

Social Trust as a Development Factor – Selected Aspects

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Abstract:

The aim of the article is to present selected relationships between social trust and the development of a territorial unit. Social trust affects the level of cooperation in society and decides about the competitiveness of a territorial unit [12, p. 7]. The main thesis of the article is the author's conviction that there is a significant correlation between social trust and the activity of citizens, the consequence of which is the development of territorial units. This relationship applies to different categories of units, the article mainly focuses on municipal units. The conclusions presented are a consequence of the analysis of information sources and surveys carried out in three cities: Cracow, Helsinki and Valletta. The socio-economic situation of Poland, Finland and Malta is varied, also due to historical and political conditions. Social trust in these cities depends on different factors. Everywhere, however, significantly affects the direction of urban development, accelerating and stabilising it. Trust is a component of social capital, which translates into the ability to build an innovative and modern economy. In countries where citizens trust each other, a sense of security increases which significantly affects well-being.

Keywords: social trust, social capital, development, activity, territorial unit.

1. Introduction

Urbanisation is a process characteristic of both developed and developing countries. For the former it is a natural consequence of change, for the latter it is a stimulus for their introduction. The aim of the article is to demonstrate that the development of urban space is particularly dependent on public trust. The main thesis is the author's conviction that there is a significant correlation between social trust and the activity of citizens, the consequence of which is the development of territorial units. Investment efficiency and, consequently, the pace of city development depends on the level of social trust. Formulated models and development initiatives included in development plans and strategies are not effective enough to meet the problems of 21st century cities. They do not provoke a sense of security and they do not build social trust. The slogan popular in Polish planning documents – sustainable development, with human capital as one of its cornerstones – is not implemented in practice. Urban planning is accompanied by a lack of monitoring of spatial processes whose effectiveness determines the investment success.

2. Social Trust – Selected Definitions

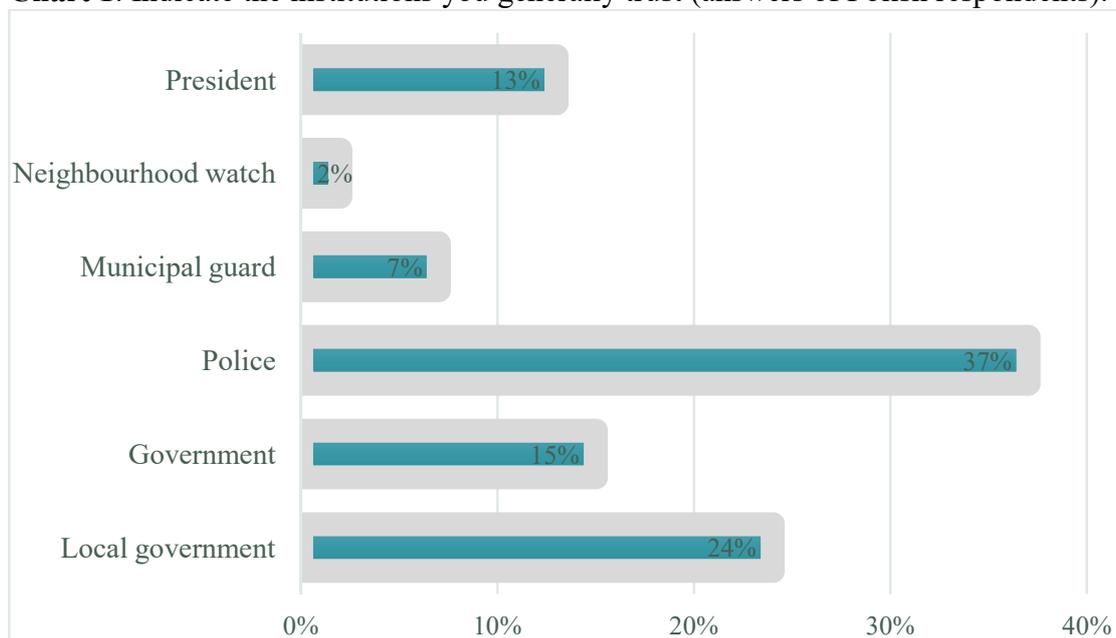
Trust is an ambiguous concept. Francis Fukuyama considers trust to be an expression of social capital. In his opinion, it is “a mechanism based on the assumption that other members of a given community are characterised by honest and cooperative behaviour based on their standards” [9, p. 38]. Trust applies to a certain community and is closely linked to the extent to which members of that community are able to give up their individual interests for the benefit of the group [9, p. 20]. According to Anthony Giddens, trust is “based on a belief, which balances ignorance or lack of information, reliance on individuals or abstract systems” [11, p. 318]. The author distinguishes between so-called passive trust “based on acceptance of symbols of power established by custom or tradition” [10, p. 13, 144] and active trust, which is a mechanism of social solidarity in post-industrial and network societies – “based on monitoring the honesty of the other person in an open and continuous manner” [10, p. 13]. Piotr Sztompka explains that “trust and distrust are a kind of betting on the future uncertain actions of others” [22, p. 310]. The author distinguishes between types of trust, emphasising that “trust is a belief plus an action based on it” [23, p. 71]: personal (in relation to specific people), positional (to specific social roles, professions, positions), commercial (in relation to products, brand, company). Other types of trust are technological (to various technical systems: communication, energy, IT), institutional (to complex organisations, involving numerous, anonymous participants, e.g. to a bank, stock exchange or university), systemic (to the social and political system, civilisation or economy). The basis for these types of trust are human activities, and the presented division constitutes their results and products [23, p. 111]. Trust is therefore a personal attitude, but also a reference to the processes taking place in contemporary society, becoming an element of its culture. According to Sztompka, trust is the most valuable form of social capital [23, p. 71]. According to Andrzej Matysiak, the ambiguity of the notion of trust determines the existence of two spheres of social life: the private and public spheres, which imply the existence of two types of trust. The first is market trust – present in the private sphere, with market exchange as its essence. The second type is public trust, the subjects of which are citizens and state bodies acting on the basis of established law and coordinating collective actions [17].

