

POLICY ARENA

‘MISSING LINK’ OR ANALYTICALLY MISSING?: THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

edited by

JOHN HARRISS

AN INTRODUCTORY BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

JOHN HARRISS* and PAOLO DE RENZIO

Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics, London, UK

Abstract: This paper offers a substantial review of the ways in which the concept of ‘social capital’ has been used in the recent theoretical and policy literatures. Attention is drawn to the significant difference between the way in which the term has been defined by its two major proponents, James Coleman and Robert Putnam. Putnam’s usage, which is the one which has been taken over in development policy thinking by some in the World Bank, is subjected to substantial critique. It is concluded that policy arguments which pose civil society against the state, or which rest on the view that rich endowment in ‘social capital’ is a precondition for ‘good government’, are almost certainly misconceived. © 1997 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

J. Int. Dev. **9**: 919–937 (1997)

No. of Figures: 0. No. of Tables: 0. No. of References: 54.

1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of ‘social capital’ has been current in the sociological literature for quite some time, but it entered significantly into thinking about development mainly as a

* Correspondence to: J. Harriss, Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, UK.

result of the publication of Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* in 1993 (Putnam, 1993a). Putnam marshalled an impressive range of evidence and argument to show that the nature and intensity of interaction in civil society in different parts of Italy — what he refers to as 'networks of civic engagement' — have been the principal determinant of regional government performance. For Putnam civic engagement gives rise to social capital — 'features of social organization, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam, 1993b) — and this in turn provides the basis both for effective government and for economic development. In the paper from which this definition of social capital is taken Putnam offers what has effectively become a charter for much recent thinking and some empirical research:

... working together is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital ... The social capital embodied in norms and networks of civic engagement seems to be a precondition for economic development as well as for effective government. Development economists take note: Civics matters. (Putnam, 1993b).

They — and others in the development community — quite clearly have taken note, and we now see references being made to 'social capital' in many different contexts. The argument struck a responsive chord in the context of recognition in the 1990s of the problems of governance and of the role of civil society (reflected in the themes of the *World Development Report* for 1997 (World Bank, 1997b).

The idea of social capital has seemed to promise answers which are attractive both to the neoliberal right — still sceptical about the role of the state — and to those committed to ideas about participation and grassroots empowerment. Thus it is that since 1993 'social capital' has become one of the key terms of the development lexicon, adopted enthusiastically by international organizations, national governments and NGOs alike. In 1995 it was suggested — for example — that social capital could constitute a unifying theme for the research programme of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex. There was a panel on 'Social capital and market institutions' at the Tenth Anniversary Conference of the Centre for the Study of African Economies in April 1997.¹ The Civic Practices Network in the United States offers material on social capital on the internet.² The government of Colombia is developing a 'Social capital barometer' (BARCAS, *Barometro del Capital Social*) with the aim of providing '... an analytical base to foster a collective learning process on the topic, and its incorporation into the formulation and evaluation of public policies' (Sudarsky, 1997, p. 196; our translation). The Inter-American Foundation has developed a 'grassroots development framework', in order better to evaluate its projects, in which the construction of social capital, in the forms of community norms

¹ The papers in this panel were by Robert Bates and others on 'Political institutions and economic growth in Africa'; Jennifer Widner, on 'Social capital and investment'; Marcel Fafchamps on 'Ethnicity and markets: supplier credit in African manufacturing'; Abigail Barr on 'Social capital and technical information flows in the Ghanaian manufacturing sector'; Jean-Philippe Platteau and others on 'Participation in the construction of a local public goods: a case study of watershed management in the Ethiopian highlands'; Lant Pritchett on 'Cents and sociability: household income and social capital in rural Tanzania' (see commentary in this paper); and Albert Zyefack on 'Ownership structure, uncertainty and investment in the Cameroonian manufacturing sector: a panel data analysis'.

² The Civic Practices Network has an article on social capital at: http://www.cpn.org/sections/tools/models/social_capital.html.

and organisational culture, is regarded as a fundamental 'intangible' effect that has to be taken into account (Ritchey-Vance, 1996). Social capital has been looked to by some in the World Bank as describing 'the missing link' in development (see World Bank, 1997a). Yet even as the idea has taken wing, confusion about its meaning has become apparent. As Narayan and Pritchett say 'Social capital, while not all things to all people, is many things to many people' (1996, p. 2). In this essay we aim to review arguments about 'social capital'. Is it indeed 'the missing link' in development? Or does the fact that it means so many different things reflect the fact that it is an idea which serves as a convenient peg for different agendas?

2 ORIGINS AND MEANINGS

Putnam refers to Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) for the first use of the term 'social capital' in its present sense (see Putnam, 1995, endnote 4)³, but he credits James S. Coleman with having developed the theoretical framework around it, initially in an important paper in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1988. Coleman then devoted a chapter to social capital in his monumental *Foundations of Social Theory* (1990), in which he attributes the introduction of the term to Loury, in work which was published in 1977, on the determinants of income differences between members of different racial groups in America. Here, as Coleman explains: 'social capital is [taken to mean] the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person' (1990, p. 300), and this is how he himself used the concept in explaining variations in performance in the school system (1988). Several other writers used the term in a similar way, including — most influentially — Pierre Bourdieu (1980; 1986). Bourdieu writes, for example:

one can give an intuitive idea of it by saying that it is what ordinary language calls 'connections' ... by constructing this concept one acquires the means of analysing the logic whereby this particular kind of capital is accumulated, transmitted and reproduced, the means of understanding how it turns into economic capital and, conversely, what work is required to convert economic capital into social capital, the means of grasping the function of institutions such as clubs or, quite simply, the family, the main site of accumulation and transmission of that kind of capital. (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 32–33).

