

Albernoa Revisited: Tracking Social Capital in a Portuguese Village

Renato Miguel do Carmo

Abstract

In the field of rural studies, social capital has been seen as an important factor that can contribute decisively to the development of rural communities. The aim of this article is to identify some of the social problems that are affecting the capacity of one particular village to generate and improve new forms of social capital. Albernoa is a Portuguese village situated in the region of Alentejo (southern Portugal). Over the last three decades some profound and contradictory changes have occurred in the rural environment: progressive population ageing, continuous depopulation and, simultaneously, the recent trend towards suburbanisation. Internally, the population of Albernoa has profound difficulty in reinforcing the community ties capable of organizing and improving on some collective projects, like the local sports club. The residents are deeply divided in terms of collective trust. Some local leaders complain about this problem, which affects the levels of social capital among the villagers.

Introduction

In the second half of the 1970s the Portuguese sociologist Afonso de Barros (1986) characterised the traditional system that was dominant in the Alentejo region¹ in a study carried out in Albernoa, a village located in Baixo Alentejo, 20 km from the city of Beja. Like most Mediterranean villages of that time in the Alentejo, the population of Albernoa earned its living mainly on the surrounding estates. Links to urban areas were fairly residual.

The traditional system that dominated the structures of villages and social life in the Alentejo until 1974 can be defined in terms of two distinct views presented by two writers who studied the region in detail, namely, Orlando Ribeiro and Afonso de Barros. In his best-known book entitled *Portugal, o Mediterrâneo e o Atlântico* (*Portugal: the Mediterranean and the Atlantic*), the geographer portrayed a population concentrated in the Alentejo in which 'villages grew, becoming drowned in the vast areas of large holdings that provided work for thousands of agricultural workers' (*ganhões*) (Ribeiro 1998, p. 96). Sometimes the villages that had more land would have small vegetable allotments with smallholdings (*ferragiais, courelas*) around them,

but generally the agricultural estates began and ended at the borders of the village itself.

The other image can be said to define *latifundismo*, a concept used by Barros (1986), Alier (1968) and Sevilla-Guzman (1980) as a system that is deeply hegemonic and does not provide socioeconomic alternatives to most its population. According to Barros, this can be characterised as 'a system of agriculture which is based primarily on workers who, for the most part, are paid for working on the land, but beyond this, there are few alternatives and these people had either no land or very little land indeed' (1986, p. 181). Closely linked to the hegemony of the agricultural sector, one must also consider 'the predominance of casual labour as opposed to the occupational/professional make-up of the labour market in the Alentejo' (Barros 1986, p. 206).

The men and women who lived in the villages worked on holdings that were either within the villages themselves or at least close by. Work in the agricultural sector did not provide a permanent source of income for most villagers because there were always times of intense employment when the land was ploughed or during harvest times, but then there were long months of unemployment when there was no available alternative work whatsoever.

In the last 30 years profound structural changes have occurred in rural environments that have decisively affected this classical image. In fact, in 2003 we had the opportunity to revisit Albernoa and it was evident that the village had changed significantly, both in terms of its structure and social life.

Two types of method were used in our study, a survey of the village residents in 2003 and interviews with 13 villagers. For the survey we selected 145 individuals from different family backgrounds. About 45 per cent of the residents in the parish (according to the statistics from the 2001 General Population Census) filled in the questionnaires. Using the data obtained, we were able to characterise 370 of the people making up the family groups in question. This figure represented about 42 per cent of the people who lived in the village in 2001 (a total of 890 according to the same census). Around 53 per cent of our sample were women. The selection of people for the 13 interviews was based upon two criteria; awareness of the broad heterogeneity of some social characteristics like age, gender and professional status and people who were interviewed were involved in civic activities, that is, in village life.

Thirty years after the study by Afonso de Barros we can say that Albernoa has witnessed the effective dismantling of a whole range of its public and private services together with a high level of depopulation and the ageing of the its residents. In light of all these regressive aspects, it is important to enquire into the associative capacity of the village and whether it is sufficient to be able to promote diverse forms of social capital that could help to mobilise the community through local initiatives. Therefore the aim of this article is to find out if a village that is losing its population and many of its traditional functions can manage to take actions to reverse the inevitable trend towards marginalisation.

This article proceeds as follows. Firstly, it reviews features of social capital and trust. Then it synthesises the main structural factors that have caused the social changes in the village. Finally, it focuses on an analysis of two specific associative projects as a way of finding out if they were successful in increasing the levels of social capital in the community.

