

Can Social trust and participation be reinforced through education? Empirical data from Greece.

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Abstract

The present study is part of a wider research conducted in Greece on social capital and the correlation of its two dimensions – social trust and participation – with variables, such as gender, age, income etc. The study also attempts to explore the differences presented in social capital among participants of different educational levels. The present article particularly focuses on a specific group, i.e. Second Chance School graduates in Greece and studies the impact of their involvement in life-long training on their social trust and participation levels, compared with adults of other educational levels. Correlations between educational level, social participation and trust were calculated using the Pearson Chi-Square test.

Introduction

Social capital constitutes – along with economic and cultural – one of the three forms of capital distinguished by Bourdieu (1986) and refers to “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” (Bourdieu, 1986).

Coleman (1988) offered a wider meaning of the term, also to include the mechanisms generating social capital, i.e. networks of relationship, reciprocity, trust and social norms. In Coleman’s view, social capital is a neutral resource that facilitates any manner of action, but whether society is better off as a result of that, entirely depends on the way in which the individual uses it (Foley & Edwards, 1997).

Putnam (1993) goes much further and draws a distinction between two main components of the concept: “bonding social capital” and “bridging social capital”. Bonding refers to the value assigned to social networks between homogeneous groups of people and bridging refers to the link of social networks between socially heterogeneous groups.

Fukuyama (2000) defines social capital as “an instantiated set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permits them to cooperate with one another”.

All definitions of social capital offered so far by various researchers inevitably lead to the conclusion that the basic condition for the existence of social capital is also the existence of trust, as social capital seems to involve and demand trustworthiness. Trust can be defined as the mutual expectation that no party involved in an exchange will take advantage of the vulnerability of others (Fukuyama, 2000). Furthermore, trustworthy people are those who keep their promises (Francois *et al.*, 2003) and such trustworthiness is extremely valuable when relationships cannot be fully and formally circumscribed by contracts. A society with many trustworthy members allows individuals to have confidence and build relationships and is, thus, rich in social capital (Francois *et al.*, 2003).

In the majority of studies conducted so far on the importance of trust (Anderson and Narus, 1990; Moorman, Deshpande and Zaltman, 1992; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Doney and Cannon, 1997), it was found that trust in other people is vital to sustaining a relationship and forming successful networks. Moreover, the development studies literature (Schmitz, 1995 and 1999; Schmitz and Nadvi, 1999; Altenberg and Meyer-Stamer, 1999; Weijland, 1999; McCormick, 1999; Humphrey and Schmitz, 1998) has revealed that a pre-existing atmosphere of trust, often resulting from an earlier common ethnic or social connection, ensures the establishment of sustainable networks.

Harrison (1985) goes much further in his study of trust, by introducing the “radius of trust” theory. According to his theory, all groups embodying social capital have a certain radius of

trust, that is, the circle of people among whom cooperative norms are operative. Depending on the nature of social capital, a group's radius of trust can be larger than the group itself or smaller than the size of the group. In this way, modern society may be regarded as a series of concentric and overlapping radii of trust.

According to research by Field & Schuller (1997), Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998) and the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, social capital has to do mainly with motivation to learn and is to be found in the norms and values of a society. More specifically, in their attempt to study the role of social capital in the creation of intellectual capital, Nahapiet and Ghoshal suggest that social capital should be considered in terms of three clusters: structural, relational and cognitive. The structural dimension of social capital relates to an individual ability to build weak and strong ties to others within the same system (i.e. school). The relational dimension focuses on the nature of the connection between individuals, which is best identified through level of trust towards others, as well as cooperation. Hazleton and Kennan (2000) added a third dimension, that of communication. According to them, communication is needed to access and use social capital through the exchange of information, as well as identify problems, find solutions and manage conflict. Therefore, when related to education, social capital and social networks do not affect learning stimuli acquisition, but rather ways of accessing them.

As far as learning is concerned, the disposition to knowledge is influenced by personality, existing cognitive norms, intelligence and willingness to learn, but it can be further developed only when it is incorporated into adult life experience. The greater the involvement in social activities and social capital, the deeper the understanding of the world and the greater the adaptation capability, development of networks and linguistic flexibility.

