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**SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE PROCESS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT
IN THE WIELKOPOLSKA PROVINCE AT THE BEGINNING
OF THE 21ST CENTURY**

*KAPITAŁ SPOŁECZNY W PROCESIE ROZWOJU OBSZARÓW WIEJSKICH
W WIELKOPOLSCE NA POCZĄTKU XXI WIEKU*

Keywords: social capital, rural areas, Greater Poland, entrepreneurs, groups of agricultural producers

Słowa kluczowe: kapitał społeczny, obszary wiejskie, Wielkopolska, przedsiębiorczość, grupy producenckie

Abstract. The article is an attempt to assess the spatial differentiation of social capital in rural areas of Wielkopolska. It introduces the changes which have taken place in social capital reserves in the early twenty-first century. The analysis of the classic indicators (voter turnout, the number of associations, social organizations and foundations and the number of entrepreneurs – in both cases in relation to population) has been expanded by the assessment of farmers' participation in the life of local communities (councilors in the municipal council) and the level of self-organization of agricultural producers (number of groups of agricultural producers).

Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries social capital issues have become a subject of intense study of many science fields, among others, sociology, political science, economics, geography. The concept as well as the whole theory of social capital was developed by social scientists (mainly sociologists). The authors of the most talked-about studies of theoretical approaches to social capital are: Bourdieu, Coleman, Fukuyama, and Putman – who is credited with the popularization of the concept of social capital [Fukuyama, 1997, Trutkowski, Mandes 2005, Janc 2009]. Some scholars are of the opinion that it is merely the term which is new. They stress that it covers known issues in sociology, namely: norms, social networks, trust and relationships. Note, however, that it is now variously interpreted and studied. Trutkowski and Mandes [2005] emphasize that the basic formula of the theory of social capital is contained in the following situations: „(...) people maintain contact with others, especially when they work together regularly and repeatedly to pursue shared objectives. This leads to long lasting and positive effects of a threefold dimension: on the entities themselves, on strengthening the ties between them and on making institutions work (especially those which are democratic). Research on social capital focuses primarily on the genesis and the outcomes it generates. Studies devoted to social capital concentrate on the relationships between individuals”. There is a widespread belief that investing in social capital has a beneficial effect on social and economic development. People who are able to think and cooperate creatively, work more efficiently. However, it is extremely difficult to determine precisely the importance of social capital in economic development – there are not enough good tools for its measurement. Although, various types of indicators are used they usually describe social capital and allow for an indirect assessment only.

The aim of the article was to attempt to assess the spatial differentiation of social capital in rural areas in the Wielkopolska province. The focus was on analyzing the changes which have taken place in the reserves of positive social capital in the early twenty-first century¹.

¹ Janc [2009] points out that „positive social capital occurs when it manifests itself in such forms of cooperation and interpersonal ties which bring economic and social development. That is when the so-called „common good” is created. Negative social capital is related to such phenomena as: the activity of criminal groups, clientelism and corruption”.

In assessing the spatial differentiation of social capital in the study area, the indicators which allow to specify indirectly the degree of social and economic activity, as well as trust, were taken into account. Thus, the following were analyzed: voter turnout, the number of associations, social organizations and foundations, and the number of entrepreneurs (in both cases in relation to population). In addition, due to the adopted area of research – much of the rural area of Greater Poland is a purely agricultural land and is inhabited by a population living on farming activity, the farmers' activity in the creation of groups of farmers and local community life was evaluated (participating in the municipal council).

The time range of the study covered the years 2000-2009. The basic unit of study was the municipality. In addition to rural areas cities were also included which has enabled to show a more thorough internal diversification of the research area. In turn, the need to define the position of the Greater Poland Voivodeship in relation to other regions led to the fact that the unit of reference were also the Voivodeships.

The analysis used data obtained from the Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolska province and the Regional Data Bank CSO [www.stat.gov.pl]. The analysis also included materials from field studies conducted in Krobia, a town located in the south-western part of Wielkopolska Krobia Municipality (District Gostyń). The choice of this unit was not random. Krobia Municipality is an urban-rural² municipality, yet over 90% of its area is arable, and the level of agricultural production is very high – especially in the field of animal production (over 800 pigs per 100 ha). When choosing the municipality an important factor was that for several centuries, the central-northern part belonged to the Bishops of Poznan, which had a tremendous impact on shaping the culture of the area. A small ethnographic region called Biskupizną emerged and some elements of folk culture have been preserved to this day. Field studies and literature have shown that the inhabitants' responsible approach to work, which has been shaped for centuries, still remains important for the development of this area – especially in agriculture [Brencz 1996, Rule 2003, Zasada 2003].

