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The Governance of Cooperation – Policy implications for rural Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

The newly acceded Central and Eastern European states find their rural development strategy should fit into the European Union's (EU) framework and policy for rural development. The EU's approach is based on using rural networks for policy implementation, or building networks where they are missing in a participatory manner. This principle has been expounded in the new Rural Development Regulation for the period 2007-2013. Such an approach requires cooperation between individuals, or the coordinated action and collaboration of individuals within a group. Thus governance structures are instituted within these groups. This paper explores the governance of cooperation using case studies conducted in rural CEE. The case studies were undertaken within the IDARI project (Integrated Development of Agriculture and Rural Institutions in Central and Eastern European Countries). An evaluation tool was developed to classify the effect of policy on cooperation between agents. Policy can have a direct or indirect effect on existing networks, both of which should be understood at the policy design stage.

Key words: cooperation, social capital, rural policy, policy evaluation

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Introduction

To solve many social dilemmas, cooperation is required. Actors must collaborate with one another and find solutions within and amongst their own resources. Cooperation requires a localised response to a particular problem. It requires the collaboration of individuals, thereby creating a common understanding amongst the group or network, and it requires the establishment of group norms to govern the interactions (Murray, 2008). The former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) experienced a paradoxical system, which destroyed trust between people and government, while attempting to establish a community based on mutual trust (Lovell, 2001). Official hypocrisy, corruption, secret police surveillance and the suppression of meaningful citizen participation jeopardised trust, and thus it would seem, would leave a legacy, which hinders cooperation between citizens. Cooperation can solve problems where the government will fail. This then begs the question as to what the role of the government is in promoting or facilitating cooperation, especially in countries where the institutions have been overhauled in the last twenty years. Government policies and programmes inevitably affect how people interact with each other, and also affect the patterns of social capital development. This paper explores systematically how State intervention affects patterns of cooperation in rural CEE. Such an analysis is important to inform the policy debate on appropriate intervention in rural CEE given that such areas have experienced massive changes in the transition period from socialist control to market organisation, and furthermore with the accession of CEE countries into the European Union. Despite the presumption of low levels of social capital in CEE (Paldam and Svendsen, 2000), examples of rural cooperation were identified and analysed through a series of case studies. The research was undertaken in the IDARI² project, and used to highlight the effects of different levels of State intervention (from laissez faire to high levels of intervention) into rural cooperation. Examples are drawn from cooperation in Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Hungary. These case studies are used to make policy recommendations for rural development in CEE. It is intended that this paper contribute to the debate on how rural policy objectives are met in CEE.

2 IDARI (Integrated Development of Agricultural and Rural Institutions) is a European Commission funded project under the 5th Framework Programming Quality of Life (QLRT-2001-02718 FP5)

Rural Policy in Central and Eastern Europe

Kovach (2000) outlines the nature of the ‘rural crisis’ that emerged in the aftermath of the collapse of socialist systems in central and eastern Europe. There was a decline in the relative importance of agricultural production, which was the first sector to be privatized. Thus the relative importance of agriculture declined to levels similar of other EU States. However, the rates of rural unemployment were much higher than those of the member states in this initial period of transition. This structural problem was exacerbated in many CEE countries by an increasing rural population – people moved from the cities back to rural areas. This was despite the assertion that the negative aspects of post-socialism affected rural areas to a greater extent than they did in urban areas (*ibid.*). On accession to the EU in 2004, the CEE countries subscribed to the notion of an integrated Europe, with acceptance of its formal institutions and *modus operandi*. This included the Common Agricultural Policy, and individual agreements were negotiated between each acceding country and the EU with respect to the level of agricultural support.

One central component, or an emerging “pillar”, within the CAP, is rural development. In 1996, the Cork Conference on Rural Development launched a wide debate on rural development policy. This debate culminated in the Agenda 2000 reforms which saw rural development policy established as the “second pillar” of the CAP. The mid-term review of the CAP was adopted by the Council in September 2003. It strengthened the second pillar role of rural development further. The Commission organized the Salzburg conference on rural development policy in November 2003, where Commissioner Fischler emphasized the role rural development within the CAP. In 2006, a new Rural Development Regulation was formulated by the Commission for the years 2007-2013. The regulation has four main objectives, and groups potential support measures into four “axes” that reflect those objectives. The first objective is to improve the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector; the second is improving the environment and the countryside; the third improving the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy; and the fourth objective is to have a LEADER element, based on bottom-up development as per the LEADER I, LEADER II and LEADER + programmes. This fourth objective is most relevant to this paper, and the issue of cooperation within rural policy.

