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SOCIAL CAPITAL IN RURAL AREAS IN POLAND THE CASE OF THE ŚWIĘTOKRZYSKIE PROVINCE

Abstract: The study tackles the issue of the spatial distribution of social capital in Polish rural areas, using the example of the Świętokrzyskie province. R. Putnam's theory was adopted as to social capital referring to social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. A synthetic indicator of the quality of social capital was developed, which included 4 components: civic and religious engagement, reciprocity, honesty, trust and local press readership. The research was conducted mainly on the basis of unpublished data. Gminas (municipalities) with a high, an average and a low level of social capital were identified. The highest level of social capital was recorded in highly urbanised gminas with a favourable demographic structure. An average level of social capital was characteristic of typical agricultural gminas. A low level of social capital was recorded in areas with well developed industrial functions. The farmers employed at industrial plants in addition to working on their own farms, which was a prevailing practice in the time of the centrally planned economy, had a largely adverse impact on the weakening of bridging capital, and in recent years the population has not been capable to develop bonding capital as yet.

Key words: social capital, civic engagement, religious engagement, reciprocity, honesty, trust, local press readership, social capital indicator, rural areas, Poland, Świętokrzyskie province.

INTRODUCTION

Among factors which have an impact on the development of rural areas there is one which is increasingly gaining in significance. The idea behind it is based on the assumption that the main factor stimulating economic growth in the postindustrial era is the capability of a society to form organisational structures and develop social networks (Putnam, 2008). In fact, the ability of a community to form groups within itself and to create networks lies at the root of any activity (Tocqueville, 1996). The economic prosperity of a country or a region, as well as its competitive potential, largely depend upon the level of trustworthiness and the social networks which this community can build (Fukuyama, 1997).

Poland's low level of social capital is perceived as a major factor hindering progress and development. This especially applies to rural areas, which are affected by an outflow of young and well-educated people, with a continuous ageing process being observed (Kamińska 2008). Furthermore, according to Fedyszak-Radziejowska (2007, p. 66) "an atmosphere of distrust, which inhabitants of rural areas, mainly farmers, had to face up to for many years, an atmosphere resulting from the policy of 'repressive tolerance' which the communist government waged against peasants' traditional norms and values, land ownership, market mechanisms as well as against the peasantry elite, was hardly conducive to the building of social capital".

Świętokrzyskie is one of Poland's smallest provinces (*województwo*) in terms of population and area, with more than half of its inhabitants (54%) living in rural areas. Two parts of this province can be distinguished: the north – featuring a higher population density – and the poorly populated area in the south-east. Such a situation is closely related to the structure of the economy, as the northern part of the province is a region with a well-developed industry, while farming prevails in the south. In the research, all the rural administrative units, or municipalities (*gminas*) as well as rural areas being part of urban-rural *gminas* were included.

For the purpose of this work, an assumption was adopted whereby social capital refers to interactions among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness arising from them (Putnam, 1993). Various forms of social capital can be distinguished, with *bridging* social capital and *bonding* social capital being its two major types. The former strengthens small groups, whereas the latter determines the level of cooperativeness between individuals with different social and economic characteristics. The bonding relations constitute the basis for cooperation between people of different ages, incomes, professional environments, etc. This type of social capital is the most effective in integrating people with the community, and at the same time – as has been proved by empirical research – it brings the most measurable benefits (including economic ones) (*Stowarzyszeniowo-obywatelski... 2008*).

1. RESEARCH METHODS AND INDICATORS APPLIED IN THIS WORK

In this work, a synthetic indicator of social capital is used, in accordance with the UNDP methodology applied in calculating the human development index for particular countries (*Human Development Report 1996*). This indicator is as follows:

$$WKS = \frac{1}{n} \sum \alpha_i \left(\frac{X_{ij}}{X_{i\max}} \right); (j=1,2,\dots,m) \quad \text{for stimulants,}$$

and

$$WKS = \frac{1}{n} \sum \alpha_i \left(\frac{X_{i\min}}{X_{ij}} \right); (j= 1,2\dots m) \quad \text{for destimulants}$$

whereby:

WKS (*wskaźnik kapitału społecznego*) – social capital indicator

J – given spatial unit (*gmina*)

n – total number of variables adopted for building the measure

X_{ij} – value of the variable i for gmina j

$X_{i\max}$ – maximum value of the variable i

$X_{i\min}$ – minimum value of the variable i

α_i - load coefficient included in WKS.

