

## Is It Time to Disinvest in Social Capital?

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### ABSTRACT

In an effort at theoretical clarification, the authors reviewed 45 recent articles reporting empirical research employing the concept of ‘social capital’. The literature is roughly equally divided between those who treat social capital as an independent variable and those who consider it as a dependent variable, and between those who operationalize the concept principally in terms of norms, values and attitudes and those who choose a more social structural operationalization, invoking social networks, organizations and linkages. Work on social capital as a mainly normative variable is dominated by political scientists and economists, while sociologists and a wide range of applied social scientists utilize more social structural understandings of the term. We find little to recommend in the use of ‘social capital’ to represent the norms, values and attitudes of the civic culture argument. We present empirical, methodological and theoretical arguments for the irrelevance of ‘generalized social trust’, in particular, as a significant factor in the health of democracies or economic development. Social structural interpretations of social capital, on the other hand, have demonstrated considerable capacity to draw attention to, and illuminate, the many ways in which social resources are made available to individuals and groups for individual or group benefit, which we take to be the prime focus and central attraction of the social capital concept. The paper concludes by elaborating a context-dependent conceptualization of social capital as access plus resources, and cautions against ‘over-networked’ conceptualizations that equate social capital with access alone.

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Since Robert Putnam popularized the concept of ‘social capital’, a welter of scholarship has appeared, divided between reports on empirical research and argumentative pieces directed towards readers of journals of opinion. Empirical research has been dominated by political scientists and sociologists, but a number of economists and other social scientists have taken up the notion in studies that range from renewed attempts to document or deny a ‘decline in social capital’ in the United States to analyses of the impact of varying levels or kinds of social capital on economic performance, public health, or delinquency among teenagers. Some analysts have sought to explain variations in the kinds and value of social capital by examining cross-national differences in the predominance of politicized rather than ‘civic’ groups operating in a society<sup>1</sup> or by historical changes in the structure of local economies. Despite the evident fruitfulness of this body of work, we continue to have concerns about the scope of the claims made for social capital as an independent variable, about its conceptualization, and about its operationalization.

#### *Theoretical Tributaries to the Current Debate Over Social Capital*

Three relatively distinct tributaries of social capital theorizing are evident in recent literature (Wall, Ferazzi, and Schryer 1998). That associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu stresses differential access to resources via the possession of more or less durable relationships, constructed through ‘an endless effort at institution’ (1986: 249). Where Bourdieu builds his notion of social capital on essentially Durkheimian micro-foundations, James Coleman (1988, 1993) incorporates a similar understanding of social capital into a theory grounded in rational choice theory. Where Bourdieu’s macro-sociology owes its greatest debt to Marx, Coleman remains within the functionalist tradition of Durkheim and Parsons. Work by political scientists and others following the lead of Robert Putnam (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1996), finally, presents a vision of social capital more congruent with the Weberian assumptions of the political culture argument in American political science, in which exogenously generated attitudes and norms such as trust and reciprocity are featured alongside social networks as ingredients enabling a society to undertake collective action.<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu and Coleman’s conceptions of social capital take the analogy with financial capital seriously, seeing it as instrumental in the flow of goods and services to individuals and groups. Putnam, by contrast, has popularized a notion of social capital which ties it to the production of collective goods such as ‘civic engagement’ or a spirit of cooperation available to a community or nation at large.

Bourdieu defines social capital as ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word’ (1986: 248–9). For Bourdieu, social capital is one of three forms of capital (economic, cultural and social) which, taken together, ‘explain the structure and dynamics of differentiated societies’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 119). Differential access to capital, not individual utility maximizing behavior, shapes both economic and social worlds in Bourdieu’s sociology. Similarly, the fundamental structures that produce and reproduce access to social capital are not, for Bourdieu, self-regulating markets but networks of connections, which themselves are ‘the product of an endless effort at institution.’ Bourdieu’s emphasis on ‘institution rites,’ ‘the alchemy of consecration’ and gift giving at the heart of the transformation of ‘contingent relations, such as those of neighborhood, the workplace, or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt’ (Bourdieu 1986: 249–50), underlines the Durkheimian roots of this conception.

If the mechanisms for the construction of social capital in Bourdieu’s account may appear elusive to some, his understanding of how we might measure and weigh social capital has a clarity and coherence not found in Coleman and Putnam. For Bourdieu, ‘the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent . . . depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected’ (249). We will take up and develop this approach at the end of the article.

Perhaps the most influential formulation of the concept of social capital, nevertheless, is that of sociologist James Coleman. Coleman defines social capital as ‘a variety of entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure . . . Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons. It is lodged neither in individuals nor in physical implements of production’ (Coleman 1990: 302). The forms of social capital identified in Coleman’s most extended treatment of the subject include ‘obligations and expectations,’ ‘information potential,’ ‘norms and effective sanctions’ (grouped together because, as Coleman notes, norms are a ‘powerful, but sometimes fragile, form of social capital’), ‘authority relations,’

‘appropriable social organization,’ and ‘intentional organization’ – understood as ‘direct investment in social capital’ (Coleman 1990: 306–13).

Coleman has been criticized by some for the relative incoherence of this laundry list (Portes 1998). The relationships that Coleman draws attention to, moreover, are conceived of in instrumental terms, as elements in the rational calculations of self-interested agents, and not, as in Bourdieu, as constitutive of individual identities and strategies. As Charles Tilly remarks, ‘. . . Coleman feinted repeatedly toward relational accounts of norms, commitments, and similar phenomena but pulled his punches as they approached the target. Although his verbal accounts mentioned many agents, monitors, and authorities who influenced individual actions, his mathematical formulations tellingly portrayed a single actor’s computations rather than interactions among persons’ (1998: 19).

Nevertheless, like Bourdieu, Coleman highlights the sense in which concrete social relationships can give individuals access to crucial resources not otherwise available despite ample endowments of human or financial capital. He underlines the limited fungibility of social capital: ‘a given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others’ (1990: 302). Moreover, he insists that social capital is embedded in relations, not borne by individuals wherever they might go. Finally, he insists that such subjective attributes as trust, expectations and norms are endogenous to specific social relations. Indeed, the ‘trust’ that figures prominently in Coleman’s account is not the ‘generalized social trust’ of the political science literature, but a feature of the specific context in which specified individuals or classes of individuals can be trusted. Thus, social capital is constituted as ‘social-structural resources’ available only in and through relationships and social structures.

Robert Putnam’s initial interpretation, in *Making Democracy Work* (1993) and ‘Bowling Alone’ (1995a), gave a distinctively Weberian and Tocquevillian reading, consonant with a long tradition in American political science, to Coleman’s concept. Putnam defined social capital as ‘. . . features of social life – networks, norms, and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives’ (1995b: 664–5). For Putnam, associations, particularly those featuring face-to-face, horizontal relations among individuals, generate trust, norms of reciprocity, and a capacity for civic engagement which are essential to the functioning of a modern democracy. In the absence of a strong associational life, citizens would lack the skills and inclinations necessary to work together on economic and political projects. Neither informal networks nor large, national level membership groups

could substitute for the powerful effects thought to emanate from the face-to-face associations characteristic, Putnam argued, of vibrant democracies (Putnam 1993, 1995a). A handful of aggregate indicators, readily available in existing survey data sets, thus come to stand in for Coleman's (and Bourdieu's) context-specific notion of social capital: 'generalized social trust,' membership in organizations, and norms such as reciprocity, cooperation and tolerance. Though Putnam's argument hinges on the ability of associations to produce 'networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity' which in turn promote 'civic engagement' (1995b), the focus on trust, norms and values in his and others' accounts align the argument with the older 'civic culture' tradition, with its assumption that distinctive mixtures of such attitudes and values weigh heavily in the success or failure of democracy.