Coleman himself then undertook a major conceptual review (1988, 1990) in which he argues that 'social capital' refers to social–structural resources which constitute 'a capital asset for the individual':

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 social structure*, and *they facilitate certain actions of the individuals who are within the structure*. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the attainment of certain ends that would not be attainable in its

³ Caroline Moser, however, refers to a statement of the anthropologist Meyer Fortes, made in 1958, which also seems to anticipate the contemporary usage of 'social capital': Moser (1996, note 7, p. 96).

absence. Like physical and human capital, social capital is not completely fungible, but is fungible with respect to specific activities. A given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others. *Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons.* It is lodged neither in individuals nor in physical implements of production. (Coleman, 1990, p. 302; our emphasis).

He goes on to give a number of examples to illustrate different forms of social capital: the way in which student activism in South Korea was built on study circles formed by groups of students coming from the same high school or hometown or church; the apparent decline in trust in the relationships between doctors and patients in the United States; the greater sense of security felt by a mother of young children in Jerusalem as compared with Detroit, because 'In Jerusalem the normative structure ensures that unattended children will be looked after by adults in the vicinity ...' (p. 303); and the social relationships which obtain between merchants in the central market in Cairo (in which 'family relations are important ...'; p. 304). These examples are reflected in Putnam's emphasis on 'networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation'.

Coleman then asks what it is about social relations that can constitute useful capital for individuals. His carefully argued answer to this question highlights (i) the significance of insurance, related to the obligations and expectations which arise in social relationships (so that rational individuals create obligations amongst others, which function like 'credit slips'); (ii) the information which is communicated through social relations; and (iii) the ways in which the existence of norms and effective sanctions facilitates action (reducing transactions costs in a variety of ways). When social relationships concentrate effective power then social capital may be created for all the members of the group concerned because of the overcoming of free-rider problems. But beyond this specific case much social capital is a public good. This means that it is not necessarily in any individual's interest to bring it into being, and in fact 'most forms of social capital are created or destroyed as a by-product of other activities' (1993, p. 317). But there are also some forms of social capital which are the result of deliberate investment by actors, such as in business organizations or voluntary associations like parent-teacher organizations, where those concerned 'have the aim of receiving a return on their investment' (p. 313), whether or not there are externalities which benefit non-participants.

In Coleman's account social capital is an inherent aspect and—most significantly—an unintended outcome of the institutionalization of social relationships in 'social structure'. For him it accrues to individuals. His is a broad and encompassing conception, and the implications of 'social capital' differ according to circumstances and for different groups of actors.

3 PUTNAM'S CIRCULARITIES

Putnam's book *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, written as a result of long collaboration with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Nanetti, was described in an extraordinary review in *The Economist* as being, beneath its appearance as a conventional study of regional government, the most important work of social science since Pareto and Max Weber. In the few years since it was first

published it has been very widely cited, and it has been the outstanding source from which the idea of 'social capital' has entered into development discourse. The basic argument of the book is by now so familiar as to require only brief recapitulation. Putnam and his collaborators have studied the performance of regional governments in Italy from their establishment in 1970. They find that the most important single determinant both of the performance of these democratic local governments, and of the differing levels of socio-economic development in the regions of Italy, is the factor which they label as 'civic involvement' or 'civic tradition', as measured by the vibrancy of associational life, newspaper readership and indicators of political participation. Quite contrary to the expectations of the classical social theorists who saw modernity as 'the enemy of civility' (or of a sense of 'community'), '... The least civic areas of Italy are precisely the traditional southern villages' (1993, p. 114). Putnam traces the roots of the marked differences that are observed, notably between north central and southern Italy, to the Middle Ages and the establishment of the Norman feudal kingdom in the south while communal republicanism grew up, meanwhile, in the towns of northern and central Italy. He argues, then, that the south has been locked into a vicious spiral in which social institutions reflect an adjustment to pervasive mistrust (in an account which draws significantly on the notion of 'amoral familism' developed in Banfield's *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (1958): 'Force and family provide a primitive substitute for civic community. This equilibrium has been the tragic fate of southern Italy for a millenium' (1993, p. 178). The north and centre, on the other hand, have experienced a long history in which the existence of 'networks of civic engagement' and of 'norms of generalized reciprocity' have given rise to a virtuous spiral of 'brave reciprocity' (as opposed to the maxim of 'always defect' which is implicit in southern 'amoral familism'⁴):

Social trust, norms of reciprocity, networks of civic engagement, and successful cooperation are mutually reinforcing. Effective collaborative institutions require interpersonal skills and trust, but those skills and that trust are also inculcated and reinforced by organized collaboration (1993, p. 180).