Social capital: relationships and trust

Social capital can be regarded as a socioeconomic value embedded in interpersonal relationships and forged by social networks to achieve mutual goals that favour a group of individuals or a community (Shuller *et al.* 2000). Two sociologists are behind the concept of social capital, P. Bourdieu (1980) and J. Coleman (1990). Although their concepts are different, both conceive of social capital as an important resource for relatively circumscribed individuals or groups resulting from the level of inter-connectivity of their relations and social networks. Bourdieu (1980) specifically mentions having a durable network of relations of inter-knowledge and inter-recognition. In this sense, social capital is based on persistence over time of the networks that feed on the reciprocal relations based on the sharing of certain norms and values. In other words, individuals interact according to their expectations of experiencing personal, social or economic gains from belonging to that network.

According to Robert Putnam (1993, 2000) and Nan Lin (2001), the central idea behind the theory of social capital is the value of social networks that allow people to make contact with one another and ultimately lead to increased productivity and wellbeing in a group or a community. Social links or ties between individuals can be characterised according to how strong they are.

Mark Granovetter (1973) was one of the first writers to distinguish between strong and weak social ties. The former occur in social circles that involve close social relationships (such as, for example, a group of friends, neighbours, co-workers and family). The latter are more tenuous, sporadic ties that develop among people we associate with, but to whom we do not feel closely attached. In a study of social mobility the author draws our attention to the importance of weak social ties when trying to get a job and emphasises how important they are in climbing the social ladder, because they contribute decisively to achieving certain goals. In this sense, weak social ties tend to be more heterogeneous than strong ones.

Apart from social networks and relationships, another determining factor concerning social capital is trust: 'social capital and trust are highly systemic, with a strong complementarity between the various sources of reliability, in institutions and individual relationships' (Nooteboom 2007, p. 49). The capacity to create social ties is aimed at achieving mutual goals that rely on relationships based on trust. Without this secure foothold (Giddens 1991) it is simply not possible for individuals to develop and nurture mutual relationships, at least not those of a medium-term or long-term nature: instead relationships become ephemeral and unstable and tend to depend more upon individual than on mutual motivations (Molenaers 2003).

According to Putnam (2000), social capital can take two different forms: bonding and bridging. The former reinforces social identities and maintains homogeneity among people who live in similar situations (such as members of the same family, friends and neighbours), while the latter tends to include individuals and groups from different social and cultural backgrounds who are not bound by any strong ties (Field 2003; Halpern 2005).

For Putnam, the dynamics created by a high level of social capital mainly depends on the associative capacities of its population. However, according to Michael Woolcock (2008), 'in order to accommodate the range of outcomes associated with social

capital, it is necessary to recognise the multi-dimensional nature of its sources' (Woolcock 2008, p. 276). Therefore it is essential to incorporate a vertical dimension capable of balancing the meaning of the two forms of capital defined by Putman, which emphasise the value of horizontal networks and relationships. In contrast, Woolcock identifies another dimension (linking social capital) that promotes 'the capacity to leverage resources, ideas, and information from formal institutions beyond the community' (Woolcock 2008, p. 277).

Moreover, certain authors (such as Evans 1996; Heller 1996; Woolcock 1998, 2008; Harriss 2001; Rothstein 2005) defend the notion that, beyond the existence of consistent, fundamental social ties, the ability to generate social capital also depends on transverse and vertical social networks and connections among the citizens themselves and on public and private organisations. From this perspective, the state (and local councils) play a key role in mobilising the private sector to put social restructuring and rural development programmes into action. For example, through the interdependence of the public and private sectors of the community it would be possible to generate lasting forms of social capital in rural communities to promote the right conditions for them to develop.

In fact, in the field of rural studies, the concept of social capital has been used to describe a factor that can contribute decisively to the development and progress of rural communities. Regarded in this way, it refers to the potential outcomes of interactions between various regulatory bodies (internal and/or external) that can affect different layers of these communities at micro, meso and macro levels and as such must be taken into account when trying to redevelop and revive communities (Falk and Kilpatrick 2000; Bowles and Gintis 2002; David and Malavassi 2004; Svendsen and Svendsen 2004).

Nevertheless, some writers in the field of territorial and rural studies see social capital as something that is dependant upon how effectively political entities and the public services work together, as well as the collective capacity of these local authorities to communicate competently with one another and therefore put local development initiatives into action (Rydin and Holman 2004; Lee *et al.* 2005).

First and foremost, in the case of marginal areas of rural communities that have a very weak social infrastructure it should be the public institutions that take the responsibility for organising and implementing political measures and getting their local representatives in these communities to take an active role in putting community projects into action (Cecchi 2009; Magnani and Struffi 2009). The notion of embeddedness (Evans 1996; Woolcock 1998; Estrada 2005) is used by several authors to define this kind of synergy between institutions and local authorities, as well as the implementation of projects by local representatives to ensure the future of their communities: 'social capital inheres, not just in civil society, but in an enduring set of relationships that spans the public-private divide' (Evans 1996, p. 1122).

