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The importance of social capital in rural development, networking and decision-making in rural areas

Georg Wiesinger

- 1 Due to overall economic, political and socioeconomic reasons structural change in agriculture and rural areas has accelerated during the last few decades causing positive but also some negative impacts. The term "rural marginalisation" defines a series of problematic tendencies particularly evident in remote and less-favoured European regions comprising socio-economic and cultural decline such as unemployment, the closing down of farm enterprises, out-migration, over-aging, brain drain, rural poverty and social exclusion, loss of infrastructure and services, environmental degradation, biodiversity depletion, loss of habitats, afforestation, land abandonment, landscape degradation, loss of cultural tradition and local identities. Agricultural marginalisation has to be considered as part of the larger phenomenon of rural marginalisation. For a long time rural marginalization has been the centre of attention for regional planning and rural development initiatives but also for rural sociology and rural policy studies. These problematic, unwanted and in most cases unintended incidents are due to local and global political reasons (missing or insufficient rural development measures, globalisation, telecommunication) but also due to so-called "intrinsic aspects" which coincide with the social structure and sociological patterns of local communities.
- 2 Applied regional development reveals no clear correlation between the quantity of input in terms of budget, political instruments or other efforts undertaken and output in terms of success or whatever is to be considered as a positive effect. Despite huge financial means and numerous measures the result of rural development remains unsatisfactory or at least not sustainable in many regions while we can observe remarkably sound social, economic and environmental conditions in other regions without much public support from outside. However, rural marginalization can be largely explained by unfavourable conditions and missing resources, but not entirely and not in all regions. Some very sparsely populated regions with lack of policy

measures, poor economic and unfavourable climatic conditions prove to be even more viable than regions which are much better off. Some kind of an intangible asset seems to be involved in the marginalisation dynamism. This is a dilemma of indicator econometrics which calls for an alternative approach. In many recent publications "social capital" has been introduced as a tool or "missing link" to explain this rather sophisticated and complex relationship. This paper discusses whether or to what extent social capital can fill in this gap. For a better understanding of the various interfaces and relationships the paper then develops a model combining Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus applied on a territorial level with the social capital concept as it is employed by Robert Putnam.

- 3 Many considerations for this paper have been drawn from the research project "Strengthening the Multifunctional Use of European Land - EUROLAN" conducted under the EU Fifth Framework Programme on Technological Development and Demonstration Activities (FP5). The objective of this project was to acquire a better understanding of how multifunctional land use can counteract the problems of marginalisation and land abandonment in Europe. I would like to thank Hilikka Vihinen and Marja-Liisa Tapio-Biström from MTT Economic Research in Helsinki who participated in this project and with whom together I developed the general ideas and Laura Fagarazzi from the University of Padova for her comments and critics concerning the perception of environmental issues sketched in this paper.

Social capital, civil society and territory

- 4 In the age of globalisation and neo-liberalism as the prevailing economic paradigms public infrastructures and services are cut down affecting remote rural areas most severely and tackling rural economy and the whole fabric of society. Socially weak and underprivileged people suffer most from the reduction of public welfare. Rural poverty and social exclusion are becoming widespread incidents across Europe. Simultaneously it got more and more popular to address the endogenous potential of the regions. Mutual assistance and selfempowerment are considered as a remedy against all negative impacts and should foster democratic participation on a local/regional level. Common initiatives such as the LEADER or INTERREG programme incited by the EU can be listed under this heading. Local inhabitants should rely on their own power and less on public support. Although the trajectory towards enhanced participation, civic engagement and self-reliance is considered unanimously as positive in the debate, many critics on some dark sides are also presented. John Locke (1632-1704) was probably the first who introduced the term "civic society". Although each individual in the state of nature has the right to enforce the natural law in defence of property interests, the formation of a civil society requires that all individuals voluntarily surrender this right to the community at large. Civil society and more recently "social capital" refer to the growing space between the individual and the government or state. This subsequently implies the restructuring of governance or governmentality (Foucault, 1991). Since the beginning of the 1980s and even more during the 1990s plenty of surveys have been conducted on social capital and an increasing number of studies and articles have been published (Bourdieu, 1986 and 1993; Putnam, 1993 and 2000; Coleman, 1988, Woolcock, 1998; Fukuyama, 1999; Burt, 2000; Norris, 2003; Tillberg Mattsson et al., 2004, Árnason et al., 2004). Bourdieu (1979 and 1986) and Coleman

(1988) from whose work the idea originated emphasized the importance of social ties and shared norms to societal well-being and economic efficiency, and their concept has widely been used in the study of social inequality and hierarchical social structures. Putnam (1993 and 2000) above all linked the ideas of social capital to the importance of civic associations and voluntary organisations, and emphasised positive aspects of social control.

