

RECONCILIATION

THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN ROAD TO A PROSPEROUS FUTURE

LÁTNI és LÁTTATNI

LÉPÉSEK A MEGBÉKÉLÉS KÖZÉP-EURÓPAI ÚTJÁN



CHARTA | XXI

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THE POLITICS OF GOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD: ON THE ROLE OF THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL CAPITAL IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE¹

INTRODUCTION

This article presents a concept of good neighbourhood, a conceptual framework, in which I suggest we have to reflect on neighbourly relations in East Central Europe. The concept incorporates many aspects of the questions that other authors in this volume discuss: How do people of different ethno-cultural backgrounds in a multicultural neighbourhood perceive each other? How do they communicate? Do these neighbours live together or rather next to each other? My concept brings these issues together and proposes a comprehensive (analytical and policy) approach. Reconciliation and rapprochement involve a complex set of matters and require a variety of actors. Overall, this article emphasizes the role of the state and civil society and argues for the enhancement of cultural capital in the building of good-neighbourly relations in multicultural neighbourhoods.

BOURDIEU'S NOTION OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

The concept of good neighbourhood outlined here draws upon the works of various scholars such as Henrikson², Putnam³ or Kymlicka⁴. However, the most important influence has been French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu⁵ and his notion of cultural and social capital.

In brief, cultural capital comprehends different forms of knowledge, skills and education that a person disposes of. According to Bourdieu, they determine our status in society, yet not exclusively, because our cultural capital is interrelated with two other forms of capital: social capital (which is social networks that we are embedded in) and economic capital (which is money or property that we have). A great amount of this capital is predetermined, before we are born, since we are born into specific social/cultural environments. However, there are ways by which one can effect change, because, as Bourdieu suggests, we can convert one form of capital into another. For instance, if we get a good education, if we learn foreign

¹ This article builds on findings that have been partly generated in the framework of the EU 6th FP research project *SeFoNe – Searching for Neighbours*, which dealt with the dynamics of physical and mental borders in Europe. This project included extensive fieldwork and a large number of interviews with different stakeholders mainly from politics and civil society, amongst others in Hungary, Serbia and Slovakia.

² Henrikson, Alan K. (2000): Facing across Borders: The Diplomacy of Bon Voisinage. In: *International Political Science Review* 21, 121-147.

³ Putnam, Robert (2000): *Bowling alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster, New York.

⁴ Kymlicka, Will (2007): *Multicultural Odysseys. Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity*. Oxford UP, Oxford.

⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre (1986): The Forms of Capital. In: Richardson, John G. (ed.): *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Greenwood Press, New York/London, 241-260.

languages, we might make more money; or, social networks can give us access to a new job, to mention just a few examples.

Cultural and social capital are crucial for the building of good-neighbourly relations in East Central Europe, as my empirical research in Hungary, Serbia and Slovakia has shown. It is above all education and knowledge on the one hand, and social contact or social networks on the other, that determine the quality of neighbourly relations in multicultural societies.

THE PYRAMID OF GOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD

Building on the insights gained during my empirical research and drawing on Bourdieu's notion of cultural (and social) capital, I developed the "pyramid of good neighbourhood", a model that incorporates many aspects that have individually been subject of scholarly work and political practice. However, what I argue is that these different aspects can only be thought as single elements of a bigger picture in the framework of neighbourly relations.