A case study approach has been selected precisely due to the need to „capture” the cultural context in the assessment of social capital. A survey was conducted among private farmers who had farms in Krobia municipality³ and representatives of local authorities, deputies and village leader were interviewed.

Economic activity

A strongly positive change in social capital is the increase in economic activity of the inhabitants of the Wielkopolska province. In the period 2000-2008 the number of entrepreneurs increased by 23%. Above-average growth of enterprise among the inhabitants (compared to the country) has been observed both in relation to the entire province, as well as rural areas. After eight years, the number of entrepreneurs per 1000 inhabitants has increased to a level of 83.1 in the province, 59.3 in the villages and 101.6 in the cities. It should be noted that similar indicators for Poland were significantly lower and amounted to – 74.6, 51.1 and 89.6.

The spatial distribution of economic activity is extremely diversified (Fig. 1, 2). In 2008, only about one third of entities were registered in rural areas. However, it was a situation better than the national average – the index for Poland was 26.7%. Economic activity was the least developed in northern and eastern parts of the province. In both analyzed time points, entrepreneurs focused on urban areas and the Poznan agglomeration and its immediate vicinity.

When taking into account the role of agriculture in the socio-economic development of rural areas of the Greater Poland Voivodeship, attention should be paid to assessing the level of organization of producers of agricultural products. In Poland the interest in forming producer groups is still too small in relation to the production capacity of agriculture, the fragmentation of agricultural production and the possibility of obtaining EU funds for the activity of agricultural producers. However, farmers do not prefer team forms of action, even though they usually notice the benefits. In 2009, only approximately 450 groups of agricultural producers were active in the country. Most

² The rural area is inhabited by 68% of the population of the district.

³ The study included over 5% of farms – 59 questionnaires were obtained.

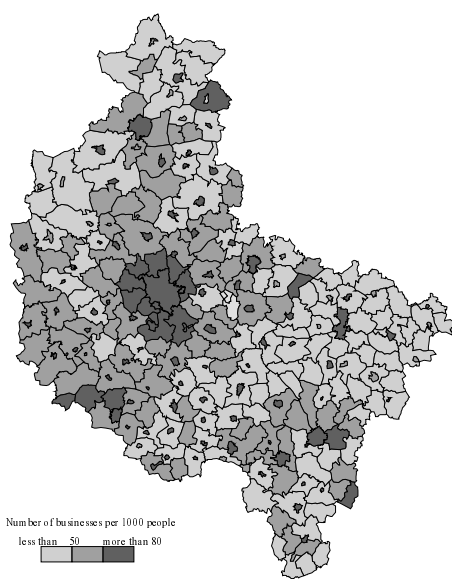


Figure 1. Economic activity in 2000
Source: Baza Danych... 2000.

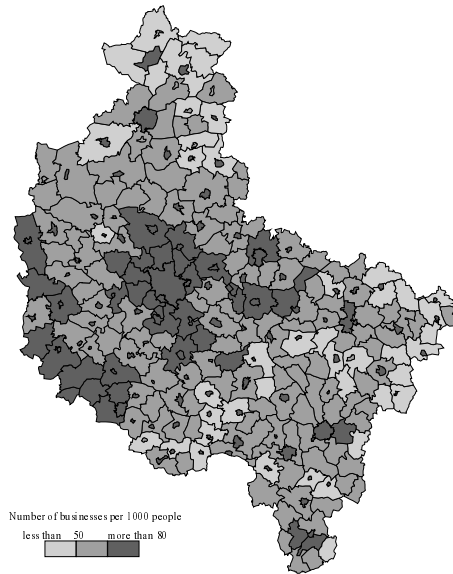


Figure 2. Economic activity in 2000
Source: see fig. 1.

of them, that is 90, were active in the Wielkopolska province. The first group was registered in 2001 and initially not many were formed. The situation improved in the years 2008 and 2009, when respectively, 27 and 29 groups of agricultural producers were registered.

Most groups take the form of cooperatives or limited liability companies. The most popular are pigs (over 60% of groups), which is related to the fact that Greater Poland is in first place in the country in terms of stock of pigs. The distribution of producer groups is uneven (Fig. 3). Most organizations operate in areas characterized by intensive agricultural production (especially pig farming), namely, in the central-southern part of the Wielkopolska province.