Putnam's argument has been attacked for neglecting the 'dark' side of social capital (Portes and Landolt 1996), avoiding politics and political structure (Foley and Edwards 1996, 1997; Tarrow 1996), and under-emphasizing the role of large-scale economic changes in undermining civic engagement in the United States and elsewhere (Skocpol 1996). At the same time, his conceptual framework has been criticized for incoherence, in particular for failing to specify under what conditions face-to-face interaction can be thought to generate the desirable civic traits of the argument (Foley and Edwards 1998; Edwards and Foley 1998). Jackman and Miller's careful re-analysis of Putnam's Italian data, moreover, undermines the notion that a coherent 'civic culture' can be discerned behind the differences in performance Putnam found among Italy's regional governments (1996a).

Despite these criticisms, Putnam's formulation of the social capital concept has been tremendously influential in the spate of empirical work that has appeared over the last few years. This work, particularly among political scientists and economists, focuses on the relationships among associations, trust and other attitudes and norms, or, alternatively, between one or both of these sets of variables and social, economic and political outcomes. At the same time, network analysts in particular, and sociologists and applied social scientists more generally, have adopted versions of the social capital concept more in keeping with the social structural versions enunciated by Coleman and Bourdieu, in that they emphasize individual and organizational social ties in predicting individual advancement or collective action.

In the rest of this article, we review a sample of recent empirical work on social capital, distinguishing those approaches which center attention on 'social trust' as a prime indicator of social capital and those which take a more decidedly social structural view. Ours is a theoretically driven review, that is, we review empirical work in hopes

of clarifying the notion of social capital theoretically. As will become apparent, we favor an approach more in keeping with that of Bourdieu. In particular, we will argue that neither resources in general, attitudes and norms such as trust and reciprocity, nor social infrastructures such as networks and associations can be understood as social capital by themselves. As we have argued elsewhere (Edwards and Foley 1997, 1998) the key to understanding how social relations facilitate individual and collective actions lies in a conception of social capital that recognizes the dependence of its 'use value' and 'liquidity' on the specific social contexts in which it is found. The context-dependent nature of social capital, moreover, means that access to social resources is neither brokered equitably nor distributed evenly, as Bourdieu's conception, alone among those canvassed here, explicitly recognizes. The access required to convert social resources (the 'raw materials' of social capital) into social capital has two distinct, but necessary, components – the perception that a specific resource exists and some form of social relationship that brokers individual or group access to those particular social resources. That brokerage can be socially organized at the level of dyads, informal networks (Burt 1997; Heying 1997), voluntary associations (Eastis 1998), religious institutions (Wood 1997), communities (Bebbington 1997; Schulman and Anderson 1999), cities (Portney and Berry 1997), or national (Minkoff 1997) and transnational (Smith 1997, 1998) social movements. The specific social context in which social capital is embedded not only influences its 'use value'; it also shapes the means by which access to specific social resources is distributed and managed.

The context dependency of social capital poses conceptual and methodological difficulties for analysts using it to explain the kinds of macro-social, political and economic outcomes of interest to many political scientists and economists. In such analyses a perverse trade-off exists. The more bluntly one measures social capital and the higher the level of social organization characteristic of the process being explained, the more the model must posit that all social capital is of equal value and that all relationships (or networks, or associations) provide equal access. Work which seeks to explain social capital as a dependent variable, on the other hand, has the advantage that it focuses analytical attention toward, rather than away from, the role of context. It does so by explicitly or implicitly framing a two-fold question as to the production of and access to social resources (which, again, constitute social capital only in conjunction with one another). In the following pages, we consider, first, work which takes social capital as an independent variable conceived in essentially social-psychological terms. Then, we turn to research informed by more social-structural conceptions of

social capital. Finally, we consider research which treats social capital as a dependent variable. In the concluding sections, we lay out what we consider key components of a concept of social capital capable of delivering on the promise of the term.

### *Recent Empirical Research*

We reviewed forty-five recent papers from a variety of disciplines reporting research in which 'social capital' played a major role.<sup>3</sup> In the majority of cases, social capital is treated as an independent variable affecting such outcomes as national-level economic growth (Knack and Keefer 1997; Fukuyama 1995), volunteering (Wilson and Musick 1997), dropping out of school (Teachman, Paasch, and Carver 1996, 1997), mortality rates (Kawachi, Kennedy, and Lochner 1997), returns to human capital (Burt 1997; Friedman and Krackhardt 1997), fertility (Schoen, Kim, Nathanson, Fields and Astone 1997), local economic development (Flora, Sharp, Flora and Newlon 1997; Bebbington 1997), neighborhood stability (Temkin and Rohe 1998), housing quality and levels of crime (Saegert and Winkel 1998), government-community relations (Brown and Ashman 1997; Mazaika 1999), juvenile delinquency (Rubio 1997), and organizational effectiveness (Baku and Smith 1998).

In other studies, social capital is treated as a dependent or intervening variable, with particular emphasis on the sorts of voluntary organizations said to produce it (Banks 1997; Minkoff 1997; Wood 1997; Portney and Berry 1997; Stolle and Rochon 1998; Eastis 1998; Smith 1998; Welsch and Heying 1999), but including work on the impact, in producing and/or shaping it, of schools and youth programs (Youniss et al. 1997), varying types of network linkages within and between micro enterprise programs (Severon 1998), housing mobility resulting from desegregation policies (Briggs 1998), spatial design of communities or the 'architecture of engagement' (Bothwell, Gindroz, and Lang 1998), political context (Booth and Richard 1998a, 1998b), government policy (Nowland-Foreman 1998), economic restructuring (Heying 1997), and even national elections (Rahn, Brehm and Carlson 1997). One study tests a structural model of social capital which posits tight reciprocal relations among social trust, trust in government and civic engagement (Brehm and Rahn 1997); another surveys recent research on social trust and trust in government across nations and finds little such relation (Newton 1999); still another looks at variation over time in 'misanthropy' as measured by the GSS social trust items (Smith, T. 1997).

Even a cursory review of recent empirical literature utilizing the con-

cept of social capital reveals striking differences across disciplines in both conceptualization and operationalization of the term. Among political scientists and the handful of economists and psychologists who have busied themselves with the concept, social capital refers mainly to attitudes, as measured by survey responses to items on social trust, norms of reciprocity and tolerance, and, occasionally, trust in institutions. Though 'social organization' of all sorts is considered a form of social capital in Coleman's work, political scientists and economists tend to see 'associational membership' more as a source of social capital than as an indicator of its presence. 'Civic engagement,' measured as voting, contacting public officials or, occasionally, membership in groups, is most often seen as an outcome of high levels of social capital, though sometimes these variables, too, are used as indicators of social capital. Most of this literature rests on, and sometimes tests, the hypothesis that social capital or associational density have a direct impact on economic performance and the health of democracy, following Putnam's lead (1993).

Sociologists, including applied sociologists working in international or community development, tend by contrast to conceptualize social capital as primarily a social structural variable, operationalizing it as social networks, organizations or linkages between individuals and/or organizations. Even where it is conceived partly in subjective terms (i.e., as norms and values), it may be operationalized as social structures, as when Flora, Sharp, Flora and Newlon identify their 'entrepreneurial social infrastructure' as a 'format for the mobilization of social capital' which effectively creates and directs energies for rural community economic development (1997). In such studies, comparisons among nations are difficult if not impossible, because the level at which social capital is presumed to operate is tied to mainly local social structures. The emphasis, following Coleman, is decidedly on the role of social capital in enhancing the flow of goods and services to specified individuals or groups.