Throughout this study we see the huge difficulties faced in a village that has suffered serious socio-demographic problems when trying to put into action local development projects that have been started by specific individuals and small local groups. According to the authors who have embraced the notion of the importance of social capital for the rehabilitation of community life, the central idea behind this concept is the 'thought that social relations have value' (Anderson and Bell 2003,

p. 234). But the question that should be raised is: what kind of value are we talking about? For some authors the key to this concept is the capacity to generate social networks, while for others the central issue is the production of reciprocal, generalised trust or the maintenance of common values and norms.

There are extensive perspectives that emphasise different aspects of social capital and use distinctive qualitative or quantitative methods to measure them correctly (Van Deth 2003). Thus, there are a variety of valid approaches to measure the production of social capital, but all of them must take into account the social profile of the places and communities that are being studied. For instance, regarding the peculiar reality of a small rural village like Albernoa, it is very difficult to identify the social dynamics (such as the networks, values, norms and trust) that are really building up their capacity to generate forms of social capital.

In fact, in places like this, which have suffered from depopulation and a continuous ageing process, it is very difficult to define the meaning of this concept without carrying out the sociological exercise of tracing the tracks of social capital. As a way of achieving this we looked for the significance of particular actions and individual motivations that have built up potential platforms of social capital in the village. So, it seems important to consider the individual dimension of social capital (Shucksmith 2000). This article pursues this perspective as a way of detecting the tiny dynamics developed by a restricted number of people in the community (McAreavey 2006), whose social attachment in the development of specific associative projects contrasts with the general inactivity and social division in the village as a whole. One type of social involvement comes from the leaders of local associations whose impact on the village is relatively well known.

Albernoa: the case study

Barros identified Albernoa as one of the villages that was part of this traditional system during the 1970s. At the beginning of 1974 he surveyed 355 households. The survey consisted mainly of questions on the structural components of the rural population, such as social class, spatial mobility, migration and agricultural activities. Normally, the residents lived and worked within or very close to the village. Apart from daily trips to and from the fields where they worked, any mobility beyond these routines was negligible (and people who worked in Beja were few and far between). This was the picture in Albernoa until the first few months of 1974. The only difference from previous decades was that there was an exponential increase in (e)migration which led to continuous depopulation of the village.

Thirty years after Barros's study we returned to Albernoa and observed huge changes in the social infrastructure that can be described in just a few words. The most obvious of these was how aged the population had become. Currently 36 per cent of the residents are over 65 (see Table 1). Since 1940 it had lost a massive 75 per cent of its population (National population censuses from 1940 to 2001) (Table 1). Another obvious change was in how the village's social services and facilities had diminished. Apart from three cafés, a handful of grocer's shops, an old people's home, a primary school and a nursery, the village had lost a host of services, such as

Table 1: *Population ageing in Albernoa (% gain or loss)*

	1991	2001	1991–2001
0–14	14.7	11.1	–29.3
15–64	56.6	52.6	–13.4
Over 65	28.8	36.4	+18.2

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estatística (1991 and 2001).

a permanent GP, a pharmacy, different types of shops and local businesses, some industry and a police station.

The disappearance of almost every form of employment in the agricultural sector represents one of the most marked changes that the working population of Albernoa had experienced in the last three decades. According to the study by Barros in 1974, almost 61 per cent of the active population of Albernoa were employed in agriculture. This percentage has dropped to the extent to 10 per cent in the 1991 census and to just 6 per cent by 2001.² This profound change in the occupational structure of the village has two basic causes. One is the modernisation and mechanisation of agriculture that has made most manual labour redundant. The other is that most of the population do not own any farmland and subsistence farming is not viable because of the difficulty in articulating agricultural and other work.

All these factors put together mean that in reality almost nobody in the villages works in agriculture any more. Currently, working life is influenced by another phenomenon that has changed the face of the labour market, that is, mobility. Looking for non-agricultural work and consumer needs outside the village means that people have had to get used to new urban lifestyles, which has led to a new trend of people commuting from the village to Beja. Now most of the working population earn their living outside the village and, according to a survey carried out in 2003, this figure is as high as 58 per cent. Approximately a third of the village's working population works in Beja and 26 per cent in other places.

There is also a high frequency of people travelling to Beja to do their shopping and seek other services. Overall 57 per cent of those who took part in the survey said that they regularly went out of their local districts (a few times a month, at least) to the supermarkets in Beja, where they would do most of their household shopping. On an equally regular basis, another 48 per cent said they went to banks, 48 per cent to pharmacies and 44 per cent to health centres (Table 2).

These figures indicate that the decline of the village is a contemporary phenomenon caused by concentrated urban development and socioeconomic progress (mainly in the sectors of business, retail and public services) in Beja. The truth is that these changes offer a variety of public services that cannot be found in rural districts, which is why they attract more and more people from villages like Albernoa.

