

Article

Engagement and Participation of Stakeholders in Regional Development Projects and the Emergence of Bridging and Bonding Social Capital

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Abstract

The success of regional development projects is highly dependent on the social capital established during the project period and sustained thereafter. This paper investigates the role and interaction of stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation in fostering the emergence of social capital in such projects. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach—combining joint correspondence analysis and in-depth interviews—an exploratory empirical study of nine project teams involved in a publicly funded Danish-German initiative is presented. The findings indicate that both stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation are critical to the development of social capital in regional development projects. Stakeholder engagement primarily influences social capital at the personal level, whereas higher levels of stakeholder participation are associated with a more embedded or targeted form of social capital that may extend beyond the formal project duration. Additionally, the analysis suggests that stakeholder engagement serves as an influential factor in shaping stakeholder participation.

Keywords: stakeholder engagement; stakeholder participation; regional development projects; emerging social capital**JEL:** R58, F63, E24

1. Introduction

In the context of national or supra-national (e.g., European Union) funding, regional development projects are often used as an organising form to support regional development goals in economic, financial, social, or other fields through the interaction, or networking, of stakeholders (Nicholds et al, 2017; Rius-Ulldemolins and Gisbert, 2019; Sum et al, 2023). The present paper explores such regional development projects, which are defined as projects that (a) involve regional stakeholders with specific knowledge enabling the precise identification of economic and societal problems (b) in order to develop innovative solutions which are appropriate to tackle the problems at a regional level (c) in better ways than non-regional stakeholders would do (Luyet et al, 2012; Thompson, 2002). Regional stakeholders play a pivotal role in such projects because they can initiate a transformation of the knowledge and capabilities emerging during the project that benefits the region (Oedl-Wieser et al, 2020; Hakeem et al, 2023). Often, these stakeholders have a high reputation and are embedded in regional networks, which enables them to act as bridge-builders between a regional development project and the region (Devine-Wright et al, 2001; Luyet et al, 2012; Sørensen, 2016), particularly when they are committed to establishing intensive relationships during the project.

The present paper will address the commitment to relationship-building by regional stakeholders through two

different concepts: stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation. Stakeholder engagement is understood as arrangements initiated by the key stakeholders in a project, typically, the project manager or project managers (Lehtinen and Aaltonen, 2020). For example, a project manager allocates highly relevant resources and tasks for a project to a group of involved stakeholders; this activity may represent an important lever that may not only involve other (regional) stakeholders (Lehtinen and Aaltonen, 2020), but also improve the quality of their interaction during the project. While stakeholder engagement focuses on management-driven activities as a factor that presumably leads to higher levels of involvement by stakeholders (Greenwood, 2007; Lehtinen and Aaltonen, 2020), the concept of stakeholder participation stresses the specific impact that stakeholders may have upon decisions in projects (Vitálišová et al, 2021). More generally, stakeholder participation denotes whether stakeholders are provided with a voice and/or whether they have a say in decisions in an organisation, a project, a team, or a specific activity (Luyet et al, 2012; Nagel, 1987). Hence, to initiate high levels of stakeholder participation, it will not suffice to allocate resources and targets to a group of stakeholders, but, in addition, the stakeholders must be involved in the decisions that need to be taken regarding a particular activity.



Since the management of regional development projects represents a complex task, the existence of both stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation is, however, no guarantee for a well-functioning project collaboration that will safeguard a connection between a regional development project and benefits for the region (Baker et al, 2010; Luyet et al, 2012). There are several reasons for this: firstly, the involvement of various and different types of stakeholders, such as individuals *versus* organisations, private-business actors *versus* public-policy actors, *etc.*, raises the complexity of relationship-building and relationship-management processes, both concerning the supporting factors and the barriers (Lehtinen et al, 2023). Secondly, the emphasis that is placed upon relationship-building may vary among the project participants (Maak, 2007). Thirdly, conflicts among stakeholders may occur in projects that influence the project management process and its output (Gretzinger and Ingstrup, 2022; Vaaland, 2004). Fourthly, even with well-functioning relationships among regional stakeholders in regional development projects, the long-term effects of the projects upon, e.g., social and economic goals to be achieved, may require the involvement of external stakeholders that reside outside the projects and the region, respectively, because they may be necessary for the transfer of project elements or project results (such as novel knowledge) to networks embedded in the region (Benz and Fürst, 2002). Finally, even in the case of high levels of interaction between stakeholders in regional development projects (Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000), time is needed to generate any potential return of the outcome of project collaboration.

One important approximation for such outcomes of regional development projects is the social capital that is built and maintained in projects in terms of relationship-building and relationship-management. In the context of regional development projects and their management, social capital is defined as the resources which are available for stakeholders in projects and that reside in the quantity, the quality and/or the structure of their interactions and the relationships that they establish over time (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Miković et al, 2020). This definition is followed in the present paper. Concludingly, regional development projects can be understood as networks in which social capital among and across regional stakeholders emerges (Iyer et al, 2005; Sørensen, 2016; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). To achieve such outcomes, the association between stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation, on the one hand, and the social capital built and maintained in such projects, on the other, seems pivotal, because, even if this cannot be taken for granted, it is not unlikely that relationships developed during such projects—both among regional project stakeholders and with external stakeholders—turn into long-lasting and valuable social capital that shapes lasting regional connections which are embedded in the region. This finding is echoed by Manning & Sydow (2011, p. 1371) as follows: “...a number

of studies indicate that project-based relationships often do last”. Muringani et al (2021) as well as Tomay and Tuboly (2023), moreover, highlight possible links between such long-lasting regional social capital and economic growth or development, respectively.

