

Deconstructing the Relationship between Social Capital and Civil Society

تفكيك العلاقة بين رأس المال الاجتماعي والمجتمع المدني

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Abstract

This study aimed to deconstruct the relationship between social capital and civil society and clarify the disagreement over defining the two difficult-to-define concepts. Utilising the fundamental contributions of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam, the study applies a conceptual technique to analyse the many components of social capital and examine their intersection with civil society. This study provides a critical theoretical framework that enhances the understanding of social capital by addressing contemporary critiques and digital disruptions in civic engagement. The paper concludes by outlining avenues for future research that investigate the influence of social capital on civic agency within varied socio-political contexts.

Keywords: Social Capital; Civil Society; Deconstruction; Democracy; Development.

المخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل العلاقة بين رأس المال الاجتماعي والمجتمع المدني، وتوضيح الخلاف حول تعريف هذين المفهومين اللذين يصعب تعريفهما. بالاستفادة من المساهمات الأساسية لبورديو وكولمان وبوتنام، تطبق الدراسة أسلوباً مفاهيمياً لتحليل مكونات رأس المال الاجتماعي المتعددة، ودراسة تقاطعها مع المجتمع المدني. تقدم هذه الدراسة إطاراً نظرياً نقدياً يُعزز فهم رأس المال الاجتماعي من خلال تناول الانتقادات المعاصرة والاضطرابات الرقمية في المشاركة المدنية. وتختتم الورقة بتحديد مسارات للبحوث المستقبلية التي تبحث في تأثير رأس المال الاجتماعي على الفعالية المدنية في سياقات اجتماعية وسياسية متنوعة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: رأس المال الاجتماعي؛ المجتمع المدني؛ التفكيك؛ الديمقراطية؛ التنمية.

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Introduction

"Civil Society" is frequently used, particularly when discussing democracy (Burnell, P., & Calvert, P., 2004). Civil society gained significant popularity during the 1990s (Kopecký & Mudde, 2003). The idea of "Social Capital" and civil society started to be connected in the 1990s. Because of the debate over the connection between the two concepts, the lines between them are almost impossible to distinguish, as there is no consensus on their meaning. This study aimed to deconstruct the relationship between social capital and civil society, clarifying the disagreement over the definitions of the two complex concepts. Additionally, to determine who established the connection between the two concepts and when it was done.

However, one of the most prevalent concepts in our time is "civil society," which has captured the interest of many academics, writers, and intellectuals. Despite its interest, this phrase remains one of the most contentious ideas. There is no consensus on what constitutes civil society or its meaning. If we look up its definition, we will not find just one definition, but several. The difference also extends to its origin, components, conditions, role, and uses. As a result, confusion arose in its semantics. This encouraged some writers to describe the concept as "blurry" or "misty" (Abu-Zaher, 2008). Although descriptive language is often used to describe the meaning and components of various writings, it is a "normative" concept, defining what semantics this concept should possess. It serves multiple political, economic, social, or ideological goals. It does not describe a particular type of societal structure or behaviour. Whenever a new use of the concept emerges, the controversy surrounding it intensifies, and the confusion surrounding its meanings increases. Some authors, like Benjamin Bart, stated this when he said: "The more the concept of civil society is used in recent years, the less it is understood." (O'Connell, 1999, p. 10).

Moreover, some authors used the concept of civil society to support a specific theory, whether it is political, economic, or social. Some intellectuals consider that the transition in civil society's emphasis from politics to economics began with thinkers like Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and Hume (Ferguson, 1995). Additionally, others argue that sociology defined civil society at the end of the last century as a social sphere distinct from the state and the economy. Therefore, political, economic, and social scientists employed this concept to support their conceptions of what it should be.

Nevertheless, Robert Putnam, a professor of public policy at Harvard University, employed the concept to support a particular theory to prove his social capital theory. This step sparked a new type of discussion about the interrelationship between the two concepts. According to Putnam's theory, which he tried to prove, social capital is a tangible concept that can be evaluated by looking at the existing participants in civil society. Thus, Putnam was the pioneer in associating the notion of social capital with civil society by characterising social capital as the "attributes of social organisation, including networks, norms, and social trust, that enhance coordination and collaboration for mutual advantage. This is evident in urban areas, where communal norms and trust foster collective effort, such as community clean-up initiatives. An illustrative example

is the function of familial and kinship networks in promoting business collaborations inside small firms." Putnam, 1995.

