

Chapter 3

Social Capital Levels in Greece in Times of Crisis

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Introduction

Several scholars have analysed the role of social capital in the economic development of a country (Miller and Rivera, 2007; Wallimann, 2014; Dudley, 1994; Beugelsdijk and Van Schaik, 2005; Knack and Keefer, 1997). Social capital is a component that enables a community to maintain its well-being, even in conditions of economic recession (Verick, 2009; Dudley, 1994; Putnam et al., 1993). It has also been claimed that high levels of social capital promote economic stability and equality alongside high levels of volunteerism (Liu and Besser, 2003; Casey and Christ, 2005; Helliwell et al., 2014). Apart from the influence of social capital on the economic development of a country, it is also interesting to observe how social capital changes in times of financial crisis. Several authors have revealed the significant impacts of the current recession in Greece (Zavras et al., 2013; Milios and Sotiropoulos, 2010; Verick, 2009). These concern a variety of impacts in the context of the economy, society and the environment (Matsaganis and Leventi, 2011; Declerq et al., 2011; Kouretas and Vlamis, 2010; Mazurek and Mielcova, 2013).

In this chapter we will explore how the recent recession has affected the social structure of the Greek community and specifically the social capital levels of the country. A main question is how levels of trust and networks change as a reaction to a recession and whether these changes facilitate the ability of communities to deal with difficult financial times.

We will try to answer this question by looking at recent data from Greece referring to elements of social capital. In the next section, we will briefly explain the term social capital and then analyse the main characteristics of the Greek political culture which are linked to social capital issues. We will then present data for social capital in Greece, divided into two main periods, before and after 2008. In the final part of the chapter, we will highlight the main changes in social capital levels and we will discuss the role of the state-citizen relationship in the changing levels of social capital in Greece.

Explaining the Term ‘Social Capital’

One of the most important scholars analysing social capital for individuals and communities is James Coleman (1990). He emphasised networks as a fundamental element of social capital. Social networks are regarded as a structural feature of social capital (Uphoff, 1998; Grootaert and Bastelaer, 2002; Putnam, 1998) and refer to the involvement of citizens in both formal and informal social groups (Putnam, 1998). Informal groups include non-organised connections such as networks of family and friends. On the other hand, formal groups refer to the involvement of individuals in organised collectivities, such as NGOs. Due to the importance of social networks in the development of civil society, a consideration of social networks is included in several studies measuring social capital (e.g. Putnam, 2000; Narayan and Cassidy, 2001).

The involvement in social networks provides individuals with an opportunity to improve their lives and well-being. This is because networks are associations of individuals that often share a common interest or unite a common body (Fischer et al., 2014; Garcia and Chavez, 2014). They also create links between different actors that are characterised by reciprocity and build on interpersonal communication and exchange (Siisiainen, 2000; Fischer et al., 2014; Piracha et al., 2014).

Social capital through social networking may be converted into economic development. Among other functions, networks in society are the source of social ties that create solidarity and high levels of trust among citizens (Nandan and Ciccotosto, 2014). Furthermore, through strong social networks, the costs of transactions and dissemination of information can be significantly reduced (Cote and Healy, 2001). Regarding the link between social trust and economic development, the study of Knack and Keefer (1997) presents some initial findings. According to these authors, countries with higher levels of trust have also a more equal distribution of income (Knack and Keefer, 1997). Further studies have shown that when social trust is at a high level, the cost of the labour market decreases (Bjornskov, 2009). From an instrumental point of view, trust matters for the economy as it affects exchange relations, risk management and income inequalities (Lindstrom, 2014; Carpiano and Fitterer, 2014). A lack of social trust can prevent the implementation of required measures of economic performance, as they are not perceived as credible and accepted from the citizens (Gyorffy, 2013).

However, social networks can also have a different important role especially in time of crisis. They can result in collective activities which support people in need, such as food banks, homeless support and daycare services (Helbing, 2013). Thus, communities with dense networks and strong civic associations may be able to deal more effectively with poverty issues, marginalisation and vulnerability (Narayan, 1997; Varshney, 2000; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

Another important element of social capital is social trust (Coleman, 1990) which is closely linked with social networks (Putnam, 2000; Lindstrom, 2014; Carpiano and Fitterer, 2014). Social trust is one of the most commonly measured indicators of social capital. It refers to the level of trust and trustworthiness

which is developed between citizens. Trust can be significantly promoted through networks and is associated with different forms of social engagement such as volunteerism (Putnam, 2000; Carpiano and Fitterer, 2014). High levels of social trust and reciprocity are able to give an effective solution to conflicts that are inherent in a governance system, and are related to polycentric approaches (Henry and Dietz, 2011; Jones et al., 2014). As Putnam states, social trust is embodied in individual relationships and establishes trustworthiness that can improve the level of efficiency in a society by facilitating coordinated actions (Putnam, 1993, p. 167). Social trust is often categorised in two types; one is linked with generalised trust and the other with particularised trust (Molm et al., 2000). The former refers to the level of trust in other people in general and the latter to the level of trust in specific social groups. Both types of trust are very important for the collective activities of a community.