There is, therefore, 'path dependence'(in the sense in which Douglass North (1990) has used this term), and 'Where norms and networks of civic engagement are lacking the outlook for collective action appears bleak. The fate of the Mezzogiorno is an object lesson for the Third World today and the former Communist lands of Eurasia tomorrow ...'(1990, p. 183). The problem with which Putnam leaves his readers is that of the constructability of social capital in circumstances—like those of the Italian south—where it has been missing historically. He argues that the changes that have taken place in the formal political institutions of Italy have had a positive effect, even though 'The new institution [of regional government] has not yet lived up to the highest expectations of its optimistic advocates'. And the final lesson from his research is, he says, 'that most institutional history moves slowly' (p. 184). For those concerned with social and economic development, therefore, the findings of the

⁴ Banfield argued that: 'extreme poverty and backwardness [in the place he called Montegrano] is to be explained largely ... by the inability of the villagers to act together for their common good or, indeed, for any end transcending the immediate material interest of the nuclear family. This inability to concert activity beyond the immediate family arises from an ethos—that of 'amoral familism' [meaning "maximise the material, short-run advantage of the nuclear family; assume that all others will do likewise"], which has been produced by three factors acting in combination: a high death rate, certain land tenure conditions and the absence of the institution of the extended family'.

Putnam study are ambiguous: on the one hand it demonstrates the importance of social organization (social capital as 'the missing link' in development), but on the other it suggests that those societies which have been burdened historically with ineffective and inefficient institutions may not easily shift to another path on which the virtuous spiral of 'brave reciprocity' will flourish. The ambiguity is an extension of the uneasy and in the end unsatisfactory way in which Putnam's use of the notion of 'path dependence' aims to resolve the problems of action and structure: it seems that actors do make choices at some point but that they are subjected thereafter to a deterministic, even culturalist, logic.

There is a confessed circularity in the argument ('the culture-vs.-structure, chicken-and-egg debate is ultimately fruitless'; p. 181): 'norms of generalized reciprocity' and 'networks of civic engagement' give rise to social capital which in turn makes co-operation between people possible, and reinforces reciprocity and civic engagement. How the problems of collective action which constrain reciprocity and civic engagement are overcome in the first place is a problem which not really addressed, and indeed it is stated that 'where no prior example of successful civic collaboration exists, it is more difficult to overcome barriers of suspicion and shirking' (1993, p. 174). The only way out of the circularity is in the strong suggestion that civic engagement arises from 'weak' horizontal ties. Putnam follows Granovetter in arguing that

'strong' interpersonal ties (like kinship and intimate friendship) are less important than 'weak ties' (like acquaintanceship and shared membership in secondary associations) in sustaining . . . collective action. Dense but segregated horizontal networks sustain cooperation within each group, but networks that cut across social cleavages [such as are created in sports clubs, mutual aid societies, cultural associations and voluntary unions] nourish wider cooperation (1993, p. 175).

(It is rather odd, therefore, that he should refer elsewhere, and so approvingly, to the importance of strong interpersonal ties like those in Chinese family networks, which would not seem to 'nourish wider co-operation'; see Putnam (1995 esp. note 2)). There is a some resonance in these arguments with those of Elinor Ostrom concerning the supply of new institutions for governing the commons. These emphasize — as well as the importance of small, incremental and sequential steps through which knowledge is built up and shared (Ostrom, 1990, ch. 3) — '*extensive common knowledge* about the structure of incentives they face, the types of individuals with whom they would be interacting over the long run and alternative ways of structuring their relationships (for those involved)' (1995, p. 130, author's emphasis).

4 SOCIAL CAPITAL IN AMERICA

Putnam has subsequently written two essays, which have attracted a great deal of discussion in the United States, and which both qualify some of the arguments of *Making Democracy Work* and concern the erosion of social capital, in the form of civic associations of different kinds, in the country. This is reflected in the title 'Bowling alone: America's declining social capital' (1995): more Americans go bowling than before, but fewer of them participate in teams and bowling leagues (which are likely to establish the kinds of horizontal, 'weak ties' which are the base of social capital). In this essay, and then in greater depth in 'The strange disappearance of civic America' (1996) Putnam analyses the causes of the decline in precisely those

kinds of associations which De Tocqueville believed to be so distinctive of American democracy. His conclusion is that we are witnessing a generational effect, and that those born in the period between about 1910 and 1940 are more likely, at all educational levels, to have participated in associations than those born afterwards; and that the principal cause of this generational change is probably the effect of television, which has individualized the way in which people spend their leisure time: 'each hour spent viewing television is associated with less social trust and less group membership' (1996). The Social Capital Foundation in the United Kingdom has recently picked up on these leads in relation to this country.

But it is argued by others that the last thirty years have seen contradictory trends in American civil society, and that there has been 'a complex historical dynamic in which substantial learning and capacity building has taken place . . . amidst many broader indicators of decline (so that) . . . The capacity of community-based organizations to engage in complex public-private partnerships, and the availability of workable models for this, are far greater than in the 1960s, and have been increasing steadily' (Sirianni and Friedland, 1995, pp. 12 and 13). These authors point out that 'we need to be careful not to interpret the argument for the overall, quantitative decline of social capital to entail a nostalgia for earlier times. This is most obvious when it comes to forms of social capital that were illiberal and socially exclusivist . . . (while) . . . the decline of other forms of social capital, such as bowling leagues, may not be all that significant, if they do not lend themselves to being mobilized for new forms of community problem-solving and trust building. The decline of church attendance may be far more significant . . . (when it is the case that) . . . congregation-based organizing mobilizes existing stocks of social capital in church networks, and generates new stocks across denominations and (sometimes) across ethnic and racial lines' (CPN 1997, pp. 6 and 2). Verba, Schlozman and Brady find evidence ' . . . that participation has modestly increased at the level of community and local problem solving activities, and that the decrease in voter turnout has not been accompanied by a general decrease in citizen activism' (CPN 1997, p. 5).