- 5 According to Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1986) there are different forms of capital. Economic capital is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights. Bourdieu's cultural capital, which may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications, includes what economists consider as human capital, but it is a wider concept. His concept of social capital encompasses the resources derived from one's belonging to a group. Relations of social capital may exist on the basis of material and/or symbolic relations of exchange, and they may also be institutionalized in the forms of a title of nobility. Social capital can be defined as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. The membership in a group provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a credential which entitles them to credit. According to Bourdieu, the amount of social capital held by an individual depends on the extent he or she is able to mobilize a social network and from the capital (including the economic, cultural or symbolic capital) held by the members of that network. Social capital like other types of capital is unevenly distributed, mobilised, utilised, transformed and exchanged in society.
- 6 In *Making Democracy Work* (1993) Putnam explored the conditions for creating responsive and effective democratic institutions that lead to economic growth. Putnam points out that features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks of civic engagement (associations) can substantially improve a society's efficiency in overcoming dilemmas of collective action. Putnam uses social capital as an attribute of the social structure in which a person is embedded, and emphasises that social capital is "not the private property of any of the persons who benefit from it" (Putnam, 1993, 170). Networks of civic engagement like neighbourhood associations, choral societies, cooperatives, sports clubs, mass-based parties represent intense horizontal interaction which essentially promote trust, reciprocity and co-operation within the society. In contrast, vertical networks such as patron-client relationships can, according to Putnam, not sustain social trust and co-operation and rather tend to undermine solidarity, especially among clients. The radius of trust is the circle of people among whom cooperative norms are operative (Fukuyama, 1999). Social capital promotes access to resources (Rifkin, 2001) and social capital is also assumed to be produced by networks, defined as social actors, or nodes and flows of information and resources. Tillberg et al. (2004) underline that networks can also be formal, with an explicit and public structure, or informal, with no explicit name, and yet an identifiable group of nodes and flows. The role of EU in introducing innovative local modes of organisation and cooperation like local action groups fostered by LEADER-programmes has also to be acknowledged.
- 7 Putnam (1993) suggested the number of associations per local inhabitants for measuring social capital. Both he says just very little about the structure of local population which is attracted by those associations and about the gender issue.

Women, young people and persons with distinct lifestyle or cultural interests may find themselves not affected by the given associations. Norris and Inglehart (2003) emphasised that associational membership can be vertically and horizontally segmented for women and men. Actually, women are often the promoters of social cohesion with their both formal and informal networks.

- 8 A territorial approach to social capital was brought into discussion by Rifkin (2001). He states that all real culture exists in geography because that is where intimacy takes place, and without intimacy it is not possible to create bonds of social trust and engender true feelings of empathy. Our more ancient nature is embedded as much in geography as in temporality. Simultaneously, there is a process of disembedding between space and time and consequently a loss of special intimacy (Giddens, 1990). Local societies are traditional historical communities, but not stable or inert. There is a continuous process of transformation going on in rural areas, and the means of living, the population structure and social cohesion are in a state of flux. Yet, territory is more than just a social convention, and rootedness to geographical place is still valued. Some feel a deep empathy with a certain place or territory, others with the local social community, some both of them. New communication means have made location less of a constant in fashioning of social relationships. However, there is a close relationship amongst people and long-term individual experience with a territory also enhances social capital.
- 9 But the dark sides of the "territorial imperative" must be also taken into consideration. As much as local communities tend to enclose their citizens and assist persons in need their close ties also account for dynamics of social exclusion of all those who are unable or not willing to cope with the social norms of the local community. Young people with different lifestyles, persons with different opinions from the majority, those who do not participate in local associations or religious congregations may experience the dark side of locality (Dax/Machold, 2003). Besides that local communities have a propensity of hostility towards incomers and thus prevent innovations. Recently Árnason et al. (2004) discussed the concept of social capital in the context of rural development. Also they maintain that social capital may affect the performance, competitiveness and social cohesion of a community. Networks can be understood as articulating the flows of information and resources that produce rural development and society more generally. The intangible asset of social capital can be affected by policy, both positively and negatively. Measures which encourage the creation of networks and working modes enhancing co-operation are important elements in the creation of social capital. On the other hand policies encouraging competition dividing rural inhabitants into winners and losers might be detrimental to the positive development dynamics and could mean a total break down of the rural social fabric. There are some examples from US agricultural areas (Schubert, 2005).