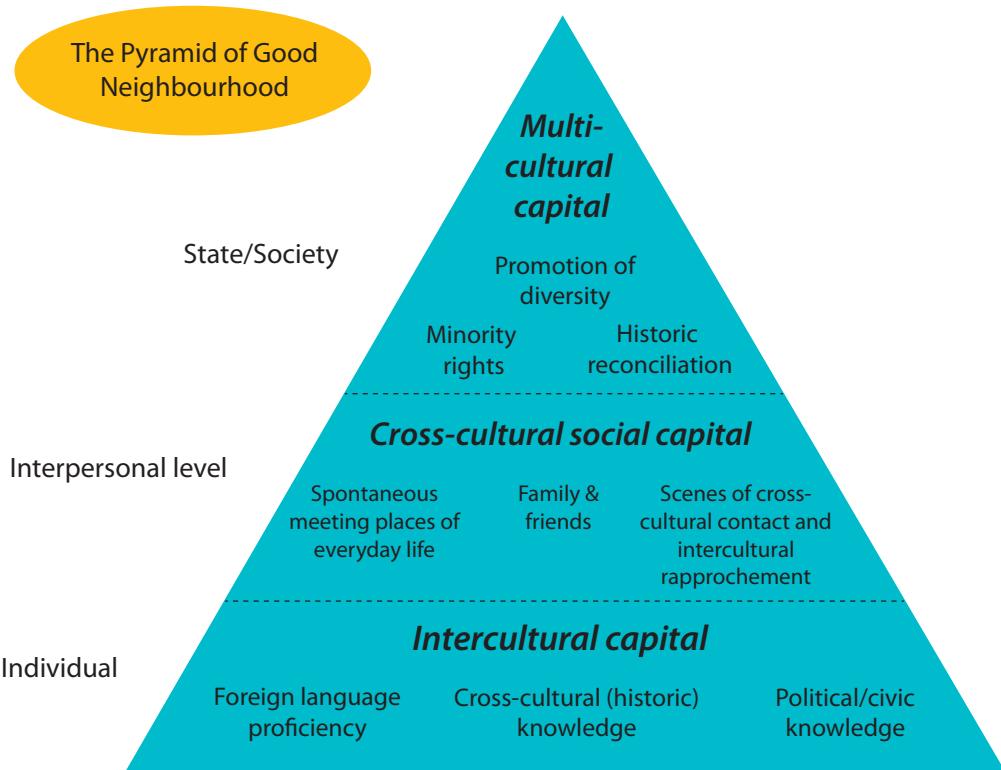


Figure 1: The pyramid of good neighbourhood (own figure)

INTERCULTURAL CAPITAL

The first form of capital in the pyramid, intercultural capital, is characterized by individual intercultural capacities, which mainly children and young adults acquire (or, in the worse case, don't acquire) through their school education, most importantly:

1. Foreign language proficiency (more specifically, languages other than one's mother tongue in a specific multicultural environment)
2. Cross-cultural (historic) knowledge
3. Political/civic knowledge

The underlying argument here is that the lack of intercultural capital inherently produces a lack of mutual understanding among ethnic or ethnicized neighbours. The enhancement of intercultural capital thus facilitates communication (1), raises cross-cultural interest (2) and increases mutual respect (3).

CROSS-CULTURAL SOCIAL CAPITAL

However, intercultural capital itself is not enough, since ethnic or ethnicized neighbours also need settings, social environments for exchange and rapprochement. A good neighbourhood requires that people have social contacts and networks that go beyond one's own ethnic group. This is cross-cultural social capital, the second form of capital, which is indispensable in multicultural contexts. Cross-cultural social capital can be generated and enhanced in:

1. "Spontaneous meeting places of everyday life" like schools, the work place, sports clubs or music groups
2. Scenes of cross-cultural contact and intercultural rapprochement, for instance intercultural events or intercultural programs, which offer and generate cross-cultural experience; and through
3. Cross-cultural social contact within the family and among friends

MULTICULTURAL CAPITAL

The third form of capital, multicultural capital, is expressed as mutual respect and appreciation among ethnic or ethnicized neighbours, particularly at a higher, societal or political level. More specifically, multicultural capital includes:

1. Historic reconciliation between 'cultural nations' or between majority and minority populations; it is a result of the acknowledgment of one's own wrongdoings or the crimes of one's own nation in the past. The willingness to reconciliation shows the commitment to regret and remorse, and expresses the respect and recognition rendered in relation to neighbours that fell victim to violations.
2. The granting of minority rights, which is a way to express respect and recognition. In addition, minority rights convey the recognition of the multicultural character of a state or a neighbourhood.
3. The promotion of diversity via different policies and channels (for instance, state institutions and state legislations, tourism or civil society organizations). The promotion of diversity goes beyond acceptance or tolerance and demonstrates recognition and appreciation for cultural diversity in a multicultural neighbourhood.

What I suggest is that inter-ethnic neighbourly relations should be thought in this comprehensive framework, the pyramid. Firstly, we always have to consider the individual, his or

her intercultural education in a (specific) multicultural context; secondly, we have to include the existence (or absence) of cross-cultural social contacts in our considerations; and thirdly, we have to contemplate the societal or state framework that guarantee the conditions and environment for a good multicultural neighbourhood.

