

# Rethinking Social Capital



# Rethinking Social Capital:

*Global Contributions  
from Theory and Practice*

Edited by

Elisabeth Kapferer, Isabell Gstach,  
Andreas Koch and Clemens Sedmak

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March 2017





## INTRODUCTION

ELISABETH KAPFERER / ANDREAS KOCH

Concepts of social capital play a well-established role in a number of academic disciplines and continue to grow in popularity in the discourses of the sciences as well as those of civil society and social practice. The relevance of social capital as an individual, collective and universal resource has often been described in literature, as have its most common manifestations such as shared values and norms or reciprocal trust. Commonly membership of clubs or associations is considered here as a reference point, but also other links such as kinship, friendships, neighbourhoods, job relations, social strata, local and regional ties etc., are acknowledged as important. While on the one hand generating apparently positive effects, being based on a kind of belonging—a belonging that is not always of one’s own choice however—on the other hand social capital also contributes to social inequalities and an unequal distribution of power as well as inequalities in capabilities and opportunities to engage in social life. In a nutshell, social capital is discussed quite controversially on the basis of different conceptualizations influenced, e.g., by Robert D. Putnam, James Coleman or Pierre Bourdieu, but nevertheless as an element that is fundamental and constitutive of various forms of societal coexistence and wellbeing.

This volume, “Rethinking Social Capital”, represents the extended proceedings from a two day conference held in Salzburg, Austria, in March 2015 dedicated to bringing together researchers and practitioners from different scientific disciplines. The volume comprises the contributions to this conference and is supplemented by a number of further reflections and case studies provided by specialists from all over the world. Their shared concern is to step out of well known paths of discourse and to follow distinct trains of thought about social capital: the phenomenon, its theoretical and philosophical reflection, methodological comprehension as well as the issues and challenges of its practical application.

## Part I—Reflections on the Concept of Social Capital

The contribution of Andreas KOCH questions the usefulness of the capital approach in social relations. While economic capital serves as a means of exchange, a means of value hedge, and a unit of calculation, it is less obvious whether social capital can be associated with these attributes. Based on this problem of analogy the paper addresses three common questions. Is the close dependence on the concept of a capital-based approach still adequate to describe forms of social (inter-)actions? What meaning can be addressed to “things” that are not captured by (different sorts of) capital? What relationship can be assumed between individual resources (capital) and collective contexts (institutions)?

Clemens SEDMAK directs the reader’s attention to the bridging function of social capital. His argument here is that, compared with the bonding function of social capital, the quality of bridging capital is more inclusive and involves ties between heterogeneous social entities. By drawing empirical, semantical, and metaphorical analogies with the notion of the bridge he clearly points out the versatile functions and meanings bridges have in our lives. With these imaginations of bridges in mind Sedmak then illustrates their real impact on social capital by the introduction of three examples.

One function of social capital can be seen in its quality as a means of mitigating social inequality and supporting social cohesion. To emphasize this function seems to be important when taking increasing inequalities and injustices in contemporary capitalistic societies into consideration. One option of strengthening ties between people of different social classes is to refer social capital measures to social spaces, i.e. the environment that immediately affects human interactions. Jens DANGSCHAT reflects upon this idea by focusing on cities as breeding grounds for utilizing social capital as a “social bridging tool” in urban diversity management strategies.

The fact that good ideas and strategies can incorporate non-intended problematic side effects is illustratively demonstrated by Sieglinde WEYRINGER’s contribution. She analyses three community projects in South America, Africa, and Europe by focusing on their initial positive purposes and where they ultimately ended up. Misunderstandings, due to cultural differences, a lack of knowledge and adequate communication relationships, lead to frustration with and refusal of the projects by the beneficiaries in all these cases. By making the possibility explicit that social capital efforts do not necessarily result in positive outcomes the paper concludes with the suggestion of incorporating a multi-perspective approach including geographical, historical, and cultural contexts in a tailored way.

A similar discourse is delineated by Benjamin GRÖSCHL. He investigates the carrying capacity of social capital concepts with respect to their flexibility to include deviant behaviour. Social capital very much rests upon trust and solidarity in communities of more or less similar members. If these can be assumed as fundamental ingredients of collective well-being then the question of the resilience of social networks can be raised. Is it possible to deal with deviant behaviour—from an insider perspective of affected communities—in a credible way? In trying to find an answer Gröschl applies an equation-based mathematical approach.

