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In the Search of Trust

- A Study on the Origin of Social Capital in
Cambodia from an Institutional Perspective

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Abstract

This thesis examines the origin of social capital from an institution-centered approach, in order to find whether the Public Administration and Decentralization Reform can increase social capital in Cambodia. Apart from this empirical aim, the theoretical ambition of the thesis is to test a Western-based theory on an untried setting and to develop the theory if it proves not applicable. The thesis is conducted as a case study divided into two parts. The first part examines traditional forms of trust and social interaction in Cambodia by a literature review and through in-depth interviews with experts on Cambodian civic and political cultures. The second part of the case study examines the origin of social capital from an institutional theory of trust with a survey conducted in three rural villages. The results show a tendency that formal institutions have an impact on the creation of social capital in Cambodia, when the institutions can assure the individual's rights in relation to the other citizens. By assuring civic rights, the institutions create a safety-zone where the people dare to trust each other. The theory does however not fully apply to the traditional structures of trust and social interaction in the country. The conclusion is thus drawn, that for the theory to be applicable outside the welfare-state setting, the theory needs to be developed. A recommendation is made that apart from the *effectiveness* and *fairness* of administrative institutions, *connection* between the citizens and the formal institutions also needs to be added as a requirement for the institutions to generate trust.

Key words: Cambodia, social capital, trust, institutions, mfs

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1 Point of Departure

After decades of war that ravaged all institutions and left a whole society in ruins, Cambodia started its reconstruction in the early 1990's. The genocide and civil wars destroyed nearly all physical capital in the country and brutally scattered its human capital.¹ Aside from this, a third type of capital, maybe less visible at a first sight but still of major importance, was damaged – namely the social capital. Social capital² is often said to be a fundamental element in making a democracy work. While economists highlight social capital's capacity to reduce transaction costs, which lead to economic prosperity and growth, political scientists tend to focus on the positive effects social capital has on democracy.³ Social capital generates a feeling among citizens of mutual obligation and responsibility for their actions, which are invaluable elements in a democracy. For Cambodian democratization process to succeed, building up the country's social capital in order to promote democratization and economic development is therefore crucial.

Although many studies on social capital focus on the developing world, most research on how social capital originates has been done by Western scholars, studying Western democracies. The theories existing are therefore all Western orientated and sometimes ethnocentric, which makes them best apply to the context for which they were developed. Yet, it is in the developing world where the need for creating higher levels of social capital is the greatest. Research has shown that mechanisms that work in the West do not necessarily work in the South, and that one population's trust structure can be far different from another population's.⁴ This demonstrates the need to be cautious when making generalizations based on trust studies in rich, post-modern countries and subsequently applying them to developing countries. Nevertheless, aid agencies frequently apply these Western-based theories on how social capital originates to social structures in the developing world, despite the fact that these theories have never been rigorously tested in these parts of the world – where the civic and political culture greatly differs from that of Western democracies.

Returning to the case of Cambodia, the political institutions that were re-built in the early 1990's are now being reformed as part of the democratization process. Since a large number of intellectuals were assassinated by the Khmer Rouge regime, there was a lack of educated people to staff the new institutions and extensive corruption soon became a

¹ Physical capital refers to tangible resources, such as infrastructure and goods, while human capital refers to the skills and education of the citizens. See Hooge and Stolle 2003:4.

² Social Capital is often defined as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, which can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” Putnam 1996:167. The definition used in this thesis is a bit narrower, mainly referring to generalized trust. See 3.1.1 Definition of Key Terms

³ E.g. Fukuyama 1995:27pp, Knack and Keefer 1997:1251-1288

⁴ Holm, H. & Danielsson, A. 2005:507,530; Molenaers in Hooge and Stolle 2003:126pp

serious problem that still remains today.⁵ Donors earmarked aid money to build *good governance*, which resulted in the establishment of the Council for Administrative Reform in 1999. The Council started to work on an action plan for Public Administration Reform, closely connected to the decentralization reform, which both have now entered the implementation phase. Just as Italy went through a decentralization reform, starting in the 1970's, Cambodia is now going through a similar process of change, reforming both domestic decision making responsibilities and public administration institutions.

Robert D. Putnam, who studied the decentralization process in Italy with his research team for nearly 20 years, reached the conclusion that it was the level of social capital in the different regions that determined how well democracy worked there. In regions with high social capital, visualized by civic engagement, high generalized trust and a dense network of associations, democracy would flourish, while in parts with low levels of social capital, it would fail. His data correlated the intensity of civic community to the performance of the regional government.⁶ With the low levels of social capital in Cambodia today this is a rather discouraging conclusion, which makes the prospects of the decentralization and democratization process look dark and doomed to failure. If Putnam's theory is accurate, the lack of social capital will obstruct the democratization process and hinder successful reforms.

Is Cambodia then trapped by its history, which has created these low levels of social capital? Some would argue this is not the case. Many researchers are now arguing Putnam's reasoning could be the contrary. According to theories by Bo Rothstein, Margaret Levi, Dietlind Stolle and more,⁷ political changes such as administration reform, could change the low levels of social capital. These theories argue that social capital, or trust among people, can generate from peoples trust in well functioning governing and administrative institutions. By dealing with corruption and reforming the countries political institutions trust for institutions can grow, which can generate social capital. In contrast to Putnam's bottom-up perspective they support the possibility of a top-down perspective in the creation of social capital. If their reasoning is right, the prospect for Cambodia's democratization process looks much more encouraging. It would in fact mean that the level of social capital can be changed by a political decision. Studies with this approach have however been concentrated to welfare states only,⁸ and are therefore not proved to apply to the context of developing countries. The intent of this thesis is thus to fill this blank space in the discourse of social capital.

1.1 Statement of Purpose

The aim of this thesis is threefold. Firstly, the empirical aim is to examine how social capital is created in Cambodia from an institution-centered approach. This will be done in

⁵ Transparency International 2006

⁶ Putnam 2001

⁷ E.g. Rothstein 2003, Uslaner & Rothstein, Levi 1997, Hooghe & Stolle 2003

⁸ Hooghe and Stolle 2003:242p

order to find whether the Public Administration and Decentralization Reform can increase social capital in Cambodia. Secondly, since institution-centered theories of social capital all developed in Western democracies, the theoretical ambition of the thesis is to test the theory on an untried setting and to develop the theory if it proves not applicable, by making suggestions of improvement.

To be able to test the institutional theory of trust in the cultural and historic context of Cambodia, factors that affected traditional social structures need to be investigated. Before applying the theory to Cambodian society, traditional forms of trust and social interactions, which may vary from Western, will thus be outlined.

There have only been limited studies on the origin of social capital, not only in the developing world but also in the West, which is seen as one of the main shortcomings in current social capital research.⁹ The focus of study has almost exclusively been on trying to measure social capital and finding out its consequences. The third intend of this thesis is therefore to fill part of the gap in the discourse of social capital.

1.2 Research Questions

- How is social capital created in Cambodia?
- Can the Public Administration and Decentralization Reform increase social capital in Cambodia?

To be able to answer these two questions, a third question must be asked:

- How do the traditional forms of trust and social interaction in Cambodia differ from Western?

⁹ Hooge and Stolle 2003:7

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Definition of Key Terms

2.1.1 Social Capital

A major problem in the research of social capital is that no single definition of the term has been established. Whether it is sustainable for researchers to use different definition and still claim they examine the same phenomenon is questionable. Partha Dasgupta and Ismail Serageldin highlight the absence of a common definition in their anthology about the creation of social capital, where they recognize the authors' many different conceptions of the term. Some authors define it as a civic engagement in social networks, others as the trustworthiness of people; some consider it to be social norms that determine the way people act, while others consider it to be a combination of all definitions.¹⁰ However, at a closer look at the different definitions, some common elements can be found.

The main reason for the numerous definitions might be that Robert D. Putnam, who was one of the first to define the term in modern research of social capital, considers it to be a combination of many factors. He defines it as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, which can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions”.¹¹ In his definition he includes behavior in the form of participation in formal and informal networks, attitude in the form of generalized trust, and social norms in the form of norms of reciprocity.¹² This definition has been criticized as being too wide since it refers to behavior, attitude and social norms in the same term. According to Bo Rothstein and Dietlind Stolle, social capital should instead be defined much narrower. They argue that it is the level of trust, closer defined as generalized trust, between people that is the essence of social capital. The level of trust then constitutes the basis for peoples' behavior and norms.¹³ Another problem with the wider definition, which is particularly interesting to note in this thesis, is addressed by Rothstein. He argues that the problem occurs when looking at Putnam's theory of how social capital

¹⁰ Dasgupta & Serageldin 2000:X

¹¹ Putnam 1996:167

¹² Putnam 1996:201, Rothstein 2003:15

¹³ Rothstein & Stolle 2002:2, Rothstein 2003:286

originates. According to Putnam's theory, social capital originates from peoples' participation in formal and informal networks. With this definition, networks become a part of the social capital at the same time as it explains its existence, and this would not be possible according to Rothstein.¹⁴ The attitudinal component of social capital, in other words trust among people, is an element brought up in all definitions of social capital and can therefore be seen as the connecting factor. Furthermore, social capital is defined as trust by most scholars with an institution-centered approach, which is the approach that will be utilized in this thesis. Social capital will therefore be defined as trust, but civic engagement and social norms will also be considered and measured since these are signs of social capital.