The notion of social capital was articulated in his article. «Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" was seen as "the newest phase of the new infatuation with civil society." Others saw that this article was proof of the deterioration of American civil society (Harris, 2003, p. 9). Even though Putnam was not the first to write about the idea of social capital, some people still view him as "one of the most important writers who contributed to the development of this concept, as he added to it distinct dimensions that were able to extend it from the individual to the family to society."

Since Putnam addressed social capital in his article and supported his theory with the concept of civil society in the 1990s, interest in and discussion of the topic have grown noticeably (Siisiainen, 2003). However, the discussion of social capital started before the concept was first proposed.

Even though there have been several studies on the connection between social capital and civil society, the vast majority of them attempt to support a specific thesis or a particular view of what social capital should entail regarding its relationship to civil society and try to prove it. (Abu-Zaher, 2010). As a result, the opinions were involved in the discussion or took a confident stance. This study aims to examine the issue objectively and impartially, with a clear understanding of what social capital should entail in connection with civil society.

The link between the two concepts is noted in more than one aspect. Others found that civil society depends on social capital and rises due to its advancement. Some find that abundant social capital is supposed to produce a dense civil society. Some consider civil society one of the two dimensions of social capital. Since the researcher is objective, the study aims to deconstruct the relationship between 'social capital' and 'civil society.' (Fukuyama. 2001).

A controversy of a new kind emerged around it that did not exist before, which increased the chaos of its meanings. In addition to explaining how Putnam used 'civil society' to prove his theory of 'social capital', it was not based on describing a particular structure of society. This study is important because of its comprehensive approach to the interaction between civil society and social capital, particularly in developing societies. It takes up two concepts, distorting the debate among scholars.

The debate on the concept of social capital is diffused on more than one level, not only in terms of its definition and role but also in ways to measure it. This study is concerned only with discussing social capital and its relationship to civil society, a debate from the mid-1990s. This paper critically re-evaluates the idea of social capital by elucidating the frequently neglected difficulties inherent in its theoretical application, especially concerning civil society. This research offers a unique perspective by examining the epistemological assumptions that inform the usage of the term "social capital" across

several traditions, despite the extensive exploration of its connection to civil society. The study aims to elucidate conceptual uncertainties and propose a more cohesive analytical framework instead of presenting a new theory. It offers researchers an enhanced toolkit for interacting with social capital in a more sophisticated and contextually aware manner.

Therefore, this study's primary issue is articulated in its main research question: What is the Conceptual challenge in the link between civil society and social capital? The study will address how the concept of social capital is related to the concept of civil society.

1. Methodology: Conceptual Approach

The objective will be to rely primarily on the conceptual approach. This approach will help deconstruct the concept of social capital and its relationship to society. It is an approach used to analyse concepts and how they develop for their use (Zins, 2007).

This technique aims to elucidate, dissect, and recontextualise contentious notions. Rather than gathering evidence, the study critically analyses the diverse definitions and applications of "social capital" within prominent theoretical frameworks. The objective is to reveal these definitions' underlying assumptions, normative perspectives, and inherent contradictions.

The methodology follows three main steps:

1. Conceptual Mapping: Identifying and categorising the prevailing interpretations of social capital in the literature, specifically those of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam.
2. Analytical Deconstruction: Analysing the foundational assumptions of each interpretation while emphasising conflicts, contradictions, or ideological biases.
3. Reconceptualisation: Suggesting an enhanced analytical framework that solves the observed conceptual deficiencies and provides a more cohesive interpretation of the world within the context of civil society.

This methodology is grounded in the traditions of conceptual analysis present in both analytical philosophy and critical social theory. However, it is not confined to any specific philosophical school. It prioritises clarity, coherence, and theoretical rigour to enhance conceptual refinement.

This section provides a conceptual analysis of "social capital" and critically evaluates its connection to civil society. This analysis seeks to clarify the ambiguous terminology and many theories associated with social capital, elucidating the varying interpretations and their implications for civic life, political involvement, and social organisation.

This study essentially utilises the fundamental writings of Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Putnam, and James Coleman to deconstruct the concept of social capital. The three theorists provide divergent and frequently contradictory interpretations of social capital, rendering their contributions vital for any conceptual understanding of the term. The study critically analyses each method's theoretical foundations, definitions, and

implications by directly engaging with their original texts. This foundational engagement establishes the groundwork for recognising conceptual difficulties and for cultivating a more nuanced and differentiated comprehension of social capital in connection to civil society.