In the subject literature, the concept of trust is most often defined in a broader context of social capital. Different objects can be a subject of trust: general public, national and ethnic groups, family and other microgroups [3, p. 131]. One of the criteria for their classification is the type of bonds that connect their members. Therefore, one can distinguish primary or social (generalised) trust [3, pp. 131-132]. Primary trust [24] is a binding social capital. It represents strong social networks, it connects people who already know each other and have personal (private) trust. The binding dimension of trust makes the created network inclusive, and the bond built up can unite members while excluding other individuals [21]. Such groups can reduce the overall level of trust. They include, for example, family or a narrow group of friends. This situation makes cooperation difficult and often impossible, directing all resources towards protection against strangers instead of development. There is a bridging social capital in external networks, involving people from different groups, across different social divisions [19, p. 22]. The creation of general (generalised) trust is significantly influenced by the level of social life and political factors. The lack of this trust, however, results not so much from the actions of others, but above all, from the attitudes of individuals who are oriented towards the realisation of their own good, at the expense of the common one [18]. Social trust can also have an institutional dimension, where there are both relations with people who hold positions at different levels of power and relations between groups differentiated by function, size, character or position in the social hierarchy [2, p. 12]. Information about the functioning of public institutions and political leaders constitutes a characteristic feature of institutional trust. The existence of this type of trust is particularly important in the context of limiting the phenomena of social pathology (the more trust of this type the less social pathology). Social trust can therefore determine the shape of institutions, but also results from their operation.

3. Social trust – Selected Aspects. Comparative Research

The experience of the conducted research in the field of social trust and development of public space in selected units in Poland, Finland and Malta shows a diversity of opinions. The survey was conducted in three cities: Cracow (Poland), Helsinki (Finland) and Valletta (Malta) using the same tool. The survey was completed by 120 respondents in each of the units. In total 360 respondents took part in the survey. The survey was conducted between April and May 2019. The answers are an expression of individual thoughts and opinions, provoked by the structure of the questions asked (“Who do you think...”, “What do you think...”). The place where the survey was carried out in each of the mentioned centres was the library, which undoubtedly influenced the age structure of the respondents. The dominant group are students in the age range: 25–34 (67% in Cracow, 73% in Helsinki, 69% in Valletta). Women constitute the majority in the study (75% in Kraków, 63% in Helsinki, 77% in Valletta).