The issue of network or community resilience is also discussed by Márton LENDVAY. His approach, however, does not take the durability of networks into consideration, but introduces the idea of extending the imagination of social networks to non-human actors such as computers, fences or contracts. In particular he refers to watermelons as non-human actors in an empirical case study located in southeast Hungary. He argues that watermelons, by incorporating a great deal of individually and collectively assigned identifications, act “as if” they were humans. In doing so, they then can be understood as important nodes in hybrid social networks.

The metamorphosis of social capital towards a more fluid understanding of their ingredients is also captured by the contribution of Mario WINTERSTEIGER. In postmodern societies it seems no longer possible to deal with trust or solidarity using a simple binary distinction of “given” or “not-given”. Instead, smooth transitions of socially capitalized interactions with subtle differentiations in temporal, spatial, and social contexts lead to a more suitable understanding of what is going on in communities. Referring to Nietzsche’s philosophy, Wintersteiger concludes that the Apollonian cultivation of myths and aesthetics is a prerequisite for stabilizing today’s Dionysian understanding of social capital.

The contribution of Thomas LAMPOLTSHAMMER and Johannes SCHOLZ can be read as a practical instance of the aforementioned theoretical reflections as it discusses the role of open data as a new, hybrid and fluid form of social capital in digital societies. Technological change has reinvented an old idea of sharing collective goods—the idea of the commons that can be found in software licenses, car sharing, or social co-housing projects. Open data can be seen as a necessary precondition for all of these sharing efforts. By presenting two already realized open data projects the chapter highlights the relevance of open data as resources for fuelling social capital. This contribution also serves as a bridge to the second set of chapters dealing with applications of social capital concepts in various domains.

## Part II—Case Studies

In the opening chapter of this second set, Katja NEUREITER, Alina KRISCHKOWSKY, Ulrike BRUCKENBERGER and Manfred TSCHELIGI emphasize the importance and value of work life experience and professional knowledge—during employment, but also after retirement. Employment not only provides us with the necessary material means for a living but also creates meaning and relationships, or social capital. In the course of the European project *ProMe* an online platform was established to foster exchanges between older and young adults, people in occupations and those who are retired, in order to facilitate collaborative engagement and foster relationships that activate intellectual capital. Based on a survey conducted with participants in *ProMe* between 20 and 93 years old, the authors discuss what qualities such a platform requires in order to successfully support cooperative engagement across generations.

The flooding of the city of New Orleans during hurricane Katrina serves as the background for Paul KADETZ to study the dynamics of social capital in crisis: he examines the social impact the disaster had on two different minority groups in the city who already showed different levels of social capital prior to the hurricane and in the light of the catastrophe showed different coping patterns. Findings from more than 150 in-depth interviews give insights into the complex relations between social cohesion, trust and equality and their impact on social capital, with consequences for a community's ability to overcome adversities and for community resilience.

The chapter by Laura M. WESTHOFF also refers to a U.S. located exemplary episode, namely to the building and growing of the Community Service Organization (CSO), its foundation in 1947 and its development in the following years. The CSO played a significant role in California's multi-ethnic civil rights movement and in establishing citizenship practices among marginalized Mexican American farmworkers and Mexican immigrant communities as a form of social capital. Westhoff shows how the CSO and its leaders succeeded in fostering social capital, political inclusion, social and economic security for marginalized citizen farmworkers while at the same time their practices excluded those immigrant workers who did not enjoy citizenship and contributed to their further discrimination.

Immigrants, again, are the protagonists in the following examination by Ursula TRUMMER, Sonja NOVAK-ZEZULA and Arild AAMBØ. They focus on the interplay between health and migration and, in particular, the significance of social capital with respect to both. Depending on their personal background migrants can be more affected by inequalities, including health

inequalities, than native residents. While health research provides plenty of evidence on the general importance of social capital to physical as well as psychological health, little attention has yet been paid to migrants' strategies to gain and make use of social capital. The authors address this point by looking exemplarily at Turkish women living in Austria. Data from qualitative interviews shows that social capital, though significant, is by no means a panacea. In daily life and with regard to health and well-being social relations can be supportive as well as restricting. Social capital, however, in its many facets, appears as seminal in order to describe, analyse and understand their dynamics and impact.

Martin MAYR adds to this volume with a field report from a development aid worker's perspective in Western-Bahia, Brazil. Since 1993 he has been involved in all kinds of work in the field of agrarian development of poverty areas and has experienced the relevance of social capital as well as the implications of its lack. His report includes accounts of two specific development projects, both aimed at assisting small farmers in cooperating instead of struggling alone, in organizing their community and to collectively take matters into their own hands. Mayr's experience also tells us about expectations and disappointments, goals and failures, about (probably essential) high hopes and (presumably inevitable) basic struggles and efforts.

