

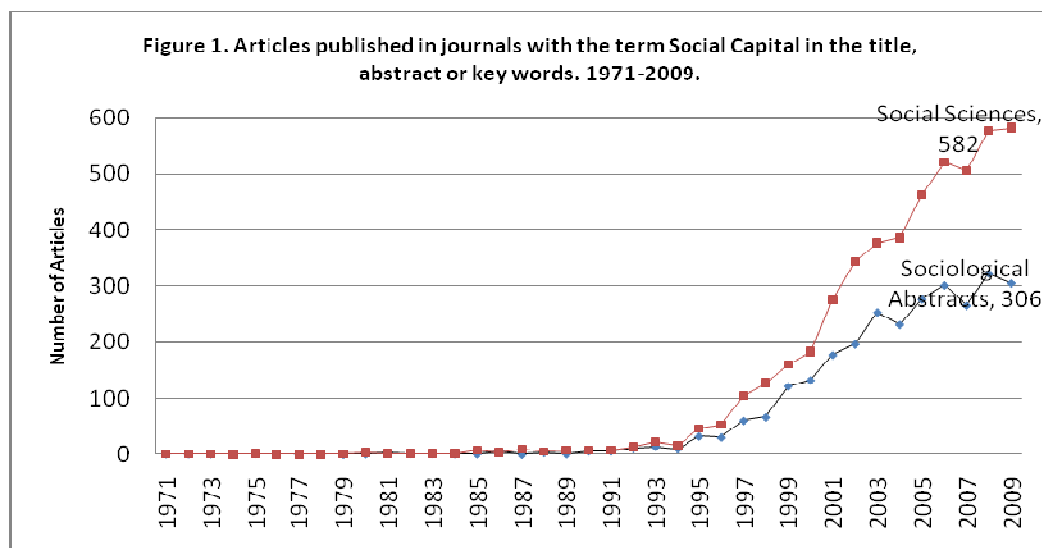
The concept of social capital revisited.¹

ABSTRACT

Analyzing the foundational work of Bourdieu and Coleman and current definitions and approaches on social capital concept, this article propose a response to three questions: (1) What are the components of social capital?, (2) Where does social capital come from?, and (3) What are its fundamental properties and characteristics. The article holds that social capital is composed by a core mechanism composed of a sequence of three elements (an informal microsocial relation, a transfer of resources, and benefits or returns generated by the use of the resources). The resources composing social capital are analyzed and classified as of first, second and third order. I argue that the core mechanism of social capital has to be analytically separated from what are its sources and facilitators. I propose to differentiate five types of sources and facilitators of social capital: social ties, structure of social networks, appropriable social organization, institutions, norms and bodies of expectations. With respect its characteristics, the paper argues social capital is a particular type of capital characterized, among other aspects, by its roots in social relations, intangibility, requirements of individual and social investment, capacity to generate returns, and existence both at an individual level and at a macro level (as a emergent property of collectivities and social systems).

Introduction

In recent decades, the use of the concept social capital has expanded greatly in Sociology and Social Sciences. A review of the number of articles published in scientific journals from 1970 to 2009 that include the term in the title, abstract or key words reveals an impressive growth (see Figure 1).



Source: Sociological Abstracts.

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The basic idea behind the concept, that is, the fact that social relations and social structures generate benefits and returns for individuals and collectivities can be traced back in the work of classic authors of Sociology. Some examples of this are: the importance of social ties and normative regulations that reduce the propensity to suicide (Durkheim, 1951), the solidarity generated by class consciousness (Marx, [1894] 1967), or the benefits captured by individuals belonging to different "social circles"(Simmel, 1922).

However, beyond the presence of the idea behind the concept in the writings of the classics of sociology and the use of the term, the development of a theoretical body and a research program around the concept is mainly due to the works released during the eighties by Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman. These authors - with greater or lesser differences of emphasis in each case - devoted a particular effort to define the concept, its components, characteristics, forms, sources and facilitators, and also its similarities, differences and relation to other types of capital (economic, financial, human, cultural).

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Coleman

In a widely quoted definition, Coleman characterized social capital as follows: "*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*" (Coleman, 1990:302)

The theory of Coleman (Coleman, 1988; 1990) can be summarized as follows: (1) Social capital is lodged in the structure of social relations. It does not reside in the body of the individual (such as human capital). It is "out there" (such as physical capital) but located in the intangible realm of social relations. (2) Like human capital and physical capital, social capital is productive, generating profits and returns for individual and corporate actors. This "function" is a constitutive feature of the concept. (3) Social capital is a resource (in Coleman's terminology a good, service or event) that can be accessed and used by actors in order to meet their interests and achieve certain purposes. (4) Social capital can take various forms. Coleman advances and explores the analysis of some of them: rules, obligations and expectations, and information channels provided by social relations. (5) Aspects of social structure can act as facilitators of social capital. Coleman preliminarily analyzed two types of facilitators: the degree of closure and density of a network of social relations, and various types of appropriable social organization, exemplified in voluntary associations, clubs, groups or other organizations that provide resources (social capital) to their members through informal channels, which usually exceed the specific and explicit objectives for which these organizations were created. Certainly where social relations exist there is the potential for access and transmission of social capital. Along this line, Coleman explores the role of family and specifically the parental action (or its absence) on the transfer of capital to the children and its effects on educational performance and the creation of human capital. (6) With respect to its properties and characteristics, Coleman emphasized the public good aspect social capital has, that is, social relationships that compose it, benefit not only those individuals directly involved, but externalities may also benefit third parts, free riders,

and more important, the communities and social systems in which the action of the actors takes place. (7) Coleman places the concept in the context of the analysis of social action from the perspective of rational choice, which sees social actors as entities displaying strategies and means to maximize the satisfaction of their interests and benefits. In this context, social capital is an asset in which the players invest (for its creation, accumulation and growth), managing credit and debt rationally in their dealings with others and seeking to maximize the profits captured from their social capital.

Bourdieu

In a work carried out prior to the contributions of Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu provided a set of definitions and a theoretical framework to interpret what is social capital. His work is given in connection with a research program regarding the acquisition, transmission, conversion, and social effects of the three forms of capital, namely, economic capital, cultural capital and social capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu's definition of social capital is as follows:

"Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition-or in other words, to membership in a group-which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a "credential" which entitled them to credit, in the various senses of the word". (Bourdieu, 1997: 51).