Four primary components were established in the empirical analysis of social capital (Putnam, 2008; cf. Fig. 1).

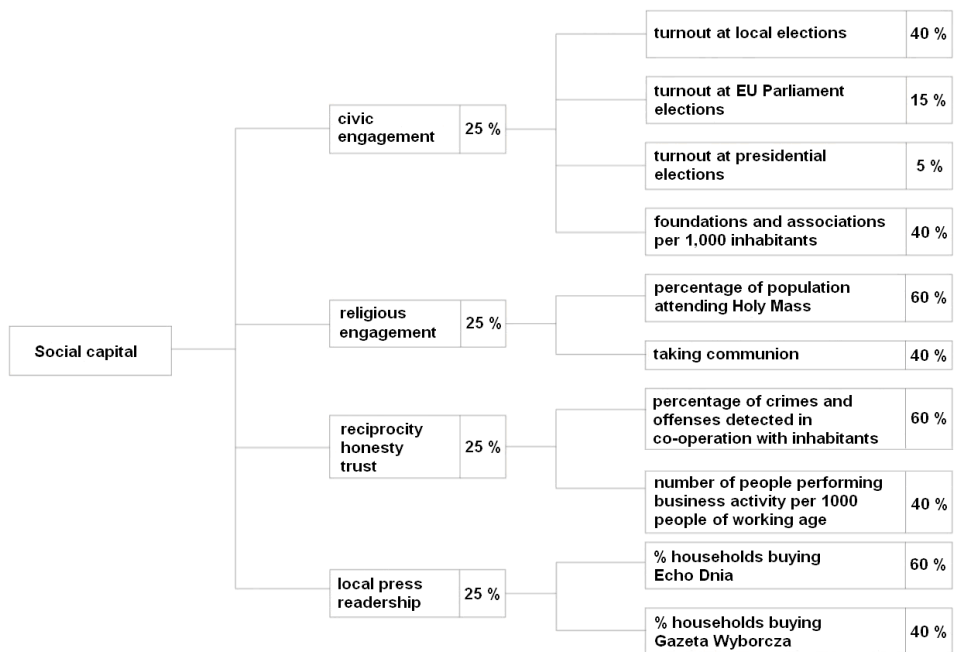


Fig. 1. Indicators of social capital assumed in the research and their loads
Source: prepared by the author.

All the data illustrating the level of civic engagement and the number of people running their own businesses per 1,000 of working-age population (in the section: *Reciprocity, Honesty, Trust*) were obtained from the Provincial Electoral Committee in Kielce and *the Rocznik Statystyczny Województwa Świętokrzyskiego* (2009). The other data were calculated on the basis of unpublished information. Data relating to the rate of crime were provided

by the Provincial Police Headquarters in Kielce. Information about the sales of local newspapers was offered by the *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Echo Dnia* dailies, and by the two largest press distribution companies, i.e. Kolporter S.A and Ruch S.A. Data on religious engagement were obtained from the Dioceses of Kielce, Sandomierz and Radom, as well as from the Statistical Institute of the Roman Catholic Church (SAC) in Warsaw.

In this work, it has been assumed that the examined aspects of social capital are of the same load (25%), with particular indicators within described aspects being of different loads.

3. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In the literature, the belief prevails as to the efficient functioning of liberal political and economic institutions being invariably based on a sound and dynamic civic society (Gellner, 1994). Civic society is understood as “a complex network of indirect institutions, including volunteer associations, educational institutions, clubs, unions, media, charity and religious organisations” (Fukuyama, 1997).

Participation in elections is the most common form of grassroots political activity and civic engagement; “the same as a canary in a coal-mine, voter turnout can serve as an indicator of large-scale social changes” (Putnam, 2008, p. 60).

The primary measure of political engagement adopted for the purpose of this study is voter turnout in local, presidential and EU parliamentary elections, with their loads varying. It was assumed that participation in local elections is the most important since the work of the local authorities has the greatest impact on the development of particular gminas. This measure was given a load of 40%. There were also considerable controversies surrounding Poland’s accession to the European Union. In their manifestos, political parties highlighted extreme consequences that could arise from it, especially those supposed to have an impact on farmers’ lives. Initially, more than a half of the population of rural areas opposed our country joining the EU. The developments of the following years showed the actual value of those views. The voter turnout at the elections for the European Parliament illustrates the level of civic engagement. This indicator was given a load of 15%, while the voter turnout at the presidential election was given a load of only 5%. The reason is, firstly, that the presidential election was held a long time ago – in 2005, and, secondly, the quality of life in rural communities does not depend significantly upon decisions made by the President of the Republic of Poland.