The following chapter by Georg WIESINGER transfers the issue of social capital in rural development, networking and decision-making from rural Brazil to peripheral areas in Austria. Drawing on two research projects Wiesinger discusses the role of social capital regarding the question of why some remote areas affected by rural decline struggle more than others whilst other areas are better able to defy unfavourable conditions and thrive. Applying Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" on a territorial level and combining it with social capital concepts as introduced by Robert D. Putnam, he concludes that rural development policy should pay a lot more attention to social capital and its crucial importance for strengthening local networks and successfully implementing innovative initiatives and development strategies.

One specific instance for an initiative aimed at fostering community well-being and social cohesion in peripheral regions can be found in the Austrian social festival *Keep the Ball Rolling*.—Isabell GSTACH and Elisabeth KAPFERER in their contribution present the idea behind the festival and discuss if and how the objectives set by its initiators could be reached in the regions where it has hitherto taken place. Findings from the scientific monitoring of the project applying combined methods suggest certain patterns in the development of relations, networks, trust, recognition and, hence,

social capital. The phases of development that could be identified in this case study also clearly point to the significance of allowing time for such initiatives to prosper.

The concluding chapter expands the perspective from local to national level and from local communities to the development of a political system and society. Rachid TOUHTOU directs our attention to Morocco, pre and post the 2011 Arab Spring. He portrays the emergence of civil society activism, such as volunteering, as a new form of social capital that during the democratization phase in Morocco ought to be translated into political capital. The author discusses not only different dimensions (religious, cultural and historical) of volunteering in civil society but also its impact on new forms of doing politics. Touhtou explores whether civil society can contribute to good governance practices and mechanisms. Generally, its impact appears rather limited, for reasons to be found as much in the political system as in civil society itself and in its interplay with the public sector. Encouragingly, however, some recent examples also show the potential inherent to civil society activism as an “engine of democracy” and to civil society NGOs as new protagonists in (speaking with Nancy Fraser) societal “needs talk”.

The contributions in this volume aim to open up new perspectives on social capital and ways to acquire and nourish, maintain and foster it as well as to discuss the manifold desirable and undesirable implications of social capital. They come from researchers and practitioners with different backgrounds including sciences such as sociology, philosophy, social geography, economics, health studies, history, interpersonal communication studies and cultural studies, as well as social practice in development aid. The volume hence addresses a broad audience from diverse disciplines coming both from academic fields and from practice.

## **PART I**

# **REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL**





# CAPITAL, THE SOCIAL AND THE INSTITUTION— BOURDIEU'S THEORY OF SOCIAL CAPITAL REVISITED

ANDREAS KOCH

## Introduction

Bourdieu's approach, in order to justify the incorporation of capital into the cultural and social realms, rests on the idea that the creation, consolidation, and transformation of social relations takes time to evolve. "The social world is accumulated history, and if it is not to be reduced to a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents who are treated as interchangeable particles, one must reintroduce into it the notion of capital and with it, accumulation and all its effects" (Bourdieu 1986: 241). Availability and utilisation of social relations, of interacting with other individuals, are not realised in an environment that provides instantaneous linkages without any reference or framing. Capital, understood as "accumulated labour", takes time to be recognised as trust, solidarity, or empathy. The question raised here is whether the idea of capital is (still) an adequate context to understand and represent social actions.

Two alternative theories are assumed to be worth using to confront the social capital theory of Bourdieu in order to describe, explain and understand the meaning of social relations—one is actor-network-theory (ANT) that does not neglect Bourdieu's idea of capital as a means for social distinction but puts it as a specific subset of objectives among many others (Latour 2005), and the other theory is system theory which argues for communication as a basic means in social relations (Luhmann 1997). Considering these theories as relevant alternative approaches does not insinuate a blind spot in the social capital approach. In fact, there are other theoretical reflections within the general discourses on social capital which evolve from a strong relation to social capital as an individual capital resource, such as Coleman's (1988) functional approach or Putnam's (2002) systemic approach. Furthermore, Bourdieu (1986: 241) himself criticises an economic reductionism of the capital concept. Nevertheless, his thinking remains embedded into a capitalistic-economic perspective with negative and positive effects (Nassehi & Nollmann 2004: 11).