2.1.2 Generalized and Particularized Trust

As the central term to describe social capital, the definition of trust needs to be further defined since it can take various forms. The difference between particularized and generalized trust is often emphasized in the social capital research. Particularized trust is trust for individuals that are members of the same group as one belongs to or imagine one belongs to, in other words people you can identify with.¹⁵ This trust can create strong links within the group, which are beneficial especially on an individual level, but these strong links may cause the members to distance themselves from people outside their group.¹⁶ Generalized trust on the other hand, is a much wider value that includes most other people, including strangers. This trust goes beyond kinship and friendship, and includes people that are not personally known. While particularized trust is beneficial on an individual level, generalized trust might benefit both the individual and the society at large.¹⁷ A sign of generalized trust is when people believe that most other people can be trusted. This type of trust has great impact on the success of democracy, since it can solve the problem of non-cooperative game theory.¹⁸ For democracy to work, it is vital that the citizens sees the common good as their own interest and feel a responsibility and obligation in relation to the other citizens to act for the common best alternative. However, without trusting most other citizens to do the same, it does not make sense to support a solution that would benefit the common interest prior to one's own.¹⁹ Because of its impact on society and democracy, generalized trust has been the focus of political science research on social capital, and has by many been argued to be the very heart of social capital. This thesis will examine both forms of trust, but generalized trust will be in focus of the analysis as the core element of social capital.

¹⁴ Rothstein 2003:286

¹⁵ Hooge & Stolle 2003:5

¹⁶ Rothstein 2003:166

¹⁷ Hooge & Stolle 2003:5

¹⁸ Faysse 2005:252

¹⁹ Rothstein & Stolle 2002:2

2.1.3 Bonding, Bridging and Linking Social Capital

A third definition that needs to be clarified is the division of bonding, bridging and linking social capital. What needs to be kept in mind though is that this division is made by scholars with a wider definition of social capital, which includes social networks, norms of reciprocity and trust. As stated above, social networks and norms of reciprocity are in this thesis instead viewed as the results of social capital. However, this division is still relevant and brought up since the third form, the linking social capital, may have something to add to the theory that will be tested. The bonding and bridging forms are quite similar to particularized and generalized trust. Bonding social capital refers to relations within homogeneous groups, such as ethnic enclaves or exclusive associations, similar to the particularized trust, while bridging social capital refers to much more heterogeneous connections, cutting across social cleavages, and being much more inclusive, similar to the generalized trust.²⁰ Linking social capital can also be considered as a form of bridging. It is said to be the vertical dimension of social capital and refers to networks between different levels of status and across borders of hierarchy, or as the World Bank puts it “the capacity to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond the community”²¹. It does not however refer directly to the *trust* for formal institutions, which will be examined here, but to the contact and communication between the citizens and the formal institutions.

2.2 The Origin of Social Capital

2.2.1 Civil Society Approach vs. Institutional Approach

The main division in the social capital research runs between scholars who consider it to originate from civil society and be historical-determined, and scholars who consider it to originate from formal institutions and can be changed by contemporary political changes. The “society-centered approach” explains the origin of social capital by evolution, in other words, it originates when the cultural and historical prerequisites are right for it. Robert D. Putnam argues in *Making Democracy Work*, that it is civic engagement in social networks that creates the “civicness” and trust among people, which facilitates cooperation, makes the citizens feel responsible for the commons and promotes their political activity.²² According to Putnam’s theory, social capital originates from the horizontal relationships between people, which then affects the vertical relationship to formal institutions. Francis Fukuyama shares this view and explains social capital as a

²⁰ Putnam 2001:22pp and Woolcock 2001

²¹ The World Bank

²² Putnam 1996:218pp

by-product of religion, traditions, shared historical experiences and cultural norms.²³ Their reasoning is based on path-dependency and although they do not reject the idea that societal reforms such as promoting civil society, social networks and association building can affect the level of social capital, they argue these changes will take generations to discover.²⁴

The institution-centered approach developed as a reaction to the causal mechanism in Putnam's theory, which has been criticized of lacking successful empirical testing. Many have questioned the causal claim in Putnam's logic of how trust can improve the citizens' political engagement and the performance of institutions.²⁵ As Margaret Levi puts it, it is rather questionable whether participation in a bird-watching club actually can lead to increased political participation on the individual level.²⁶ One of the main criticisms of this theory has been its inability to prove the causal mechanism on the individual level, since a person active in associations do not necessarily have higher trust in other people. The causal mechanism will only bear when comparing whole regions or societies civic engagement with levels of trust.²⁷ Another problem with the causality is what Eric Uslaner argues, that trust must come before participation. For citizens to engage and participate in community activities and social networks, they first have to trust the other members of the group.²⁸ So where is this generalized trust generated?

By turning the causal mechanism around, new theories on the origin of social capital have developed. Levi states the possibility of a top-down perspective, in contrast to Putnam's bottom-up perspective, in the creation of social capital. She argues that a trustworthy government and parliament could generate higher levels of generalized trust.²⁹ Furthermore, she emphasizes the impact of the rule of law, and argues that if the government succeeds in effectively establishing the rule of law and ensure the enforcement and monitoring of the law, it will create the basis for the citizens to trust each other. State institutions, especially courts and police force, can in this way function as third party enforcers, and create the right setting for the development of generalized trust.³⁰ Rothstein also supports the top-down perspective, but in contrast to Levi, he does not see the elected representatives as generators of trust, since this assumption would imply a lower level of trust within the opposition since they seldom trust the government. This is however not the case since there are no signs that members of the opposition would have lower levels of generalized trust.³¹

Rothstein does however support Levi's reasoning regarding the impact of institutions, and focus his argument on government services and public administration institutions. He argues that administrative institutions have an important role to play since the ordinary citizen have more frequent contact with the administrative institutions than with the elected representatives, and thus estimate the quality of democracy on the

²³ Fukuyama 2001:7

²⁴ Putnam 1996:78

²⁵ Hooghe and Stolle 2003:244

²⁶ Levi 1996

²⁷ Rothstein 2003:168f, Rothstein & Stolle 2003:191

²⁸ Uslaner & Mitchell 2005:889

²⁹ Levi & Stoker 2000

³⁰ Levi 1998:85pp

³¹ Rothstein 2003:174

effectiveness of these institutions. When the citizens believe that institutions, which are responsible for guaranteeing civil rights and duties, perform their task in a fair way, they develop a trust for these institutions, a trust which they convey to society at large.³² These theories do not deny that social capital may originate from cultural or historical factors, but argues that these elements are not its only source; it can also originate from factors that human have the ability to change. The theory I will test on Cambodian society has been developed from Rothstein's and Levi's theories of how institutions can generate generalized trust and will be more closely described in the following section.

2.2.2 An Institutional Theory of Trust

The theory takes an institutional approach and claims that it is the state's administrative institutions, and especially its legal institutions, that generate generalized trust, the essence of social capital. The reasoning goes as follows. One of the most important tasks of the administrative institutions is to monitor legislation and enforce civic rights and rules. When the citizens can trust that this is done in an *effective* and *fair* way, where everyone is treated equal, they develop trust for society at large since the government protects the citizens from people who can not be trusted. State institutions offer a degree of assurance that allows citizens to trust people they do not know.³³ With trustworthy administrative institutions, the citizens can establish contracts with strangers knowing that the state will protect them. This theory could explain the fact that the most corrupt countries have the least trusting citizens.³⁴ Citizens of a corrupt regime, who lack experience of impartiality from government institutions, will not develop trust in these institutions and thus have no assurance that their rights are protected in relation to other citizens. Thus, if the citizens can trust the *effectiveness* and *fairness* of the administrative institutions, they feel safe to trust, and their generalized trust in others can develop.³⁵

2.3 Public Administration and Decentralization Reform

The aims of the Cambodian Public Administration and Decentralization Reform correspond well to the requirements of trust generating institutions, according to the institutional theory of trust. The Cambodian government's strategy for good governance has four overarching goals: anti-corruption; legal and judicial reform; public administration reform, including decentralization and deconcentration; and reform of the armed forces. The Council for Administrative Reform started to work on an action plan for administrative reform in 1999, and thus, the reform entered its implementation phase

³² Ibid.

