

Cooperatives and Social Capital: Innovative approach toward definition of an interconnection

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Abstract:

Significant changes have taken place in the social studies, first of all in the sphere of economic sciences during recent decades. These alterations impact the theoretical and methodological foundations of investigation and involve reconsideration of old economic theories and advent of new ones, and they create new theoretical and practical relationships between different concepts. One such example is interconnection between cooperatives and social capital. This article defines the specifics of social capital and cooperatives and considers cooperatives as a subject of social capital. The paper develops common characteristics of social capital and cooperatives, such as a voluntary association of people, mutual interests, conjoint goals, the necessity of investment, personal participation etc. The paper develops also the common principles of operation of the social capital and cooperatives, mainly specific norms and rules of behavior, transparency of work activity and relationships.

Keywords:

Social capital, Cooperation, Cooperatives, Trust, Norms, Transparency

Introduction

The term “Capital” is one of the most popular and frequently used in the economic science and practice. The theory of capital has a long history. It seems that the first use of this term belongs to Adam Smith (1723 - 1790), who described capital as a form of wealth and considered its impact on the wages of labour and profit (Smith, 2007). Representatives of the classical school of political economy David Ricardo (1772-1823), Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), Jean-Baptiste Say (1767-1832), Karl Marx (1818-1883), etc. investigated the nature, essence and forms of capital and its impact on different sides of economic, social and political life of a society. Later the economic category “Capital” was studied by followers of neoclassical political economy Léon Walras (1834-1910), Alfred Marshall (1842—1924), Fisher Irving (1867 — 1947), John Richard Hicks (1904- 1989) and others.

In XX century researchers, including neoclassical economists, continue to develop the theory of capital and formerly injected new forms of capital into the area of research and explore their features. In the scope of researchers’ investigation came different forms of capital such as Fiscal Capital, Economic Capital, Real Capital, Production Capital, Financial Capital, Property Capital, Human Capital, Intellectual Capital, Spiritual Capital, Living Capital, Symbolic Capital, Social Capital, etc.

In the general theory of capital, a special place belongs to social capital. A systematic investigation of social capital started in the 1980’s although a phenomenon that later was expressed under the term “social capital” was described in the first half of XIX century.

The first person, who drew attention to the relations, which in future were reflected in the term “Social capital”, was French politician and the leader of the Conservative Party, French Foreign Minister Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859). Later, in 1900, American philosopher and psychologist John Dewey (1859–1952) created a social pragmatism theory, which examines the peculiarities of cooperation and association process and its impact on the civil society. In 1916 a

public figure, head of rural schools Lyda Judson Hanifan (1879–1932) introduced (Putnam, 2000, p. 19) the concept social capital and in 1969 political scientist Robert Salisbury (1916-2003) advanced the term social capital as a critical component of interest group formation (Salisbury, 1969).

The first systematic investigation of the social capital as a phenomenon and as a term was done by French sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) in 1970-1980th. Pierre Bourdieu distinguished four forms of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital. In Bourdieu understanding "social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, Loïc, Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). Later the investigation of social capital was done by Alejandro Portes (born October, 1944), Coleman S. J. (1926-1995), Raymond W. Baker (born October, 1935), M. Belliveau, Ronald Burt (born 1949), Allen Wallis (1912-1998), Ellen Wall, Keith Ferrazzi and others.

Today the concept of social capital has a large theoretical and practical meaning. Social capital is recognized as a factor of political consolidation, economic prosperity, civil society development, and a personal success.

At the same time today becomes very important to find new and develop already-existing forms of social consolidation and economic development. One of such forms is recognized cooperatives. Do cooperatives bring the same benefits as social capital? Can people take the same advantage of cooperative membership as from social capital?

The given paper concentrates attention on the interconnection of social capital and cooperatives.

Methodology of the research

The study rests on the interdisciplinary approach and on the theoretical methods, such as abstraction, the dialectical method, induction and deduction methods, the comparative analysis method, scientific classification, and the modeling method. The paper is largely based on analysis of appropriate scientific literature regarding the terms and phenomena "social capital", "cooperation", and "cooperative", developed by researchers-sociologists, political analysts, and economists.