Against this backdrop, the present paper addresses the following research question: How can stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation, respectively, support the emergence of social capital during regional development projects? This research question will be investigated by using empirical data from nine project teams in the Danish-German cross-border region, which have been gained from the funded EU Interreg project “Benefit4Regions” (2016–2019) (Benefit4Regions, 2024). In this paper, the term “project team” will be used, which, however, does not focus on team and teamwork, but denotes the organising form of the ten groups in terms of various sub-projects within the framework of the cross-border project. The project region can be described as a rural and organisationally thin region (Isaksen and Karlsen, 2016; Tödtling and Trippel, 2005), as it is known for some important shortcomings regarding its resource endowments, available networks, availability of skilled labour, investments and (social) capital, all of which represent barriers for regional development strategies and targeted activities to support such strategies. Empirically, a methodological mix of a joint correspondence analysis (JCA) and qualitative, in-depth interviews with stakeholders associated with the project teams will be applied as an exploratory study.

The paper will contribute to the literature as follows: firstly, both in the project management and network management literature, questions of whether and how stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation influence the emergence of social capital in regional development projects have been widely under-explored (with the notable exceptions of Bartsch et al, 2013; Pihkala et al, 2007; Aragón et al, 2014). Therefore, this paper will add novel insights by describing how some specific interaction modes of stakeholders support the emergence of lasting social capital. Secondly, the paper will present an inside-out perspective that reflects upon the ways how stakeholder engagement in projects, in general, and regional development projects, in particular, can support the development of social capital by identifying emerging social capital in such projects that will support the establishment of long-lasting relationships and thereby contribute to project goals, such as regional development goals. By applying such an inside-out perspective that emphasises the process of emerging social capital in regional development projects, it can be argued that both stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation lead to a transition of social elements and knowledge into the networks around the participating stakeholders (Brunet et al, 2021; Lundin and Söderholm, 1995; Sørensen, 2016; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). In the extant literature, the perspective of how a collaborative structure can be established in projects through stakeholder involvement so

that lasting social capital will be established beyond the project duration has not been in the focus of research (with the exception of, e.g., [Freeman, 2004](#); [Mathur et al, 2008](#); [Missonier and Loufrani-Fedida, 2014](#)). Thirdly, this study will conceptualise social capital from a process perspective, instead of applying a classical relational network view on stakeholders that emphasises the network structure of project collaboration in connection with the characteristics of stakeholders ([Yu et al, 2017](#); [Mathur et al, 2008](#); [Borgatti and Halgin, 2011](#)). More specifically, the paper will shed light on how the interaction of various types of stakeholder involvement with the leadership of projects, such as regional development projects, influences the level and quality of social capital raised within regions over time. The discussion presented will help broadening the discourse on the management and governance of projects based upon stakeholder engagement (e.g., [Derakhshan et al, 2019](#); [Giest and Howlett, 2014](#)) and its impact on output criteria, such as the emergence of social capital. The interaction of the impact factors on different levels—the level of the management, individual stakeholders, and teams—will allow important insights into how managerial and non-managerial mechanisms may be described to support the emergence of social capital in projects.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: Section 2 presents the related literature, which is followed by Section 3 on the research context and Section 4 on the methodology and data used. Section 5 presents the empirical findings, and the subsequent Section 6 provides the discussion. The final Section 6 concludes and provides the research implications of the study.

2. Related Literature

Section 2 provides an overview of the current state-of-the-art in the literature. Through a review of this literature, the key terms and concepts will be explained, including the central interactions between these terms and concepts. This section ends with a summary of these key interactions.

2.1 The Emergence of Social Capital in Regional Development Projects

As social capital is a phenomenon that has conceptual origins in network approaches ([Borgatti and Halgin, 2011](#); [Yu et al, 2017](#)), the configuration of a project, e.g., a regional development project, in which the social capital emerges, must be understood as a specific network, which becomes connected with surrounding networks of the region ([Beckham et al, 2023](#); [Cooke et al, 2005](#); [Sørensen, 2016](#)). The stakeholders (individuals or organisations, represented by individuals) interact within networks incentivised by a particular interest which is of relevance for the project and can be supported through the project ([Eslerod et al, 2015](#); [Freeman, 2010](#)). More specifically, during projects, such as regional development projects, stakeholders establish contacts, plan and share activities over a given period of time. These activities do not only

support the participation of regional stakeholders in decision processes during the project work, but also the development of social capital. Hence, we assume that each stakeholder in a project shapes the social capital through relationship-building, which takes place embedded in the project activities ([Bizzi and Langley, 2012](#); [Brunet et al, 2021](#)). It can thus be argued that, the higher the level of stakeholder engagement will be—as induced by the project management—the more likely social capital is being developed, which, in return, supports a knowledge transfer into the region ([Bartsch et al, 2013](#); [Greenwood, 2007](#); [Sørensen, 2016](#); [Yu et al, 2017](#)).

As a point of departure to conceptualise social capital, this paper relates to the broad discussion in the literature on social capital and networks: [Borgatti and Halgin \(2011\)](#) argue that classical network theories, such as the social capital approach, treat networks as an exogenous variable, but that emerging network structures will also be shaped internally by stakeholders with their interaction in networks. Hence, contrary to this view by network scholars, the agency of stakeholders (in the wording of network theories: “actors”) in terms of building new relationships and developing trust will intentionally support both the quantity and quality of the social capital emerging between these stakeholders ([Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000](#)).

In fact, the emergence of social capital can be understood as a process which is shaped by the interaction among stakeholders in the form of activities, initiated by the leadership of project management and/or due to the agency of its participants ([Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000](#); [Prokkola and Jakola, 2024](#)). In the case of regional development projects, these stakeholders are the project manager(s) and the participating stakeholders. Undoubtedly, the agency in managing regional development projects with a focus on relationship management supports the emergence of “good”, lasting social capital ([Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen, 2007](#); [Iyer et al, 2005](#); [Lundin and Söderholm, 1995](#); [Nilsen et al, 2023](#)). The more frequently, on the one hand, and the more friendly and constructively, on the other, the activities in the project will take place, the more likely it will be that such lasting social capital will accumulate, which benefits the project and, indirectly, the region.

