



Local Power Valences in Rural Communities

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Abstract: The analysis of the local power valences in the rural communities was realized by implementing different methods of community development. Which are the mechanisms that encourage a community to engage actively and effectively in a deliberate process focused towards community development? What does provide the sustainability of such initiatives and processes? Who has the power? How does it use the power? What can be done to obtain a growing number of individuals with power in a community? Such questions have also resulted in the efforts focused to research of the power dynamics in the rural communities, topic explored in this paper.

Keywords: governance; initiatives; authority

1. Introduction

The power games, the mechanisms that made some to have powers while others not, the unseen world behind them: social norms, values passed from generation to generation, traditional customs, have always caused intrigue.

The changing of the political system in 1989 has generated a number of challenges and opportunities. At both macro and micro level, Romanian citizens were in a position to make decisions, in which their value system, their own and community interests found forms of expression. In the same time with this freedom a number of problems appeared. If until then the society was governed by a system in which the locus of control was predominantly external to the individual, he has suddenly seen himself in the context in which the locus of control is internalized and in the same time in the position in which he has to assume the responsibility of the taken decisions. All of a sudden the government and governance (theoretically) no longer held the entire responsibility of the individual because they had been freely elected as representatives of the people. A similar challenge also occurs in rural areas where the mayor, the priest, the teacher and the doctor are no longer the only important "voices", but other voices are heard as well.

The present paper aims to analyze the "voices" that are allowed to influence the rural community area where community development initiatives have been implemented, respectively to what extent the implemented community development models create the necessary framework for multiplying the "voices" that influence community.

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2. Theoretical Perspectives with Emphasis on the Theories of Weber, Parsons, Giddens

The power and its valences at the rural communities level brings into question the concept of power and influence exerted by the individual - or individuals at the community level.

A special attention was paid to the study of democratic values (tolerance, trust, participation), of the impact of the spiritual dimension on the power, respectively of community development, as well as of the control and participation mechanisms at the local level.

The theories of Weber, Parsons and Giddens are important for explaining the dimensions of power.

Table 1. Power Model Analysis Tool

Attitude towards:	Weberian theory	Parsonian theory
Decision making	One or more individuals make decisions, others are affected by them.	All the persons affected by a decision participate in the decision making.
Giving an account	Absence of an accounting system that allows the community members to monitor and assess the progress made and the distribution of the related resources.	Joint monitoring and assessment of community projects.
Corruption	Corruption is publicly tolerated.	There are created structures and opportunities where corruption can be addressed openly.
Trust	The community does not trust the character of leaders; in their turn, they do not trust the ability of community members to develop.	The existence of an environment of mutual trust among members, between members and leaders.
Inclusion	Intimidation of those with a lower level of education by external leaders and facilitators through the use of modern technology, complex terminology, by assuming leadership and the related status.	It is encouraged the interaction of all individuals with all individuals in the community regardless of their economic and social class, their ethnic, religious, gender, age groups.
	Certain categories of individuals are deliberately or otherwise excluded from opportunities and benefits.	It is encouraged the participation of all community members in existing opportunities and benefits.
Access to resources	Elitist groups are favored in terms of access to information and resources.	There are granted equitable rights to control community resources.
Interests	First the interests of the elite are promoted, and if possible, of other community members as well.	There are promoted the common interests of all members of the community, or of as many as possible, including vulnerable groups.
Implication	Community is involved only occasionally, very rarely in major decisions.	Community is actively involved in all phases of the DC process.
	It is observed the apathy of the majority to the needs and opportunities of community development due to the belief of their own helplessness.	It is encouraged and appreciated the individual contribution to the collective good.
Solidarity	Solidarity and creation of a common vision are not seen as goals.	There are promoted common principles, values.
Power	The power distribution imbalance is accepted as a status quo.	Deliberate efforts are made to decrease the power distribution imbalance.
	A teaching-learning relationship is implicitly promoted.	A reciprocal learning relationship is promoted: one learns from another and all learn together.
Constructive criticism	It is discouraged or avoided the creation of a platform where solutions proposed by formal or informal leaders can be criticized.	It is encouraged cooperation among community members, critical analysis of proposed solutions to the existing problems.
Governance	Governing is performed through authoritative social and political systems or structures that do not allow community members to be involved in community decisions.	Governing is performed through social and political systems and structures to allow community members to be involved in community decisions.

In Weber's conception, those who hold power can realize their own will when they are in a group context, even when it means going against those who disagree with them. In other words, for someone to have power, someone else is deprived of power.

Parsons believes power is a general resource for the society as a whole and it belongs to everyone. Power is neither limited nor consumable. The more individuals develop their potential by exercising their power, the more the society as a whole benefits from it.

Giddens, in opposition to Weber, defines power as *the transformative capacity of human beings*.

Throughout their lives, individuals have the opportunity to develop this capacity by collectively mobilizing various resources (information, material resources, skills, local resources) in order to achieve certain goals without negatively affecting others.

3. Power: from “power over” to “power together with”

Based on the theories of Weber, Parsons and Giddens, various expressions have been formulated to capture how much power of change an individual has.

