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Social Capital in Bahia Clusters

By Dr. Murilo Barreto Santana, Risia Kaliane Santana De Souza, Amarildo José Morett, Andressa De Souza Santos Ferreira & Jeferson Santos De Santana

Universidade Estadual de Santa Cruz

Abstract- This paper aimed to assess the impact of social capital on the performance of clusters in the state of Bahia, Brazil. Through bibliographic and documentary research, it was possible to achieve the desired objective. It was evident that the most developed clusters in Bahia are found in regions with good levels of social capital. The operationalization of social capital results in cooperation processes that have a direct influence on the performance of the agglomerations of companies. It is concluded that social capital is a decisive factor for the development of clusters.

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Social Capital in Bahia Clusters

Dr. Murilo Barreto Santana [α], Risia Kaliane Santana De Souza [σ], Amarildo José Morett [ρ], Andressa De Souza Santos Ferreira [ω] & Jeferson Santos De Santana[¥]

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I. Introduction

The economies of agglomerations have their bases in the joint work of firms, institutions, and infrastructure present in a given location and which generate economies of scale and scope (Marshall, 1982). These savings would come from stimulating the growth of labor markets and training centers; the advanced exchange between suppliers and local consumers, common infrastructure, and other localized externalities.

Any type of cluster works to encourage cooperation between the actors, under penalty of not achieving important proposed objectives. A group of companies is not able to develop without the existence of engagement and contribution from members in sharing information and resources. And, the encouragement of cooperation depends, to a great extent, on the levels of social capital. As stated by Putnam (2002), social capital refers to characteristics of social organization that generate coordinated actions and are capable of increasing the efficiency of a given location.

Specifically, in Bahia it is possible to find several clusters from different economic sectors, such as the companies of clothing companies, information technology, tourism, and fruit growing. The state has group of companies in all its territories of identity and with different levels of development. Based on what has been described, this paper intends to analyze the influence of social capital on the development of clusters in Bahia.

Author α: Doutor em Administração e professor do DCAC/UESC.
e-mail: mbsantana@uesc.br
Author σ: Doutora em Administração e professora do IFBaiano.
e-mail: risiakaliane@gmail.com
Author ρ: Mestre em Adminstração e professor do DCAC/UESC.
e-mail: ajmorett@uesc.br
Author ω: Mestre em Economia Regional e Políticas Públicas (UESC).
e-mail: andressa.ferreiras@hotmail.com
Author ¥: Mestrando em Ciências Contábeis (FUCAPE).
e-mail: epotico@hotmail.com

II. Social Capital

The concept of social capital is recent, and does not have a watertight definition. Still, in the exploration phase, the concept has permeated some theories and has been very important in the construction of research around the world. Albagli and Maciel (2002) justify that the reason for exploring this concept is due to the relevance of building definitions that reflect the complexity and the interrelationship of different faces of human intervention.

Authors have contributed to research on social capital, such as Jhon Durston, Douglas North, and Mark Granovetter. However, the literature refers to three authors as the most expressive, cited, and with the greatest contributions to the topic of social capital: Pierre Bordieu (1980), James Coleman (1990), and Robert Putnam (2002). Bordieu (1980) carried out an orderly modern pioneering analysis of social capital, focusing on reproduction tactics or changing dispositions in the social structure. The author adds to the examination of social capital the notion of conflict between the participants in an agglomeration. In turn, Coleman (1990) establishes a link between the theory of rational choice and social relations in the development of humans and also social capital.

Despite various contributions, only Robert Putnam, based on a 20-year study in Third Italy, unveiled some issues related to social capital. The author, considering the Italian context, sought to understand distinctions of civic engagement and effective regional governments between the Center-North and South Italy, considering the different levels of social capital (Albagli and Maciel, 2003).

Putnam sought to answer, based on the contrasts found between regions in Italy, why the same type of institution would perform so differently in different social contexts. The author's research revealed that the social context and history deeply affect the performance of institutions and institutional history tends to evolve slowly. Also, considering political stability or good governance, social capital is capable of having more importance than physical or human capital (Putnam, 2002).

In Putnam's view (2002), social capital refers to characteristics of social organization capable of improving society's efficiency and facilitating

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coordinated actions, such as trust, norms, and systems. Opportunism and other problems of working together are overcome through a broader social context. Thus, when the community already has a stock of social capital, voluntary cooperation becomes easier.

The researcher also believes that the principles of civic participation conceive an intense horizontal exchange, and as the principles are developed, the likelihood that individuals in that community will cooperate for mutual benefit increases. Therefore, social capital stimulates the performance of the government and the economy and not the other way around. "Strong society, strong economy; strong society, strong state". (Putnam, 2002, p. 85).

There is an important relationship between social capital and agglomerations. This relationship is based not only on the involvement of companies, but on other types of actors such as government agencies, associations, research, education and training institutions. (Albagli and Maciel, 2002). Social capital, in this sense, can represent an factor in cooperative interaction for local development. Thus, it is considered an instrument in the performance of clusters.

There is, therefore, the importance of the existence of social capital in the formation of clusters of companies. In the presence of levels of social capital tends to facilitate and promote cooperation between the entrepreneurs participating in the networks. The interaction practiced by the entrepreneurs, which includes levels of social capital, is revealed as a aspect in the instrumentalization of a cluster, being of fundamental importance in its constitution and development.

III. Social Capital of Bahia Clusters

As a way of reaching the results foreseen for this study, bibliographic means (texts by renowned authors) and documentary means (minutes, regulations, agreements of the clusters) were used. The data examined through content analysis.

The research revealed that there is a relationship between the levels of social capital and the constitution of clusters in Bahia. The levels of social capital would be associated with the engagement of entrepreneurs, government entities, unions, associations, universities, and research centers.

It is possible to observe different levels of social capital and engagement in the clusters of Bahia. The group of companies that managed to reach more stages of development were precisely those that notably had better levels of social capital and developed a number of interactive activities. In this sense, the Clothing and Information technology clusters stand out, both located in the Metropolitan Region of Salvador, the capital of Bahia.

Bahia presents different territories of identity where representations of clusters exist. There is a contrast between the more developed territories (metropolitan region) and less developed territories (interior of the state). The research shows that, as described by Putnam (2002), the social context and history conditioned the performance of the institutions. Thus, the state of Bahia has the most developed clusters in regions that have levels of social capital.

The aspects of the social capital related to social organization would have influenced the performance of more developed clusters. In these clusters, transactions took place with less opportunism and more cooperation. The companies became more involved, and the group of companies started to be supported by governmental and non-governmental entities. In addition, it encouraged entrepreneurs to develop collective actions that benefited the clusters, but also the regions involved.

Thus, cooperation between entrepreneurs represents an characteristic in the construction of cooperative activities in a cluster. And joint activities, considering the case of Bahia, depended to a large extent on the social capital involved. The regions of Bahia that had levels of social capital stimulated and promoted the economic activities of the clusters.

IV. Final Considerations

To assess the impact of social capital on the performance of agglomerates in Bahia, research has shown that the most economically developed groups of companies in Bahia are also those with the highest levels of social capital. In other words, social capital translates as a relevant aspect for the formation and development of clusters.

It is undeniably proven what the literature says about social capital. It is decisive in the success or failure of the clusters. In the case of Bahia, it was no different. The still limited economic results of many groups of companies reflect, even, the insufficient levels of social capital of the regions.

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