The above general question aims at approaching three domains of social mechanisms that are closely related to the purpose of capital-based explanations and can be delineated in the following way:

- *Is the close dependence on the concept of a capital-based approach still adequate to describe forms of social (inter-)actions?* This question reassesses basic characteristics of economic capital and the justification for translating it into cultural and social contexts.
- *What meaning can be addressed to “things” that are not captured by (different sorts of) capital?* Social mechanisms (actions, interactions) are associated with and associated by many “human and non-human”<sup>1</sup> objects necessary to live and survive as human being which are not appreciated by social capital.
- *What relationship can be assumed between individual resources (capital) and collective contexts (institutions)?* The introduction of social capital has in part been justified by the sociological approach of a class society. This approach will be compared with a functional perspective of social differentiation.

The three questions will then be conclusively analysed using the phenomenon of socio-spatial homogenisation in order to demonstrate an application domain where an exclusive capital approach does not fully embrace the structures and processes which contextualise social (inter-)actions.

## **The capital domain of social capital**

Many contemporary societies (at least of the Western world) are intuitively dealing with a contradiction: on the one hand we are facing the fact that more and more spheres of our lives are determined by economic principles of efficiency and profit-motive, on the other hand we are reluctant to consider our behaviour as the result of rational choices (*homo oeconomicus*). The idea of capitalising social relations may thus be convincing and dubious at the same time.

Bourdieu (1986: 248) defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable

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<sup>1</sup> Quotation marks are used here to indicate that the sharp distinction between the two worlds is somewhat artificial and will be resolved later in the paper.

network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition". With this definition an actor-centred and utilitarian perspective prevails that not only presupposes the affiliation to one or many social networks as a constituent characteristic, but also assumes knowledge about the structure and function(s) of these. Networks vary significantly in size and complexity; they can be concrete and manageable as, for instance, families and cliques as well as abstract and opaque, as is the case for associations, organisations, labour markets, or electoral rolls.

Furthermore it is remarkable that the unit of value, the currency, is implicitly given by solidarity, reciprocity, and trust, expressed explicitly as network connections, however. "The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus 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" (ibid.). This quantitative relation—the more connections one has the higher his/her social capital is—sounds odd, because it makes no qualitative difference in terms of network structure (density of relations), or the nature and value of relations (positions and roles of agents, weights of directions). "Resources" within the social capital context are understood as the availability of network relationships, which are, however, not specified—neither quantitatively nor qualitatively.

Economic capital is characterised by indicators or criteria which allow for a comparative evaluation of its use, independent of the concrete case of application. Examples of these indicators are purchasing power, interest rate, inflation rate, dividend or land value index. Though the determination of value of these indicators crucially depends on complex relationships<sup>2</sup> they can be used as an independent reference, nonetheless. This is different from social capital. Value and evaluation of resources become concrete in Bourdieu's approach only when they are utilised in a specific social network context. Coleman's (1990: 302) functional approach of social capital accounts more suitably for assigning value to social relation: "Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different 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" (see also Jungbauer-Gans 2006). The point

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<sup>2</sup> The complexity of relationships is, among others, due to global value chains, tariffs, minimum wages regulations, spatio-temporal disparities, scarcity of goods and services, production and trade regulations, and debts.

I want to make here is: either social capital emerges routinely in concrete social network relations; if this is true then it would be more appropriate to disengage from the position of social capital as a sort of capital comparable with economic capital, because it has no common meaning transferable to arbitrary contexts. Or social capital can be counted and represented as figures; then it would be useful to consider social capital as methodologically closely related to economic capital.<sup>3</sup>

The three functions of capital and money, respectively, are (i) a means of exchange, (ii) a means of value hedge and preservation, and (iii) a unit of calculation.<sup>4</sup> Accumulation may play a major role in all of these functions, but is not restricted to them. The worth of capital also stretches to the functions of distribution and circulation within a commodity and service economy (Felber 2010, Hopkins 2013). Taxation and social security contributions are other examples of how capital is used. In addition, economic capital accumulation implies accumulation of both surplus and debt. The execution of all these functions requires not only a general usability of capital but also a (statistical) scale of measurement that enables comparisons and evaluations across a diverse field of objectives, and of spatial and temporal scales. All this is not given—or not sufficiently so—with social capital. It is possible to weigh and to qualify the direction of network relations, but still no adequate measures are available which account for the latent variables associated with social capital. In other words, it makes no sense to say “we must double solidarity or trust by doing X”. It would, however, be a scientifically fruitful endeavour to develop indexes of social capital—based

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<sup>3</sup> Coleman’s definition points to another topic which will be briefly outlined here. His mutual reference of social structure and individual action contributes to the insight that the possession of social capital as resource must also consider the other side of the coin, that is the institutional arrangement regarding capital: a common agreement (by rules and laws) on, e.g., the properties of capital, its legal use, and the hedge of its value (inflation)