This research utilises a conceptual approach based on analytical reasoning and critical theory. Instead of supposing a static or singular meaning, it regards social capital as a contentious conceptual domain. The analysis unfolds in three interconnected phases:

1. Mapping the Conceptual Terrain

Building upon the fundamental contributions of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (1993), the paper initially delineates the prevailing conceptions of social capital. Bourdieu highlights the significance of social capital in perpetuating class privilege and symbolic authority, whereas Coleman concentrates on its practical utility in upholding social norms and fostering collaboration. Putnam, however, idealises social capital as a communal asset, linking it to trust, civic participation, and democratic vigour. These variances indicate differing ontologies and normative assumptions about the individual, the community, and the state.

2. Uncovering Conceptual Tensions

A thorough analysis uncovers intrinsic tensions within the concept: Is social capital intrinsically egalitarian, as Putnam proposed, or essentially unequal, as Bourdieu suggested? Does it originate from informal community connections, or is it integrated within institutional structures? Does it promote solidarity or perpetuate exclusion? These enquiries reveal the ideological aspects of the notion and underscore its normative volatility (Fine, 2001; Portes, 1998).

3. Reframing the Concept to Civil Society

The concluding step entails positioning social capital within the broader context of civil society debate. This study contends that a more cautious interpretation is warranted despite most research treating social capital as the essential "glue" of a flourishing civil society (Putnam, 2000). Not all types of social capital promote democratic existence; specific networks may perpetuate inequality, exclusion, or authoritarian norms (Berman, 1997). This paper presents a differentiated paradigm that categorises social capital into civic, instrumental, and exclusionary forms, each with unique implications for civil society.

This paper provides both a conceptual explanation and a critical intervention about the normative application of social capital in political and developmental discourses. This concept is not considered neutral or universally beneficial; instead, it is examined as a dynamic and contentious construct that requires analytical revision to conform to democratic and inclusive principles.

2. Literature Review

The notion of social capital has attracted considerable interest across multiple fields, including sociology, political science, and development studies. It has been extensively utilised in recent decades to elucidate various phenomena, including educational attainment, civic engagement, and institutional efficacy. Despite its extensive application, the idea remains conceptually disputed and methodologically unclear.

This section offers a critical analysis of the key theoretical contributions to the evolution of the idea of social capital, emphasising the foundational viewpoints of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam. It subsequently examines the current scholarly discussions over the term's coherence, definitional precision, and relevance, along with the criticisms from academics who challenge its analytical efficacy. Significant focus is placed on the nexus between social capital and civil society, as this connection has been pivotal in numerous empirical and normative discourses within the literature.

This study delineates contributions and debates, establishing a framework for the paper's conceptual intervention, which seeks to re-examine the underpinnings of social capital and provide a more nuanced analytical approach.

2.1. The relationship between the notion of social capital and the civil society

The notion of social capital has garnered the interest of numerous researchers and intellectuals during the past decade, even though there is disagreement among them about their vision of the reasons that led to this concept being drawn to attention. Joe Maguire believes social capital has become attractive because of civil society's dependence on it (Maguire et al., 2002, p.109). Regardless of the accuracy of this statement, and no matter how authors differ in their views of the reasons for drawing attention to social capital, no one can deny the link between the concepts of social capital and civil society.

Fukuyama discussed that civil society is linked to social capital, but he thinks that civil society does not constitute social capital itself. It is another thing that might help us connect the two concepts. A dense civil society is believed to result from an abundance of social capital, which is, in turn, regarded as a prerequisite for contemporary libertarian democracy. A liberal democracy will preserve a safeguarded realm for individuals. Freedom that limits state interference. If a political system devolves into anarchy, the society within that safeguarded domain must possess the capacity for self-organisation. (Gaus, 2021) Civil society equilibrates governmental authority and safeguards citizens against its potential overreach in the absence of civil society. The state must consistently intervene to organise persons who cannot self-organise.

The relationship between the two notions is also evident through Richard Wood., who believes that social capital constitutes a combination of civil society analysis: "The concept of social capital to analyse the roots of democratic action, and makes an effort to represent all the benefits and limits of social capital as it constitutes a combination of

civil society analysis.” (Wood, 2001, p. 254). John Dilulio Jr. argued that numerous articles from the mid-1990s frequently referred to the article "Bowling Alone." According to him, Robert Putnam proved the widespread and quick collapse in civic involvement that started in the last 25 years of the last century (Dilulio Jr., 1998, p.56).

