

Human Resources

Social Capital and SME's: A Study on Lakes District Enterprises

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The rapid change in technologies and markets (innovations) as well as government policies has induced firms and localities to take collective actions to enhance their capacity to adapt and respond to uncertainty (Lundvall, 1998). In this regard current approaches to economic development draw upon diverse theoretical fields and concepts but there is some agreement as to the importance of social capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993; Sabel, 1993). Social capital refers to embeddedness of trust and strong civic relations in a locality that serves as a source of competitiveness through cooperation. The SME's are, naturally, both creators and users of the social capital in a locality. It is observed that different regions perform different qualities in the creation and exploitation of social capital in Turkey. Thus, this study aims to analyze and identify the attitudes of the SME's towards networking, trust and collaboration in Lakes District (Isparta and Burdur Provinces) in order to assess the social capital capacity and capability. Is there a certain level networking among SME's? Do they trust each other in their local business environment? Do they trust other local actors such as business chambers and local authorities? Is there awareness about collaborative business development among SME's? The findings of such questions will help policy makers to design effective strategies in order to improve the role of social capital in economic development process.

This study depends on a survey conducted in 2005. 66 SME's were chosen from KOSGEB's regional data inventory which includes 250 SME's for Lakes District. In this survey, 50 questions questionnaire was used. The data collected have been evaluated by SPSS and MINITAB. In order to explore the social capital attitudes and differences among the SME's, discriminant analysis, t-test and ANOVA are used.

The social capital was categorized into (i) supportive structure of local actors (ii) collaboration among SME's (iii) trust at different levels. The initial findings are less supportive of a strong social capital among SME's and between SME's and local actors.

It is expected that informal and social relations should have been much developed in less developed economies, mainly as a consequence of less capitalization of social processes. Ironically, strong social relations in developing countries are not enough to produce/reproduce social capital. Referring to Putnam (1993), trust and civics can be assumed as more compatible producers of the social capital (Keating, 2001) instead of strong social relations.

Introduction

Current approaches to (regional) economic development draw upon diverse theoretical fields and concepts but there is some agreement as to the importance of social capital. Various researchers from a wide range of disciplines stress the role of social structure in the process of economic development (Gambetta, 1988; Fukuyama, 1995; Landes, 1998; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). In this regard, social capital refers to embeddedness of trust and strong civic relations in a locality that serves as a source of competitiveness through cooperation. This kind of so-called “*copetition*” (cooperation+competition) is becoming more vital in the global market where firms and localities have to face with an increasing competition fostered by high mobility. Thus, the rapid change both in technologies and markets (innovations) as well as government policies has induced firms and localities to take collective actions to enhance their capacity to adapt and respond to uncertainty (Lundvall, 1998), and social capital is the one of the main routes to collective action.

In the era of globalization, the SMEs are regarded as the ultimate impetus employment, innovation, entrepreneurship and prosperity. So it is inevitable to connect a (strong) tie between SMEs and social capital, yet the coin is two sided: the SMEs are both creators and exploiters of the social capital in a locality. This makes SMEs a central issue at the heart of social capital. Although 99% of business enterprises comprise of SMEs in Turkey, their share in value added, credit and export are very low compared to the European counterparts (OECD, 2004). In other words the SMEs in Turkey seem to have problems in the fields of innovation and finance which are assumed to be solved or enhanced through social capital as stated by various adherents of social capital literature (Puntam, 1993; Ruuskanen, 2004). Unfortunately the studies and the measurements of social capital on Turkey are very limited and even they are not related to SMEs and regional development. For example Akçay (2002) has studied the relation between social capital and corruption in a group of country including Turkey. In another paper, Turkey and Brazil is found to be least developed countries among 47 economies in terms of social capital (Norris, 2000). Almost the same conclusions are reached by a cross-country analysis of social trust in which Turkey appears to be at bottom of the list among the OECD economies (Healy and Sylvain, 2001: 44). The basic indicator in the literature about Turkey is World Value Survey (Fidrmuc and Gérxhani, 2005) and generally the trust is used as the main proxy to measure social capital (Erdogan, 2006; ARI Hareketi, 2006). On the other hand, the need to stress social capital in Turkey and collect fine data on it argued by many others (see: KOSGEB, 2005; Kenar, 2003). The only study related to entrepreneurship and regional development is by Yetim (2002) where she investigated social capital formation among females in Mersin province.

This study has a few intertwined goals. The paper mainly aims to analyze and identify the attitudes of the SME's towards networking, trust and collaboration in Lakes District (Isparta and Burdur Provinces) in order to assess the capacity and capability of social capital. We also investigate the awareness among SMEs towards collaborative business development and their attitudes towards local actors such as business chambers and local authorities. The findings of such investigations will help policy makers to design effective strategies in order to improve the role of social capital in economic development process.