<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu highlights the “value of exchange” of social capital. Compared with economic capital this value is seen as neither original nor most important in economic trade relations. According to Kunkel’s (2014: 123 ff.) reading of Graeber’s (2011) book “Debt. The first 5.000 Years” it is the unit of calculation (UoC) that is historically original and economically important. This also has impacted and still impacts economic relationships since the function of the UoC is important for the emergence of debts, and debts in turn are one type of tie which continue for a long(er) period compared with trade relations. In addition, debts create a hierarchy of power between lender and borrower. Here an accumulation of capital and power is becoming manifest.

on trust, solidarity, network relations, etc.—with the aim of investigating social networks comparatively.<sup>5</sup>

Economic capital too depends on exogenous factors, as mentioned above, which set their possession and use in relation to institutional regulations. This is similar to social capital: I possess trust and the power to “execute” trust (including the ability to sanction mistrust). In order to “execute” trust I must occupy an adequate position within the network—and this position depends crucially on the assignment of other members of the network. I may have earned the position because of my trustworthiness, but the position results in a (temporal) assessment of many exogenous influential forces.<sup>6</sup>

Although Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital as one sort of capital relevant in social relations contributes to the discovery of social mechanisms of reciprocity and trust in social networks there remains a lack of conflation of—or a lack of transferability between—the different sorts of capital. The gap between economic capital (property rights) on the one hand and cultural capital (educational qualifications) as well as social capital (network resources, or “titles of nobility” in Bourdieu's wording) on the other hand seems to be too large to allow for a seamless translation.

The thesis receives confirmation partly due to a change of the nature of economic capital in contemporary economies and societies, respectively. Today's regimes of capital accumulation are realised with advanced telecommunication technologies which ensure capital transfer without temporal delay. This situation is akin to Bourdieu's (1986: 241) description of a Roulette economy, “which holds out the opportunity of winning a lot of money in a short space of time, and therefore of changing one's social status quasi-instantaneously”. This is close to a non-historical view, “[...] a world without inertia, without accumulation, without heredity or acquired properties, in which every moment is perfectly independent of the previous one [...]” (ibid.).

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<sup>5</sup> Huge progress has been made in the field of analytical social network research; see, e.g., Batagelj et al. 2014, Buskens et al. 2015, Namatame and Chen 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Another interesting question which is simply raised here is that of settlement of surplus and debt. With respect to economic capital an agent (household) can have a surplus of income and debt (mortgage) at the same time. Similarly, it is possible (and real) to have positive income and public debt simultaneously. A third example would be the relation between interest (positive) and inflation (negative). Is this simultaneous settlement of “plus” and “minus” also possible in the domain of social capital?

The thesis also receives confirmation due to an increased struggle for a coherent and adequate interpretation of Bourdieu's definition of social capital under current societal conditions.<sup>7</sup> A common tendency can be seen in attempts that understand social capital in the most comprehensive way possible as basic ingredients of social networks. In this sense social capital is defined as "the stuff that networks are made of" (Früchtel et al. 2010: 85, translation A.K.), or as a "rigorous relational category" (Kessl et al. 2005: 191, translation A.K.). Dill (2012: 85) claims for his own approach that a definition should be a clear and simple one: "Social capital is the sum of intangible merits and goods within a community" (translation A.K.). Although Bourdieu proposed a definition that can be applied to empirical studies in principle, many researchers are struggling with their own attempts to grasp the nature and epistemology of social capital.<sup>8</sup>

Dill's definition, for example, is anything but clear and simple. What can be accepted as "intangible merits" in communities and by whom? Who or what defines communities, and why are we dealing now with communities instead of networks? Are they identical? Who is producing and who is consuming intangible goods, based on which distribution rules? How does one sum up intangible goods? This definition is different from the accumulation and the "unit of calculation" concept, because it provides no clues about distributional rules (it is a simple sum), the nature of intangible goods, and the nature of communities (which is much harder to specify than talking about social networks<sup>9</sup>). The distinctive property of social capital in comparison with human or economic capital is, according to Dill (2012: 27), its total idealistic nature. If people are friendly to each other, hospitable, or if they trust strangers then they express an attitude which is independent from their bank account—and justifies attributing social capital to them. Is this really social capital? Important components are missing, such as the mobilising capacity, the mutual transferability of the different sorts of capital and thus an explicit dependency from the availability of economic capital to accumulate social (and cultural) capital.

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<sup>7</sup> These are definitions that are closely related to Bourdieu and his approach of social capital.