³³ Levi 1998:85pp

³⁴ Uslaner in Hooge and Stolle 2003:172

³⁵ Rothstein and Stolle 2002:16

only a few years ago. The goals of the Public Administration Reform are to rationalize the structure of civil service, to strengthen civil service management, and diminish corruption by increasing the civil servants salaries.³⁶ These changes would increase both the effectiveness and, by diminishing corruption, also the fairness of the institutions. With improved effectiveness and fairness, the prospect for these institutions to create generalized social capital would be good according to the institutional theory. Directly linked to the public administration reform is the decentralization reform, which was suggested by the Ministry of Interior in 1998. One of the main goals of the decentralization reform is to bring the citizens closer to the governing and decision making institutions.³⁷

The reform of the administrative institutions is well needed. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, Cambodia scored 2.3 on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (highly clean) in 2005.³⁸ A study made by the same institute, states that corruption now pervades almost every sector of the country. The study describe it as an "everyday form of corruption" where the citizens need to pay unofficial fees to secure a range of basic services, such as education credentials, medical care and even birth certificate. However, the study underlines that even though the citizens now acknowledge these fees as routine, no Cambodian view them as fair or acceptable.³⁹

2.4 Previous Research

Social capital is a frequent topic of study within the development research. However, most of this research focuses on ways to measure social capital and finding out its consequences and impact on society. The same tendency can be found on the social capital research conducted in Cambodia. Studies can be found on the impact of the Khmer Rouge regime, and the impact of the traditional social structures, on the level of social capital.⁴⁰ No studies have however been found on how social capital can be created. The studies on social capital in Cambodia will be further discussed later on.

Some research in other developing countries have however been done on the topic. For instance, Nadia Molenaers examines whether the same relationship between associational membership and trust can be found in a third world setting by studying the associational landscape in two peasant villages in Nicaragua. She reaches the conclusion that it is not necessarily so that the civil society approach is linked with the creation of trust, and that there is a need for more development related research on social capital research.⁴¹ In an article about social capital in sub-Saharan Africa, Göran Hydén argues that collective action, trust and social networks may arise from other reasons that need to

³⁶ The Royal Government of Cambodia 1

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Transparency International 2006

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ E.g. Krishnamurthy 1999, Colletta & Cullen 2000, Kim 2001, Pellini 2006

⁴¹ Molenaers in Hooge and Stolle 2003:128

be considered when analyzing social capital in developing country contexts.⁴² In addition, the World Bank has conducted studies in the developing countries on the impact of participation in associations, but nearly all of their studies have been conducted from a society-centered approach. The need to study the institutional-centered theories in other settings has also been emphasized by researchers interested in the origin of social capital, since all studies with this approach have been concentrated to welfare states.⁴³

⁴² Hydén, G. 2001:161p

⁴³ Hooge and Stolle 2003:242p

3 Method

3.1 Disposition

The institutional approach is often placed in contrast to the cultural approach. But when applying a theory with an institutional approach to a different cultural context, it shows that the two perspectives are in fact closely connected. When testing an institutional theory on an utterly different historic, religious and cultural context, one must be cautious of the deep influence cultural factors may play in the creation of formal and informal institutions. Thus, the institutional approach cannot be disconnected from a cultural view. Though I am using an institution-centered approach, I will keep a cultural perspective and also examine the effects a different history, religion and culture may have on social structures.

Subsequently, the analysis is divided into two parts. The first part of the analysis focuses on the traditional forms of trust and cooperation in Cambodia, since these may vary from the Western forms. This is done by examining the impact of cultural, religious and historical factors on trust, cooperation and social interaction. In addition, the Cambodian view of authorities is explored because of its relevance to the institutional approach. The differences found from Western structures are then highlighted before applying the theory to the Cambodian society. The second part of the analysis will test the institutional theory of trust on the Cambodian society by conducting a case study in three rural villages.

3.2 Case Study

The first part of the analysis is examined by doing in-depth expert interviews with specialists on Cambodian history and culture, politicians and religious leaders, to see the impact of these factors on trust and cooperation. The results of the interviews are presented combined with a literature review on the topic to verify what is said, and to confirm my interpretation of the interviews. These qualitative interviews were all recorded and then transcribed from audiotapes, except for the interview with anthropologist Kim Sedara, since this was more of an informal meeting with an informal discussion and thus not recorded. Since the respondents in these interviews all spoke English, they were conducted without using an interpreter.

The second part is a bit more problematic to examine since it is too soon to see any societal changes arising from the decentralization and public administration reform yet.

Scholars with a cultural approach often argue that it takes time before the effect of new institutions become visible, and most institutional scholars agree these changes do take some time to discover.⁴⁴ Since the reform process only started a few years ago, the level of trust for administrative institutions has not changed.⁴⁵ There is however another possible way to empirically test whether the Public Administration and Decentralization Reform can have impact on social capital in Cambodia.

Studies of social capital carried out in Cambodia have, in all the literature I have found, been carried out on the village level.⁴⁶ Villages have been described as being small scale societies, with a local system of social services and welfare activities.⁴⁷ The villagers have limited contact with public administration institutions, except for the police and schools. Instead of visiting courts when a conflict arise, the village chief (who is employed by the state) and sometimes the commune chief, function as local judges. Since it is too soon to test the theory on national administrative institutions, I will therefore test it in the local setting, and test whether the local administrative institutions, such as the police and the village/commune chief in their role as judges and facilitators of conflict, can generate higher generalized trust. According to the theory, it is the administrative institutions that monitors legislation and enforces rights and rules that are the most important institutions to generate social capital. Since these services are handled by the village chief and police in the villages, the core logic of the theory can still be tested on a local level. The results of this examination can then theoretically be argued to say something about the possibility for the Public Administration and Decentralization Reform to create additional social capital.

The role of the village chief, to inform the people and implement new regulations, has been criticized for being an authoritarian system.⁴⁸ However, the Khmer words for inform (*phsob phsay*) and implement (*aknouwat*) can also be used to describe systems that reinforce democracy or the rule of law.⁴⁹ Furthermore, approximately 85% of the Cambodian population are farming peasants living in village based communities.⁵⁰ To conduct the study in villages among rice farmers is therefore more representative of the Cambodian society than if the study would have been carried out in Phnom Penh or another city. An objection to this way of testing the theory can be that the village/commune chief does not have any legal power over strangers, and can only assure the citizens rights within the village/commune. However, the societal structures on the Cambodian countryside are far different from industrialized countries'. Without means of transport, mobility decreases. The villagers rarely travel and seldom meet people from other communes. In the "small scale society", the villagers' generalized trust can

⁴⁴ Putnam 1996:78 and Rothstein in Stillhoff 2006

⁴⁵ The test-survey (see methodological considerations below) showed that trust for public administration institution was still extremely low. For instance it showed close to 100% distrust for the court system.

⁴⁶ E.g. Krishnamurthy 1999, Kim 2001, Pellini 2006, Colletta & Cullen 2000

⁴⁷ Krishnamurthy 1999 chapter 1

⁴⁸ Ovensen et al. 1996:12pp

Ovensen et al. wrote this before the decentralization reform had started. However, the village chiefs interviewed in this thesis all explained their main task to be to implement directions and programs they received from the commune chief, so Ovensen's reflection is still valid.

⁴⁹ Kim 2001:33p

⁵⁰ Ovensen et al. 1996:39

therefore be measured by their trust in people from villages outside of their own, and people in their own village whom they do not know.

The three villages are examined by surveys and group interviews to capture the villagers' levels of trust and cooperation. They are all located in Svay Rieng province, an agricultural province on the boarder to Vietnam.⁵¹ By spending between four days to a week⁵² in each village, observation of cooperation and some community activities was also carried out. The survey was conducted in order to get the publics view by using a questionnaire with standardized questions which can be found in Appendix A. To be able to include the large percentage of the villagers that are illiterate, and to have the possibility to ask follow-up questions, the questionnaires were filled out by me and my interpreter⁵³ while doing face to face interviews with the villagers.

The intention was to conduct individual interviews. However, the family members, and sometimes people from the houses nearby, always gathered during the interviews, which turned the individual interviews into group interviews. As a result, the questionnaires were filled out by households instead of individuals. The villagers often offered us to stay for rice or tea, and several wanted to show us around. The interviews therefore took much longer time than estimated. We stayed between 45 minutes to more than an hour at each house, and thus fewer interviews than planned were conducted. A total of 59 households were interviewed in the survey. All the tea drinking and rice eating did however result in many interesting observations and gave a good insight into the Cambodian village life.

The group discussions brought up many interesting reflections and examples, of interest for the case study. However, since the number of people interviewed per household varied from two, up to as many as thirteen people, the survey material can not be used as statistical material. Even though the surveys in most cases were filled out by the answers of one person, the reliability is still weak, since his or her answers were influenced by inputs from the others.

