

DIFFERENTIATING TRUST IN RURAL DECISION MAKING DRAWING ON AN ENGLISH CASE STUDY

ABSTRACT

Within the context of rural civic participation, three different types of trust are described, based on Simmelian-related constructs: personal trust, system trust and instrumental trust. Each has two components, a 'justification' and a 'leap of faith'. These vary in proportion according to degrees of knowledge held. Shifts in public domain decision-making have changed the emphasis of different types of trust. In using constructs of social capital to explore rural decision-making, bonding social capital is seen to cohere around notions of personal trust, bridging social capital around system trust and contested social capital around instrumental trust. In rural decision-making it is suggested, drawing from case study evidence in Gloucestershire, England, that personal trust is becoming increasingly important because of the localisation of decision-making and ambiguities in representation. A greater reliance is also being placed on system trust because of increasingly complex decision-making structures. Whilst in principle instrumental trust can be ameliorated through access to knowledge and information, increasingly, the volume of information is problematic, and decision-makers are relinquishing their knowledge to 'experts'.

TRUST: A RESEARCH CONTEXT

There has been a growth in academic interest in trust over the past 20 years both as a result of studies relating to a decreasing confidence in governance, the press and large corporations (Anheier and Kendall, 2002) and stemming from the increasing complexity with which modern societies are organised and public domain decisions are made (Kooimans, 2003). In this second context, trust can have the role of reducing

complexity and uncertainty, where technical and social change is rapid and can have the function of displacing self-serving social materialism (Viklund, 2003). It is this second context, specifically in the context of complex rural decisions, that provides the focus for this paper.

The increasing interest in the study of trust is manifest in legal, economic (North, 2005) and rational choice approaches (Bohnet *et al*, 2001) as well as socio-psychological studies conducted through the vehicle of interpersonal influence (Chun and Bavier, 2004). Trust also has been explored sociologically, including in the context of tacit agreements underlying on-going social relationships (Korczynski, 2000) and through theories of social capital and the mutual gains associated with trust within networks (Zadoroznyi, 2001). This study adopts the last of these, social capital, as the principal vehicle for an exploration of trust in rural decision-making.

Within this social capital context, trust, it has been argued, is highest where citizens can fully participate in their (democratic) civil societies (Fukuyama (1995), Rose *et al* (1997)) and (at least to some extent) their institutions (Newton, 2001, Secor and O'Loughlin, 2004). High trust societies offer the greatest potential for long term co-operative and communal partnerships through civil society (Fukuyama, 1995) because they build confidence and reliability into community decision-making. Khodyakov (2007) correlates these high trust societies with ones that have high levels of social capital. In these cases, there is trust in the 'public' sphere which engenders civic participation (Newton 2001).

These notions of trust that describe a direct bilateral relationship between trust and social capital, however, are not without their critics. Khodyakov (2007) suggests that they are limited to an assessment of undifferentiated *macro*-notions of social capital. Cook (2005) says that this macro level creates difficulties for theoretical development and empirical research relative to the Bourdieullian (1986) and Coleman (1988)

definitions of *micro* social capital which limit social capital to the resources that people obtain through their personal networks (Secor and O'Loughlin, 2004). In addition, institutional (or system) trust is seen as being largely superior to individual (or personal) trust in these assessments (Uzzi, 1997) despite the fact that the two can have a strong influence over each other (Parry, 1976). These two forms of trust are considered, together with the notion of 'instrumental' trust, in the Simmelian context in the following section.

Gambatta (1998) also suggests that studies that explore the bilateral relationship between trust and social capital, tend to view trust as a variable or a continuum from trust to distrust, rather than as a process. As an independent variable, for example, trust is primarily concerned with the benefits of trust: the potential of trust to reduce transactions costs (Noteboom, 2000); to facilitate co-operation (Gambetta, 1988); create social capital (Giddens 1990), or reduce risk and uncertainty (Luhmann, 1988). As a dependent variable it is the factors that impact on trust that are the focus for study: who is being trusted (Yamagishi, 2001); the reputation of trust intermediaries (Levi, 1998), the relative importance of honesty and rationality in influencing trust (Messick and Kramer 2001).