THE TV QUIZ “KOLIKO SE POZNAJEMO” IN VOJVODINA

In order to underscore the importance of such a comprehensive approach in the building of good-neighbourly relations, I will now discuss an example, which cuts across the different levels within the pyramid.

In 2005, the secretariate for national minorities of the Vojvodina province in Serbia initiated an intercultural program named “Tolerance” with the aim to serve the rapprochement of the many different ethnic groups in Vojvodina. The program targets teenagers in the age between 14 and 18, and includes several projects, amongst others an exhibition called *Living Together* that travels the region, a sports competition called *Cup of Tolerance*, and a TV quiz called “*Koliko se poznajemo*” (or *How well do we know each other?*).

The TV quiz “*Koliko se poznajemo*” is a particularly interesting idea. As explained above, this project was initiated by the Province, that is, at the political level; moreover, its aim can be localized somewhere between the promotion of diversity and historic reconciliation. Therefore, I begin my explanations at the top of the pyramid.

PROMOTING DIVERSITY – WRITING A TRANSCULTURAL HISTORY BOOK

First of all, a history book was written, which tells a transcultural history of the Vojvodina province. This book includes various perspectives as it builds on the cultural diversity in Vojvodina; that is, not a national, but a multinational history of the region is being told. In the introduction to the book, the authors write the following:

“We believe that if the reader delves into this short summary of the history of the nations that live on the territory of today’s Vojvodina, he or she can draw from the historical examples the lessons that are also valid for the future, which can be summarized in the following way: the coexistence of the peoples here is to be imagined in the spirit of tolerance, cooperation and mutual respect. If we get to know each other better, the region’s cultural and historical legacy makes us nobler and richer. The profound knowledge of the different cultures and languages, the respect for difference result in a harmony of the kind, which can only bring good to all of us.” (Grlica et al. 2008)⁶

The ideas behind the book were implemented in a way that can be read from the book extracts below. For instance, both Hungarian (Sándor Petőfi) and Serbian historical figures (Svetozar Miletić) are portrayed. In the Serbian version, the name of Petőfi is also written in Hungarian, so is his place of birth; also the *Nemzeti Dal*, one of his most famous writings, is

⁶ Author’s translation from the Hungarian version of the book: Grlica, Mirko (2008): Ismerjük meg egymást! Vajdaság Autonóm Tartomány Vérehajtó Tanácsa. Tartományi Jogalkotási, Közgazgatási és Nemzeti Kisebbségi Titkárság, Újvidék.

written in its Hungarian original. In the Hungarian text about Miletić the names of various geographical locations are written in two languages.

ENHANCING CROSS-CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE – LEARNING FROM A TRANSCULTURAL HISTORY BOOK

In a second step, this transcultural history book was distributed to high schools in Vojvodina, whose students then participated in the related “Koliko se poznajemo” TV quiz. That is, the bottom of the pyramid was concerned, where we have the individuals, the high school students, who learned and prepared from the book, if they wanted to succeed in the TV quiz. By learning from this transcultural history book, the students enhanced their intercultural capital, their cross-cultural knowledge.

CREATING A SCENCE FOR CROSS-CULTURAL SOCIAL CONTACT – RUNNING A TV QUIZ

Finally, the high school students participated in the TV quiz, which became a scene, where intercultural encounters took place and cross-cultural social capital could be generated.

Moreover, we can say that the “Koliko se poznajemo” TV quiz has the potential to generate cross-cultural social trust, because the students, in a playful way, have to cooperate and listen to each other. The teams are not ethno-culturally homogeneous, Hungarian and Serbian students from one school compete with Hungarian and Serbian students from another institution. In this way, the quiz offers a possibility for students in Vojvodina to increase their cross-cultural social trust.

CONCLUSION

What can we read from the example of the TV quiz “Koliko se poznajemo” for the building of good-neighbourly relations in multicultural societies? In my view, the TV quiz shows how a simple tool can already fulfil a complex set of matters: it has the potential to generate intercultural capital and cross-cultural social capital and expresses multicultural capital in one project. Therefore, one should not underestimate the potential effects of such initiatives in the building good-neighbourly relations, be they carried out by the state, civil society or in a joint effort.