These profound changes represent a very real rupture when compared to the traditional rural life of *latifundism* described by Barros. Traditional village life was relatively close knit and remote from the city and urban lifestyles. People lived in the villages and worked on the surrounding farms and holdings. Very few regularly set

Table 2: *Frequency of commuting to Beja, 2003 (% of all respondents)*

	Every day	Several days a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	Never	Total
Supermarkets	1.4	13.8	41.4	6.9	36.6	100.0
Banks	0.7	5.5	42.1	14.5	37.2	100.0
Health centres	1.4	2.1	22.1	32.4	42.1	100.0
Pharmacy	0.7	2.1	40.7	18.6	37.9	100.0
Restaurants	5.5	3.4	9.7	11.7	69.7	100.0
Pubs and discos	–	0.7	4.8	6.2	88.3	100.0
Cinema	–	1.4	4.8	11.0	82.8	100.0

Source: Survey (2003).

foot in the city. On the other hand, there was a strong interdependence between the villages and the farmland, which meant that most of the labourers were recruited in the villages. This system broke down completely and was replaced by another that can be said to be its opposite. This is what happens nowadays as the villages open up to the cities and become more and more dependant upon them for their existence, both in socioeconomic and cultural terms. At the same time, the village is turning its back on farming because manual labourers are no longer needed on such a large scale.

It is clear that the village has undergone a series of profound changes that have transformed it into a much more complex place of distinct and often contradictory processes. The fact is that, despite the ongoing ageing of the village population, dynamic urban changes are also taking place not just in the areas of employment but also and especially in the villagers' lifestyle. This picture leads to the realisation that one of the key problems of the socioeconomic situation in Albernoa has to do with its excessive dependence on Beja. Urbanisation has swept through the village at such a rate that it is true to say that it has not only partially destroyed its traditional structures, but has also led the village further and further away from agriculture and working the surrounding farmland. By opening themselves up to the world outside, particularly to the city, the villagers have been forced to change their way of life. Therefore, the village has not only suffered continuous depopulation, but has also experienced a whole diversity of changes that have altered a number of its sociological characteristics. The most obvious change is the generation gap, because it is through the younger working generation that modern life has been filtering into and changing the face of traditional village life. While the older generation is not involved directly in these processes, it is certainly at a disadvantage when it comes to mobility between one place and another. For example, most of the old people go only 'occasionally' to Beja for consuming practices: to supermarkets (66 per cent), to banks (63 per cent) and to restaurants (94 per cent). In contrast, the percentage of the youngest that go 'occasionally' is almost irrelevant: to supermarkets (3 per cent), to banks (7 per cent) and to restaurants (40 per cent).

It has become clear, therefore, that what constitutes urban living and modern life is not a uniform process that affects day-to-day village life. These developments are appropriate to different settings and factors and have different meanings that are

Table 3: *Places and kinds of sociability in the village, by sex (%)*

	Men	Women
Talking to the neighbours every day	75.4	56.8
Talking near home	66.7	83.0
Talking in a village street	91.2	87.5
Talking in the grocery shop	15.8	52.3
Talking in the café	70.2	20.5

Source: Survey (2003).

often contradictory. Hence there are distinct changes in the dynamics of village life that do not only go against the grain of the linear evolution of the demographic structure of the village (accentuated by the rapidly ageing population), but also serve to make everyday social practices more complex.

Opening the village up to the outside world does not simply imply a homogeneous adoption of what we call a modern, urban way of life. Looking at the roles of men and women, for example, the men continue to play a much more public role, while the women tend to spend most of their time in more domestic spaces. Traditionally there has been a strict division of roles, which is evident in ways of life and the occupation of spaces in villages. This has resulted, for the most part, in the application and continuous redefinition of the code of *honour-shame* (Pitt-Rivers 1971), which, in most traditional, rural societies – especially in the Mediterranean ones – ‘has represented a kind of domination of social groups who are better off and particularly the domination of men in these groups over their respective wives’ (Silva 2003, p. 69). Moreover, nowadays, even though this situation does not arise as much, there are still some divisive elements that do not respect the diverse forms of socialisation in village life.

In fact, as far as women are concerned, it is generally true to say that they are not less involved in spatial mobility to Beja than their male counterparts. Instead, in the heart of village life, women tend to confine their social interaction to specific spaces like the home, (or their neighbours’ homes), or local grocery shops. Men, on the other hand, continue to dominate other places like cafés, which are still predominantly male domains. Hence, even though the village has not lost many of its social meeting places, those that do exist have become differentiated in terms of the social characteristics of the people who frequent them. (Table 3)

Urbanisation, therefore, cannot be regarded merely in hegemonic, unilateral terms. On the contrary, it is a multidimensional phenomenon that depends on factors and relationships between a variety of people (groups and individuals) who are trying to fit into different social practices and ways of life.