Khodyakov (2007), however, suggests that trust can be seen as a process, which allows the exploration of the negotiation of trust, rather than just how it is manifest (Noteboom and Six, 2003), how trust changes over time (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) and how it builds on previous experiences and reputations (Ensminger, 2001). Khodyakov (2007), too, finds these assessments of trust as a variable somewhat unsatisfactory as they do not differentiate between different types of trust.

This paper seeks to embrace some of these critiques by exploring trust, both conceptually and functionally, as a differentiated set of processes, rather than a variable. It purposefully draws on the earlier thinking of Georg Simmel as this provides an

appropriate and insightful framework for relating differentiated trust processes to pluralistic notions of social capital. The following section examines some of Simmel's conceptual notions of trust before examining the role that trust has to play in public domain decision-making. The relationship between trust and social capital is then explored. The nature of different kinds of trust and social capital specifically in the context of rural decision-making are then examined in the context of an empirical case study in Gloucestershire, England, before conclusions are drawn about the increased explanatory power of the application of trust and social capital to decision-making, if it is differentiated into different types.

DESCRIBING TRUST

A number of authors (Luhmann, 1979, Giddens, 1990, Misztal, 1996) have acknowledged the significant contribution that Georg Simmel (1990, 1992), writing at the turn of the 20th century, has made to the understanding of trust. These authors collectively have identified three distinct types of trust that follow from his work, although Simmel himself did not use the terminology deployed here. *Personal trust* concerns the way in which individuals relate to individuals. *System trust* (a term coined by Möllering, 2001, but which has also been termed, for example, generalised trust (Frankel, 1977) or institutional trust (Uzzi, 1997)) is concerned with how groups such as partnerships and networks relate to each other. What will be termed for the purposes of this paper *instrumental trust*, is distinct from personal and system trust in that it requires reciprocity and a moral obligation.

Simmel (1990) considered the third of these, instrumental trust, to be the trust of secret societies where the first rule of a secret society is that it has a reciprocal confidence amongst its members. This type of trust is where people might not really trust each other fully, but the consequences (or risks) of not trusting each other are greater than the risks of trusting each other. This can be significant where the consequences of the

'secret' elements of an organisation (for example, a body concerned with making public domain decisions) becoming publicly known are significantly detrimental to the organisation.

But how can trust be defined? Certainly it can be considered conceptually but Möllering (2001), drawing from Simmel, defines trust *functionally*, as:

"a state of favourable expectation regarding other people's actions and intentions"
(Möllering (2001), page 412)

Simmel suggests that society would simply collapse without trust and yet the bases for trust actually are rather weak (Möllering, 2001).

In conceptual terms (1), Simmel (1992) suggested that the trust that we place in people is made up of a 'justification' for trusting someone (a rational reason for doing so – he called this an interpretation) but also our preconceptions or feelings about people which he termed a "leap of faith". The 'justification' is a weak form of presumptive knowledge (for example, a village committee might believe (trust) the vicar to be an honest person). Trust thus combines good reason with faith but the trust that we place in people and the way in which we justify that trust may be only weakly linked (Möllering, 2001).

The leap of faith has a number of characteristics. It is not based on knowledge and, as Luhmann (1979) suggests, it operates most effectively if deployed with 'humility'. It is the element of trust (of all three types) that might help to explain why some rural decision making processes work well and others do not when the framework for decisions has ostensibly the same structure. The leap of faith relates to 'people getting on', in successful decision-making and 'a clash of personalities', in unsuccessful decision-making.

The leap of faith will be bigger, the less secure or certain the 'justification' is. Given that the justification element of trust must be based on some form of knowledge or understanding, then 'perfect knowledge' would require no leap of faith, but 'complete ignorance' would require that trust is entirely a leap of faith (blind faith). Perfect knowledge thus would allow completely 'rational' decisions to be made but anything short of perfect knowledge requires an element of trust – 'reasonable' decisions – and no knowledge at all will lead to 'irrational' decisions (Hollis, 1998).