Using voter turnout as the only factor in the analysis of civic engagement is incomplete and misleading (cf. Verba et al., 1995). Therefore, the number of NGOs and associations per 1,000 inhabitants was adopted as one of the main measures (with a load of 40%). Notwithstanding the fact that formal

membership of an association constitutes only one of the aspects of social capital, it is often regarded as a useful barometer of civic engagement. (Tocqueville, 1996). Data were obtained from REGON¹.

The synthetic indicator of civic engagement in rural areas ranged from 0.45 to 0.89, with its average value amounting to 0.64. It means that on the basis of the adopted measures a conclusion can be drawn about a considerable civic engagement in the rural population. It contradicts the thesis that the rural population shows inertia, lack of civic values and an incapability to adapt to the new rules of taking and implementing initiatives. In fact, Wieruszewska's opinion (2002) should be adopted: that the inertia of rural population results from the misconception that no instruments other than political ones can be used for expressing one's interests.

The highest indicators of civic engagement (more than 0.70) were recorded in gminas situated at the outer edges of the province as well as in its southern part, where the agricultural sector dominates (Fig. 2). An assumption can be made here that the high potential of 'bridging' capital in these areas is conducive to the election of local leaders, whereas gminas situated around major urban centres (Kielce, Ostrowiec, Sandomierz, Jędrzejów, Busko-Zdrój) are characterised by a relatively lower level of civic engagement.

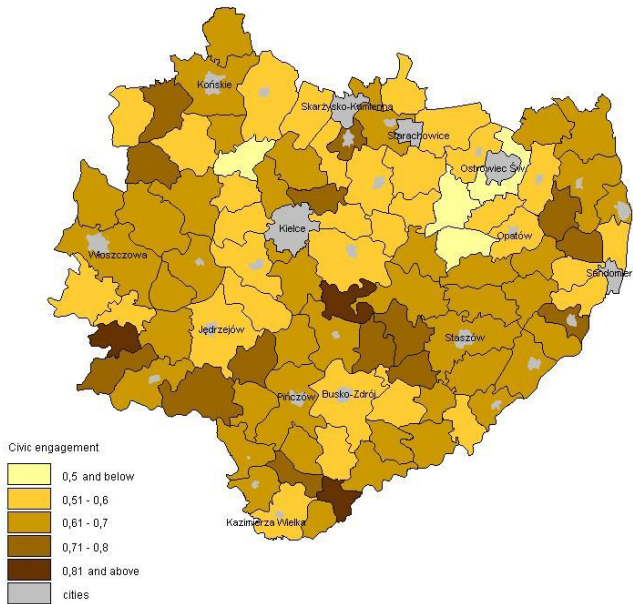


Fig. 2. Spatial distribution of the synthetic indicator of civic engagement in the rural areas of the Świętokrzyskie province
Source: prepared by the author.

¹ Register of National Economy – National Register of Business Entities, statistical register of the Central Statistical Office.

4. RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT

Faith-based communities, which provide opportunities for collective religious practices, are an important repository of social capital values. Churches are incubators of new skills and norms of civil life, engendering interest in all matters relating to the community, in addition to enhancing civic engagement. Practising believers meet other people, who, subsequently, involve them in new forms of community work. This is the reason, as has been proved by Verba et al. (1995), why church-goers are much more involved in the work of secular organisations, showing a higher level of voter turnout and enjoying enhanced social relationships. Religiousness can compete with education, strongly correlating with most of the forms of civic engagement (Putnam, 2008). People of faith are fierce 'social capitalists'. As a matter of fact, it has not been unambiguously proved that the very fact of going to church engenders sympathy and generosity. However, a sense of belonging to a faith-based organisation results in a greater sensitivity to other people's needs.

Two measures have been used in this study to characterise religious engagement: the percentage of believers attending the Holy Mass (load of 60%) and the percentage of believers receiving Holy Communion (load of 40%). The synthetic indicator of religious engagement in the rural areas of the Świętokrzyskie province ranged from 0.24 to 0.96. It showed much different values (Fig. 3), in 45 gminas being equal to or higher than its average value for the Świętokrzyskie province, and reached lower values in 52 gminas. In the spatial distribution of this phenomenon, a regularity can be discerned: gminas with a high indicator of religious engagement form a well-defined belt stretching across the central part of the province: starting from Włoszczowa in the west, passing through Kielce and going further to the east – to Staszów and Sandomierz. These areas have undergone a significant transformation as a result of semi-urbanisation and suburbanisation processes (Kamińska 2008).