Of particular interest, in view of Putnam's view of the relationships between 'civic engagement' and government performance, as well as of his views on the decline of social capital in America, is the finding that 'Federal support for Community Action [a programme of the Johnson administration in the 1960s], and a variety of other programmes that grew up around it, was a very important factor in spurring the development of new forms of social capital . . . Community Action turned out to be a vast incubator for involving new community actors . . . building local associations, forging broader networks, and laying the foundations for new forms of collaboration between local groups and city and service agencies' (Sirianni and Friedland, 1995, p. 15). The emphasis which these writers place on the possibility of mutually supportive relationships between state and civic action, leading to the construction of social capital — which Putnam actually acknowledges in his own writings on social capital in America — is picked up also, as we shall see, in the development literature.

5 THE CRITIQUE OF PUTNAM

Criticism of Putnam has come from his fellow specialists on Italian politics (Sabetti, 1996; Tarrow, 1996 — to refer only to English language sources) and from other social scientists (Goldberg, 1996; Levi, 1996; Portes and Landolt, 1996). There are telling

criticisms of Putnam's methodology, including perhaps especially Goldberg's which points up the problem that while the variable of 'civicness' rather powerfully explains differences between north and south, it does not appear to explain variation *within* either North Italy or South Italy (see also Morlino 1995, on the indices which are developed for different variables). There are criticisms of his analytically shallow use of the idea of 'path dependence' (Levi, Sabetti), of his inadequate theorisation of trust (Levi), and of his romanticized image of community — with its concomitant neglect of the negative aspects of sociability (Levi, Portes and Lindolt). It is indeed striking that Putnam's arguments reverse those of an earlier tradition of scholarship which rather emphasized the constraints imposed on entrepreneurship by embeddedness in social networks (see Moore 1997, for a recent critique of this literature).

The last point ties up with another, which is that whereas Coleman argues explicitly that social capital is a resource of individuals, for Putnam it becomes a property of groups and even of nations. As Portes and Lindolt point out 'Collective social capital, however, cannot simply be the sum of individual social capital. If social capital is a resource available through social networks, the resources that some individuals claim come at the expense of others' (1996); 'social capital' for some implies 'social exclusion' for others. Arguably, this misrepresents Putnam's argument, which is rather (see the quotation above) that there are socially significant externalities arising from horizontal association (which cuts across 'dense but segregated networks'). The problem seems to lie in an unquestioned acceptance of the 'public good' nature of social capital: yet in economic terms, while the condition about non-rivalry in consumption always holds, since social capital cannot be appropriated by any single individual, the condition about non-excludability of benefits does not necessarily hold. Norms of trust are only shared by people who are 'inside' the network. The externalities are therefore associated with the activities in which social capital is drawn upon, and not social capital itself. This has led to a tendency, in spite of Coleman's warnings on this, to neglect the negative aspects of social capital, which include (following Portes and Lindolt) 'conspiracies against the public' (think of mafias), 'restrictions on individual freedom and business initiative' (the tight social networks which may restrict productive investment amongst returned Gulf migrants in Kerala, for instance: see Osella 1993), and 'downward levelling pressures'.

This criticism bears significantly on another, which is that Putnam does not explain the mechanisms or processes whereby 'networks of civic engagement' lead to more effective government. As Levi points out, the capacity even of highly mobilized citizens to make effective demands on government may remain limited (Fox 1996, illustrates this in regard to Mexico) while there is absolutely no guarantee that effective demands will be of a democratic nature. There is, in short, a lot of slippage in Putnam's analysis. 'Horizontal' organization in civil society is simply assumed to be in the interests of society as a whole. No differentiation is made between different types of organizations. Are football clubs and choirs just the same in terms of their implications and effects as labour unions? Power is not taken into account. Michels may not have succeeded in establishing an invariable principle with the concept of the 'iron law of oligarchy' but he certainly raised some very important questions about the requirements and concomitants of organization outside the state.⁵ As with some others who have advocated

⁵ Fisher has assembled evidence which shows that in grassroots organisations, grassroots support organisations, and in the networks of both in 'the Third World' 'The iron law is not inevitable' (1994,

the virtues of civil society in relation to the state there is 'a very conservative message implicit in much of what Putnam writes (although his intention is to promote political and economic progress)' (Levi, p. 52), not only because he romanticises community but also because he skates over social differentiation. As Foley and Edwards put it, 'what is missing . . . is the political variable' (1996, p. 47). The role played by civil society organizations will depend crucially on the wider political setting, and on the ways in which inequalities of power and resources are dealt with in the economic and political arena. In this sense 'we are likely to find that social movements organizations, grassroots interest groups, political associations of all sorts are far more likely to generate Putnam's active citizenry than the choral societies, bird-watching clubs and bowling leagues he is so fond of citing' (1996, p. 49).