Associations and civil participation

Civil participation is one of the most important forms of social capital (Putnam 1993, 2000). Among the various ways of participating, belonging to an association is one of

the aspects considered to be representative of the dynamic, cohesive social life of a community. In Albernoa there are some five organisations which could be said to be community oriented. These are the two social centres (one for men and one for women), the football club, the youth club and the community centre. Considering the number of residents, our first impression would suggest that this number of associations shows a degree of dynamism. However when we look at the results of the survey, we find that only around a third of their membership (37 per cent) consists of people who belong to one or more associations. We identified only 75 people in the 145 families and 74 per cent of those are members of associations or organisations in Albernoa. The club and community centres have the most members.

The fact that so few people are involved in associations and the social life of their community was confirmed by the people who run (or ran) some of these organisations. As we will see from the interviews with the leaders of two associations, this lack of interest and participation in associations is a reflection of the apathy and mistrust that residents feel towards social life in their community.

All in all, there have been a series of initiatives in recent years in an attempt to revitalise existing associations or alternatively to propose new facilities for leisure and socialising. The most important examples were getting the local football club up and running and the opening of a women's' social club. We therefore focused on these two projects in an attempt to understand the reasons why others have failed, by interviewing the directors of these initiatives.

The football club

'O Albernoense' football club was practically inactive until 2001, when a group of people drew up a list of objectives not only to revamp the sporting activities of the club, but also to develop a project that could involve the entire community in a whole series of activities. The idea was to transform the club into a collective organisation that would unite the sporting activities and so reinforce the cultural side of the club. It was thus decided to get the youth and senior football teams, clay pigeon shooting and other sports activities up and running and, on the cultural side, to form a children's theatre group and a choir. In order to achieve these objectives it would be necessary to join forces so that they could buy the basic equipment needed to play sports and expand the existing club facilities. This would be based in the old police station.

As far as the sports equipment was concerned, the managing committee was able to get sufficient funds together to buy a small bus and sports gear and kits for the football teams, among other things. As to their second objective, another proposal was made to both the local council and the head of the community centre asking them for permission to use the community centre's facilities so that the new club could put them to good use.

During the term of office of the committee in charge at the time³ the chairman was voted off the board due to personal rifts with the other members, which led to a certain amount of stagnation in achieving the goals of the initial project. Meanwhile, the project is still alive, although the former and the current chairmen of the committee feel that the project has failed to mobilise the population had been hoped at first. The

money invested and the better results obtained by the football teams have not managed to involve people as much as had been hoped, and they had not succeeded in revitalising the village. An indicator of this lack of participation is the number of members (63), which had not increased significantly.

As far as the current chairman (interviewed in March 2003) and his predecessors were concerned, one of the motives for lack of participation in the club has to do with the mistrust felt by the people in the village:

Q. But why do you think that people don't want to join the club?

A. People don't join the club because they have probably lost trust, or perhaps the reason lies in the fact that the club was founded 10 or 12 years ago, but then it stopped, stagnated. There was nobody running it, there were no meetings, there were no projects and so people became rather disillusioned and sceptical. (President of the club, aged 42)

Q. But do you think that the people who are discouraged don't believe in this type of project very much?

A. Good grief! I can tell you one thing. As far as the sports' club goes, we took over in September 2001, we organised it, we collected some trophies, we kept records. We needed a place to meet so that we didn't have to go to the café. I got hold of some furniture here in a local shop owned by the local council and so on and so forth. ... We have managed to get things up and running, more or less and we are going to organise a campaign to get new members. We got lots of responses saying things like 'hey guys ... keep up the good work and then I'll see' ... first they want to see to believe. (Former president of the club, aged 45)

Trust is a prerequisite if one is to generate some social capital (Rothstein 2005; Nooteboom 2007) that would enable and motivate a group of people in such a way as to make them want to get involved in a common project. This case is a good illustration of the difficulty that some communities have in undertaking sociocultural projects that might invert the tendency towards becoming alienated from the collective wellbeing of the community. This situation has evolved, to some extent, because the population is ageing. This necessarily reduces its capacity to take initiatives and accentuates dependence on the city, which provides people with a means of socialising and finding entertainment and leisure beyond the village borders.