The relevance of these policy developments is that the options for rural development are now available to actors in the former socialist countryside. Pilot programmes such as PHARE and SAPARD were implemented in the accession countries during the transition period (1990s to 2005), introducing the EU model of rural policy incentives. The policy objectives echo those of their partners in the older EU member states: the idea of shifting the focus of interventions away from

primary agricultural production towards rural development; the cultivation of niche markets such as rural tourism and ‘green’ local products; the search for new, innovative ideas (and sources of funding) based on the revival of local traditions; and the use of partnerships and networks to achieve development objectives. The Treaty of Accession (2003) allowed for a special rural development regime in the new Member States for the period 2004-2006. This was based on a new Temporary Rural Development Instrument, funded by the EAGGF (European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund) to support the four so-called “accompanying measures” (agri-environment, early retirement, afforestation, and compensatory payments for less-favoured areas and areas subject to environmental constraints). In terms of cooperation, what is important is that this instrument could be used to support producer groups. In addition to these measures, new Member States could benefit from a Leader-type measure funded by the EAGGF Guidance. Thus policy in CEE is fusing with that of the EU, and this has been formalised in the New Rural Development Regulation of 2007-2013. Cooperation between actors in EU rural areas is an indirect policy objective in the challenge of promoting growth and sustainable development in rural areas (Ray, 2003). In particular, rural development policy explicitly advocates the use and creation of social capital in its implementation. Social capital requires cooperation, which is the focus of this paper. The following section details how cooperation was conceptualised and investigated for this study.

Analytical Framework

This section deals with the strategy adapted to examine cooperation. It looks specifically at one element of a broad framework for understanding cooperation – that of State intervention in influencing or promoting cooperative behaviour. In the EU, rural policy is increasingly targeting local communities and citizen participation through partnerships and the use of local resources. Thus, understanding the relational dynamics within existing and successful networks is important for understanding how policy can best achieve its aims. Furthermore the level of State involvement affects how individuals cooperate – whether there are incentives (financial or otherwise) to cooperate, or whether cooperation is forced, due to the actions of the State.

Three institutional settings were identified, with varying levels of State intervention (figure 1). The first is a situation of *laissez faire*, or little State intervention. Thus the market dominates, and the role of the State (or active policy) is considered minimal, only in the upholding of property rights. Cooperation for market development is voluntary, with actors realising the mutual economic gains

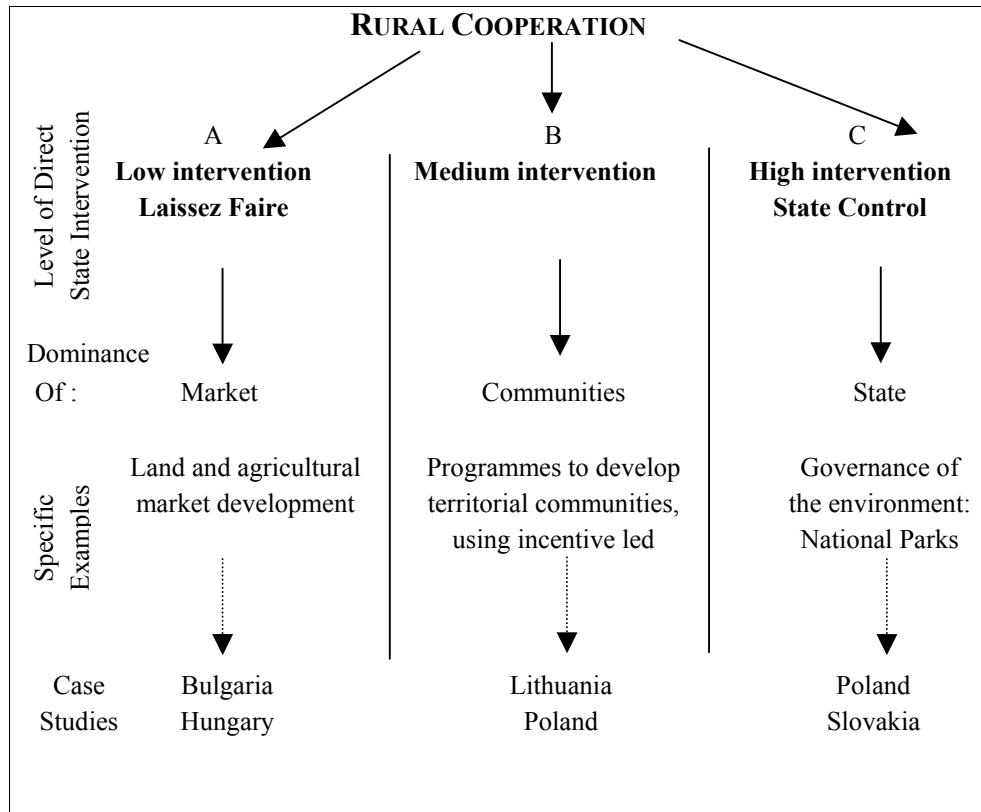
to be made through cooperation. As such cooperation is seen as a pragmatic intended institution. The second setting has a medium level of State intervention, and was chosen due to its real life reflection of the prevailing rural policy in the EU. The EU tries to enact rural development through incentive led programmes and projects (for example LEADER, SAPARD and PHARE), while at the same time attempting to get rural people to solve their collective problems. Inevitably local communities and networks will determine how successful rural development policy will be. The focus here is on a mix of endogenous and exogenous processes or how communities react and organise themselves in response to a policy incentive. The third setting has a high level of State intervention, through a direct command of policy. Environmental directives from the State or EU are a good example of such intervention, as compliance to specified environmental standards is obligatory, with little choice but to adhere to the policy³. The designation of an area requiring environmental protection often forces communities to engage in a debate where they possibly would have preferred to remain autonomous.