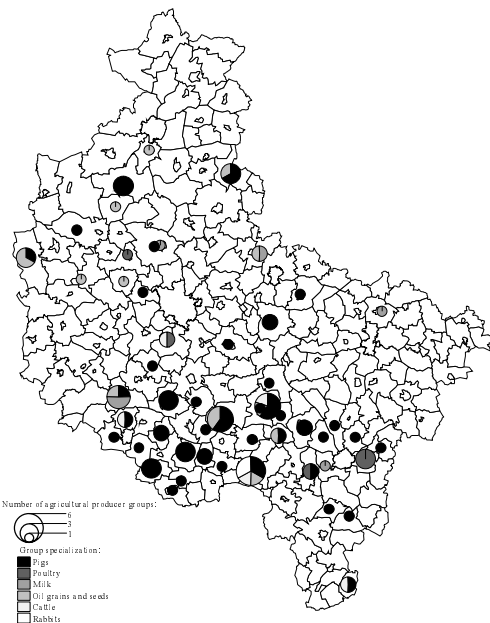


Figure 3. Agricultural producer groups in 2009 (31.12.2009)
Source: on the basis of Marshal Office of the Wielkopolska province data.

Most farmers still value independence the most. Their unwillingness to work together is determined by many factors, including bad experience from the past (forced collectivization, the liquidation of cooperatives in the 90s of the twentieth century), a long period of developing regulations which govern the functioning of producer groups, mentality (firmly rooted rivalry between the owners). However, it appears that entrepreneurship of Wielkopolska farmers, the situation on the agricultural market, success (financial, investment) already existing groups, the availability of EU funds to develop the group's activity will all contribute to the growth of interest in establishing agricultural producer organizations.

Social self-organization

In the analysis of social capital, turnout is usually regarded as an indicator of social involvement. This indicator, however, is highly dependent on the type of elections, or referendums [Janc 2009].

The inhabitants of the Wielkopolska province do not participate very actively in elections and the turnout is usually close to the national average. In 2009, the turnout in the elections to the European Parliament was only 24.13%. In turn, in the parliamentary elections of 2007 the turnout was over 55%, and local elections in 2006 reached a ceiling of 47%. However, in 2003 in a nationwide referendum on granting consent to ratifying the Treaty on the Polish accession to the EU the turnout slightly exceeded 60% [www.pkw.gov.pl]⁴.

It should be noted that in all types of elections spatial heterogeneity of attendance is apparent in the area of study. Residents of rural areas are far less engaged in the election of representatives to the European Parliament than the urban population (e.g. in 2009 the turnout in rural areas was 17.8% and 28.7% in urban areas). In the recent elections to the Sejm and Senate, and the European Parliament a low turnout was characteristic for municipalities located in eastern and southern parts of the Wielkopolska province. Traditionally, the highest turnout was recorded in the municipalities of the district of Poznan. As for local elections, there was an opposite tendency – lower turnout in municipalities constituting the Poznan agglomeration (Poznan District around 41%) and significantly higher in the eastern part of the voivodeship (59% Kalisz District, 54% Konin District). The rural population is more likely to participate in local elections, because their problems are close to local life and the candidates are known to them. A less varied spatial distribution of the turnout occurred in the referendum of 2003. At that time, the turnout exceeded 50% in almost all western and central municipalities of Greater Poland. By contrast, the lowest index value was recorded in the eastern part of the province.

In assessing the social self-organization of the inhabitants of Wielkopolska living in rural areas, the number of foundations, associations and social organizations were analyzed in relation to population. This indicator, although imperfect, is commonly used in research on social capital. Unfortunately, available data (CSO) does not contain information about some NGOs. The following organizations typical of rural areas are not included: volunteer fire brigades, associations of rural housewives, or hunting clubs. Nevertheless, in the first years of the 21st century there was an above-average increase in the number of foundations, associations and social organizations in rural areas of the Wielkopolska province (Fig. 4, 5). There has been a threefold increase of these organizations in rural and rural-urban municipalities in Wielkopolska. As a result, in 2008 in these units of Wielkopolska there were more than 62% of these analyzed organizations (46% in 2000). At the same time the density rate of non-governmental organizations increased, and its spatial distribution changed. The low value of the index (less than 20 organizations per 10 thousand inhabitants) is typical for most municipalities in northern and central-eastern parts of the province (Fig. 6). The greatest density of foundations, associations and social organizations can be seen in several municipalities of southern and western parts of the research area.

The analysis above indicates quite clearly that there is large social activity among the inhabitants of the villages in Wielkopolska. But in reality, the situation is not that positive. The average organization which functions in a rural area, embraces a small number of people and only some members participate actively in its projects. A strong connection with local authorities is evident (sometimes they initiate the formation of non-governmental organizations). Rural organizations differ greatly from those which operate in major urban centers. This concerns mainly human resources, funding opportunities for businesses, trade structure [Gumkowska, Herbst 2008]. Unfortunately, farmers and their families engage in developing and participating in non-government organizations. Most farmers in Krobia are members of the volunteer fire department or the village council. However, if someone in the family is active in community life (village leader, councilor), then the rest of the family (especially younger generations) is totally uninvolved in social activities, explaining their behavior in agricultural production workload and the necessity of large invo-

⁴ Analogous values for Poland were: 24.53, 53.88, 46 and 59%.