2.2. Putnam's Theory of Social Capital

Based on new information, Putnam developed the concepts from his essay "Bowling Alone" in his 2000 book, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community." He showed how Americans are increasingly disconnected from their families, friends, and neighbors and how they can reconnect with democratic structures. His decision to call the book "Bowling Alone" refers to a childhood recollection of Putnam's going bowling in the 1950s, when bowling was done in teams. However, he thinks this no longer happened in the late 1990s since people now bowl individually rather than as a team, and each friend plays with two other friends or family members. He found that while there was a 10% increase in the total number of people bowling in the USA between 1980 and 1993, there was a 40% decrease in the number of people bowling as part of an organised team.

Putnam's main point in "Bowling Alone" is that there are indications that "American social capital" is starting to fall apart. He presented data showing a steady decline in American participation in social and political networks and institutions to support his claim.

In "Bowling Alone," Putnam said, "American civic society in particular during the past several decades has dramatically degraded." He noted that since Alexis de Tocqueville released his analysis of American democracy, the United States has been pivotal in thoroughly examining the relationship between democracy and civil society. Tocqueville's visit to the United States occurred in 1830; the most surprising thing to him was the American inclination toward civil associations, which was evidence of their unprecedented ability to make democracy work. He added that, during his twenty years of empirical study in different regions of Italy, he concluded that civic norms, networks, and associations affect the performance of representative government.

Any examination of Putnam's article will reveal that he aimed to establish a connection between civil society and social capital. We can see the connections between the two concepts in several places. For instance, he proposes that having tangible social capital shares makes living in communities more manageable and more fortunate. According to him, civic association networks embrace strict reciprocity criteria and promote social trust development. Due to joint activity to address complex challenges, such networks encourage collaboration and communication among their members (Putnam, 1995). For instance, the dynamics were apparent following the Beirut explosion, as grassroots networks significantly contributed to emergency assistance efforts.

On the other hand, he claims that Americans' direct attachment to politics and government has decreased gradually and drastically during the past generation. Putnam pointed out that fewer people have joined sports groups and federations in the past forty years. He provided several examples of decreasing membership, including the decrease in traditional women's groups in the middle of the 1960s. Consider how the National Federation of Women's Club membership has decreased by over 50%. He also gave instances of falling electoral participation (Putnam, 1995). In his book *Bowling Alone*, he confirms the idea he put forward in his article. He believes that since the 1960s, the United States of America has seen an unprecedented breakdown in civic, social, and political life, resulting in severe repercussions. The author described this collapse quantitatively and stated that traditional civil, social, and fraternal organisations had experienced a sharp decline in membership.

From the previous paragraph, we can notice that trust constitutes a fundamental element of social capital. In communities with a high level of trust in public institutions, adherence to public health measures is generally greater, as evidenced during the COVID-19 epidemic in nations such as New Zealand (Putnam et al., 2002).

In addition to reviewing the data supporting his assertion that "American social capital" had collapsed, Putnam also attempted to investigate what he termed the "strange disappearance of American civilisation." He questioned why Americans are becoming less and less ready to engage in group activities like bowling, attending social gatherings with neighbours, attending church, and voting. In response to his query, he explained that Americans no longer prioritise social connection over television viewing and the simple pleasures it provides.

We argue that Putnam frequently parallels the concepts of 'social capital' and 'civil society.' The statement that "there is increasing evidence that the qualities of civil society impact the health of our democracies, our communities, and ourselves" can be used to draw this connection in addition to what we have already discussed. Additionally, there is strong evidence that the social capital curves, which reflect the key aspects of civil society, change with time (Putnam & Goss, 2002, p. 6).

2.3. Measuring Social Capital

Putnam pinpoints the concept of civil society and social capital when he uses 'civil society' to measure social capital. He has attempted to calculate social capital, as Fukuyama 1999 examines the quantification of civil society groups by utilising the variable (n) to monitor membership sizes in sports clubs, bowling alleys, literary societies, political clubs, and similar organisations, which fluctuate throughout time and many regions. Thus, the first method for calculating the total social capital, according to Fukuyama, was based on calculating the total memberships in all groups according to the following equation:

$$SC = \sum n1..t$$

(SC=Social Capital)

A new discussion about how to assess social capital has been sparked by Putnam's attempt to quantify it mathematically using memberships in civil society. Some writers have directed various criticisms of social capital as an illustrative concept. Critics differ on quantifying the idea and are unclear about what it truly means (Murray et al., 2005, p. 59). Due to the lack of consensus among the writers on a single approach for evaluating social capital, several research studies focus solely on debating the topic. Fukuyama, for instance, sought to define two metrics for social capital. Michael Cahill observed that social capital may be calculated in various ways (Cahill, M., 2018). In the future, I predict that "social capital" will be more often computed, resulting in more debate around the term.