The material used in this thesis consists of both primary sources, in the form of interviews, and secondary sources in form of the literature review. To be able to answer my research questions there is a need to conduct both respondent examinations, to get the view of the people, and informant examination, to get a deeper understanding of traditional structures in Cambodian society.⁵⁴

⁵¹ The province was chosen after consultation with Mr. Blang Boeurth, Public Officer for Comfrel, Committee of Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia, who has provincial offices in every province of the country. Mr. Blang also gave his advise on which villages to select, which was further discussed with an officer at Svay Rieng provincial office, Mr. Chan Chomroeun.

⁵² I and my interpreter did not "live" in the villages. We only went there during the days and lived in two other villages nearby.

⁵³ My Khmer interpreter, Mr. Pen Dina, is an English teacher working both at Svay Rieng High School and the newly opened Svay Rieng University.

⁵⁴ Esaiasson et al. 2002:253p

3.3 Methodological Considerations

3.3.1 How to Measure Trust

The most common way to measure trust is by doing attitudinal surveys. The World Values Survey (WVS), a worldwide investigation of social, cultural and political changes conducted in more than 80 countries (but not in Cambodia), are measuring generalized trust by asking the question: *Generally speaking would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with other people?*⁵⁵ The same questions used in WVS studies can also be found in a number of other studies, such as surveys from the SOM-institute in Gothenburg and the FSI-institute. From this question, statistic results of generalized trust are compared between different cultures and societies. However, there is a problem with this question since it requires rather advanced analytical skills to answer it correctly. Before leaving for the province I conducted a test-survey to try out my questionnaire and method. It was conducted at Pannasastra University in Phnom Penh by interviewing students and some staff members. Even the people at the university had problems answering this question, and their answers to it did not correspond to their answers on more specific trust questions. The question was still asked in the villages, but followed by many sub-questions about trust in different groups of people to check their answer. There was a need to use more concrete, real life questions in the villages, and thus examples that the villagers could relate to were given to almost each question.

Many researchers complement their survey findings with game theory experiments to get a better understanding of the trust structures in a society. This is especially done in economic research but also in social and political science. However, these game theory experiments nearly always include money in one way or another. Since extreme poverty can cause a different mindset, this type of experiment would most likely not be possible to conduct on the Cambodian country side. Instead, observations of cooperation and community activities in the villages were carried out to check the results of the survey.

Regarding the selection of a valid representation, the aim was to get a broad representation of respondents in age and an equal number of men and women. Since this field study was conducted at a time when the fields were being prepared for sowing the rice, there is a majority of female responses since the men were ploughing and harrowing while the women were at home taking care of the farms. The age representation of the respondents to the survey is ranging from 23 years to 75 years, with an age average of 47.5 years (many of them did however not know their exact age). Also younger villagers were present at the group interviews.

Moving on to how their answers will be interpreted. The results of the villagers trust is measured by their trust in different groups of people, general questions about trust

⁵⁵ WVS 2000 Questionnaire

and by observation. Trust in family, close neighbors and friends, is interpreted as particularized trust, while trust in groups of people they do not know and cooperation with these people is interpreted as generalized trust. These trust levels is then compared with the level of trust for administrative institutions to see how they correlate. After that, the result of this comparison is analyzed in the light of the traditional forms of trust and social interaction in Cambodia. Trust surveys are often presented in graphs and different types of trust compared in diagrams. Because of the lack of reliability in the number of respondents, no such statistical analysis is done. However, when searching for the correlating relationship, the respondents are divided into different groups according to their answers before comparing them with each other.

4 Traditions of Trust in Cambodia

Cambodian society is full of contradictions. The Mekong River is known for its paradoxical behavior as a river that floats in both directions, both south and north. Even more contradictions appear when you walk through the capital, Phnom Penh, as you pass Charles de Gaulle Boulevard, Mao Tse Tung Boulevard, Eisenhower Boulevard and Kim Il Sung Boulevard, all within an hour. The same kind of inconsistency appears when analyzing social capital in Cambodia from a Western view. There seems to be almost no trust at all between people, and yet they cooperate all the time. To be able to understand how it is possible to honor as opposing men as the republican Dwight D. Eisenhower and the communist Kim Il Sung in the same city, there is a need to look at the country's history. In the same way, there is a need to look at Cambodia's culture, history and religion to understand the traditional structures of social capital in Cambodia. This will therefore be done on the following pages to get the cultural and historical background of trust structures in Cambodia, before applying the Western-based institutional theory to the Cambodian society.

4.1 Traditional Forms of Trust and Cooperation

4.1.1 Impact of Culture and Colonial Heritage

The Cambodian culture has gained influence from several directions through out the history of the kingdom. Some of the major cultural influence has come from the Indian civilization, the Chinese immigrants and the French colonization.⁵⁶ Even though traces from different cultures can be found in Cambodian society, many Cambodians argue that there is a traditional Khmer culture, which has survived both emperors and dictators. History professor Manara Sombo at the Royal University of Phnom Penh explained the endurance of Khmer traditional culture in an interview, by describing Cambodian civic culture as a tree; a tree that always keeps its roots but change its top.⁵⁷ So which are these cultural roots that form the structure of the Cambodian trust?

⁵⁶ Ovensen et al 1996:32p, Curtis 1990:11

⁵⁷ He gave a metaphor of a tree that has been cut down many times since the dawn of the kingdom, but the roots have always been preserved. As soon as the storm was over, the tree started to grow again, but it never grew up to look the same even if the basis of it always stayed the same. From interview Manara 2006-05-30.

According to Manara, Cambodian culture can be described as being based on collectivism rather than individualism, with traditions of sharing and helping each other.⁵⁸ Collectivism is often described as creator of particularized trust/bonding social capital. However, it has been argued that there is limited collectivism in Cambodia today and that people have a “me-first” attitude.⁵⁹ Except for the effects of recent conflicts on cooperation, some elements from colonial times have been mentioned as creators of a more individualistic mind-set. According to Gyallay-Pap, the limited solidarity seen in the Cambodian society can be traced to the French colonization and the French “mission civilisatrice”.⁶⁰ Village life used to be based on communal activities and moral norms and be highly decentralized in the pre-colonial time. But with colonization came a centralized administration and an economic system that emphasized individualism, which reduced the sense of solidarity among individuals.⁶¹ However, Manara argues that the collectivistic attitude and the strong community ties, which would be a sign of particularized trust, or bonding social capital, have started to return to Cambodian society. He did however emphasize that the strong bonding ties refer to relations based kinship in most cases.

Both the anthropologist Kim Sedara and the historian Manara Sombo gave examples of cultural impact on generalized trust among people. According to Cambodian culture, no one should be excluded, but at the same time people do not trust strangers until they have been observed and shown they can be trusted.⁶² The same analysis of Cambodian generalized trust is made by Ovesen et al. who explain this reservation for strangers by referring to the many social rules of conduct in Cambodian society. It is part of the Cambodian culture to be careful and not “too readily believe in others”.⁶³ These social rules show a reservation towards strangers.

4.1.2 Impact of Religion

Since Western societies, which the institutional theory has developed in, are based on a different religious tradition, it is also crucial to consider the impact of religion on the traditional forms of cooperation and trust. A vast majority of all Cambodians follow Theravada Buddhism, which will therefore be my focus here. The Vietnamese and Chinese descendants follow Mahayana Buddhism, and there are some minority groups of Christians and Muslims. However, the main religious influence on social structures arrives from Theravada Buddhism with some influence from Hinduism, and thus, this is what will be considered here.

There are some similarities between the impact of Christian/Catholic traditions in Western societies and Buddhism in Cambodia. Putnam describes churches as central elements in America’s social capital, since the churches has been the centre of communal

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ E.g. Curtis 1999:112

⁶⁰ Gyallay-Pap 2004:35

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Kim 2006-05-26 and Manara 2006-05-30

⁶³ Ovensen et al. 1996:34

activity, charity and voluntary work, and focus on relationship between people, which is an essential part of social capital.⁶⁴ Just like the churches have been the center for charity and communal activities, the Buddhist Pagodas have been their equivalents in Cambodian society. Arnaldo Pellini argues that pagoda associations represent a traditional channel for community action.⁶⁵ He describes the associations as the indigenous form of social capital and the most solid part of Cambodian society. Charity is also an important element in the pagoda associations. In an interview with the monk and Buddhism teacher Tev Sophea, he described the pagodas as a local welfare system. The pagoda takes care of the elders who often come and live in the pagoda, and of the poor, especially during religious celebrations.⁶⁶

But there are also considerable differences between Christian/Catholic and Buddhist traditions that affect social capital. Putnam tends to simplify the differences, by referring all religious confessions and congregations, such as mosques, synagogues and Hindu congregations, when writing about the impact of churches.⁶⁷ There are however some important differences to note. In contrast to Western societies, Cambodian society is built on an hierarchical order, which arrives from Buddhist and Hindu teachings of reincarnation. Buddhism teacher Tev Sophea explained that these hierarchical structures leaven all through the Cambodian society⁶⁸. For instance, it can be found in the language, since the people needs to use a special language when speaking to the monks, which are higher ranked than ordinary people. But most importantly, it can be observed in the way people act towards their leaders,⁶⁹ which will be addressed further under *Political Culture*.