Social trust can be considered an element through which a society builds confidence to invest in collective or group activities (Pretty and Ward, 2001). Hence, high social trust co-exists with high levels of honesty in a community and assists in the prevention of corruption (Svendsen and Bjornskov, 2007). Furthermore, communities with high social trust can limit opportunistic actions and resolve ongoing collective issues (Grootaert and Bastelaer, 2002).

A final important indicator of social capital is institutional trust. This refers to the level of trust towards institutions that exist in a community. These may include the level of trust in the national government, specific ministries and in general any organisations involved in the management of public issues which are fundamental for the functioning of communities. This type of trust is an important parameter of social capital as it represents to a significant extent how well the networks between citizens and the state work. For example, in communities with high levels of institutional trust, there is a higher level of acceptance of public policies, as citizens consider that proposed public policies will be effective (Cvetkovich and Winter, 2003). Furthermore, citizens tend to be more receptive of information coming from certain actors if the level of trust is higher (Jones, 2010).

Institutional trust has also been linked to policy implementation and policy outcome. It has a significant impact on monitoring and control, in terms of conflict management and in negotiation procedures (McEvily et al., 2003; Warren et al., 2014). Thus, it is linked with the level of compliance with regulations of a community and also with the level of acceptance for proposed public policies (Jones, 2010). It should be noted that this type of trust is characterised by a top-down policy approach and is not depended on horizontal relations but on institutional performance. In this context, institutional trust is directly correlated with indicators like the GDP, the level of unemployment, the rate of inflation and corruption indexes (Mishler and Rose, 1998). For example, some scholars have pointed out that the state's capacity to collect taxes is directly related to citizens' trust towards the government (Kuokstis, 2012). This is because citizens are expected to accept a certain level of social services in return for their taxes (Uslaner, 2007).

Social Capital in Greece

Before exploring the impact of the current recession on social capital levels in Greece, it is important to analyse the general context in which social capital has been developed in Greece over the past decades. Several scholars have highlighted the low levels of social capital in Greece, along with the weak civil society and centralised state (Patra, 2012; Bezruchka, 2009; Kazemipur, 2006; Sotiris, 2010). Greece has also been characterised in the literature as a country with strong informal networks, in particular family networks (Paraskevopoulos, 2006; see also Chapter 4). Greek civil society, in particular, has been considered to have had an idiosyncratic development through the years (Mouzelis, 1987, 1995; Mouzelis and Pagoulatos, 2003; Sotiropoulos, 2004; Tsoukalas, 1987; Mavrogordatos, 1988; Diamandouros, 1997, p. 64). This has been linked to the socio-political conditions which have developed since the establishment of the Modern Greek state, and are linked mainly with an irregular process of political integration of citizens (see Mouzelis, 1987; Tsoukalas 1987; Mavrogordatos, 1988), in the context of the broader process of democratisation of Greek society following the fall of the Greek Junta in 1974. This process is related to the gradual recognition of the independent role of labour and professional organisations and with the construction of a constitutional change, strengthening the democratic process in both civil and political society (Alivizatos, 1993; Tsoukalas and Panagiotopoulou, 1992).

Two additional characteristics of Greece are the dominant role of political parties, especially in past decades, and the highly interventionist and centralised state (Tsoukalas, 1987; Mouzelis and Pagoulatos, 2003; Matsas, 2013). The development of the centralised state was historically based on patron-client relationships between state actors and citizens. (Diamandouros, 1997, p. 61; Knight, 2013; Matsas, 2013). By the 1980s, statism was regarded as a major issue, obstructing significant structural changes in both the public and the private sector (Lavdas and Papadakis, 2003; Konstantinidis and Xezonakis, 2013). It is interesting that even during the 80s, when an increase in the levels of political participation was witnessed, the patron-state continued to exist and clientelistic networks flourished (Kairidis, 1997; Skouras and Christodoulakis, 2014; Mouzelis and Pagoulatos, 2003).