However, this does not necessarily mean that the social capital is positive as such ([Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000](#); [Woolcock, 1998](#)), because the teams of stakeholders that interact in projects are different in their levels of stakeholder engagement, as shown during the project work. Various individual or team-related mechanisms exist, such as leadership and communication style ([Turner and Müller, 2005](#)), conflict-resolution capabilities ([Pinto, 2000](#); [Stepanova, 2015](#)), etc., which will influence both the process and quality of emerging social capital. Since project teams show different forms of stakeholder participation and are moreover associated with various levels of stakeholder engagement, emerging social capital from project work can be positive in terms of being productive in a targeted way, or not. No-

tably when mechanism that moderate the process of emerging social capital, such as bridging social capital are missing during project work, it can happen that the emerging social capital is less productive, *i.e.*, does not generate benefits for the region.

2.2 Emerging Social Capital in Projects—Bonding and Bridging Capital

As defined above, and in line with social capital theory (Burt, 2005; Coleman, 1990), emerging social capital is influenced by the underlying social structures that shape the availability of resources, which are residing in the relationships of stakeholders (Maak, 2007). Social capital can be further categorised as bridging and bonding social capital, which are two forms of emerging social capital that complement each other and may be beneficial for regional development projects (Callois and Aubert, 2007; Ceci et al, 2020; Sørensen, 2016; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000; Woolcock, 1998). While the so-called bonding social capital (Coleman, 1990; Sørensen, 2016) mainly stabilises the interaction of stakeholders due to the existence of rules, norms, sanctions, trust, or specific institutions, the so-called bridging social capital (Burt, 2005; Sørensen, 2016) supports the expansion of relationships in projects and the acquisition of information, knowledge, and other resources from wider circles of stakeholders.

Both categories of social capital seem to be important for regional development projects. It can be argued that the mere focus in the project management on bonding social capital bears the risk of lock-in-effects, so that the current capabilities united in the project will not be adapted to future trends (Bresnen, 2007; Eklinder-Frick et al, 2011; Pillai et al, 2017). Therefore, the complementary bridging social capital can help projects with existing bonding social capital to update the capabilities and resources in the project by means of drawing wider circles, activating new relationships, and acquiring new ideas and resources from stakeholders outside the focal setting of the project (Eklinder-Frick et al, 2012). This may be considered as a means of increasing the likelihood that regional solutions can be adapted to future trends and even turn into innovation that may provide the region with competitive advantages (Leick and Gretzinger, 2018; Maak, 2007).

2.3 Social Capital and the Role of Agency in Regional Development Projects

Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated that the outcomes of regional development projects, such as specific project-related or regional goals (Horlings, 2012; Nicholds et al, 2017), including the social capital that is established during such projects in terms of specific (types of) relationships, are contingent upon the quality of the project management with an agency provided by the project manager(s) to lead the group of project participants. In fact, leadership skills, such as general networking capabilities (Merkaĳ et al, 2020), and proactive leadership approaches

that initiate relevant project activities, which pertain to the gatekeeping and brokering of contacts, knowledge, and information (Devine-Wright et al, 2001; Gretzinger and Leick, 2017), form part of the agency (Nilsen et al, 2023) that characterises the quality of project managers (Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen, 2007).

Social capital represents an important outcome that is commonly strived for in regional development projects, as it is considered to be supportive of achieving pre-defined goals based upon the relationships built in the projects, such as, for instance, innovation and economic growth (Muringani et al, 2021; Pihkala et al, 2007; Westlund and Larsson, 2021), or environmental and social goals (Andersson, 2009; Rius-Ulldemolins and Gisbert, 2019). The literature also acknowledges that the social capital strived for in regional development projects is often burdened or constraint by specific regional conditions (for example, rurality, peripherality, or organisational thinness, Leick and Gretzinger, 2020; Isaksen and Karlsen, 2016) and thus requires shared understandings of the goals in the project (Bentley et al, 2017; Tietjen and Jørgensen, 2016), which, again, points to the agency of key project stakeholders, who are supposed to create these shared understandings.

Furthermore, in the project management literature, the involvement of stakeholders through participatory approaches is described as a means of supporting social-capital building in projects (Baker et al, 2010; Holman, 2008). Besides agency based upon project leadership, the importance of governance through the involvement of individuals or teams among the project participants is also acknowledged (Biesenthal and Wilden, 2014; Derakhshan et al, 2019). With regard to regional development projects, stakeholder involvement is confirmed to affect the project outcomes in a positive way (Lukman et al, 2009; Prager and Freese, 2009). However, the specific modes or levers of how this participation of stakeholders is achieved in order to build social capital and which qualities of social capital this involvement may imply—or not—remain unclear in this literature.

2.4 Summary

During regional development projects, stakeholders interact, plan and share activities. These activities are triggered by both stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation. Bonding and bridging social capital play an important role here, because this social capital is not only inherent in the social structures of projects but emerges as well due to agency in the course of time. Put differently, activities initiated and managed by key stakeholders and the way how these activities are embedded in the projects have an impact on the emergence of new social capital.

3. Empirical Investigation

In the following section, the empirical analysis of the regional development project studied concerning the emergence of social capital over time will be presented.

3.1 Context of The Study

The Danish-German cross-border region connects the county of Southern Jutland in Denmark with the federal county of Schleswig Holstein, Germany, and is home to approximately 700,000 citizens. The major industries are logistics, tourism and food energy, clean-tech, and mechanical engineering (Gretzinger and Ingstrup, 2022). The concept of the chosen regional development project, which was based upon the participation of stakeholders from both countries, was to form nine project teams that would enhance relationship-building and knowledge exchange by running targeted activities with the goal to build solutions for various regional challenges. Originally, nine project teams were planned in the funded EU project, but only eight of them managed to finalise all or most of their targets (project team 3 did not manage to move beyond the planning phase but is still included in the empirical part of this paper).

Each project team worked on a specific regional development issue in the following areas: food, tourism, CO₂-neutral heating, funding, accessibility, recruitment of labour, broadband, networking and exchange, digital infrastructure and mobility. Moreover, each team was guided by a project manager, who oversaw the facilitation of the process by agreeing upon goals, developing activities, and implementing action plans to render the identified problems manageable (Gretzinger and Ingstrup, 2022).