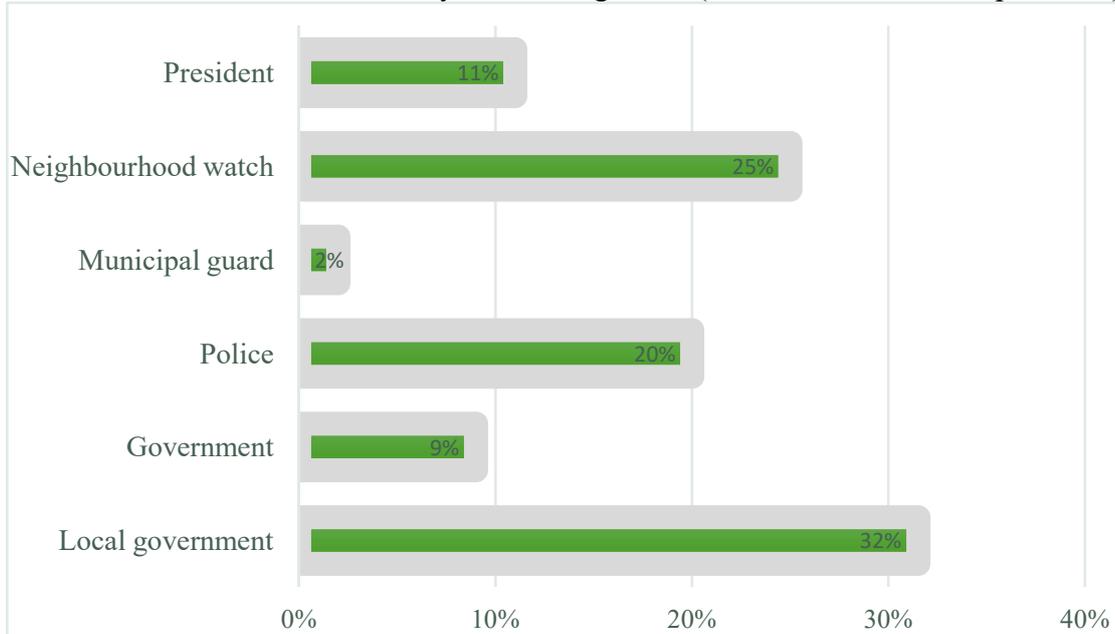
Chart 1. Indicate the institutions you generally trust (answers of Polish respondents).



Source: Own study.

In Poland, the basic, armed uniformed service, whose task is to protect people and maintain public order, and also to protect life and health of people and property is the Police [4, p. 134]. The answers indicated by the respondents demonstrate the conviction that security and ensuring order are primarily the responsibility of state institutions. Trust is one of the most important values maintaining the integrity of social groups, and more broadly – societies. In recent years, however, the attitude of Poles towards state institutions has changed. According to the respondents in Poland, Police (trusted by 37%) is among the most respected institutions. The second place among state institutions was taken by the local authorities of a city/municipality, which were trusted by 24% of respondents (2% of respondents chose the answer – it is difficult to say).