A recent theoretical development within this literature distinguishes what might be called 'within group' social capital from 'between group' social capital. Drawing expressly on Durkheim, Michael Woolcock suggests we attend to both 'integration' (at the group level) and 'linkage' (between groups, or between groups and influential others) (1998). Briggs suggests a similar dyad, 'social support and social leverage' (1998), Lang and Hornburg offer 'social glue and social bridges' (1998), while Warren *et al.* (1999) suggest 'bonding social capital' and 'bridging social capital'. All such efforts should be seen as extensions of the insight that the value of social capital at any given level depends on the larger context, including the insertion of the individual or group in question into networks of relations at higher levels.



*Social trust and social capital*

Because political scientists, in their work on social capital, rely so heavily on survey research, the variable is usually conceived of as something that inheres in individuals (norms and attitudes such as trust). In other words social capital is treated as an individual attribute that constitutes a fully portable resource, the value of which does not fluctuate as the individual moves in and out of numerous social contexts. When conceptualized this way social capital generally flies beneath the radar of the kinds of localized social contexts invoked by Coleman. In cases when social capital is measured at the national level by aggregating survey responses into a 'grand mean,' it cruises at an altitude from which differences among such contexts are indistinguishable. Put another way, the operationalization of social capital in terms of individual subjective states measured at the aggregate level renders it impossible to assess the degree of integration enjoyed by a given group – and this despite the emphasis in this literature on the importance of voluntary associations for 'generating' social capital.

John Brehm and Wendy Rahn's sophisticated effort to rebuild the internal scaffolding of the civic culture argument under the social capital label may be taken as a good illustration of the limitations of this strategy. Brehm and Rahn's model attempts to demonstrate the 'tight reciprocal relationship between levels of civic engagement and interpersonal trust' (1997: 1001). Trust generates participation in the community, and participation generates trust. The two together, moreover, are said to enjoy a similar reciprocal relationship with trust in government, establishing the 'virtuous circle' that Putnam found threatened by reduced levels of associational membership and social trust in the United States (1995). Brehm and Rahn's model thus remains wholly at the individual level, hence does not measure 'social capital' in Coleman's sense or test its consequences directly. The central argument of Coleman's treatment, that the presence of such attitudes and behaviors will provide resources for others who depend upon them, is never directly engaged. Rather, the model attempts to strengthen our confidence in the social capital thesis à la Putnam by showing that higher levels of interpersonal trust in the individuals who make up a polity will naturally be associated with higher levels of civic engagement and trust in government on the part of those same individuals.

It is hard to carry Brehm and Rahn's findings very far, as they are based solely on U.S. data and avoid systematic comparison over time. In fact, a recent survey of cross-national research on social trust, civic engagement and trust in government by Kenneth Newton (1999) shows that Brehm and Rahn's results are idiosyncratic to the United States.

Not only are levels of social trust, political trust and their variation over time significantly different even among developed Western nations, but there is no reliable correlation between levels of social trust and trust in government across nations. In general, moreover, both social trust and political trust seem to be only weakly related to membership in social organizations. Most important, Newton notes that while social trust ‘tends to be high among those who hold a central position,’ and higher within richer nations than poorer, ‘political trust is often rather randomly distributed throughout social groups and types’. Political distrust tends to be associated with high partisanship, particularly where one’s preferred party is out of office for a long time. In general, as Newton puts it, ‘Those who are satisfied with life are trusting, and they are satisfied with life because their income, education, status, . . . social position [and political fortunes] give them good cause to be so’.

Political scientists’ efforts to resurrect the civic culture argument under the rubric of social capital thus appear to get the relationships exactly the wrong way around. As Jackman and Miller point out, the norms and values of the political culture theorists have always been treated as exogenous variables, whereas Coleman explicitly casts social capital as endogenous to particular social structural contexts (Jackman and Miller 1998). Putnam, they note, traces the origins of the patterns he found in northern and southern Italy back to the late middle ages, and is markedly pessimistic about the chances for creating social capital in the absence of such deeply rooted traditions (1993). More in keeping with the expectations generated by Coleman’s argument than with the culturalist expectation that ‘values’ come first, Brehm and Rahn show a stronger relationship running from trust in institutions to interpersonal trust than the other way around, suggesting that more trustworthy governmental institutions make for greater social trust in a society (1997; see also Booth and Richard 1998b). More profoundly, the sort of effects posited for ‘generalized social trust,’ or even the ‘civic norms’ of some of this research, are likely to be highly mediated by much more ‘local’ social structures (Tarrow 1996).

Even when ‘generalized social trust’ is taken as survey respondents’ assessments of the trustworthiness of their social environment, aggregate scores at the national level can tell us little to nothing about what social groups enjoy trustworthy environments, under what circumstances. Moreover, if analysts wished to examine respondents’ assessments of their everyday social environment, rather than the trustingness of the respondents themselves, extant survey data on the U.S. offer more direct indicators, for example the standard question, ‘Is there any area right around here – that is, within a mile – where you would be afraid to walk alone?’

An example drawn from Coleman's exposition might help make clear what we mean. The presence of norms ensuring that 'unattended children will be looked after by adults in the vicinity' constituted social capital for a Jewish acquaintance of his who noted the difference between her old home in the United States and Jerusalem (Coleman 1990: 303). Such norms are no doubt borne by individuals. But even their wide distribution may be irrelevant to the peace of mind of parents unless they are active for *their* children (e.g., Arab children as well as Jewish children, Yemenite and Ethiopian Jews as well as those of obviously European origins) in *their* neighborhood (East Jerusalem, as well as West; Arab neighborhoods, as well as settler communities). The wider the distribution of such norms, no doubt, the more reason I may have to trust my children to themselves (so to speak); but my knowledge that one individual possessed of such a norm is at my small neighborhood park today may be enough to allow me to permit my child to wander over there and hence may constitute social capital for me.

Even more than the distribution of certain norms, the context that makes it possible (or not) for me to rely upon other people's adherence to them determines their significance as social capital. A given neighborhood may have many individuals predisposed to such norms without the neighbors having a sense that theirs is a safe place for children. People's perception that it is so may depend upon such factors as the extent to which people are out on the streets, the external reputation of the area, or a dramatic incident 'demonstrating' the trustworthiness of neighbors. Similarly, high levels of 'generalized social trust,' absent information about who has access to such trust under what conditions, can tell us little about a polity or a community. Context counts, as we have observed before, and counts crucially.

The theoretical difficulties inherent in taking the next step and linking attitudinal data with macro-economic and political outcomes is compounded, in much of the political science literature, by the opaque character of the aggregate data employed. Cross-national research relying on mean scores at the national level on variables such as social trust, civic norms, or trust in government ignore the significance of varying distributions that may lie behind identical statistical profiles. In this respect, work like that of Ronald Inglehart on 'political culture' and Putnam's on the 'civic culture' in Italy is vulnerable to the same criticism that has been applied in the development literature against the use of per capita GNP as a measure of 'development'. In both cases, the underlying distributions may reflect wildly varying national or regional patterns.

