

## Social capital –a short literature review

Our project “Bridging” aims to “bridge social capital by participatory and co-creative culture”. Consequently, it is necessary to define “social capital”, by referring to the latest researches in the academic field.

There are several definitions of social capital. The concept goes further than culture and is debated especially in sociology and political sciences. Generally, these meanings could be divided in two categories: the social capital is either internal (as an asset for social mobility, as in the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu)<sup>1</sup> or external (as a link within society). The “external” vision of it is the one corresponding to our project.

Already in 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville identifies the importance of associations to foster civil society and democracy<sup>2</sup>. Even though Tocqueville did not use the concept of social capital, he anticipated this debate, by the opposition between a country valuing political liberalism (the United States of America) and a country with a centralized power and a more important control of the State (France of the “July monarchy” in 1835). The work of de Tocqueville can be distinguished in the thinking of Robert Putnam:

“[...] features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1995 p.67)<sup>3</sup>

The social capital is the element that distinguishes audience and civil society: it has been studied by Robert Putnam in his infamous *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Communities*. By opposition to Tocqueville, Putnam uses the example of bowling leagues as an illustration of the decay of social capital. The bowling leagues in the US were self-organized, people are starting to play more and more alone. Like in Tocqueville’s work, cultural capital is needed to pass from a passive consuming audience to an active civil society (Putnam, 2001)<sup>4</sup>. The individualization of society would have been harmful for the associations according to Robert Putnam.

The question of the cause of the decline of social capital, and by opposition its rise, is still debate. The main positions would be the argument heir from Tocqueville of the necessity of a lesser involvement of the state; the historical context from Putnam (changing mindset of

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<sup>1</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education (pp. 241–258). R.(1974). *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*.

<sup>2</sup>Méda, D. (2002). Le capital social : un point de vue critique. *L'Économie politique*, n° 14,(2), 36-47. ; De Tocqueville, A. (1889). *Democracy in america* (pp. 179-207). John Wiley & Sons, Inc..

<sup>3</sup>Putnam, R. D. (1995). (1995a). Bowling alone: America’s declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6, 65-78.

<sup>4</sup>Putnam, R. D. (2001). *Bowling alone*. Simon and Schuster.

the individuals) and the argument of political democracy from several political scientists (for example Theda Skocpol). For the latter, the vision of social capital explained by Putnam would put too much emphasis on individuals; when the participation of public powers is necessary to create the means of individual engagement. Equality would be an obligatory characteristic for developing social capital.

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#### Non-exhaustive list of articles related to social capital

- Belfiore, E., & Bennett, O. (2007). Rethinking the social impacts of the arts. *International journal of cultural policy*, 13(2), 135-151.

[http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/53054/1/WRAP\\_Belfiore\\_Rethinking%20the%20Social%20Impacts%20of%20the%20Arts-IJCPversion%20FINAL.pdf](http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/53054/1/WRAP_Belfiore_Rethinking%20the%20Social%20Impacts%20of%20the%20Arts-IJCPversion%20FINAL.pdf)

This article lists the effects of the arts. If it is not linked directly to social capital, it is nevertheless showing (based on a list of philosophers from the French Enlightenment) that arts could have the effect of “civilizing” the people, it has a public utility within society.

- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education (pp. 241–258). R.(1974). *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*.

[http://home.iitk.ac.in/~amman/soc748/bourdieu\\_forms\\_of\\_capital.pdf](http://home.iitk.ac.in/~amman/soc748/bourdieu_forms_of_capital.pdf)

This is the first English article in which Pierre Bourdieu presents his capital theory, although he already presented social capital in 1980 (in French). This article is more general, it does not concern only social capital; it shows how it is part of Bourdieu’s theory, as social capital is a tool to position oneself in the “field” (a social frame concept developed by Bourdieu).

- Ferragina, E. (2010). Social Capital and Equality: Tocqueville's Legacy: Rethinking social capital in relation with income inequalities. *The Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville*, 31(1), 73-98.

<http://muse.jhu.edu/article/385876/pdf>

This article is summarizing the main arguments in the debate over social capital. It shows the influence of Tocqueville’s work over Putnam and provide counter-argument to a individual-centered approach to social capital.

- Putnam, R. D. (1995). (1995a). Bowling alone: America’s declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6, 65-78.

<https://archive.realtor.org/sites/default/files/BowlingAlone.pdf>

This is the founding article of Robert Putnam's work, which was developed later in a book in 2001. In this article, he proves the decline of social capital by a historical explanation of a transformation of the individuals' mindsets.

- Skocpol, T. (1996). Unravelling from above. *American Prospect*, (25), 20-25.

<https://perma.cc/BXM9-8S4C>

Theda Skocpol is arguing against the individual explanation of a decline in social capital. She argues in favor of equality and State-involvement for pre-conditions of the sustainability of social capital.

- Skocpol, T., Cobb, R. V., & Klotz, C. A. (2005). Disconnection and reorganization: the transformation of civic life in Late-Twentieth-Century America. *Studies in American Political Development*, 19(2), 137-156.

[http://www.as.miami.edu/personal/cklotz/01\\_sck\\_civtrans.pdf](http://www.as.miami.edu/personal/cklotz/01_sck_civtrans.pdf)

This article shows also the question of the individualization cause as reason for the decline of social capital, against the "civic change" idea (the decline would be provoked by the political frame).

The research project "Understanding everyday participation" (2012-2017) led by Prof. Andrew Miles (University of Manchester) aimed to study everyday cultural practices and their effects. On this website, you can find several reports regarding this topic.

<http://www.everydayparticipation.org/>