

A review on Pierre Bourdieu's theory about social capital

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Abstract: The concept of social capital goes back to the history of social sciences, but it became known in the 90s, with the efforts and studies of Bourdieu, Colman, and Putnam. Bourdieu analyzed the three economic, cultural, and social dimensions. He emphasizes mostly on class struggle. Social interactions lead to an increase in one's ability to fulfill their aims, and social capital becomes a source for social conflicts (Bourdieu-1986). Despite human and physical capital, social capital is a concept beyond one's belongings, and has backgrounds and correlations in which interaction plays the main role. In this article, the writer tries to study Pierre Bourdieu's views about social capital. [Mohammad Mahdi Bahar, Sima Farid Kian. **A review on Pierre Bourdieu's theory about social capital.** *Life Sci J* 2014;11(1s):58-60]. (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 9

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1. Introduction

Social capital includes social trust, norms, and networks people create to solve public problems (Adam and Roncevic-2003). The essence of social capital is a solution to various problems such as poverty, crime, ill economy, and unprofitable governments (Boix and Posner-1998). In the last 2 decades, there has been an increase in sources related to social capital, based on some definitions (Aldridge et al-2002 and Halpern-2001). The concept of social capital has various vast practicality. Also, it might not become close to any organization or situation in its conceptual framework (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer-2002). The study of social and human capital and social networks in 1990 to 2000 indicates that this concept has deep intellectual backgrounds and different roots, and has been able to influence the 18th and 19th centuries (Adam and Roncevic-2003). This idea parallels some thinkers' views like Tocqueville, Jay, Es, Mill, Tounis, Dourkheim, Weber, Luke, Rousseau, and Simmel (Brever-2003; Lazega and Pattison-2001; Portes and Sensenbrenner-1993; Putnam-1995; Bank and Zhou-2002). In 1972, Pierre Bourdieu used the expression social capital in designing a "pragmatic theory", and after a few years he made it clear before cultural, economic, and symbolic capitals.

Social capital is an expression used by Bourdieu for being a member of social groups. In his works, Bourdieu defines the social capital as a combination of potential or actual sources belonging to individuals or groups having the advantage of a sustainable network of more or less established relationships, familiarity, and mutual understanding (Bourdieu-1992).

A review on social capital theories from Bourdieu's point of view:

Social capital is a mixture of potential or actual sources created by having a steady network of nearly established relationships based on familiarity or mutual understanding. Accordingly, the amount of social capital an agent has depends on the number of networks he/she can successfully mobilize, or even on the amount of capital the whole agents linked with them have (Bourdieu-1986). From another point of view, Bourdieu believes the two-component theory which says social capital is a source related to being a member of a group or social networks, and the volume of one's social capital depends on the volume of their relationship networks they make, that is, such sources in their networks will turn social capital to economic or cultural capitals. Based on what Bourdieu says, he looks at this concept in an abusing way, because he mainly concentrates on two aspects: benefits achieved from membership in a group and intentionally creating social bonds to access more to these sources and personal advantages (Portes-1998).

For Bourdieu, social capital is a network each member of which provided with its support and deserving "credit". These relations might exist only in practice in financial or symbolic transactions done in order to protect them.

Bourdieu holds the view that society is a "battlefield" to own, renew, and reach sources exclusive to them. These sources – called "capital" by Bourdieu – are conditional issues of social power; they are spread in the field in an unbalanced, sparse way and create the required dynamics of dominance, obedience, and disputes in a single arena. Those with social positions, which makes them have access to sources, are able to dominate this "war".

What is important is that Bourdieu believes social capital is related to economics and simultaneously is a combination of power brought by realms and social interactions, however irrelevant to economics. For him, it is the nature of creating and renewing the capital being yoked with power. In fact, he argues that capital and power are to a great extent synonymous; capital could be any source affecting a particular aspect giving each individual the opportunity to obtain a special advantage by cooperating in completion for the top.

Bourdieu divides the concept of capital to several vast areas – economic, social, cultural, and symbolic – each of which, in light of specific subjects, able to be divided into scientific, professional, literary, collegiate, law, philosophic, political, informational, and educational capitals. For him, social capital is merely a tool to analyze social wealth, and somewhere it will be made clear that different people with same amount of capital, whether cultural or economic, gain different amounts of profit which indicates the amount of group capital they have made use of.