In contrast to traditional approaches to measure social capital through structural data and network analysis (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011), this paper does not count stakeholders and their ties, but instead illustrates and describes the process through which social capital emerges, based upon a combination of quantitative data that explore the use of relationships and qualitative interview findings, which aim to develop a rich understanding of the phenomena studied (Holman, 2008).

3.2 Research Design and Sampling

To study the research question addressed in this paper, two approaches were combined for the data sampling. Firstly, a bilingual online questionnaire (in Danish and German) was used that asked the project members, based upon scaled variables, to measure issues related to the project work and project management, such as the mutual support, their level of commitment, their stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation, and the emerging social capital from their perspective. A total of 50 stakeholders were initially invited to fill in the questionnaire during September 2019, of which a total of 39 stakeholders answered it, which corresponds to a response rate of 78 per cent. Secondly, additional in-depth interviews were conducted with $n = 15$ project participants in 2019 that explored in more detail the various activities and processes connected to these activities during the project period. The interviews were assembled and conducted in line with a purposive sampling

strategy (Miles et al, 2014). The goal of the in-depth interviews was to uncover problematic but also positive examples, such as specific contexts, problems or results of project activities. The interviewer was an independent person from a regional consultancy agency, a fact that safeguarded a high level of neutrality. These qualitative data, which were gained through personal interviews, complemented the data sample based upon the questionnaire, because they allowed for an interpretation and evaluation of the leadership style, notably regarding the question of how it supported, or hindered, the translation of stakeholder participation and/or stakeholder engagement into relationship-building during the project work. The data from the interviews were coded on a lower-theme level (Saldaña, 2021), as they are primarily used in this paper as additional explanations that aim to reach in-depth understandings of why and how the activities and processes supported or hindered stakeholder engagement/stakeholder participation and how this interacted with the emerging social capital.

More generally, combining these two methodological approaches offers two advantages (Cameron et al, 2015; Kelle, 2006). Firstly, the initial quantitative analysis, which was based upon a survey, measures the subjective and broad evaluation of various issues by the project participants, and it serves as an outside perspective. For example, social capital is approximated by differentiated variables that respondents evaluated, ranging from frequent (but not necessarily intense) contacts during the project and professional networking relationships (e.g., the use of relationships for receiving consultancy services) to friendship relationships, which are likely to be sustained. Another example is that the survey enabled a precise evaluation of how “good” or “bad” the context of the project work and project management were experienced by the respondents, for example, the support by the leader of the team or by project members. The subsequent interviews allowed the respondents, who are project participants, to report in more detail about their inside view on the project collaboration, including the emerging social capital, and explain specific activities conducted.

Secondly, the combination of these two empirical approaches (quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews) has been utilised to actively engage stakeholders in the evaluation of the project. It was communicated that, through the empirical fieldwork, stakeholders could gain a voice. Beyond the purely academic research, the empirical materials were thus used for reflections on the project which had been discussed internally on project meetings. While the quantitative survey offered the stakeholders the possibility of grading activities, the qualitative in-depth interviews provided some space for reporting and sharing the individual experiences. In addition to these advantages, the validation of the data could be improved through the combination of methods used in this paper (Kelle, 2006).

3.3 Definitions and Operationalisations

For the qualitative data sampling through interviews, sensitising definitions in line with [Bowen \(2006\)](#) and [Blumer \(1954\)](#) (see Section 1. Introduction) were used that offered room for interpretations of social capital, notably with regard to the difference between stakeholder participation and stakeholder engagement and the understanding of social capital by the respondents. However, for the quantitative data analysis, these sensitising definitions were translated into definitive operationalisable concepts that express the phenomena studied in terms of well-tested scales and proxies.

To this aim, the concept of *stakeholder participation* was applied in line with the definition presented in Section 1, and following [Lehtinen and Aaltonen \(2020\)](#), it was operationalised as the perceived participation in the case project team. More specifically, the respondents were shown a figure with the five ladders of citizen participation (adapted from [Arnstein, 1969](#); [Luyet et al, 2012](#)) with the following steps included: (1) partnership (defined as a high interdependence on the local and trans-border level), (2) high participation (with a high interdependence on the project level), (3) participation (with a low interdependence on the project level), (4) low participation (with information-exchange, but no real impact by the respondent), and (5) non-participation (defined as a casual acquisition of information). *Stakeholder engagement* was operationalised based upon the degree to which the respondent found the project study work meaningful and purposeful. More specifically, according to the definition used ([Lehtinen and Aaltonen, 2020](#)), the 17 items of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale ([Schaufeli et al, 2006](#)) were adapted to the context of the investigation.

Social capital was measured based upon the frequency of contacts with other project team members and two types of relationships: a consultancy relationship (the question of whether the relationship between the project team members is considered to be a professional relationship) and a friendship relationship (the question of whether the relationship with others in the project could be described as a friendship; [Weiler and Hinz, 2019](#)). To explore how well supported the stakeholders felt by the leadership and the other collaborating stakeholders, further variables were included that denote specific characteristics of the collaboration in the project teams, such as mutual support, communication, cohesion and effort ([Hoegl and Gemuenden, 2001](#)), and, in addition, variables that measure social skills (or the general social ability of project stakeholders) and their general self-efficacy in order to operationalise the respondent's self-perceived project management skills ([Ferris et al, 2001](#); [Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995](#)). All responses were measured through five-point Likert scales (values ranging from 1 = strongly agree/never to 5 = strongly disagree/always).

Finally, because the exploration also aimed to understand how different constellations of leadership and stakeholder interaction within the various project teams influ-

ence the phenomena studied, *the affiliation to the project team* was implemented as a supplementary variable "project team".

