

Interactive comment on “Participative environmental management and social capital in Poland” by A. Hunka and W. T. de Groot

Anonymous Referee #1

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This paper addresses the influence of social capital on the varying successes experienced in the deployment of environmental management strategies in Poland, since becoming a member of the EU. Specifically, the paper reflects upon the reasons for problems in this area, and identifies tensions between a top-down administrative culture and the need to foster greater bottom-up participation as a means to meet the requirements of EU environmental legislation. This is considered to be an important avenue for further research in the context of EU expansion. Moreover, the issue of social capital in Poland is marked-out as distinctive due the post-socialist context, with the suggestion that trust-relations have been detrimentally affected by the previous regime of government. The overall ambition to explore social capital in these circumstances is, therefore, considered to make an important contribution.

However, the way in which these aims are deployed in this paper could have been made clearer, particularly in the introduction & conclusions. Specifically, it is suggested that there is some confusion as to whether this paper is setting up an agenda for further research, and defending the need for such work through a review of examples. Or, whether the paper is intending to advance a more thorough-going evaluation of the effects of social-capital in the examples discussed. Moreover, the focus upon the role of social-capital in the pursuit of environmental management does not become apparent until section 3, although noted in the abstract. Consequently it is suggested that the overall aims and objectives should be made more explicit in the introduction. Equally, the difficulties of a social capital ‘gap’ is only referenced in relation to literature that discusses economic development, but the translation of these ideas to cover environmental issues is not defended – a point I will return to below.

It is noted that some of these issues with clarity could be as a consequence of difficulties with the use of the English language, which are apparent throughout the paper. Significant problems were noted in the conclusion section (4), with only minor errors in other sections.

Moving to section 2, the discussion of the social capital literature is clearly presented, and the case for investigating ‘missing social capital’ in a post-socialist content was well made. However, there is a relative lack of references to material linking social capital and environmental management; (eg. Pretty and Ward 2001; Ballet, Sirven et al. 2007). This is considered to be problematic because whilst this paper suggests that environmental management can be better effected by developing social capital, the assumption that social capital is good for the environment is not unpacked. Specifically, it is suggested that the way in which social capital affects environmental management is a complex relationship – and can not be explained by ‘more’ or ‘less’ denominators. The nuances of social capital are outlined in section 2, but the way in which these translate to instances of environmental management (in section 3) does not reflect the depth of the previous discussion. In addition, it is suggested that greater attention to

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the specificity of the environmental management in question is perhaps needed. In particular, it is suggested that 'the environment' is a very plural category and the outcomes of management will, therefore, be dependant on a high number of variables beyond the social capital input. This point is clearly evident in a range of political-ecology research – for example work detailed in Heynan, McCarthy et al. (2007) and Robbins (2004) Further reference to the particularities of 'the environment', and associated challenges, in Poland and/or other post-socialist countries could have helped here (eg. Pavinek and Pickles 2000).

Finally, it is suggested that the methodology employed for the analysis of section 3 is unclear. In particular, I was unsure as to how examples had been selected – and the rigour involved in their evaluation. Consequently, I felt that the arguments presented could have been further substantiated. The third quote used from Hunka and Palarie (2008, p18) on page 4 needs to be italicised.

In summary, the paper needs some work to improve clarity – both through adjustments to the quality language and in terms of the content, particularly in the introduction and conclusions. Specifically, the focus upon the links between social capital and environmental management are not considered to have been well made, although this is acknowledged as an important avenue for research.

References:

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