All in all, when asked about why they lacked trust, the interviewees mentioned the divisions that were latent in their village. A lack of trust in certain individuals who were in charge of the associations and who might be taking advantage of them was one of the aspects that they referred to. According to them, this lack of trust could be resolved only through strong leadership that could demonstrate and prove to the people the directors' good intentions and trustworthiness. This was the only way, through a personal example, to construct a platform of trust that could inspire people to get involved in a common project:

I also think that the problem with Albernoa is the lack of leadership and those who are at the head of projects need someone to lead them, someone to give them a broader vision of things, someone who is forward looking and motivates them. I think that I could do that and I believe that in the past 14 months I have more or less managed to do this in Albernoa and, moreover, I got on well with the people and I managed to motivate them and all that. ... Often it is not just a case of doing something, because if people say that they are going to do something and see it through, they still need someone to push them, and that is where the problem lies, in my view. (Former president of the club, aged 45)

The women's' social club

The foundation of a women's' social club began with the idea of an association of nine women. In 1995 they succeeded in achieving their goal of setting up a centre for leisure and free time activities, which was principally aimed at retired women in the village. The centre was already aware of the existence of several suitable meeting places and it set itself up in Albernoa's former police station. The interior of the building was done up reasonably well to accommodate a tea room and another room for leisure activities like sewing and games. The products that the women made at the centre, especially needlework, were sold on a stand at the Pensioner's Fair that was held every year in mid-June. This event was organised by the local municipality and also involved the other communities in the district of Beja.

We interviewed the president and the secretary of the association, as both were aware that the centre was losing its membership, mainly because of two factors. The members of the club did not get on with one another and other social spaces had also become available. In fact, the idea of a tea room began from a need to create places in the village where people could meet and socialise, because there was only one café in Albernoa. With the opening of two new cafés (one of which was a pastry shop), the tea room began to lose customers.

The things we do [in the social club] has always been a bit lame, embroidery, lace (each to the best of her ability). And at the end of June ... we have a fair here, an old people's fair, which is where we show our work and sell it to help our day centre. There are only nine ladies. ... Only nine of us are on the committee registered at the notary ... normally there are not many more, but people can't be bothered, which is why the village has been going down instead of up. (Secretary of the social club, aged 77)

The other problem was that rifts were beginning to open up among the women who ran the association. These problems arose from the question of the money coming into the club from the sale of products made mainly in the sewing groups. Another reason was that there was often nobody available to run the tea room (it was closed during the winter of 2003).

The association consists of nine people and only one of those nine was available [to run the tea room], Mrs A. [the secretary]. Poor thing, she couldn't be there every day. Those two or three hours every day were tiring for her. She's almost 80, I think. ... It was a good thing that we did. It was done with the best of intentions but it's just that we are not managing to balance our lives with the tea room. It actually makes me very sad. If we have to close the tea room, that is really something that I don't want and Mrs A. doesn't want to either. (President of the social club, aged 40)

We can conclude from these two examples that in the past few years there have been a number of initiatives to set up clubs and associations in the community, which shows that the village is capable of generating some social capital. In addition to the football club and community centres, there has been an investment in new social spaces like cafés. It is also clear, however, that these projects suffer from a certain degree of stagnation, which is due, among other factors, to the divisions that have developed and a certain lack of trust on the part of the villagers. As we saw in the examples of the football club and the women's centre, this problem of trust resulted

Table 4: *Helping the neighbours by age and sex (%)*

Helping the neighbours	Age (%)				Sex (% of all respondents)	
	Up to 35	36–55	56–65	Over 65	Male	Female
Often	0.0	10.7	4.0	0.0	7.0	0.0
Sometimes	43.3	42.9	40.0	37.1	40.4	39.8
Occasionally	16.7	10.7	28.0	11.3	17.5	13.6
Never	40.0	35.7	28.0	51.6	35.1	46.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey (2003).

in the members of the committee falling out with one another and their consequent inability to motivate people to participate and make a success of the projects.

A divided village: parallel circuits

During the fieldwork in Albernoa we found a general picture of a divided village where people did not have any strong routine practices to help each other. One example of this is of the degree of mutual help between neighbours. Most of them (irrespective of age and gender) show low rates of interpersonal solidarity (Table 4). In fact, this rural community has undergone different social transformations, described above, that have increased this development of relatively closed relationships.

As mentioned before, social capital takes two distinct forms – bonding (exclusive capital) and bridging (inclusive capital). These can be used to understand the general mistrust and social closure in the population of Albernoa. Using the data, we can analyse how internal and external interaction in the village is organised. To begin with the latter form of capital, which characterises the way in which social ties and networks are set up in the community, we can say that the village has opened itself up to new spaces, especially to Beja. This case study has demonstrated that the links forged between the village and the city are, for most of the villagers, utilitarian and instrumental and are used to fulfil bureaucratic and shopping needs. We can say, therefore, that bridging social capital does not bring about much in terms of change or progress for most of the people who commute to Beja on a regular basis. On the other hand, the small amount of capital that is generated is channelled to particular social groups (such as the young man) who are not particularly willing or able to build social bridges with other groups (women and the elderly) that would enable people to participate in new ways of community life.