Social Capital: A View into the “Kaleidoscope”

Despite the discussions and agreement on the increasing role of social capital in economic development, it is becoming more difficult to sort out the exact meaning and definition of it. Nearly all the recent studies begin with an explanation of various types of social capital, yet with a stress on its uniqueness (Ruuskanen, 2004, Paxton, 2002, Puntam, 2000). This kind of growing academic and political appetite on social capital might be related to the social dimension of economic development which is well-known among evolutionary and institutional economists since Polanyi's (1944) study about the embeddedness of economic actions within the social environment (See also Granovetter, 1985; Barber, 1995). However so-called “enthusiasm” (Putnam, 1993; 2000) on social

capital may be connected to a set of reasons. Firstly, the developed economies already seem to exploit all or most of the available tangible resources. Accordingly these economies are trying to find out new forms of competitiveness including intangible ones. For developing countries, on the other hand, limited availability of tangible factors of production makes social capital more attractive as a new factor of production. Second, the re-invention of regions and localities turns the focus on the relations among regional actors (Dulupçu, 2005). This, in turn, fosters arguments on relational assets, such as associational economy, untraded interdependencies, learning region where social capital is an infrastructure for all, and obviously at the regional level these kind of soft relations take place intensively (economic localness). Third, the indigenous development rather than the solely FDI's oriented development is becoming more important, and social capital is assumed to be an asset to accelerate endogenous development.

Through trust, members of a group enable the social structure to take collective action which can create benefit to all parties. So under the uncertainty of a highly globalized economy, structures of social relations, like association, family, friendship, ethnic group or community generate economic coordination, like family business, local networks or alliances which increase economic performance through reducing transaction costs, and increasing productivity, mobility, flexibility and innovation.

Although there are some negative arguments on social capital such as lock-in or social immobility in a society or exclusion of non-members of a group (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993, Grabher, 1993), the mainstream tendency seems to be very positive and optimistic. As Cooke (2000) puts it "...social capital is a missing ingredient of economic development". The adherents of social capital follow a series of reasoning to explain the relation between the performance of economy and society and social capital (Boschma, 2005). Firstly social capital improves the flow of information in social or local networks, and enables the easier exchange of knowledge which is vital for the SMEs where search for knowledge is an important item of the costs. Whereas the exchange of codified knowledge is almost free, the transmission of tacit knowledge is generally difficult and necessitates closer and informal relations among regional actors. In this context, collective and interactive learning among SMEs is an important source and consequence of social capital. But we have to keep in mind that trust is a must *-sine quo non-* for such a learning activity. Second, it reduces the transaction costs, such as information costs, research costs, contracting costs and bargaining costs. For example, in a trustful environment firms do not need to ask for detailed contracts which in turn reduce the costs mentioned above. Third, social capital supports the creation of human capital (Coleman, 1988). And finally it improves the effectiveness of institutions of governance.

Social capital however contains some fuzziness both at the theoretical and conceptual levels. Sometimes, it is difficult to distinguish the sources and consequences of social capital, i.e. is trust or an associative action a source or a result? This is mainly due to the intangible nature of it hence it includes unwritten norms, values and social relations with multi-dimensional and non-transferable characteristics. Social capital, unlike human capital, is not owned (Cooke, 2000) and this makes cloning social capital almost impossible. It is neither transferable nor replicatable. Additionally, the uniqueness of social makes it more difficult to compare the relation between economic development and social capital. Instead of its impact on general economic growth, social capital has more impact on specific economic activities. Furthermore it is very difficult to measure accurately the stock of social capital. It is easy to destroy but hard to create because it is a time-consuming process to create social capital and there is no substitution for social capital.

The SMEs and Regional Economic Development: The Lakes District Region

Social capital exists and performs at different scales (family, community, network, and organization-local-regional-national levels). As stated earlier the local and regional level is assumed to be most appropriate due to the proximity. Sharing common values and norms along with trust is a cumulative process like learning: the more you trust, the more social capital is created, and

correspondingly any society attracts more participants who have the capability to support social capital creation. But firstly we need social capital infrastructure for any locality. Thus, first of all, for a region having collective goals rather than individual actions, is a pre-condition to build up a strong social capital. The availability of social capital in a certain region means that the locality has openness and a will to collaborate, and able to mobilize resources through developing both horizontal and vertical high caliber networks (Flora et al., 1997). In this regard the institutional environment plays a crucial role through interaction for a common goal. Especially for the SMEs, the competitiveness is highly related to social capital as a valuable input; because it is heterogeneous and immobile likewise labor (Maskell, 1999).