Unlike Coleman, Bourdieu did not develop a program of empirical research of social capital (Schuller et al., 2000). However, he outlined a valuable theoretical framework and a set of propositions for understanding it, which can be summarized in the following points: (1) Social capital consists of social relations, that is, material and/or symbolic exchanges socially instituted. (2) Social capital operates in an institutionalized context (in a Durkheimian sense). Hence, many consequences arise. Social capital is linked to the rights, duties and obligations involved in performing roles within an institutional context (family, community, class, group). Social capital is received and given in a context of belonging, mutual recognition, solidarity and certain homogeneity afforded by the existence of institutionalized relationships. Seen from the individual perspective, it implies the existence of durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.. or institutionally guaranteed (rights). (3) The volume and quantity of social capital an individual has depends on the size of the network of connections owned and the volume of economic capital, cultural and symbolic capital that the people connected have. (4) Social capital can generate both material (goods, services) and symbolic (prestige) profits. (5) The existence of the network of relationships that constitute social capital is a product of investment strategies, both individual and collective. At individual level, this investment represents an effort and energy spent in sociability and interaction. The investment, not necessarily is linked to a gain calculation, and may be based on emotional or altruistic logics.

Current definitions

In Table 1 below are entered four definitions of social capital, developed after the work of Coleman and Bourdieu, which are commonly cited in the current literature on the subject (Field, 2003). The definitions vary in scope and emphasis but a general review of them, capturing the

list of constituents that are mentioned as components of social capital (without analyzing how they are combined in the definitions) refers to: (a) social relations - in the form of ties and contacts (b) network as a structure of social relations, (b) norms (c) resources (d) trust (e) benefits and returns.

Table 1. Definitions of Social Capital

PUTNAM. Features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and social trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”(Putnam, 1995:67)

LIN. Social capital is resources embedded in social networks that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions with expected returns (Lin, 2001b: 29).

PAXTON. Social capital involves objective associations between individuals and subjective type of tie (reciprocal, trusting, emotionally positive). When social capital is present, it increases the capacity for action and facilitates the production of some good.(Paxton, 1999)

BURT. Social Capital is defined as both the resources contacts hold and the structure of contacts in a network” (p. 12). Holding a certain position in a social network can be an asset in its own right. That asset is social capital.(Burt, 1992)

Putnam’s definition closely follows Coleman’s in terms of its amplitude, including a variety of features of social organization as social capital components. In his most extensive work, which raises the decline of social capital in the United States, Putnam emphasizes (macro) aggregate measures of community organizational life, engagement in public affairs, community volunteerism, informal sociability and social trust as indicators of the concept (Putnam, 2000). In his scheme, such civic and community connectivity, norms and regulatory expectations would facilitate, promote and lubricate cooperation between people, and by this route, a set of individual and collective benefits are obtained. It should be noted that Putnam’s use of the term “social networks” basically refers to the connections and social ties between individuals, and does not involved a specific use of approaches and methods of what is known as Social Network Analysis (Scott, 2007; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). As mentioned, Putnam’s definition and approach to social capital has had a powerful impact on the popularization of the term in the public arena, and its influence has been extended to the research area of economic and public policies, particularly through the formulation of policies that promote social capital as a key component of economic development (Field, 2003; World Bank, 2001; Woolcock, 1998).

The definition offered by Paxton reserves the use of the term social capital for trusting and positive social ties (Paxton, 1999). Unreliable and non-reciprocal social ties are not social capital in this version. Based on this conceptualization, Paxton developed a set of indicators for each of the two components of social capital, namely, trust and association. Trust is estimated according to perceptions of trust in people and institutions. Association is estimated in relation to a connection with neighbors, friends, groups, and involvement with the community. Finally, social capital as a unit, is estimated by two measures: (a) the product of the latent variables of each component (trust and partnership), and (b) the percentage of individuals who both trust and

associate at high levels. With respect returns or profits, Paxton sees that social capital generates a wide spectrum of returns that includes both individual and collective benefits.

Lin's definition emphasizes the relationship between social capital and social networks. Social capital is resources accessible through one's direct and indirect ties (Lin & Erickson, 2008: 4).

Central aspects of this approach are: (a) Social capital is composed of resources captured through social networks, (b) Individuals invest in social capital (their networks and personal contacts) in the context of purposive actions, (c) Social capital is *capital*, that is, an investment that generates returns in a market (d) The study of social capital must distinguish the processes of access (the extent of ties-resources that ego can access) and mobilization of social capital (resources actually used and put in motion), (f) social capital generates many benefits, both expressive and instrumental, and impacts multiple domains of individual and collective well-being.

While Lin acknowledges that social capital can be considered both collective and individual goods (Lin, 2001: 26) the emphasis of his view is focused on personal networks (ego-centered networks) and their associated resources. Consistently, one of the main methodological tools for estimating social capital is a tool called the Position Generator (PG). In basic terms, the PG tries to capture the social capital accessed by an individual estimating the potential resources capturable through her/his social ties. The reference used by this tool is a set of salient structural positions within a society or social context (i.e., occupations, authorities), and asks respondents to indicate contacts in each of the positions. Based upon this information, indicators of social capital access may be elaborated by considering the range of accessibility to different hierarchal positions, the extent or heterogeneity of accessibility to the different positions (number of position accessed), and the upper reachability of accessed social capital (prestigious or status of the highest position accessed) (Lin et al.,2001). As can be noted, in this view civic engagement, trust and norms are not social capital.

Finally, Burt (2005) conceptualizes social capital as a competitive advantage that depends both on the location of individuals in one or more social networks and the particular configuration that these networks adopt. In a study on social capital in populations of managers, Burt (2005) shows how individuals located in *structural holes*, that is, locations situated in gaps that bridge different clusters or subnetworks have a competitive advantage that make a difference in terms of returns (i.e, performance evaluation, promotion, compensations). The value-potential of structural holes is given because they separate nonredundant sources of information, sources that are more additive than overlapping (Burt 2005:16). Burt uses the term capital as a *metaphor* to describe structural advantages. In this version, social capital is an individual asset (linked to a position or location occupied by individuals) structurally determined (by the network structure and the resources that flow into it). To measure social capital, Burt uses a network constraint index, which essentially determines the extent to which a personal network is directly or indirectly concentrated in a single contact².

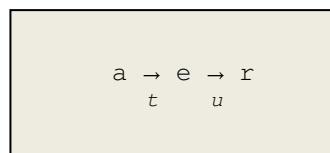
²A detail of the Index is found in Burt (1992). Roughly explained, to measure Constraint, Burt considers three dimensions of a network: size, density, and hierarchy. Constraint is low in large networks of disconnected contacts, high in a small network of contacts that are close to one another (density), or strongly tied to one central contact (hierarchy) (Burt, 1992). The higher the Constraint index of an actor is, the more redundant her/his contacts are, and consequently, the lower her/his social capital is.