Studies conducted until now on adult learning have focused on different aspects of education, according to the theoretical background of researchers. Therefore, they have either studied the socioeconomic and cultural factors which facilitate or inhibit learning, or the psychological features of adult learning.

As far as the relation between social capital and education is concerned, although it constitutes a community characteristic, the impact of social capital on adult education can be viewed and measured on individual level. Coleman (1988) studied its relevance with school performance and pointed out ways, in which family relations produce knowledge that can be used from all members of society. According to the same researcher, it is mainly family attitude towards education and general cultural surroundings that determine whether an adolescent will go on attending high school or will abandon it.

There are three distinctive dimensions in the term of social capital: testing dimension, which focuses on different forms taken up by impersonal networks among individuals, interactive dimension, which, according to Granovetter (1992), refers to particular relations with bodies, institutions and other social forms, and to their quality (trust, sanctions, values, culture, obligations, expectations, self-identity, self-esteem etc.) and cognitive dimension, which relates to the common linguistic and non-linguistic codes of communication and to social and individual attributions. Research in Greece has shown that all those dimensions facilitate informal learning and are, therefore, correlated to life-long educational experience.

Life-long learning can be either formal or informal. The first is usually offered through structured curricula at school and has specific objectives and teaching methods. Formal educational system in Greece involves 9 years of obligatory school attendance: 6 years at preliminary school and 3 years at junior high school. The main objective of obligatory education in Greece is the balanced and multi-dimensional psychological and physical development of students, as well as the development of cognitive skills irrelevant of students' sex, nationality and socio-economic background. Furthermore, students develop their linguistic skills and get familiar with the basic concepts and national, religious and humanistic values of Greece (Giavrimis *et al.*, 2007).

On the other hand, informal education refers to learning opportunities arising from adult initiatives to participate in social activities, to interact with bodies and other citizens and to take advantage of the cultural stock of the society they live in. It is this particular dimension of adult learning that relates to bonding and bridging social capital. According to Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998) and Schumpeter (1934/1961), the learning process and the production of new knowledge involves interaction and linking. Linking has to do with relating existing elements and stimuli that were previously unlinked, while interaction refers to information diffusion through social action. According to Coleman (1998), Putnam (1993) and Granovetter (1973),

information contributes to the improvement of adult perception, since it helps individuals expand the boundaries of their micro-world beyond the reality of time and space, to develop symbolic thinking and to exchange acquired knowledge for a better career, group action and a variety of other choices. Social capital transforms and gives value to knowledge, making a reality out of it to be found in the framework of community.

According to Berger and Luckman (1966), the relation between social capital and learning is an interactive one: knowledge, skills and experience disposed by a community can affect social practices and, consequently, structural and interactive relations concerning social capital. Knowledge determines the quality of social capital.

Social integration and well-being refer to the right of citizens to express their full potential in every aspect of community activity, and to the attempt of the society to provide equal opportunities for all. Exclusion from labour market, health services, resources and education can have a negative impact on physical, social and mental health.

Lack of education is the main cause of social exclusion. Socially excluded individuals lack basic life skills, such as numeracy and literacy, as well as good social practices and communication skills. They have left school at an early stage, not having, thus, the opportunity to acquire specialised knowledge. The most usual exclusion indicators are absenteeism from school, the percentage of students who do not complete compulsory education and the percentage of non-qualified workers.

Numerous studies have established the impact of education on social capital and its proactive nature against social exclusion. The practice of social skills in the classroom, out-school activities in the community setting combined with learning stimuli provide the necessary qualifications contributing to the elimination of exclusion. Education also promotes flexibility, which is a major prerequisite in order to get by in the post-industrialised society.

However, at the same time, new forms of exclusion appear for those who are find it difficult to catch up with the rapid changes or do not live in societies with strong social networks that favour the diffusion of new principles. Societies with strong social capital are more flexible and tolerant, are more easily adapted to different conditions and develop through interaction collective self-esteem, which constitutes the necessary basis for knowledge acquisition.

