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## Article

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## Clarifying the concept of social capital through its three perspectives: individualistic, communitarian and macro-social

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**Abstract.** The concept of social capital has received increasing attention in recent years. The complexity and multidimensionality that accompany the variable of social capital have caused confusion and ambiguity. This article presents a synthesis of social capital in three perspectives. From the individualistic or micro-social perspective, social capital is an "individual resource" that consists of the networks of relations of the focal subject that bring it a set of instrumental and expressive resources. For the communitarian or meso-social perspective, social capital is a "community resource" or set of attributes and properties present in the social structure (shared norms and values, private trust, closure ...) that facilitate its functioning and collective action. Finally, for the macrosocial perspective, social capital is a "macro-social and macro-institutional resource" resting on aspects such as civic-mindedness, general trust and social cohesion, which favors the functioning of the economy and society in general.

**Keywords.** Social capital; individual social capital; communitarian perspective of social capital; general trust

**JEL classification.** A14; Z13

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### 1. Introduction

Since the 1990s there has been an exponential growth in the research of social capital. The concept has come to inform a large number of subjects and theories, such as economics, sociology, politics, education, family, health, crime, organizational theory and even technological innovation (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998, p. 446; Adler and Kwon, 2002, p. 17; Castiglione et al., 2008a, p. 1; Woolcock and Radin, 2008; Guiso, Sapienza and Zingales, 2011, p. 418).

However, as Ahn and Ostrom (2008, p. 92) express, criticism is part of the take-off of all theory and paradigm, especially when it is played in the field of new and abstract concepts (Castiglione, 2008). In this sense, the main reproach that falls on social capital alludes to its ambiguity as a variable. It is argued that social capital is an umbrella concept because it brings together aspects as diverse as norms and values, rules, social networks and trust (Sobel, 2002, p. 145; Sánchez-Santos and Pena-López, 2005, p. 142).

Despite the seductive appearance of the idea, this evidence results in the construct being ambiguous and difficult to outline (Dasgupta, 2005), which is one of the reasons why it is strongly criticized by those who do not recognize its own personality. It is called "a wonderfully elastic term" (Adler and Kwon, 2002, p. 18), "a notion that means many things to many people", a term without demarcation (Dasgupta and Serageldin, 2000, pp. XI), a "vague and imprecise concept" (Roche, 2004, p. 107) and an "ambiguous if not incoherent concept and valid for everything" (Fine, 1999).

The term "umbrella concept" is justified; however, it has a lot to do with the "multidimensional" nature of this construct. It is evident that "social" is a broad and complex entity. However, this peculiarity does not negate the relevance it has in economic fact and productivity in general. This theory should go deeper into the analysis of how cultural aspects (norms, values, trust) are linked to structural aspects (social networks); and how the micro and macro dimensions of the concept are linked (Portes, 2000). It must also rely on the validity of the indicators used for its empirical measurement, even though the nature of the construct makes it difficult to have a single quantification system or a system of consolidated indicators.

This article aims to concretize the perspectives that coexist within the theory of social capital. This point is central because it helps to specify what it is and what the use of this variable-paradigm is. In what follows the concept of social capital will be introduced and we shall show some attempts of conceptual classification carried out by some investigators. Next, we shall present three great perspectives that coexist within the theory and that encompass in their totality what social capital is and what it is used for. Each of these three approaches places social capital within a social level (micro-, meso-, or macro-), which in turn is a resource for such a network.

A) From the individualistic or micro-social perspective, social capital is an "individual resource" that consists of the networks of relations of the focal subject that bring him a set of instrumental and expressive resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 1999a, 2001).

B) For the communitarian or meso-social perspective, social capital is a "community resource"; A set of attributes and properties present in the social structure (shared norms and values, particular trust, closure) that facilitate its functioning and collective action (Coleman, 1988; Bowles and Gintis, 2002).

C) Finally, for the macrosocial perspective, social capital is a "macrosocial and macroinstitutional resource" resting on aspects such as civic-mindedness, general trust and social cohesion that favors the performance of the economy and society in general (Putnam, 1993; Knack and Keefer, 1997).

As we have pointed out, the lack of consensus and the ambiguity about the precise meaning of social capital naturally affects the agreement about its measurement system (Bjørnskov and Svendsen, 2003; Pérez García et al., 2005; Castiglione et al., 2008, p. 6; Van Deth, 2008, pp. 151-153). In this research we review the empirical methodology that accompanies each of the three perspectives.

## 2. The concept of social capital

The concept of *capital* in the economy refers to the installed productive capacity involved in the execution of productive processes, which is strictly speaking called "physical capital" (Pena-López and Sánchez-Santos, 2011, p. 125). Another conventional form of capital, commonly cited, is "natural capital", which refers to the natural resources of the environment. However, none of the above reflects the uniqueness of the human being, his capacities and relationships. For this reason, the concepts of "human capital", referring to capacities and knowledge, and "social capital", referring to relational structures and other social attributes, have come to complete the analysis of endowments that presents the economic fact (Sánchez-Santos and Pena-López, 2005, pp. 138-139).