According to McAllister (1995), as decisions move from being 'rational' to being 'reasonable' (and therefore the leap of faith element of trust becomes larger) elements of being emotional or intuitive have an increasing role to play in the decision. It follows that emotion and intuition are both in some way drivers of the leap of faith. McAllister (1995) considers that these drivers play out differently in personal trust, where individual self interest is to the fore in decision-making, and system trust, which has a greater degree of social and moral embeddedness. Further, Frankel (1977) suggests that personal trust tends to have an inherently larger element of the leap of faith than system trust, which tends to have a larger element of 'favourable expectation' to it, particularly when perfect knowledge is not available. Trust (particularly system trust) allows behaviour to take place as if some things were known that actually are not known. From this perspective, it allows social interaction to take place on a relatively simple and confident basis.

Simmel's conceptualisation of trust – that it can be of three types (termed here personal, system and instrumental trust) each of which has two components (a justification and a leap of faith) is now related differentially to different forms of social capital.

TRUST AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

At the beginning of the 20th Century Simmel suggested that trust was becoming increasingly impersonal because of the growth of corporate institutions and organisations. In decision-making, this reduced a reliance on personal trust but brought the operation of system trust to the fore. Much of this was to do with the maturation of democracy. If institutions were introduced through some kind of democratic consensus (for example laws through Parliament), he argued, then trust could be placed in the propriety of these laws.

There are many parallels, at the beginning of the 21st Century, with this growth in institutions, driven by the changing nature of governance (Rhodes, (1997), Kooimans (2003)) that has led to differentiated, interactive socio-political structures and the empowerment of individuals and communities (Stoker, 1998). Here, as governmental structures become more complex, there is a critical shift in the making of public domain decisions from the dominance of system trust (occasioned, as Simmel asserted, by the growth in representative democracy) towards a greater reliance on both personal trust (where decisions become more local and interpersonal) and instrumental trust (where decisions become less democratic and less clearly accountable) (Saward, 1992).

In the context of this changing nature of governance, social capital has been used as a core framework for evaluating public domain decision-making (World Bank, 1999). In conceptual discussions, social capital has been closely linked to trust (Adler and Kwon, 2002). Koniordos (2008) notes that Putnam, writing in 1995, suggested that social capital was formed by:

“features of *social organizations*, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions. (Putnam 1993, page 167, cited in Koniordos (2008) page 235, Koniordos’s emphasis).

But that 2 years later, Putnam had modified this definition:

“features of *social life* - networks, norms and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. (Putnam 1995, pages 664-665, cited in Koniordos (2008) page 235, Koniordos’s emphasis).

One interpretation of these two definitions is that Putnam was distinguishing between initially trust at the level of organisations and subsequently trust at the level of the individual. These two levels have been incorporated in to Putnam’s (2000) ‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ capitals. A third classification is commonly deployed in tandem with bonding and bridging capitals, ‘linking’ capital, although Putnam did not actively deploy this concept himself (Field, 2003, page 42). As with the three Simmelian types of trust, these categories were never intended to be exclusive, but rather were means to explain dominant forms of social capital in any one situation (Portes, 2000).

Bonding capital has been defined in a variety of ways (Woolcock, 2001). It relates to ties between different *individuals* in similar situations – for example friends, family, neighbours and colleagues – both inside and outside of any specific organisational context. From definitions of bonding capital it holds many of the characteristics of the Simmelian notion of *personal trust*. Bonding capital and personal trust alike can tend to be inward looking and reinforce exclusive social identities and like-minded groups. This ‘bonding’ capital has been explored in the context of personal trust by Brown (2009) in the context of the importance of interpersonal communication in lay and professional decision-making in healthcare.

Bridging capital is used to describe a more distant, less interpersonal platform for social capital transactions, where external network and other organisational structures come to the fore. It is this bridging context in which Simmelian *system trust* dominates. Again,

bridging capital and system trust encompass an outward-looking context, embracing people across different groups and social contexts. This relationship, without using these terms has been explored, for example, in the context of community decision-making and local government in Japan by Richley and Ikeda (2009) in respect of seeking to increase the involvement of marginalised groups in institutional decisions .