The foundational contributions of Bourdieu and Coleman, and the subsequent definitions and approaches provide by Putnam, Paxton, Lin and Burt pose a variety of versions and emphases on the concept of social capital. In light of these texts and related literature, in the following sections I explore answers to the following three questions: (1) What are the components of social capital?, (2) Where does social capital come from?, and (3) What are its fundamental properties and characteristics? As a way of presentation, and to avoid falling into an endless discussion that compares the various existing viewpoints to provide answers to these questions, in each section I establish certain propositions and statements regarding social capital, arguing their plausibility and – when appropriate - examining how these propositions differ or coincide with the definitions and approaches examined earlier.

How social capital is constituted?

Proposition 1: The core of social capital is composed by a process or mechanism. This process, involves a sequence of three elements (see Figure 1): (i) a social relation in the form of an informal microsocial tie between an alter a and an ego e (ii) a transfer t of a resource r from alter to ego, and (iii) the existence of benefits and returns u generated by the use of the transfer.

Figure 1. The core process of Social Capital



The argument of the proposition can be summarized through the following points: (1) To be complete and consummated, social capital requires of an actualisation of the entire sequence traced. The components described are necessary conditions for the existence of social capital (although not sufficient ones, since as will be argued later there are previous sources acting as determinants and facilitators of the process). (2) The starting point of the sequence is the existence of an informal³ social connection constituted by interpersonal transactions. The social

³ This excludes from the concept *formal social relations*, such as those regulated by contracts, formal regulations, monetarized market exchanges, services and assets transferred by private or public organizations. The point is important to highlight at least for two reasons: (a) One is the enormous importance that in modern societies have formal relations as a source of transfer of resources for people, and the interaction and juxtaposition between formal and informal ties. As an example, in the study of the effects of social capital in the labour market of professional groups (i.e., Burt's managers), emerges as a question how much of the detected positional advantages come from ties and resources (i.e, non-redundant information) obtained through *formal* relations. (b) Second, part of the literature on social capital, particularly along the line of Putnam's perspective, has analyzed the decline of informal ties (and other formal or partly formal such as those involved in parent associations or unions) in contemporary societies and the loss of benefits this would imply. However, usually this kind of analysis omits estimating how what has happened is that formal structures and relationships (primarily monetarized market relations and public programs) are the new providers of resources that in the past were obtained through informal ties. Thus, a variety of

relations behind these transactions may be more or less institutionalized, ranging from a highly patterned relationship punctuated by a role to encounters with strangers or anonymous exchanges. (3) The transfers can cover material goods, personal services, symbolic goods, emotional contents and information. Likewise, the existence of the relationship and the tie can represent by itself a social resource bearer of reputation, prestige or power. (4) Resources transferred from alter to ego should be used to have an effect in terms of benefits (say “a social capital effect”). In many instances (for example, when unpaid child care is provided by a friend) the transfer and use run in parallel. In other cases, for example when certain information is transferred, a period of time can mediate between the transfer and the activation of the resource, or sometimes, the use of the resource involves the deployment of an effort or strategy of use on the part of ego⁴. (5) The chain of the social capital process is completed with a return or profit. Basically, returns can be evaluated as satisfactions or benefits to an ego, or as an output that involve a gain in a market⁵. Research on social capital has documented a variety of possible positive returns of social capital in areas such as employment, social support, economic well-being, health, happiness, among others. An additional aspect to mention here is the possibility of obtaining *negative returns* of social capital. Such is the case, when in a market and its regulatory context, the use of a resource transferred through a social relationship involves damage, loss of benefits or even direct sanctions or punishments. An example of this is given when an individual receives a benefit (say money) from an informal contact (say a friend who stole the money) and the reception and use of the transfer has negative returns in a market and regulatory context (say the person goes to jail as an accomplice to a crime).

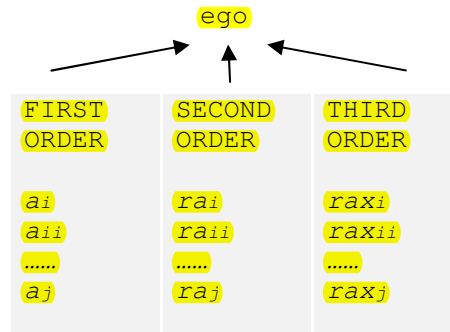
Proposition 2. The component resources of processes of social capital can be classified as follows (see Figure 2): (a) Resources of first order, referring to the network of personal contacts (from alter i to alter j) available to ego. (b) Second-order resources, consisting of the set of transfers the network of contacts can provide to ego (resources from alter i , rai , to alter j , raj) (c) resources of third order, that include all those transfers that ego can get from relations located beyond her/his personal network, which is mainly formed by contacts with strangers and anonymous relations (from contact ax_i to ax_j).

matters such as child and elderly care, psychological support, information, minor services or even sex are obtained through market or formal connections.

⁴ Two related processes to the use and activation of the resources tied to social contacts are what Lin calls *access and mobilization* of social capital (Lin, 2001:82-83). The former term refers to the extent of resources the ego can access through her-his social ties, the latter refers to the effective use that ego of the social contacts and the resources provided by the contact in order to get a goal (for example, getting a job).

⁵ Here, I borrow the definition provided by Lin who conceptualizes capital as an investment of resources with expected returns in the marketplace (Lin, 2001:3). However, unlike Lin that conceives the individual investment guided by rational choice in a context of purposive actions, I consider the investment in social capital (social relations) as both an individual and collective effort (as Bourdieu pointed out). On the other hand, and as it will be illustrated below, I argue that the motivations of the investment can be rooted on several possible sources of social capital, and also can be guided for different logics of action (rational-instrumental, normative, pragmatic).

Figure 2. Social Capital Resources of First, Second and Third-Order



The first two components (called here resources of first and second order) are widely recognized in the various conceptualizations of the concept (Coleman, 1998; Bourdieu, 1997; Putnam, 2000; Lin, 2001; Flap, 2001). On the resources of the first order, I emphasize here two aspects. First, the network of contacts by itself constitutes a resource that can be estimated according to its quantity (number, or volume in the Bourdieu's terminology), diversity and composition (variety and types of social positions that includes) and social value (prestige and reputation of the contacts). Second, the resources of first order are the entrance to access to resources of second order, these latter consisting of transactions and transfers of goods, services, information, referrals to other actors, etc. As has been pointed out by Flap, second-order resources are "what is at the other end of the tie" (Flap, 2001:36)⁶.

