

SOCIAL CAPITAL, LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRACY: RETHINKING FATSA

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—Abstract—

From 14 October 1979 to 11 July 1980, a very particular experience of direct democracy was experienced in Fatsa, a small Black Sea town in Turkey. An independent candidate, Fikri Sonmez, obtained a very comfortable majority surpassing political parties in local elections. From then on, neighborhood committees were created and considerable public work was realized collectively. The experience was ended by a military operation held in 11 July 1980. This paper tries to examine Fatsa experience with the help of social capital and leadership concepts, aiming to explore and understand the conditions, which favored voluntary public involvement in local political life in Fatsa.

Key words: *Social Capital, Leadership, Participatory Democracy, Fatsa*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Fatsa is a small town with 19,500 inhabitants in the Black Sea region in Turkey. After the death of the mayor in charge in 1979, on 14 October 1979, early local elections were held and, an independent candidate, Fikri Sönmez, known as Fikri the tailor, who was a member of a radical left organization *Dev-Yol* (Revolutionary Path) obtained 61% of the votes and won the office. From then on, mechanisms of direct democracy were introduced in order to make local institutions more responsive to public preferences. Under the outstanding political leadership of Sönmez, the citizens and administration shared responsibilities for common purposes. The local government turned out to be accountable to citizens thanks to neighborhood committees and neighborhood meetings held actively until a military operation on 11 July 1980, during which the mayor and 300 citizens were taken into custody. Two months later, on 12 September 1980, the

armed forces seized control of the country in a military coup. This communication aims to examine Fatsa's experience with the help of social capital and leadership concepts and to understand the conditions at the time which favored voluntary public involvement in local political life in Fatsa.

2. SOCIAL CAPITAL AND LEADERSHIP

The launch of the social capital concept as research agenda and policy discussion has been due to the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1986), James Coleman (1988,1990) and Robert Putnam (1993,2000). Bourdieu and Coleman define social capital as a range of resources available to individuals thanks to their participation in social networks (Herreros,2004:6). Bourdieu (1986:248) defined social capital as the "aggregate of real or potential resources that are associated to the possession of durable network of more or less institutionalized relations of mutual acquaintance and recognition". Participation in social networks generates resources such as the acquisition of information, obligations of reciprocity derived from systems of mutual trust or the use of cooperative social forms. In sum, the access of individuals to resources of social capital depends on their participation in some forms of social relation (Foley and Edwards,1999:166; Herreros,2004:6). According to Herreros (2004:7), social capital comprises two resources: "obligations of reciprocity (lack of resources) associated with a relation of trust and information derived from social relations", like associations. Although the analysis of trust is crucial for the social capital research agenda, trust is not in itself social capital (Herreros,2004:7). Social networks, as voluntary associations, engender relations based on trust. If one person cooperates with a co-member of his association, this cooperation is based on the trustful expectation that his co-member will reciprocate this cooperative behavior. Benevolent behavior toward another person will be recompensed by similar behavior on the part of that person.

Another concept primordial to understand Fatsa is leadership. Burns defines leadership "as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations - the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations - of both leaders and followers. And the genius of leadership lies in the manner in which leaders see and act on their own and their follower's values and motivations" (Burns,1978:18-19). The leader responds to the followers' needs with common values, goals and motives. These shared values constitute the source of the leader's transforming power (Fairholm,2001) as well as his or her legitimacy. There is one other reason for discussing leadership, which refers to the link between the leadership and the question of local democracy. As it has been

stated by Haus&Sweeting (2006:269-270) “if urban governance is at least partially *constructed* by local actors, and if political leaders, endowed with resources stemming from political legitimacy, formal power and social capital, play a key role within this field of actors [...] we should be interested in the possible normative-semantic field within which these leaders act and communicate”. Local political leadership and representative democracy more generally cannot be viewed in isolation from citizen participation and community involvement. According to Barber (2003:239), “three special kinds of leadership are pertinent to ‘strong democracy’: transitional leadership on the model of the founder; facilitating leadership as a foil for natural hierarchy and a guarantor of participatory institutions; and moral leadership as a source of community”.