Others (Newtson, 2001, Koniordos, 2008) have seen social capital in a less consensual way than Putnam's bridging and bonding forms of capital. De Fillipis (2001) suggests that whilst Putnam's notions are characterised as a cornerstone of economic and social development, they have little theoretical or empirical support. Instead he suggests that Bourdieu's (1986) notion of social capital as the exercise and contestation of power in social contexts is possibly a more realistic concept. Here social capital can be used for both virtuous and anti-social purposes. Coleman (1988) too, suggests that social capital is normatively and morally neutral. It is neither desirable nor undesirable and simply provides a platform upon which social action can take place. This is in contrast to the Putnam view, which sees social capital as both owned by people, and primarily a 'good thing' (Edwards and Foley, 1997). Certainly, empirically in the English rural context, Moseley and Phal's (2007) study found that social capital whilst having many positive attributes, also could be negative:

"trust broke down catastrophically a year or so ago, partly because a culture of cliquishness and suspicion has developed" (paragraph 6, page 24);

and

"..... factions, cliques and 'war lords'. Nothing appears to destroy social capital quite as effectively as a culture of factionalism and local infighting" (paragraph 14iii, page 28).

Even where it was positive, Moseley and Phal (2007) suggested that social capital tended to be deployed in pursuit of pleasant and self-gratifying goals rather than attempts to remedy more problematic social or economic issues.

This interpretation of social capital as contestation has some bearing on 'linking' capital in that Woolcock (2001, pages 13 – 14) describes it as capital which reaches out to unlike people in dissimilar situations, such as those who are entirely outside of the community, thus enabling members to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available in the community. Here, linking capital can be interpreted as a means of resolving the inherent contestation found in social capital. But this resolution is not always achieved. It is in the context of more contested views of social capital (resolved or otherwise), that the Simmelian notion of *instrumental trust* (although not named by him as such) has a relevance. In this context, Koniordos (2008) notes that Max Weber, writing at the beginning of the 20th century, has shown that trust can actually be imposed by organisations on its members rather than it just developing voluntarily or personally, because of the disciplines that organisations are able to impose through what has been termed 'enforceable trust' (Woolcock 1998).

Thus, in linking concepts of trust to notions of social capital, personal trust can be seen to share common ground with bonding social capital, system trust with bridging social capital, and instrumental trust with contested social capital.

TRUST IN RURAL DECISION-MAKING

To gain some understanding of the *nature* of these different kinds of trust and social capital in application, they are profiled in the context of rural decision making in England. This platform is pertinent because there has been an increasing interest in exploring the role of trust in both the rural arena and in the context of public domain decision-making. These interests have an underlying theme which is concerned with the

relationship between 'local' or 'lay' knowledge, interest and action on the one hand and 'expert' knowledge, interest and action, on the other.

In the rural context, for example, much has been written about the role that trust has to play in the development of local food networks. Kirwan (2004), for example, explores the notion of trust as 'regard', itself generated by respect, intimacy friendship and sociability. Using farmers markets as a case study, he finds that regard develops into trust through repeated satisfactory transactions, particularly where reciprocity (Lee, 2000) and the sharing of ethical values (Sage, 2003) also develop.

Hinrichs (2000) uses Granovetter's (1985) notion of 'embeddedness' (the development of strong personal relationships within market transactions) to explore trust in local food systems, positing that one of the main features distinguishing direct agricultural markets from global food systems is the degree of trust and social connection that is found within them. She explores the power of trust to overcome instrumental behaviour in such markets but concludes that, where there is economic exchange, trust is always vulnerable to being compromised.

In another rural application, Palmer *et al* (2009) explore the relationship between trust and risk in the implementation of bio-security regulations in Australia. They note that knowledge about such regulations is limited by a lack of trust in scientific expertise and governments (Beck, 1992): the conveyors of the message are less likely to be trusted than the message itself (Frewer *et al*, 1998). This has important implications for extension services seeking to reduce bio-security risks as it is the services themselves that are less likely to be trusted than the information about risks (Priest *et al*, 2003).

Public domain decisions also have been subjected to trust analyses again with tensions between the 'lay' and 'expert' views at their core. Zinn (2008), for example, evaluates the critical nature of trust in public decision-making in general, in the context of

decision-making becoming increasingly important and problematic at the same time because of the rising complexity and volatility of decision-making situations, considered above. Because of a lack of time and knowledge, decisions are becoming increasingly 'fateful'. Such decision-making requires increased trust (delegating time and expert knowledge to others, for example).