The most telling lines of criticism are of Putnam's historiography, and of his analysis of causality; and they converge upon a point which is of the utmost importance from a policy perspective: whereas Putnam argues that 'civic engagement' gives rise to good governance both historical evidence and theoretical argument suggest that the direction of causality is at least as likely to lie in the reverse direction (see also Tendler, 1997, esp. pp. 151–157). Sabetti and Tarrow both show that Putnam relies on a stylised historiography which neglects many inconvenient facts, notably about the extent of associational life in the Italian south, and which even involves highly selective quotation from sources (Sabetti, 1996, p. 34). There is an alternative historiography which explains the differences which Putnam observes between north and south in terms of social (including class) relationships which were established by changes in governmental institutions after the eighteenth century (which had the effect of making Sicily 'the Ireland of Italy', in the words of a nineteenth-century commentator)—rather than long-run 'path dependence' reflecting cultural patterns like that of 'amoral familism'. Putnam never takes account of the semi-colonial status of the Italian south, nor 'considers the effect of the pattern of state building on indigenous civic capacity' (Tarrow, 1996, p. 394). Thus he also neglects the possible causal links between the establishment of progressive politics in some parts of the north (the Po Valley, in particular) in the later nineteenth century and both civic capacity and the performance of regional governments in the present. There is an alternative model, therefore, in which 'The operative cause of the performance of regional institutions in both north and south is neither cultural nor associational, but political' (Tarrow, 1996, p. 394).

The other, ultimately convergent, line of criticism has been put notably by Levi, who addresses the problems of where the norms of reciprocity which Putnam assumes actually come from, and what the mechanisms are which maintain them. What are the 'mechanisms by which membership in such groups as bird-watching societies and soccer clubs lead to a high level of civic engagement, democratic politics, and high quality government performance' (Levi, 1996, p. 46)? Putnam's argument is that dense networks of such 'weak' horizontal ties produce the specified effects because of the sanctions against defection which they involve, the information which they provide, which makes for trustworthiness; and the 'culturally-defined templates for future collaboration' which they represent. Levi finds these points entirely logical without being convinced that it all adds up to a basis for the kinds of sanctions and

p. 129, summary). But the evidence she refers to also shows that in many instances it does obtain. We have no basis for judging claims as to its prevalence, or not, statistically.

information that are necessary for promoting large scale economic exchange. 'Nor', she points out, 'is it clear that they produce norms of reciprocity with those outside the club; in fact, they may have just the opposite effect' (p. 47)—though in fairness to Putnam again it should be pointed out (as with reference Portes and Lindolt's criticism: see above) that he argues that it is actually overlapping memberships of a number of different associations which count (because they set up ties which cut across social cleavages). Levi thinks that trust (which is at the centre of the argument, and yet is inadequately specified by Putnam) is more likely to emerge in response to experiences and expectations outside small associations, and from the shared values associated with them, as well as the existence of institutional structures which set up sanctions and offer incentives: 'Expectations about the behaviour of others form as a result of interactions among groups defined by ethnicity, religions, or some other shared value; confidence in a backdrop of third party sanctions; or sufficient costs to discourage betrayal' (p. 48). This then leads through to a conclusion which converges with the historiographical critique, that: 'There is considerable evidence that state institutions can . . . lay the basis for generalised trust' (p. 50), Putnam himself actually recognizes this — at least implicitly — in his work on America.

The policy point here is that much of the enthusiasm for Putnam's ideas and for the concept of social capital derives from the belief that they suggest either an alternative at least to the central government part of 'the state', or the means of improving the quality of government in general. What his critics suggest is not that the 'features of social organization, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation' are unimportant, but that they are actually very powerfully influenced by political institutions, including state institutions. Development interventions which are aimed at 'creating social capital', therefore — as for example, in programmes of support for associations in civil society — could miss the mark. The point is different from, but closely cognate to, that made by Tarrow. He argues that 'policy makers who attack the lack of social capital by encouraging associations would be attacking the symptoms not the causes of the problem' (Tarrow, 1996, p. 396) because he believes that structural factors such as its semi-colonial status in relation to northern Italy are much more important in explaining the backwardness of the Italian south than any lack of 'social capital'. And there surely are societies in which there is a lot of social capital (in the sense of networks of contacts and connections) but in which other assets and resources are insufficient to allow people to escape from poverty. As Portes and Landolt observe 'There is considerable social capital in ghetto areas [of the USA], but the assets obtainable through it seldom allow participants to rise above their poverty' (1996).

The current enthusiasm for the idea of 'social capital' shares in what Judith Tendler (1997, ch. 6) refers to as 'decentralization fever' in current development thinking — the uncritical acceptance of the view that decentralization and participation necessarily make for better government (because they bring government spatially closer and make it more receptive to pressures from citizens, increase the amounts of and the quality of information that are available and make for greater flexibility and responsiveness in the delivery of services). As she points out, amongst the assumptions on which this view rests are the ideas that robust civil societies (i.e. those with Putnamian 'networks of civic engagement') make for good government, and that NGOs and other institutions of civil society are autonomous and independent of government. But her own research on clear cases of 'good government' in the state of Ceara in northeast

Brazil reaches much more nuanced conclusions. Here it seems that improvements in local government were less the result of decentralization than they were of a three-way dynamic involving local government, civil society and an active, interventionist central government (the state government in the Brazilian context). Civic and NGO actors were often important in these cases, but in some instances this was made possible by something that central government did first. On the other hand the performance of central government, not just of local government, was positively influenced by activity in civil society. Perhaps most significantly, central government sometimes acted in such a way as to engage in advocacy on behalf of local citizens vis-à-vis local government. Tandler's firm conclusion is that: 'Civil society [and we may read also 'social capital' *sens* Putnam] was not a homogeneously virtuous institution, keeping wayward governments on the straight and narrow and working its magic best on local government. *The causal relationships between good government and civil society were anything but unidirectional . . .*' (Tandler, 1997, p. 156; author's emphasis).

