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INSTITUTIONS, CIVIL SOCIETY, TRUST AND QUALITY OF LIFE: A SOCIAL CAPITAL- AND SOCIAL IDENTITY-BASED APPROACH. EVIDENCE FROM THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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Abstract

Many scholars, since the last decade, have advocated for the integration of institutionalist and communitarian views of social capital generation in order to explain civil society dynamics, in particular in countries – such as former communist states - characterized by transitional processes and by peculiar features of social networking. The present paper is an attempt at conciliating the institutionalist and communitarian frameworks through a micro level-focused model, able to investigate the linkage between institutional climate on the one hand, and civic engagement and trust on the other, with the support of social psychology theories (in particular, social categorization and shared agency theories). In detail, the proposed approach emphasizes the linkages existing between perceptions of institutional behaviour and civil society empowerment on the one hand, and individual engagement and trust in the society and civil identity on the other. The analysis is based on over 2000 observations from two macrodistricts of the Russian Federation (Central and North Caucasus okrugs). The proposed model investigates the possible causal chain existing between perceptions of civil society empowerment, trust towards institutions, civic engagement, trust and tolerance in the society, through a structural equation modeling-based approach. Results show an existing, mainly positive, role of perceptions on social capital formation, and a more ambivalent role of ‘narrow’ networking activity.

Introduction

The application of social capital theory to community studies in the last 20 years has led to many empirical results and theoretical-conceptual frameworks worth of interest, with regard to the analysis of both generation and benefits of social assets. One of the core elements of debate in such a domain lies in the identification of the determinants of social capital generation. Two main approaches to this issue can be identified in literature (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000): on the one hand, a bottom-up focused perspective, probably originated with Putnam (1993), which identifies the source of social capital in culture-bound attitudes towards civic engagement; on the other hand, a top-down perspective which focuses on a positive insitutional climate as the source of trust growth in the community (see e.g. Levi, 1996; Tarrow, 1996; Knack and Keefer, 1997). The two approaches have been widely adopted, but also widely criticized, from different points of view – to mention just the most relevant, the latter for underestimating the role of civil society in development, the former for ‘depoliticizing’ socio-economic processes, and downplaying vertical (power) relations (Levi, 1996; Tarrow, 1996; Hadijmichalis, 2006). The emergence of studies related to countries in transition – often characterized by deep recent changes in terms of social structure and content, both at the institutional and community level – plus the growing awareness about the weaknesses of the two mentioned approaches, has led some scholars to advocate for an integration of the two approaches, which focuses on the civil society as the result of micro level community networking and social resources, institutional quality, and institutional-community interactions. A synergic approach presents many advantages in investigating the complex and sometimes contradictory interaction between institutions and community. Such an integration, however, presents several problems of a theoretical-conceptual and methodological nature. In practice, empirical studies have rarely attempted a multi-level synergic analysis, partly because of incompatibility of methodologies; the few synergic models have rarely focused on contexts and

disaggregated data. As a result, two typologies of studies based on a broadly synergic perspective have emerged – qualitative studies investigating the interactions between institutions and community from a social capital point of view (e.g. Lehtonen, 2004; Smith, 2006), on the one hand; and aggregated data-based quantitative studies, trying to model the influence of both institutional quality and community trust on growth and development (e.g. Ahlerup et al., 2009), on the other hand. Empirical evidence points at a sometimes complementary (Woolcock, 2001; Balamoun-Lutz, 2011), sometimes contradictory (Smith, 2006) role of institutional activity and community level social capital in respect to social, economic, and environmental development of countries and territories.

The present paper tries to investigate the linkages between the two main factors at stake (institutional role and bottom-up social networks and resources), through a micro level quantitative approach which integrates social capital theory with social psychology frameworks (theories of social categorization and shared agency) distinguishing between three main levels of social categorization: self-categorization, categorization of immediate social groups, and categorization of large-scale mediated social groups (Swann & Bosson, 2010, Abdelal et al., 2009, Brewer, 1991). The important assumption that can be derived from the current analysis is that, by adopting the social capital concept as framework, we can observe some patterns of generating the sense of shared social agency (Bratman, 2014, Gilbert, 2004, 2006, Tomasello, 2009, Searle, 2008). We are further arguing that in case of post-soviet societies perception of shared agency and generation of sense of belongingness (that, in turn, generates social identity of a group) might be determined by transitional processes. This is in fact reflected in the patterns of social capital and social networking as we were able to explore according to the current results.