Measuring Changes of Social Capital in Greece

Data Used in the Analysis

In order to analyse the change of social capital levels in Greece, we will focus on three main indicators of social capital: social trust, institutional trust and social networks. The data used in the analysis were obtained from a series of Eurobarometer surveys (up until 2013) (European Commission, 2013) and four rounds of the European Social Survey in which Greece participated (ESS Rounds

1, 2, 4, 5 conducted respectively in 2002, 2004, 2008 and 2010). All of these studies were conducted on a national level with a representative sample from all Greek regions. Additionally, a comparison of Greece with several European countries (up to 2008) is presented. Finally, data from a study conducted in 2011 by the University of the Aegean (UAEGEAN) is also used. We should note that the latter study was not conducted on a national level but rather in six research areas (Thessaloniki, Kavala, Mesologi, Korinthos, Chania and Lesvos). The study was part of a larger research project which explored several socio-environmental issues, including the measurement of social capital elements (Jones et al., 2014).

Social Capital in Greece before 2008

Social Trust

We will now look at each indicator of social capital separately. In several studies of social capital, social trust is measured through the question of whether ‘Most people can be trusted or you can’t be too careful’ (e.g. Paxton, 1999; Newton and Norris, 2000; Beugelsdijk and van Schaik, 2005). Nevertheless, several other questions have been used concerning the level of fairness and helpfulness among individuals (e.g. Paxton, 1999; Narayan and Cassidy, 2001).

Regarding the levels of social trust in Greece, it is interesting to see the data from the ESS in 2004, which used the question of generalised trust. This was measured on a 10-point Likert scale, with higher scores revealing higher levels of trust. According to this data, in 2004 Greece had one of the lowest levels of generalised trust in Europe, with a mean score of 3.9. Lower levels were presented only in Poland and Portugal.

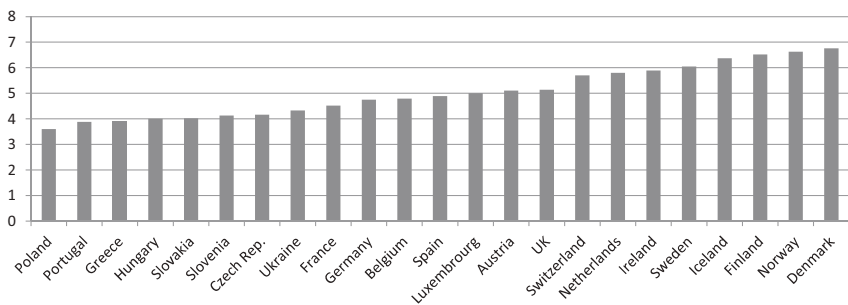


Figure 3.1 Social trust levels across Europe (10-point scale)

Source: ESS (2004)

Institutional Trust

Another vital component of social capital is trust in certain institutions (e.g. Newton and Norris, 2000; Narayan and Cassidy, 2001), both national (e.g.

national parliament, police) and international (e.g. European Parliament, the UN). Data on this theme from Greece and other European countries were collected by the ESS in 2004. Here we present the data on the level of trust in the national parliament and the European parliament as these are the main institutions involved with state decisions, especially during the financial crisis. According to this data, it is interesting to observe that Greece had the highest level of trust in the European parliament in 2004 (Figure 3.2). Furthermore, the level of trust in the national parliament was at an average level compared to other countries in Europe. A possible explanation for the relative high levels of trust in Greece is that 2004 was the year that the Olympics were organised in Athens, a fact which had assisted in promoting economic development, reducing unemployment and developing of a feeling of national pride in the country.

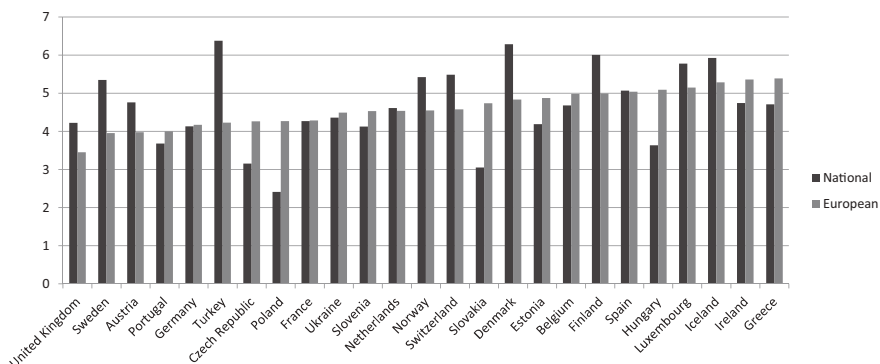


Figure 3.2 Levels of institutional trust in the National and the European Parliaments, across Europe (10-point scale)

Source: ESS (2004)

Social Networks

Concerning social networks in Greece, a general assumption in the relevant literature is that formal networks are weak whereas informal networks of family and friends are significantly denser (Lyberaki and Paraskevopoulos, 2002; Christoforou, 2005). According to the first wave of ESS (2002), it is observed that passive participation in formal networks (membership) tends to be in a higher rate than active participation (volunteerism). Specifically, 24.8% of the sample stated that they are a member of at least one from a list of organisations, whereas only 6% had participated in some type of voluntary work. By comparing Greece with other European countries (using the same data), Greece had the second lowest level of membership (after Poland) and the fourth lowest level of volunteering amongst a list of 21 countries.