By implication, at least, Tandler's work puts Putnam's views on the determining significance of the 'social capital' which derives from the networks, norms and trust in civil society, firmly in their place, without denying that social capital in this sense does count for something. It matters, but in the context of government institutions. The argument coincides with that of Peter Evans and of his fellow authors of articles in a special section of *World Development* (24(6), June 1996; articles by Evans, Lam, Heller, Ostrom, Fox and Burawoy) on 'Development strategies across the public-private divide'. Here the view is put that it seems that all societies are endowed with at least a minimal stock of social capital, in the form of family and kinship ties, or of cooperative arrangements among friends and neighbours. What makes the difference is, in a sense, how social capital is scaled up, or not, through the relationships between state and private and voluntary organisations, 'to generate solidary ties and social action on a scale that is politically and economically efficacious' (Evans, 1996, p. 1124). The articles present instances in which there is evidence of synergy having developed in these relationships. Synergy is based both on the complementarities that may exist between state organizations and those in civil society, as sometimes in systems of 'coproduction', and on the positive effects, in some instances, of the embeddedness of the former in the latter. In a similar vein, with particular regard to state intervention in relation to civil society, and therefore to processes of social capital formation, Haddenius and Uggla (1996) have constructed a scale in which state action ranges from 'hostile', where it does not tolerate independent civil activity, to 'benevolent', in which not only is there space for autonomous activity, but such space is supported by 'channels for influence, arenas for interaction, and a facilitative legal-administrative framework' (p. 1630), and by policies actively to promote and strengthen civil society organizations.

6 THE 'MISSING LINK'? SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE WORLD BANK

The concept of 'social capital' — notwithstanding the ambiguities and the imprecision surrounding it which this review has shown up — has entered into the discourses of the World Bank. An early reference in work from the World Bank is by Serageldin and Steer, of the Environmentally Sustainable Development Programme, who took

over Putnam's view of social capital as deriving in particular from voluntary horizontal associations (1994, p. 31). Subsequently, a Satellite Group on social capital was formed within the World Bank's Task Force on Social Development. The idea has entered onto the agendas of other agencies, too, for example in the statement concerning tenders for research on social policy put out by the Department for International Development of the UK government in 1997. It appears significantly in the *World Development Report* of the World Bank for 1997, where it is again defined after the manner of Putnam, and treated as an endowment of societies (World Bank, 1997b, p. 114). This new focus reflects the recognition that as well as natural, physical and human capital, the ways in which actors organise themselves is also important in explaining economic growth and development. But then 'organization' is equated with 'social capital', which is described in one World Bank document as 'the missing link to complete the equation' (World Bank, 1997a, p. 77).

The paper from which this statement has been taken goes on immediately to refer to the problem that 'There is, however, no consensus about which aspects of interaction and organisation merit the label of social capital', and it then distinguishes three different usages. One, associated with Putnam, locates social capital in 'horizontal associations'; a broader conception, covering a wider range of types of associations, is associated with Coleman; and an even more encompassing view which effectively equates social capital with the entire institutional framework of a society is associated with Olson (1982) and North (1990). Yet, it is suggested, the three views have common features and it is concluded, with little discussion of the point, that 'the three definitions of social capital are not really alternative views, but rather complementary dimensions of the same process' (World Bank, 1997a, p. 79). Under any of the definitions, it is argued, social capital affects development outcomes through information sharing (group based lending schemes are mentioned in particular), coordination of activities (as by water and forest users' groups), and collective decision-making, all of which are themselves influenced by the 'macro-level social capital' in the institutional framework of the society as a whole. The argument would only be a restatement of the basic proposition that 'organization matters' were it not for the fact that the paper — after the influence, perhaps, of Putnam — consistently highlights the role of what it refers to as 'local institutions' (meaning local associations and groups of different kinds). It is recognized that such institutions may be most effective at enforcing co-operative action 'when the local distribution of assets is more equal' (p. 81); that local institutions may be captured by those with local power, and that 'The application of social capital in development is not a distribution-neutral process' (p. 83); and that by themselves — without other resources — these associations may not make much of a difference. All of which seems very sensible. Yet the paper still concludes with some quite strong recommendations about the role of donors and of government 'in promoting "desirable" forms of social capital' (p. 88), which are in turn equated with 'local level social capital', local government and NGOs. It is hard to avoid the conclusion, therefore, that in spite of the caveats which it enters the paper participates, nonetheless, in 'decentralization fever', with the attendant pitfalls which Tendler has illuminated. The article in this collection by Jonathan Fox, on World Bank policies in rural Mexico, also makes the point — in the context of an extensive critique of the applications of the idea of social capital by the Bank — that the expectation that decentralisation of resources and power to state governments should increase public accountability, is unjustified.

In this respect the approach which is put forward in the *World Development Report* (ch. 7, on 'Bringing the state closer to people'), though it is comparable, appears somewhat more balanced with a stronger emphasis on the role of government and on the 'organizations at the interface of state, markets and civil society' (depicted in Figure 7.2, p. 116). But it, too, seems to miss the point which Tendler makes about the 'paradox of decentralization', which is that it may involve a stronger role on the part of central government and important direct relationships between central government and civil society at the local level (compare Figure 7.3, p. 123).