The social networks and relationships established in the village form types of so-called parallel circuits between groups and different spaces. These social circuits do not usually intersect or relate to one another. Indeed, we identified a deep division between different social realities, so much so that we found very different worlds coexisting in the same village. These worlds are very different from one another and are determined by a series of sociological factors (such as different generations,

different roles and relationships between people in general and mobility between one place and another).

These different worlds are the cause of the fragmentation of social networks and they often lead to social division and lack of trust which, as we have pointed out throughout this study, represent the greatest obstacles in generating social capital. Exclusive social capital (bonding) is not only incapable of capitalising on ties established outside the village, but it also stifles the social initiatives within the village that had been set up to try and bring people together and form social ties. It can be said that bridging social capital is channelled into certain closed circuits (that is, restricted spaces and specific social projects) and becomes fragmented within these same circuits, thus quashing any benefits that may be gained from joint ventures.

Conclusion

When asked about the future of Albernoa, most its citizens say that they cannot see any reversal of the current trends towards decline. According to them, the symptoms of demographic desertion and the breakdown of social services and infrastructures is going to get worse in the coming years. The most probable scenario is a village in which there are no young people left and a population of even more elderly people. Around 76 per cent of those interviewed in the survey predicted that most young people living in the village at that time would leave in the future and only 4 per cent thought that Albernoa could attract young people from the outside.

As far as the future of the local economy is concerned, the outlook is very bleak. In truth, there is enormous resistance when it comes to the potential for developing concrete plans that might help to reverse the current situation. As many as 61 per cent of the interviewees thought that local employment would diminish in all fields of work. As few as a third of the population envisaged any increase in employment in Albernoa, with perhaps tourism being one of the few exceptions mentioned.

The future of Albernoa is uncertain. The village is at a crossroads of conflicting processes and realities. On the one hand there is a high proportion of old people and a large-scale demographic exodus but, on the other hand, some socioeconomic progress is evident because the village is opening itself up to urban life. The result of this complexity is partly a more marked separation between different social worlds. The most poignant is the void between the young people and the working population who commute regularly between the village and the city, and the old people and those who do not work and who make up the majority of the village's population. These people tend to confine themselves to life within its perimeters. Other barriers are also in evidence, some of which are more traditional, like the one that separates the social and more public world of the men from the comparatively withdrawn world of the women, who are confined more to the home.

In a village with these characteristics, the possibilities of generating new ways to create social capital that might bring villagers together in joint communal projects are very limited. Throughout the interviews and the survey, it was very difficult to identify dynamics that might generate forms of social capital. In fact, the general social fragmentation and the tendency for social closure described above compelled us to emphasise the individual dimension of social capital as a way to generate a profile of

a few individual actions towards the development of some specific associative projects.

The continuous shrinking of the population and the internal divisions between various social groups are decisive factors that make the success of local initiatives impossible. It is clear that associations and clubs alone are not enough to mobilise the community. In fact, this is not really an issue in Albernoa because it already has a reasonable number of voluntary associations. The problem lies in an inability to create an environment built on trust that would see the various projects through to fulfilling their objectives. In this respect, a number of the interviewees talked about the need for effective articulation of local policies developed mainly by the local authority with private or individual initiatives in the village. In other words, it would make all the difference in the world if the local authorities could get involved in the village's real problems so that action could be taken in accordance with common and joint interests.

Associations and clubs are an essential element of rural development. Throughout our study of Albernoa we witnessed how a small sports club could make a significant impact and be a starting block in mobilising a village. However, initiatives like this need public as well as private support to provide the basic conditions for larger, more dynamic projects.

Notes

- ¹ Latifundium region situated in the south of Portugal.
- ² These figures were proved by a survey that we conducted in 2003 (Carmo 2007).
- ³ The mandate was extended until June 2003.

References

- Alier, J.M. (1968) *La estabilidad del latifundismo* (França: Ruedo Ibérico)
- Anderson, C. and M. Bell (2003) The devil of social capital: a dilemma of American rural sociology. Pp. 232–244 in P. Cloke ed., *Country visions* (Harlow: Pearson Prentice Hall)
- Barros, A. de (1986) *Do latifundismo à reforma agrária. O caso de uma freguesia do Baixo Alentejo* (Oeiras: Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência)
- Bourdieu, P. (1980) Le capital social: notes provisoires. *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 31 pp. 2–3
- Bowles, S. and H. Gintis (2002) Social capital and community governance. *The Economic Journal* 112 (483) pp. 419–436
- Carmo, R.M. (2007) *De aldeia a subúrbio: trinta anos de uma comunidade alentejana* (Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais)
- Cecchi, C. (2009) Social capital in rural areas: public goods and public services. Pp. 47–72 in A. Árnason, M. Shucksmith and J. Vergunst eds, *Comparing rural development. Continuity and change in the countryside of western Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate)
- Coleman, J.S. (1990) *Foundations of social theory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press)
- David, M.B. and L. Malavassi (2004) Social capital and rural development policies: starting point or finishing point? Pp. 421–464 in R. Atria and M. Siles eds, *Social capital and poverty reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean: towards a new paradigm* (Santiago: ECLAC and Michigan State University Press)