Theoretical framework

- 10 Now we want to draw our attention to the role of social capital in rural development and combating marginalization by concretising and discussing our considerations by the following scheme.
- 11 This scheme only refers to the local level, to a local community. We are well aware that there are numerous supra-regional issues and interdependencies with the outside

world (such as globalisation, national and international politics which do not explicitly focus on the local area etc.) which form the institutional environment for local decision making. Policy measures (a) include every kind of policies such as agricultural, environmental, rural development, economic, social and cultural politics. Instruments are regarded as a tool for the implementation of the policy measures.

- 12 Multifunctionality in general refers to the results of economic activities exerted on a locality other than the intended product with the character of positive externalities. The preservation of rural landscapes, the prevention of depopulation and the development of viable rural areas can be looked upon as public goods. As a consequence multifunctional results of any activity must be taken into account in policymaking and planning and hence must form the basis of policy decisions.
- 13 Marginalisation (b) has been above defined in a broader sense as economic, agricultural, environmental, and sociocultural decline. A traditional approach for studying policy impacts is to analyse statistical quantitative indicators defining certain thresholds for marginalization (c). However, data drawn from various databases may explain largely but not entirely the correlation between the whole range of driving forces and the outcome in a given region. Certain policy measures are successful in some areas whereas in others fail why areas with approximately similar physical and economic conditions perform so differently, is a question which merits further thought. We can identify at least four potential interactions besides all cases of non-impact: a proper set of policies according to economic theory (+) might either improve the situation (+) or not (-); a non-existing or improper set of policies (-) might incite marginalisation (-) or despite every expectation the situation might even improve (+). Since the correlation (+) to (+) and (-) to (-) seems to be logical, we want to draw our attention to the anomic relations between (+) and (-) where we will have to pose the question whether and to what extent social capital could explain these anomies.
- 14 Furthermore political instruments and measures may also influence the creation as well as the weakening and destruction of social capital. The link between policies and social capital can be defined as "governance" or "governmentality" (d). Regional and local governance forms the institutional setting, where the interaction takes place. By using governance we refer to the fact that policies are increasingly both prepared and implemented in cooperation among both public sector, market and civil society actors, and that there is a shift from command and control to steering. Governmentality defines the "art of government" in a wide sense, i.e. with an idea of government that is not limited to state politics alone, that includes a wide range of control techniques, and that applies to a wide variety of objects, from one's control of the self to the "biopolitical" control of populations (Foucault, 1991).

Figure 1. Conceptualising social capital, Rural development and Marginalization.

- 15 The space between social capital and the outcome can be defined as the field of "perception" (e). Since social capital is immanent with the people and formed by people living in a territory, the way in which people perceive the given (socio-economic, cultural, environmental etc.) situation in their location is crucial. Some issues might be seen as a problem, others not. Similarly, the perception of different people of the same phenomenon varies. This is often related to age, gender, professional background, education and life experience. The given situation also affects social capital. Abandonment, landscape and landuse change, economic and socio-cultural marginalization (or their opposite in stability and prosperity) may cause a weakening of social capital or quite the reverse wealth and prosperity might facilitate the creation of social capital. A wealthy and prosperous context might also lead to the disruption of the traditional social tissue, without creating a new one. On the contrary, an area which is marginal according to the main economic and social flows can still hold a viable social capital, although threatened by exodus of most active, mainly young people.
- 16 In the current neo-liberal discourse the concept of social capital is sometimes taken as an endogenous remedy. While the state withdraws (f) social capital is seen as a substitute for services formerly organized by the public. But a negative development in the local economy can also destroy social capital by placing too heavy demands on people's solidarity and the maintenance of social safety-nets, which are too demanding and beyond the capacity of the remaining local inhabitants. Strong political capital implies negotiation capacity in decision making that can be used in cases of marginalisation, for example.

Figure 2. Regions defined according to the distribution of capital types.

Source: Wiesinger 2007.