I call *resources of third order* those captured through the set of informal ties located beyond the personal network (egocentric network)⁷, and constituted by contacts with strangers, ties and anonymous transactions, which occur in the wider social environment. This type of social capital is not measured when standard instruments for measuring the composition and characteristics of the personal networks are applied. However, in contemporary societies, these types of contacts are the more numerous and frequent. Social capital of third order is "out there" and the quantity and quality of its composition may vary enormously depending communities, cities and countries. Examples of transactions of social capital of third order are when you lose your wallet on the street and the person who found it calls you to return it, when you receive aid, information or guidance in informal contacts with strangers, anonymous donations, or simply but not less important, when you have the benefit (in this case absence of damage) not being attacked by strangers while walking in the night in a neighborhood.

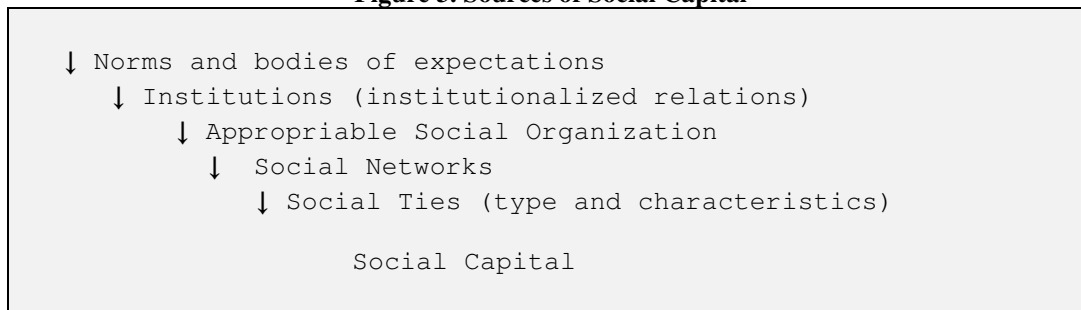
⁶ As noted by Flap (2001), the term second order resources was initially used by Boissevan (1974) as referring the resources that a person can obtain from (or through) others to whom they are tied.

⁷ An ego-centered network consist of an individual (focal node), the set of alters who have ties to ego, and the connections between the nodes components of the network. Normally, when personal networks are studied, a sample of respondents report on a set of alters to whom they are tied, and on the ties (Wasserman & Faust, 1995:42).

Where does social capital come from?

Proposition 3a. There are multiple sources (loci) of social capital, which are composed of social and normative structures at various levels (see Figure 3). In a given social context, these sources, can act with more or less intensity and more or less combined on a specific generation of social capital (transfer, use and benefits). Analytically, these sources can be classified as follow: (a) Social ties, differentiated according type and characteristics (b) Structure of social networks (c) Appropriable social organization (d) Institutions (conceptualized them as institutionalized relations), and, (e) norms and bodies of expectations .

Figure 3. Sources of Social Capital



Social ties, its types and characteristics

Certain types of social ties correlate with certain types of transfers of social capital. I illustrate the importance of the types and characteristics of the social ties as a locus of social through three examples picked up from the literature related to the topic. (a) *The strength of the tie*. From the work of Granovetter (1973) the distinctive implications that derive from the possessions of strong and weak ties have been analyzed. Weak ties, that is, those connections with individuals who are located beyond our circle of close friends or relatives, occupying locations other than ours in the social structure (ideally superior), report information and valuable resources which we probably do not find in our circle of strong ties, these latter characterized by emotionally intense connections and formed by alters with whom we often share similar levels of information and types of resources. (b) *Uniplexity vs. Multiplexity*. To a greater or lesser extent, social ties are unidimensional or multidimensional with respect to the *content* being exchanged (for example, information, services, goods, support, emotions). Although the effects (positive or negative) of this uni/multidimensionality may vary widely according to the context, the fact is that this characteristic matters in social capital processes. One example is provided by Kapferer (1969) who examines how multiplex ties (those characterized by the exchange of multiple contents and types of connections) may significantly strengthen the capacity of individuals to face disputes and conflicts in a work context. (c) *Presence/absence of a tie*. The importance of a tie begins with its presence or absence which defines its existence or not as an asset. An example of this is provided by Coleman, who demonstrates how the absence of one of the parents is associated with higher rates of dropout (controlling for human and financial capital in the family). In another domain, Helliwell (2003) shows (consistent with other studies) how married persons show greater levels of subjective well-being when compared to those who are not married.

Network structures and location of the actors

The structure and configuration of those social networks in which we act and the location we occupy within them has relevant consequences for the social capital we access (Burt, 2005). Social networks analysis provides a set of concepts and measures directly associated with social capital processes, which include both positional measures focus on the location of individuals within one or more networks, and structural measures focused on the configuration of an entire network (Lakon et al 2008:70)⁸. Positional measures such as degree centrality (the number of direct connections an actor has in a network), betweenness (the degree to which an actor intermediate or serves as a link between actors in a network), are associated with positive effects in terms of the capture of benefits of social capital (Borgatti & Jones, 1998). At the level of the structure, Coleman and Burt offer - in different contexts of analysis, examples on how the level of closure of a social network (roughly the density of relations and the degree to which the actors are connected) impacts on certain (sometimes opposed in nature) benefits of social capital. Thus, Coleman argues that dense and “closed” social networks between parents, children and parents of other children in the school promote an atmosphere of control with a positive effect that press students to remain in school and to take actions to promote and monitoring their academic achievement. In other context (managerial market) and bearing in mind other returns (compensations, promotions and other career advances), Burt (1992) emphasizes negative effects of network closure and shows how, on the contrary, it is network openness and not closure what facilitates the access to opportunities, information and consequential returns.

Appropriable social organization

In his analysis of social capital, Coleman examines how a set of organizations such as voluntary associations, unions, clubs, and community and neighborhood organizations, created for certain purposes also aid other, providing benefits to the individuals who have available to them such organizational resources (Coleman, 1990:311-13).

For the purpose of our analysis, appropriable social organization can be understood as a set of social infrastructure composed both of organizations and informal groups accessible for individuals, in which - through informal ties - a variety of resources are transferred and exchanged, generating a set of returns.

This environment constitutes a collection of sites located in different “social spaces”. Traditionally, these sites have been associated with the community context and civil society, organizations and associations linked to the economic and political domains and the like. However, they can also take the form of virtual spaces (for example those operating on internet or other informational platforms). In general terms, participation and involvement in the various social settings here commented increase the opportunities to access and get benefits from social capital. As a direct example of this, Coleman illustrates how a Club formed by members of a Union operates as an informal source to help members to find jobs (Lipset et al., 1956). In other

⁸ A reference on concepts and positional and structural measures of social networks can be observed in Wasserman & Faust (1994).

area, Kalmijn & Flap (2001) show how in the context of the dutch society voluntary associations are a relevant part of the market marriage⁹.