The main concept behind the analytical model proposed in this paper is the idea of an existing linkage between citizens' perceptions of institutional performance and community empowerment on the one hand, and community trust and civic engagement on the other hand. The empirical analysis, which is based on structural equation modelling for ordinal variables, analyzes over 2000 observations from two macrodistricts of the Russian Federation (Central okrug and North Caucasus okrug), characterized by deep socio-demographic, socio-cultural, and socio-economic differences. Results are compared with previous studies on social capital in the post-Soviet world and with the results of recent studies by the authors, which have found empirical evidence of correlation between institutional trust, civic engagement and community trust in the Republic of Latvia (Sechi and Skilters, 2011; Sechi, Borri, De Lucia and Skilters, 2013).

Literature Review

Woolcock (1998) provides with a detailed survey of approaches to social capital in territorial community studies (see also Wakefield and Poland, 2005; Mladovsky and Mossialos, 2008) by identifying three main threads (communitarian, institutionalist, network-based).

Hence, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) advocate for an integration of the mentioned perspectives through a synergic view based on able to encompass micro / bottom-up and macro/top-down dimensions of social capital, and on the view of the civil society building as the result of both institutions and community activity.

The necessity of such an integration stems from a re-thinking of the social capital concept in a socio-political perspective focused on sustainable development. Woolcock (2001) defines social capital as the socio-political environment able to create norms, shape social structure, and facilitate collective action, emphasizing the role of linking (vertical) social capital as leverage of resources beyond the community (see also Lehtonen, 2004). Further scientific implications consist in the advocacy of an integration of the 'psycho-social' social capital perspective into the political economy discourse (e.g. Szreter and Woolcock, 2004; Folland, 2007). Further elaborations on the issue (Woolcock and Narayan, 2006; Mladovsky and Mossialos, 2008) make the multi-level features of the synergic view explicit, by taking into account the analysis of bonding and bridging

social networking at both micro and macro levels, that is, within and between the community and the institutional complex.

The core studies in social categorization (for overviews see: Swann & Bosson, 2010, Hogg & Terry, 2000, Abrams & Hogg, 2010, Baumeister, 2010b, Crisp & Hewstone, 2006), in the light of the current research, are consistent with the idea that social identity is a three-fold structure consisting of self-categorization followed by the categorization of immediate groups and finally groups that are global (ethnic, politic) (Abdelal et al., 2009). An approach that converges assumptions from social psychology, social theory and theory of social capital within the framework of three-level structure is provided by Côté (1996, 1997). The basic work on shared agency that assumes that there is a distinct sense of belongingness that is reflected in joint group-level actions, obligations and commitments is elaborated in the frameworks by Bratman, 2014, Gilbert, 2004, 2006, Tomasello, 2009, Searle, 2008.

Theoretical framework

In the present study we attempt to integrate individual and socio-territorial (and, at the same time, psychological and socio-political) levels of analysis, by adopting a theoretical framework able to encompass social psychology and community sociology approaches. Our scope is to investigate the psychological linkages which may connect the macro level of institutional performance and community-institutional relations with the creation of social capital at the micro (individual) level.

Our theoretical framework that we adopt from the social cognitive sciences and theories of social categorization assumes: (i) that social identity is a three-fold structure, and (ii) social identity determines the sense of collective social agency.