3.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed by means of a JCA in a deductive manner and in line with [Greenacre \(1988, 1984\)](#). A JCA is a procedure to analyse quantitative data according to three consecutive steps: firstly, in the case of this paper, the 15 in-depth interviews were transcribed. Secondly, they were clustered according to the following themes: participation and engagement of stakeholders (low/high/characteristics); the activities of stakeholders in terms of social or professional activities (frequency/characteristics); and the drivers and barriers of processes. Thirdly, the clustered data were interpreted according to [Bizzi and Langley \(2012\)](#) by using the patterns of actors, resources and activities that matter for social networks and by studying how these three fundamental elements that constitute networks sequence each other regarding the phenomena of interest. All data from the interviews were treated anonymously, and the project teams were assigned numbers to avoid an identification of their members.

The general idea of a correspondence analysis is related to the main component analysis and enables the presentation of the correlations or, more precisely, the correspondence between the categories of cross-classified tables. A JCA is applied to empirical data that are assigned to contingency tables involving three or more variables or sets of categories. For both correspondence analysis, in general, and JCA, in particular, in the graphical overview, the common position of the categories in distance from the center is to be interpreted as the correspondence of the categories. The closer the categories are located to the center, the higher the correspondence of the categories will be, and *vice-versa*. The dimensions (or axes in the graphical overview) present the variations of the input data with decreasing amounts of explanation. To perform the JCA, the values of the presented scales were recoded from mean scores into integer values (1: high, 2: medium, 3: low). Stakeholder participation remained at its original scaling, ranging from 1: high participation to 5: very low/non-participation. As a result, various clusters of stakeholder engagement could be identified.

4. Analysis

4.1 Findings From the Quantitative Analysis

As a first step, and based upon the results of the JCA, a two-dimensional solution is established (Fig. 1), which explains 79.4 per cent of the principal inertia. The first axis (dimension 1) absorbs 64.3 per cent of the variance, and the second axis (dimension 2) 14.9 per cent. The colour of the data in Fig. 1 points to the contributions that the variables make to the dimension: orange constitutes a high, yellow a medium and blue a low contribution.

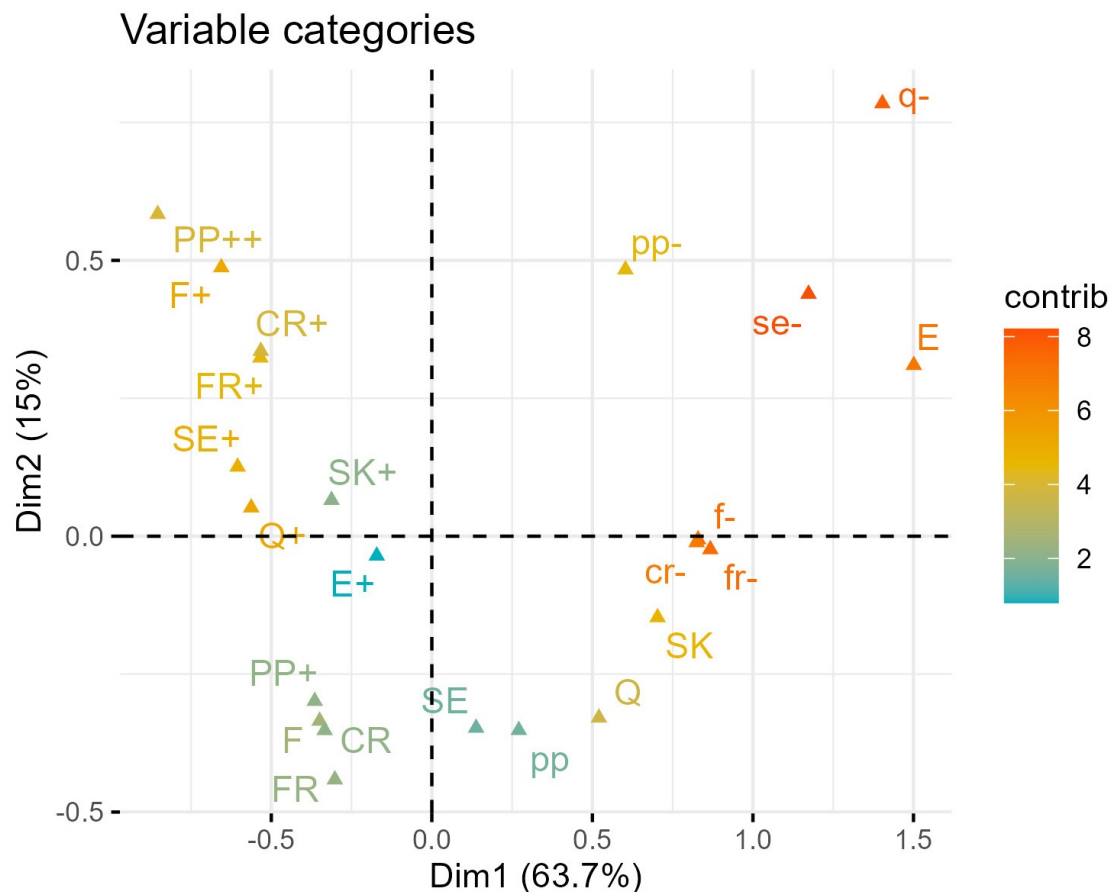


Fig. 1. Participation and networking as two dimensions. PP, Stakeholder participation: PP++ very high, PP+ high, pp medium, pp- low, pp- very low; SE, Stakeholder engagement: SE+ high, SE medium, se- low; F, Frequency of contact: F+ high, F medium, f- low; CR, Consultancy relationship: CR+ high, CR medium, cr- low; FR, Friendship relationship: FR+ high, FR medium, fr- low; Q, Quality of teamwork: Q+ high, Q medium, q- low; SK, Social skills: SK+ high, SK medium, sk- low; E, General self-efficacy: E+ high, E medium, e- low; cs1-cs9, Case Study in which the stakeholders participated (supplementary variable). Dim 1 is named “low social capital”; Dim 2 is named “strong social capital”, see the findings in Table 1.