Competitive Factors of the Lakes District SMEs'

“The Lakes District” is the name given to the region which comprises both the provinces of Isparta and Burdur, and also a very minor area of the neighborhood provinces. Basically, the Lakes District term refers to Isparta and Burdur provinces. Existence of 26 natural and 21 artificial (dam) lakes provide the concept of the name for the region. Thus the geographical characteristics define the region. The region is located in the middle of a triangle between Konya, Denizli and Antalya provinces where Konya and Denizli have a significant share in Turkey’s industrial production and Antalya is the most important tourism center of Turkey. The productions of the SMEs in Isparta heavily concentrate in textile (yarn, carpet, fabric), food, lumber, marble, tanning, and rose oil industries. On the other hand, the SMEs in Burdur mostly produce the goods in the sectors of agriculture and animal farming. The productions of the SMEs in Burdur intensify in milk products, feedstuff, garment, chemistry, plastics and machinery processing industries. The natural beauty and historical background of the region also attracted the tourism investments towards the region in recent years. (TOBB: 2003) According to the census of year 2000, Isparta and Burdur respectively; have a population of 514 thousand and 257 thousand; and have a percentage of 0.5 and 0.3 in Turkey’s GNP. The education level of the population of the region is also very satisfactory due to the existence of a higher education institution_ Süleyman Demirel University. (DPT: 2006)

The socio-economic development of the provinces of Turkey has surveyed through the indicators of employment, education, industry, agriculture, finance, infrastructure and welfare by the State Planning Organization (DPT) in 1996 and 2003. In the latter survey, Isparta and Burdur were identified as the third degree socio-economic developed provinces where the agricultural structure is dominant and the SMEs do business both at provincial and regional scales. The socio-economic indicator values of the mentioned provinces are close to Turkey’s averages. (DPT: 2003)

Table-1: Socio-Economic Development Rankings of Isparta and Burdur

	Isparta	Burdur
Socio-economic Development Place (1996, in 76 provinces)	21	29
Socio-economic Development Place (2003, in 81 provinces)	28	31
Development Place of the Education Sector (2003, in 81 provinces)	28	20
Development Place of the Health Sector (2003, in 81 provinces)	4	14
Development Place of the Manufacturing Industry (2003, in 81 provinces)	32	41

In a recent work, by Dulupçu et al. (2005), some conclusions were reached about the competitive factors of the Lakes District SMEs. According to this work, the SMEs of the Lakes District positively interpreted their entrepreneurship culture and their interest to the sector which they took place, although the collaborative environment in the region was interpreted as the least positive factor. On the other hand, it is observed that there is a very strong connection between the success of the local authorities/administrative actors (municipality, governorship, chamber of commerce and industry, etc.) and collaborative environment. The result of the work expresses that there is no fundamental difference between the structures of industrial and service sectors in the Lakes District, but the SMEs acting in the service sector are both more entrepreneurial and more capable of creating dialogue (or cooperation) than the SMEs acting in the industrial sector.

Moreover, the negative approach to the local authorities/administrative actors is interpreted as a sign of underdevelopment of the social capital in the Lakes District.

Methods

Survey Administration

This study depends on a survey conducted in 2005. The instrument administered to the owners or managers of the firms. Anonymous questionnaires were distributed via mail and returned by each respondent directly to the researchers. The final sample used in the study consisted of 66 SMEs and was drawn from KOSGEB's (Small and Medium Industry Development Organization) data inventory, which includes 250 SMEs for the Lakes District.

Measure

The survey instrument was composed of 44 items. The respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement on each item by choosing one of the five scales, that is from (1) never agree to (5) always agree_ a standard Likert scale. According to the conceptual model of the study, the dependent variables of the research divided into two main groups: Collaboration among SMEs, and trust at different levels among firms, local institutions and other stakeholders. The collaboration and trust levels are measured using the statements like "I rely on the activities of Chamber of Commerce and Industry; the Municipality supports collaboration efforts in our region etc." Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale was 0.7906 which is sufficiently reliable.

Hypotheses and Data Analyses

The two basic hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: There is a strong relationship between trust and collaboration among local economic actors of the Lake District Region.

Hypothesis 2: Differences of firm structure, province and sector have strong effect on collaboration and trust levels among local economic actors.

Data analyses were conducted in two steps. In the first step, ANOVA was performed to test for the significance of difference between betas. In the second step, logistic regression analyses were used to test the hypothesized relations between the dependent and independent variables.