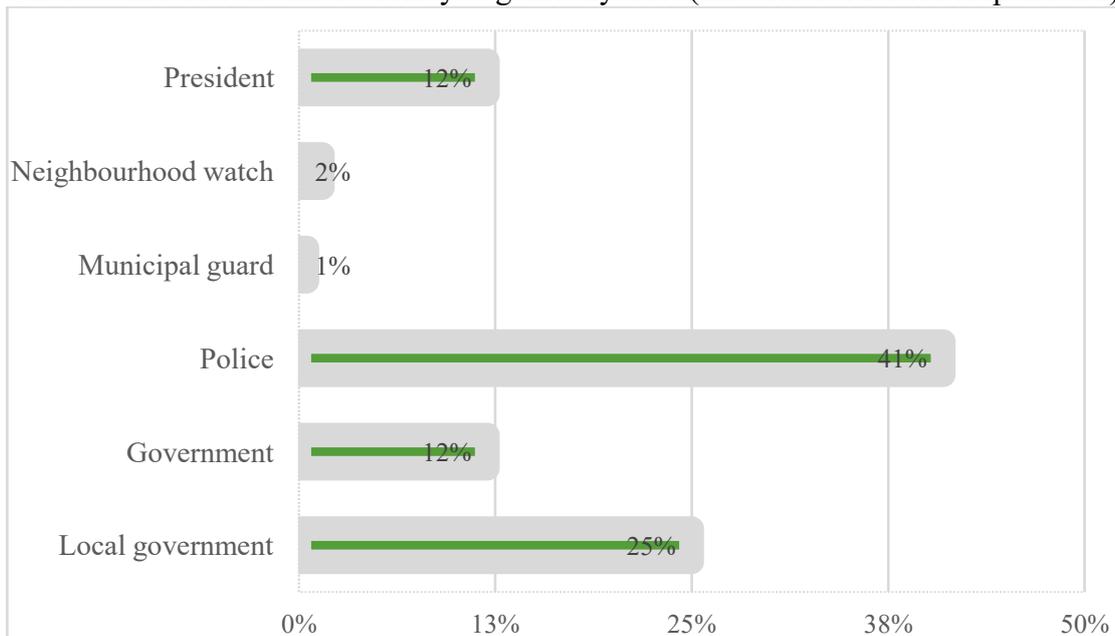
Chart 2. Indicate the institutions you trust in general (answers of Finnish respondents).



Source: Own study.

According to the Finnish respondents (32% of those interviewed), local government deserves the trust of citizens as the main entity responsible for the security of public space. In Finland, public trust is a key element of responsibility for public space. The term “Public Facility” means not only public space and facilities, but above all a sense of responsibility for their security, in the implementation of which members of local communities are particularly involved. In Finland, there is a high degree of trust between members of the local community. This is why as many as 25% of those surveyed trust the neighbourhood guards. Citizen’s activity on behalf of the state is identical to that of a member of the local community or a neighbour, who responsibly takes care of the order and safety of the common (public) space. Asked about the institution that they trust the most, 2% of respondents chose the answer – is hard to say.

Chart 3. Indicate the institutions you generally trust (answers of Maltese respondents).



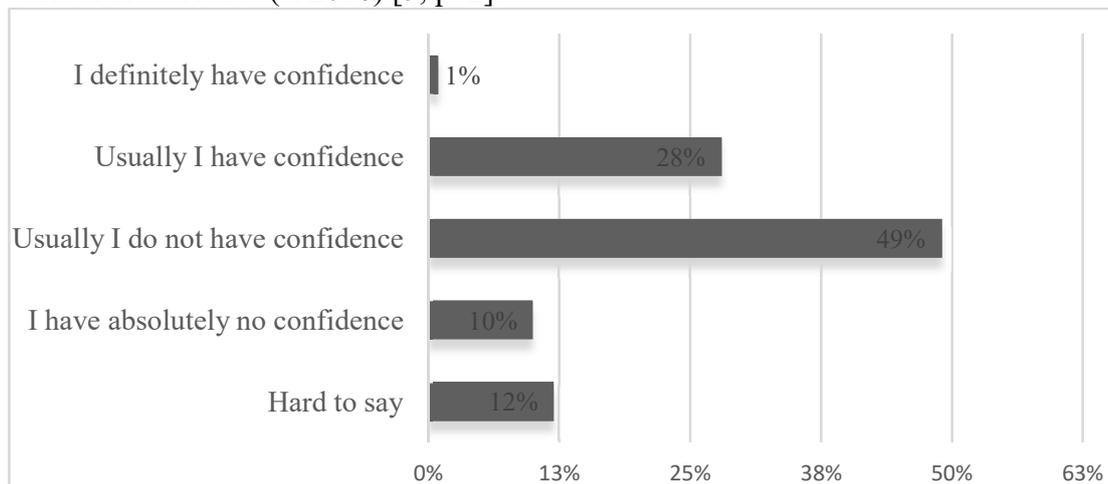
Source: Own study.