Two other important elements in the Buddhist tradition is Kun and Karma, which according to Tev can affect cooperation and civic engagement. Karma is Sanskrit for action. Because of the Buddhist belief in reincarnation, having a good Karma and to gather good deeds in this life to prepare for the next, is of great importance to most Cambodians. This mindset has positive effects on society since it makes the people help each other and cooperate. Kun on the other hand can, at least for an outsider, be seen as a bit more problematic since people tend to use it to justify bribes. Kun means 'gratefulness' or 'the return of good deeds'. In practice it means that one should give something back to the person that has been to assistance, which is not a bad thing per se, but have been argued to be a mindset that defends corruption. Also the tradition of nepotism is said to origin in Kun. However, according to Tev, corruption is not caused by

⁶⁴ Putnam 2001:68

⁶⁵ Pellini 2005:10

⁶⁶ Tev 2006-04-19

⁶⁷ Putnam 2001:67, in footnote

⁶⁸This hierarchical order is part of all social interactions and it is vital to know your status and to keep your place in this order. This became clear to me after just a few days on the Cambodian country side. Since I was 'lower' than the parents of the families I stayed in on the countryside, some practical problems arose when I tried to follow the rules of social interaction. For instance, you are not allowed to sit higher than the people of higher status. Being 15 inches taller than the father of the family, the same problem occurred each dinner time when we sat down on the floor since my head, no matter how much I crouched, was always higher than his. This was solved by him moving to the other side of the rice mat so the height difference would not be as obvious, which made my eating technique much less complicated.

⁶⁹ Tev 2006-04-19

this mindset, since it is not considered as *Kun* if the person that helps you expects something in return.⁷⁰

4.2 Political Culture

To understand the Cambodian view of authorities and state institutions, I will here bring up some of the traditions of their political culture. The so called patron-client relation is often claimed to be the spine of traditional political structure in South East Asia.⁷¹ The relationship is described as dyadic, in other words involving only two parties, and vertical, where the patron is being superior to the client. The role of the patron is to offer economic assistance and physical protection while the client assure its patron political loyalty and sometimes supply labor. This relationship takes the place of official structures under conditions marked by “the relative absence of effective impersonal guarantees such as public law for physical security, property, and position”.⁷² This has been a common system on the Cambodian countryside, but according to Ovensen et al. there is no empirical evidence that this relationship exist in Cambodia today.⁷³

There is how ever a clearly visible hierarchical structure. It is to consider as a social norm not to question the elders or your leaders. Kim explained that the citizens’ relationship to authorities is traditionally described by three words in Cambodia. The citizens are supposed to show *korob*, *kaud*, *klach* (respect, admiration and fear) for authorities and even for civil servants.⁷⁴ However, in a study made by him and Öjendal, they argue that the general atmosphere in the villages has sharply changed and that *klach* (fear) is much less pronounced now, even if the three words are still used and expected to be followed.⁷⁵ In Cambodia, I had the opportunity to interview Mu Sochua⁷⁶, one of Cambodia’s most visible and well-known female politicians. Her view of the political culture in Cambodia is in line with what Kim and Öjendal argues. Even though Mu sees the past three elections high voters’ turnout as a sign of that people are interested in politics and that there is a certain level of trust in politicians, she highlighted that voters are afraid and intimidated by politicians, in particular those in power. This comes, according to Mu, as a result of generations of top-down leadership and the lack of rule of law. When mentioning *Korob*, *Kaud*, *Klach*, her response was that this is in fact still a very noticeable part of the contemporary political culture. She claimed that the people are used to putting their heads down in front of the “Master”.⁷⁷ Ovensen et al. has however

⁷⁰ Tev 2006-04-19

⁷¹ Pye 1985:27

⁷² Ovensen et al. 1990:71

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Kim 2006-05-26

⁷⁵ Öjendal & Sedara 2006:518

⁷⁶ She was the Minister of Women’s and Veteran’s Affairs from 1998 but resigned from her post in 2004 to join the opposition party, Sam Rainsy party. She became an active voice for the opposition and has done groundbreaking work for women’s and human rights.

⁷⁷ Mu 2006-06-4

made the observation in interviews with Cambodian commune chiefs that the villagers have become more reluctant to obey the authorities and that the fear is not as visible on the local level anymore.⁷⁸

The hierarchical structure and respect for leaders can explain the distance between the ordinary people and the authorities. According to Kim the connection between the people and the authorities is very weak, especially on the countryside where there is no interaction between the villagers and external actors. This is an interesting observation to keep in mind when analyzing the results of the survey.

4.3 Impact of Armed Conflicts and Recent History

Many researchers agree that even though social capital, measured by social interaction and community activities, was damaged by the wars, it was not destroyed by it.⁷⁹ Among others, Arnaldo Pellini argues that even though the Khmer Rouge regime undermined traditional social values, such as family and religion, trust between people was never completely shattered. He argues that it survived through traditional forms of collective action.⁸⁰ It did however change all the social structures in the country, and I will therefore limit the changes brought up here to how trust levels were changed by the armed conflicts.

According to some authors, not only the generalized trust, but also the particularized trust within families and among friends was damaged as a consequence of the war. Curtis Grant states that the Khmer Rouge regime destroyed the very foundations of society which also ruined the particular trust, since family members, friends and neighbors were forced to spy on each other.⁸¹ Other authors have also recognized the damage on particularized trust, but have argued that it has returned and that the bonds of kinship now are as strong as before.⁸² How the generalized trust was harmed is more difficult to estimate, since there is little information on how it used to be. In the studies found on armed conflicts impact on social capital, only the effects on traditional forms of social capital, mostly particularized trust, has been studied.⁸³ The effect on the vertical lines of trust, the trust for authorities near to abolished, since the hideous crimes were carried out by the rulers.

A more tangible result of the years of war and the genocide is the country's very young population. More than 65% of its population was born after Pol Pot.⁸⁴ According to Manara, this has affected the impact of the wars, since young people are much less affected by the history. Manara points out that Cambodian youth do not think as much as

⁷⁸ Ovensen et al. 1990:65

⁷⁹ See Krishnamurthy 1999; Kim 2001

⁸⁰ Pellini 2005:9

⁸¹ Curtis 1998:114

⁸² Colletta & Cullen 2000:32

⁸³ E.g. Colletta & Cullen 2000, Krishnamurthy, 2005

⁸⁴ Landguiden

the elders about what happened during Pol Pot and the Khmer Rough regime, and thus, the social effects of the war has not had the same impact on the youth.

4.4 Review

Before moving on to the next part of the case study, the findings from this chapter are summarized. To start with the particularized trust, there are strong indications that this can be found in the Cambodian culture. The literature review and interviews both implied that collectivism and strong community ties can be found in the traditional culture. Even though these features were damaged by the years of war, they seem to have been restored. However, the particularized trust found in the culture is argued to be highly exclusive, including only the nearest relations, often based on kinship. There are some major differences here to the Western traditions, since most Western societies are based on individualism rather than collectivism and thus, have different structures of particularized trust.

Moving on to the generalized trust, this was not found in the culture. On the contrary, there was a reservation towards strangers found in one of many social rules of conduct. The lack of trust can however not be described as a cultural distrust for strangers, but a clear cautiousness. The many years of war have also severely harmed the generalized trust. Another thing to keep in mind for both types of trust is the hierarchical structures that pervade all forms of social interaction.

Lastly, the Cambodian view of authorities. It is described as a hierarchical relationship and the citizens are supposed to show respect, admiration and fear for authorities, and even for civil servants, although fear is not as strongly pronounced anymore. In contrast to the West where the elected representatives are viewed as ordinary people, the authorities are viewed as superior to the people in Cambodia. This view originates from the traditions of Patron-Client relations and the hierarchical structures of society. With the traditional structures of trust in mind, we will move further into the Cambodian society by setting out to the villages in the search of how additional trust can be created from an institutional approach.