Our first guiding assumption that social identity is a three-fold structure means that social identity is generated in interaction between three levels of social categorization: first, self-categorization that is characterized by the mutual interdependence of feeling to belong *and* to be unique, self-reflexive in respect to a community (Brewer, 1991; Brewer & Gardner, 1996, Baumeister, 2010b). At the first stage of social categorization the self of an agent is generated. That enables further processes of social categorization, in particular, the second stage of social categorization, -- the categorization of immediate and direct groups (e.g., family members, close relatives and friends) (Saribay & Andersen, 2007, Roccas & Brewer, 2002). The second stage is inherently linked to the first stage: close others are frequently incorporated into the representation of the self (Saribay & Andersen, 2007). Finally, the third level of categorization refers to large-scale communities (e.g., of ethnic or political nature) (cf. Abdelal et al., 2009). The main pattern of interaction between the three levels is that the first level is the most inclusive and psychologically most significant one (e.g., parts of the second level are inherently incorporated into the self), whereas the third level has less impact on the social self of an agent. A general observation is that the third level has less impact on the self of the agent and, thus, is psychologically less real than the second one (Pencis, Skilters, & Senkane, 2011). However, if exploring the third level it should be kept in mind that there are large-scale communities that are global, trans-national but at the same time psychologically real (cp. Buchan, Brewer, Grimalda, Wilson, Fatas, & Foddy, 2011).

The second background assumption that characterizes our framework of social cognitive sciences and social categorization concerns shared social agency.

Sense of social identity as represented by social groups corresponds to the sense of shared epistemic agency (that differs in diverse communities because of distinctive grade of saliency and belongingness that characterizes communities). Instead of the epistemic agency that is represented by 'I-identity', communities contain an epistemologically distinct and instrumentally and intrinsically crucial 'we-identity' (cp. for different views on shared intentionality and agency: Bratman, 2014, Gilbert, 2004, 2006, Tomasello, 2009, Searle, 2008).

Although there are inconsistent or contradicting beliefs that are represented in different agents at the individual level, they still can share the same belief at the community level due to their shared agency. The main idea of shared agency is that collective cognitive states refer to beliefs that are

based on joint commitment: “A population, *P*, believes that *p* if and only if the members of *P* are jointly committed to believe [...] that *p*.” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 100).

Social groups containing the shared agency can be characterized by intentionality, unity, and consciousness of that unity (Gilbert, 2006, 62, 63): First, as soon as we think of social group (instead of a mere social aggregate) we have to consider that membership in a social group is intentional (at least to some degree) and further action as a member of the group is also intentional. Second, social groups are characterized by the unity and structure that bind their individuals as their members (and further generates hierarchies, function dependencies among their members). Third, members of the group are conscious (to a different degree) that they belong to this group. Although there are different patterns of action at individual and group level, the crucial properties of shared agency at the group level are shared intentions, joint commitments and obligations.

THEORETICAL MODEL

The core assumption of the adopted model consists in the idea that social capital (both bonding and bridging) and civic action are influenced by personal attitudes and perceptions related to the individual's role in the society and to the institutional climate, both directly and indirectly (the latter through fostering personal networking). This way, psychological linkages between perception of institutional activity and community-institutional relations on the one hand, and the development of micro level bonding and bridging social capital on the other, is hypothesized and operationalized. In social identity terms, it is assumed that large scale identity determinants (related to politics and institutions) affect small scale levels (intra-and inter-community bonds) and individual action. As in mainstream community social capital studies, the role of informal networking is also accounted for in the model, but it is associated with ambivalent effects on social capital generation.

If explored within the context of social categorization framework, our theoretical model assumes that the sense of shared agency is determined (or even co-created) by active engagement in social processes, whereas mediated social processes decrease active interaction and thus decrease to an extent the generation of the sense of shared agency.

Variables and hypotheses

The theoretical model is a recursive (path analysis-based) one, including 7 latent variables (2 of which exogenous). Included latent variables are:

Empowerment perception;

Trust towards institutions;

Trust in the society (bonding social capital);

Openness to ethnic diversity in the society (bridging social capital);

Family-based personal networking;

Extent of friendship relations;

Civic engagement.

Hypotheses are:

1. Empowerment perception positively affects civic engagement. This hypothesis relates to the assumption that the more the citizen perceives that personal engagement will have a political impact, the more he / she is inclined towards engaging. This is consistent with shared agency theory.
2. Institutional trust positively affects trust in the society. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that community cohesion and social capital are affected by perception of a good institutional climate and performance; as mentioned above, this can be seen as a micro-level declension of the widespread approach in community studies, which identifies the roots of social capital generation with institutional quality and performance, dating back to North (1990) (see also Skocpol, 1996; Knack and Keefer, 1997)- This hypothesis is also consistent with shared agency theory.