<sup>8</sup> It must be added that this statement here takes the micro perspective into consideration, leaving aside for a moment definitions of social capital from the meso and macro perspective.

<sup>9</sup> This can be confirmed by the work of, for example, Bauman (2001), Brumlik & Brunkhorst (1993), and Gertenbach et al. (2010).

These definitions may represent attempts to relax social capital from an all-encompassing economically grounded capital concept, but the conclusion given here is that they are far beyond approaches that appreciate an independent character of social characteristics and that enable a coupling to economic and cultural capital. In a nutshell: network relations, trust, or solidarity are not equivalent to “capital”, but they need economic (and cultural) capital to exhibit the potential of being part of a network.

### **The social domain of social capital**

While with the first question the “capital” domain of social capital has been reflected it is the second question which turns its attention to the “social” domain of social capital. The problem raised here is whether social capital is a sufficiently comprehensive concept to scrutinize social relations in communities or collectives perceived as networks. Even if intangible commodities or values such as trust, reciprocity, responsibility or mutual support can be captured by the idea of a sort of capital, it is worth thinking about some other ingredients that help create ties between actors and that help understand the act of creating networks. To give an example: Woolcock (2000: 10 f.) distinguishes between “bonding”, “bridging”, and “linking” social capital<sup>10</sup> in order to highlight different forces within social networks that are responsible (or at least a positive feed-back catalyst) for social inequalities. While they appear natural to our understanding when structuring networks qualitatively it is, however, useful to incorporate the material and immaterial components that make networks alive and visible this way.

Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) provides a convincing approach to address this question (Latour 2005, Latour 1993, Law & Hassard (eds.) 1999).<sup>11</sup> The cogent argument of ANT is to move from a “sociology of the social” to a “sociology of associations” which implies that “‘social’ is not some glue that could fix everything including what the other glues [of a sociology of the social, A.K.] cannot fix; it is *what* is glued together by many *other* types of connectors. Whereas sociologists [...] take social aggregates as the given [...] these other scholars, on the contrary, consider

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<sup>10</sup> Woolcock's differentiation in turn roots in Granovetter's (1973) work on strong and weak ties.

<sup>11</sup> It is not the place here to delineate Actor-Network-Theory in detail; the brief reference to it just covers a few ideas addressed to social capital.

social aggregates as what should be explained by the specific *associations* provided by economics, [...], etc.” (Latour 2005: 5, italics in original).

The “tracing of associations” as the main task of ANT means to collect data and all kinds of other materials (devices, reports, widgets, instruments, tables, etc.) with the aim of detecting relations, correlations, and—precisely—associations that may impact the emergence and/or continuation of networks between actants,<sup>12</sup> i.e., human and non-human actors. This implies that social networks do consist of and are built on many more components than human nodes and their connections. Phenomena associated with social capital thus cannot be reduced to network features alone or to individual agents’ properties. As human actors endowed with connections we are surrounded by and we rely on tangible (computers, electricity, etc.) as well as intangible things (software, knowledge, etc.) that are pertinent components for the creation and consolidation of networks. All these things, in addition, have an impact on the complementary relationship of autonomy and dependence, and conflate in individual actions.

ANT as a research programme is challenged by “five major uncertainties”, four of which also shed some light on our question of extending the scope of social capital:

- the nature of groups: there exist many contradictory ways for actors to be given an identity;
- the nature of actions: in each course of action a great variety of agents seem to barge in and displace the original goals;
- the nature of objects: the type of agencies participating in interaction seems to remain wide open;
- the nature of facts: the links of natural sciences with the rest of society seems to be the source of continuous dispute (Latour 2005: 22).

For the sake of completeness the two types of “tracers of associations” are mentioned here. “An *intermediary* [...] is what transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs. [...]. *Mediators* [...] cannot be counted as just one; they might count for one, for nothing, for several, or for infinity. Their input is never a good predictor of their output; their specificity has to be taken into account every time. [...]. A properly functioning computer could be taken as a good case

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<sup>12</sup> The word *actant* is used to express the merging of humans and non-humans as acting units; its origin can be found in the study of literature (see Latour 2005: 54, Latour 1993: 23).



of a complicated intermediary while a banal conversation may become a terribly complex chain of mediators where passions, opinions, and attitudes bifurcate at every turn" (ibid.: 39).