The elementary statistical point bears reiterating: the same mean

may reflect a normal distribution or a bimodal one; the same mean and standard deviation can capture bi-modal or relatively flat distributions. Surely it matters whether support for democratic values is (1) normally distributed in a population; (2) represented by a core of activists, organized labor and peasant groups, but counterbalanced by an anti-democratic upper middle class and military; or (3) evenly distributed along a continuum ranging from radical democrats to radically anti-democratic elements. Given the fact that most research on these topics ignores such possible differences, it is little wonder that Newton found little correlation among the key variables of Putnam's thesis.<sup>4</sup>

At some lower level the aggregation of individual characteristics could indicate empirically accessible variations in social context capable of capturing the sorts of expectations and access to social resources Coleman and Bourdieu have in mind, and their impact on people's behavior. To return to the earlier illustration, if I know that my neighbor will look out for my children at the park, then his presence is social capital for me. But this is strictly a function of our relationship and of his availability, and not one that is necessarily generalizable to the whole neighborhood. If we are going to talk about social capital at the level of the neighborhood, the norm that neighbors should look after unattended children probably has to be adhered to by some 'critical mass' of residents. More important, that fact would need to be widely known and accepted as a characteristic of the neighborhood before it could generate the expectations that convert those norms to social capital. Aggregate scores on such norms and perceptions at the level of the social network or neighborhood might well describe significant differences among neighborhoods, but they would not certify real differences in 'social capital' without a closer look at how such differences play out in concrete cases. Aggregating at this level might be empirically difficult or expensive, but makes sense theoretically. Efforts to do so using existing surveys have not proven fruitful.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, interpersonal trust is certainly important at the level of the firm, organization or neighborhood. But the sort of aggregate national measures employed in cross-national studies of political culture since Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture* mask very real differences within societies between the affluent and the poor, white and black, dominant ethnic groups and the marginalized, and political winners and losers, as Newton's survey of the literature shows. Tom Smith's analysis of the data on 'misanthropy,' operationalized as negative scores on the 'social trust' items of the GSS, similarly should give pause to those who have adopted Putnam's reading of the evidence. Smith notes that responses have been shown to be sensitive to both wording and context in the overall questionnaire, and both shift over the years in which the GSS

has been administered. A more careful look at the data shows no clear overall trend, but reveals that misanthropy ('negative social trust') 'is shaped by socioeconomic and minority status, noneconomic life events, religion, and age-cohort.' It is higher among 'the less educated, those with lower incomes, and those with recent financial reversals,' 'among subgroups toward the social periphery,' among victims of crime and those in poor health, among non-church goers and fundamentalists, and among younger adults (1997: 172–80 and 191). Clearly, 'social trust' itself depends upon a larger social context than that captured by the usual measures of associational membership. By the same token, its 'use value' to individuals will vary systematically in ways scarcely considered by macro-analysis of the sort preferred by most of the political scientists in this literature.

The more the 'use value' of social capital is shaped by systematic variations between and within groups, the more distorted the connection between the 'grand mean' of self-reported attitudes and beliefs among survey respondents and the varying social locations and contexts within which social resources are capitalized and made accessible to people.

Both theoretical and methodological considerations, then, point to the difficulty of sustaining the sorts of claims that have been made about the relationships between social capital, conceived in fundamentally normative terms, and macro-economic, political, or social outcomes. Similarly, recent research demonstrates wide variations in the association between membership in voluntary organizations and the sorts of normative outcomes posited in Putnam's argument (Stolle and Rochon 1998; Eastis 1998; Booth and Richard 1998a). Moreover, work outside the social capital framework on the determinants of political participation in American politics points to a complex interplay of factors – including the skills attendant on participation in churches, higher levels of education, and networks of mobilization and recruitment – with variable effects for different sorts of participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Finally, comparative research on the bases for economic growth in higher income, industrial nations suggests that, while cooperation is important, it is won more through conflict, the threat of sanction, and institutions than as a result of exogenously generated trust or norms (Kenworthy 1995, 1997).

These observations underline the importance of returning social capital to its original conception and paying closer attention to the context in which it is said to operate. In the next section, we take a look at some of the recent sociological literature in an exploration of how social capital has been deployed as a structural rather than a cultural construct.

*Social Capital and Social Structure*

Political science research that has examined the relationship between associations and social capital generally identifies social capital with norms and attitudes and looks for effects of associational life (formal and informal) on individual attitudes and behavior. The presumption is that associations facilitate economic growth or democratic performance through their impact on individual norms and attitudes, which in turn have an impact on society through individual behavior (Stolle and Rochon 1998; Eastis 1998). Coleman's conception, however, is both more expansive and less indirect. Social capital includes social organization of all sorts, including 'appropriable social organization' and 'intentional organization' (1990: 311–13). Associations are created for specific purposes but can also be turned to other uses; like social networks, they may be appropriated or intentionally created as 'investments in social capital.' In either case, they are 'social capital' for those who are able to use them, i.e., for those who have access to them. The same may be said of informal relations between people.

As we have argued above, the norms and attitudes which may become social capital for an individual, in fact, do so only by virtue of the institutions or social networks in which they are embedded. Moreover, the social capital available in my neighborhood – to return to our example – stems not only from the subjective attributes carried around by the individuals who live there, but more profoundly from emergent and existing social infrastructures which facilitate individual and collective actions of many kinds. For example, the PTA, neighborhood churches, the volunteer fire department, local realtors, the area newspaper, and the community policing program might all be employed to reinforce the notion that this is the kind of neighborhood where neighbors look out for one another's children and where unattended children are safe on the street. Or these and other organizations may contribute willy nilly to the contrary perception. As instances of 'appropriable social organization' they may be mobilized directly in the service of social goals (good or bad), whether or not they are particularly good at generating attitudes of trust, norms or reciprocity, or civic engagement in their own endeavors.

To expand upon our hypothetical example, when a neighborhood child is struck by a drunken driver, his mother, a member of the network of neighborhood parents who gather in the park for picnic dinners every Friday night, mobilizes other parents in the group to form a chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Her brother enlists the members of the volunteer fire department, up to now better known for misusing public funds for their clubhouse. Other parents join with the

police department to lobby the mayor's office to seek a block grant to beef up the town's community policing program. And the mayor, building on the town's growing reputation as an urban 'multicultural Mayberry' boosts his own clout with county officials by hosting a waffle breakfast at the local coffee shop for the Democratic candidates for governor and assembly, drawing on the business association, realtors, and the new Crime Watch group for funding and ticket sales.

As these examples suggest, the focus of most political science research on the generation of attitudes and a narrow range of behaviors may miss the real meaning and scope of social organization for individual and group efforts. Social organization, both formal and informal, provides multiple resources to individuals and communities. But sheer 'associational density' is not enough, just as the mere existence of other-regarding norms among scattered individuals is not enough to make such norms 'social capital'. Again, aggregate statistics at the national level hardly capture the sort of dynamic sketched above, which depends upon a social context in which social networks, existing organizations, and enterprising individuals conspire to create a cumulative effect which may be absent in other settings, whatever the average level of membership in associations either locally or across the nation. The difficulty of achieving lasting peace in Belfast and Beirut should warn us against assuming that 'associational density' has the same meaning in all social and political contexts.<sup>6</sup>

Social structures must be 'appropriable' by individuals and groups to really be 'social capital'; their use value as social capital will be multiplied to the extent that they enable multiple linkages across communities and beyond them (Bebbington 1997; Flora, Sharp, Flora, and Newlon 1997). Moreover, as the mention of Northern Ireland and Lebanon suggests, not all examples are so happy as the ones we have sketched here. Social networks and institutions may limit members' connections with the wider community; they may include some and exclude others; they may serve selfish and/or anti-social as well as 'public' ends (Portes and Landolt 1996); and they may battle one another furiously over the nature of the 'public good'.

Sociologists who have treated social capital as an independent variable have been much more attentive to the role of informal social networks and formal social organization in providing both individuals and their communities with vehicles for the advancement of their goals than most of the economists and political scientists. Because sociologists have tended to conceptualize social capital more as a structural variable than an attitudinal one, even their use of survey data to measure the concept has differed markedly from that of most political scientists. In developing an analytical model of volunteering, for example,

Wilson and Musick (1997) first carefully distinguish between the human, cultural and social capital revealed in the panel data from the Americans' Changing Lives data set. Their measures of social capital are quite parsimonious – the number of children living in the household (on the assumption that children help connect adults to other adults) and self-reported informal social interactions; but they are clearly tied theoretically to the extent to which respondents enjoy access to resources embedded in a wide range of social networks. Wilson and Musick find that number of children in the household and informal interactions are positively related to volunteering. In addition religious ties predict higher levels of volunteering, presumably through providing opportunities and means to do so, as well as through normative processes. Formal volunteering appears to encourage informal helping, but being part of an informal network of family and neighbors helping one another does not necessarily lead to higher levels of volunteering. These results suggest both the complexity of the relations among forms of social interaction and civic engagement and the way in which the social structural dimensions of social capital might be unraveled.