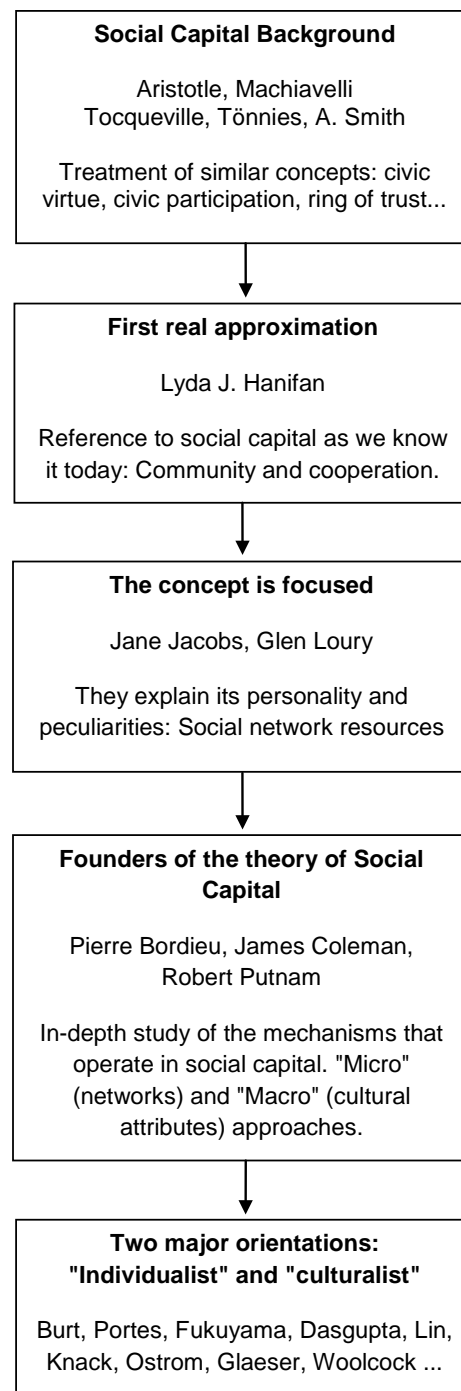
Social capital is an ambitious concept that serves to agglutinate the problem of embeddedness, that is to say, the question of the overlap between social and economic (Pena-López and Sánchez-Santos, 2013). More concisely, it is very useful when studying the contribution of the "social dimension" to the economic fact (Membiela, 2013, 2016); with a special focus on "the active value of social networks" (Conill, 2004). The reasons for its success lie in its capacity for synthesis and in that it allows, from the supporters who defend social institutions to those of third parties, participatory ways to politically unite, including those who are against regulatory interventions and who favor free social organization as those who are uncomfortable with the free play of market forces (Sobel, 2002).

It is a new and disputed concept, with a potential that has not yet been fully covered (Paldam, 2000). Depending on the individual or social approach that is adopted, we focus on seemingly unconnected facts (Portes, 2000).

As a whole, social capital research offers a complex and controversial conceptual framework that allows the integration of different lines of research from sociology, political science and economics (Adler and Kwon, 2002).

### *History of the concept*

The systematic study of "social capital" is recent but several authors point out that the concept has a diversity of roots traceable to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Adam and Roncevic, 2003). We could say that social capital is a general concept that links with the work of thinkers such as Tocqueville (associative activity), John Stuart Mill (civic engagement), Tönnies (community value), Durkheim (forms of solidarity), Weber (hierarchy and power), Locke (civil society), Rousseau (network of relations), Simmel (group identity) and Marx (social class) (Bankston and Zhou, 2002; Brewer, 2003; Lazega and Pattison 2001; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Putnam, 1995; Knack, 2002), and finds antecedents in the work of other authors like Aristotle and Machiavelli, who studied "civic virtue", and Adam Smith that approached the grounds of relationality, moral feelings and trust (Brewer, 2003); see Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Historical evolution of the concept of social capital.

Castiglione, Van Deth and Wolleb (2008, p. 2) indicate that in the economic literature of the nineteenth century it is possible to find this term, although without consistency in its use and with a different meaning. Robert Putnam writes that the first person to refer to social capital as we now understand it, was Lyda J. Hanifan (1920). This rural educator of the early twentieth century understood that "the community as a whole will benefit from the cooperation of all its parts, while the individual will find in his associations the advantages of the help, sympathy, and

fellowship of his neighbors" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19).

Recently, Jane Jacobs (1961) and the economist Glen Loury (1977) have appeared as the first to explicit social capital with a personality and peculiarities accepted by the common researchers, even though the concept seems to require a more systematic elaboration/development. These authors expressed the importance of community ties because they contain the social resources that are useful for the development of individuals and that contribute to give vitality to cities and society (Woolcock 1998; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998; Glaeser et al., 2002, p. 440; Durlauf, 2008, p. 602).

However, it was the two sociologists, Pierre Bordieu (1986) and James Coleman (1988, 1990), who made the two most relevant contributions with their methodical and detailed study of social capital in the 1980s. We shall return to the work developed by these authors when we deal in depth with the three perspectives of social capital.

Bordieu, in his classic article "The Forms of Capital" (1986), understands social capital as the resources available to a subject that are a function of belonging to a group. From a Marxist perspective he tries to outline a general theory of social reproduction and develops an instrumental vision in which the network of relationships is the product of "investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term" (Bordieu, 1986, p. 52).

For James Coleman, social capital corresponds to a variety of aspects of social structures, information channels, obligations and expectations, sets of rules and systems of sanction that facilitate or inhibit the actions of actors (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). From the methodological individualism, this American sociologist used the field of education to study the implications of social capital and in his popular article "Social capital in the creation of human capital" (1988) he analyzed the relation and the degree of influence with the human capital.

In spite of the fact that the roots of the concept go back to the authors mentioned above, it is the writings of Robert Putnam, *Making democracy work* (1993) and *Bowling Alone* (2000), which introduce social capital with clarity in public debate (Castiglione et al., 2008, p. 3). These works spurred the interest of scholars and a number of publications on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to previous individualistic or class reproduction perspectives, this author develops a more culturalist view of social capital.