Changes in Social Capital Levels since 2008

Based on the available data, it is apparent that the weakest elements of Greece concerning its stock of social capital were the low levels of social trust and the low level of participation in formal networks. In this section of the chapter we will focus only on Greece and present the most up to date available data for social capital. We should note at this point that there is significant lack of data since 2011 as there has been a reduction of surveys conducted at national level measuring social capital elements. Apart from the results of Eurobarometer surveys and the ESS, we will also present results from the UAEGEAN study.

Social Trust

We will first look at the levels of social trust. According to the results of the national data of the ESS until 2010, there is a trend of increasing social trust over the past decade. Specifically, in 2002 the average level of social trust was 3.64 (ESS, 2004), in 2004 this was 3.9 (ESS, 2004), in 2008 it was 3.92 (ESS, 2008) and in 2010 social trust had increased to 4.02 (ESS, 2010). In the UAEGEAN study, which was conducted in 2011 and measured social trust in 6 cities of Greece, the level of trust reached approximately the mean score of 5 (in a 10-point Likert scale) which is the highest level of social trust reported in the past 20 years. We should note that, although these measurements may indicate a change in the level of social trust, the two sets of data cannot be considered comparable as they refer to a different sampling frame of the Greek population and sampling size.

Social Networks

Concerning social networks, there are very limited data available for Greece. By comparing the level of participation in formal social networks in 2002 (ESS, 2002) and the results of the UAEGEAN study in 2011, an increase in the level of volunteerism is observed. In particular, according to the ESS (2002) data, the level of volunteerism in 2002 was 6% and membership in NGOs was at 24.8%. In the UAEGEAN study, volunteerism in some type of NGO was at 24.9% and membership remained at similar levels to the 2002 study (22.3%). Although the two samples are not identical, there appears to be very clear increase in volunteerism. On the other hand, membership in NGOs does not seem to have increased.

Institutional Trust

A final indicator concerns the level of institutional trust. This is the indicator for which there are the most up to date measurements, as it is included in the standard Eurobarometers (European Commission, 2013). According to the available data up to 2013 (Figure 3.3 and 3.4), there has been a clear decrease in the level of trust, both towards the European Parliament and the National Parliament. This question

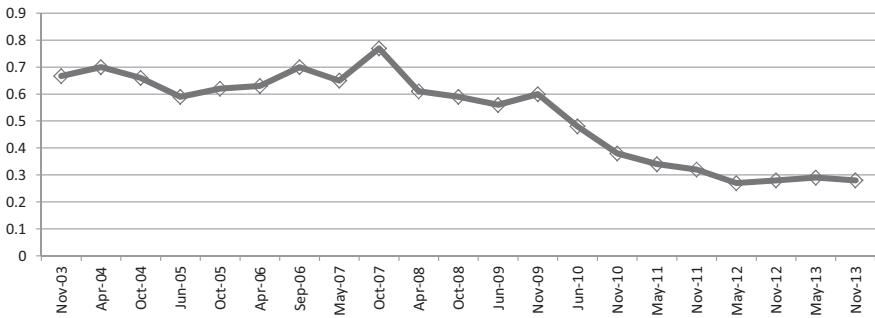


Figure 3.3 Trust in Greece in the European Parliament (%)

Source: Standard Eurobarometers 2003–2013 (European Commission, 2013)

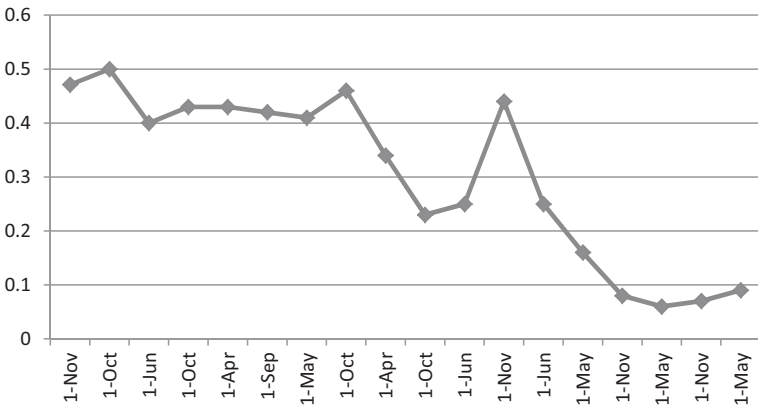


Figure 3.4 Trust in Greece in the National Parliament (%)