In our context of rethinking the meaning of social capital all these explanations elucidate that it would be misleading to reduce social network effects on trust, commitment, etc. exclusively to social network processes. The creation and/or enhancement of social capital may, in fact, take place in social networks, like economic capital is being created and increased in economic networks such as banks, insurance companies, stock exchanges or real estate agencies. Necessary and desirable prerequisites for the generation and articulation of social capital are—to a considerable extent—to be found outside social networks.<sup>13</sup> Trust, reciprocity, morals, or attitudes will be reproduced and modified in social networks, but not exclusively produced. In a nutshell: the configuration of *social* capital such as “enforceable trust” (norm reliability at community level), “value introjection” (internalised general values to realise social ties) or “bounded solidarity” (identification of specific subgroups as specifically socially near) (see Portes 1995, cited in Jungbauer-Gans 2006: 29 f.) also owes its common origin to social developments that lie outside the social domain, namely developments from economics, politics, law, or religion.

### **The institutional domain of social capital**

As invoked above the volume of social capital depends on the mobilising capacities of actors within a social network and on the economic, cultural, and symbolic resources they possess—and “they” are meant to be both the mobilising and the mobilised agents. Social capital thus always represents the amalgamation of material and symbolic (immaterial) com-

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<sup>13</sup> In Latour's (2005: 84, italics in original) style of criticism, also against Bourdieu: “It would be incredible if the millions of participants in our courses of action would enter the social ties through three modes of existence and *only three*: as a ‘material infrastructure’ that would ‘determine’ social relations like in the Marxian types of materialism; as a ‘mirror’ simply ‘reflecting’ social distinctions like in the critical sociologies of Pierre Bourdieu; or as a backdrop for the stage on which human social actors play the main roles like in Erving Goffman's interactionist accounts. None of those entries of objects in the collective are wrong, naturally, but they are only primitive ways of packaging the bundle of ties that make up the collective.”

ponents, which in turn implies that well-functioning networks never solely rely on spatial, social, and economic proximity. Economic capital generally serves as a necessary foundation for social and cultural capital, but all three sorts of capital do not blend into each other. This gives rise to deliberations which consider macro aspects such as social structure, norms, etc. as a complementary level in the creation and consolidation of social capital.<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu (1986: 254) actually criticises polarised debates, favouring either “economism” with its reduction of all sorts of capital to economic capital and to commercialised communication or “semiologism (or structuralism)” with its reduction of social interaction to communication leaving aside the rationalist impetus. His differentiation of the states of cultural capital—mentioned here as a source of comparative analysis—into “embodied state”, “objectified state”, and “institutionalised state” gives us some hints to justify the inclusion of social macro-scale determinants since it describes a climax from micro (body) to macro (institution).

The value of social capital in Bourdieu’s theory is embedded into a social macro context which he calls social space or social field. Accumulation of social capital as an individual unit of calculation finds its relational counterpart in this social field, understood as a network of objective relations between positions (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1996: 127). Positions represent the (accumulated) possession of and access to capital. Social space, according to Kneer (2004: 33 and 39), functions as the overarching social field connecting different subfields with specific sorts of capital to a comprehensive entity. The ultimate aim of this theory design is to conceptualise a multidimensional approach of social classes (Weiß 2004: 214 ff.). Social capital in this sense is used to describe and explain empirically vertical differences in a society which is thought to be a stratified society.<sup>15</sup>

It is not intended here to discard the idea of social capital as a resource to gain positions in social networks (or at a larger scale in society), but to extend the actor perspective (bottom-up) to the institutional perspective (top-down) as an essential influential force for the existence and differentiated utilisation of capital. The idea of the individual actor equipped with

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<sup>14</sup> The philosophical definition of “complementarity” reminds us of the relationship of facts: the relation of two terms which do exclude one another but also supplement one another.

<sup>15</sup> Bourdieu as a representative of a theory of praxis comprehends social classes statistically. Classes are thus represented through models, and as such they are models of statistical classes rather than models of political classes. This is seen here as a benefit and not a drawback.

autonomy arises due to associations—constraining associations as well as enhancing ones—available in a society. In the light of the contemporary economisation of most societal activities it is often stated that markets are a result of increased individualisation processes. Interestingly and convincingly, Nassehi & Nollmann (2004: 12) assume exactly the opposite: markets produce the individual who is then exploited as a consumer. Consequently, it is not positions that lead to social networks, but exactly the contrary: networks are the source of positions.

Any evaluation of social inequalities needs to account for a multidimensional and multi-contextualised set of criteria and associations which go beyond a narrow consideration of social (and cultural as well as economic) capital though all these sorts of capital are in fact a source of inequality.

