

Report on the CSGR Workshop
GLOBALISATION, CO-OPERATION AND TRUST

1st – 3rd July 2004
Gianluca Grimalda

Trust, co-operation and social capital are now increasingly seen as key resources for a socio-economic system to progress. Thus far, the unit of analysis in most of the theoretical studies in this field has been local communities or nation-states. However, the rise of interest in the notion of global public goods – e.g. the environment, international justice, international financial stability - as advocated for instance by the United Nations Development Programme, has brought to centre stage the relevance of trans-national co-operation as a means to increase global prosperity.

The workshop on Globalisation, Co-operation and Trust, held at CSGR the past July, sought to take some steps in this direction by analysing the links between globalisation on one side, and individual attitudes toward co-operation and trust on the other. The focus on the individual as the key unit of analysis is buttressed by the theoretical conjecture that individual dispositions and motivations are key in accounting for the provision of public goods at the aggregate level. Moreover, the particular angle chosen to analyse the issue was empirical, or, more specifically, experimental. Simply stated, the experimental approach consists of studying a situation of interaction among individuals within a ‘controlled’ environment, similar to that of a laboratory for experiments in natural sciences. The experimental setting, despite its high level of abstraction, is generally constructed in such a way as to be reminiscent of real-life situations, so that the interpretation of the results and their practical implications in terms of policy analysis are often straightforward.

The workshop was organised in two main sessions. One was open to the public, and a group of researchers coming from a wide spectrum within the social sciences presented their more recent works on the theme. In particular, Nancy Buchan (University of Wisconsin – Madison) presented experimental results on how trust and expectations of trustworthiness vary in relation with culture and social distance; Rick Wilson (Russell Sage Foundation/Rice University) reported on his experiments conducted in Russia, and emphasised the presence of a significant intergenerational gap in terms of social norms of co-operation, the younger cohorts being more individualistic and less inclined to co-operation than the older ones. Syed Ahsan (Concordia University) illustrated his ongoing work on the influence of globalisation on social norms and values, and thereby on macroeconomic performance.

The second session of the workshop was devoted to the discussion of the project launched by CSGR under the co-ordination of Gianluca Grimalda and Nancy Buchan “An International Experimental Investigation into the Influence of Globalisation on Co-operation and Trust”¹. The fruitful debate among the research group helped to define the main theoretical and practical aspects concerning the implementation of the project. Its main thrust is to replicate the same series of experimental situations, which are modelled on a Public Goods problem, in different nations, in different settings – rural vis-à-vis urban – and in different formats – one involving only compatriots and another one involving subjects coming from different nations – in order to provide empirical evidence on the link between globalisation and individual attitudes toward co-operation. On the grounds of these results,

¹ The research project can be found at
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/csgr/research/projects/grimalda03_int_coop/.

different institutional mechanisms may be studied and tested in a further phase of the project as devices to increase the level of international co-operation.