The Maltese model of local security was based on the conviction of the effectiveness of the Police, which explains the high rate of trust of Maltese respondents (41%) in the Police. The respondents indicated territorial self-government in second place (25%). The economic development of Malta and economic security are a consequence of the effectiveness of tourism policies implemented by the country. The safety of visitors to Malta is one of the priorities of the strategic document entitled “National Tourism Policy for 2015–2020”. The image of a Police officer in Malta differs from the image established in Poland and Finland. A Maltese police officer not only keeps order but also provides information and advice. Tourism is the main source of income for Maltese residents.

4. Trust of Poles – According to CBOS Research¹

Based on CBOS data, the confidence of respondents in the public sphere in 2018 is clearly differentiated. The highest social trust is characteristic of local authorities in urban centres or municipal units. Trust in local authorities is declared by almost two thirds of adult Poles (65%) [5, p. 7]. The second place is held by the President of the Republic of Poland, who is trusted by three fifths of the respondents (60%), while less than one third (32%) do not trust him [5, p. 7]. More than half of the respondents declare trust in the Ombudsman, as well as trust in public administration officials (54% each) [5, p. 7]. More than half of the respondents trust the European Union (53%, with 32% of votes declaring a lack of trust) [5, p. 7]. The government is not trusted by 46% of respondents, while 44% declare trust [5, p. 7]. Poles have the least confidence in political parties. As many as 63% of those surveyed [5, p. 7] do not trust political parties. More than half of those surveyed do not trust parliament (53%, with 34% confidence votes) [5, p. 7]. Half of those surveyed do not trust the judiciary – the Constitutional Tribunal and the courts (50% each) [5, p. 7] the Police is among the institutions which enjoy the greatest trust of Poles, it is trusted by 71% (21% do not trust them) [6, p. 1]. Higher trust was indicated only with regards to the army (74%) [6, p. 1]. In the CBOS trust ranking, the third place among state institutions was taken by the local authorities of the city/municipality, which were trusted by 60% of those surveyed [6, p. 1].

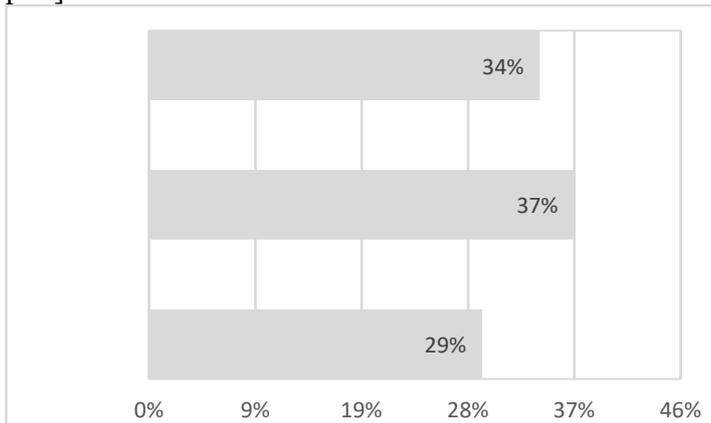
Chart 4. “Do you generally have confidence or not have confidence in strangers you encounter in various situations?” (II 2018) [5, p. 2].



Source: Own studies on the basis of: CBOS [5, p. 2].

The research conducted by CBOS shows that in 2018 distrust towards strangers was the highest since 2006. Relatively high distrust towards strangers (at the level of more than half of the indications) was recorded in 2006 and 2014, but they were lower than those of 2018 (54% and 55% respectively, compared to 59% in 2018) [5, p. 3].

Chart 5. “Which of the two opinions concerning social life in Poland is closer to your views?” [5, p. 3].



Source: Own studies on the basis of: CBOS [5, p. 3].