Institutions and institutionalized relations

Bourdieu largely emphasized the institutional origins of social capital, and explicitly the nexus between the component resources of social capital and “*more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.. (and)... to membership in a group*” (Bourdieu, 1997: 51). Bourdieu focused his analysis on those institutionalized relations that have implications to reproduce relations of domination and social inequality between groups and individuals. In that line, for Bourdieu “*the title of nobility is the form par excellence of the institutionalized social capital which guarantees a particular form of social relationship in a lasting way* (Bourdieu, 1997: 53). However, Bourdieu himself mentions that the institutionalized mechanisms of social capital operate in a variety of environments: the neighborhood, the workplace, the kinship (Bourdieu, 1997: 52).

For the purposes of this analysis, I postulate that the system of roles and statuses that socially regulate the actor’s behaviour in a variety of institutional domains (for example, marriage, parenting, neighboring, occupational domain, among others) shape the interactions, transfers, rights and obligations of those interacting, and consequently, constitute one of the most relevant sources of social capital.

An example of the above, can be seen in the field of education - and specifically on the fulfillment of parenting roles and their effects on the transfer of resources and support for the school performance of children. Thus, in the US context, Coleman (1987) notes that families with different ethnic backgrounds (and different institutionalized models on what is the role of parents) exhibit important differences with respect the type and extent of involvement and supervision on their children’ school performance. This differences are illustrated when Asian mothers take an active role supporting their children’s education (and some of the Asian families purchase not only one but two textbooks, one for the child and one for the mother (Coleman 1987). In line with Coleman’s research, other studies reaffirm how structures of roles that vary from social strata (Lareau, 1987), ethnicity (McLead, 1987) and family structure (Milne et al, 1986), impact (be positively or negatively) on resources transferred to the children and the subsequent academic performance.

Other example of the importance of institutionalized relations as source of social capital, this time in very different domain and involving negative consequences to the large society, is given by the institution of *patronage*, that is, asymmetrical and institutionalized relationships established between those who use their influence, social position or some other attribute to assist and protect others and those whom they so help and protect (Boissevain 1966:18).

⁹ It is important to note that the specific advantages and types of transfers that the sites of appropriable social organization have in terms of social capital will depend on the composition of the members of these sites in factors such as prestige, status, wealth, gender, age, cultural orientations, as well as on the size and homogeneity/heterogeneity of the group. According to the characteristics that adopt these factors, the components of the capital (resources of first and second order, transfers and returns) may vary to a great extent.

Mechanisms of patronage and their processes of social capital associated can be observed in different contexts such as the Mafia (Gambetta, 1988b) and political systems (Auyero, 2000).

Norms and bodies of expectations

The transfer of resources in the context of a social relationship can be shaped or facilitated by norms and bodies of expectations.

A norm can be defined as a shared belief that persons ought or ought not to act in a certain way (Gibbs 1965:589). It seems self-evident that all those social norms that in its contents prescribe a transfer of resources and benefits in the context of a social relationship are potential sources of social capital. The existence of norms acting as triggers of social capital can be seen in several domains. Such is the case, for example, with those norms that prescribe the care of children, support among members of the marriage, or honesty in commercial transactions, among others. However, the potential effect of norms on social capital is conditioned by a variety of factors. First, because a process of social capital may be being determined by multiple factors in turn, both structural and normative, or in other cases, the potential influence of the norm is inhibited by any other factor (for example, when interest or instrumental calculation inhibits a transfer normatively expected). Second, the influence of the norms on the processes of social capital can vary widely according to the characteristics and type of the norms in question. Norms can be prescriptive (to do x) or proscriptive (to do not x). They vary according their conditionality (conditions under which the norm is more or less applicable), intensity (the extent to which individuals subscribe to the norm), and consensus (the extent the norm is shared in a given group (Jasso & Opp, 1997). All these characteristics, affect the potential impact of norms on the way in which social capital expresses¹⁰. Finally, to have an impact on social capital, the norms must be *actualised*. This is, they should be expressed in a social relationship and a transfer¹¹.

An example that illustrates the importance of norms as a source of social capital, is given by the norms of reciprocity (doing to others what others have done or would do to you), which seem to be observed in all societies (Gouldner, 1963)¹². In contemporary societies, the existence of norms of reciprocity and its impact on social exchanges has been documented in a variety of contexts that include rural villages and urban neighborhoods of both developed and less-developed societies (Cote et al., 2009: 50-51). An interesting empirical study of a neighbourhood in Toronto, Canada, analyzed reciprocity in personal networks, found ample evidence on the

¹⁰ Thus, for example, many of the benefits received through social exchanges derive from the influence of proscriptive norms and consist of not receiving a damage or loss. This is observed, for instance, when you leave your belongings in a place where others have the opportunity to take them for themselves without being observed, but they do not do that due to a normative imperative.

¹¹ Francis Fukuyama, an author that considers social capital as norms, includes this clarification in his social capital definition "social capital is an instantiated informal norm that promotes co-operation between two or more individuals"(Fukuyama, 2001:7).

¹² Here, I limit the analysis to an illustration on how these types of norms mould the giving and taking of resources in the context of social relations. The regulatory principles to which are subjected and the characteristic of the relations of reciprocity vary to great extent according to institutional and social contexts. Thus, reciprocity in the context of relations such as those established for couples, parents and children, neighbours, work mates, or citizens, to mention some, can imply a variety of contents, timing of the exchanges, and directionalities of rights and obligations between the participants.

extensivity and importance of that practice (Cote et al., 2009). Some of the results of this study indicates that (a) Reciprocity is particularly important to exchange minor services and emotional support, (b) It is the nature of the relationships (kinship, friendship) and not personal attributes (such as gender, socioeconomic status and other) the factors that strongly affect reciprocity (c) Most of the reciprocity is tit-for-tit, that is, people get back the kind of resource they give.

Expectations and cognitive evaluations that actors bring into their social relations play a significant role on the processes of transfer of resources among them. These expectations are activated by those who operate as donors and recipients in specific transfers of social capital but also include the body of expectations of the social environment in which the transaction occurs and particularly the expectations of third parties that influence the process. Among other cases, the role of expectations is observed in the expected behaviour linked to a status. As an example, the fulfillment of the status of mother is associated to the existence and internalization of certain social expectations which exert a pressure on the agent and enforce a transfer of resources (e.g. giving care, protection, food, etc.).

Broadly speaking, it can be said these cognitive evaluations and expectations can play a role that ranges from facilitating to inhibiting processes of transfer of resources associated to social capital.