Social capital and its features

There is a number of definitions and interpretations of social capital. Social capital is considered as "a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors - whether persons or corporate actors - within the structure" (Coleman, 2000, p. S98), as "connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19), as "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), as "resources embedded in one's social networks, resources that can be accessed or mobilized through ties in the networks" (Lin, 2005, p. 4). All of the different interpretations of the term "social capital" are based on the perception that social capital is a resource available in and through personal and business networks and there is a direct link between social capital and the quality, purpose, and meaning of life (Baker, 1964).

An American political scientist and political economist, a famous investigator of social capital Francis Fukuyama (born 1952) also evaluated social capital in terms of informal relations,

norms, trust, obligations, and reciprocity (Fukuyama, 2000). Trust is considered as “manifestations of social capital” (Fukuyama, 2000, p.13).

Social capital is based on the facilitation of collective and individual action that are generated by certain networks, reciprocity, trust, and social norms, developed in a network (Fukuyama, 2000, p.433; Woolcock, 1998; Putnam, 1993, p. 167), it promotes individual and collective action, cooperation and mutually supportive relations between people (Putnam, 2000). Social capital is a specific arrangement of social organizations which has a certain features and supports the efficiency of society.

Social capital could not be attributed to any separate person. It exists as an interpersonal phenomenon, as a “person-to-person” relation. Social capital arises and is maintained between individuals. Therefore, social networks are considered as the core of social capital that is common to all authors and conceptualization of social capital (Putnam, 1993, p.167; Putnam 2000; Fukuyama, 2000; Sato, 2013, p.1 etc.). Not all social networks always create social capital. Social networks have a “situational” character, which means that social networks become social capital only for some people in a defined situation but for other people in a different situation it does not become social capital. In other words, social networks can be viewed as a necessary but not sufficient criterion for social capital creation.

Apart from the social networks in the capacity of the social capital are qualified components or elements such as trust, norms (Putnam, 1993, p.167; Fukuyama, 2000, p.402, 433), resources for actors (Lin, 2001, p.29), social closure (Coleman, 1988, 1999), reciprocity, common interest, goals, motivation (Norris, 1996, p.474; Quddus, p.189), in-group solidarity (Fukuyama 2000, p. 4) etc.

All social relations and social structures facilitate some forms of social capital (Coulman, p. S105). Different forms of social capital - structural, cognitive and relational (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Uphoff, 1999; Edelman et al.) - comprise various elements of social capital. Thus, the *cognitive form* of social capital implicates norms, beliefs, attitudes, and values, the *relational form* of social capital employs motivation, reciprocity, attitudes, control and compliance while the *structural form* of social capital includes social networks, rules, precedents, roles, procedures.

Trust primary impacts the social capital (Fukuyama 2000, p.433). Trust and its various forms such as trustworthiness as well as its different levels (personal trust, social trust, generalized trust) are employed as one of the most important component/indicator of the social capital. Trust means that members of a community are conducting their relations based on the good faith. Such interrelations assume that no one will act solely out of self-interest.

Social norms or standards of behavior set from within the community itself, are socially constructed (Fukuyama, 2000, p.402). Norms that are chosen by a particular group of people are result of cultural and biological predisposition (Fukuyama 1999, p.188).

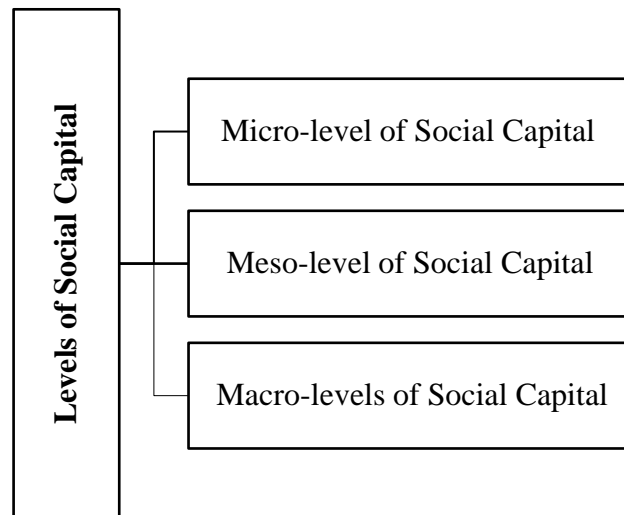
Norms are “a powerful but fragile form of social capital” [Coleman, 1988] that exists in case the socially defined right to control an action could be executed by an individual actor but is possible to be executed by others (Coleman, 1990). Social norms directed on the restriction of self-interest actions and maintain the collective interests. Social norms “reinforced by social support, status, honor, and other rewards, is the social capital that builds young nations (and then dissipates as they grow older), strengthens families by leading family members to act selflessly in "the family's" interest, facilitates the development of nascent social movements through a small group of dedicated, inward-looking, and mutually rewarding members, and in general leads persons to work for the public good” (Coleman 1988, pp. S104- S105). Solid networks of