In the first of the cited works Putnam establishes the importance of social capital for the development of democratic institutions. In particular, Putnam (1993) understands this concept as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" and points out that the different degree of civic engagement between regions of northern and southern Italy had played a relevant role in the greater economic success and superior institutional performance of the north facing south. This author claims a rich associative activity, since, he points out, associations "instill in

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<sup>1</sup> In these years diverse authors begin to publish articles and essays following the wake of Bordieu, Coleman and Putnam, becoming independent or no longer acknowledging them and acquiring wide relevance; we can use the example of Francis Fukuyama with his well-known work *Trust: The social virtues and the creation of prosperity* (1995).

their members habits of cooperation, solidarity and public spirit" (Putnam, 1993). Putnam's other major work, *Bowling Alone* (2000), talks about the causes that have led to the loss of social capital, and focuses on the case of the United States. The author pays attention to the generation of prosocial behaviors and the characteristics of social organizations that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit (Sánchez-Santos and Pena-López, 2005, p. 139).

Among other names that illustrate articles, books and studies considered "key" in the broad theory of social capital, we must mention the works of Mark Granovetter, Ronald Burt, Alexander Portes, Francis Fukuyama, Patha Dasgupta, Nan Lin, S. Keefer, Norman Uphoff, Elinor Ostrom, Glaeser and Michael Woolcock. These researchers fall into the two main orientations of social capital mentioned above: the individualist and the culturalist, and, in a more systematic way and following the classification that we propose below, they fall into one of these three approaches: individualistic, communitarian and macrosocial.

### **3. The three perspectives of social capital**

As we pointed out earlier, social capital is an ambiguous and disputed concept. The term "umbrella concept" is justified by the coexistence of multiple definitions and measurement systems (Dasgupta and Serageldin, 2000).

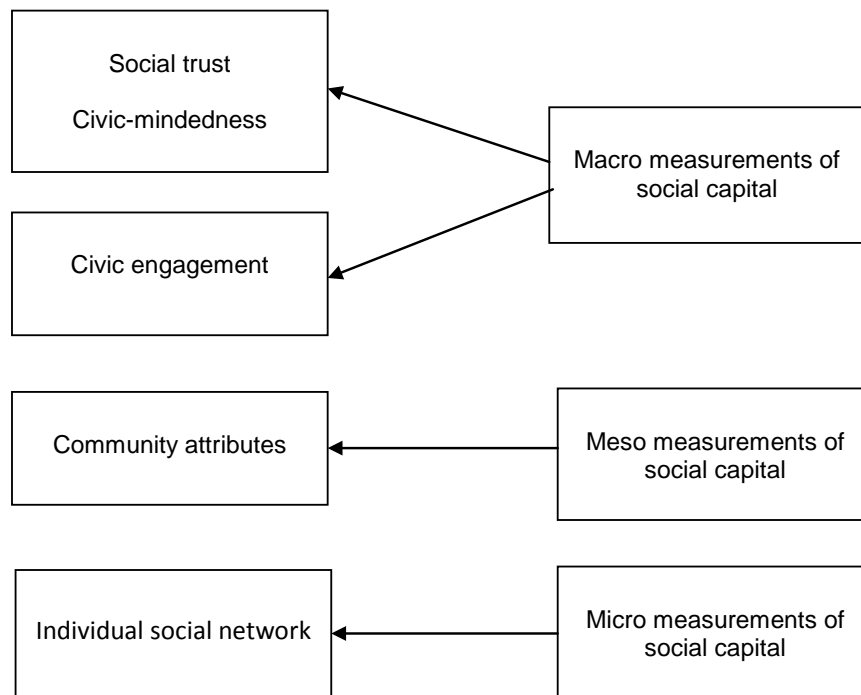
Robinson et al. (2002) indicate that definitions of social capital are grouped and depend on whether they focus on substance, sources (causes) or effects (consequences). Adler and Kwon (2002, pp. 19-20) classify the families of definitions based on the relationship that an actor maintains with other agents (bridging views) or based on the structure recreated by actors within the community (bonding views). Herreros and De Francisco (2001) differentiate "structural definitions" —where social capital is conceived as a set of available resources derived from the participation of the individual in social networks)— and "cultural definitions" —in which social capital carries more than relations because it is a subjective phenomenon that is composed of attitudes and values—. Paldam (2000) talks about three families of concepts within the theory of social capital; the one that has "trust" as its axis, which is based on the "ease of cooperation" and the one that identifies it with the "social network". Finally, Millán and Gordon (2004) link the different streams of social capital with the thought of the following authors: James Coleman, Robert Putnam and Nan Lin.

We propose that classifications can be systematized as follows: the first understands social capital as an "individual resource" that consists of the networks of relations of the focal subject that bring him a set of instrumental and expressive resources. The second sees social capital as a "community resource", i.e. as a set of attributes and properties present in a social structure that facilitate its operation and collective action. And the third, conceives social capital as a "macrosocial and macroinstitutional resource" that rests on aspects such as civic-mindedness, social cohesion and general trust that favors the functioning of the economy and society in general (see figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The three perspectives of social capital.

This division into three approaches corresponds to the triple cataloging of social capital as "individual good", as "collective good" and as "public good" (Putnam, 1993, 2000; Adler and Kwon, 2002, p. 22; Dasgupta, 2005; Sánchez-Santos and Pena-López, 2005). That is, social capital generates returns for the individual, for the group and for the whole of society.



**Figure 3.** Micro, meso and macro measurements of social capital.



In what follows we shall analyze each one of the perspectives presented and we shall present the empirical methodology that accompanies them (Figure 3). The latter diverges on the basis of four attributes: (1) The level of analysis of social capital: micro, meso or macro. (2) The main study variable: structural (focusing on social networks) or cultural (focusing on norms, values, trust). (3) The method of measurement used: surveys, polls and statistical indicators, community studies and observations, projects and experiments. (4) The type of study: quantitative, qualitative or comparative (Membiela, 2016).

### 3.1 Individualistic or micro-social perspective.

The "micro" perspective, also known as "networks approach", is very widespread and focuses on the analysis of social capital as an individual resource, where the actor uses his network of relationships<sup>2</sup> in the achievement of personal goals, both instrumental (income, status, power...) and expressive (welfare, health, recognition, mutual aid...).