What is interesting about the design of this analytical framework is that it incorporates three dominant actors/sectors – Markets, Community and State – with differing relative importance. It is assumed that there is communication and discourse between the State, Community and Market, although each category is not mutually exclusive (White, 2000; Hurrelmann, 2004).

Amongst other objectives, rural development policy is an attempt to commodify existing and potential resources in an area. To have a sustainable rural economy, spatial inequalities need to be redressed through the growth of economic activities in those areas. Therefore there is the implicit goal of moving from non-market use to market use of resources in rural areas. By introducing a rural development policy, the State attempts to influence this process to some degree. One aim of the research was to analyse cooperation through the dynamics of existing networks in the three settings of figure 1. To this end, it was necessary to choose a case-study approach for the research. The case studies enabled a detailed discussion of the causes of variation in cooperative behaviour of individuals within a particular network, and by using this approach an attempt was made to understand systems of behaviour from a holistic perspective. The literature on case studies favours using replicated cases to illustrate the range of organisational and institutional forms in a particular setting, rather than calculating the incidence or frequency of these forms (Norgaard, 1989; Yin, 1994). Replicated case studies

3 It is recognised that the government may adopt less of a command and control approach and attempt to institute participative approaches with the designation of a protected area. Trends in environmental policy making in the EU are moving in this direction – see for example Juntti and Potter, (2002).

Figure 1. Analytical Framework for analysing cooperation



suited the analytical framework developed above. The following section details the empirics of the data collected in these case studies.

Empirical Data collection

The empirical data was collected by researchers in six CEE countries, looking at social capital, cooperation and rural institutional innovations. Seven case studies were completed in this project: two in Poland, and one in each of Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Latvia and Lithuania. As the method of replicated case studies was chosen, guidelines for the design of the case study were agreed upon by all researchers. Although the institutional environment differs in each country, and indeed within regions of the same country, six cross cutting themes were identified for minimum comparison of the cases. These were:

- a. The role of trust/mistrust and opportunism (both social and institutional)
- b. The role of communication and learning on cooperation
- c. The role of transaction costs and changes in governance on cooperation
- d. The role of the State (both national and EU) and the formal institutional environment on cooperation
- e. The role of communities, social networks and informal institutions on cooperation
- f. The role of the market and competition in fostering/hindering cooperation

The first two themes relate to the formation of social capital in the case study area, and how information is transmitted within the network. The third theme looks at how cooperation is a rational choice, resulting in a reduction in transaction costs for the actors involved. The last three themes explore the relative importance of the three pillars – Market, Community and State for overall cooperation. It is from the findings in these themes that the policy recommendations of this paper are derived.