Teachman, Paasch and Carver (1996, 1997) revisit some of Coleman's earlier work to examine the connection between social and human capital and the decision to drop out of school. They analyze a variety of measures of social capital drawn from National Educational Longitudinal Survey data, centering on family structure and parental involvement in the child's development, but including sibling example, school type and frequency of changes of schools. Catholic school attendance is thought to reflect density of social ties between families and the school, while frequency of school transfers reflects the strength or weakness of students' social ties to their current school. Children with access to higher levels of social capital in all these forms are significantly less likely to drop out of school.

Other analysts have pursued explicitly network analysis and treated social capital as an intervening variable whose 'use value' for career advancement is affected by network structure (Burt 1997) and ethnicity (Friedman and Krackhardt 1997). Burt collected network, performance and background data on a probability sample of 170 men from among the 2,500 who occupied one of three positions just below the rank of vice president in a large U.S. electronics firm. The presence of many 'structural holes' in a network and one's position in the network provide varying access to social capital in the form of 'information and control benefits' which can be utilized to facilitate career advancement. Burt finds that managers with fewer peers doing the same work and whose positions bridge structural holes in the network are more likely to be promoted faster and receive larger bonuses. Friedman and



Krackhardt collected similar network data on five work teams in the computer services division of a major bank and found that social capital, operationalized as 'advice and feedback centrality' was a key intervening factor in explaining why Asian employees were less successful translating human capital into positive career outcomes than were white employees of European descent.

Like these sociologists, a few political scientists have utilized data beyond the General Social Survey, National Election Studies, and the World Values Survey datasets to uncover social structural components of new models of citizen participation, as we noted above. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) utilize their own dataset to get at the sources of both the motivation and the capacity of Americans to take part in political life in family, school, and the institutional contexts of their adult lives. They draw attention to the role of churches – relatively conservative and egalitarian institutions – in developing the skills and motivations relevant for politics. They also point to the significant role of personal connections among friends, family, and acquaintances 'often mediated through mutual institutional affiliations' in recruitment for political activities (p. 17). Though they do not mention 'social capital' in their treatment, the key variables here are 'skills' ('human capital' in Coleman's terms) and contacts ('social capital'). Significantly, neither 'trust' nor 'civic culture' appear in their index. Similarly, Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) put to use a variety of relatively untapped data sources to demonstrate the considerable weight of formal and informal mobilization (above all, through personal contact) in generating political participation. Using data from his 'Russian social capital' survey Richard Rose (1998) examines the differing types of social networks Russians rely on to acquire different kinds of goods and services. Following Coleman's rational choice framework, Rose develops the hypothesis that 'Empirically, situational theories of social capital predict: an individual relies on a heterogeneous set of social networks, depending on the incentives and constraints affecting how things get done in a given situation' (p. 7). Rose tests this expectation against propositions derived from social-psychological or cultural conceptualizations of social capital.

These studies suggest the potential of a social structural interpretation of social capital for explaining individual variations on a wide variety of outcomes. But social structural operationalizations of social capital are also important to explaining more 'meso-level' social, political or economic outcomes. Bebbington (1997), for example, undertakes a comparative case analysis of six communities in the Ecuadorian and Bolivian Andes to explain their varying development trajectories. His structural conceptualization of social capital focuses directly on the

presence (or not) in each community of base and federated organizations and of specific individuals – a university professor in one case, European development volunteers in another, and priests ‘with a pragmatic view of development’ in the others – who linked communities to extra-local institutions and resources. The ‘organizations first helped create the *pre-conditions* for intensification, and then helped catalyze *processes* of intensification’ (1997: 194). The key individuals played crucial roles in renegotiating existing relationships between state, civic and market spheres; i.e., in establishing *linkages* between local organizations and extra-local agencies.

Flora, Sharp, Flora and Newlon (1997) surveyed elected or appointed officials in a random sample of 1,099 non-metropolitan communities to test the relationship between local variations in ‘entrepreneurial social infrastructure’ and its impact on their having undertaken an economic development project. Entrepreneurial social infrastructure – conceptualized as a format for mobilizing social capital – is comprised of three components: the community’s capacity to accept controversy (‘legitimacy of alternatives’); its ability to mobilize resources from diverse sources; and variations in the structure of community networks. Flora *et al.* operationalize the ‘legitimacy of alternatives’ in community deliberations from items asking informants to assess their community’s acceptance of controversy, its depersonalization of local politics, and the openness of local governance processes. Mobilization of diverse resources and the development of broad-based networks with permeable boundaries are also measured with multiple *community level* indicators. The authors find that an unbiased local newspaper (legitimacy of alternatives), contributions to community projects from several types of financial institutions (resource mobilization), and more extensive network linkages to other communities were significant predictors of economic development activity.

Both of these studies suggest three important lessons for empirical investigations using social capital as an independent variable. First, they demonstrate the potential of structural conceptions of social capital to explain meso-level social, political and economic outcomes. Second, both support Coleman’s emphasis on the importance of constructed forms of social organization (e.g., networks, local organizations, linkages) rather than primordial ones (e.g., kinship, geographical proximity). As Flora *et al.* note, this provides an important and optimistic contrast to Putnam’s account of Italy, where regional differences in social capital are said to date to the Middle Ages and so appear rather impervious to change.<sup>7</sup> Finally, both studies demonstrate fruitful and relatively parsimonious models for gathering reliable data on social capital at the same level of social organization as the political or eco-

conomic outcome of interest. In so doing both avoid entirely the methodological difficulties inherent in aggregating individual attitudes or actions into a single measure of political culture with effects posited at the level of the polity or region.

### *Explaining Social Capital*

A final group of analysts have taken up the task of explaining social capital as a dependent, rather than independent, variable. By seeking to explain empirically patterns in the production, presence and use of social capital, they must, as noted above, wrestle directly or indirectly with the ways specific social contexts both shape the 'use value' of social capital and broker access to it. The several studies discussed below point to the importance of context from more proximate organizational contexts (Eastis 1998) to emerging transnational political ones (Smith 1998).

Heying (1997) and Schulman and Anderson (1999) examine how economic restructuring during the 20th century has affected the production of and access to social capital for the current residents of Atlanta and Kannapolis, North Carolina, respectively. Heying's (1995) examination of elite networks in Atlanta from 1931 to 1991 finds that Atlanta's core civic leadership was dominated by the highest ranking executives from locally owned firms. Through 1961 this core group constituted a cohesive network able to exert effective civic leadership. After 1961 the cohesiveness of this network declined, its capacity to exert leadership eroded, and executives from the corporations currently dominating the local economy became comparatively disengaged from civic affairs. Heying (1997) credits the recent trend of mergers, acquisitions and globalization and a resulting 'delocalization' of the economy with causing the civic disengagement of elites. The 'social capital' residing in this social network, in other words, declined in direct relation to shifts in the global economy and the corresponding changes in corporate outlook and operating procedures. Schulman and Anderson (1999) examine the firm of Cannon Mills and social relations in its associated textile community (Kannapolis, N.C.) to demonstrate how the strong 'paternalist' social capital rooted in firm-based hierarchical relations has been eroded by economic restructuring and contemporary market relations and partially replaced by a form of worker-based horizontal social capital produced by various union organizing campaigns. The case illustrates the context dependency of social capital and the social processes by which social capital can be both destroyed and reproduced.