5 The Search of Trust - in the Field

5.1 The Three Villages

The three villages chosen are all located in an area of about 25 km around the provincial capital, mainly because of practical issues of transportation.⁸⁵ Since the villages were gathered within limited vicinity, we had the possibility to go back several times to each village. All three villages have a population which is described as *neak króó* (poor people) or a mix between *neak króó* and a few *neak kuésóm* (the step higher than the poor)⁸⁶. Even though there is no cast-system in Cambodia and the hierarchy is not mainly based on class, it is important to note that they were all in the same category since social standards may affect the level of social capital. This group does unfortunately constitute a valid representation, since one third of Cambodians still live below the poverty line.⁸⁷ Before interviewing the villagers, the village chiefs were interviewed to get an overview of the village and his role there. In all villages, the village chief described his main role to be administrative, carrying out programs given to him by the commune chief. In Kandal and Prash Tonle villages, the village chiefs could carry out projects on initiative from the villagers. In Meloung village on the other hand, the village chief had no independence at all, and could not do anything without permission from the commune chief. The reason for this dependence could be that the Meloung village chief was quite new in his position with only two years of service, compared to the others who had been in their positions for at least a decade. There were no associations in the villages. According to the village chiefs the reason for this is because the people are too poor and do not have time to engage in associations.

Village 1: Kandal village in Check Commune, Svay Chrum District, Svay Rieng Province. 106 families live in the village, with an average of 4-6 members in each family, out of which 22 households were interviewed. This seemed to be the poorest of the three

⁸⁵ There were only a limited number of cars in Svay Rieng province, and in the village I stayed in, there were none. Consequently, me and my interpreter had to go around either by "motodop", which is the Cambodian motorcycle taxi, or by my interpreters motor scooter. This gave us limited possibilities of travel and made us bound to the areas surrounding where we lived.

⁸⁶ Peasantry is divided into three categories in Cambodia. The highest category is *Neak Min*, which means people with much rice field and a nice house, the next one is *Neak Kuésóm*, which means 'people with enough', *Neak Króó*, means poor people and *Neak Toal*, which means poorer than poor.

⁸⁷ Transparency International 2006

villages. There were no associations in the village and no common wells⁸⁸ as there was in the other two villages.

Village 2: Prash Tonle village in Sankhor Commune, Svay Teap District, Svay Rieng Province. 182 families live in the village, with the same average of 4-6 members in each family. 14 households were interviewed in this village.

Village 3: Meloung village in Svay Check commune, Svay Chrum district, Svay Rieng Province. The village has 1407 inhabitants and 23 households were interviewed in this village.

5.2 A Rural Mindset

Before sharing the results from the case study in the three villages, there is a need to look deeper into the life in the rural areas of Cambodia, in order to get a better understanding of the mentality of the people living there. Without understanding their conditions and the root of their mindset, their answers seem ambiguous. As brought up in the previous chapter, culture and history needs to be considered when analyzing their answers, but apart from that, also more tangible factors such as income and living conditions, needs to be considered.

Svay Rieng province has suffered both drought and flooding the last couple of years, and the condition for the people in the rural areas is very tough. Like a majority of the Cambodian farmers, they are *Neak Sre* ‘people of the rice fields’, in other words rice farmers. Most of the villagers had no periodic income. Their only income came when they sold a hen or some rice, but a number of them had also started private businesses on the side. Some were making palm sugar out of palm juice, others made baskets and wall-sections out of palm leaf and some had opened small shops in front of their huts. These businesses did however not generate more than an average of 1000-5000 riels⁸⁹ per day. Since poverty can cause a certain mentality, the results of the survey needs to be interpret with this in mind.

Because of the villagers’ economic situation, their trust levels seemed ambiguous. One of the most striking observations in the result from all three villages was the vast difference between “economic trust” and other types of trust. The answers given to questions, in which economic issues were brought up, all showed a very low level of trust. The most outstanding result was the relationship between question 8 and the following two questions. Question 8 asked *If you would drop something valuable around here and someone saw it, would they return it to you?*⁹⁰ All of the interviewees answered

⁸⁸ Common wells associations could have been a way to measure social capital if it had existed, see Ostrom *Governing the Commons*. There was in fact only one pump in the village which had been provided by UNICEF through the local pagoda, but except for that, all water was gathered from rain.

⁸⁹ 1USD = 4000 riel

⁹⁰ I picked this question from an often referred to trust-experiment, carried out by The Economist. Ten wallets were “dropped” outside the City Hall in ten European capitals. The purpose was to measure the level of trust and ‘civicness’ by observing how many wallets that were returned to the police. In Oslo ten out of ten was returned, in Stockholm seven, in Paris four, in Rome two and in Ankara zero. The reason for the low result in Ankara and

no to this question, and many of them could exemplify their answer with experiences they had had. On the following two questions, close to everyone answered that they trusted most people would help others even if they did not benefit from doing so, and that they would get help for free from people when building a new house or by people taking care of their farm if they got sick etc.⁹¹ In other words, they trusted people to cooperate, and help others even if they would not benefit from it, but did not trust people to be honest regarding money. Roland Inglehart has recognized that cooperation and trust seem to be particularly difficult for the poor.⁹² However, the result showed that it was mainly economic trust that was low, other forms of trust was, as will be shown below, at a higher level.

As mentioned earlier, the society-centered approach has been criticized for not being able to empirically prove the theory on the individual level, a person active in associations do not necessarily have higher trust in other people. This theory will only bear when comparing whole regions' or societies' civic engagement and levels of trust.⁹³ Because of the small scale of this case study, the problem here is the contrary. The results of the case study can only be shown on an individual level. Since there are no major differences in the results of the three villages, no useful comparison can be made between them. The results will instead be presented on an individual level.

5.3 Survey Results

5.3.1 Trust and Cooperation

The villagers trust levels were measured by interviews and observation. Aside from the results of the survey⁹⁴, many interesting comments were made by the villagers. Their particularized trust seemed to be quite strong, with the exception of economic trust as described above. For instance, when asking the villagers about their trust in neighbors and friends, many of them answered that they often helped each other and looked after each other. The survey showed that 53 out of the 59 households interviewed trusted their close neighbors, while all the villagers interviewed claimed to trust their family members. The people who did not trust their neighbors explained the reason for this to be because

Rome was explained by that people there assumed others would keep the wallet if they would have found it, and if they returned it to the police, the police would have kept it. By rational thinking, the citizens figured they could just as well keep it themselves. This could be a good measure for trust in administration institutions (the police) and generalized trust (in other citizens), but it did not work, neither in Phnom Penh, nor the rural areas of Cambodia, since it was referring to 'economic trust'.

The reason *something valuable* was used in stead of *wallet* is simply because very few people use wallets.

⁹¹ See Appendix B

⁹² Inglehart 1988, article

⁹³ Rothstein 2003:168f, Rothstein & Stolle 2003:191

⁹⁴ The results of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

some incident had occurred. When dividing the answers into the three villages it shows that all of them had the same high levels of particularized trust.

Apart from the interviews, some communal activities were observed in the villages. In Kandal village, the road was being repaired by the villagers two of the days we were there. The village chief was leading the construction and many of the men in the village helped graveling of the road. Later on, the village chief explained that the men had been working for free. Furthermore, after all the interviews had been made in the villages, we participated when a small school was built in Kandal village. Once again many of the villagers came to help without any of them getting paid. The villagers in this village seemed to cooperate more than in the other villages. The village chief explained that cooperation networks, such as harvest networks, had existed in the village. Incidents like drought or flooding had temporarily stopped the cooperation, since people had to look after their own interest, but it always seemed to return in one way or another. In the other villages, no communal activities were observed the days we were there. However, since we were only there a limited number of days, no conclusions can be made out of this.

The villagers' generalized trust was a bit unclear. If it would only be measured by the question of generalized trust that is used in World Value Surveys, their generalized trust level would seem rather high. About two thirds of the interviewees answered *Most people can be trusted*, while the other third answered *You can't be careful enough when dealing with other people*.⁹⁵ Their answer to this question did however not correspond at all to their trust for people they did not know in the village, people from other villages and other strangers. In fact, their answers to the first question and the following questions about trust in different groups were often contrary. The questions about trust in different groups implied a much lower trust level than the World Value Study question.

By the examples given, and of what was being said among the villagers, their generalized trust seems quite complicated. A frequent answer to the questions about trust in groups of people they did not personally know was a commonly used proverb. "*Cher kaong woir poat, ma-nooh kjat prot kom youk kluen beat*". It is not possible to translate this phrase literally into English, but the meaning of it is: "Just as a clinging vine surrounds the tree and hides what is inside, you never know what is inside the stranger, so do not be too close to them."⁹⁶ The villagers did not express a clear distrust for strangers, but they were very reserved and the most frequent answer was that they needed to observe the stranger first, before they would trust him or her. The survey showed that the further away from the village a certain group was, the less trust they had for it. The results of generalized trust do not say much on their own, but become more interesting when combined with other results as will be done later on.