Within the market pillar, data was collected from two locations in Hungary and Bulgaria. The town of Hajdúböszörmény was selected for analysis in Hungary (Forgacs, 2005). In former times, agricultural production was organised collectively in the form of cooperatives. Despite the fall of the socialist system, not all institutions collapsed, and there are examples of continued cooperation within such agricultural cooperatives. One such cooperative was studied, and contrasted with a newly established (late 1990s) agricultural cooperative in the same town of Hajdúböszörmény. In Bulgaria, the selection of the case followed a different logic. It was not due to evident cooperation, but where cooperation was required and desirable for effective market functioning that determined the selection (Aleksiev and Penov, 2005). The issue of land fragmentation is specific to Bulgaria, due to the inheritance laws relating to property. Fragmented plots are a hindrance to farming systems, and debilitate the markets for certain agricultural products and also the land market itself. The village of Dubene in the Plovdiv region was selected, and despite its small size, had 1350 landowners. Limited cooperation within the village was identified, in the form of agricultural cooperatives, farmer's partnerships and family farms.

Within the community pillar, three case studies were undertaken. The first in the Carpathian region of Poland focused on a project that was funded by a regional (non EU) agency. The case study looked at cooperation within the Bieszczady's Local Product (BLP) initiative (Korczynski, 2005). The initiative aimed to create a regional identity for food and non-food produce from the area. Although Bieszczady forms a microregion, a complexity in the study emerged due to the overlap of administrative districts (voivodships) and communes. The second case study in this pillar was an incentive led project in rural Lithuania (Zemekis, 2005).

The PHARE 2000 - Economic and Social Cohesion (ESC) project, funded by the EU, provided an incentive for communities to work together for a common purpose. The project to create a tourism infrastructure for the Jura river waterway was funded under PHARE, and required the statutory agencies and programme implementers to cooperate with one another. A peculiar aspect of this project was that the geographical scope of actors extended along the length of the waterway, in Taurage county in the north west of Lithuania. The third case study in this pillar differed from the other two, as the cooperation was community led, rather than organised cooperation in response to available funding. The Rauna Tourism Association in the Cesis district of Latvia is a grassroots organisation with the aim to share information and promote the town as a tourism destination (Zobena, Summane and Kalnina, 2005). It also differs from the other two case studies in that the cooperation is focused within a smaller geographical area, and there are fewer actors involved.

The third pillar is that with high State intervention. Two cases of a national park designation were selected. These are interesting, as such designations reflect the command and control style of governance of former times, in that landowners and resource users within the park bounds are limited in their actions. Rights over resource use are defined by the State, for the preservation of nature. In Poland, the Drawieński National Park is situated in the north-west, at the border of three administrative regions or voivodships (Matczak, 2005). The park was established in 1990, fulfilling the requirements of IUCN II category, and is predominantly woodland, with some waterway and abandoned fields and meadows. Although economic opportunities within the area are limited, there is contestation over the use of resources, especially commercial interests on the outskirts of the park. In Slovakia, the Slovenský-Raj national park in the north-east was selected (Kľuvánková-Oravská, 2005). It was categorised as a protected natural area in 1964, and gained national park status in 1988, being an eroded karstic benchland and having many canyons, waterfalls and rivers. As with the Drawieński national park, the administration of the park is divided between municipalities – adding complexity to its governance. There are problems of finding a balance between nature conservation, economic interests (especially tourism and farming) and informal user rights in the park. Cooperation is required, by all stakeholders, for the sustainable management of the park.