Portney and Berry (1997) and Booth and Richard (1998b) make

clear that local and national political contexts exert substantial influence on the kind and degree of mobilization of social capital. In a study of neighborhood organization across U.S. cities, Portney and Berry found that neighborhood associations chartered by city governments and given substantial local decision-making powers succeeded where other, less formal organizational structures failed to increase citizen satisfaction with city services and sense of ownership of their community, empowering racial and ethnic minorities along the way. Booth and Richard's analyses of survey data from Central America showed that high levels of repression affected both the kinds of organizations that citizens tended to belong to and the degree to which democratic norms and attitudes prevailed among them. Like Stolle and Rochon (1998) and Eastis (1998) – see discussion below – Booth and Richard find that different sorts of groups are associated with different sorts of attitudes, with poor people's organizations (unions and community groups) associated with 'leftist ideological extremism . . . and support for such confrontational tactics as civil disobedience, revolution, and political violence,' while those representing wealthier constituencies were characterized by higher scores on right-wing extremism, revolutionary change and reform, and negative attitudes on civil liberties (Booth and Richard 1998a). These outcomes themselves undoubtedly reflect the highly polarized political situation in several Central American countries at the end of the civil wars of the 1980s.

Minkoff (1995, 1997) and Smith (1997, 1998) both use longitudinal data derived from editions of the *Encyclopedia of Associations* dating back to the middle 1950s to track the emergence of national and transnational social movement organizations and their production of an array of social resources and means of making them available to dispersed participants independent of face-to-face interactions. Specifically, Minkoff (1997) examines the role of national and transnational social movement organizations in producing social resources and making them available as social capital to wide-ranging constituencies through their organizational infrastructures, communication networks and mediating collective identities. Minkoff shows that national social movement organizations build upon and extend the social resources inherent in community-based institutions and organizations. By developing movement infrastructures and collective identities, national social movements knit together a dispersed membership and facilitate collective and individual participation in the public sphere. Smith extends Minkoff's analysis to demonstrate how the recent growth of international political and economic institutions has facilitated patterns of cooperation among transnationally organized social movements. Furthermore, she argues that transnationally organized social

movements produce social capital that is pertinent to the global political arena by providing an infrastructure that facilitates communication and action, cultivates transnational identities and develops public discourse globally. Together, these studies demonstrate that the production of social capital, far from being restricted, as Putnam claims, to arenas where face-to-face interactions predominate, can be found wherever social resources are made available to individuals and groups. Social movements, just like more staid sorts of social organization, provide people with incentives and resources for action, and wide access to both, in local, national and international policy arenas.

Even when analysts focus on the 'neo-Tocquevillian', that is, normative, interpretation of social capital, context proves to be important once we ask under what circumstances what sorts of social capital are produced. Stolle and Rochon (1998) utilize cross-sectional survey data from the United States, Germany and Sweden to examine the relationship between membership in different types of voluntary associations and multiple indicators of what they term 'public social capital,' i.e., attitudes and behaviors thought to be associated with 'civic engagement'. They find important differences between type of group and levels of generalized trust, community reciprocity and tolerance among members. For example, membership in most types of groups were correlated with generalized trust and community reciprocity, but not with tolerance. Members of political associations were both more politically active and less likely to evidence generalized trust or political trust. These findings support Jackman and Miller's conclusion that the traditional civic culture variables do not constitute a particularly coherent complex of cultural traits (1996: 646). In findings broadly similar to those of Tom Smith discussed above, and congruent with the usual civic culture argument, Stolle and Rochon report that members of internally homogeneous groups were less likely to have high levels of generalized trust and community reciprocity.

Carla Eastis (1998) undertakes an ethnographic analysis of social capital in two choral groups operating in the same city and having some overlapping membership. She finds that the community chorus afforded members greater opportunities to acquire organizational skills and gain access to social networks that might subsequently prove useful in civic or political settings beyond the choir than did the more technically demanding, university supported group. Furthermore, differences in the type of music performed – popular show tunes rather than pre-classical music – promoted member diversity in the former and homogeneity in the latter, thus (in keeping with a 'neo-Tocquevillian' logic) instilling norms of reciprocity and trust more effectively among the members of the more diverse community chorus. While Stolle and

Rochon (1998) emphasize that different types of voluntary associations provide participants with differential access to social capital, Eastis' work makes clear the analytical risks inherent in treating even two ostensibly similar groups as equals with respect to social capital (however conceived).

*Is it Time to Divest our Stock in the Social Capital Concept?*

Our answer is a qualified 'No.' If, on the one hand, social capital is conceived as little more than a stand-in for the old political culture variables, we can see very little use in applying a new label to the traditional stock of terms. To the extent that researchers in this tradition continue to rely upon the equally time-worn methodological templates of the early 1960s, we see even less to commend that approach. On the other hand we find much that is promising in the context dependent and social structural/relational approaches of Bourdieu and Coleman. We discuss these below.

We judge the use of 'generalized social trust' (as measured by one or more of the three GSS items commonly used for these purposes) as the primary focus of attention in political scientists' work on social capital a dead-end. While there is no doubt that trust of some sort is crucial to many social relations, there is little evidence that greater or lesser proportions of a population expressing themselves trustful of 'people in general' has any bearing on the health of democracy or the prospects for economic achievement in a given country. On the contrary, such expressions appear to reflect the peculiar social, economic and political positions of the respondents: social trust is the result of a social, economic or political system that works well for some, if not others, not the cause of their felicity. Trust, moreover, is not the universal lubricant that oils the wheels of cooperation wherever it is applied. Rather, cooperation is achieved through a variety of mechanisms, not the least important of which is effective government regulation (Kenworthy 1995). Where cooperation succeeds, trust may be presumed to follow.

Part of our discomfort with the use of 'political culture' variables (norms and values) of all sorts in research inspired by the concept of social capital, is that such research tends to divorce such subjective attributes of individuals from the social context in which (and only in which) they can be understood usefully as social capital. As we have argued above, the mere existence of any such norm 'between the ears' of some number of individuals only becomes 'social capital' to the extent that others in the community may draw upon those normative dispositions in formulating expectations, making plans and carrying out

their activities. The social context – including both how such norms, values and attitudes are distributed among a population and to whom they are ‘available’ – makes all the difference in the world. Hence our dispute with the common use of aggregate statistics at the level of the nation or state to measure something called ‘political culture.’

In the dispute between quantitative cross-national researchers and proponents of ‘small-N’ comparative research, accordingly, our critique of recent uses of social capital in political science and economics would seem to put us squarely on the side of small-N comparison. While it is easy to imagine more adequate uses of the rich data in the World Values Survey, for example, than the sorts of comparisons we and others have criticized – employing cluster analysis, for instance, to uncover significant ‘political cultural’ cleavages in given societies and examining the relationship between the number and relative strength of such cleavages on democratic process or economic performance – it is harder to see how meaningful cross-national comparisons might be achieved using such approaches. Given the likelihood that the link between social trust or any other norm or attitude and civic engagement is highly mediated by social, political and economic context, we find little reason to expect that further efforts to resurrect the civic culture argument under the guise of ‘social capital’ are likely to bear much fruit.<sup>8</sup>

This said, it seems apparent that the notion of social capital provides a useful heuristic for capturing the ways in which social resources are created and made available to individuals and groups (Edwards and Foley 1998). And properly operationalized, it is more than a heuristic, as we have seen. Recent research has shown how interpersonal relations and institutional context may affect outcomes as diverse as individual exploitation of their own human capital, juvenile delinquency, and the success of communities in attracting resources for economic development. At the same time, other work has shown to what extent economic and political context may shape the level and kind of social capital a community may enjoy. Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes may promote more inward-looking strategies; corporate disengagement or government-mandated professionalization of non-profit social service provision may undermine community spirit and voluntarism; different sorts of organizations may produce different mixes of self-regarding and civic behavior.