Amongst a number of attempts at measuring social capital and its impact (reviewed in World Bank 1997a) perhaps the most thorough is that of Narayan and Pritchett (1996). They define social capital, in the overriding spirit of the other World Bank papers which have been referred to here, as 'the density and nature of the network of contacts or connections amongst individuals in a given community' (1996, p. 3). In other words, *not* as 'norms' or 'trust' or in terms of broad cultural values (though there is discussion of norms and levels of trust in Tanzanian villages elsewhere in Narayan's work (forthcoming)). This seems a fair measure of what Putnam might mean by 'civic engagement', and Narayan and Pritchett operationalize it by using data from household surveys in Tanzania to construct a 'Putnam index' which combines information on the number of groups in different villages, their kin heterogeneity, their income heterogeneity and their functioning. They find that 'higher village social capital [in this sense] is associated with higher levels of individuals' incomes, even after controlling for household education, physical assets and village characteristics' (1996, Summary), and that the effect is surprisingly large. The finding seems to confirm the idea that 'social capital' as 'local institutions' is indeed the missing link, and it lends weight to 'decentralization fever'. Unsurprisingly, it features quite prominently in the *World Development Report 1997* (see p. 115). The finding is undoubtedly interesting and important, but only more substantial investigation would show up what the directions of causality are between local organization and government.

The other outstanding World Bank research, thus far, to draw on the concept of social capital is that of Caroline Moser, in studies of responses to poverty and vulnerability in various poor urban communities (see Moser 1996; and Moser and Holland 1997). She takes Putnam's concept of social capital, as being a characteristic of societies—'The norms, trust, and reciprocity networks that facilitate mutually beneficial cooperation in a community' (1996, p. 11)—and she describes reciprocal arrangements as well as community-based organizations. She explores both how 'the process of settlement consolidation influences the stock of social capital' (1996, p. 60), and how these stocks increase or decline in conditions of economic difficulty. She finds that struggles to establish squatter settlements can be conducive to the development of effective local organization, and that the pressures of economic crisis can have contradictory effects, both strengthening social capital, as reciprocity networks are used more, and weakening it 'as households' ability to cope decreases and community trust breaks down ... Women have less time to collaborate in voluntary community based activities and choose only those that generate income, and increasing crime and burglaries have severely eroded the trust between neighbors' (1996, pp. 60 and 65–66: the latter point, and the dynamics of the 'poverty–violence–institutions nexus' is the particular concern of Moser and Holland, 1997).

7 CONCLUSION—DISTINGUISHING FORMS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

The great huzzah which has gone up for the idea of social capital is partly to be understood in the context of the recognition in the last decade of the significance of 'the way in which the economic actors interact and organize themselves' (World Bank 1997a, p. 77) for growth and development. This recognition is reflected in the rise of 'the new institutionalism' (see, for example, Harriss *et al.* (eds), 1995); in the 'new economic sociology' (Granovetter and Swedberg (eds), 1992); in research on the different ways in which capitalist economies may be organized, and their implications (as, for example, in research on industrial organisation: see, *inter alia* Appelbaum and Batt, 1994; and Humphrey (ed.), 1995), as well as in the whole genre of research on the relationships between political institutions and development (see, for example, Rueschmeyer *et al.*, 1992; Leftwich, 1995). If social capital is understood to mean simply 'the way in which actors organize themselves' then there is indeed a very good case for saying that it is 'the missing link' in development, for organization quite clearly matters a great deal. But to use the term 'social capital' in this way is likely to create confusion, for it came into use originally to refer to the resources that inhere in family and community organization—especially networks of contacts or connections—which can be seen as a form of capital which accrues to individuals. It has more recently been taken to mean specifically, following Putnam, the norms and networks of 'civic engagement', or 'local institutions', which, it is argued, constitute endowments of capital for societies. And this understanding of 'social capital' has appealed to a diverse constituency, in just the way that the idea of 'civil society' has, or the ideas of the new communitarianism associated especially with Etzioni (1993). 'Organization in civil society' (a phrase which pulls together these different but complementary ideas) is attractive as an alternative to organization by the state to thinkers and policy makers of different political hues. For some (including many of those possessed by what Tandler calls 'decentralization fever') it is a question above all of efficiency, for others it is a desirable end in itself (see, for example, Brown and Tandon, 1994). Both ways round it is liable to be profoundly misleading, above all—as Jo Beall illustrates in her article in this collection, using examples of community involvement in solid waste management in South Asian cities—because it neglects considerations of power and the fact that the consequences of organisation, or of 'social capital', can be negative for many members of a society, especially those who are relatively powerless. The idea of 'social capital' as 'community' is thoroughly conservative-populist.