In application, Baxter *et al* (1999) examine the nature of trust in the relationship between community groups and professionals in the context of public decision-making about the siting of waste disposal facilities in Canada. Hindmoor (1998) examines the nature of trust in decision making within health policy networks that are made up of professionals and interest groups. Paddison *et al* (2008) examine trust in the context of decision-making in respect of urban housing development, exploring specifically the different levels of trust within state and community sector housing provision. Khodyakov (2007), too, examines the changing nature of trust in Soviet Union decision-making systems in the transition to democracy.

Within this context of an increasing interest in trust both in respect of rural issues and public domain decision-making more generally, the differentiated notions of Simmalian trust and social capital are now illustrated in a rural decision-making context. This is pertinent because an increased reliance on social capital for rural decision-making in England, relevant to each of the three forms of trust, is manifest in the Rural White Papers of 1995 and 2000 (Department of the Environment (1995), DETR (2000)).

The former stressed the traditional strengths of rural communities in respect of independence and self-help (Lowe, 1996). Rural decision-making should be more responsive to local circumstances than to uniform plans, and quality of life started with local people and local initiative (Hodge, 1996). As well as responding to the possibilities of harnessing social capital, such a policy approach also would have a smaller Exchequer cost.

Exemplifying the political ubiquity of the citizenship agenda in Britain, the New Labour Rural White Paper of 2000 (DETR, 2000) contained the same rhetoric. It provided specific funding streams (Community Service Fund, Special Parish Fund, Parish Plans Fund) to allow local rural communities to become actively involved in decision-making for their own development. Indeed in the same year the Local Government Act, 2000, gave local authorities a *duty* to prepare Community Development Plans and Community Strategies as inputs to the new statutory Local Development Frameworks.

This institutionalised rural social capital by giving rural communities responsibility for many planning functions of the state through the production of Participative Rural Appraisals, Rapid Rural Appraisals, Action Planning, Future Search, Planning for Real, Parish Plans, Village Appraisals, Village Design Statements and the like. By July 2008, the English Communities White Paper (DCLG, 2008) was offering further powers to parish and other local councils and encouraging more of them to be formed as part of a process or 're-democratising' local social capital.

The increasing advocacy of the use of social capital in rural policy allows the exemplification of the changing nature of the different forms of trust in rural public domain decision-making. Here, *personal trust* is explored through the growth in community participation and the increasing dependence on bonding social capital in the making of very localised rural decisions. *System trust* is explored through the growth in the number of organisations (forming bridging social capital) that have a role in rural decision-making. These are termed by Curry (2009), agents of rural governance (ARGs). *Instrumental trust* is explored through the need for knowledge and information to defend contested decisions, and the relationship of such knowledge to risk-taking. Whilst these three types of trust can never be mutually exclusive, the three examples considered here provide an analytic focus for each.

In these examples, reference is made to a range of rural case studies from the literature, exemplifying different kinds of trust. Recourse also is made to fieldwork carried out in the county of Gloucestershire, England, during 2007, where some 62 ARGs (of 175 identified) operating in the county responded to a questionnaire on the nature of rural decision-making.

PERSONAL TRUST AND BONDING SOCIAL CAPITAL IN RURAL DECISION-MAKING

In the wake of the rural community empowerment policy developments in England noted above, new demands have been placed on personal trust, because of the increased importance of interpersonal relations and bonding capital: individual actors influence rural decisions through personal interaction (Blumer, 1986) rather than, dominantly, traditional democratic accountable organisations. The ethos of the Rural White Papers is that decision-making should be devolved to the local, more personal level (Murdoch, 1997).

McAreevey (2006) reports on a study of rural decision-making in the East Anglian part of England, which explores the development of very local or 'micro' politics where the power of individuals tends to dominate over the power of groups. Here, decisions become more hidden, tacit (Polanyi, 1998) and indeterminate (Gerholme 1990). Decisions about agenda setting, the constituency of partnerships and so on can be covert as well as overt and often are not documented. These are characteristics that impact directly, and sometimes negatively, on personal trust (Khodyakov, 2007).