The most outstanding reference within this expository line is Nan Lin. However, one of the initiators of the theory of social capital, Pierre Bordieu, in his pioneering article *The forms of capital* (1986) already defined social capital as the "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". From Lin's point of view, it could be interpreted as an instrumental action from the perspective of class position defense, in which "the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term" (Bordieu, 1986, p. 52).

In Bordieu, useful relationships serve to obtain material and symbolic resources; and thus, the social capital possessed by the agent depends on the network of connections he can mobilize and on the volume of capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) that networks have.

"Social capital as an individual resource" is reflected in numerous definitions, as shown in Table 1. These definitions are grouped within the same approach because they rest on two identifiable elements: the individual as the focal subject of the benefit and the social network as the entity from which the benefit is extracted. However, in their reading matter it can be observed that the authors differ when specifying what social capital is, since some identify it with the amount of networks of relations previously constructed by the person that facilitates the access to a pool of resources (Burt, 1992; Boxman, De Graaf and Flap 1991; Belliveau, O'Reilly and Wade 1996; Pena-López and Sánchez-Santos, 2013), while for others social capital consists of "resources" that the individual obtains from such networks (Bordieu, 1986; Lin, 2008; Baker, 1990; Nahapiet and Goshal, 1998). Therefore, we can talk about the prominence of networks or resources.

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<sup>2</sup> These networks are made up of very different bonds (family, community, work, associations...; what is called *bonding social capital* or *bridging social capital* depending on the strength of the ties) and have a different origin because they could have been inherited or created by the main actor.

**Table 1.** Definitions of social capital in the individualistic perspective.

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Individualistic perspective</b>
Pierre Bordieu (1986)	<i>"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 or recognition."</i>
Nan Lin (2001, cap. 2; 2008, p. 51)	<i>"Resources embedded in one's social networks, resources that can be accessed or mobilized through ties in the networks."</i>
Baker (1990, p. 619)	<i>"A resource that actors derive from specific social structures and then use to pursue their interests; it is created by changes in the relationship among actors."</i>
Burt (1992, p. 9)	<i>"Friends, colleagues, and more general contacts through whom you receive opportunities to use your financial and human capital."</i>
Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998, p. 243)	<i>"The sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and Ghoshal derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit. Social capital thus comprises both the network and the assets that may be mobilized through that network."</i>
Portes (1998, p. 6)	<i>"The ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures."</i>
Knoke (1999, p. 18)	<i>"The process by which social actors create and mobilize their network connections within and between organizations to gain access to other social actors' resources."</i>
Boxman, De Graaf and Flap (1991, p. 52)	<i>"The number of people who can be expected to provide support and the resources those people have at their disposal."</i>
Belliveau, O'Reilly and Wade (1996, p. 1572)	<i>"An individual's personal network and elite institutional affiliations."</i>

From our perspective, the first option is more appropriate because the networks, with their attributes, constitute the "social fact" from which the resources available to the principal actor emerge a posteriori. In this sense, it can be said that networks are instrumental and polymorphic and allow a multitude of resources to be obtained.

Lin's perspective (1999b, 2008) integrates both proposals. For him, social capital is the set of "resources embedded in one's social networks, resources that can be accessed or mobilized through ties in the networks." That is, it integrates both material and immaterial resources and networks. Now, for this author "social capital" and "social networks" are not equivalent or interchangeable terms; the networks provide the necessary condition to access and use the resources rooted in them but to equate both notions is incorrect (Lin, 2008, pp. 58-59).

Lin (1999b) understands that actors find in their network (of strong and weak ties) a place of exchange where interests (or preferences) are able to coordinate naturally and generate equilibria, just as the market can regulate prices (Millán and Gordon, 2004). Individuals invest in social relationships with the expectation of obtaining benefits and therefore interact with other subjects, assuming that the responses are the consequence of the expectation of a reward or return. This investment in relationships facilitates the flow of information and opportunities and access to differentiated resources, both instrumental and expressive.

In Lin's model, "network" is understood as the structure that organizes material and immaterial resources and the strategic positions of individuals. For Lin, "social interaction" is a means of access to these resources and of approach between positions; and "action" is conceived as the orientation of the behavior destined to obtain returns (Millán and Gordon,

2004, p. 741).

As Millán and Gordon (2004, p. 743) point out, in this perspective "the network is the element that organizes resources, and the action aimed at capitalizing them is what makes us talk about social capital."

*Measurement in the individualistic or micro-social perspective.*

As we have just seen, in the individualistic perspective social capital is perceived as a set of resources which an individual has access to (actively or potentially) as a result of his membership of a social network.

To measure social capital in this micro and structural approach, we analyze the extension of the individual network and the resources that it implies. To do this, a survey is usually used to provide information about his access to nodes and the capacity to mobilize them when some resource is needed. As an example: someone who knows an official in the local administration has access to a number of resources (information, procedures ...); whoever belongs to an extended family has access to greater family support; and whoever knows one or several subjects in the banking sector has better financial advice.

Nan Lin (2008, pp. 54-56) points to two methods: the "name generator" and the "position generator".<sup>3</sup> In the name generator, a list of contacts proposed by the focal subject is created for each of the proposed resources (Pena-López and Sánchez-Santos, 2013). In the "position generator" a list of socially useful positions for the purposes of the focal subject is presented to a respondent and then asked about the first individual who could give access to that resource, additionally considering the level of relationship between them (family, friend, acquaintance) (Erickson, 1996; Pena-López and Sánchez-Santos, 2017).

Both methods have advantages and disadvantages. Lin points out that the "name-generator" method is appropriate for testing the depth of close nodes; but is limited in the universe of contacts that the individual (usually three to five)<sup>4</sup> proposes (and/or remembers). The "position generator" facilitates the study of the individual's access to the different levels of the social hierarchy (e.g. different occupations and strata in society)<sup>5</sup> and shows high degrees of validity and reliability. However, this relational structure-based methodology is less developed and provide less precise information about strong links (Lin, 2008, pp. 56-57; see also Van der Gaag and Snijders, 2004, 2005).