The existence of specific authors who think social capital can be assessed does not preclude the existence of others who think an issue with its measurement relates to how the notion is theoretically understood. L. Riabova and U. D. Skaptadottir posit that there are multiple methods to assess social capital, asserting that the primary issue in its measurement lies in the significant gap between theoretical comprehension and practical evaluation (Riabova & Skaptadottir, 2003, p.445).

There is no need to study the methods of measuring social capital or its problems here. We believe it is crucial to demonstrate how social capital was assessed in civil society. As a result, the disagreement between the writers about the definition of "civil society" and its constituent parts used to calculate social capital will continue to complicate the debate over the relationship between the two concepts. Disagreements about measuring social capital are unavoidable without a consensus on its definition, resulting in more conflict over how to measure social capital. Putnam aimed to validate his concept of social capital. This concept is not theoretical but a material concept that can be measured by measuring the existing memberships in civil society. In order to prove the correctness of his vision, he used the concept of civil society in his use of civil society. He was not delineating a specific society structure or a model for one; instead, he engaged in a "normative" process. He set a specific standard or criterion for civil society and its components. It is decided based on what components or memberships civil society should or should not include.

2.4. Digital Civil Society: New Frontiers of Engagement

In recent years, civic society has experienced a significant transformation due to the emergence of digital technology. The conventional limits of civic engagement have broadened into digital realms, leading scholars to denote this phenomenon as "digital civil society increasingly." Individuals and organisations now utilise social media platforms, digital campaigns, and decentralised online networks to engage in activism, solidarity, and civic engagement that contest traditional concepts of public involvement.

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) used "connective action" to characterise novel kinds of digitally mediated involvement, which contrast with traditional collective action due

to their dependence on personalised content sharing and weak-tie networks. Castells (2012) similarly examines how digital networks facilitate the swift mobilisation of dissent and influence new civic power and identity frameworks. These advancements prompt essential enquiries regarding the transforming essence of social capital within digital environments: How do online contacts foster trust, reciprocity, or exclusion? To what degree may digital engagement be regarded as a manifestation of civic social capital?

2.5. Contemporary Critiques of Social Capital: Rethinking the Concept

Notwithstanding its popularity, the notion of social capital has encountered considerable theoretical and empirical critique. Researchers like Fine (2010) and Lin (2001) contend that social capital is frequently regarded as a vague phrase, devoid of conceptual precision and applied inconsistently across many fields. Others, such as Durlauf (2002), challenge its empirical measurability and caution against confusing correlation with causation in research connecting social capital to development or democracy.

Furthermore, opponents assert that the normative characterisation of social capital as intrinsically beneficial or desirable conceals its more sinister aspects. Bonding social capital can enhance intra-group cohesion while concurrently perpetuating exclusion, hierarchy, or even aggression. This necessitates a more analytical and contextualised perspective that rigorously considers the power dynamics, disparities, and political roles inherent in social networks.

This study aims to address these issues and advance a more analytically rigorous and politically conscious framework for comprehending the relationship between social capital and civil society.

3. Conceptual Analysis

There is a range of opinions among writers regarding the relationship between civil society and social capital, ranging from those who considered the process of tying the two ideas together valuable to those who saw it as risky; some contend that positive social capital is essential for fostering civil society and enhancing the quality of democracy; yet, a degree of skepticism towards institutions is also anticipated under democratic regimes (Sotiropoulos, 2005, p. 243). The effect of this connection between civil society and social capital has frequently increased disagreement and uncertainty in their relationship, regardless of whether the link between the two notions is "beneficial" or "dangerous." This encouraged some writers to argue that there is a distorting relationship between civil society and social capital (Szreter, 2002).

We will work to clarify how the writers' disagreement over the definition of the first concept confuses its relationship with the second concept after establishing when the concept of social capital began to be validly linked to the concept of civil society and how Putnam used the second concept to demonstrate his vision regarding the first concept.

3.1. The debate over the definition of social capital

In the debate over the definition of social capital, for example, Fukuyama noted that the terms "civil society" and "social capital" differ. However, just as there is no universally accepted definition of civil society among authors, the same is true of the idea of social capital. There are several definitions for social capital, as we shall discover if we try to track them down. We will provide a few instances to demonstrate how the writers disagree with this concept.