As we can see, the obtained results contradict the thesis that a higher level of religious engagement is usually found in typically agricultural gminas. A CBOS (public opinion research centre) poll shows that 90% of inhabitants of Poland's urban areas consider themselves to be believers, while the corresponding value in rural areas amounts to 98% (Boguszewski, 2009). In a few large cities as little as 7-8% of the population declared that they took part in religious practices several times a week, and 30% once a week. As far as rural areas are concerned, 10% of the polled population took part in religious practices a few times a week, with 60% doing it once a week.

North and south of this belt, there are gminas with a lower level of religious engagement. These are both gminas with a well developed industry, located in the north of the province, and typical agricultural gminas situated in the south.

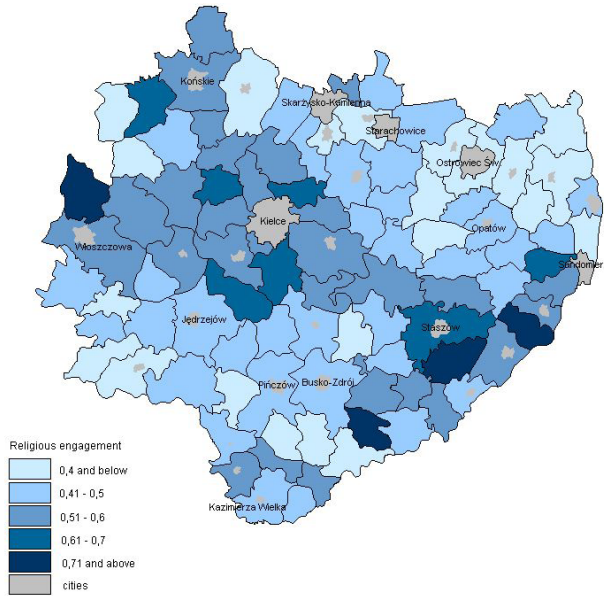


Fig. 3. Spatial distribution of the synthetic indicator of religious engagement in the rural areas of the Świętokrzyskie province
Source: prepared by the author.

5. RECIPROCITY, HONESTY, TRUST

A measure for social capital is the principle of generalised reciprocity, honesty and trust. In a situation of reciprocal trust the so-called transaction costs decrease, which is also true of the costs of daily life and of the conclusion of business agreements. Communities based on honesty and reciprocal trust derive measurable benefits from it (Fukuyama, 1997). People who believe in other people's honesty are less inclined to tell lies, swindle and steal, in addition to respecting other people's rights more willingly (Brehm, Rahn, 1997). Moreover, those trusting other people are also good citizens, being more involved in community life, and people who are more involved in community life are both more trustworthy and more trusting (Putnam, 2008). The crime rate serves as an indicator of honesty and reciprocity. For the purpose of this work, the percentage of crimes and offences in the detection of which the society played a major role was used as the indicator, while the indicator of trust is business activity performed by individuals. In each society, business activity is a major and most dynamic area of community life.

Smith said that the economic life is so much rooted in the life of a community that it cannot be addressed without taking into consideration such phenomena as customs, moral values and local habits (Muller, 1992). It has been preliminarily assumed that business activity conducted by individuals

indirectly testifies to the trust that the population bestows upon the local authorities and upon other members of the local community. The stability of legal regulations, tax rates, social and economic policies implemented by the government stimulates the establishment of new business entities.

The synthetic indicator of the examined component of social capital ranged from 0.1 to 0.81 (average 0.41), and varied considerably (Fig. 4).

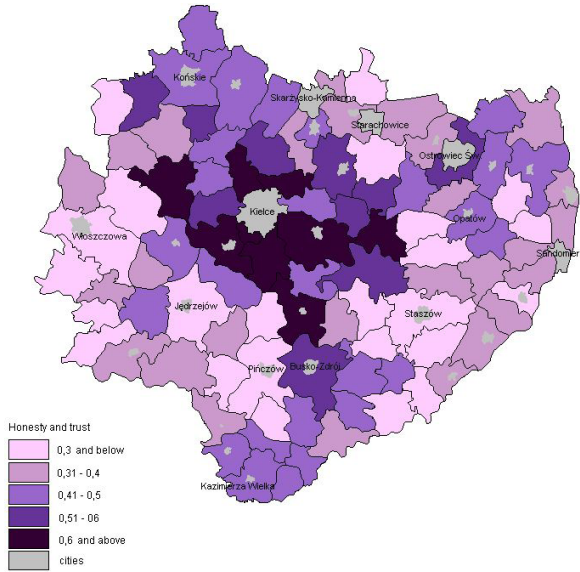


Fig. 4. Spatial distribution of the synthetic indicator of reciprocity, honesty and trust in the rural areas of the Świętokrzyskie province
Source: prepared by the author.

