Role of social capital in cross-sector partnerships overarching the primary, secondary and tertiary industries

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With aging population, shrinking public finance and decentralization, Japanese government indicated promotion of partnerships overarching the primary (agriculture, forestry and fisheries), secondary and tertiary industries (“PST partnerships”) as a vital policy for community revitalization and the Law to Promote Cross-sector Partnerships overarching the Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Industries in 2008.

What roles can and should nonprofit organizations play in the PST partnerships? What roles can social capital—trust, norms of reciprocity and networks (Putnam 1993, Nishide 2009) play in the PST partnerships?

Literature has described very few about the role of nonprofit organizations and social capital in PST partnerships. In the 88 cases of PST partnerships introduced by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (2008), only a few cases deal with nonprofit organizations. Tohoku Regional Agriculture Policy Dialogue Committee (2005) and Seki and Matsunaga (2009) have described very few about the role of nonprofit organizations.

However, the author hypothesizes and explores that the role of nonprofit organizations and social capital is vital in promoting PST partnerships, especially when it relates to the primary industry such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries. It directly relates to the empowerment of community. Yates and Jochum (2003) proposed the role of the voluntary sector in the development of social capital in rural areas.

Interviews were conducted in 2008 and 2009 at several organizations conducting PST partnerships in Okinawa and Miyagi, Japan such as Nonprofit Corporation EcoVision Okinawa and Nonprofit Corporation Wind of Food and Nonprofit Corporation Environmental Protection Rice Network. Role of nonprofit organizations in the partnerships and the creation and utilization of social capital as well as the partnership process were analyzed. Moreover, a participatory observation was conducted on the “program for cultivating producers who promote projects overarching the primary industry, secondary and tertiary industries” conducted with the partnership between academia and a local think tank. The purpose of this program is to cultivate specialists who can tap and connect resources in agriculture, commerce, and industry, and who can run new businesses providing new added-value service and products.

PST partnerships involving nonprofits and the perspective of social capital were found to be crucial in developing and providing value-added service and products, and building new value chain through new combinations—bridging social capital. In selecting partners, understanding social capital in the organization and community and supplement the insufficient type of social capital such as bonding, bridging or linking is crucial for producing innovation and synergy effect of partnerships. In order for PST partnerships to be successful and sustainable, pursuing the value of nonprofit organizations and social capital in community are no less important than pursuing an economic benefit deriving from the partnerships.

Reference