- 17 Further considerations, conclusions and queries can be taken from this scheme: Firstly it should be discussed whether social capital is really essential for explaining the success or failure of policies and variations and dynamics of rural development. Could a prosperous situation or an efficient combat against marginalization also be achieved without bringing in the concept of social capital? Or can we imagine other possible explanations?
- 18 Now we are going to exemplify three prototype regions (Region A, B and C) classified according to the distribution and availability of the different types of capital. Then we will discuss various implications connected with the distribution of capital which reveals in the perception of the people towards the state of marginalization in the region. We are well aware that further types of regions could be defined according to all the other potential combinations of capital such as regions with lacking economic, cultural/intellectual and social capital etc.
- 19 In applying this scheme we can define prototype regions according to the distribution of capital. This figure only illustrates the relative share of capital distribution. A three dimensional three angled pyramid would be necessary for displaying the absolute portion of capital (the total amount of social capital will not essentially decline when cultural capital increases etc.).
 - Region A: Marginalized remote rural region with little economic, cultural/intellectual capital (poor education level, brain drain, high unemployment, overaging, out-migration, agricultural decline and afforestation) but with a strong social capital (associations, mutual trust, neighbourhood, strong norms).
 - Region B: Commuter region which is a less remote and economically marginalized region; the economic and cultural/intellectual capital is higher than in Region A, but social capital is lower. Since the accessibility is better than in Region A most of the

people commute and thus spend just little time for civic engagement in their community. This situation might either lead to better conditions for agriculture and lower rates of land-use change, abandonment and spontaneous afforestation or – on the contrary – even to a marked abandonment and afforestation trend due to a higher level of industrialisation or even a well developed tertiary sector, which often go hand in hand with farmland abandonment.

- Region C: Periurban region with plenty of urban incomers and day commuters who are just little interested in the affairs of the local community; the economic and cultural/intellectual capital is much higher than in Region A and in Region B; the amount of social capital is very low. The decline of social capital is mainly not due to the fact that local people commute like in Region B but that a huge number of urban incomers change the social network. People brought up in the community and incomers are living in different worlds (Burnett: 1998).

- 20 Region B and C are characterised by an unravelling of local associations, trust and cultural life whereas in Region A community life is lubricated by social capital despite cultural and economic marginalization. In terms of social marginalization Region A is better off than Region B and C but only temporarily, the situation is not sustainable since the lack of economic dynamism and employment opportunities forces the young people to emigrate.
- 21 With this typology we will be able to deduce a number of further patterns of reasoning. How do people in Region A, B and C perceive the given situation in their region in terms of economy, socio-culture, environmental development and is their also an impact from the situation on the attitude and awareness of local people? Let's just consider the relationship between social capital and the state of the environment (encompassing also the landscape, natural heritage, biodiversity, etc.). We could make up a hypothesis that people in Region A and a consider their environment more as a material resource which should be extracted and used, whereas people in Region B and particularly urban incomers in Region C will emphasis the value of natural landscape and the environment.

Testing the concept

- 22 As to understand the particular role and importance of social capital for the socio-cultural micro-level of a community in a remote place endangered by virtual marginalization, we shall apply Putnam's social capital concept of association, trust and civicness. For that purpose we chose the most extreme examples among all municipalities of the Austrian EUROLAN case study region. Schwarzauf im Gebirge, situated in Neunkirchen district, southern part of Lower Austria, displays the worst figures regarding socioeconomic indicators such as population decline, overaging, out-migration and brain drain. It has lost more than 60% of its population during the last 150 years. This decline is sustaining. Population dropped by another 30% since 1971. In 2001 only 831 persons lived in Schwarzauf signifying a population density of only 4.4 inhabitants per km². Now, 25% of the population is aged over 60 years. The main problem is that young people who try to get a better education (high-school, college or university) are forced to leave the region. And when they have finished they will not find an adequate skilled job. Thus about 15-20% of the youth leave Schwarzauf for ever. Only the less educated remain which means that the education level is rather low.

Schwarzau is geographically isolated compared to most of the other municipalities of the district. During winter after heavy snowfall the main road connections are sometimes locked because of avalanche risk, which makes daily life and also commuting quite inconvenient. Tourism does not play a very important role in Schwarzau and the local economy relies on a small number of industrial works and artisans. About 40% of all employees are commuting. People who find a job further away (mostly in Vienna) usually tend to migrate for ever. The main problem is the restricted number of high-quality jobs for skilled people in the region. Attempts to create high-quality jobs within the municipality have failed for many reasons.