Lack of confidence in strangers is less relevant in the business sphere. The research clearly indicates a division of opinions among Poles on trusting business partners. Slightly more than a third of respondents believe that trust in business generally pays off (34%), 3% more respondents say that one should be careful, because trust in business generally ends badly. The lowest level of trust in business was recorded by CBOS between 2002 and 2006 [5, p. 3]. Lack of social capital kills business – it makes negotiations more difficult, increases transaction costs, delays investments, gives rise to disputes and complaints about badly conducted tenders or court cases that last for years. The lack of trust capital fosters corrupt practices. Poland is a country of “increasingly efficient individuals and invariably ineffective community” [7]. Thus, currently the primacy of human capital (education, qualifications, health) prevails over social capital, which in poorer countries may temporarily be a premise for development [7].

5. Urban Space and Social Trust

It is difficult to compare the quality of urbanised space in Poland with other European countries. The process of wide participation present in Finland, based on the willingness to work out a compromise in the course of substantive discussion and in the spirit of understanding of all entities interested in new investments, is rare in Poland. Social trust has to be earned, in the case of public institutions the way to do this may be to prioritise the needs of the citizen. In the city space such a priority area may be projects of better quality of public spaces, oriented towards better quality of everyday life [15]. A society of high trust requires fewer formal regulations and institutional controls [8, p. 34]. R. Putnam noted the relationship between decreasing public trust and increasing number of lawyers and police officers in the USA [19, p. 31]. In contrast, greater trust leads to an increase in pro-social attitudes, and promotes participation in associations and social initiatives. An important function of social trust is to make the flow of information more effective, which leads to improved communication and cooperation between citizens and businesses [25, pp. 893-919].

Jane Jacobs in a study entitled *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* claims that usefulness is the main function of cities and their streets. According to the author, cities cannot be boring. They should be diverse and full of visual surprises. Tall buildings in the city space are not a good solution. They can only be used by rich users due to high overhead costs of their maintenance. Exploitation of small blocks of flats is cheaper, allows for greater variety of forms and cubatures. Social trust in cities is determined by the sense of security that needs to be taken care of. According to Jacobs, the three main principles have a significant impact in strengthening the sense of security of city dwellers [14]:

- 1) a clear division between public and private space,
- 2) orienting the buildings on the street so that the side walls are not facing the street

3) users should appear in the streets at different times of day.

A properly designed and socially used street is a space for social integration. An area deprived of people, in contrast, becomes increasingly dangerous. According to Jacobs, the most difficult is to achieve the effect of diversity, which favours social integration. The condition for the effectiveness of such a planned urban structure is, among other things, to plan basic functions and services (education, work, museums, schools, public buildings), to design low buildings, to develop old buildings and to diversify the residents' professions. The comfort of living in a safe urban space builds social respect based on generalised trust, which strengthens and even initiates city development. Jacobs stresses that each district or housing estate should have at least one object – a hallmark. Such a housing estate's signature serves as a node for maintaining the presence and activity of the residents. A similar view is represented by Waldemar Siemiński, who considers the city filled with people in the streets not only safe, but also interesting and used [20, pp. 91-121].

6. Summary

Wrong investment visions and forcing planning solutions against economic realities and social expectations are the main reason for the lack of trust in investment proposals among Poles. Discussions on investment must be accompanied by a reliable plan created on the basis of substantive social agreement. Residents of territorial units must be sure that the planned investment can provide them with attractive space, new jobs and significant income for the commune. Trust is a factor that favours the development of urban units. It mobilises people to act, motivates them to be creative and entrepreneurial. The feeling of security implied by trust (rather than increased supervision and control of the state) favours non-conformist attitudes, originality and innovation. Trust increases tolerance and acceptance of strangers, builds bonds between individuals and the community, leading to cooperation, willingness to help and readiness to engage for the benefit of the community. Trust realises the flow of information in the networks of connections that it builds and strengthens. The economic value of social trust in the context of social and economic development is substantial.

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Notes

1. Research „Aktualne problemy i wydarzenia” (333) carried out using a computer supported (CAPI) face-to-face method from 1-8 February 2018 on a random sample of 1057 people.