⁹⁵ 71% of the villagers answered *Most People can be trusted*, while 29% villagers answered *You can't be careful enough when dealing with other people*

⁹⁶ Translated by my interpreter Pen Dina

5.3.2 Trust for Authorities and Public Administration Institutions

The trust for national administrative institutions was very low in the villages. Their answers to question 18, whether they trusted the provincial court to treat people fair and impartial, was either strong distrust or they had no opinion since they did not know anything about the court. In fact, only as little as four people expressed trust in the provincial court. A young school teacher in Prash Tonle village explained his view of the low trust in administrative institutions. His trust in the police, the courts and even in schools was extremely low. When asking him why, his reply was that he would trust these institutions, if the policemen, judges and teachers were given higher salaries. He stated that these occupational groups do not take bribes because they can not be trusted, but because they have to do so in order to survive and feed their families. His view is especially interesting considering his occupation as a school teacher himself. All villagers were aware of the corruption in these institutions. Their trust in the police was higher than their trust in the courts, which could be explained by that a local policeman lived in each of the three villages. Several of the villagers, especially those who did not trust the police, did however comment on corruption also in this case. Less than half of the villagers trusted the police to be fair and treat everyone equal.

The trust for the commune chief and the village chief correlated in almost every interview. If the villagers trusted the village chief, they also expressed trust for the commune chief. On the question whether they trusted the village chief to solve land disputes in a fair and impartial way, nearly all the villagers, 50 out of 59 respondents, expressed trust for the village chief. The question proved to be relevant for the villagers and several of them shared stories of land disputes they had with their rice field neighbors. Since the rice paddies are rather small, even the narrow paths between them are being cultivated, which are causing many boarder disputes. The village and commune chiefs are therefore quite active in their role as judges and facilitators of conflicts. Even though trust for the village and commune chief correlated in most cases according to the questionnaire, many of the villagers expressed a greater trust for the village chief since they had closer contact with him and could go to him when they needed help. An interesting thing to note is that the people, who did not trust the village/commune chief, all mentioned suspected corruption to be the reason in one way or another. Even though the village chief in Meloung was new in his position, there was no difference in the villagers' level of trust between him and the other villages' chiefs. Another highly trusted institution on the local level was the pagodas. All except for two of the respondents expressed trust in the local pagoda. This is also an interesting observation considering that the pagoda has been referred to as a local welfare institution.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ This is especially interesting from the theory about universal welfare institutions' impact on trust levels, which is closely connected, but not brought up, to the theory I use here. See e.g. Rothstein & Uslander , Rothstein 2003

5.3.3 Correlating Relationship

The results of the survey become much more interesting when compared with each other. It is not easy to find absolute connections with the limited number of respondents, but some interesting observations can still be made. What is of importance for this thesis is to look at the relationship between the generalized trust and trust for administrative institutions. By dividing the respondents into two groups, those who trusted the village chief and the commune chief in their role as judges and mediators of conflicts and those who did not, some interesting observations can be made. The results from this division can be found in Appendix B. A first observation is the connection between trust in people from villages outside of their own and trust for the village chief. The people who trusted the village chief turned out to have a higher level of trust for villagers from other villages. However, this connection does not tell us much since the total level of trust for these outside villagers was very weak. What is more interesting is instead to look at the trust for people in the village that they did not know. Among the people who trusted the village chief, only 6 out of 50 did not trust the other villagers, while among the villagers that did not trust the village chief in this role as judge, 8 out of 9 expressed distrust for other people in the village. This was in fact the only clear difference between the two groups, which makes it even more remarkable. They both had the same high level of the particularized trust, i.e. trust in family, close neighbors and friends, and the same low levels of trust for other strangers. But their trust in other villagers varied remarkably. This shows a tendency that when the villagers trusted the village chief to assure their rights, they also dared to trust the other villagers.

The correlation between trust in the police and generalized trust was not as clear, but the same tendency could be found. Less than half of the respondents trusted the police, and many of those who did not expressed corruption as the reason why. The villagers were in all three villages extremely aware of corruption and the need to bribe teachers, judges etc. Among the villagers who trusted the police two thirds also trusted the other villagers, and consequently, one third of those who did not trust the police did not trust the other villagers. The connection is not as strong as with the village chief, but still shows the same correlation. As in the previous two groups, no difference in the particularized trust could be found between the two groups that did or did not trust the police.

Regarding the results on trust for state institutions, there is a problem with reliability since my interpreter could not ask every one these questions out of different reasons. The most sensitive questions were however totally removed from the interviews. For instance, there was a question about trust in the Cambodian government in the questionnaire. At first, my interpreter did not ask it at all since he worried the villagers would become suspicious of what we wanted and why we asked. Also the officer at the provincial cabinet office, who checked the questionnaire before we went to the village, recommended us to remove that question. The answers on state institutions are therefore not as reliable, even if the people who did answer these questions seemed to be honest. Because of this combined with the low trust levels in the national administrative institutions, no correlation between generalized trust and trust in these institutions can therefore be found.

6 Results and Reflections

6.1 Contemplating the Results

6.1.1 Trust and Social Interactions

The first thing to consider when analyzing the findings is the traditional structures of trust and social interaction in Cambodia, and how they differ from Western structures. The division of particularized and generalized trust is based on the difference between trust within the group and trust outside the group in the social capital research. When analyzing the result, it is thus essential to know what type of group is referred to. The traditional forms of trust in Cambodia showed that the particularized trust is limited to a rather small group, involving only the most intimate relations. Strong ties based on kinship and close friendship was the main feature of the particularized trust found in the Cambodian culture. However, the study of the three villages implied that strong community ties also outside the family existed, by showing strong trust in fellow villagers that they did not personally know.

A possible hypothesis is that the traditional “inside group” expanded, from only including family and close friends, to now include the entire village. When the poor villagers can not trust their government to assure their economic and physical safety, strong communal ties are built up as a social safety net. When state institutions fail to protect them, they start trusting those who are close to them and start to cooperate in order to survive. The strong trust in the village chief would then, if this is the case, be a sign of that the villagers view him as their Patron. As mentioned earlier, this traditional Patron-Client relation occurred in the past as a result of the government’s inability to provide guarantees for public law and physical and economic security. Hence, with the severe conditions on the countryside and the lack of trust in state institutions, it is possible that this traditional relationship has returned. However, as mentioned in chapter three, there is no empirical evidence that this relationship exists in Cambodia today, and this case study is too limited to draw that conclusion on its own. Instead, it can be argued that it is not an expansion of the particularized trust that was observed by the broader trust and cooperation in the village, but that there is a development of generalized trust.

The generalized trust first appeared difficult to measure in the village because of the limited contact between the villagers and people outside their own community. But when considering the relatively isolated environment they live in, which is caused by the lack of communication measures and vehicles, “outsiders” can be found closer than what

first appears. The villagers' view of people from outside the province, or from the cities, was rather diffuse and they often had no opinion of them, simply because they had not been in contact with them. The village can therefore be examined as a small scale society, where strangers can be found within limit vicinity.

6.1.2 The Origin of Additional Trust

The research on the origin of social capital has never proved any causal mechanisms by empirical investigations, neither the society-centered nor the institution-centered approach. Empirical studies have only shown a connection between a well functioning democracy and strong social capital, while the causal mechanism is explained by theoretical arguments alone. A similar condition appears also in this thesis. Though the empirical examination indicates some interesting tendencies, the causal mechanism can not be verified by it. As shown in the previous chapter, the villagers' generalized trust corresponds to their trust for the village chief, especially in the case where the village chief was not trusted. It seemed like when the village chief could assure the villagers rights in relation to other villagers, he created a safety-zone in the village where the villagers dared to trust each other. However, the empirical correlation only verifies a connection between the vertical trust for the village chief and the horizontal trust among the villagers, but does not say anything about the causal mechanism of trust. The causality can therefore only be argued, but before going deeper into that discussion, there is a need to look at other elements, which may influence the villagers' generalized trust.

Putnam and others would argue that the cooperation networks that existed in the village, such as harvest networks and the common wells, increased trust among the villagers. Even though I argue that cooperation can be a sign of generalized trust, the small scale cooperation networks, such as the common wells, seemed to come from historical and cultural traditions. It might instead be that these networks are rather *confirming* traditional structures of trust than *increasing* and developing them into different types of trust.

Since the exclusiveness of the networks was not measured in this case study, it is difficult to make any assumptions on their impact on generalized trust. Close connections in exclusive networks can generate a feeling of "we against them" which harm the generalized trust. This conclusion is similar to the observation made by Hydén who states that cooperation can build up what he describes as a para-public realm, which seems to weaken the civic-public realm.⁹⁸ In other words, put in the terms of social capital used in this thesis, strong communal ties build up the bonding social capital within the group. This strong bonding trust may decrease the bridging trust in people outside the group. Hence, the cooperation and collective action observed in the villages, does not say much about the 'civicness' of the people, or their generalized trust. To continue the discussion on the causal mechanism of trust, the results of the examination of the institutional theory of trust thus needs to be interpreted more closely than the cooperation observed.