- 23 Despite those unfavourable socio-economic conditions community life is still vibrant. Schwarzau can be classified as a prototype Region A according to our classification system indicating a weak economic and intellectual capital but a rather strong social ties. The number of traditional associations is extraordinary high. Due to the big choice of different associations rather few persons do not take part in the socio-cultural life of the municipality.
- 24 In terms of gender distribution we can observe that there are several associations which are more attractive for women than for men. Most of the young people are generally well integrated in the traditional associations but some of them bring in also new ideas which are usually backed by the municipal administration. In terms of trust people are willing to support their neighbors. Families seem to disentangle as elsewhere. 40% of the women bring up their children alone even in this remote rural area. The conflicts between the generations become more and more evident. Women and girls are getting more independent. Maybe they are still less employed and the number of commuters is higher amongst men but most of the women now have their own cars and therefore they are quite mobile. They organize themselves in social groups while family life loses importance. Extended families are becoming rare, men are working outside and children are reared and taught in kindergartens and schools. Enhanced mobility also creates new social ties. The importance of civiness (keeping rules and norms) was discussed in group discussions and individual interviews revealing a unanimous understanding that most people were rather reluctant in keeping rules and regulations. The majority is acting according a general consciousness of justice. So they rather oppose than subject to a decision when they do not understand the significance.
- 25 Another valuable indicator for social capital is political engagement and participation in elections. In local elections the turnout rate of Schwarzau is above the district and province average. Whereas, Schwarzau's turnout rate in national elections is less than the average level. This is an indication that people of Schwarzau are particularly interested in their community affairs.

Figure 3. Results and turnout rate of local and national elections, Schwarzaeu im Gebirge.

	ME 2005%	ME 1995%	ME 1990%	NE 2002%	NE 1999%	NE 1995%
Turnout						
Schwarzaeu	76.50	86.23	87.78	86.45	83.08	85.10
Neunkirchen	71.30	77.99	80.74	86.58	83.15	87.61
Lower Austria	71.17	75.32	78.90	89.09	85.95	89.15
Valid polls	96.83	97.97	98.22	97.68	98.00	97.18

ME: municipal elections, NE: national elections.

- 26 These results give strong evidence that social capital has an important function for the municipality of Schwarzaeu. In this case it seems that social capital can really integrate people, counterbalance economic problems and maintain a comparatively sound environment by keeping up land use and cultivation. Social capital is one of the primary features of socially organised communities and it allows citizens to resolve collective problems more easily. People engaged local voluntary associations and in community life also feel a stronger connectedness to their social neighborhood and physical environment.
- 27 Even in Schwarzaeu in Gebirge we can expect a community collapse when population number will under a certain threshold and as a result infrastructure will become thinned out and when economic and cultural capital will decline further. Thus we must conclude that social capital is not thoroughly the missing link to close the gap between the driving forces and the state of marginalisation, even though it can help better understanding the dynamics beyond them. Yet, what we suggest is that a strong social capital can sometimes – as in the case of Schwarzaeu im Gebirge – mitigate marginalization effects even in those contexts where marginalization indicators would suggest otherwise.

Disenchantment of social capital

- 28 What particular conclusions can be drawn from this concept? Can social capital act as the most important or one of the prominent explanatory factors and missing link for filling the gap between various policies and a concrete outcome in a region? Can social capital even compensate structural deficiencies for a successful rural development and what are the role of multifunctionality, local governance and the perception of territorial civiness in this game of gaining and maintaining economic, socio-cultural and environmental sustainability? What kind of policies would enhance local development? Can increased policy integration counteract marginalisation processes?
- 29 Social capital thrives more easily under sound economic socio-cultural and environmental conditions. As Putnam (2000) announced a "well-connected individual in a poorly connected society is not productive as a well-connected individual in a well-connected society. And even a poorly connected individual may derive some of the spillover benefits from living in a well-connected community". This indicates thoroughly the limits and restrictions of social capital as a tool for rural development. Where the preconditions are poor mischief is likely to occur and social capital could hardly compensate or at least extraordinary efforts are needed. Simultaneously, social

capital is a precious asset. A "connected society" that is rich of social capital may promote rural development more easily.