On the other hand, participatory democracy demands communicative interactions of citizens for the creation, articulation and promotion of the common good, as its basic assumption relies on the idea that the citizens are best placed to decide about the common good (Barber,2003; Fishkin,1991; Pateman,1970; Haus&Sweeting, 2006). Although leadership and participatory democracy may be considered as contradictory at first sight, transforming leadership refers to the capacity to initiate a collective action for a common goal. So, it is used in the sense of an interactive relation between the leader and the citizens which leads to a deliberation and public action. According to Barber, “[p]olitics in the participatory mode does not choose between or merely ratify values whose legitimacy is a matter of prior record. It makes preferences and opinions earn legitimacy by forcing them to run the gauntlet of public deliberation and public judgment. [...] For this reason there can be no strong democratic legitimacy without ongoing talk” (Barber,2003:136). Common decision-making is connected to the common good because of prior deliberations. Thus, “ ‘common work’ may generate a kind of pre-political sense for taking on the views of others” (Haus&Sweeting,2006:279) “ ‘Common work’ , as the probably most *communitarian* dimension of participatory strategies, can be understood not only as an attempt to activate citizens for civic engagement, but also as a channel of participation in constructing the common good of local society” (Haus&Sweeting, 2006:280). Moreover, the leaders “might be interested in the involvement of the broader population, in order to overcome resistance to their policy agenda within the core institutions of the local political and administrative system. They could well believe that there is a kind of ‘hidden consensus’ between themselves and the citizens ‘out there’ whereas councilors and bureaucrats are far too concerned with cultivating their organizational self-interest or serving specific clienteles, and that this hidden consensus will be

revealed if citizens are given a louder voice” (Haus&Sweeting,2006:278-279). Indeed, the Fatsa case confirm this assertion very well as we will mention later.

3. FATSA: A DREAM ENDED UP IN A NIGHMARE

As soon as Sönmez was elected, the seven neighborhoods of the town were divided into eleven sub neighborhoods and a public committee was created for each sub neighborhood. From 3 to 7 committee members were elected in each sub neighborhood where from 200 to 400 people attended the meetings. The number of candidates for committees was up to twenty in some cases (Aksakal,2007a: 93,133). Regular meetings were organized every two or three months in each sub neighborhood. A ‘draft work program for the municipality’ prepared by the Mayor and the employees of the municipality was discussed, modified and adopted. Then the floor was given over to the public under the mediation of the employees of the Public Relations Department. The problems cited by the citizens were classified according to their priority and eventual possibilities of solution were discussed. During the regular sub neighborhood meetings, the mayor presented a detailed financial account concerning the activities of the municipality (Aksakal,2007a:40,105,171). The accountability of the administration and the deliberation process produced a positive effect on citizens’ incentive to participate in local affairs. Having information about where their money was spent motivated them to ask for the satisfaction of their needs and to demand that their priorities be taken into consideration (Aksakal,2007a:95). The decisions of these committees were adopted by the municipal council and put in to execution by the municipality. All local issues and even personal conflicts (vendettas, private property border disputes, other property conflicts, girl’s elopement cases, gambling and drugs, family problems like domestic violence) were brought to the committees by citizens. Indeed, the committees worked as local ombudsmen and in most cases the conflicts were successfully resolved there in a friendly way. The committees had a positive role in eliminating the male-dominance in the local society and encouraging the equal treatment of women. This is why women had a great sympathy for Fikri Sönmez.

4. HOW SOCIAL TRUST WAS CREATED IN FATSA

Trust seems to be a key concept to understand Fatsa, where the Mayor and his comrades were known as trustworthy with reference to their past struggles against hazelnut dealers. The Mayor Sönmez successfully transformed this particularized trust to the social trust during his mandate thanks to his integrity, fairness and his

working for public good. One of the significant activities of the Sönmez administration was the struggle carried out against stockpilers and the black market. In fact, in these years, some basic consumer goods like gas, gasoline, diesel, coal, margarine, cigarettes and cement were very scarce in Turkey. In Fatsa the stockpilers were tracked and stocked articles seized and sold to the people under the control of municipal police (Aksakal,2007a:146-147). Another example concerns the hazelnut shell distribution. In fact, at that time, hazelnut production was the main economical activity of the town and hazelnut shells were an important good utilized for heating by local people. During the previous administrations, it had been the influential families of the town who were supplied with hazelnut shells. But under the Sönmez administration, the public committees were charged with the allocation of these goods which were distributed in a fair and equitable manner in consideration of the needs and economical situation of the families, and in discussion with the residents (Aksakal,2007a:93).