Power over someone (based on Weberian theory): it occurs when one or more individuals make a choice that affects someone else. It is the most common form of power expression.

Power together with (based on Parsons' theory): it is exercised when a group of individuals make a choice that affects everyone by promoting collaboration and mutual support.

Inner power (anchored in Giddens' Theory): refers to situations in which an individual makes a choice that primarily affects himself, using his unique potential to influence his own destiny and the surrounding environment (Giddens).

4. Leaders and Leadership

In the Romanian countryside, the concept of power seems to be most often understood and applied in a Weberian way of seeing things. An immediate consequence is that most individuals are not involved in politics, in local initiatives because they do not think they can generate change.

Muller also brings a development of knowledge and understanding of the power, of its intrinsic valences when he introduces into the equation the perspective of men on the world and life.

Each culture, the political behavior of individuals, the way in which they relate to power are based on one of the three value continuums described below or the combination of two of them:

- a) guilt and innocence;
- b) shame and honor;
- c) fear and power.

The Romanian rural communities are still deeply marked by the 50 years of communism, the transition period and the post-accession period to the European Union. Consequently, the peasants' perspective on the world and life is given by a combination of elements of the fear-power continuum (mainly inherited from the communist period) and guilt-innocence (introduced together with the transition period and the post-accession period to the European Union).

In the community development equation, the term “empowerment” was introduced to describe the form of expression of power among the various social actors involved in the process. In Romanian language, this term has been translated both as capacity - a meaning which shows the increase of the inner power of individuals, of their confidence in their own forces to influence their own destiny - and as

empowerment - meaning which shows more explicitly a power transfer towards those who are in the process of being equipped with various abilities and knowledge to increase their inner strength.

The empowerment process also conveys the transfer from a form of *power over* to a form of *power together with*, from a *Weberian* understanding of power to a *Parsonian* one. The result is that the person empowered has acquired new skills, abilities, and also confidence that he/she can use them appropriately. In this way the capacity of the community grows and its social capital together with it, thus generating the necessary premises for sustainable change in the community.

This paradigm brings important changes in the operation way of development agencies that are dared to rethink the help they offer to the communities they invest in, so that they are not only helped for the moment in a paternalist way that perpetuates dependence but empowered to be able to solve their own problems without being dependent on external intervention.

The social and power structures existing in the Romanian society, especially in rural areas, limit to a certain extent the capacity of the village inhabitants. Yet, there is some flexibility that allows individuals to exercise their power, to change existing structures, and to create new structures (for example the local initiative groups, the telecenters, etc.).

In the rural area, the leaders who benefit from the trust of community members are the village intellectuals (priests, doctors, teachers) followed by local authorities: some of them are respected for their knowledge, for the answers they give to soul problems, and others for the power they have to manipulate resources and act to solve community problems. The success of the initiatives requires trust (generalized and especially in leaders), and now priests seem to be the most trustworthy persons, followed by physicians, teachers, local authorities, I propose exploring the ways in which the priests, together with the other soul leaders, be active actors without increasing their capital of power but, on the contrary, increasing the power capital of the community members by the use of the resources they have.

The participatory methods used by many models are instruments good to consider when trying to promote a greater degree of tolerance, inclusion, empowerment, trust. However, their efficiency is questionable in the absence of an intentional process of reflection on the present situation, the own values, emotions, antecedents that support an intolerant behavior towards community members that are different, of establishment and commitment to common goals in order to increase tolerance. To make a lasting change at this level, addressing symptoms may be an ineffective means.

For being successful, one needs constant, effective information, initiated long before the actual change, and risk reduction strategies.

Although participation is weak, local initiatives are often missing, Romanians remain optimistic about the success of community projects if they were started. On this optimism, local authorities can build actions to involve the village inhabitants in public decisions, create frameworks where their decisions can be criticized constructively, where there are platforms to account for actions taken and resources used, etc. In other words, if they desire to support community development, both political and soul leaders must avoid exercising power over citizens as often as possible and instead exercise power together with them.

Because the purpose of community development is not to maintain the power of the rich or influential, and to increase the helplessness of the poor, but to favor the creation of new power structures that allow all members of the community to strengthen their inner power generating change, it is recommended that increased attention and special efforts be made to avoid the perpetuation or the establishment of an

elite that exercises the monopoly over the decision-making process. The decision-making process should, as far as possible, include everyone, or as many as possible, of the people involved / affected.

The created instrument can be used to test any community development model to determine the concept of power it promotes.

The purpose of any community organization action is to acquire power by people, so that the community can know its needs, be able to organize them and be able to fight for fulfilling them. For gaining power, victories are needed, because only those who like to suffer will persevere in a lost cause.

The involvement in a community involvement action makes sense if the inhabitants of the community are permanently facing results or victories.

Victory seems pretty easy to define: the football team with the most scored goals wins; the golf player with the fewest penalty points gets the victory. In the community organization things are not that simple! Goals change, negotiations take place, and victory leads to another goal.

5. Conclusions

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