3. Institutional trust positively affects openness in the society. Bridging (e.g. interethnic) linkages are supposedly fostered by perception of a good institutional climate and performance. (E.g. Levi (1996) finds evidence of effective institutions being bulwarks against interethnic conflict.) Shared agency theory provides wit support for this hypothesis too.
4. Empowerment perception negatively affects narrow networking. A low perception of civic empowerment may lead to intensifying 'informal' networking activity, as pointed out by field research in post-Soviet societies (see Rose, 1998)
5. Narrow networking positively affects bonding social capital. This is the standard assumption about networking generating social capital in Putnam (1993) and other proponents of bottom-up views of social capital generation in communities.
6. Narrow networking negatively affects bridging social capital. This assumption is fostered by several studies pointing out the negative sides of community-based structural social capital with regard to tolerance and inclusion (see e.g. Narayan and Shah, 2000) and its connections with the issue of 'amoral familism' (Woolcock, 1998).
7. Narrow networking negatively affects friendship contacts.
8. Friendship contacts positively affect bridging social capital. It is assumed that networking based on friendship may foster plural networking and therefore openness social capital.
9. Bridging social capital positively affects bonding social capital. It is assumed that tolerance and openness may actually enhance community cohesion.

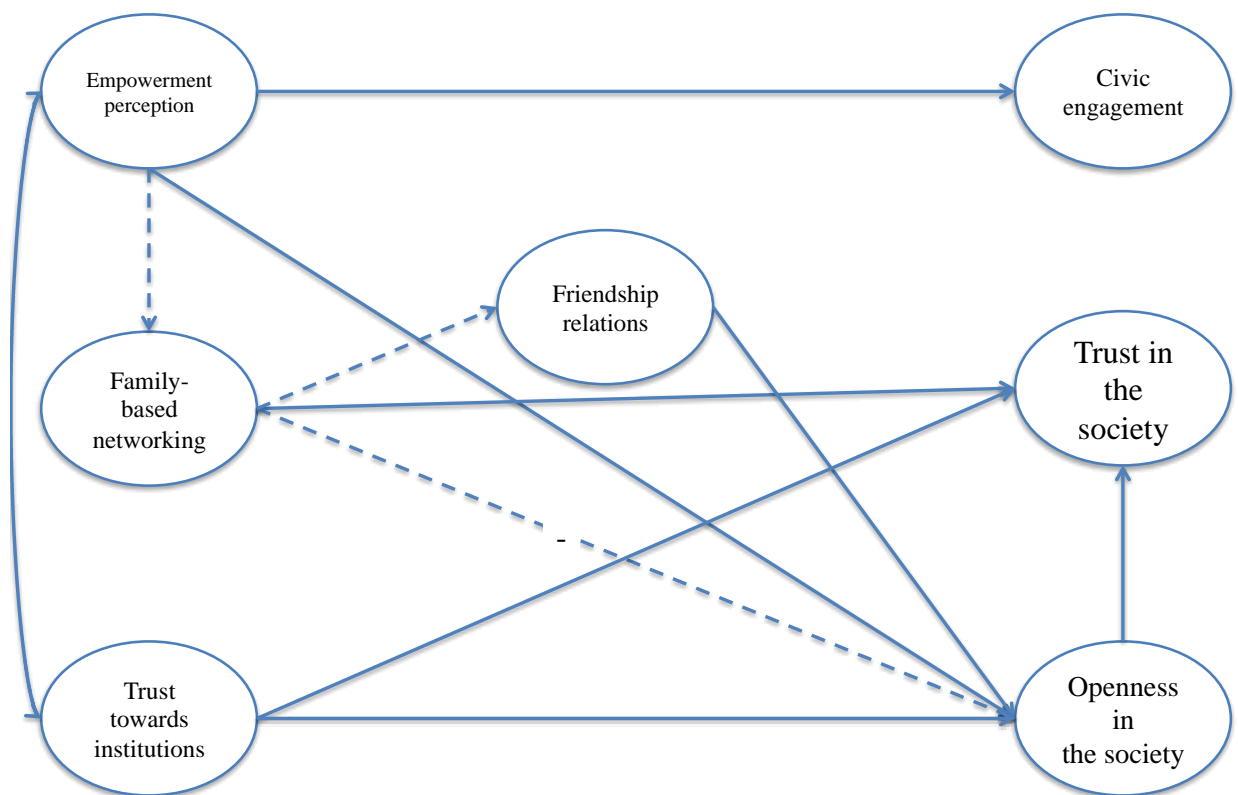


Figure 1: Theoretical model

Study context

The model was tested on 2046 individual observations collected in two federal districts of the Russian Federation (Central okrug and North Caucasus okrug). The two districts present sharp differences in terms of socio-cultural profile (due to a very diverse ethnic composition), urbanisation figures, and Human Development Index:

- a. the CDI – which includes the capital city Moscow and the historical core of Russia - is characterized by an overwhelming prevalence of ethnic Russians (almost 90%), by a high degree of urbanisation (81%) and by a generally high HDI;
- b. the NCDI – which includes 9 subjects, 8 of which are autonomous republics - is characterized by a very diverse ethnic profile, with ethnic Russians being a very slight overall relative majority (31%), and, in general, a minority in all subjects with the exception of Stavropol kraj; average HDI is the lowest among Russian federal districts. Rural settlements are very relevant, the degree of urbanization being below 50%.