- 30 In the age of globalisation or post-modernity rural areas are subject to various transformation processes which reshape the local socio-economic patterns. Many of these pro-cesses have a negative impact on civic engagement. People have less time to voluntarily participate in local associations. Television, mass-communication and internet produce a kind of virtual neighbourhood. There is no need for networking to gain all necessary goods, entertainment and information. But the loss of local infrastructures, shops, pubs etc. coincides also with the loss of opportunities for social linkage and human connectedness.
- 31 Local social capital may play a decisive role but its influence should also not be overestimated. In general social capital facilitates the utilisation of local resources both in terms of natural and human resources via the creation of social networks, trust and civiness. But there are certain limits and some negative aspects.

Some positive prospects

- The concept of social capital is important for explaining non-economic patterns BUT social capital is not the only matter for a successful regional development.
- Social capital cannot thrive without an institutional background. Policies have to encourage cooperation and provide opportunities for learning and thus promote trust between the local actors: e.g. LEADER initiatives. BUT policies can also destroy the basement for social capital. The closing down of railroads, post offices and public services disrupt community ties. Local civic community can hardly replace or compensate for this.
- Socio-economic and environmental framework may facilitate the building of social capital BUT social capital is also a prerequisite for sound rural development.
- Social capital may play a decisive role in CEE countries for rebuilding trust and local identity after the political transition and the collapse of former socialist collective institutions in rural areas.

Some dark sides

- Social capital may cause social exclusion of all those who are not able or willing to adopt the local norms.
 - Strong linkage within a closed community may bring about rejection of incomers, innovation and xenophobia.
 - Association membership tells very little about the quality of civic participation. Some persons may become member in several associations while some groups of persons remain excluded (youth, elderly persons, females, incomers, etc.).
 - The thinning out of local infrastructures leads to a further decline of economic and cultural capital and finally also of social capital.
- 32 Social capital may not be considered as a constant and stable feature. It is generally in flux and transition. The structure of social capital has to adapt to new challenges and developments. New collective organizations will have to emerge in response to new needs. The biggest future challenge may lie in the understanding of the policy structures and obstacles associated with integrating rural development in the context of a more regionalizing and 'programmed' state system. The question may be framed as

how rural integration can be achieved as a part of the new rural development paradigm. Social capital may be considered as a software package. It has to be installed in the hardware of functioning infrastructures and services as a prerequisite for successful rural development.

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ABSTRACTS

Rural decline is frequently explained in economic terms by unfavourable conditions and by missing resources or support. But this link is not entirely clear and does not apply in all regions. Some particularly remote rural regions with a very sparse population, a lack of policy support, poor economic performance and unfavourable climatic conditions prove more viable than some regions with more plentiful economic resources and support. The presentation will discuss the issue whether the concept of social capital could lead to a better understanding of these patterns. The role of social capital will be demonstrated by means of a model connecting it with rural development, multifunctionality, local governance and environmental perception and national policies. The findings of several case studies within the EUROLAN project (Strengthening the Multifunctional Use of Land: Coping with marginalisation), suggest that social capital should be more recognized by policy makers as a key issue in the rural development process, hampering (when weak) or supporting (when strong and well-rooted) the implementation of rural development policies.

La marginalisation rurale peut en grande partie s'expliquer par les conditions peu favorables et un manque de ressources, mais pas uniquement et pas dans toutes les régions. Certaines régions de faible densité, aux conditions économiques et climatiques peu favorables, et qui ne font pas l'objet de politiques locales d'envergure, s'avèrent plus viables que certaines régions bien plus aisées. Dans le présent article, nous nous demanderons si le capital social peut aider à combler ce fossé, et si tel est le cas, dans quelle mesure. Le rôle du capital social sera démontré en tant que vecteur d'un modèle le reliant avec le développement rural, la plurifonctionnalité, la gouvernance locale, la perception environnementale et les politiques nationales. Les résultats de certaines études de cas incluses dans le projet EUROLAN (Renforcement de l'usage multifonctionnel du Sol, prendre en charge la marginalisation) laissent entendre que le capital social devrait être mieux pris en compte par les acteurs politiques comme une question clé dans le processus de développement rural, freinant (lorsqu'elles sont faibles) ou encourageant (lorsqu'elles sont fortes et bien enracinées) la mise en œuvre de politiques de développement rural.

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