In general, dimension 1 (named: low social capital) distinguishes the non-engaged stakeholders with low social capital (measured through their frequency of interaction, friendship and/or consulting relationships), who perceive no participation among the project team members, from the highly engaged stakeholders, who perceive the project work in the team as participatory. More precisely, the positive side of dimension 1 (in mathematical terms) is characterised by a low frequency of contact among the case study members, a low perception of both friendship and consultancy relationships among them, a medium level of general self-efficacy and social skills, and a low level of the project work quality in the team. Not surprisingly, this side of dimension 1 is also characterised by both a low stakeholder engagement and low stakeholder participation. By contrast, the negative side of dimension 1 (in mathematical terms) is characterised by a high perception of the collaboration quality, high perceptions of friendship relationships among the project team members, and both a high stakeholder engagement and high stakeholder participation.

The results for dimension 2 (named: strong social capital) in the JCA are more ambiguous, compared to dimension 1. Dimension 2 distinguishes the *non-engaged project team members with strong social capital* but with *both high and low stakeholder participation* from the *medium-engaged members with mediocre networking activities and mediocre stakeholder participation*. In more detail, the positive side of dimension 2 (in mathematical terms) is characterised by project team members with both low and very high stakeholder participation, a high frequency of contact, high perceptions of friendship and consultancy relationships in their team, a low level of perceived teamwork quality, and a low stakeholder engagement. The negative side of dimension 2 (in mathematical terms) is characterised by project team members with a medium level of both stakeholder participation and stakeholder engagement, a medium frequency of contact, a medium perception of friendship and consultancy relationships among the project team members, and a perceived teamwork quality on medium level.

4.2 Findings From the In-Depth Interviews: Project Teams

To complement the JCA results with in-depth insights for the individual project teams, the following findings are derived from the personal interviews that shed light on specific associations within the teams.

Project team 1: In project team 1, many social and professional activities were initiated. The professional activities were targeted to the demands of the stakeholder so that any stakeholder could receive some benefit from the project collaboration. All stakeholders in this team were very engaged, as the leadership involved them from the very beginning. The leadership style (the leader was Danish) in project team 1 was described as collegial, based upon dialogue, common ground and showing a common sense about the project management. Because of this, most of the stakeholders perceived that they reached high levels of participation in the project. A tremendous volume of targeted activities initiated by both the leadership and the most active stakeholders shaped manifold communications channels and supported the commitment of individuals. This happened early in the project process, as one interviewee in this team acknowledges: *“we did quite soon manage to shape plenty of communication channels with and around the key actors from the municipality, important regional institutions and the German partners”*.

The stakeholders in team 1 were not only highly engaged, but also achieved high levels of participation, and their formal commitment to the project supported their participation within the team as well. Even those stakeholders who were not formally committed to the project reached high levels of engagement, but not high levels of participation. However, both the stakeholders that achieved high levels of engagement *and* participation and those, who were engaged but did not manage to formally participate in decision processes, contributed greatly to the development of emerging social capital. Within team 1, strong relationships were established that are likely to continue after the formal project end.

Project team 2: This team was also committed to many customer-oriented activities (targeted to defined goals and a defined target group, respectively; the leader was a Dane), and the stakeholders were involved in these activities from the very beginning of the project work. As a result, many relationships could be established, and possible future collaborations were discovered that offered the potential to benefit the stakeholders due to synergies. These potentials identified supported the relationship-building during the project work. Most of the stakeholders in project team 2 achieved high levels of both stakeholder participation and stakeholder engagement. Emerging social capital can be identified for this project team, similar to project team 1. Due to the future potential for a long-term collaboration, it is likely that the relationships established will last beyond the formal project duration. Those stakeholders, who were not formally involved in the project, however, were mostly not involved in the project activi-

ties of team 2 and thus showed no engagement, which is a difference to team 1. One interviewee stated this as follows: *“even if a few network partners got motivated to be engaged, ...the network partners were often inactive and not really integrated into the team”*.

Project team 6: In this case, the goals of the project team were not developed in a bottom-up process but mostly defined by the project leader. This led to a situation in which two sub-groups emerged. The Danish stakeholders worked in one sub-group that was interested in developing specific tools to support recruitment in rural areas, whereas the German stakeholders were in another group that was more interested in receiving an overview of various tools that could be developed. One interviewee from project team 6 described these reasons for this development as follows: *“...some participants were thrilled, but, all in all, too many practitioners were not committed. ... For me as leader, it was difficult to find out who would support the project and who would not”*. Finally, a lack of commitment and dialogue lead to a fragmentation of the team and a missing team spirit. Only a few formally committed stakeholders showed higher levels of stakeholder engagement in project team 6. Notwithstanding this, even if there was no cohesion in this team and the level of engagement was low, many contacts and relationships emerged. This was apparently due to the manifold activities that were put into action. Hence, social capital emerged in project team 6, but the team did not develop a common theme that could represent a linking pin for future activities.

Project teams 4, 5, 7, 8: In these four project teams, there are some common characteristics. Various challenges affected the project work in these teams. Some teams started late and had not enough time to establish a structure that was goal-oriented and based upon a clear strategy. Other teams developed such a structure but lacked stakeholders with an interest in the topics and goals discussed. A common denominator with the four project teams is that the level of activities was low with all of them. In a similar vein, the level of stakeholder engagement that the teams reached remained low, and only very few stakeholders were observed with high levels of stakeholder engagement, who, however, rather played their own game, instead of being really committed to the project team, as one interviewee reports: *“it seems to be that the Danish colleagues are embedded in other structures as we. Often, I had the feeling they would have liked to participate, but due to other priorities, the planned activities needed to be cancelled”*. In these four cases, social capital did not emerge on the team level, and social relationships are only based upon few and isolated relationships among the stakeholders. The leaders of these teams were in one case Danish, and in 3 cases German.