According to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2011), the Russian Federation has a higher level of generalized trust than the average of post-communist transition countries. Trust towards institutions, however, is relatively low, such as inter-ethnic or inter-religious tolerance levels.

Data collection

Sample

Data were collected in the context of *Russian survey* “Values and Economical Behavior: Testing explanatory models in experiments and field studies”, administered between June 2012 and August 2012. This study was conducted by request the International Laboratory for Socio-Cultural Research of HSE.

Between June 2012 and August 2012, a representative sample of Russian adults from two large regions were drawn and persons aged 18 to 60 years of age (inclusive) residing in private households were selected.

We employed a multistage (3-stage) area sample. The effective total sample size was 2,058 interviews: 1,024 personal interviews in the Central federal region including the city of Moscow and 1,034 personal interviews in North-Caucasian Federal region.

Table 1. Sample composition.

Federal region	N	male		female		age				
		N	%	N	%	Mean	SD	Mode	Min	Max
Central federal region	1020	488	48	532	52	38.84	12.33	22	18	60

North-Caucasian Federal region	1026	489	48	538	52	36.64	12.37	22	18	60
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Methods of the study

Below we have the scale statements of measurements that we used to evaluate parameters social capital. While answering it was necessary for the respondents to give answers using a 5-point Likert scale.

1. Level of trust. We evaluated trust in the society and the institutional trust.

1.1. We evaluated social trust in the society using 3 statements from different international surveys: *Most people can be trusted; Most people always act honestly* (Putnam, 2000, p. 291); *I trust my neighbours* (Häuberer, 2011).

1.2. We evaluated institutional trust using 3 statements developed by us that allowed us to evaluate the overall institutional trust of the person: *I trust federal government; I trust regional government; I trust municipal/ local authorities in place where I live.*

2. Openness to ethnic diversity in the society. We used the following two statements to evaluate tolerance to ethnic diversity: *If people of different nationalities live near each other it makes life better; I don't mind to live* (Onyx & Bullen, 2000)