Trust is an important type of expectation that can act a facilitator/or blocker of processes of social capital. It is possible to argue that a process of social capital cannot exist without some level of trust (Glanville & Bienenstock, 2009), this understood as the expectation held by one or more of the participants (or even third parties) that the transaction of resources will happen, the donor will consider the interest of the recipient and/or the recipient will/would return the favour (in some way) in the future. However, trust *per se* does not constitute social capital because does not include neither a transfer of a resource nor an actualization of benefits or returns¹³.

Trust can be defined as a probability assigned a priori that an action (beneficial or not detrimental) will be performed by other agent (Gambetta, 1988a:213). In general, trust is built in a cumulative process that takes into account the “shadow of the past” or the history of previous interactions and information available on the agent in which trust will or will not be placed (Flap, 2001; Burt, 2005; Blau,1968). In this process also acts as a reference the “shadow of the future”

¹³ Not less important, expectations of trust can take many forms, with very different consequences for the operation of social capital. For example, one can distinguish: (a) Expectations of trust in the form of one or two- ways (mutual), (b) Expectations of trust based to greater or lesser extent on the influence and role of third parties (enforceable trust), (c) General trust, based on a general expectation on the behavior of the other agent, or specific trust, based on the expectation on the behavior of the other agent in relation to a particular transfer and circumstances. (d) It is known that levels of trust are related to the intensity of social ties. Thus, strong ties are characterized by its emotional intensity and high levels of trust. On the contrary, weak ties are associated with a lower emotional commitment and lower levels of trust. Beyond our personal networks, where the multiple social transactions we have with strangers take place (third-level social capital) emotional intensity and levels of trust are even lower. Paradoxically, weak ties can be a highly profitable social capital and a source of important benefits. Meanwhile, relations with strangers, which are the more frequent in contemporary societies, can be a source of “small” daily benefits which can make a big difference in terms of quality of life, safety and viability for the initiatives of individuals and collectivities. Thus, when social capital is restricted to those trusting ties (Paxton, 1999), an important part of the social capital actually accesable or available to people, is excluded.

that includes the expectations of risk of transactions, potential gains, alternatives available to the agents according to different scenarios of transaction, environmental conditions and third parties that act as an incentive or control for the performance of the expectations (Flap, 2004).

Trust lubricates and facilitates the transfer of resources through social relationships of which social capital is made. A relevant and frequently cited example in this regard is the role that trust plays for the operation of the rotating-credit associations. In a context of operation often marked by informality, and under the risk that people who receives a payout early in the sequence do not fulfill their next contributions, these types of associations could not operate without a high degree of trustworthiness among its members (Coleman, 1988).

Properties and characteristics of social capital

There has been a considerable debate about the properties of social capital. Among other things the discussion has included questioning the use of the term *capital* in the concept, its differences with other types of capital (physical, human) and whether it is a property of individuals and/or collectivities. Below I formulate some propositions that seek to clarify these points.

Proposition 4. Social capital is a particular type of capital, characterized by the following aspects: (a) It resides in social relations and in the transfer of resources that emanate from them (b) It is an intangible, mainly not alienable, but it can include a certain degree of transferability (c) It is partly durable asset, that depends on the existence of the actors who participate in the transactions and social structures that operate as sources of capital (c) Its existence requires of processes of individual investment in sociability and processes of collective investment in sources and facilitators of social capital. (D) It is a productive resource that generates benefits of well-being and returns in a variety of markets.

That informal social relations and transactions constitute a resource and are source of transfers of varied type does not seem disputable. Through these transactions human beings get (in greater or lesser degree) aid, information, services, material goods, emotional support. These resources, as it has been argued, come from the composition of our personal networks and the resources the members of such network are willing to transfer us (resources of first and second-order), as well as from the set of contacts and transactions we have with strangers and people in the wider social environment (resources of third order). Can these resources be called *capital*? The answer, of course, will depend on the definition of capital we adopt.

As it is known, physical capital can be defined as tangible, durable and alienable goods (for example, buildings, machines, equipment) result of an investment made in the past, that can be used to produce further capital or other goods or services. In Economics, the notion of capital has been expanded with great acceptance to human capital (Shultz, 1964; Becker, 1961), understood this as those attributes of individuals (for example, skills, education, knowledge, health) that involve a process of investment too, and that have a productive value that generates returns in a market.

The use of the notion capital in the term social capital offers three general possibilities: (1) To abandon the denomination *capital* in the term, since one or more decisive properties of what is capital cannot be held for social capital (Arrow, 1998), (2) To use the term as a *metaphor* that expresses the capacity that social contacts have to generate gains and benefits for individuals (Burt, 2001), or (3) To hold that social capital is a particular type of capital (as it is in the case of human capital or other types of capital) in which the fundamental characteristics of what is capital are met (Coleman, 1990; Bourdieu, 1997; Lin, 2001).

If the third alternative is explored, the characteristics of the capital can be depicted as follows: (a) **Intangibility**. Social capital is an intangible constituted by social relations through which a variety of resources are transferred (b) **Durability**. It can be argued that the social capital is durable. Social contacts possess certain durability in time. Meanwhile, social capital of third degree (accessible from the wider social environment) has considerable duration. (c) **Investment**. The investment involved in the social capital has various facets. On the one hand, the possession of social capital of first and second-degree requires an individual investment in sociability (Portes, 1998). The motivations of this investment may have varied origins such as rational calculation and expectations of profit of a relationship (rational choice), normative or institutionalized structures that drive the interaction, habits and pragmatic orientations that guide behaviours¹⁴. On the one hand, the point is related to the fact that social capital is often a byproduct of social relations established primarily for other purposes (Coleman, 1990). On the other hand, the sources of social capital previously mentioned (institutions, norms, bodies of expectations and social networks) presuppose a social and collective investment without which social capital would not exist¹⁵. (d) **Transferability**. In general, social capital of first degree (and second-degree resources associated with it) is scarcely transferable through an “automatic” mode. However, in certain contexts, the social capital of an individual can be “socially” transferred to another. That happens for example, when an individual transfers a contact of his-her personal network to a third (see example E5 in Table 2). A relevant process related to the transferability of social capital is the transfer that takes place in a family from a generation to another. At birth and in the early stages of life, a stock of social capital associated with the social location of a family is inherited and transferred from parents to children (Bourdieu, 1997; Flap, 2001). (e) **A productive resource**. The resources that constitute social capital generate benefits and returns to the actors who capture and use them (Lin & Erickson, 2008:4). As noted earlier, social capital may involve benefits in multiple domains such as employment, physical and mental health, material well-being, safety, etc. Essentially, this potential of multiple impacts is related to the versatility of the resources of second-degree and the variety of *contents* they

¹⁴ While it is valid to consider rational choice explanations to analyze processes of investment and exchange in the context of social capital (as Coleman and Lin propose), the analogies relating to the management of credit, investment and debts of social capital have serious limitations since in many social contexts normative, institutional and habitual factors act as drivers of the investment.