The highest values of the examined indicator were recorded in 9 gminas. All of these gminas are situated near the region’s largest city - Kielce. Relatively high values (higher than the average in the province) were recorded in other 37 gminas. These units form a curved belt stretching from the north-west of the province (from Końskie), passing through Kielce and leading further on to Busko-Zdrój and Kazimierza Wielka in the south. On either side of this belt, there are gminas in which the examined indicator shows values lower than the average in the province.

6. LOCAL PRESS READERSHIP

The knowledge of politics and interest in public affairs constitute a decisive basis for more active forms of community participation. It is local press that brings the population up-to-date on current political and social issues. Therefore research on social capital is often carried out using the level of local and regional press readership as one of the main indicators.

Two indicators were used for the purpose of this work, i.e. the percentage of households buying *Echo Dnia* (the most popular daily in the province - with a load of 60%) and those buying *Gazeta Wyborcza* with the regional supplement (load 40%).

The synthetic indicator of local press readership in rural areas ranged from 0.01 to 0.91, with the average value amounting to 0.18. The level of local press readership is low. What, however, should be taken into consideration in this respect is the fact that data relating to Internet press readership were not included. Furthermore, this indicator was based on the sale of newspapers, which means that those living in rural areas and buying newspapers in cities were not taken into consideration.

In terms of press readership, there are a few urban-rural gminas in the lead, e.g. Busko-Zdrój, Włoszczowa, Pińczów, and Jędrzejów, with the values of this indicator exceeding 0.3 (Fig. 5). This may be the result of the availability of press sale outlets (in urban-rural gminas a larger number of such outlets is located). In the other areas, a low level of local press readership is recorded.

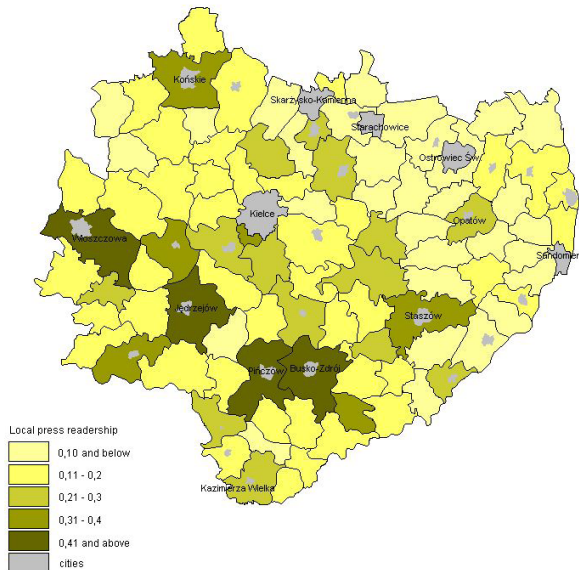


Fig. 5. Spatial distribution of the synthetic indicator of local press readership in the rural areas of the Świętokrzyskie province

Source: prepared by the author.

7. SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL – SYNTHETIC INDICATOR

The synthetic indicator of social capital in the rural areas of the Świętokrzyskie province ranged from 0.27 to 0.64, with the average value amounting to 0.43.

The gminas fall into the following categories: (Table 1, Fig. 6):

- A high level of social capital (indicator above 0.5). This group is made up of 14 gminas (i.e. 14.4%), with 17.5% of the province’s rural population. All these gminas are situated in the vicinity of 3 urban areas: the city of Kielce, the towns of Busko-Zdrój and Włoszczowa.

- An average level of social capital (indicator 0.41 – 0.5). There were 43 gminas meeting this criterion (44.3%), with 45% of rural population living there. This spatial units are situated mainly in the central and southern parts of the province, around gminas with a high level of social capital.