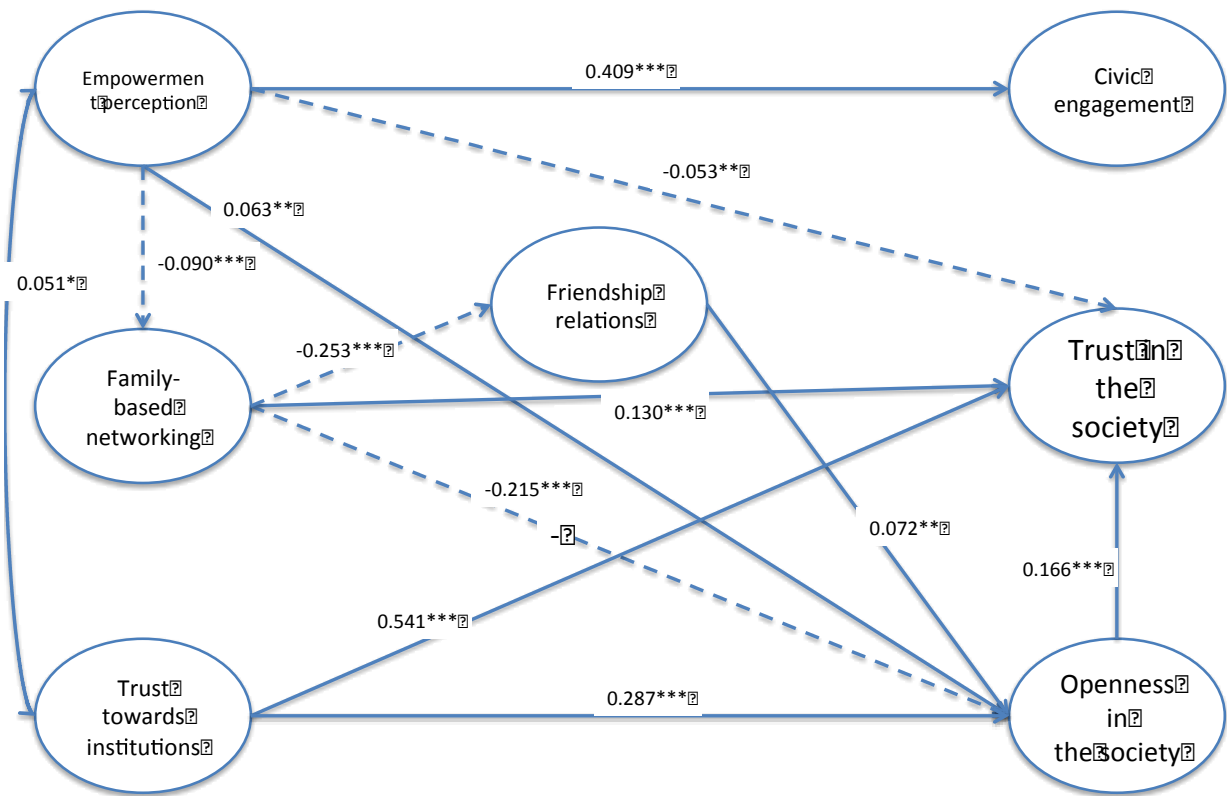
3. The size of personal networks (Häuberer, 2011; Gaag, 2005; Verhaeghe & Tampubolon, 2012).

We measured the informal network of *Family* by asking about the number of the respondent's contacts with their adult brothers and sisters older 18 years and older (Häuberer, 2011; Gaag, 2005; Verhaeghe & Tampubolon, 2012). We measured the informal network of the *respondent's friends* by asking about his or her number of friends in the workplace, in the neighborhood and other friends.

4. Civic engagement: membership in organizations (Häuberer, 2011). We measured the formal network of organizational membership of the respondent by asking about the number of memberships in political parties, trade unions, professional association, church, religious, charity organizations, public beneficial organizations, sport or interest organizations, civic associations, non-government public organizations (cf. Häuberer, 2011).

5. Empowerment perception This scale assesses the perceptions of respondents of the chances to defend their interests and local political activities through civic engagement (Grootaert, 2003). Examples of questions: *"How much influence do you feel you have on the local authorities' decisions?"; "Do you feel that you have power to make important decisions that could change the course of your life?"* etc. For such questions, we have used responses on 5-point Likert scales.

