community development: degree of personal identification with the community (Identification scale no. 1)

Identification scale No. 1

Community development depends primarily on personal reasons		← least							most →		symbol	code
1.	Economic reason	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
2.	Social reason	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
3.	Cultural reason	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
4.	Moral reason	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
5.	Traditional reason	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				
6.	Family reason	1	2	3	4	5	6	7				

Table 1. Factors corresponding to social construction identification with community

	Factors	
	1 (47%)	2 (27%)
Economic reason	0.173	0.820
Social reason	0.594	0.532
Cultural reason	0.944	0.000
Moral reason	0.920	0.145
Traditional reason	0.849	0.162
Family reason	0.000	0.785

Extracted from the battery of items were two factors and they are noted in Table 1. The first factor (operating at the intensity of 47%) as a strong social construction is foretold by items, which express rather impersonal reasons for community development (cultural, moral, traditional, and social). Ranked among weaker constructions are reasons rather bound to personal reasons (economic and familial). Weaker factor operates in the intensity of 27%.

Constructions were made by the respondents themselves – with a help of the researcher (an interview – location on the scale).

Classification of constructions (strong and weak) – in other words “new constructions of constructions” – were made by the researcher.

Thus, the following examples illustrate results (constructions) of two different methodologies:

- (ethno)methodology of the respondent (Garfinkel 1967: 11, 32), and
- methodology of the researcher.

B. Social construction of environmental capital – example:

Environmental capital in community – new (Identification scale No. 2)

Score for use of new environmental capital:

The score expressing the degree of utilizing environmental capital by means of an opinion of the respondent

<i>Local natural resources could contribute to improvement in the life of the community</i>		← least							most →	symbol	code
1.	Landscape – tourism standard	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
2.	Climate – tourism standard	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
3.	Landscape – new infrastructure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
4.	Landscape – new natural facts/artefacts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
5.	Alternative energy resources	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
6.	Alternative residential area	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			

Table 2. Intensity of new use of environmental capital

Contributes	Score of individual items
Tourism standard	4.5833
Tourism standard	4.4000
Landscape – new infrastructure	3.9667
Landscape – new natural facts/artefacts	3.5500
Alternative energy resources	3.1000
Alternative residential area	2.7000

to new environmental resources is noted in Table 2 according to the achieved rank.

Social construction of new use of environmental capital

Extracted from the battery of items were two factors and they are noted in Table 3. The first factor (operating at the intensity of 46%) as a strong social construction is linked with items that correspond with the usual processes for community development (touring in a nice environment, suitable regional climate, construction of new infrastructure, new use of natural and artificial monuments). Ranked among weaker constructions is the use of alternative processes (construction of new housing estates, energy resources). Corresponding factor, although called “weaker”, operates at the intensity of 36%.

<i>What knowledge and contacts contribute to the community development?</i>		← least							most →	symbol	code
1.	Related in business subjects	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
2.	Professions in business subjects	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
3.	Professions in political subjects	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
4.	Political in business subjects	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
5.	Political in political subjects	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
6.	Concentrated into groups/networks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			

Table 3. Factors of new use of environmental capital

Contributes	Factors	
	1 (46%)	2 (36%)
Tourism standard	0.912	0.127
Tourism standard	0.936	0.132
Landscape – new infrastructure	0.851	0.313
Landscape – new natural facts/artefacts	0.539	0.559
Alternative energy resources	0.000	0.916
Alternative residential area	0.241	0.855

C. Social construction of social capital – example:

Social capital in community development – clientele (Identification scale no. 3)

Score of benefit to clientele for community development:

The score expressing the degree of benefit for clientele for community development by means of the opinion of the respondent is noted in Table 4 according to the rank achieved.

Social construction of benefits to clientele for community development

Extracted from the battery of items were two factors and they are noted in Table 5. The first factor (operating at

Table 4. Benefits to the clientele

	Score of individual items
Related in business subjects	6.0667
Professions in business subjects	5.6000
Professions in political subjects	4.9667
Political in business subjects	4.0833
Political in political subjects	4.0000
Concentrated into groups/networks	3.7500

Table 5. Social construction of benefits for clientele

	Factors	
	1 (44%)	2 (23%)
Related in business subjects	-0.209	0.797
Professions in business subjects	0.287	0.794
Professions in political subjects	0.789	0.156
Political in business subjects	0.853	0.000
Political in political subjects	0.745	-0.265
Concentrated into groups/networks	0.775	0.126

the intensity of 44%) as a strong social construction corresponds to contacts for political subjects. Ranked among weaker construction is a relative or professional clientele. Corresponding factor operates at the intensity of 23%.

Additional steps for analysis are standard steps in quantitative research – it follows upon a search for additional dependencies: in the first place, there is the question of dependence between the degree of identification of individuals with the community on the one hand and the method of the construction of capital types on the other, in additional places of the analysis, this depends on the construction with socio-demographic and socio-professional categories, and additional standard steps.

CONCLUSION

By means of the methodology tested in the above mentioned empirical research, we can combine merits of quantitative/qualitative research approaches in one research strategy. This methodology is able to measure as well as to understand. So, we can identify two parallel complementarities in this methodology – the complementarity of quantitative/qualitative research as well as the complementarity of endogenous/exogenous research approach.

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