Political scientists need to think more seriously about the ways in which the elements of social structure facilitate or constrain individual political participation or collective action and look for sources of data which can capture such phenomena. Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995) and Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) have pointed the way in

devising new datasets and creatively exploiting older ones to get at such variables. Mario Diani (1995), Debra Minkoff (1995) and Jackie Smith (1997) have each built extensive datasets focusing on regional, national and transnational organizations respectively, each of which has provided considerable leverage for thinking about how the connections and structures embodied in them work. Richard Rose (1998) has designed a survey instrument expressly intended to tap social capital variables and the varying strategies of individuals in employing available social capital for making organizations work.

Finally, the notion of social capital has already proven useful for political scientists and others concerned with understanding local processes of resource mobilization, economic development, and political recruitment and mobilization. We find much that is promising in this work. At the same time, social capital research in political science and political sociology need not confine itself to local politics, as the work of Minkoff and Smith cited above demonstrates. What these efforts have in common is attention to the social structures in which social resources are embedded and to the kind and degree of access they provide individuals and groups to such resources. Understood in this way, the concept of social capital provides useful leverage for uncovering the ways in which individuals, groups and societies generate, broker and put to use the non-economic resources that are crucial to our maneuvering the diverse social settings of which the economists' 'market-place' is only a minor subset.

#### *'Networking' Social Capital*

Recently there seems to have been a shift of analytic attention regarding social capital away from civic culture analyses based on existing national sample surveys (which has been the 'default' orientation of American political science since the early 1960s), toward a more 'networked' conceptualization of social capital. At two recent conferences of network researchers the concept of social capital was center stage. Both conferences evidenced the presumption that network analysts had been talking about social capital for years and now large sectors of the academic world had finally caught on. While we think that network analysis holds much promise in research on social capital, we offer in closing certain cautions against what might be called an 'over-networked' concept of social capital. Two broad issues must be raised. First, the relationship between 'networks' and social capital must be carefully specified, because as we have already suggested, 'networks' as a means of accessing resources are a necessary, but not sufficient component of social capital. Second, what 'networks' means varies as



the level of analysis rises from individual persons, to informal groups, to organizations, to communities and on to cross-national, or transnational analyses. The meaning of 'networks' at higher levels of analysis has important implications for thinking about social capital, and it is essential to integrate such higher levels into assessments of even individual-level access to social capital.

For many, the precise relationship between networks and social capital is most clearly visible at the level of the individual actor. That relationship, however, cannot be described adequately without distinguishing between social networks as a unit of social structure and the individuals whose relations make up those networks. As a unit of social structure analysts must consider the social location of those networks (e.g., how the network itself is embedded in broader patterns of inequality) and the attributes of those networks (e.g., horizontal vs. vertical). Both features can be expected to influence the type and value of resources accessible through a given network. These two features of social networks are analytically distinct from the network attributes of the specific individuals (e.g., number and breadth of ties, or centrality) comprising the network. A given individual in a network could be described, for instance, in terms of the number of ties they have to others, whether those ties integrate them further into the network or link them to the broader social field. The term 'networks' is often wielded imprecisely in this sense in recent discussions of social capital to refer to the number of ways a given individual would have available to access resources. The expectation is that having more ties, or more diverse ties, increases an individual's likelihood of accessing resources of various kinds. While there may be something to these assumptions, such a view glosses over the enormous differences that different *sorts* of ties and network positions, and the resources they give access to, can make.

Consider, by contrast, the implications of an approach that sees the network as the micro-structural context in which individuals act. The network is the immanent structure (Bourdieu 1986) that influences the 'use value' of an individual's network position or ties. The amount of access an individual gains from a network depends on two things. First, it depends on the structure of the network itself and the individual's precise position within it. As the contours of the network change over time, the amount of access to resources that individuals command by virtue of their network attributes also changes. Second, the social location of the entire network within the broader socio-economic context shapes the ways that specific networks can and cannot link their members to resources. As we have noted elsewhere (Edwards and Foley 1997, 1998), an individual may have extensive

access to resources in a specific network, but the network as a whole may be embedded in a declining sector or an oppressed constituency. Recent discussions of social capital from a social-structural perspective underline this point in referring to the ‘linkages’ or ‘social bridges’ that local networks need in order to gain access to a greater array of resources.

Finally, while more, or more diverse, network ties increase an individual’s likelihood of accessing crucial resources in a given socio-historical context, resources are accessed one tie at a time. As Briggs concludes, ‘adding just one steadily employed adult to an adolescent’s circle of significant ties has dramatic effects on perceived access’ (1998: 177). Or, as we discussed above, knowing that just one reliable parent is in the neighborhood park enables a child’s care giver to benefit from that social tie. In other words, more ties are better, but one tie might be sufficient to gain access to a crucial resource. This distinction helps clarify why neither networks (as micro-structures), nor network attributes of network members alone equal social capital. Networks and the network attributes of individuals are but one – very important – means of accessing resources. Without some knowledge of the resources available through networks, we have no way of judging how much social capital an individual or group actually has at its disposal. Whether conceived as the number or diversity of ties, as network position, or as structural attributes of entire networks, networked access is but a crucial component of social capital. Access is a necessary, but not sufficient component of social capital (Bourdieu 1986; Portes 1998). *Social capital is best conceived as access (networks) plus resources.*

#### *A Model of Social Capital*

In closing, we draw together these points in order to clarify a model of social capital. Figure 2 helps illustrate the relationship of social context to social capital and social capital to both means of access and the agency of specific actors. The top arrow in Figure 1 denotes the uneven distribution of social resources across specific social contexts in a given society and signals the fact that the ‘use value’ of resources available in a given context varies according to the location of that context within the larger socioeconomic setting. Thus, both the resources present in a given social context and their potential value to individual or collective actors capable of accessing them are dependent upon the location of the specific social context within which the actor operates – whether an organization, community, or a network – in the broader context of socioeconomic stratification. The second arrow problematizes the question of access to the specific resources present in a given context. In

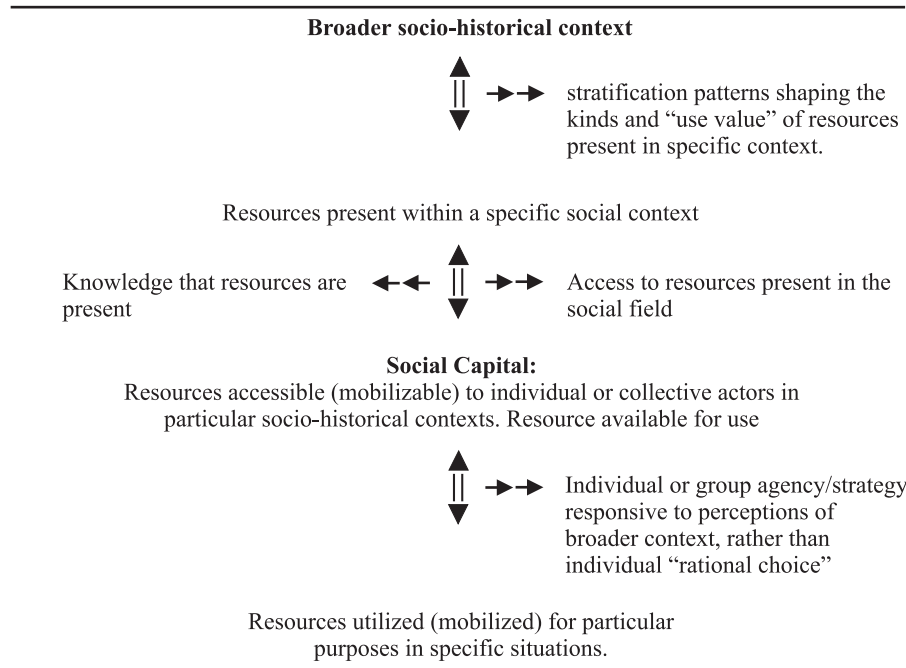


FIGURE 1.

order for such resources, the ‘raw materials’ of social capital, to be converted into social capital, individual or collective actors must perceive that some specific resource is present within their social field and have some form of social relationship that provides access to those resources. Social networks provide direct access to both resources and information. They also constitute the most proximate spheres of interaction in which individuals come to perceive resources to be both available and valuable.