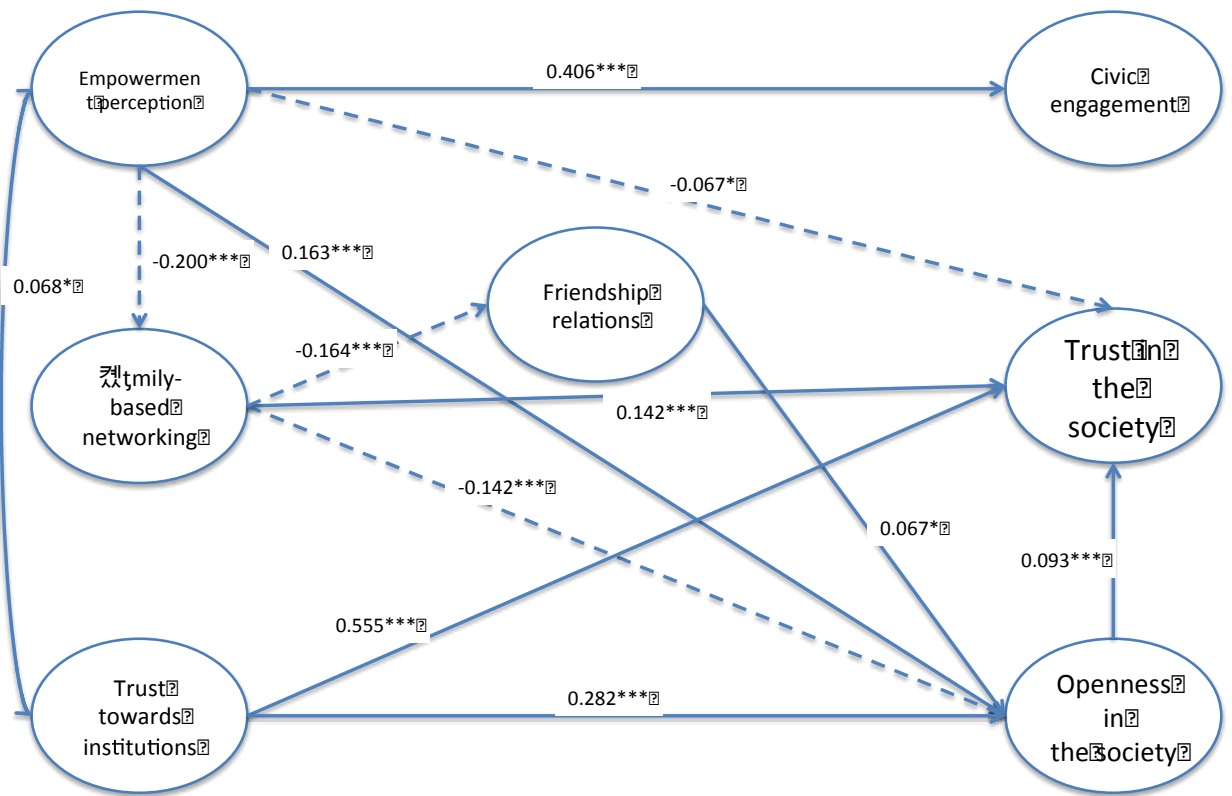
6. Demographic variables. In addition to the aforementioned scales to measure the observed variables, questions asking respondents' background information such as gender, age, level of education, were included in the questionnaire.