¹⁵ An interesting aspect to be observed is that in the empirical analysis of social capital carried out by some authors who support of a rational choice approach to social capital (Coleman, Lin) not much evidence or measurements are presented on how a rational process of investment and management of social capital operates, and how this orientation would predominate over other alternative orientations (for example, normative, institutionalized, pragmatic). Thus, for instance, the parents investing and transferring social capital to their children in the Coleman’s study, may be oriented whether by a rational calculation on the future return, by norms or institutionalized patterns that shape their roles, or by habits and repetition of routines proven as effective

transfer (information, services, goods, support, etc.). These resources have a value in various markets (Lin,) as evidenced by the studies that examine the effects of social capital on getting employment (Granovetter, 1974) work performance and promotion (Burt, 1992) or status attainment (Lin et al., 1981). However, the returns of social capital are not reducible to market situations in which agents sell and buy certain types of goods and services. Simply put, a variety of benefits of social capital may help people to satisfy needs and increase their well-being.

Table 2. Examples/Scenes of Social Capital Processes

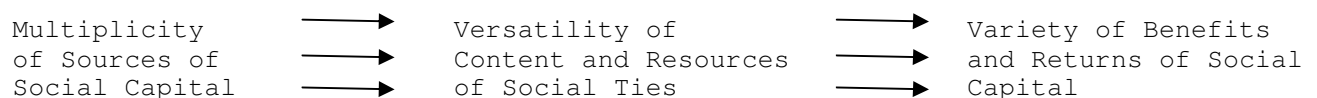
- E1 A neighbour cares for a child of another neighbour while his parents are working, without charging for it
 - E2 A child plays in the streets of a neighborhood. Their parents are not there, but other people of the vicinity look after for the child (Coleman, 1990).
 - E3 A manager has an extensive and diversified network of informal contacts. This network provides great benefits in terms of valuable information coming from contacts located in other networks (Burt, 2001)
 - E4 A police officer, member of a community of immigrants faces a murder trial that he considers unfair. He shares his problem in a radio program heard by that community and then receives significant donations for paying his legal bills (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993)
 - E5 A young woman is looking for a job. Her mother contacts a friend who runs a business and asks if there is a spot for her daughter. Although the friend does not know the girl he gives her a job.
 - E6 A hospitalized person urgently needs a blood donation. There is no blood available in the health system. Relatives and friends spread the request through their social networks and a person that belongs to the same ethnic community of the patient serves as donor.
 - E7 The parents of a child help him daily with his homework and devote several hours a week to supervise and support his school activities.
 - E8 Members of a political group that uses violent methods help one to another providing protection and exchanging a variety of goods and services (Coleman, 1990).
 - E9 A person loses his wallet with money in a downtown area. The wallet has identification and phone number. A day after the owner, which a day after receives a call from a stranger who found the wallet and wants to return it.
-

Proposition 5. As a general property, social capital presents a high degree of plasticity. This plasticity is a result of: (a) The existence of multiple sources of social capital and the variety of combinations and effects that they can have (b) The versatility of resources and contents that social ties can transfer (c) The variety of benefits and returns generated by social capital.

In propositions 3 and 4 has been mentioned the existence of multiple possible sources and facilitators of social capital (norms and bodies of expectations, institutionalized relations, appropriable social organization, social networks, type and characteristics of the social ties), and at the same time, the variety of contents and resources that can be transferred through social ties (information, services, goods, support, etc.), which in turn, can be expressed into a variety of benefits.

The variety of possible elements to be contained in each component of a circuit of social capital (Sources→ Transfer of Resources→ Returns) gives the process a great plasticity, understood as the variety of configurations, forms and contents that can adopt a given circuit of social capital. Being so, it is not surprising that significant contributions to the study of social capital have been focused on analyze particular circuits and configurations that social capital adopts. This is observed, for example, in the analysis of weak ties and its impact on getting a job (Granovetter, 1974), the effects of positional advantages of certain network locations on rewards of occupational careers (Burt, 2001), or in the effects of first-degree social capital (measured by the Position Generator) on returns of income (Lin, 2001c). At the same time, it is interesting to note the limitations the studies have had in terms of identifying the *processes and mechanisms operating in the transfer of resources*, its characteristics and contents. Thus, for example, in Burt’s study on managers (Burt, 1992) the stage of transfer of resources is a “black box” whose generic content is inferred (i.e. non redundant information) as operating between the Source of social capital (positional advantage) and the returns (career progress and rewards). The same phenomenon is observed when the impact of social capital on certain returns (for example, income or status attainment) is estimated through the Position Generator and the process of transfer of resources is inferred, assuming that occupational prestige or other social hierarchal attribute correlates with the possession (and value) of certain resources that can be transferred.

Figure 4. The plasticity of Social Capital Process



Individual or/and Collective?

Several scholars who have analyzed social capital agree that the concept has both an individual and collective facet (Bourdieu, 1997; Coleman, 1990; Lin, 2001b; Putnam, 2000; Paxton, 1999). However, there are considerable differences on what emphasis is given and how social capital is conceptualized at each level. Thus, for example Putnam emphasizes the collective nature of social capital and focuses his work on the analysis of aggregate measures of certain sources and facilitators of social capital (indicators of community connectivity, civic engagement, trust), analyzing its change in time and relationship with other macro variables such as institutional performance, health and happiness, crime, among others). In this approach, not much is said about what actually happens at the individual level with the transfer of resources that compose

social capital of second and third degree. In other approaches, for example Lin (2001b), social capital is discussed mainly to at individual and meso level, focusing on the individual capture of resources from the meso structure of networks to which is connected. Although in this case the macro existence of social capital could be conceived as an attribute of networks of networks, collective social capital is not a focus of the research.

Proposition 6. The core mechanism of social capital operates at micro level, through the transfer of resources between individual actors connected by an informal relationship. At the same time, social capital may be considered an emergent property of groups, networks and collectivities which can be characterized at socio structural level according to the social capital that operates within them.

