

Social Capital and European Regions: A Possible Paradigm Shift?

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Abstract

This paper explains why Social capital should be measured in European regions. There are theoretical, historical, institutional and empirical reasons to propose a paradigm shift. First, on a theoretical level, evaluating participation and networks at a lower administrative level captures more variation and provides a more accurate image of Europe. A new interesting literature has been developed, and concerns the opportunity to rescale the level of analysis in order to create a new spatial economy (Brennen, 2004). Second, on a historical-political level, regions are more consistent concepts with the development of our continent. Certain areas of Europe such the South of Italy, the Flemish area of Belgium, and Eastern Germany are very different from the rest of the respective countries. Third, at institutional level, the powers attributed to regions are consistently increasing in all European Countries, as demonstrated by the RAI index of Hooghe, Schakel and Marks (2008). Fourth, at an empirical level, evidence derived from EVS (1999-2000) demonstrates that individuals, who identify themselves with regions, rather than their community or nation, participate to a greater extent in the third sector and have a higher level of generalized trust. This article is focused on the historical-political and empirical reasons to undertake regional analysis in 15 Western European Countries.

Key Words: Social Capital, European Regions, Regional autonomy, European Union.