The most important problem faced by the newly elected Sönmez administration was the financial crisis. In 1970s, municipal transfers from central government constituted major local revenues. However, right wing 'nationalist front' government had cut down on transfers and centrally distributed consumption goods allocated to Fatsa municipality. When Sönmez came to power, the officers and employees of the municipality had not been paid for 8 months. The only way forward for the new administration was to increase its own revenue receipts. Mayor Sönmez engaged in a local revenue generation effort and in the first place abolished the concessions that had already been given concerning flour, cement and mineral water production. Secondly, the properties of the municipality began to be managed effectively and therefore the revenues coming from them increased, e.g. the real estate, seaport and market place revenues. Finally, the municipal fees were collected efficiently (Aksakal,2007a:130). In short, Fatsa municipality became successful in generating its own revenues. The total revenue of Fatsa municipality, which had equalled 12 million Turkish lira for an 8 months period under the previous administration, became 23 million in only 3 months under the Sönmez administration (Aksakal,2007a:174). Bribery and corruption were also prevented thanks to greater accountability assured in the financial affairs of the municipality (Aksakal,2007b:36). Consequently, the municipality was able to double its machine park and to realize significant public works concerning physical infrastructure, electricity and water facilities (Aksakal,2007a:130). Another resource employed by the Mayor was, in Burdieu's terms, his 'mobilizing capacity', which is also considered as a leadership quality.

With reference to the leadership capacities of the mayor, two dimensions should be stressed; first, the interaction between the leader and the citizens, which leads to deliberation and consensus (about the common good), and second, 'common work' which has turned out to be the way to assure 'common good'. In Fatsa, considerable public work was achieved by the mobilization of people, and not only that of Fatsa but also that of surrounding communities. With a remarkable capacity to mobilize citizens, Sönmez followed a decidedly 'activating' approach in the attempt to realize his objectives, which helped him to strengthen the legitimacy of his policy agenda.

4.1. Common work: halt the mud campaign

'Common work', which worked as a catalyser in Fatsa constituted a base for participation and led to the common good for the local society. The citizens participated actively in design, production and consumption of the common good. The most urgent problem was identified in the course of sub neighborhood meetings: the mud. Indeed, during the infrastructure studies undertaken by the previous administration, the streets had been excavated and then left unpaved, as the roadwork could not be completed properly. So the residents were continuously walking in mud and motor vehicles could not properly circulate in the town. But, the municipality had neither the necessary equipment to undertake this work, nor the financial resource required. So, citizens decided to launch a campaign to eliminate the mud and called it a 'halt the mud campaign' (Aksakal,2007b:52-54). All the surrounding municipalities and provincial administration were asked to support the campaign, lending their heavy construction equipment and employees for a week. Not only the people of Fatsa but also inhabitants of surrounding communities joined the campaign with their vehicles, pickaxes and shovels. The public committees planned and managed the work meticulously. Women of Fatsa cooked for the working people and hosted them as guests in their houses. The campaign lasted for six days, and the result was amazing; the streets were cleaned up and improved, an old swamp area was dried out and a 4 km new line was opened. During the halt the mud campaign people observed that benevolent behavior was rewarded by similar behavior on the part of these persons. Fatsa residents asked for a favor from neighbor communities and these people effectively came to Fatsa to offer their workforce and equipment in an altruistic fashion. The trust between these people generated obligations of reciprocity. The residents of Fatsa reciprocated this favor by opening their houses to these people. So trust effectively became a form of social capital.

4.2. Cultural festival

Another example through which we can discuss social capital is the cultural festival organized by Fatsa municipality. The idea of organizing a popular cultural festival was also advanced in the public meetings and realized in April 1980. Artists, intellectuals, authors and journalists were invited to Fatsa. The great Turkish poet Can Yücel, authors and intellectuals like Murat Belge and Sükran Ketenci, journalists like Yazgülü Aldogan, Tugrul Eryilmaz came to Fatsa (see Unutturulanlar). During the festival, movies were shown, concerts and panels were organized and several spectacles were produced. The success of the festival was even quoted in the national press. The festival was also followed closely by the inhabitants of neighbor communities. As in the case of the mud campaign, the visitors and guests were hosted by the families of Fatsa. In sum, a total of 30.000 people attended the 4 day long festival.

5. PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN THE HEART OF LOCAL COMMUNITY

“One of the peculiarities of social capital is that it has some features of a public good. A pure public good has two properties: a) The difficulty to excluding individuals from benefiting from it; and b) The non-subtractability of the benefits consumed by one individual from those available to others” (Taylor,1987:5-6; Ostrom et al.,1994:6-7; Herreros,2004:19). Indeed, the social capital created during the cultural festival in Fatsa was not only accessible to those who participated in its creation, but also had external effects on a wider community as indicated by Putnam (2000:20). Also, free-rider behavior was difficult to observe in Fatsa. Indeed, one means of the pressure to abstain from egoistic arguments is public deliberation. Another is relative to the participants’ attitude in a deliberative process. Individuals are inclined to make what they think coincide with what they do, to reduce dissonance (Elster,1993:183; 1995:390; Herreros,2004:54-55). Herreros claims that “in political associations the pressures to formulate preferences and beliefs in terms of common good encompasses not just the common good of the members of the association, but by the very nature of the association, the common good of the community at large” (Herreros, 2004: 56). Indeed, the common good, which grows from citizens’ interaction, constitutes the basis of the very idea of participatory democracy (Barber,2003; Haus& Sweeting,2006). These mechanisms are very revealing to understand the role and position of the elected municipal council in Fatsa. Although Sönmez had been elected with a comfortable majority, no independent councilor had been elected.