According to the points argued in previous propositions, social capital is obtained from micro social relations between individuals who through an informal relation transfer resources from one to another. However, at the same time it is possible to hold that social capital is also an emergent property that characterizes supra-individual units such as networks, groups and communities. It seems clear, for example, that different families (as a group and system) may differ in type and characteristics of social capital that they provide to its members. Also, collectivities such as neighborhoods, communities, ethnic groups or even countries differ in their levels and characteristics of social capital understood as aggregate patterns, characteristics and types of flows, content and amount of resources transferred through social capital of first, second and third-degree.

To illustrate the socio-structural dimension of social capital, I consider here three aspects: the socio-structural and collective nature that most of the sources of social capital have, the level and distribution of social capital that characterize groups, networks and collectivities, and the structure of flows and exchange (transfers of social capital) that characterize the relation between groups that compose a collective. **(a) Sources and facilitators of social capital.** Much of the sources of capital (social networks, institutions, set of expectations, norms) have a collective nature. These sources are meso and large structures acting as precursors and facilitators of social capital, and (as it was mentioned earlier) they are a relevant component to understand where social capital comes from and how it operates. **(b) Differences in social capital between collectivities and groups as a units.** Social capital of first, second and third-degree is socially distributed and groups and collectivities differ in their level of possession and characteristics. Thus, for example, the sum, mean, mode or variance of the size of personal networks, or the amount of certain resources accessed through social ties for the members of a given group or collectivity represent proxies used to capture characteristics of the social capital of a collective unit. The collective substrate of social capital is clearly illustrated when individuals (or families) move or migrate from one collective unit (say neighbourhood, city, country and so on) to another and note differences in collective social capital that impact their lives. The example provided by Coleman, in which a family migrates from a neighborhood in Detroit to another in Jerusalem (where children play safe in a neighbourhood, benefiting from the characteristics of the community where the vicinity look after for children (see E2 in Table 2) illustrates this point (Coleman, 1990:302). **(c) Intergroup connections.** From a point of view, the social capital of a collectivity can be characterized by the combination of ties, transactions (and the flow of resources associated) between members of various subgroups composing the collective (for

example, ethnic groups, classes, status-based groups). It can be argued that the pattern of relationships referred to the transfer of resources through social capital between groups (and subsystems) of a collectivity is a structural (or systemic) characteristic. An example of this analysis is given when the social capital of a collectivity is characterized according to what has been called bonding, bridging and linking social capital (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000), referring bonding relations to those between relatively homogeneous individuals (family members, close friends and neighbors), bridging relations to ties between relatively more socially distant individuals, and linking relations to ties that connect individuals from different social strata or power positions.

CONCLUSIONS

While the idea behind the concept of social capital, that social relations and social structures are a source of benefits and returns for individuals and groups can be traced to the sources of classic sociology (Simmel, Durkheim, Marx), the foundational work of Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman built a specific conceptual field and research agenda around the concept.

In this article, I reviewed the conceptualizations of Coleman and Bourdieu on social capital, trying to identify key aspects of their theories. Then, four current definitions of the concept (Lin, Burt, Paxton, Putnam) were analyzed identifying its main components. In the light of this material, its diversity, differences of emphasis and ways of understanding social capital, the paper propose a response to three questions: (1) What are the components of social capital?, (2) Where does social capital come from?, and (3) What are the its fundamental properties and characteristics.

The arguments presented in the article can be summarized in the following points: (i) To understand how social capital composed it is fundamental to separate the core process that constitutes social capital from its sources and facilitators. Thus, I argue that the core of social capital is composed by a process or mechanism which involves a sequence of three elements: a social relation in the form of an informal microsocial tie between an alter and an ego; a transfer of a resource from alter to ego; and, the existence of benefits and returns generated by the use of the transfer. (ii) In a process of social capital can be identified resources of first, second and third order. Resources of first order refer to the network of personal contacts available to ego. Second-order resources consist of the set of transfers the network of her/his contacts can provide to ego. Third order resources include all those transfers that ego can get from relations located beyond her/his personal network, which is mainly formed by contacts with strangers and anonymous relations. (iv) Social capital is generated through multiple sources composed of social and normative structures at various levels. These sources can act with more or less intensity and more or less combined on a specific generation of social capital. I argue that these sources can be differentiated and classified for analytical and research purposes into five categories, namely: social ties (differentiated according to type and characteristics); structure of social networks; appropriable social organization; institutions, conceptualized as institutionalized relations; norms and bodies of expectations (v) Social capital is a particular type of capital, that resides in social relations and in the transfer of resources that emanate from them. Its main characteristics and properties are: it is an intangible, mainly not alienable but it can include a degree of

transferability; it is a partly durable asset that depends on the existence of the actors who participate in the transactions and social structures that operate as sources of capital; its existence requires of processes of individual investment (in sociability) and processes of collective investment (in sources and facilitators of social capital); it is a productive resource that generates benefits of well-being and returns in a variety of markets. (vi) Social capital has a distinctive existence both at individual and collective level. The core mechanism of social capital operates at micro level through the transfer of resources between individuals. At the same time, social capital can be considered an emergent property of groups, networks and collectivities which can be characterized at socio structural level according to the social capital that operates within (for example, analyzing the level and distribution of social capital that characterize groups, networks and collectivities, and the structure of flows of transfers that characterize the relation between groups that compose a collective). (vii) As a general property, social capital presents a high degree of plasticity which is a result of a variety of possible elements to be contained in each component of a given circuit of social capital (Sources→ Transfer of Resources→ Returns). Thus, this plasticity is expressed in the variety of configurations, forms and contents that processes of social capital can adopt.

This analysis suggests that far from being a repetition of ideas contained in the sociological theory for a long time, the concept of social capital is a powerful tool to analyze social relations and its impact on the well-being of individuals and communities. The research agenda the concept raises is particularly rich, and among other avenues includes: (a) To increase the knowledge on how a variety of sources operate in combination to generate social capital. This is particularly challenging because to date the approaches on social capital guided by different theories and tools of analysis (for example network analysis vs. normative perspectives on social capital) have shown low capacity to integrate and account for the complexity and multiple-action that different sources of social capital exert on its characteristics (Moody & Paxton, 2009), (b) To advance in the conceptualization and measurement of social capital as an emergent property of communities and social systems. This implies studying the characteristics of the sources of social capital and the aggregate patterns and contents of transfers of resources that compose processes of social capital. (c) To progress to a variety of conceptualizations (and measurements) that can be used to analyzed the resources transferred in processes of social capital (Van Der Gaag & Snijders, 2005), (d) To develop theories and measurements about social capital of third order, which comprises a big proportion of our everyday transactions in which we interact with strangers in the wider social environment, and (e) To carry out and accumulate research that closely analyze the circuits of social capital behind a specific phenomenon (type of benefit in a given social context) and its level of specificity/generality.

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