Among the studies that have followed each methodology, Campbell et al. (1986) examined the association of individual network resources and socioeconomic status, based on information from the Detroit area for the years 1965-1966. Following the "name-generator" method, they found that the composition of network resources had a significant association with the status

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<sup>3</sup> Also, Van der Gaag and Snijders (2005) propose a third methodology called *Resource Generator*.

<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the resources tend to be homogeneous and the relations related to the subject, "homophilic".

<sup>5</sup> It is therefore a more favorable methodology when evaluating "heterophilic" relationships and weak ties of the focal subject.

reached, as measured by occupational prestige and family income (Lin, 1999, p. 477). Volker and Flap (1996), in their study of East Germany, used the "position generator" methodology to ask the respondents to identify, among 33 occupations, if they knew someone in each of them, and, if so, to specify what kind of relationship they maintained (family, friends, acquaintances). For the occupational scenario of 1989, the effect of the highest status reached was positive and significant (Volker and Flap, 1996, p. 478).

### 3.2 Communitarian or mesosocial perspective

*"Gal Oya was said by engineers and officials to be the most deteriorated and disorganized irrigation system in the country. Yet it became one of the most efficient and cooperatively managed systems, even fairly quickly, once approached with an effective plan for engaging farmers in joint system management. The efficiency of water use was doubled within two years, even before the planned physical rehabilitation was completed, through the introduction of 'social infrastructure'." (Uphoff, 2000, p. 232).<sup>6</sup>*

The social capital approach as a "community resource" highlights the benefit that it generates in the community, compared to the previous one that conceives it as a mere individual good. Its axis of study is the "social organization", which contains a set of resources that in addition to serving the individual subject favors cooperation and global functioning. In this approach, however, the term "resource" is not equivalent to its use in the individualistic perspective of social capital. A rule or a sanction constitutes in this approach a resource for the subject and for the collective; while in the previous approach the word *resources* refers to material goods, influence, or promotion, for example.

The definition of social capital provided by James Coleman (1988, p. 98; 1990, p. 302) fits this way of understanding social capital, although the author's epistemological approach is based on the idea of individual who behaves with criteria of rationality. Coleman (1988) points out that "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". The resource-entities referred to by this author, which mediate interactions between individuals and favor individual and community productivity, are: obligations and expectations, potential information, norms and effective sanctions, relations of authority, closure and appropriate social organization (Coleman, 1998, p. 98),<sup>7</sup> all integrable into the concepts of networks and community.

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<sup>6</sup> The author refers to his experience in a development project in Sri Lanka that began in 1980.

<sup>7</sup> *Closure* means the existence of sufficient ties between a certain number of people to guarantee the observance of norms (Portes, 1998). Coleman (1988) points out that the emergence of norms and their fulfillment depends not only on the negative external effects of "punishable" actions, but on how closed or open the structure is. While the *appropriability* of the organization (appropriability) expresses that social ties of one kind (e.g., friendship) often can be used for different purposes (e.g., moral and material support, work and non-work advice) (Adler and Kwon, 2002, p. 18).

**Table 2.** Definitions of social capital in the communitarian perspective.

Authors	Communitarian perspective
M. Schiff (1992)	<i>"The set of elements of the social structure that affects relations among people and are inputs or arguments of the production and/or utility function."</i>
Fukuyama (1995)	<i>"The ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organizations."</i>
Brehm and Rahn (1997)	<i>"The web of cooperative relationships between citizens that facilitate resolution of collective action problems."</i>
Fukuyama (1997)	<i>"Social capital can be defined simply as the existence of a certain set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permits cooperation among them."</i>
Woolcock (1998)	<i>"The information, trust, and norms of reciprocity inherent in one's social networks."</i>
Nahapiet and Goshal (1998)	<i>"The sum of the current and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit. Social capital thus comprises both the network and the assets that may be mobilized through that network."</i>
Bowles and Gintis (2002)	<i>"Social capital generally refers to trust, concern for one's associates, a willingness to live by the norms of one's community and to punish those who do not."</i>

These entities are valued as resources by the actors, employed to achieve certain interests or meet certain needs (Millán and Gordon, 2004). The norms of reciprocity or closure are appropriable by the subjects and constitute a resource for them but in turn they are an input to the overall functioning of the structure.

Other authors have proposed some definitions that also bring us closer to the idea of social capital as a "community resource", collecting certain cognitive and structural assets (Uphoff, 2000) that favor collective action (see Table 2). Francis Fukuyama (1997) identifies social capital as shared norms and values (within the organization) that favor cooperation; Woolcock (1998) and Bowles and Gintis (2002) point out that it consists of information, trust and norms of reciprocity inherent to the social network (which also favor cooperation); and Brehm and Rahn (1997) talk about the "network of cooperative relations" (see Table 2).

Let us look at three examples or models that provide insight into the way in which social capital is conceived as a "community resource".

I) The presence of a high intra-group social capital in a company that manifests itself in shared goals and values, an adequate work environment and high trust and interpersonal interaction, favors "group human capital" (Gui, 2001, p. 158), the global productivity, and therefore the final result that the business seeks.

II) The relations of trust and reciprocity established between the neighbors of a residential estate help them to act more effectively in the face of problems that require collective action, such as prowling thieves or a fire; benefiting even those members who barely interact with other residents (Putnam, 2000).

III) The New York diamond market, notes Coleman (1988, pp. 98-99), is mainly played by the hyper-laced Jewish ethnicity. Ties (their closure) provide informal insurance in facilitating transactions in the market, making the merchants belonging to this group feel "compelled" and indebted to the norm avoiding any disaffection influencing the collective good. For example, if one of the individuals of this ethnicity affronts another leading to a significant deception (opportunistic behavior), he must expect a sanction that ranges from warning to expulsion.