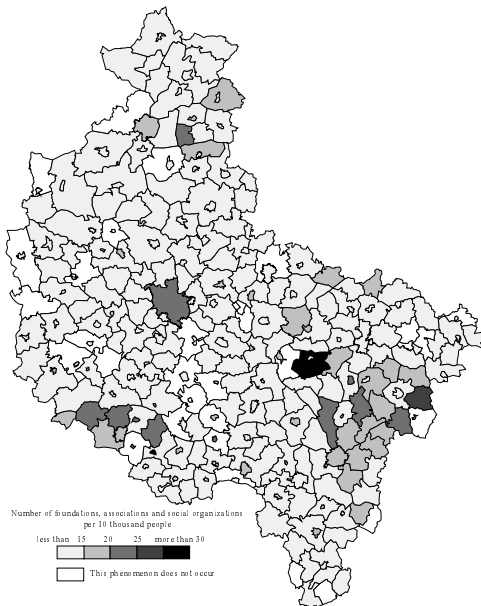


Figure 4. Foundations, associations and social organizations in 2000
Source: see fig. 1.

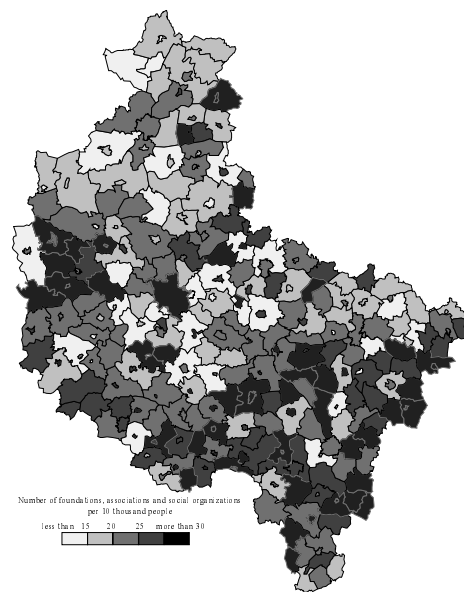


Figure 5. Foundations, associations and social organizations in 2008
Source: see fig. 1.

vement in the work on the farm. Village leaders are usually those who have turned 50 (16 of 22 village leaders), which shall remain in office for several terms of office (nearly 70% of village leaders). Sometimes they have no competition („the young do not want to or do not have the time”) and so they are elected „out of habit”. Both representatives of local authorities, as well as most village leaders have stressed that currently, it is difficult to stimulate people to be active in community life and that being a village leader is „unrewarding”. It may be observed (to a greater extent), at different levels of social life, that people only look after their own interests. In Krobia municipality the most actively developing part is the Old Krobia, where the leader (village leader), was able to integrate the population and „get them” to work together. Unfortunately, those wishing to devote their time to work for the common good are becoming increasingly rare. Today, social mobilization of rural residents is a big challenge for local authorities.

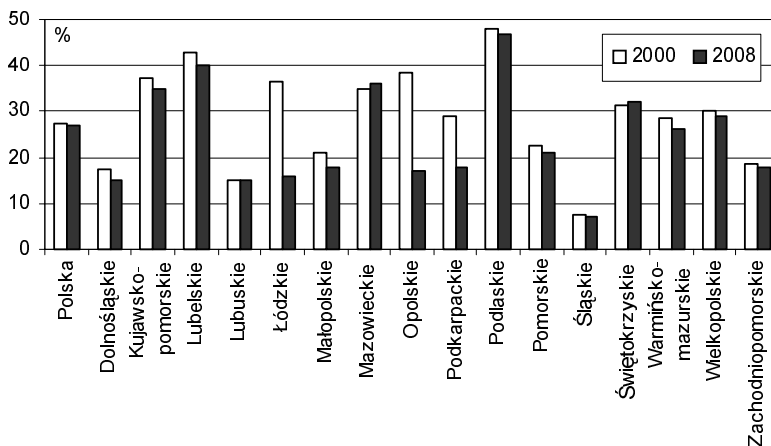


Figure 6. Farmers, gardeners and foresters in the councils of the municipalities in 2000 and 2008
Source: see fig. 1.