Goodness of fit = CMIN/DF = 2.480

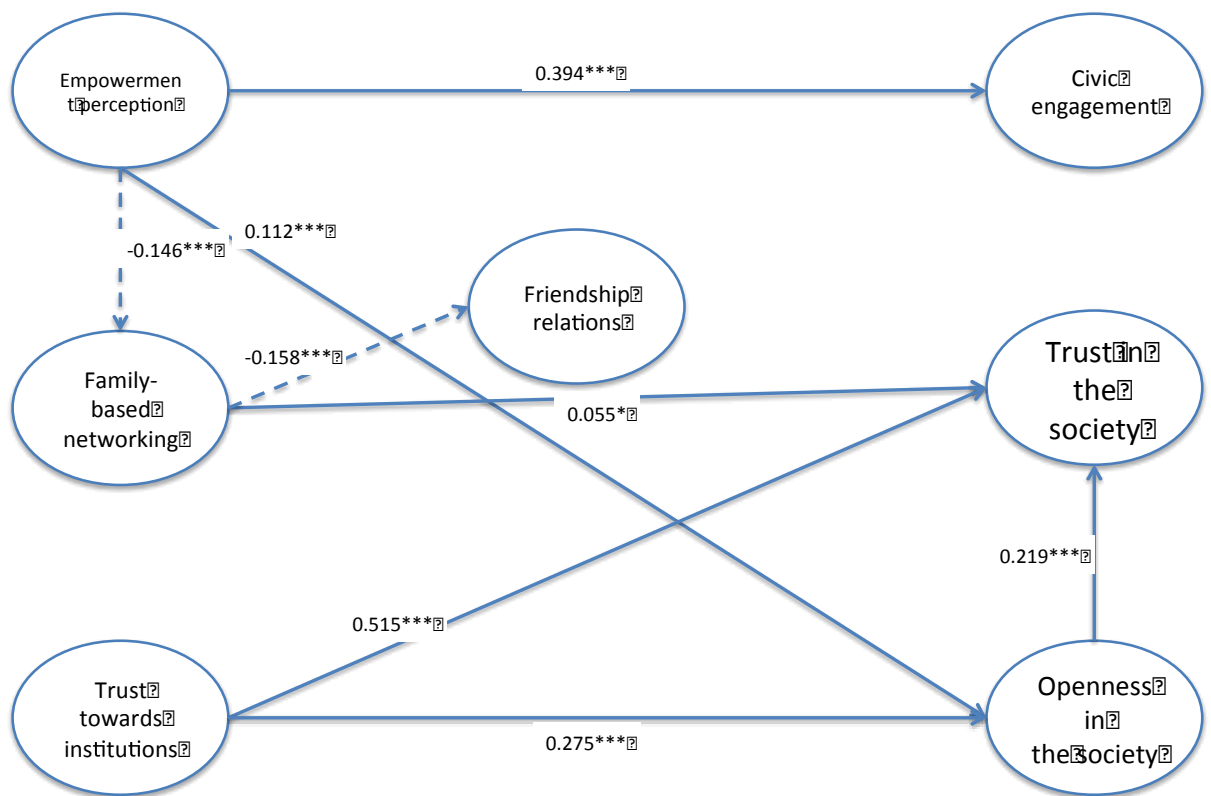
Figure 2: General results¹

¹ Solid lines: significant positive effects; dashed lines: significant negative effects. ***=99% significance; **=95% significance; *=90% significance



Goodness of fit = CMIN/DF = 2.072

Figure 3: Results (Central Okrug)



Goodness of fit = CMIN / DF = 2.365

Figure 4: Results (North Caucasus okrug)

Results

An unexpected effect (negative impact of empowerment perception on bonding social capital) is found among the general sample, and Central District respondents. Such an effect is not found among North Caucasus respondents.

The results for the two districts present two main differences, related to the role of personal networking in social assets building. In the North Caucasus case, hypotheses 5 and 6 are found to be not significant – that is, both relatives- and friendship-based personal networking do not affect openness in the society. The difference may imply a more relevant role of personal networking – in both a positive and negative sense – on bridging social capital in more urbanized environments often characterized by the prevalence of narrow, monoethnic network patterns than in more diverse regions.

Importantly, in the central district we are able to observe impact of friendship relations on the openness in society whereas there is no impact of friendship relations on the openness in society in North Caucasus district, which can be partially explained by the ethnic and religious composition of the sample.

In both cases there is strong impact of trust toward institutions on the trust in the society, which could be explained in the way, that large-scale social communities (expressed in the trust in the society in general) are perceived as determined by second level structure (expressed in trust towards institutions).

In both cases perception of empowerment supports civic engagement and feeling of empowerment interacts with trust towards institutions, which confirms the underlying model of social categorization. We could also assume that the feeling of shared agency is represented by relations of empowerment perception with civic engagement and openness in the society (whereby empowerment support both civic engagement and openness). Another plausible way of generating shared social agency is interaction between empowerment perception and trust towards institutions. A further couple of empirically confirmed causal links supporting the shared agency processes is between (a) the trust towards institutions supporting trust in society, and (b) the trust toward institutions and openness in society, which, in its turn, support trust in society.

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