Moreover, studies have shown that extensive schooling and educational quality predicts future adaptation abilities and flexibility in demanding environments, such as the competitive labour market. On the other hand, segregation of students, austere treatment of "difficult" students, different educational structures can generate social exclusion. According to Duffy (1995), "the key feature of exclusion is the lack of effective participation, rather than characteristics of particular populations, such as poverty, mental disability and ethnicity. Social exclusion is an immediate outcome of educational expulsion and dropping out. Failure at school represents "the last steps in a progressive deterioration of the relationship between the student and the school" (Cohen *et al.*, 2000).

Greek adults coming from low socio-economic strata have abandoned school and education at an early age, due to strict working conditions, lack of social networks, predominant culture and inhibiting family status. More particularly, in the agricultural and insular regions of Greece, the transition to the globalised post-industrial era has taken place in a rough way, as there was no transitional industrialized stage in the course of development: the inhabitants of those areas, which by that time had been used to agricultural activities, suddenly had to face highly specialized working conditions, with increasing need for information acquisition, know-how and competitiveness.

The Second Chance School is an innovative institution established by the EU which provides two-year programmes of adult learning to those adults who have not completed the compulsory 9-year education. The curriculum differs from that of conventional schools. It adopts individualized teaching, group work, inter-disciplinary projects and the use of new technologies. Great importance is attributed to knowledge offered outside school and classrooms and also to the use of knowledge which help them solving real life problems. The main aim of schools' activities is to help students acquire self-independence and autonomy, self-confidence and self-esteem, so that the trainees develop knowledge and skills to become critical lifelong learners. The School places emphasis on working at helping its students to be able to claim better place in the labour market. At the same time, it focuses on strengthening students' possibility of participating actively in all forms of social life.

The aim of adult education is to convert bonding social capital into bridging, as well as to identify the elements that can contribute to this transformation. But what happens with adults who out of social or personal reasons have not completed their education? Do they also lack social capital and educational opportunities? Is the relation between learning and social capital a two-way one? After all, is it possible that everything be a matter of how social capital and learning in general are defined? And should life-long learning go beyond formal definitions and include learning elements that are not mentioned in any curriculum? Which are those practices and learning activities that reflect community values and promote social capital and to what extent can conventionality restrict it? Further research has to be conducted in order to give light to these questions.

Methodology

A sample of 1200 participants from all over Greece was randomly selected from municipality catalogues. As expected, participants vary according to their educational level, reflecting the Greek population's educational status. Furthermore, a sample of 80 students attending Second Chance School was taken in order to draw comparisons between them and preliminary school graduates who didn't participate in any form of lifelong learning whatsoever. Data were collected for a two-year period by a group of 150 trained sociology students, who traveled to the selected regions of Greece in order to distribute the questionnaires and conduct interviews on the following topics: reasons of enrollment at Second Chance Schools, difficulties encountered, types of social participation etc. The questionnaire administered included closed-type questions about social participation and trust towards other people and foreigners. Using non-parametric statistical methods, we tried to establish correlation between the categorical variables (educational level and social participation and trust). Data were analyzed with the statistical package SPSS 15.

Results

Educational level affects participation in clubs, associations, groups etc. (Table 1). The percentages display this differentiation. It is interesting that the highest percentage is observed among adults of high educational level (PhD and Master's Degrees holders, University Degree graduates). University students – contrary to the expectations – exhibit low levels of social participation and trust. This finding can be explained by the structure of Greek University, which is not so closely linked to local community activities and emphasizes mainly the cognitive aspect of education. The findings are in accordance with relevant researches in Greece (National Social Research Centre), which emphasize the low participation rates of Greeks in clubs/associations and formal social activities. More specifically, 40.1% of the sample participates, in comparison to 59.9%, who declared no participation, because of limited leisure time and family engagements. The 40.1% overall participation in clubs, associations and groups might look like a high percentage, but further analysis reveals the lack of depth in social capital. The majority of Greeks believe that participation provides no supplementary benefits, as far as education, health, work, information and finance is concerned and the only reason they join clubs and associations is pleasure and entertainment. The enrolment is most of the times a typical one and rarely involves collective action for some common purpose. The vast majority of men stated participation in football fan clubs and both sexes were enrolled in fitness sports clubs. Political party participation has decreased as well, due to low levels of trust in deputies and political institutions. As revealed by percentages, there is an ascending participation tendency from lower to higher education levels. However, this association is not statistically significant ($\chi^2_{(8)} = 9.656$, $p = 0.290 > 0.05$).