social norms and social trust enable people to cooperate in the pursuit of shared interest. Social capital supports sharing of information and resources.

Social closure is considered as a kind of high density social network [Sato, p.2] that promotes information exchange between association members. As far as acquisition of information is costly, one way to get information is social relations.

Researchers distinguish various levels of social capital (Picture 1).

Picture 1 Levels of social capital



The micro-level of social capital operates on the individual level; the meso-level of social capital acts on the community or organisational level; and the macro-level of social capital functions in the society as a whole. Different authors judge different levels of social capital investigation. P.Bourdieu and Roland Burt more typically study social capital from the position of individuals. Coleman and Putnam consider social capital on the meso- (community) as well as on the macro- (societal) levels.

Cooperation and Cooperatives

As it is recognized, humans are cooperative beings that strive to cooperate because “cooperation within a group is highly beneficial to its members” (Bowles, Gintis, 2011, pp. 46,196) and humans cooperate with a purpose to share information and other valued resources with a purpose to get a benefit. Cooperation is incorporation and interaction of two or more individuals in order to fulfill a particular task and achieve common goals in various areas of economic activity.

The benefits associated with cooperation lie in reduction of costs through joining efforts of people and optimization of available resources, mutual aid and collaboration, sharing of information and knowledge, etc. Cooperation means “engaging with others in a mutually beneficial activity” (Bowles, Gintis, 2011, p,2). Cooperation is based on the certain norms of interrelations (Bowles, Gintis, 2011, p,4) that predetermines a human behavior within cooperation.

People apply different forms of cooperation (partnership, associations, unions, alliance, etc.) one of which is cooperative. According to an independent, non-governmental organization which represents cooperatives worldwide, International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) (Pezzini Enzo 2006, p.3), “a co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet

their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise”.

A cooperative is defined as a “member-controlled association for producing goods and services in which the participating members, individual farmers or households share the risks and profits of a jointly established and owned economic enterprise” (Koopmans, 2006), as “a company based on the labour activity of its members or established for developing the business and increasing the income of the members. The objective of a cooperative shall be the satisfaction of interests of the members. A cooperative shall not aim primarily at gaining profit” (Georgian Law on Entrepreneurs, Chapter V, Article 60).

In 1895, the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) adopted the general principles and values of cooperatives and today all cooperatives around the world are based and function according to the same seven core principles (Co-operative Principles for the 21st Century; Guidance Notes to the Co-operative Principles 2015):

1. ***Voluntary and Open Membership***. Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all people able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without any kind of discrimination. Voluntary association in cooperatives that means a voluntary membership and voluntary partnership in a cooperative.
2. ***Democratic member control***. Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members. It means that all members participate in the management and business of the cooperative, that every member of a cooperative can elect and be elected a person to manage and supervise a cooperative.
3. ***Members’ Economic Participation***. Members contribute equally to, and democratically control, the capital of the cooperative. This benefits the members in proportion to the business they conduct with the cooperative rather than to the capital invested.
4. ***Autonomy and Independence***. Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members.
5. ***Education, Training and Information***. Cooperatives provide education and training for members, elected representatives, managers and employees, so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperative. The members also inform the general public about the nature and benefits of cooperatives.
6. ***Cooperation among Cooperatives***. Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.
7. ***Concern for Community***. While focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of communities through policies and programs accepted by the members.