At this scale, bonding social capital becomes inherently unevenly distributed within and across communities (Greer, 2002). Many people do not wish to be actively involved (Hayward *et al*, 2004) and decision-making groups tend to be elite (in terms of high levels of education and significant amounts of available time) (Stevenson, 2003) working

(often unwittingly) against democratic participation (van Gunsteren 1998). At this micro-political scale, too, many political and administrative conventions begin to break down, placing more of an emphasis on personal trust for effective decision-making.

Groups handle discussion and decision-making in very different ways (absolute consensus vs. majority voting for example) which suit different people differently (McAreevey, 2006). New groups tend to form around individuals expressing shared values and interests almost independent of the traditional organisational structures in society. Such groups have more flexible memberships and are more experimental, but they can be more volatile as a result (Goodenough, 2007). In these circumstances, personal trust takes on a dominant role, as it displaces the more formal procedures, regulations and accountabilities that characterise system and instrumental trust.

In these circumstances limits to personal trust and bonding capital can be observed. Individuals come and go according to 'volunteering fatigue', where excessive claims are made on those who have become committed (Shortall, 2004). There is often confusion, too, as to what mandate individuals have and whom they might be considered to represent (Roger Tym, 2005). There also can be a lack of clarity as to who is supposed to implement what and where the money for implementation is to be found (Garrod and Whitby, 2005). In the Gloucestershire study, for example, only half of the 62 ARGs who responded to the questionnaire, claimed to have any *mandate to represent* community interests beyond just their membership and yet many of those that had no such mandate took part in public domain decision-making fora, the decisions of which impacted on others beyond their membership. Some 8 ARGs were not clear as to whom they represented, if anyone. Here, there is dependency on personal trust for decision-making as institutional arrangements become confused or unclear.

For those that had a mandate, this was commonly enshrined in law, or it had been adopted through the approval (formal or tacit) of a statutory body. Others *assumed* a

mandate because funding had been obtained to set up the body, because of a felt community need, through a group of like-minded people (at the time) joining together to form an association, or just because they felt it appropriate:

"we are a membership organisation, but the Board have agreed that we should be the voice for (their particular interest) for the whole of the region" (ARG 7.7).

Some adopted a representative role because the issue that brought them into being was of public concern:

"the group was formed as a result of public meetings" (ARG 6.19).

Here, personal trust will differ between those inside the ARG and those who are subject to its (actual or assumed) jurisdiction but who are not part of its decision-making structure. It could be concluded that the need to trust and the likelihood of mistrust are highest amongst those who are affected by the decisions of ARGs but who do not understand the decision-making process. They are likely to be less closely associated personally with those making decisions, falling outside the bounds of bonding capital. The fact that lay memberships of ARGs commonly are not democratically elected further places an emphasis on personal trust as a substitute for representation. This, according to Giddens (1990) is a general characteristic of the stakeholding society.

SYSTEM TRUST, BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL AND COMPLEX ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES.

A level up from these personal characteristics relating to rural decision-making, new demands are being placed upon Simmelian notions of system trust and bridging capital. These concern how networks and partnerships relate to each other and particular

demands are being made upon them because of the increasingly complex organisational structure within which rural decisions are made.

From the Gloucestershire Study, the 175 ARGs identified could be only an estimate as they were found to form, disband and reform with regularity. A parallel study at the regional level (the South West, the region in England in which Gloucestershire is situated) exploring specifically rural partnerships and networks (GOSW/SWRDA, 2006), found it difficult to “*track down*” (page 4) those that could be considered to be “*tangibly linked*” (page 4) with the “*complex nature*” (page 4) of rural delivery. Their inventory also was considered to be incomplete: they were identified “*as far as the law of diminishing returns would take it*” (page 4). Roger Tym and Partners (2005), too, identified 137 stakeholder partnerships operating within the rural parts of the South West Region of England, but these were considered difficult to define and:

“the database is unlikely to be comprehensive in its coverage of all regional groups”
(para 4.1, page 23).

The way in which some 35 of these ARGs in Gloucestershire interrelate is shown in figure 1. This density and complexity of ARGs is what Gunasekara (2006), in general, terms a ‘spaghetti and meatballs’ structure. Clearly, the interrelationships between the 175 ARGs identified in the Gloucestershire survey are much more complicated than this; indeed, they are too complex to represent diagrammatically.