Table 1: Participation according to general educational level

Do you participate in clubs/ associations/ groups?	Educational level								
	Preliminary School	Junior High School	Senior High School	Technical college	University degree	Master's Degree	PhD	University Students	Total
%									
Yes	24.1	35.5	39	41.9	47	43.3	75	37.3	40.1
No	75.9	64.5	61	58.1	53	56.7	25	62.7	59.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

What is quite remarkable (table 1a) is that adults studying at Second Chance Schools exhibit high levels of participation in clubs, associations and groups (45%), as compared to those who have attended preliminary school (24.1%) or have even graduated junior high school (35.5%). The question generated at this point is whether Second Chance students participate more as a result of their enrolment at School or high participation levels also led to them to the decision to get involved in continuing education.

Table 1a: Participation level of Preliminary, High School graduates and Second Chance School students

Do you participate in clubs/ associations/ groups?	Educational level		
	Preliminary School graduates	Junior High School graduates	Second Chance School students
%			
Yes	24.1	35.5	45
No	75.9	64.5	55
Total	100	100	100

As shown in Table 2, only 27.2% of Greeks trust their fellow citizens, whilst the majority (72.8%) shows mistrust ($\chi^2_{(8)} = 18.120, p = 0.02 < 0.05$), result also verified by the study conducted by the National Centre for Social Research in Greece (2002). Again, educational level affects this pattern: University students, postgraduate degree holders, Technical College graduates systematically exhibit higher levels of trust towards their fellow citizens.

Table 2: General trust in other people according to educational level

Trust in other people	Educational level								
	Preliminary School	High School	Senior High School	Technical college	University degree	Master's Degree	PhD	University Students	Total
%									
I trust most other people	17.9	14.5	26.3	35.6	29.1	33.3	75.0	29.9	27.2
I have to be careful with other people	82.1	85.5	73.8	64.4	70.9	66.7	25.0	70.1	72.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

However, when drawing a comparison among preliminary, junior high school graduates and Second Chance School students (table 2a), surprisingly enough, social trust levels of Second Chance School students are somewhat lower (15%) than those of preliminary school and junior high school graduates (17.9% and 14.5% respectively). We suspect that adult education and life-long learning has influenced the participation aspect of social capital, but not the inner social trust in other people.

Table 2a: General trust in other people among Preliminary School graduates, Junior High School graduates and Second Chance School students.

Trust in other people	Educational level		
	Preliminary School graduates	High School graduates	Second Chance School students
I trust most other people	17.9	14.5	15
I have to be careful with other people	82.1	85.5	85
Total	100	100	100

Things get worse when the question of trust in people of nationality other than that of the respondents arises. Theory has established that people belonging to out-groups are subject to suspicion, mistrust and are attributed negative characteristics and stereotypes. Xenophobia has its roots in these misconceptions. Education is considered to be the best remedy to such cases, as it provides access to information about other cultures and develops respect and tolerance towards differences. This is demonstrated in table 3, where high educational level is associated with higher levels of trust in foreigners. The highest percentage of trust is expressed by Master's and PhD degree holders (10% and 25% respectively, as compared to 6.9% with high levels of trust on the part of preliminary school graduates, 6.5% of high school graduates, 5.4% of senior high school graduates, 1.4% of Technical college graduates, 3.7% and 4.5% of university degree holders and students). The Chi-square test confirms this relationship ($\chi^2_{(8)} = 47.375$, $p = 0.000 < 0.01$). Unfortunately, xenophobia is high in Greek society. 56.7% of our sample shows no or little trust towards foreigners, against 38.2% who are neutral and only 5.1% who have high level of trust.

Table 3 Trust in people of different nationality

%	Educational level								
	Preliminary School	High School	Senior High School	Technical college	University degree	Master's Degree	PhD	University Students	Total
No/little trust	86.2	66.1	59	62.2	50.7	60	0	45.2	56.7
Neutral	6.9	27.4	35.6	36.5	45.5	30	75	50.3	38.2
High level of trust	6.9	6.5	5.4	1.4	3.7	10	25	4.5	5.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

In the comparison among the three lower educational level groups (table 3a), Second Chance School students, show higher levels of trust towards foreigners (8.1%) compared to preliminary (6.9%) and junior high school graduates (6.5%). It seems that the curriculum of Second Chance Schools, which gives special emphasis on social skills development and democratic principles, has had a positive impact on students, who, seem to be less xenophobic than other individuals, who have not been involved in life-long learning.