The council was composed of representatives from three political parties, namely CHP, AP and MSP. However, the mayor needed the approval of the public committee decisions by the municipal council to legalize them. To overcome an eventual resistance by the council, he resorted to an article of municipality law, stipulating, 'the council meetings are public'. Therefore he invited Fatsa people to assist council meetings and conduct the meetings directly from speakers. So, direct democracy offered opportunities for the mayor to de-legitimize opposing council majorities in decisions of major importance. Finally, councilors chose to cooperate with public committees and respect the decisions taken during the deliberations in neighborhood meetings. (Aksakal,2007a:150-151).

In sum, in Fatsa participatory democracy referred to representative committees of the neighborhoods that took decisions and were embraced with great enthusiasm by the citizens. So, the whole system turned out to be far more democratic. The citizens realized how fraternity, common work and benevolent behavior increased their quality of life. Putnam (1993:173-174) and Herreros (2004:30) suggest that unlike hierarchical relations, "horizontal relations foster strong norms of reciprocity, ease of communication and the flow of information about the trustworthiness of others. In an ideal horizontal organization, the leaders are accountable to the members. The Fatsa case confirms this assertion. There was perfect communication between the Mayor who guaranteed complete accountability and the residents. A high level of trust was established towards other people. There was no hierarchy and the people could reach committee members and the Mayor easily. Deliberation can also generate a transformation in the participants' preferences and beliefs. Some participants may reconsider their preferences after taking into account new information (Herreros,2004:54). Indeed, the participants of the neighborhood meetings discussed the problems of their community and eventual solutions to these problems. Effective solutions were set up and implemented. Also, as a by-product of these deliberations they got informed about equality of the sexes and women's rights. The men modified their behavior in the family, went home regularly, stopped gambling and beating their wives. The Fatsa experience disturbed the Demirel government in power as the participatory democracy applied in Fatsa was seen as an uprising to State authority. Right wing journals started a defamation campaign in which the town was described as 'little Moscow', 'a town directed by committees', or 'somewhere separated from the homeland country' (Aksakal,2007b:25). In a sense, an ideological basis of the military operation was prepared. The magnitude of the operation was directly proportional with the State distrust towards Fatsa.

On 11 July 1980, two months before the coup d'Etat, a military operation was realized in Fatsa. The Mayor and 300 citizens were taken into custody (see Cumhuriyet,12,13,14 July 1980). Fikri Sönmez was arrested on 18 July 1980. Tortured and deprived of necessary treatment, he died in jail on 4 May 1985.

6. CONCLUSION

For a 9 months period, a small town in the Black Sea region experienced direct democracy. The associative life in Fatsa was prone to deliberation, which made it more democratic. Participation in associations in the form of neighborhood meetings generated more information about the mayor's performance, which favored greater democratic accountability. Under such a climate of trust and fraternity, people were enthusiastic about investing in social capital. However, without the leadership of Sönmez, it would be difficult to explain the direct democracy experience and social capital accumulation in Fatsa. Leadership is not good in itself but the role played by the leader in political life as a stimulus of participatory democracy should be considered. In Fatsa, participatory democracy produced a broader legitimacy to the mayor, as he was able to construct a firm institutional base for citizen involvement. Indeed, in Fatsa, the mayor's capacity to give "an initial stimulus, a vision of a common goal and reliable procedures" (Haus&Sweeting,2006:278) was decisive and consequently the leadership became the precondition for citizen activity. As a political leader, Mayor Sönmez did activate citizens around the values and motivation shared by him and his followers. He created for himself an opportunity for visible action thanks to deliberative procedures and enjoyed a strong legitimacy stemming from the interaction between him and his followers, in which both parties raised the other in terms of morality and motivation.

In the Fatsa case, a strong charismatic leadership which was combined with a political agenda linked to the concepts of local democracy like participation, direct democracy and accountability facilitated the generation of social capital. The Fatsa experience demonstrates that citizen participation and leadership are not necessarily contradictory. On the contrary, transforming leadership could serve as a lever for participative democracy creating reliable modes of interaction and changing local government institutions.

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