⁹⁸ Hydén, G. 2001:161p

As mentioned earlier, a connection between the vertical trust for the village chief and the horizontal trust among the villagers was found, but it does not say anything about the causal mechanism of trust. However, since the only differences found in trust levels between the two groups of those who trusted contra did not trust the village chief, was their trust for other people in the village some assumptions can be made. In accordance to the institutional theory of trust, the results demonstrated that when the villagers trusted the village chief to assure their rights in a fair way in relation to the other villagers; they also dared to trust the other people in the village. That the villagers would start trusting a village chief, whom they considered corrupt and impartial, just because they trusted the other villagers is an unlikely assumption. Thus, the causal mechanism in this correlation seems apparent. However, a much deeper and extensive investigation is needed to answer the question of whether the institutional theory is applicable to the Cambodian society. The limited number of respondents in this case study challenge the validity of the results. Furthermore, other factors, apart from the cultural, needs to be examined and compared to the results found on the impact of institutions. But the main intent of testing this theory on the village level was to see whether it was applicable to the Cambodian context. Even though the results are not unquestionable, they show that the logic of the theory seemed to be applicable to the Cambodian society. Just like the administrative institutions seemed to create safety-zones in which the citizens could trust each other when applying the theory to Western welfare states, the same tendency was found in the rural villages in Cambodia.

6.1.3 Reforming Trust?

Can the results of the case study at the village level then be transferred to a national institutional level and say something about the outcome of the Public Administration and Decentralization Reform? When concentrating the analysis to the issue of corruption, the results can most likely be transferred. Firstly, the least corrupted institution, or by the villagers perceived as least corrupted, was also the most trusted in the villages. At the same time, the villagers who did not trust the village chief or the police argued the reason for this to be corruption. The same trend can be found on the national level, where thoroughly corrupted institutions also lack the trust of the citizens. By diminishing corruption and creating fair and effective institutions, as the aim of the administrative reform states, the trust for formal institutions will thereby most definitely increase. The second step of the theory, i.e. the correlation between the trust in the formal institution's fairness/effectiveness and the generalized trust, is more complicated to transfer because of the small scale of this examination. However, according to the tendency shown in the results of the survey, I argue that if the national administrative institutions - by becoming fair and effective - will be able to create the same kind of safety-zone on the national level, as the village chiefs did in the villages, they will be also able to generate trust among the citizens. But for the institutions to generate trust there is an additional requirement, apart from effectiveness and fairness, which needs to be added. One major shortcoming of the theory was discovered when applied to the Cambodian society, which clearly emphasizes the need for developing the theory before applying it to other settings than Western democracies'.

The reason why administrative institutions are central in this theory, is because of their direct contact with the citizens. Since the theory is developed in Western welfare states, it is presuming that the ordinary citizen has frequent contact with administrative institutions.⁹⁹ However, the case study showed that there is nearly no connection between citizens and state institutions in rural Cambodia. The linking social capital does not seem to exist yet. Even though linking social capital is not usually part of the institutional theory of trust, which I have tested here, the connection between the formal institutions and the citizens could in deed be seen as an important prerequisite for them to generate trust. The *effectiveness* and *fairness* of administrative institutions will not be enough if the people do not have contact with the institutions.

Subsequently, there is a need to add *connection* to the requirements for the institutions to generate trust. Rothstein has argued that the crucial question is not how the institutions are shaped or how well they function, but how the citizens experience and perceive them¹⁰⁰. If there is no connection, it does not matter how fair and effective the institutions are, since the people would not know. This was shown to be the case in Cambodia where many of the villagers did not have an opinion of the public administration institutions since they had no experience of them. When applying the institutional theory to a non-welfare state society, it is therefore important to also examine the linking social capital, that is, the connections between citizens and state institutions. It is therefore not only of significance to examine the impact of the Public Administration Reform, which the theory emphasize, but also the Decentralization reform, since this will bring the people closer to formal state institutions.

6.2 Concluding Remarks

The intention of this thesis was to fill a gap in the discourse of social capital, by applying an institution-centered theory on the creation of social capital to a new setting. The results of the thesis highlight the need for more research on the creation of social capital in the context of developing countries. The Western-based theory seemed to be applicable in this context, but needs to be developed, to better relate to the cultural traditions of non-welfare states. Also methods on how to measure these theories in a more precise manner needs to be further developed, in order to capture features of trust that may differ from Western. Even though the result of this thesis did not give a definite answer to my questions, it does spread some light on the Cambodian reform process. If the Public Administration Reform will create fair and effective institutions and if the Decentralization Reform will draw the people closer to the institutions, the administrative institutions will most likely be able to create a safety-zone, similar to the one in the villages, where the citizens dare to trust each other. However, the correlation on the national level has not yet been proved so if the reform process will be able to create any additional social capital, remains to be seen.

⁹⁹ Rothstein 2003:170pp

¹⁰⁰ Rothstein 2003:198p

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- Prash Tonle village in Sankhor Commune, Svay Teap District, Svay Rieng Province.
 Survey among the villagers conducted from 2-6 May 2006
- Meloung village in Svay Check commune, Svay Chrum district, Svay Rieng Province. Survey among the villagers conducted from 14-20 May 2006

8 Appendix A – the Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Your responses to this survey are guaranteed to be kept strictly anonymous. The questions about your background characteristics are only used to verify a valid representation of your village and will not be passed on.

Village:..... Age:..... Sex: Male... Female... Monthly income:.....
Level of education..... Occupation..... Literacy.....

1. Which of the following statements would you most agree with:
 - Most people can be trusted
 - You need to be very careful when dealing with people

I now want to ask you about your trust in different groups of people. How much do you trust the following?

2. People in your family?
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all
3. Your neighbours?
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all
4. People you know well, both within the village and outside?
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all
5. Other people in your village?
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all
6. People from villages outside of your own?
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all
7. People from Phnom Penh?
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all

Now I will make a few statements and would like you to say whether you in general agree or disagree:

8. If you would drop something valuable around here and someone saw it, they would return it to you?
Agree to a large extent - Agree to a small extent - Disagree to some extent - Totally disagree

9. If you got sick, somebody would help you take care of the family/farm?
Agree to a large extent - Agree to a small extent - Disagree to some extent - Totally disagree

11. Most people would help others, even if they would not benefit from it
Agree to a large extent - Agree to a small extent - Disagree to some extent - Totally disagree

I now want to ask you about your trust in different institutions. Always ask follow up question about if they had experience of it or why they feel this way.

13 a If you were in a land dispute with a neighbor, do you trust the village chief to treat you both fair and impartial when solving the conflict? Yes / No

13 b In general, how would you describe your trust in the village chief?
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all

14 a. If you were in a land dispute with a neighbor, do you trust the commune chief to treat you both fair and impartial when solving the conflict? Yes / No

14 b. In general, how would you describe your trust in the village chief?
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all

15. What is your relationship with the village chief and commune chief?
Family, friend, do not know him personally or others?

16 a. In general, how would you describe your trust in the police
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all

16 b. Why do you trust/distrust the Police?

17. In general, how would you describe your trust in the Government in Phnom Penh
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all

18a. Do you trust the provincial court to treat both parties in a fair and impartial way?
Yes / No

18b In general, how would you describe your trust in the court system?
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all

19a. Do you trust the public schools to treat the students fair and equal (for instance regarding education credentials)?
Yes / No

19b In general, how would you describe your trust in the public schools?
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all

20. In general, how would you describe your trust in the health care system?
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all

21. In general, how would you describe your trust in the local pagoda?
Do you trust them: very much – much – not so much – not at all

22 Are you a member in any voluntary association? Yes... No...
If yes, which association.....

9 Appendix B - Village Trust Table

<i>Survey Questions:</i>	<i>Percent of “Trusters”</i>	<i>Percent of “Trusters”</i>
1. Most people can be trusted	72% (36/50)	66%(6/9)
2. Family	100% (50/50)	100% (9/9)
3. Neighbors	88% (44/50)	100% (9/9)
4. Friends	94% (47/50)	88% (8/9)
5. Villagers	88% (44/50)	11%(1/9)
6. Outsiders	20% (10/50)	11% (1/9)
7. Phnom Penh	10% (6/50)	0% (0/9)
	Trust the Village Chief	Do not trust the Village Chief

10 Appendix C – The Thesis Visualized

Page 14 “...a majority of female responses since the men were ploughing...”



Page 12 “...without means of transport, mobility decreases...”



Page 26 “...some were making palm sugar out of palm juice...”



Page 26 “...others made baskets and wall-sections out of palm leaf...”



Page 25 “...when a small school was built ...”