Source: Standard Eurobarometers 2003–2013 (European Commission, 2013)

is measured in a dichotomous format and respondents are asked to declare whether they trust the specific institutions or not. For the national government, the lowest levels of trust are presented in 2012 and a small increase is observed in 2013. The very low levels of trust in 2012 can be attributed to the severe impacts of governmental austerity measures for Greek households. The slight increase observed in 2013 cannot be considered significant at the moment. Data over the next five years will show whether attitudes of Greek citizens have started to change towards the government in a positive way.

Discussion

The present chapter aimed to explore if and how social capital has changed in Greece over the past few years. According to the data presented, we would like to highlight two main issues. First, there has been a significant decrease in the levels of trust towards institutions. Although Greece in general is considered a country with low levels of institutional trust (Jones et al., 2008), this type of trust has decreased even further in the past decade. From the data, it is evident that there is a high level of distrust and dissatisfaction towards political institutions. Thus, it could be claimed that the financial crisis has exacerbated the lack of trust of the public to a significant extent. In this context, some scholars have highlighted the role of low institutional trust and the weak administrative capacity in widening the problem of economic recession in the country (Kroustalli, 2011; Papastamatelou, 2012). The observed decreasing levels of trust towards national and European institutions can be attributed to the impact of the austerity measures which have been imposed on Greek households in the past years. Austerity measures have resulted in an increase of taxes, the reduction of salaries and increased levels of unemployment. These measures are planned to have an effect in the long-term. As a result, Greek citizens are currently experiencing the consequences of these measures but without seeing any benefits. This could be a significant factor contributing to the decreasing levels of trust in Greece.

A second issue we would like to highlight is that there is some evidence, according to the 2011 data from the UAEGEAN study, that the level of volunteerism has increased over the past years. This finding is to some extent in accordance with recent studies. Specifically, according to the study of Sotiropoulos and Bourikos (2013), social networks in Greece are a vital tool for providing social assistance or the necessary safety nets for the poor. In various Greek cities, local social movements and informal organisations have developed (see also Chapter 10). These social networks function to some extent as emergency relief mechanisms. They tend to cover the gap in social service provision in multiple sectors, such as health and education, especially for people in need. In this way they represent a shift from the mainstream type of economy, prioritising well-being and resilience as key targets (Sotiropoulos and Bourikos, 2013; Swinden, 2012). Some examples of these new initiatives are health clinics and pharmacies, which provide relevant services for free, educational centers for children for after-school activities, and food banks (Sotiropoulos and Bourikos, 2013). Another positive sign which is linked to the development of new types of social networks is that the levels of social trust do not seem to have changed over the past few years. Social trust in Greece has been traditionally lower than most European countries. This has been linked to the individualistic culture which has been developed since the creation of the modern Greek state. However, it is important that these levels of trust do not seem to have decreased further in this time of crisis. One assumption we can make at this point is that the creation of new social networks has assisted in the maintenance of social trust in Greek communities. This may be because these

new and emerging social networks have established strong social ties based on relationships of trust between their members.

These changes in the social capital levels can be seen from two different angles. From one point of view there seems to be a shift towards more collective action aiming to replace the lack of state services. This is an important change taking into consideration the traditional individualistic character of the Greek society. On the other hand, a question is raised regarding whether this type of social change is a positive change. Should the retreat of the state, leaving space for new social movements, be seen as a positive change? In order to answer this question, significant further research is required, including both up to date quantitative data and also qualitative interviews exploring in-depth changes in the social structure of the society.

Apart from the need for social data, we would like to underline that the specific change in the social networks of the country was a forced one and did not result from a gradual transformation of communities through the years. Although the new initiatives through informal networks could be seen as a positive sign of change in the Greek society we consider that the role of the state should remain as a main support mechanism for social services, especially for people in need. This view is based mainly on the fact that a positive change in the socio-political structure of a society needs several years in order to be effective. In the context of the Greek political culture, the shift from a centralised state to a more community-based framework is a significant one. It is important that the state remains the main support mechanism for the following years for all social services while assisting in the gradual construction of the necessary institutions in order to promote community initiatives.

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