Table 3a: Trust in people of different nationality among Preliminary School graduates, Junior High School graduates and Second Chance School students.

	Educational level		
%	Preliminary School graduates	Junior High School graduates	Second Chance School students
No/little trust	86.2	66.1	73
Neutral	6.9	27.4	18.9
High level of trust	6.9	6.5	8.1
Total	100	100	100

Conclusions

Social capital is a multi-dimensional concept with both internal and external attributions. In this research the authors have made an attempt to measure it in terms of participation and social trust, the former being the external aspect and the latter the internal. Results suggest that educational level affects levels of trust in a statistically significant way. However, this is not the case with the second dimension of social capital, i.e. participation.

Formal education in Greece is strongly connected to social status and financial welfare. Well-educated people have better chances to gain social experience and prestige. The learning process most of the times entails leaving one's hometown in order to attend Post-Secondary Institutions in big cities, such as Athens and Thessaloniki or – frequently enough – abroad.

Low educated people usually join labour market at an early age and, following relevant research findings, don't share high professional and financial expectations. Very often, they are trapped in group misconceptions and stereotypes, whilst participation is limited to traditional forms, such as feasts, local activities and social assemblies.

The higher the educational level the higher the likelihood to develop bridging social capital. This becomes obvious by noticing the high trust levels exhibited towards groups that do not belong to the same ethnic or cultural group by high-educated participants. It should be noted that Greece had high sense of national identity until the early 90s. During that period, immigrants from Eastern European Countries, the Balkans and the Arabic World occupied job posts held so far by low-educated Greeks. As a result, unskilled low-educated workers and the agricultural population felt resentment about this new situation. Not having sufficient social skills and qualifications to accept foreign workers, they have become more conservative and turned back to more traditional values, showing little trust towards foreigners.

It is well documented that Greeks have the lowest mean score (3.6) of social capital when compared to Spaniards (average 4.9), Portuguese (average 4), English (average 5) and Dutch (5.7), according to National Center for Social Research (2003).

The present study supports this finding. Not only the majority of Greeks (59.9%) does not participate in social clubs or groups, but also content analysis of the interviews has revealed that they do not wish to participate, as they consider it a waste of time. In general, Greeks believe that family and peer networks are much more important and traditional values fostering this assumption are sustained. The impact of education is much more noticeable when drawing comparisons between primary education and Second Chance School graduates. It seems that adult education has a stronger effect on social skills development and involvement in social activities, as provided for by Second Chance School curricula, which focus on cultural activities and base learning on group work and life experiences.

Apart from the statistical significance of general educational level on social trust, the comparison between preliminary school and junior high school graduates and Second Chance School students suggests slight differences after reintegration in education. In fact, when compared to high educational levels, the low educated groups exhibit the lowest social trust percentages. However, education at Second Chance School seems to have had a positive impact on students, who show higher levels of social trust. Nevertheless, only 27.2% of Greeks trust other people, finding to be further investigated. Social capital promotes knowledge, reinforces individual skills and qualifications, shares collective learning creates the necessary background of trust and reciprocity and facilitates economical and personal development. In this way it reinforces human capital, which determines the competitiveness of a society and, by and large, its sustainability. Modern economic theories invest much on human factor and its capacity to draw information through informal educational systems and its experience through exchange with other members of a community.

Social capital, when viewed from the participation and trust perspective can reflect such needs, in that it can create socially-conscious forms of education, increase adults' motivation to learn and convince them that the result of such effort has great value for society. Finally, it can form the right conditions to produce knowledge, allowing at the same time the

combination of old elements with new ones. But what is most important of all is that social capital enables adults to adapt more easily to changes and, after all, to actively take part in them.

However, we are not sure whether this is a causal relationship or, in other words, whether education promotes social capital or social capital enhances formal and informal learning experiences.

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