Figure 1 near here

Within these organisational structures, system trust can become insecure because there are simply too many interrelationships within the system to be accommodated. Bridging capital, too, needs to be able to embrace a complex and changing array of actors.

The vulnerability of system trust and bridging capital are exacerbated by perceptions of an increasing organisational complexity in rural decision-making over time. In the Gloucestershire study, nearly all of the respondents felt that there were more ARGs in existence than there had been 10 years previously and 65% of the ARGs that responded were themselves a member of a partnership or a network of some sort. Despite this rather more (76%) felt that partnerships and networks were at best, of limited use for the organisation in respect of rural decision-making. As a result, the majority of ARGs did not prioritise the work of partnership or networks, with only 27% suggesting that they effectively met the needs of their organisation.

Positive reactions to the growth in partnerships and networks nevertheless acknowledged their resource costs:

"We are putting more emphasis on partnerships now and on investing in making them work effectively" (ARG 1.2).

More commonly, a sense of frustration was clearly articulated:

"On a regional basis there is a massive management overhead in terms of time and cost to participate. There is a need to refine and cull to find those that make a difference" (ARG 5.25);

and

"It is difficult to find the way through the maze" (ARG 9.10).

This growth in organisational complexity or 'overload' makes particular calls on system trust as ARGs become unable fully to acknowledge their organisational context. As Misztal (1996) notes, system trust becomes a tolerance of uncertainty within the

complexity of partnerships and networks. This leads some to simplify the structure in which they see themselves operating in order to cope with it operationally (Frankel, 1977). Gambetta (1998) suggests that here, social and organisational structures are perceived as simple and then trust is placed in the complexities that cannot readily be digested. Behaviour then takes place as if some things were known that actually are not. All of these behaviours would seem preferable to not participating in the decision-making process. The NCVO (2005) notes that whilst it is often very confusing to be part of this rural decision-making process, the consequences of not being part of it could be even worse (NCVO, 2005).

INSTRUMENTAL TRUST, CONTESTED SOCIAL CAPITAL, RISK AND INFORMATION

Instrumental trust can play out at a number of different scales. At the micro scale, Simmel's 'secret society' that holds suspicion within it, is evident from the literature on rural decision-making. Community-based ARGs can cause more traditional forms of 'collective identification' to become marginalised (Urry (1995) and can lead to both 'defence localism' (Winter, 2003) and 'exclusionary localism' (Castree, 2004). At this very local level, too, rural decision-making tends to be populated by the 'usual suspects' who keep reappearing on different groups across the community. Because they are on a number of groups they tend to assume a larger mandate than other social actors. In this context a lack of innovative decision-making and of representation of community interest can lead to a downward spiral of involvement (Baum, 1999). Decisions become dominated by key individuals.

Here, McAreavey (2006) has observed that 'cronies' of the chair of such ARGs often are invited to join in an undemocratic way, with others discouraged from joining.

Discordance and fractionation can result and notions of community even can be used to hide discordance (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). From this work, McAreavey (2006) is able to conclude that individuals involved in rural decision-making have the potential to use

or abuse their position, more or less as they choose. In these circumstances, instrumental trust may be deployed reluctantly (there is no choice but to trust) or with some scepticism.

At the core of both instrumental trust and contested social capital more generally, however, is the fact that trust might not be inherent, but there are risks associated with not trusting which might be greater than the risks associated with trusting. In rural decision-making, these risks can be ameliorated through access to knowledge and information that reduce the need to depend on others through the 'leap of faith' element of trust. Such information becomes particularly important where public domain decisions are made outside of the democratic framework and remain less than fully transparent, as Burch *et al* 2003 have suggested about the growth of regional decision-making bodies in England in the context of the Structural Funds:

"they operated at an élite level and away from the gaze of the public and the media."
(Burch *et al* 2003, page 6).

Here, Simmelian notions of 'secretness' increase the need for knowledge and information on the part of decision-makers where third party accountability and verification may be slight. The greater the (useable) information, the more likely decisions will move from 'irrational' to 'reasonable' and to 'rational'.