Project team 9: In team 9, no common ground emerged that could lay the foundation of how to interact in the project team. There was no dialogue about identifying and achieving goals or developing activities to achieve these goals. The leader, a German, managed the team in a

top-down manner. The team, again, divided itself in two sub-groups (similar to project team 6): those who were capable to live up to the targets given by the leader, and those who were not. The following quotation by an interviewee summarises this situation: “*the problem was that the team-members apparently had not the feeling of being recognised by the leader, and some were overdoing with paying respect*”. Due to some advice provided by the leader, the team managed to deliver output in terms of solutions to the problems addressed. However, the level of stakeholder engagement was overall low, even in the active sub-group, and it was close to nothing with the other sub-group. One of the interviewees reported that some stakeholders had even developed fear for the leader. In project team 9, some new relationships emerged on the individual level, but no social capital emerged that could support relation-building in line with the business-related topics that were at the center of this project team.

4.3 Findings From The In-depth Interviews: Summary and Comparison

In summary, and comparing the findings from the individual project teams, the interviews revealed that the level of stakeholder engagement is influenced by the quality of leadership, the number of proactive stakeholders, and the quantity and/or quality of the activities performed. Notably those activities that interested the stakeholders led to their high levels of engagement. To reach a range of such activities that seem to benefit many stakeholders in the project team, an early involvement of stakeholders by leaders during the project duration seems to be necessary. The creation of activities was also key to engage those stakeholders, who were not formally appointed to the project (they were called “network partners” and did not receive any resources for, e.g., travels or compensation of their work hours invested in the project).

However, and more generally, the interviews also showed that high levels of stakeholder participation require well-designed and stakeholder-oriented activities, based upon commitment through formal appointments of and delegation of tasks to stakeholders, because both the engagement and participation of stakeholders in the teams affect the emergence of social capital. The most important driver to achieve this is leadership, which needs to be based upon dialogue between leader and project stakeholders, including those non-formally appointed ones. These non-formally involved project stakeholders needed to be motivated by the leader through the activities designed. Leadership was, moreover, paramount regarding the design of goals and activities that commit all involved stakeholders. These activities encompassed both targeted activities according to the stakeholders’ interests and social activities that support relationship-building (see project teams 1 and 2, in particular). By contrast, a purely target-oriented leadership that only orchestrates project goals, instead of developing them so that the stakeholders may relate to them, was found to be

rather destructive, because the project outcomes will then only depend upon the good-will of stakeholders (see project team 9, in particular).

For the emergence of social capital, *i.e.*, to achieve frequent and close stakeholder interaction in the project teams, leadership was, again, crucial: the leader had the task of designing activities according to the interests of the various stakeholders and involve them from the start, for instance, by allocating responsibilities to those stakeholders, who were both capable of and willing to take them over. While the mere existence of relationships that were developed in the project teams determine the bridging social capital, the quality of the solutions developed through these relationships—which denotes the output of the project teams that could be used by the stakeholders and their identification of future possibilities (see teams 1 and 6)—represent the bonding social capital.

5. Discussion

Table 1 summarises the key findings from this empirical study.

The interpretation of the JCA results show that, on the individual level, a stakeholder’s supportiveness, communication, and effort (Hoegl and Gemuenden, 2001), and, in addition, variables that measure social skills (or the general social ability of project stakeholders) and their general self-efficacy in order to operationalise the respondent’s self-perceived project management skills (Ferris et al, 2001; Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995) interact with the quality of collaboration in the project team. Jointly, a stakeholder’s skills, the perceived level of participation and a “good” quality of collaboration (in terms of mutual support through leadership and other stakeholders, communication, and cohesion) have a positive impact on emerging social capital in the form of new friendships and frequent consultancy interactions. However, the ambiguous results of dimension 2 indicate that there are stakeholders, who are not engaged with the project work but engage in establishing social capital—maybe to sustain and expand their network for a later purpose. In summary, the JCA results stress two important findings for the regional development project: firstly, there exists a relationship between stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation to build emerging social capital that is associated with characteristics of the project participants, their interaction and their leadership; and secondly, social capital may be built in such projects just through stakeholder engagement-without necessarily achieving a high stakeholder participation through formal memberships and participation.

The interpretations of the qualitative data provide further insights into these associations. Firstly, it can be shown that leadership (Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen, 2007) can initiate stakeholder engagement, support the interaction and collaboration of project participants, and influence entire teams in their endeavours to succeed in delivering the demanded performance, or not. A high level

Table 1. Summary of the empirical findings.

Quantitative analysis (JCA)	<p>Dimension 1: “Low social capital”</p> <p><i>Positive side:</i> Low frequency of contact among the project team members, low perception of friendship, low perception of consultancy relationship, a medium level of general self-efficacy and social skills, a low level of the project work quality in the project team, low level of stakeholder engagement and low stakeholder participation.</p> <p><i>Negative side:</i> High perception of the collaboration quality, high perceptions of friendship relationships among the project team members, a high level of both stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation.</p> <p>Dimension 2: “Strong social capital”</p> <p><i>Positive side:</i> Low and very high stakeholder participation, a high frequency of contact, high perceptions of friendship and consultancy relationships in the project team, a low level of perceived teamwork quality, and a low level of stakeholder engagement.</p> <p><i>Negative side:</i> Project team members with a medium level of both stakeholder participation and stakeholder engagement, a medium frequency of contact among the project team members, a medium perception of friendship and consultancy relationships among the project team members, and a perceived teamwork quality on medium level.</p>
Qualitative analysis (interview data)	<p>Engagement: Leadership is key to initiate engagement (stakeholder-targeted, high level of activities, recognising stakeholders, committing stakeholders and allowing participation, based upon dialogue).</p> <p>Emerging social capital: High levels of stakeholder engagement support the emergence of social capital, whereas a purely task-oriented and top-down leadership as well as a lack of dialogue or recognition of stakeholders’ ideas support the emergence of isolated sub-groups.</p> <p>Leadership style and cultural background: While the project teams managed by leaders with a Danish cultural background provided more dialogue and intensive interaction, this was less commonly applied to the project teams with German leaders.</p>

JCA, Joint Correspondence Analysis.

of stakeholder engagement also supports such relationship-building. However, the teams which were steered and managed in a top-down fashion were less coherent (but notwithstanding delivered the demanded output), whereas those teams that were exposed to a dialogue-based leadership style were more social, and their relationships to other team members lasted longer than the project. Even if culture was not implemented as a variable in the study, the qualitative findings indicate that dialogue and involving the stakeholders into the team is more inherent in the Danish way of leading a team, compared to a more task-oriented German leadership in the projects. Hence, a dialogue-based, co-operative project leadership can be understood as a prerequisite to achieve high levels of stakeholder engagement. However, irrespective of such a supportive project leadership that may be in place, important factors that additionally influence the emergence of “good”, *i.e.*, valuable social capital in the regional development project (Iyer et al, 2005; Muringani et al, 2021), are a stakeholder’s individual commitment and social skills.