It is believed that Lyda Hanifan was one of the first to use and define social capital when he defined it as "intangible assets which are accounted for in people's everyday lives: such as goodwill, fellowship, compassion, and social interaction between individuals and families who comprise a social unit," according to Gupta and others, are these intangible assets (Gupta et al., 2005, p. 410).

The Encyclopedia of Applied Developmental Science also provides another definition of social capital. Its definition of social capital includes the individual relationships and communications between family, friends, and society. The individual interactions and communications between family, friends, and society are included in the concept of social capital. Social capital is a resource to manage people's daily lives and supply them with needs and luxuries, such as daycare, transportation, or food when in poor health. Social capital comprises the obligations, expectations, and influences that people, families, and communities share.

It creates particular standards, operating systems, and sources of information for families and individuals. Social capital comprises the duties, expectations, and influences that people, families, and communities share. It creates particular standards and operations. Systems and sources of information for families and individuals. Simple acts like lending a car, notifying a friend about a job opportunity, or supporting a family after the birth of a child or the loss of a loved one are examples of social capital creation.

According to Ram Cnaan, Stephanie Boddie, and Gaynor Yancey, "the level of development of functioning networks, both formal and informal in society," is what social capital refers to (Cnaan, R. A., et al, 2003). Leenders believes corporate social capital refers to "the resources inherent in the social structure, which operating firms reap." Additionally, according to their understanding, social structure is "the existence of a network of players who are connected, in one way or another, by a set of interactions." According to Eric Sievers, the full explanation of social capital will depend on its integration with the digital economy. "Social capital should be succinctly defined regarding game theory," he argues (Sievers, 2003, p.91). Prusak and Cohen describe "social capital" as the active connections among individuals, characterised by trust, mutual understanding, shared values, and behaviours that unite members of networks and groups, facilitating collaborative efforts (Cohen & Prusak, 2002). For instance, in numerous rural regions, inhabitants rely on social connections to obtain employment possibilities or informal financing mechanisms.

Fukuyama observes various definitions of social capital, many of which pertain to elucidations of social capital rather than the concept itself. Consequently, we discover that he uses the concept of social capital as "the informal standard that fosters collaboration between two or more people." He believes that the criteria that can make up social capital are rules of reciprocity between friends, right up to the elaborate and complex formulation of doctrines such as Confucianism or Christianity. The complexity comes from the fact that, according to this definition, social capital does not exist in and of itself; instead, it is the product of social capital, which includes trust, networks, civil society, and the like (Fukuyama, 1999). The World Bank describes social capital as norms and networks that enable collective action. So, the World Bank was based on Putnam's thoughts. For example, local community groups frequently depend on informal networks to organise emergency assistance.

We will not go into every definition since this is not what we set out to do; instead, we wanted to emphasise that there is not a single definition that all authors can agree upon. When it is connected to the concept of civil society, its relationship becomes unclear. Some authors, including Kilpatrick and Fulk, urged that social capital be defined by its uses because it has many different definitions. Landolt and Portes support distinguishing between the definition of social capital and its applications. Portis emphasised that social capital is both a cause and a consequence, which is the source of the uncertainty surrounding it (Kuehnast & Dudwick, 2002, p.56).

It can be noted from these definitions that there is disagreement among the authors over what social capital is. For instance, as provided by Gupta, Hanifan's definition of social capital restricts it to the people and families that comprise a social unit. As Ram Cnaan, Stephanie Boddie, and Gaynor Yancey see it, social capital is not limited to individuals and families who form a social unit but includes the formal and informal working networks. We also observe that Fukuyama thinks that social capital should include complicated and in-depth formulations of religious ideas, such as Confucianism or Christianity, rather than just a set of reciprocity between friends.

The issue of there being a lack of consensus among the writers on a single definition of the concept of social capital does not end at this point; we also noticed that there is a difference between them regarding their interpretation of the definitions of the three writers who contributed to the concept's development and drawing of its features. Along with Putnam, these authors include Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman. We will try to demonstrate this by using a few instances, starting with Bourdieu and moving on to Coleman before ending with Putnam.

Various authors have interpreted social capital differently based on the definition given by the French author Bourdieu. This will become clearer by providing examples of what the authors have said regarding Bourdieu's definition of the notion. For instance, according to John Field, "Bourdieu defined social capital primarily as: the capital of social relationships which, in need, would provide valuable support; the capital of honor and respect which, in most cases, is indispensable if one wishes to attract clients in

significant social sites, which serve as currency, for example, in a political career (John Field, 2003.p.14).