In the Gloucestershire study nearly all ARG respondents claimed that there was a lot of information that helped them to make rural decisions but it was not always easy to access or necessarily reliable. Some 82% felt that such information came from a wide variety of different sources and 23% were concerned about the reliability of such information once they had accessed it. Whilst for some, web-based information made information assimilation quicker, for others it led to confusion - what Shadbolt (2006) terms the information smog. As a result, 65% of these ARGs felt that assimilating the

information required to make decisions was very time consuming. Because of this, a lack of instrumental trust has a cost (of information assimilation) associated with it and has an important role in evaluating the transactions costs of rural decisions (North 2005).

Significantly here, in most elected ARGs (particularly local authorities), the salaried executive was expected to hold the knowledge required to make decisions, but the decisions themselves would be made by the elected members:

"Information is the responsibility of the officers" (ARG 1.2), and

"Members make decisions on recommendations made by officers" (ARG 1.7).

But even in voluntary organisations:

"We make use of an excellent national office to advise us on matters of all kinds associated with the organisation" (ARG 9.4).

In these cases, the instrumental trust of decision-makers is placed in third parties. For smaller bodies, though, simply having the resources to access information was problematic:

"statutory sector information, grants and ways of working are VERY time consuming, arbitrary and frustrating" (respondent's emphasis) (ARG 6.12), and

"The volume of information IS a significant problem" (respondent's emphasis) (ARG 5.5).

In this context, the leap of faith within instrumental trust is likely to increase for two reasons. Firstly, the sheer volume of information makes 'adequate' knowledge for making decisions increasingly difficult to obtain, as decision-makers contemplate the

management of ignorance every bit as much as the management of knowledge. Secondly, as 'lay' decision-makers increasingly relinquish their knowledge to 'experts', they must trust (instrumentally) experts to apply this knowledge appropriately.

CONCLUSIONS

Ultimately, the relationship between knowledge and information and trust in decision-making is likely to be of paramount importance in improving rural public domain decisions. This is for three reasons. Firstly, the more trust there is in the decision-making process, the less there is a perceived need to assemble information to reassure, affirm or contest decisions. Thus trust has been seen to increase with increasing good experiences of decision-making – trust breeds trust – but the opposite also is true (Performance and Innovation Unit, 2002). Even where trust increases, though, there may be an increased *need* to trust that outstrips the increased trust itself. In these contexts, high levels of trust have an economic value in obviating the need for (and cost of) knowledge and information assimilation.

Secondly, where trust is not inherently high within the decision-making process knowledge and information can enhance the 'justification' element of trust and reduce the leap of faith, or the size of risk, in decision-making. Indeed Möllering (2001) considers trust to be the gap between ignorance and perfect knowledge, plus Simmel's leap of faith. If perfect knowledge obviates the need for trust then trust is a corollary of knowledge. Trust also influences attitudes to the way in which we take risks, which itself derives from differing degrees of a lack of perfect information (Coleman, 1990). Attitudes to risk in turn help to define the balance between the 'secretness' and 'openness' within ARGs, a critical element in exploring Simmelian notions of instrumental trust.

Finally, where knowledge and information are required to reduce mistrust in decision-making they can be manipulated by public policy: active measures can be developed to make such knowledge and information more intelligible, reliable and accessible.

The study of social capital is increasing considerably as a vehicle through which to explore progressively differentiated governance structures that devolve rural decision-making to the more local level. Because trust has a close association with social capital, to be able to distinguish different types of trust empirically improves its explanatory power in the context of complex decisions. Certainly, how all three types of trust play out in practice is important as increased dependence in rural decision-making is placed on interpersonal relationships (personal trust), a wide range of ARGs (system trust) and knowledge and information to reduce risk (instrumental trust). The need to trust in all of these categories is exemplified by one respondent in the Gloucestershire case study:

"I don't know enough about who decides policy, how and what they are!" (ARG, 6.12).

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ENDNOTE

(1) A good summary of the *philosophical basis* of trust can be found in Bailey (2002) where he concludes that rather than love, compassion or morality, it is 'responsibility' that is at the core of trust. This is pertinent to the making of complex public domain decisions in the context of community empowerment as it suggests that trust has a more significant role to play in Foucaultian (1978) notions of responsabilisation in community

participation than more opportunity driven notions of participatory democracy (Paddison *et al*, 2008).

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