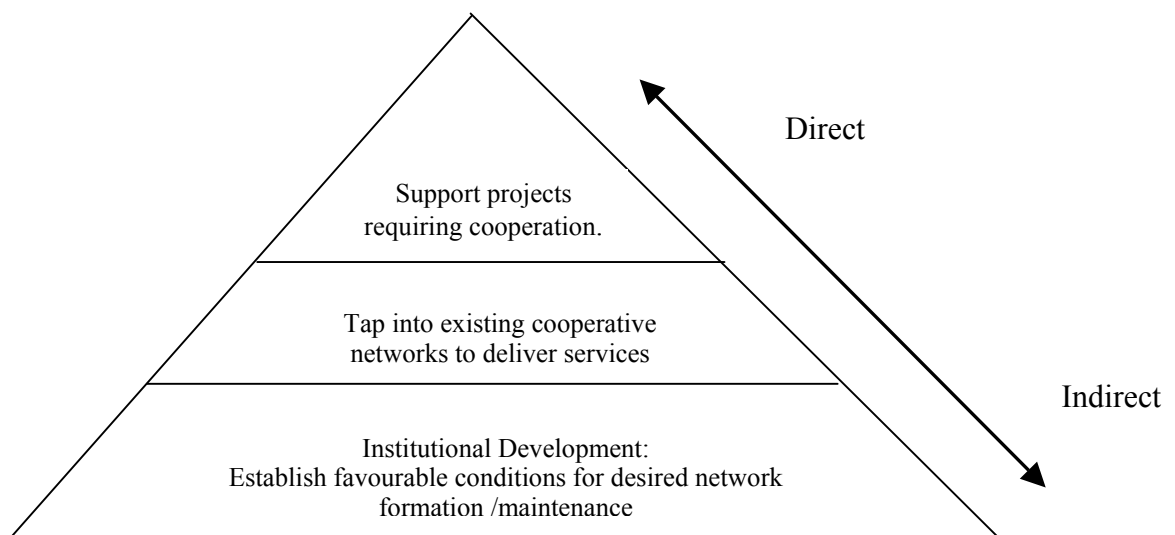
Within all the case studies, the process of cooperation was investigated. A set of interview guidelines was drawn up for each case study, exploring the six themes while adapting the questions to suit the institutional environment of the particular case. Data was collected using direct interviews (in the vernacular) with stakeholders, document analysis and direct observations in each case study. All

data was collected between March and June 2005. The following section discusses the relevance to policy of the main findings of the case.

Policy implications

The European rural development policy model has evolved over the past number of years, in response to problems faced by rural areas. The current trend in policy has been described by Osti (2000) as an attempt to substitute hierarchical intervention with a system characterized by network and market relationships. This is similar to the general transformations within CEE during the transition period. Furthermore with respect to rural development policy there is a trend toward harnessing the existing social capital in rural areas, encouraging cooperation and collective action among rural actors at a community level. During the transition period in CEE, Kovách (2000) was critical of the approach to rural development. Despite the transformation from centralised decision making and a party state system to parliamentary democracies, he argued that rural policies were not ‘modernised’ appropriately. Policy remained over bureaucratic, and despite signals from the EU and officials of the Commission, the CEE states were slow to relinquish decision making to local communities or civil society. Nevertheless, the endogenous model of rural development is extended to the newly acceded countries of CEE, and institutions will continue to evolve in response to this policy change.

**Figure 2. Effect of public policy on cooperative behaviour:
from direct to indirect influence**



Although the stated aim of policy is not to increase social capital, the implementation of policy centres on its use. At a general level, social capital supports informal institutions based on norms and behaviour, and facilitates cooperation between individuals. Figure 2 shows how policy can affect cooperation, using the continuum of direct and indirect influence. This is a useful tool for evaluating how a policy affects cooperation between actors. All the case studies examined can be placed on this continuum, with varying goals of policy that they were influenced by, or responded to an indirect influence of policy. The remainder of this section discusses how the case studies can inform the debate on this institutional change and stresses its effect on policy design and implementation in central and Eastern Europe.

In both Hungary and Bulgaria, the cooperation (or lack of it) can be viewed as a response to the broader institutional changes of transition, so any resulting cooperation within the first pillar of market development was an indirect consequence. In Hungary the aim of policy was to move agricultural production within market institutions. This forced the actors within the market to cooperate, to compete within the new structures. Existing cooperative structures were in place, prior to these changes. This case study revealed the importance of leaders in this process, to guide and coordinate the activities of these independent actors. The Bulgarian case study was interesting, as it also revealed a lack of direct policy relating to cooperation. The policy that influenced the case study related to land restitution, and the resulting land fragmentation. Within the village of Dubene new strategies for cooperation between land users were identified. These were not unified, and varied between bilateral cooperation amongst family, to multilateral cooperation within the structures of existing agricultural cooperatives. This case study showed that policy is often times focused on a single issue, which is so complex that the secondary effects (such as cooperation) are not considered.

Within the cases with medium State intervention (attempting to institute cooperation between communities), cooperation was the main aim of the policy in both the Lithuanian and Polish cases. In Lithuania, the Jura water initiative resulted from a direct policy (PHARE 2000) to animate rural development and cooperation amongst rural actors. The cooperation was successful, insofar as it resulted in the formation of a network of civil servants, who cooperated for this project. The project had limited scope in including broader communities, although certain business people were included in the project. This phenomenon has been previously documented by Kovach (2000), who viewed the pre-accession period as a time where the re-education of CEE officials and bureaucrats was dominant in policy administration. He termed this the 'technocratic model' of integration of CEE rurality, which repressed the involvement of other rural development actors.