However, it should be emphasized that these forms of social capital do not have to be positive. The same elements (obligations and expectations, norms and effective sanctions, potential information, relations of authority, closure, appropriability and trust) that are rooted in the organization and which are constitutive of social capital, understood as a community resource, can be used for negative results. In these cases, they may favor intra-group objectives, but they are adverse in their contribution to the aggregate social capital due to the (negative) sign of their externality (Portes, 1998; Paldam, 2000, p. 635; Adler and Kwon 2002; Durlauf, 2008). This is the case of "bad social capital" often exemplified by organizations such as the Mafia and the Ku Klux Klan.

*Measurement in the communitarian or meso-social perspective.*

In this perspective, social capital is considered as a collective property that emerges from the same community, benefiting the totality as an aggregate and each one of its members. As we have seen, Coleman (1990, p. 302) points out that "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 individuals who are within the structure". Consequently, Coleman (1988) uses as indicators of social capital: (a) "aspects of the social structure" that (b) "facilitate actions of individuals within that structure".

Regarding the family and the community he focuses on the strength and frequency of interaction and more concretely on whether it is made up of a father and a mother or it is single-parent; on parents' expectations regarding what the future holds for their children; on residential mobility; on whether or not the mother works; in the relationship between parents and children; on the type of school attended by the student: state school, private or private confessional — that is a question that involves differences in collegial community ties—; and on the existence of links between the students' parents.

In order to explain their impact on academic achievement and school drop-outs, Coleman uses the structural/cultural indicators cited because he considers them determinants in the construction of the entire system of obligations and expectations, reliability, channels of information, norms and effective sanctions, closure and "appropriability" of social organization. These are elements that together make up social capital and give it a greater guarantee when they seek the stated objectives; in this case, to favor the creation of human capital. As this researcher points out, a greater number of links between the students' parents (more community) impels closure in the social network and therefore the capacity of mutual monitoring on the children (and their studies), by facilitating the flow of information and the imposition of sanctions; and by promoting expectations of mutual behavior.

Other researchers develop case studies examining attributes such as norms and values, cohesion, roles and rules, trust and interpersonal interaction; all of those cognitive, structural,

and relational assets of social capital that favor collective action and the achievement of the group's objectives. As an example, Tsai and Ghoshal (1998) used data collected from a multiplicity of respondents belonging to the clusters- complex business units of a multinational electronics company. The purpose of their work was to examine the relationships that are established between the structural, relational and cognitive dimension of social capital and between these dimensions and the different patterns of resource exchange and product innovations in the company. They observed in this process the positive and significant effect of social interaction (structural dimension), trust (relational dimension) and shared vision (cognitive dimension); concluding that investment in informal social capital and formal social arrangements drive the exchange and combination of productive resources, and promote innovation.

On the other hand, Portes (1995) and Light and Karageorgis (1994) analyzed the economic welfare of different communities of immigrants in the United States. They demonstrated that certain groups (Koreans in Los Angeles and Chinese in San Francisco) thrive better than others (Mexicans in San Diego and Dominicans in New York) because of the social structure in which new immigrants are integrated. Successful communities are able to offer assistance to newcomers through informal sources of credit, insurance, migrant family support, language training, and job referrals. Less successful communities sometimes show only a short-term commitment to the host country and are almost unable to stabilize their newly arrived members.

### 3.3 Macro-social perspective

Previous visions of social capital do not enter into the analysis of its effects beyond the individual and/or the group. The third "classical" social capital approach, culturally oriented, sees it as a resource that benefits the broad socio-economic aggregate. Without abandoning the benefits that it generates at the individual and group levels (micro- and meso-), it also conceives it as a "macrosocial" and "macroinstitutional" asset (Fukuyama, 1999; Sobel, 2002; Woolcock, 2001, p. 70; Castiglione et al., 2008, p. 7; Warren, 2008, p. 123; Van Deth, 2008, pp. 200-202). In this sense, this proposal argues that social capital is important for the functioning of democracy, for institutional performance in general, for market articulation and economic development, and for social cohesion and the progress of civil society.

The work of Robert Putnam *Making democracy work: civic traditions in modern Italy* (1993) is an exponent of this approach. In it, the author offers one of the most generalized definitions of social capital, identifying it with those "features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam, 1993, p. 167).

Putnam expresses himself in "macro" terms when referring to "improve the efficiency of society"; a posture which other authors have manifested with posterity. As Table 3 shows, Knack and Keefer (1997) and Knack (2002) equate social capital with the degree of civic-mindedness of a society. Sánchez-Santos and Pena-López (2005, p. 137) point to the importance of trust and cooperative and prosocial behavior for the proper functioning of the

economy and society, and Serageldin (1996) and the World Bank<sup>8</sup> note the analogy of social capital with "social cohesion". In general and in this line, social capital is identified with different cultural and attitudinal aspects such as civic commitment, social trust, generalized reciprocity, cooperative norms and civic-mindedness, which facilitate social, economic and institutional functioning.

Within this approach, the researchers differ in the relevance attributed to the aspects that weave the social capital and in the process that links them. The most common divergence is between Putnam's position, which understands networks of association as a prior step to the extension of civic-mindedness and social trust, and that of a number of critics who find no significant correlation between trust and associationism.

For Putnam, social capital is an asset that increases the efficiency of society and favors institutional and economic performance. Specifically, and in his definition, it consists of the following three features of social organization: trust, norms and networks. These three elements, which appear in other definitions, tend to establish circular and mutually reinforcing relationships (Putnam, 1993, p 177).

Putnam, like other scholars (e.g. Fukuyama, 1995; La Porta et al., 2000; Dasgupta, 2005; Paldam, 2000, pp. 629-630), attaches great importance to "trust" as a "core component of the social capital" that acts as lubricant in the functioning of society and also mediates in any relationship or exchange, with its economic reflection on the reduction of transaction costs (Wolleb, 2008, p. 378).