Similar observations can be made by analyzing the share of people working in agriculture and forestry in the councils of local governments. Although the Wielkopolska province is identified with a high level of agricultural production and agriculture and though a vast part of the region is dominated by agricultural areas, the farmers' involvement in shaping the direction of development of the municipalities leaves a lot to be desired. The participation of Greater Poland's farmers, gardeners and foresters in district councils in the year 2000, as well as eight years later was slightly above the national average (27.2 in 2000, 26.3% in 2008) and fluctuated around 30% (Fig. 6). As in most provinces, the value of the analyzed index decreases systematically. Its spatial layout in the municipal system is highly diversified in both study time points (Fig. 7 and 8). The number of units, where the above mentioned groups of people are not active in district councils, has decreased – from 23 in 2000 to 26 in 2008. These municipalities can be observed around Poznan. Moreover, the number of municipalities characterized by high presence of farmers, gardeners and foresters in the total number of councilors (over 50%) was reduced (from 61 in the year 2000 to 46 in the year 2008). There was a clear indicator of the analyzed restriction in most municipalities in the western part of the province. Certainly, the professional conduct of a farm is time consuming. However, restricting the activities of a social nature is disturbing. Rural population gives up possession of real influence (or limit it) on the development of its „small homelands”.

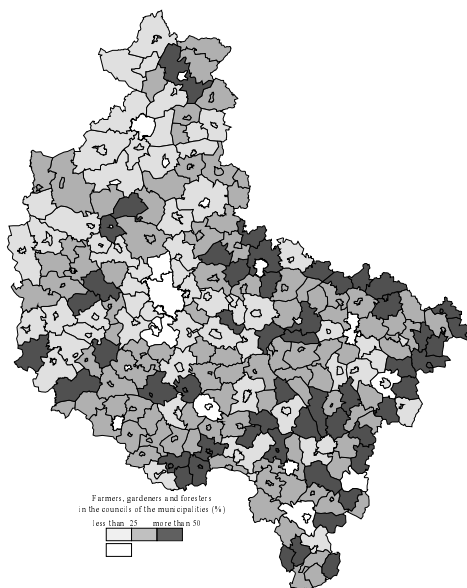


Figure 7. Farmers, gardeners and foresters in the councils of the municipalities in 2000
Source: see fig. 1.

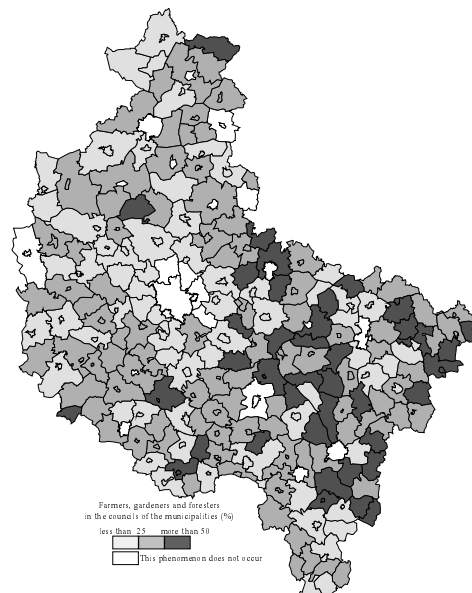


Figure 8. Farmers, gardeners and foresters in the councils of the municipalities in 2008
Source: see fig. 1.

Conclusions

Rural areas of the Wielkopolska province are still highly internally differentiated in terms of resources of social capital. This applies to both activity of an economic and social character. Among the positive changes that have occurred in the beginning of the 21st century, the following should be mentioned above all, the increase in economic activity of the population living in rural areas of the Wielkopolska province (measured by the number of businesses per 1000 people and the number of groups of agricultural producers) and the increase in the number of foundations, associations and social organizations active in rural areas of this province. However, the fact which may cause anxiety is the decrease of engagement in community life by rural inhabitants (especially farmers). Certainly there is still not enough self-organization of the rural population.

Despite the visible improvement which occurred in the years 2000-2008 in the resources and quality of social capital, there is still significant disparity between the rural communities located around major urban centers and those located more peripherally. In the first case, the development of social capital accelerates the migration of people from large cities. The new inhabitants are people of an economically productive age who have higher education. Some people start businesses, or engage in community life. Although there are usually few of them, their activity enriches the reserves of social capital at the local level.

In the near future changes in social capital (as well as in human capital) in rural areas will depend primarily on the involvement and cooperation of the inhabitants and local authorities. Supporting the activity of local leaders and the efficient use of funds from various EU programs as well as the creation of precise legislation which has a direct or indirect affect on the formation of social capital reserves is of paramount importance.

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