Aside from the economic aspect, he expands the concept to non-material concepts, especially cultural and symbolic ones. He explains how different types of capital could be achieved, transacted, and transformed to different shapes. Introducing the distributive structure of capital and also the natural essence of social world, Bourdieu provides a perception of different kinds of capital, their structures, and the practicality of the social world. Eventually, when talking about transformation of capital, he highlights that all capitals can be sourced from economic capital; cultural and social capital are basically rooted in economic one, but they will never be decreased economically. However, social and cultural capitals remain effective thanks to concealing their relationship with the economic capital which is immediately changeable to money like movable and immovable property.

Bourdieu has conducted some investigations about the correlation between the economic capital and other types, for instance, how it can change to cultural or educational ones (Bourdieu-1997). Of course, he did not show any particular interest in studying the economic aspect and would say that he would leave it to others as his own inclination was toward cultural and social capitals (Bourdieu-1992).

His work on economic capital was inspired by Karl Marx's perception which says that when accumulated and invested to have more and more profit, economic sources become economic capitals. On the other hand, the importance of economic capital for Bourdieu was because of its high rate of changeability in comparison with others. He believed

that this rate is highly influential to enhance one's esteem and value.

Cultural capital is another type of capital existing in an organization to provide the members with culture-based facilities. In some cases, the mentioned capital is able to be changed to the economic one. Finally, the other sort of capital is the social capital which focuses on the members' relations and cooperation, and can be used as a tool to achieve economic capitals.

To have a better understanding of Bourdieu's idea about social capital, it is necessary to know that his main emphasis is on social hierarchy, and is to some extent influenced by Marxist sociology. Like Marx's economy theory, Bourdieu also believes that economic capital is the root of all other capitals (Bourdieu, Field). He mainly emphasizes on the changeability and final reduction of all types of capital to the economic type. He argues that economic capital is accumulated human work, so the agents can have a direct access to economic sources through social capital – sources like subsidized loans, investment guidance, supported markets, etc.

People can enhance their cultural capital by contacting experts and specialists or reliable and credible authorities – the ones with cohesive cultural capital. Or in some other ways, they can create relations with organizations rendering valuable credits (established, institutionalized cultural capital). In other words, to gain social capital, there should be an intentional investment in both economic and cultural sources. Although Bourdieu insists that both social and cultural capitals are reducible to the economic one, the processes causing this do not have economic features, each one having their own dynamics, and in comparison to economic transactions, there is less clarity and more uncertainty to it (Portes-1998).

Conclusion:

At the end, it could be stated that Bourdieu mainly stresses the variety of capitals, their ability to be alternative, and their reducibility to the economic capital, defined as accumulated human work. Therefore, with the help of social capital, agents can simply have access to economic sources (subsidized loans and mortgages, encouraging helps in investments, supported markets, etc.). Additionally, one can increase their cultural capital by contacting experts and specialists in cultural fields, that is, making use of cultural capital of investors of such capitals. Or they can join organizations providing valuable credits (established cultural capital). On the other hand, accessing social capital in a group means having a well-evaluated investment whether in economic or cultural sources. Although Bourdieu insists that what is achieved from social and cultural

capital can be changed into economic capital, the processes creating those two are not reducible to the process of producing economic capital. Each one of those two capitals has its own dynamics and in comparison to economic transactions, they have less clarity, more uncertainty, and higher risks (Portes-1998). The authority will eventually make an advantage of the social capital existing in their more or less established relationships between others in social networks. And with the help of some specific strategies in each field and the whole social ambience, they can provide the conditions needed to improve their positions: A tool called social capital, which is reducible to economic capital, is used to climb the social hierarchy. Bourdieu goes as far as claiming that the advantages of being a member of a group, build the foundation of a unity providing them (Portes-1998). For him, social networks are not natural blessings and must be created through establishing group relationships, or to put it simply, becoming a member of a group as the source of other advantages.

Becoming a member of groups, joining social networks, and social interactions in the framework of such groups will improve the position of activists in different fields. Voluntary circles, commercial unions, political parties, secret societies like Freemasonry, will reflect these social capitals. The difference between the levels of social capital, the reasons why equal cultural and economic capitals are used, and the influence on various doers determine this.

For Bourdieu, social capital leads to social disputes in different areas and fields, because here agents constantly try to climb the hierarchy using that in a special battlefield.

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