Klaus Nielsen states, "Bourdieu defined the concept as the aggregate of current or potential resources linked to the ownership of a robust network of varying degrees of organised connections characterised by mutual knowledge and recognition." (Nielsen 2003, p. 40). Bourdieu characterised social capital based on the extent of the network and the quantity of capital (human, cultural, and financial) possessed by individuals inside that network, as per Martin van der Gaag (Van der Gaag, 2005, p.10).

The first interpretation of Putnam's definition focused on the importance of respect in interpersonal relationships. In contrast, the second saw it as proportional to the amount of social capital. When we look at James Coleman, we also find disagreement among writers about their interpretation of his definition of social capital. For example, David Knoke sees that "James Coleman defined social capital as the structural social relationships that an individual can mobilise in business and achieve specific end-to-end achievements that cannot be accessible in its absence (Knoke, 1999, p.19).

The *Encyclopedia of Applied Developmental Science* noted that Coleman defines social capital as the personal relationships within society, consisting of the family's internal and external relationships. Social capital within the family refers to the cooperative relationships between family members and the time and attention an individual gives to others. Outside the family, social capital includes the social relationships between individuals, families and institutions that create opportunities for consistent positive expectations and experiences. Robert Sampson argued that Coleman defined social capital as the resource embodied in interpersonal relationships and situations facilitating work (Sampson, 2001, p.9).

Yangmeng Chen contended that "Coleman defined social capital as the social structural configurations that enable the attainment of the objectives of the actors within the system. Ismail Serageldin and Christian Grottart assert that "Coleman perceives social capital as a heterogeneous collection of entities characterised by two common elements: each comprises an aspect of social structures and all enable specific effective actions whether individuals or collective partners during structural endeavours" (Serageldin, 2000, p. 46). Tourbillon Knutsen argued that "Coleman favoured the concept of social capital. He defined it as the ability of people to work together for common goals in groups and organisations (Knutsen, 1999, p.143).

In other words, Coleman characterises social capital as the benefit of collaboration and standard norms. An illustrative instance of this occurred during the 2011 Egyptian revolution, when individuals collaborated, provided mutual support, and organised collectively despite the absence of institutional structures.

It is clear from our review above of how some writers interpret Coleman's definition of the concept of civil society that there is a discrepancy between them in its interpretation. The situation is different when it comes to Putnam. It is noted that writers frequently differ in their interpretation of his definition of social capital. Jeff Deaton Johnson says: "In Putnam's study of the local community in Italy in 1993, for example, social capital was defined as the horizontal social relations arising from communal local activity" (Dayton-Johnson, 2003, p. 47).

Partha Dasgupta states: "Putnam defined social capital as the characteristics of a social organisation, including trust, norms, and networks that enhance community efficacy by enabling coordinated action" (Dasgupta, 2001). According to Howard Fromkin, Lawrence Frank, and Richard Jackson, Putnam characterised social capital as the relationships among persons, encompassing the social networks and the norms of exchange and trust that emerge from these links." (Fromkin et al., 2004.p.163).

As has been noticed, social networks are crucial for developing social capital. In migrant communities, social connections frequently assist newcomers in securing accommodation or employment via informal networks. In numerous Arab communities, extended family networks frequently serve as informal support systems, providing assistance ranging from childcare to small business financing. This exemplifies bonding social capital grounded in familial ties and standard cultural norms. Rowing Smidt says: "Putnam defined social capital as the manifestations of social relationships that enable members of a society to work together to achieve common goals." (Smidt, 2003, p.8). This difference in the definition of social capital, and even the difference in how the definition is intended by the three writers who contributed to its development, also has repercussions on their differences in the role that social capital is supposed to play.

From my perspective, the concept of social capital remains deeply contested, theoretically and empirically. Foundational contributions such as those by Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2000) highlight the richness and diversity of the term, yet also expose its conceptual inconsistencies. In my reading, scholars like Portes (1998) and Fine (2001) offer compelling critiques that caution against uncritical applications of the concept. I find Siisiäinen's (2000) contrast between Bourdieu's and Putnam's approaches instrumental in illustrating the ongoing theoretical tensions. Furthermore, recent empirical works such as Aldrich (2012) on disaster recovery and Harpham et al. (2002) on health in developing contexts demonstrate that despite its conceptual ambiguities, social capital continues to hold practical relevance. Comparative insights from Haerpfer et al. (2020) and Fukuyama (2001) have also shaped my understanding of how social capital adapts across socio-cultural settings. These works inform my position that while the term may be theoretically fragmented, its analytical potential remains significant, especially when approached with contextual sensitivity.