For the concept of social capital to be useful analytically it is essential to recognize different usages, and to distinguish different forms of this type of capital. Thus we might distinguish:

- *family and kinship connections*—relating to the single household, the extended family, or the clan, based on 'strong' ties of blood and affinity;
- (*wider*) *social networks, or 'associational life'*—relating to groups and organizations that link individuals belonging to different families or kinship groups in common activities for different purposes. These probably constitute the form of social capital closest to its more common definition in terms of 'networks of civic engagement', or 'local associations';

- *cross-sectional linkages, or 'contacts spanning differences in sector and power'*⁶— we may refer to these as 'networks of networks' that link together organizations belonging to different sectors of society (NGOs, grassroots organizations, government agencies, private firms) in the search for solutions to complex problems, by combining different resources and different kinds of knowledge (see also Brown, 1994). Cross-sectoral linkages are the realm of 'complementarity' in the form of 'mutually supportive relations between public and private actors' (Evans 1996, p. 1120) and of 'coproduction' (see Ostrom, 1996);
- *political capital*—constituted by the norms and networks that shape the relations between civil society and the state, giving a society the capability to mediate conflict by hearing, channelling, and composing multiple citizen demands. 'Political capital' relates to the informal institutional arrangements that may lead, on the one hand, to clientelism, rent-seeking and exclusion, and on the other to effective representation, accountability and participation.⁷ This form of social capital is located in 'political society', defined as 'the range of institutions and actors which mediate the relationships between civil society and the state' (White, 1996, p. 381), and depends on the 'embeddedness' of the former in the latter (see Evans, 1996, p. 1121);
- *institutional and policy framework*—or the set of formal rules and norms (constitutions, laws, regulations, policies) that regulate public life in a society (what the World Bank has termed 'macro-level social capital'; in World Bank, 1997a). This form of social capital has somewhat of a double nature, because it can influence the formation of other forms of social capital, but it also represents in itself a resource that facilitates co-ordinated action by citizens;
- *social norms and values*—defined by widely shared cultural beliefs and the effects these have on the functioning of a society as a whole (Fukuyama, 1995; and see also the discussion of 'collectivist' and 'individualist' societies in Greif, 1994). Norms and values bear on other forms of social capital as well as constituting the most general form of social capital in themselves.

Some of these distinctions may call for further clarification. In particular, the distinction we have made between 'cross-sectoral linkages' and 'political capital' seems to reflect that between 'complementarity' and 'embeddedness' discussed by Evans in the context of public/private synergies (Evans, 1996, p. 1120–1124); while that we have made between 'political capital' and the 'institutional and policy framework' might be better stated as the distinction between the 'formal' and 'informal' sides of institutional arrangements (see De Renzio, 1997).

There are a variety of ways in which any one of these forms of social capital might affect governance or economic performance and which may be illuminated by

⁶ This suggestion is taken from Brown and Ashman who distinguish between '(i) the existence of local organizations and networks and (ii) the existence of relationships or contacts among the parties that span differences in sector and power' (1996, p. 1470) in an analysis of how far the existence of social capital, in either form, assists in problem solving between organisations from different sectors (public agencies, NGOs, grassroots groups, and international donors).

⁷ Some examples may include the Bolivian transition, where it has been noted how interparty competition, once channelled into confrontation, has shifted to express itself in the form of bargaining and coalition formation (for a discussion, see De Renzio, 1997). In Italy, public contracts, once negotiated between government officials and Confindustria (the main industrialists association), and resulting in endless strikes, have lately been renewed after roundtable discussions involving the main trade unions as well. The same thing is happening for social sector reforms now under way. These processes can be seen as gradual constructions of political capital.

empirical research. All of them may have a bearing on the creation and maintenance of trust, understood as meaning 'action taken in a risky situation but in which there is reason to believe in the reliability of the person being trusted' (Levi), and the existence of which depends, clearly, on some combination of information about others, the kind of insurance against defection which Putnam emphasizes, and normative expectations. And the most difficult of these forms of social capital is that of 'social norms and values'.

The generation of norms and values remains a central, difficult area in the social sciences to which Putnam's analysis alludes but without illuminating. His whole case rests significantly on the view that in some parts of Italy there are 'norms of generalized reciprocity' and in others not; and the argument is referred to quite extensively by Jean-Philippe Platteau in his important article about the social conditions which are necessary for the viability and efficiency of market systems. Platteau argues for the importance of generalized morality in the achievement of these effects, and that 'norms of generalised morality — perhaps contrary to moral norms in small groups — cannot easily be created by fiat . . . Ultimately, the cultural endowment of a society plays a determining role in shaping its specific growth trajectory, and history therefore matters' (1994, p. 753, summary). This takes us back to the usage of 'path dependence' in Putnam's work, and its unsatisfactory compromise in which action seems to count at some times but not at others. It also recalls the rather pessimistic conclusion which is put by Putnam as 'them as has, gets (more)' (1993b). Against it we may set the processual view of the generation of trust reflected in Moore's commentary on Platteau (1994) which draws significantly on earlier work by Zucker (1986) who researched the *production* of trust in the USA between 1840 and 1920. These writers show how, in various ways, institutions can be created which offer a basis for trust (serving to develop the normative base for it). Their arguments lead us back to the substantive critiques of Putnam's analysis of the Italian case, which propose the counter model in which political institutions are seen as having primary causal significance. As Levi says, 'state institutions can lay the basis for generalised trust': 'social capital', in this particular, important sense, *is* constructable (a conclusion with which Brown and Ashman, for example, agree: see 1996, p. 1477). The implications for policy are pointed up very well by Tendler and by Evans (and see also Hadenius and Ugglå, 1996): the relations between local institutions and central government are complex, and effective decentralization may well mean that the latter takes on a stronger role in some areas. Those policy arguments which pose civil society against the state, or which rest on the view that a 'robust civil society' (read 'high level of civic engagement' and therefore rich endowment in social capital — according to Putnam) is necessarily a precondition for 'good government' are almost certainly misconceived. James Putzel's contribution to this collection richly substantiates this conclusion.

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