- A low level of social capital (indicator below 0.4). This group is made up of 40 gminas (41.3%), with 37.5% of the province’s rural population. These gminas are situated in the northern part of the province – from Skarżysko-Kamienna, through Starachowice, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski and as far as Sandomierz.

Table 1. Synthetic indicator of social capital in the rural areas of the Świętokrzyskie province

| Synthetic indicator | Number of gminas | Population | % gminas | % population |
|---------------------|------------------|------------|----------|--------------|
| 0.6 and above | 1 | 15291 | 1.0 | 2.2 |
| 0.51-0.6 | 13 | 106488 | 13.4 | 15.3 |
| 0.41-0.5 | 43 | 313654 | 44.3 | 45.0 |
| 0.31-0.4 | 38 | 248972 | 39.2 | 35.7 |
| 0.3 and below | 2 | 12230 | 2.1 | 1.8 |
| total | 97 | 696635 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: prepared by the author.

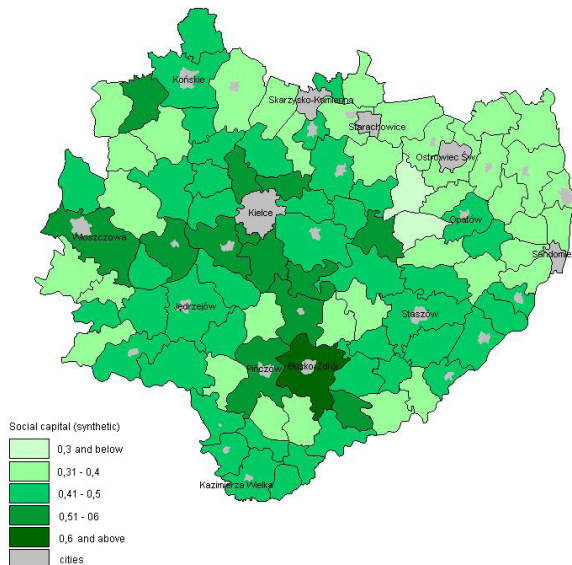


Fig. 6. Spatial distribution of social capital in the rural areas of the Świętokrzyskie province
Source: prepared by the author.

It means that a higher level of social capital is recorded in areas which have always been regarded as agricultural. Gminas situated in the north, the development of which in the centrally planned economy was related to industrial urban areas, show a decidedly lower level of social capital.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Notwithstanding the lack of trust, which is a result of the developments in the past, the thesis of the enormous social capital deficit in rural areas seems to be far-fetched. It does not mean that the situation is very good, but the research has not confirmed such a radical thesis. Our analysis indicates that especially the inhabitants of gminas situated in the southern and central parts of the province show considerable civic and religious engagement, as well as economic activity, which means involvement with the important components of social capital. The worst is the situation of local press readership. Hopefully, inhabitants of rural areas receive an update on the developments in their regions from the Internet and local TV news.

2. There are 57 gminas (58.8% of the total) with a high or average level of social capital. These areas are inhabited by 62.5% of the rural population of the province. A low level of social capital, as measured by the adopted indicators, was recorded in 40 gminas (41.2%), in areas inhabited by 37.5% of the rural population.

3. In terms of the development of social capital in the Świętokrzyskie province, 3 large areas can be distinguished, creating parallel belts: central – with a high level, southern – with an average level, and northern – with a low level of the development of social capital.

4. The highest level of social capital is found in the central part of the province, which is formed by highly urbanised gminas, with all the analysed components being equal to or above the average for the rural areas of the Świętokrzyskie province. These gminas show a favourable demographic structure (a positive migration balance, the percentage of population with secondary or higher education above the average for the province, young age population structure, etc.) as well as economic. Especially high are the indicators of business activity, which is also related to their being conveniently situated in the vicinity of the largest urban area – the city of Kielce, and to the quality of technical infrastructure.

5. An average level of social capital is characteristic of the gminas situated in the southern part of the province, which has always been regarded as agricultural. This may be a result of the stronger internal bonds (*bridging capital*). The strength of the bridging capital in the traditional village was related to its self-sufficiency and the complementary character of particular individuals' and groups' functions (Kamiński 2008).

6. The worst situation occurs in the gminas situated in the vicinity of major rural areas in the northern part of the province (Skarżysko-Kamienna,

Starachowice, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski). The farmers employed at industrial plants in addition to working on their own farms, which was a prevailing practice in the time of the centrally planned economy, had a largely adverse impact on the weakening of bridging capital, and in recent years the population has not been capable to develop bonding capital as yet.

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