**Table 3.** Definitions of social capital in the macrosocial perspective.

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Macrosocial perspective</b>
Putnam (1993, p. 167)	<i>"Features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks, which can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions."</i>
Serageldin (1996)	<i>"The glue that holds societies together."</i>
Ingleheart (1997, p. 188)	<i>"A culture of trust and tolerance, in which extensive networks of voluntary associations emerge."</i>
Thomas (1996, p. 11)	<i>"Those voluntary means and processes developed within civil society which promote development for the collective whole."</i>
Turner (1999, p. 53)	<i>"Those forces that increase the potential economic development of a society by creating and maintaining relationships and patterns of social organization."</i>
Grootaert and Thierry van Bastelaer (2002)	<i>"The social capital of a society includes the institutions, the relationships, the attitudes and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development."</i>
Pena and Santos (2005, p. 137)	<i>"Social capital represents the idea that trust and the internalization of rules conducive to cooperative and prosocial behavior are the basis for the better functioning of the economy and of society in general."</i>
The World Bank	<i>"Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships and norms that make up the quality and quantity of the social interactions of a society. Numerous studies show that social cohesion is a critical factor for societies to thrive economically and for development to be sustainable. Social capital is not only the sum of the institutions that make up a society, but also the stuff that holds them together."</i>

<sup>8</sup> <http://web.worldbank.org>, under the title "What social capital is".



At the same time, trust is closely linked to "generalized reciprocity" (Putnam, 1993, p. 172; Putnam, 2000; Szreter, 2002; Millán and Gordon, 2004, p. 726; Uslaner, 2008, p. 116). The frequency in interaction, typical of dense social networks, favors the birth and diffusion of norms of reciprocity, fosters trust and contributes to cooperation. Putnam refers to civic engagement networks (neighborhood societies, purchasing associations, cooperatives, football clubs) characterized by a horizontal type of interaction<sup>9</sup> in which there is a certain public and not merely a private interest that tends to favor generalized reciprocity and to extend the cooperative arrangement beyond the group. For this researcher, associations have a "didactic" effect on the culture of the population (Millán and Gordon, 2004, p. 734) and are a source of social commitment by fostering internal habits such as cooperation, solidarity, public spirit (Putnam, 1993, pp. 89-90), which are then projected to other associations and generalized trust.

Putnam's perspective is in the line with Alexis de Tocqueville<sup>10</sup> and assumes that institutional and democratic performance is linked to the characteristics of civic life in their common purposes. In his 1993 work, he compares northern and southern Italy, finding that the greater civic commitment and participation of civil society and the highest level of trust in the northern regions correlates with increased government quality and institutional performance, and with more satisfactory economic development. This author goes so far as to say that good governance in Italy is a byproduct of choral societies and football clubs (Putnam, 1993, p. 176).

Despite being the most widespread approach, it has been very much challenged. It has been argued that it does not take into account aspects such as the size of the network, the sociability within it, the intensity of the contact between its components or the weight of its benignity (since there are violent, racist, criminal organizations, rent seekers...) (Paldam 2000; Glaeser et al., 2002, p. 444). In addition, researchers debate the role of associations in building trust, generalized reciprocity and cooperation. Paxton (2007) expresses that civic participation generates social trust when the associations are interconnected and do not remain isolated. Stolle and Lewis (2001) point out that there is no empirical evidence to show that associations work as schools of democracy, and Levi (1996) doubts that belonging to one type of association leads to overcoming problems of free riding in another; this same researcher warns us furthermore, that Putnam does not take into account the structure and philosophy of the Italian political system when it comes to establishing the differences between the north and the south.

In this way, a new approach emerges within the perspective that considers social capital as a "macrosocial" and "macroinstitutional" resource. Social capital is equated with trust and civic

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<sup>9</sup> A vertical network, however dense and important it may be for its participants, cannot maintain trust and cooperation, since "vertical flows of information are often less reliable than horizontal" (Putnam, 1993, p. 174).

<sup>10</sup> In Tocqueville (1987 [1835-1840]) there is a virtuous link between civic associations, common good, and democracy. In this sense, the author writes: "If men are not linked in a solid and permanent way, it is difficult they act in common" (1987, p. 477). "Political parties can be considered as great free schools, where all citizens come to learn the general theory of associations" (1987, p. 481 [1835, 1840]). "In all the countries where political associations are prohibited, civil associations are rare [...]" (Tocqueville, 1987; taken from Millán and Gordon, 2004, pp. 731-732).

cooperation, but such aspects do not correlate with associationism-civic engagement in the way Putnam puts it.

This is the line followed by Knack and Keefer (1997) and Knack (2002) when they criticize the American sociologist on the basis of Olson's (1982) idea that the nature of associations is an element that must be taken into account since because of this the effect of associationism on trust and economic growth can be neutral. Knack (2002, p. 778) sets the example of those interest groups whose objectives undermine efficiency and the general interest.

This criticism goes back to the "Olson-Putnam controversy." Because not all types of associations generate trust, the positive effect per se of greater social connectivity cannot be affirmed (Sánchez-Santos and Pena-López, 2005, pp. 138, 146). Olson (1982) noted that horizontal associations could damage growth by acting as lobbies pursuing their own interests in a preferential policy that imposes a cost on society (Knack and Keefer, 1997, p. 1271).

For these authors, trust and civic cooperation (social capital) are actually the two faces of the same mirror (Knack and Keefer, 1997, p. 1258) because of the logical and intense relationship between them. An atmosphere of high trust acts by reducing the costs associated with economic activity (in general all transaction costs), it encourages innovation and investment, and creates less dependence of society towards formal institutions. While civic cooperation impacts on the economic outcome by restricting through its (civic) norms the behavior based on the self-interest of the subjects, thus reducing opportunism and leading individuals to favor the public and private good.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, it promotes the improvement of the political channel, as well as the reduction of bureaucracy and corruption (Knack and Keefer, 1997, pp. 1252-1254).