Results

Table-2: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The interest level of the local administrators towards the firms' problems	66	2,03	1,15
The collaboration level of the local actors	66	2,21	,87
The contribution of the municipality on the development of the collaborative environment	66	2,24	,99
The contribution of the governorship on the development of the collaborative environment	66	2,32	,98
The contribution of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry on the development of the collaborative environment	66	2,52	1,03
The contribution of the municipality to the economical life	66	2,59	,99
The trust level among local economic actors	66	2,65	,92
The contribution of the university to the economical life	66	2,68	1,18
The effect of the socio-economic activities in the province to the institutional environment	66	2,76	1,01
The contribution of the governorship to the economical life	66	2,79	1,05
The collaboration level of the firms within the other firms working in their sector	66	2,83	1,06
The contribution of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to the economical life	66	2,85	1,27
The firms' attitude towards establishing a multi shareholder business	66	3,05	1,22
The firms' attitude towards doing a collective business with other firms and associations	66	3,20	1,03

Human Resources

The mean values in Table 2 indicate that the managers/owners of the firms find the interest level of the local administrators to the problems of regional firms quite low. Likewise it is seen that the contribution of the municipality, governorship and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry on the development of the collaborative environment is perceived low as well. The results show that the trust level among the local actors is also low whereas the firms' attitude towards establishing a multi shareholder business or doing a collective business with other firms and associations is a little higher.

Multivariate logistic regression analysis was used to test hypotheses as to the effect of firm structure, province/region and sector on the likelihood of (1) collaboration culture and (2) trust level. The results of the logistic regression analysis are summarized as Table 3.

Table-3: Logistic Regression Results

	Collaboration Culture			Trust Level	
Constant	-7,868*	-9,212*	-6,578**	-12,345*	-13,185*
	(3,184)	(3,514)	(3,387)	(4,813)	(4,918)
Region/province	-1,311			-2,248	
	(1,063)			(1,409)	
Sector		0,757			0,334
		(1,024)			(1,225)
Firm Structure			-1,107		0,019
			(0,896)		(1,050)
Trust level	1,748*	2,092*	2,140*		
	(0,714)	(0,719)	(0,740)		
Collaboration Culture				1,156**	1,373*
				(0,696)	(0,698)
The attitude towards doing a collective business with other firms and associations	1,283*	1,204*	0,951**		
	(0,549)	(0,547)	(0,534)		
The attitude towards establishing a multi shareholder business	-1,196*	-1,179**	-0,971**		
	(0,597)	(0,624)	(0,556)		

*Standard Errors in Parentheses, (*p<0.05, **p<0.1)*

Results of the regression analysis provide support for hypothesis 1. According to the results the firms in the region have a positive relation between their perception of collaboration and trust. It can be said that as the trust level of the firms towards other firms and economic actors in the region increases, the collaborative level will increase as well. Similarly the desire to collaborate will increase the trust level in the region.

Results of regression analysis do not provide support for hypothesis 2. It is seen that the home province of the firms do not have any effect on the structure of the firm, the collaboration nor the trust level of the sector they work in.

As seen in Table 3 the two main factors that affect the perception of the collaboration is the desire to establish a multi shareholder business and doing collective business with other firms and associations. Thus, it can be said that the low level of perception of collaboration is affected only by the desire to work together. In other words, the expectation from the local economic actors (The Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the municipalities, etc.) is very low.

The firms in this study are studied in two groups: Family businesses and multi-shareholders. Since the multi-shareholders have different partners, who all want to survive and share the same goals such as profit and growth, they need to be more assured. Thus trust is much more essential in the multi-shareholders. Another interesting result is that the SMEs in the Lake District want the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to play a key role as a catalyst in the trust building process.

As a result, we find some gripping evidence that trust level and collaboration culture affects one another simultaneously. Honestly, collaboration culture couldn't be set up without trust.

Concluding Remarks

Although regional development studies focus on developed economies, informal and social relations are much developed in less developed economies, mainly as a consequence of less capitalization of social processes. Ironically, strong social relations in developing countries are not enough to produce/reproduce social capital. Regional development studies, referring to Putnam (1993), assumed trust and civicness -the mutually dependant variables- as more compatible producers of the social capital (Keating, 2001) instead of strong social relations. That is to say, social capital as a form of 'informally institutionalized democracy' leads to an environment where different local players can compete without disturbing each other. This kind of development is most probably related with the long tradition of democracy that teaches people and institutions how to negotiate. On the other hand, in developing countries, the politicized economic relations possibly avoid evolution of deeply rooted civic traditions. Hence, shared regional culture and goals are more likely to be born premature, often without aiming at wealth creation. In developed countries, the institutionalized relations enables proximately located small firms, non-governmental organizations, universities and local bodies to response collectively to uncertainty through forming 'institutional thickness' (Amin and Thrift, 1994). The findings of this study support this argument. Unless trust is created, the region can not produce collaborative structure and environment. Thus local administrative actors in Lakes District should seek new ways and forms for enhancing trust level along with cooperative structure.

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