This point is important for all policy directly attempting to encourage cooperation and collective action, and for policy that attempts to use the existing rural networks for policy objectives. There are two issues that affect policy. The first relates to exclusion, whereby policy could benefit those in powerful positions within the community – in terms of those who have access to information and strong abilities in project administration. The second issue is linked to the first, and relates to defining a group and who determines its membership. This relates to semantics, and how to define, for example, a community. This issue remains unresolved in the literature (Khumar, 2005; Ostrom, 2000; Agraval and Gibson, 1999), and is problematic for policy implementation, despite rhetoric in policy circles about increased participation. At the centre of this issue is whether cooperation emerges from grass-root collective action, or is somehow induced by access to funding.

Within the Polish case study looking at the Bieszczady Local Product, the community was defined as all producers living within the geographical region. What is interesting about this case study is that the project was considered successful, in terms of both participation of the community and achieving market goals of creating a marketable identity, despite little cooperation between the producers themselves. The project was inclusive of the community of producers without being dependent on the level of contact and communication between them. The levels of trust did increase with the producers as they joined the BLP, but cooperation was evident despite initial low levels of trust. This situation can be described as coordinated cooperation, with a central importance of the project organisers and leaders. Indeed the project leaders and coordinators were active in a grassroots partnership called “Green Bieszczady”. The BLP project was funded by a private non-governmental organisation, but has characteristics similar EU funded projects. According to the schema in figure 2, the BLP could be described as a project which used an existing network to achieve its aims.

These two case studies are important, as they highlight the difficulty for policy makers on a number of levels. Firstly, it is difficult to identify examples of collective action, an exercise requiring observation, time and research. Secondly, decisions have to be made over whether such projects should be the target of policy (using existing small scale networks to achieve policy ends), or whether this is not wise spending of public monies. An assessment has to be made over the level of displacement caused by funding, and how rural localities compete over available resources.

The two case studies within the rubric of heavy State intervention were similar from a policy perspective. Both were examples of policy having a direct effect on cooperation, but not necessarily in a benign manner. The policy of the Polish and Slovak governments had strong environmental objectives of nature preservation in the respective National Parks. These designations caused conflicts amongst the

users of the land within the national park boundaries. Out of the conflict emerged cooperation between factions of users, as they organised themselves to protect their interests – for example tourism operators and environmental groups. These two case studies reveal the importance of policy design, and how policy can cause displacement to existing networks. The designation of National Park status did not focus on the communities and the local inhabitants who would be affected. The Slovakian case also showed a lack of coordination in the implementation process (overlapping competencies) and complex management of the park's resources between the municipalities. These case studies highlight the importance of appropriate consideration for communities at the design of policy. In such cases, a process of participatory policy conception and implementation could possibly have reduced the conflicts.

Conclusion

Much research on post-socialist society stresses the separation of society into two spheres of activity – a public and private one (see for example Herslund, 2001). From a rural policy perspective, this approach usually implies the underdevelopment of civic society, and the lack of networks to bridge the gap between rural inhabitants/communities and the State authorities. This paper has extended this dichotomous classification to include the market, and furthermore views CEE rural space as a triangulation of all three – Market State and Community. The organisation of the case studies into three pillars explored differing levels of influence of each sector, and the implications on cooperation. Rural development in CEE countries is dependent on creating new social fields and institution-building. With the transformed political and economic landscape, individuals have to find and accept new rules and social norms for their interactions. This depends a lot on individuals' or communities' capacity to mobilise, use and develop their resources – both material and social ones.

The newly acceded CEE states find their rural development strategy should fit into the European Union's framework and policy for rural development. The EU's approach is based on using rural networks for policy implementation, or building networks where they are missing in a participatory manner. This paper has explored cases where cooperation is evident in rural CEE, and highlighted cases where cooperation is desirable, yet unattainable in current circumstances. Rural policy in CEE should be sensitive to the local institutions and conditions. An evaluation tool was developed to classify the effect of policy on cooperation. Policy can have a direct or indirect effect on existing networks, both of which should be understood at the policy design stage. An example of a direct effect on

cooperation would be a rural development policy with the specific goals of creating cooperation between rural people. An example of indirect effect would be a policy that was not necessarily focused on rural development but impinged on the activities of rural people. Examples of benign and malign indirect effects were discussed.

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