Sánchez-Santos and Pena-López (2005) express themselves in a similar line since they understand the social capital as "moral capital"; while Guiso, Sapienza and Zingales (2011) conceive it as "civic capital". The concept of "moral capital" focuses on the behaviors that underlie the formal and informal relationships that are established within civil society and the ethical attitudes that predispose to general reciprocity and cooperation. While the notion of "civic capital" focuses on the values and beliefs that internalize the common good, fostering cooperative behavior and economic development. Social capital ("moral capital" and "civic capital" in their case) benefits the "macro" functioning of the economy and society. However, unlike Putnam, they also point out that "although the tautological relationship between trust and social capital is evident, it is not the relationship raised by the sociological perspective, that is, the relation between associationism and social trust" (Sánchez-Santos and Pena-López, 2005, pp. 148-149).

#### *Measurement in the macrosocial perspective.*

In presenting the third perspective of social capital, we have already indicated that there are two approaches. The most significant exponent of the first one is Robert Putnam who understands

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<sup>11</sup> By promoting such rules, it facilitates cooperative solutions to numerous problems of collective action. In this sense, civic norms solve the "prisoner's dilemmas" without imposing external costs while increasing allocative efficiency.

that associative activity and civic engagement favor institutional performance and economic development by promoting civic-mindedness and social trust. The second approach, which includes authors such as Knack and Keefer (1997), Sánchez-Santos and Pena-López (2005), Uslaner (2008) or Guiso, Sapienza and Zingales (2011), equates social capital with civic-mindedness and social trust and agrees on the high relevance of these attributes for economic performance; rejecting, however, its necessary correlation with the degree of associative activity.

From this perspective —macro and cultural— two measurement options fit. Putnam employs the density of voluntary organizations as a tool (Paldam, 2000) by measuring civic commitment to the per capita number of groups and associations (church groups, labor unions, sports groups, academic or professional societies, political, and fraternal organizations) which the residents of each region or state belong to (Kawachi et al., 1997, p. 1493). Nevertheless, several authors criticize the vision of Putnam and with this, the instrument used to evaluate the social capital. For Martin Paldam (2000) there are three main problems: the definition of voluntary organization, the intensity of contacts and the problem of the weight of benignity (for example, criminal and racist associations); while Glaeser et al. (2002, p. 445) criticize the fact that the size of the network within the organization and the sociability of the organization are not taken into account.

In the second approach, the measurement of social capital is carried out using trust as the base indicator. In this type of research and in these trials the questions of the World Values Survey (WVS) are posed: "Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair?" (item for the study of the perception of probability of opportunism) and "Generally speaking, *would you say that most people can be trusted* or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" (item for the study of social trust-distrust). The indicator (trust) is the percentage of respondents who states that "most people can be trusted" (Paldam, 2000; Kawachi et al., 1997, p. 1492; Knack and Keefer, 1997, p. 1256).

To measure trust in a general sense, the so-called "wallet test" has also been used (Paldam, 2000). An experiment is performed in which N wallets are lost in public spaces, and the test analyzes how many of them are returned. Knack and Keefer (1997, p. 1257) point out that, in their study, the measure of lost wallets is correlated by 0.67 with the level of social trust.

We have indicated that social trust and civic-mindedness bear a strong correlation. However, there are systems that are primarily aimed at measuring civic capital. This is the case of Guiso, Sapienza and Zingales (2011, p. 430) who propose to focus on those values and beliefs that foster cooperative behavior. Respondents are asked about their opinion on issues such as paying taxes, abuse of public goods, and always negative actions of: unfairly changing their position in a queue, littering the streets, and other similar behaviors; scores range from 1 = never justifiable to 10 = always justifiable. It is suggested that these items with their peers can be good indicators of the prevalence of moral actions and the desire of people to internalize the common good.

In a similar sense, Knack and Keefer (1997, p. 1256), who equate social capital with "civic-

mindfulness", point out that the strength of norms and civic cooperation is assessed on the basis of justification (justified, never justified or something justified) attributed to the following reasons: a) claiming government benefits to which one is not entitled, b) avoid paying the ticket on public transport, c) lying when paying taxes, d) saving money which has been found at random, and e) covering up the damage done to a parked vehicle.

However, these authors point out that those measures are not exempt from contradictions and it is more than likely that respondents will be reluctant to admit their judgments. In this case, it is often used parallel questions (trap questions) that indicate the truthfulness with which the individual responds to the survey.

#### 4. Conclusions

We started this article with an introduction to the concept and history of social capital, an issue that is subject to increasing attention in the fields of economics, society and politics. As we indicated, the term of "umbrella concept" (social capital is many things for many people) makes it difficult to recognize its utility as a variable that favors socioeconomic and institutional functioning.

In this sense, our article has sought to clarify, based on the status questions of the theory, the three great perspectives of the concept, also reviewing the empirical methodology used in each of them. Social capital consists of the set of social networks that gives the individual material and immaterial resources (individualistic or micro-social perspective). Social capital also lies in the attributes and properties of the social structure that facilitate its operation and collective action (community or meso-social perspective). Equally, social capital resides in general cultural aspects such as civic-mindedness and social trust that favor the global functioning of the economy and society (macro-social perspective).

Social capital is therefore a multidimensional concept with great potential in its application. For this purpose, it is necessary to clarify *what it is* and *what it is for*, an issue aided by this presentation of the three great approaches within the theory.

After presenting this conceptual clarification, future lines of research will focus on different functions developed by social capital in each of the proposed approaches, as well as the concrete measures that policymakers can take to enhance this factor of development.

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