Individual or collective actors can be said to have social capital when resources are present and accessible, in other words when they are actually available for use. Thus, social capital = resources + access. Consequently, measures of network attributes should not be treated as direct measures of social capital, no more than the mere presence of some sort of resources should be. Measures of access can be taken as indirect indicators of social capital in the sense that one cannot have social capital available without access, so more means of access increases one’s *likelihood* of having greater social capital available for use. We would argue, moreover, that measures of access are better indicators of one’s potential social capital than would be some indica-

tion of the resources generally present in a given context (applying the same sort of reasoning we employed earlier with regard to aggregate measures of socially useful attitudes or norms).

Finally, the bottom arrow of the figure indicates the role of individual or collective agency. Simply because an individual or collective actor has social capital available for use does not mean that they use it immediately until it is exhausted. The basic distinction between mobilizable resources (social capital) and resources actually used needs to be maintained. Actors may use social capital for good or ill. While a rich endowment of social capital, moreover, certainly disposes an individual, group or community to success (however defined), specific strategic choices in the use of social capital determine actual outcomes.

The formulation captured here has several strengths. First, it explicitly accounts for the context dependency of social capital – not all actors in a group, community or polity have equal access to the same resources. One reason that social capital is context dependent is because neither of its necessary components (resources and access) are distributed evenly. Thus, a second strength of the view of social capital is depicted in Figure 1 is that it allows for the stratification of both resources and access to be differentiated and investigated theoretically and empirically. A network analytic conception of social capital rightly calls attention to the fact that resources are not equally available to all individuals or collective actors operating within specific geographic or organizational boundaries. Analysts are required to do more than place actors in the proximity of resources; analysts need to demonstrate that actors have access to those resources, and network analysis shows the way. Yet, to the extent that such an approach equates social capital with access, the quality and quantity of resources accessible are implicitly held constant. But in fact, the use value of social capital depends upon how specific networks are embedded within the broader system of stratification, i.e., how and why different networks provide access to richer or poorer stores of resources. The quantity and quality of the resources available must also be examined in any judgement of the value of the social capital available to an individual or group. Third, this formulation does not implicitly presume that every individual or collective actor utilizes all their social capital all the time. Rather, one can be said to have social capital if one has access to specific resources, yet one can have social capital and not use it at a particular time for a variety of reasons, or not use it well. This allows a clear distinction to be made between the possession of social capital and the use of social capital; in short, agency is problematized as a variable influenced by a range of factors, rather than implicitly presumed to be constant.

## NOTES

1. This distinction, which appears frequently in the literature, bespeaks the easy slide into normative concepts occasioned by the adoption, by Robert Putnam and others, of the 'civic culture' argument of 1950s political science. Rarely theorized explicitly, its meaningfulness is even more rarely tested. One exception in the literature under review is Knack and Keefer (1997), who explore the differences between 'Putnamesque' and 'Olsonian' groups in their effects on economic performance, with the latter being defined as traditional interest groups, while the former include religious and church organizations; education, arts, music, or cultural groups; and youth organizations. This in an attempt to test the conflicting claims that associational participation promotes trust and cooperative habits (Putnam) or harmful rent-seeking behavior (Olson). The authors find no empirical support for either position, as membership in the Olsonian groups appears to have no effect on investment or growth, while membership in Putnamesque groups appears ('perversely') to harm investment (1997: 1273-4).
2. In recent presentations and forthcoming work, Putnam has adopted an understanding of social capital which focuses exclusively on 'networks' and has argued that 'social trust' must be understood endogenously, that is, as a reflection of the experiences and social setting in which individuals find themselves and not as an independent variable.
3. Our 'sample' is more opportunistic than representative, and is mainly for illustrative purposes. We have limited ourselves to published material published since 1995 that has specifically embraced the concept of 'social capital.' Our 'sample' has two principal sources, the bibliographical databases Sociofile and Proquest, which catalog articles from a variety of sources and papers published in four recent thematic journal issues, our two edited issues of *American Behavioral Scientist* (1997, 1998), a thematic issue of *Housing Policy Debate* (1998) on 'Social Capital: Its Importance to Housing Policy and Community Development' and a 'Symposium: Community Capacity, Social Trust and Public Administration' in *Administrative Theory and Praxis* (1999). We have restricted our focus to articles we deemed to be empirical rather than those either strictly theoretical, social commentary, or opinion. Our timely retrieval rate from the bibliographical database search was roughly 85 percent.
4. Jackman and Miller (1996a, 1996b) have found serious methodological faults on other grounds with Putnam and Inglehart. They note that Putnam's single-factor solution in constructing his indicator of institutional performance in *Making Democracy Work* does not adequately represent the information in the underlying measures and that re-analysis using the original variables does not support his conclusions. In reanalyzing data from Inglehart's *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (1990), Jackman and Miller find only weak correlations among the key cluster of cultural variables and note that each responds differently to changes in economic conditions. In general, they find that 'the six "components" of political culture do not form a coherent general structure' (1996a, p.648). In a rejoinder to criticisms, they point out that the one variable that remains significant in Granato, Inglehart and Leblang's re-analysis (1996), McClelland's 'need for achievement,' is measured in 1990 to predict economic growth from 1960 to 1989 (1996b, p. 700).
5. It cannot be done, as some have thought, by simply disaggregating data representative of a larger unit (nation) to 'measure' variables at the subunit (state) level (Kawachi, Kennedy and Lochner 1997). Disaggregating the 1996 National Election Survey into state level indicators of political activity illustrates the flaws in such an approach. The nationally representative sample (N=1,714) has a margin of error of +2.4%, yet nine states have zero respondents in the nationally representative sample and six more have between one and four, which means that as state level samples they would have a margin of error of between +50 and +100%. Only three state level subsamples - California, Texas and Virginia - would have margins of error less than +10%. To make meaningful and reliable cross-state comparisons one would have to use separate random samples from each of the 50 states. For each of these to have a margin of error of even +10%, each state sample would need 100 cases for a total of 5,000 across all 50 states. To gather such data on neighborhoods or even communities would require Herculean data collection efforts and vast resources, a task for the Census Bureau. While using the standard procedure just described at higher levels of analysis like cities, states, or nations would yield reasonably reliable measures, at that level of analysis such aggregate scores, regardless of their reliability, would lack validity, because they collapse too many relevant

- social cleavages and could mask systematic and even extreme differences between geographic or social groupings.
6. Peter Uvin notes that Rwanda probably enjoyed the highest density of 'civil society' in Africa, yet many of these associations contributed indirectly and sometimes directly to the genocide which overwhelmed the nation in 1994. Little of the social capital represented by this 'rich associational life' served to prevent or stem the horror because most of it reflected the racism and structural violence that had characterized Rwandan society since independence (1998).
  7. Bourdieu (1986) would observe that even so-called 'primordial' social relations are 'constructed' as individuals and groups invest in alternative social formations through ritual institution and consecration of everyday relations.
  8. Nevertheless, we would not want to rule out further cross-national research on political culture. Such work might pay more attention to standard deviations than means on attitudinal variables and might incorporate such data as the Gini coefficient (see Knack and Keefer 1997) in assessing the importance of economic variables in predicting outcomes. Any such analysis would have to be accompanied by more sensitive, case-oriented approaches, however.

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