In summary, the interviews confirmed as well that both stakeholder engagement (Lehtinen and Aaltonen, 2020) and stakeholder participation (Luyet et al, 2012) were found to influence the emergence of social capital during regional development projects. Evidently, social capital on the individual level—in terms of personal relationships/friendships—requires only the engagement of stakeholders, while it needs stakeholder participation as a

vital driver for the emergence on the professional level. Regarding the two theoretically distinguished categories of bonding and bridging social capital, which are established in line with Sørensen (2016), it can be concluded that any single activity, but particularly the engagement of stakeholders might represent a “Trojan horse” for the emergence of bridging social capital. By contrast, stakeholder participation can be understood as a driver for achieving sustained, *i.e.*, long-lasting bonding social capital that may be maintained after the project period (Luyet et al, 2012; Sørensen, 2016). This can be explained with wishes by stakeholders in projects to not only look out for more new relationships through regional development projects but maintain the access to valuable resources through the projects. In this context, it can be stated that, the better a regional development project manages to shape and link activities to build regional networks that benefit stakeholders, the more likely stakeholder engagement increases. In return to higher levels of engagement, higher levels of participation may evolve, which will lead to more sustained, long-lasting social capital that supports regional goals (Tietjen and Jørgensen, 2016).

6. Conclusion, Implications and Limitations

The key finding of this paper (in line with assumptions made by both project management and network research, *e.g.*, Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000; Borgatti and Halgin,

2011) is that the emergence of social capital within projects can be influenced positively by the project strategies that apply engagement as a core principle. To this aim, it is paramount to conceptualise social capital not only as being inherent in social structures, but as an emerging within a process that is shaped by interactions among stakeholders, based upon their involvement in terms of stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation. Hence, both the quantity and quality of social capital in a project, such as a regional development project, can be influenced by the agency of stakeholders and their interaction. Stakeholder engagement may serve as a simple tool in regional development projects to develop emerging social capital, based upon its capacity to foster new relationships that may be useful resources in the future. By contrast, stakeholder participation will not only support the emergence of social capital (notably bridging social capital that refers to any kind of relationships, including loose ones), but also foster relationships that are embedded in the networks around stakeholders (Harmaakorpi and Niukkanen, 2007; Iyer et al, 2005; Lundin and Söderholm, 1995). Notably those stakeholders with high levels of participation—which implies high levels of embeddedness in relationships in projects—may actively shape emerging social capital in a professional manner. Project managers may apply various strategies to support the creation of stakeholder engagement and participation. Particularly leadership styles and governance modes act as driving forces of such processes, which are looked at from the inside in this paper. With these findings, the study contributes to the general literature on project management, teamwork and leadership (for example, Hanebuth, 2015; Florea and Stoica, 2019) and opens for further research on the topic.

Hence, the key implication of this research is that regional development projects should be understood as networks in which social capital emerges. Moreover, derived from this implication, a more detailed concept for describing the emerging bridging and bonding social capital in regional development projects needs to be developed. Importantly, both types of social capital complement each other. Hence, there is the need in the project management literature to address the levels of both stakeholder engagement and stakeholder participation to arrive at a better understanding of how these concepts interact with each other in regional development projects or other project types. Furthermore, for the leadership of such projects, it can be acknowledged, based upon the findings of this paper, that both the project management and stakeholders can act as drivers in this process. The findings highlight various examples of how project activities may be supported by both groups of stakeholders during this process (dialogue, targeted activities, mutual support, *etc.*). Finally, another relevant implication is that the task of a project leadership is not only to support the emergence of social capital, but also prevent negative social capital through tensions or conflicts among stakeholders that may imply hindrances to communication,

collaboration, and, ultimately, the goals set for the project and the region, respectively.

For the purpose of this paper, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis to describe emerging social capital has provided advantages: firstly, the interpretation of the quantitative data allowed a first estimation of what type of social capital emerged and which approaches to stakeholder involvement were at play. Secondly, notably for the assessment of bonding social capital, the additional qualitative data analysis provided support. Notwithstanding the interpretive power of this mixed-methodology approach, there are several limitations to the study presented in this paper. Since the period of study was only three years, follow-up research should provide a longitudinal setting to evaluate, for instance, whether and how the bridging social capital built in the project was used to further develop activities that build upon it, and whether emerging bonding social capital was used for closer collaboration among the project team members over time. Moreover, a correspondence analysis is, as such, explorative in nature. Future research should thus investigate the effects that the stakeholder involvement had on regional development through a longitudinal study. Furthermore, the study presented did not explicitly investigate the influence of culture on emerging social capital, hence, this is another factor to address with future research. Finally, as many validated scales were used to measure key variables (such as the quality of interaction, collaboration, leadership), follow-up research that works with larger (random) samples of quantitative data may work with testable hypothesis and will find better associations of the hitherto less validated variables, for instance, stakeholder participation or emerging social capital.

Availability of Data and Materials

The quantitative data sets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request. This is true for the quantitative data. The qualitative data (according to the data regulations related to personal data of the EU) will be deleted.

Author Contributions

SG and BL designed the research study. SG, BL and SJ performed the research. SJ analyzed the data. All authors contributed to editorial changes in the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. All authors have participated sufficiently in the work and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. SJ is serving as Editor-in-Chief and SG as Advisory Board editor of this journal. We declare that SJ and SG had no involvement in the peer review of this article and have had no access to information regarding its peer review. Full responsibility for the editorial process for this article was delegated to FS.

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