- Estrada, E.M. (2005) Capital social y desarrollo en zonas rurales Available online at <http://www.iesaa.csic.es/archivos/documentos-trabajo/2005/13-05.pdf> Accessed 30 September 2009
- Evans, P. (1996) Government action, social capital and development: reviewing the evidence of synergy. *World Development* 24 (6) pp. 1119–1132
- Falk, I. and S. Kilpatrick (2000) ‘What is social capital?’ a study of interaction in a rural community. *Sociologia Ruralis* 40 (1) pp. 87–110
- Field, J. (2003) *Social capital* (London: Routledge)
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modernity* (Oxford: Polity Press)
- Granovetter, M.S. (1973) The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (6) pp. 1361–1380
- Halpern, D. (2005) *Social capital* (Cambridge: Polity Press)
- Harriss, J. (2001) *Depoliticizing development: the World Bank and social capital* (London: Anthem Press)
- Heller, P. (1996) Social capital as a product of class mobilization and state intervention: industrial workers in Kerala, India. *World Development* 24 (6) pp. 1055–1071
- Instituto Nacional de Estatística (2001) *Recenseamento Geral da População e da Habitação* (Lisbon: INE)
- Lee, J., A. Árnason, A. Nightingale and M. Shucksmith (2005) Networking: social capital and identities in European rural development. *Sociologia Ruralis* 45 (4) pp. 271–283
- Lin, N. (2001) *Social capital: a theory of social structure and action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- McAreevey, R. (2006) Getting close to the action: the micro-politics of rural development. *Sociologia Ruralis* 2 (46) pp. 85–101
- Magnani, N. and L. Struffi (2009) Translation sociology and social capital in rural development initiatives. A case study from the Italian Alps. *Journal of Rural Studies* 25 (2) pp. 231–238
- Molenaers, N. (2003) ‘Associations or informal networks?’ social capital and local development practices. Pp. 113–132 in M. Hooghe and D. Stolle eds, *Generating social capital: civil society and institutions in comparative perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan)
- Nooteboom, B. (2007) Social capital, institutions and trust. *Review of Social Economy* 65 (1) pp. 29–53
- Pitt-Rivers, J. (1971) Honra e posição social. Pp. 11–60 in J.G. Peristiany ed. *Honra e Vergonha: Valores das Sociedades Mediterrânicas* (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian)
- Putnam, R. (1993) *Making democracy work: civic traditions in modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press)
- Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community* (New York: Simon & Schuster)
- Ribeiro, O. (1998 [1945]) *Portugal, o Mediterrâneo e o Atlântico* (Lisbon: Sá da Costa)
- Rothstein, B. (2005) *Social traps and the problem of trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Rydin, Y. and N. Holman (2004) Re-evaluating the contribution of social capital in achieving sustainable development. *Local Environment* 9 (2) pp. 117–133
- Sevilla-Guzman, E. (1980) Reflexiones teóricas sobre el concepto sociológico de latifundio. Pp. 29–46 in A. de Barros ed., *A Agricultura Latifundiária na Península Ibérica* (Oeiras: Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência)
- Shucksmith, M. (2000) Endogenous development, social capital, and social inclusion: perspectives from LEADER in the UK. *Sociologia Ruralis* 40 (2) pp. 117–133
- Shuller, T., S. Baron and J. Field (2000) Social capital: a review and critique. Pp. 1–38 in S. Baron, J. Field and T. Schuller eds, *Social capital: critical perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

- Silva, M.C. (2003) Honra-vergonha: código cultural mediterrânico ou forma de controlo de mulheres? Pp. 67–86 in J. Portela and J.C. Caldas eds, *Portugal chão* (Oeiras: Celta Editora)
- Svendsen, G.L.H. and G.T. Svendsen (2004) *The creation and destruction of social capital: entrepreneurship, co-operative movements and institutions* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar)
- Van Deth, J.W. (2003) Measuring social capital: orthodoxies and continuing controversies. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 6 (1) pp. 79–92
- Woolcock, M. (1998) Social capital and economic development: toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. *Theory and Society* 27 (2) pp. 151–208
- Woolcock, M. (2008) Civil society and the formation of social capital. Pp. 269–297 in M.V. Cabral ed., *Sucesso e incesso: escola, economia e sociedade* (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian)

Renato M. do Carmo

Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology

Lisbon University Institute

Lisbon, Portugal

e-mail: renato.carmo@iscte.pt