However, the notion of social capital is broadly accepted across various fields. However, its fundamental meaning is still subject to significant debate. This absence of unanimity signifies terminological ambiguity and underlying theoretical and ideological rifts. Bourdieu conceptualises social capital as a resource within networks of power and inequality, highlighting its function in social reproduction and exclusion. Coleman, by contrast, depicts it as an impartial facilitator of human capital, emphasising familial and communal connections. Putnam, in contrast, romanticises social capital as the cohesive force of civic life, linking it to trust, reciprocity, and democratic engagement.

The varying perspectives indicate that social capital is not a singular or generally applicable notion but one that assumes different meanings based on its sociological and political context. This conceptual suppleness, although facilitating broad use, also undermines the term's analytical accuracy. To resolve this uncertainty, it is essential to critically examine the assumptions inherent in each definition, concerning power,

community, or morality and to consider the implications of our chosen definitions and measurements of social capital.

3.2. The use of civil society and social capital

It is also noted that writers often use social capital in industrial societies with an urban majority differently from those writers in developing societies. This use often varies according to each of those societies' different privacy and needs. When writers in developing societies address the concept of social capital, they often focus on its role in the development process. This may be due to the need for those societies to prioritise. Because some Arab scholars believe that "social capital has emerged as an important aid in the process of developing societies." Therefore, they believe that social capital facilitates economic and political interaction processes and forms the basic structure of economic and political relations (Fathy, R. & Habagy, 2016).

Through practical tests conducted in several countries, some studies found that social capital has an important role in development. Among the first of those studies was a study entitled: "The Role of Social Capital in Development: An Empirical Evaluation," which conducted a practical study on ten countries. The aim was to emphasise the increasing physical evidence about the role of social capital in economic development and poverty alleviation (Grootaert & Van Bastelaer, 2002, p.2).

It should be noted that writers often associate the concept of social capital with the concept of civil society, mainly when used in economic development. Fukuyama, for example, asserts that civil society is an essential element of effective economic development, augmenting the functions of both the state and the market, and that one method to investigate the impact of civil society on economic performance is to utilise the notion of social capital (Fukuyama, 2001).

Fukuyama believes that "social capital is necessary for efficient work in modern economies, the necessary condition for a stable liberal democracy." The speciality of industrial societies with the urban majority and their different needs from those of developing societies led to a new debate about civil society and its connection with the concept of social capital. Although this new type of controversy is still widely raised among writers and thinkers in industrial societies with an urban majority due to the weakness of social and family ties, we do not notice the same among writers and thinkers in developing societies with the same intensity. It is rarely observed among thinkers in Arab societies currently. Even if we find this kind of debate in developing countries, we note that it is associated with development according to the needs of those countries.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the relationship between social capital and civil society is far more complex than is often acknowledged in the literature. While many scholars,

particularly Putnam, present this relationship as inherently positive, this study has shown that it is, in fact, conceptually unstable and context-dependent. Not all forms of social capital contribute to democratic engagement or civic cohesion; in some cases, they may reinforce exclusionary practices, elite capture, or informal power structures that weaken the normative foundations of civil society.

This observation highlights a fundamental theoretical challenge: the presumption that social capital inherently fortifies civil society must be critically examined. The study advocates for a transition from idealised interpretations to more critical, grounded, and nuanced approaches that analyse the functioning of specific kinds of social capital within distinct socio-political contexts.

Future research should explore several key questions:

- What is the interaction between social capital bonding, bridging, and linking and civil society's institutional and normative aspects?
- How does social capital hinder civic involvement and democratic accountability instead of fostering them?
- In what ways do marginalised communities interact with or oppose prevailing networks of social capital that perpetuate exclusion?
- What other conceptual frameworks could more effectively elucidate the interplay between trust, networks, and civic agency?

These studies should seek to create contextually relevant typologies of social capital that adequately consider power dynamics, inequality, and political frameworks. By doing so, scholars can transcend the constraints of existing models and enhance a more robust and politically informed comprehension of both social capital and civil society.

This study encourages scholars and practitioners to reevaluate social capital's normative assumptions and consider its relationship with civil society as an open, contested, and fundamentally political issue.

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