Complementary to a vertically structured society it is suitable to distinguish social inequalities horizontally, i.e., within similar living conditions.<sup>16</sup> It is furthermore appropriate to take a functionally differentiated perspective of society into account, because it accounts for an institutionalised view of inequality. System theory (Luhmann 1993) with its distinction of interaction systems, organisations, and macro-systems such as “economy”, “politics”, “science”, or “family” rests upon this functional differentiation.<sup>17</sup> The origin of differentiation is communication, since it allows thematic reduction in space and time if (and only if) “communication is compatible to communication”.<sup>18</sup> Communication is likely to be vulnerable due to different sources of semantic misinterpretation; on the other hand there are basic codes that help to channel communication along specific paths of expectation—and expectation of expectation.<sup>19</sup>

The functional approach of system theory does not exclude concepts of social classes but takes those concepts as one specific approach towards how we can interpret social inequalities as induced by vertical social status. Social capital as a metaphor for individual resources within a network structure of positions is then one possibility to account for enabling as well as

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<sup>16</sup> The question of what makes living conditions similar is very challenging, because it crucially depends on the selection of indicators which will highlight differences between individuals or collectives. Indicators are thus not naturally given.

<sup>17</sup> Again, it is not the place here to delineate System Theory in detail; the brief reference to it just covers a few ideas addressed to social capital.

<sup>18</sup> In other words, a talk that can successfully proceed among its members performs the condition of compatibility.

<sup>19</sup> The scientific code is “truth”, the political code is “power”, in economy it is “capital transfer”, and the family code is “trust”.

constraining conditions of actors according to their (assumed) goals. A systemic approach explicitly pays attention to the macro social determinants of network structures, including their definitions of functions and borders.<sup>20</sup>

Social structures emerging through associations of tangible and intangible components and functionally specified in different social systems can therefore be interpreted as a meaningful source for the provision of constituents necessary to create and organise resources as social capital. Institutional capital made available by public authorities, for example, has to be taken seriously into account to explain the research progress of private companies. This has been convincingly elaborated by Mazzucato (2013) for the role of the state in supporting companies with public venture capital and sophisticated knowledge transfer.<sup>21</sup>

An understanding of social capital as resources dedicated to mobilise network relationships neglects social capital (including economic and cultural capital) provided by public institutions. It might be helpful to benefit from Granovetter's "weak ties" when searching for a new job, but the weak and strong ties of state Job Centres offered to unemployed or inadequately qualified persons is at least as meaningful as the role of hair cutters. This is also true for a public police force instead of private security, and public courts instead of private tribunals. In a nutshell: public institutions are by and large structurally more stable and just as effective and even more targeted than social networks capitalised by social capital.

## Conclusion

The paper discussed three questions about the meaning of Bourdieu's social capital theory in the context of (i) capital economy, (ii) social associations, and (iii) social institutions. Three conclusions were drawn: (i) solidarity, reciprocity, and trust are to a large part independent from capital, even if capital is a necessary condition in contemporary societal constitutions;

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<sup>20</sup> Putnam's (2002) approach appears to be appropriate to specify social capital from the social macro level since it enables a deduction of concrete application cases from commonly recognized and valid criteria which define social capital. This is the premise to inductively account for social capital in Bourdieu's reading.

<sup>21</sup> Mazzucato (2013: 115 ff.) illustrates, among other examples, the case of Apple's increased economic relevance which owes its success to a public funding scheme; she criticises that profits are going to be privatized while loss is going to be socialized.

(ii) social relations are composed of many more “things” (objectives) than accumulated capital; (iii) institutionalised social capital is a relevant instrument to contribute to well-being.

What is the purport of the logic of capital accumulation? For economic capital it may be justified by an utilitarian or hedonistic assumption about human behaviour, because we can—to a certain degree or to infinity?—afford more material and intangible things more often. Economic capital, in addition, can be utilised as a means of social distinction, particularly if it is no longer used to create quantitative surplus but to identify with exceptional apartments, branded articles, exclusive cars or paintings.

But what about the accumulation of cultural capital? Is the acquisition of more and more educational qualifications utilitarian or hedonistic? Do these accumulations ensure adequate recognition by markets? And what about the accumulation of social capital? Are more network relations per se better? Is it possible to accumulate trust and solidarity?

All these questions justify a revision of Bourdieu's concept of social capital, incorporating “values” beyond capital, “socialised associations” beyond the social, and “institutions” beyond human activity. Last but not least: at a time of growing highly sophisticated technologies more social capital values are going to be outsourced to virtual services (“apps”) and the traditional friendly turn becomes a rare event. In terms of capital, “the less commonly we do somebody a favour the more nervous we get. We are likely to pay anybody back in his/her own coin, better today than tomorrow [...]” (Reinhardt 2016: 56).

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