Therefore, all forms of cooperatives promote wide participation in the economic and social development through which cooperative members can, on the one hand, effectively improve their lives and, on the other hand, contribute to the development of their community and nation.

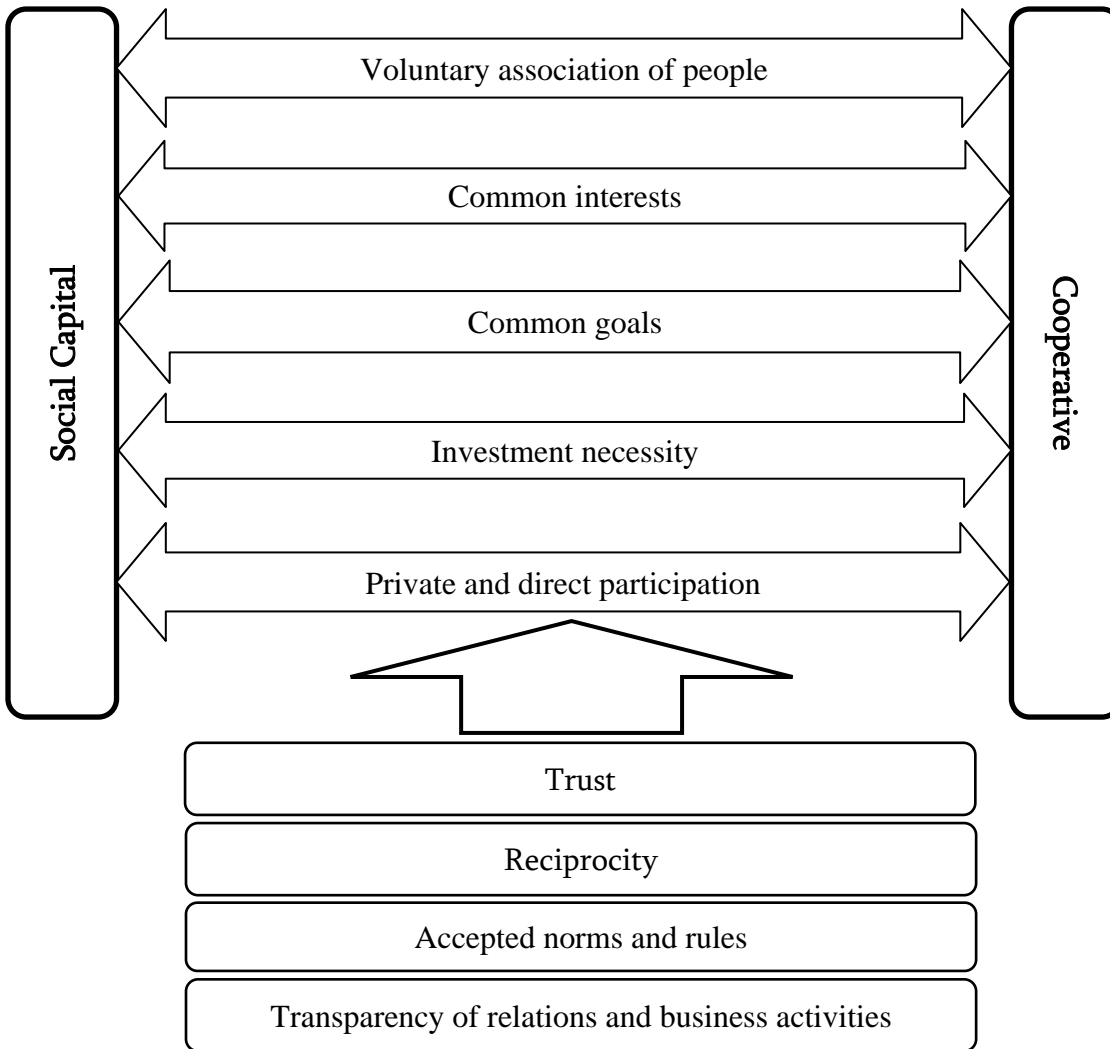
Cooperatives as a Form/Subject of social capital

A cooperative, as a network by its nature and an organization with independent members, is a voluntary association of separate entities that is established with a purpose to solve common problems and achieve interests of the members through joining their common force.

Trust is recognized as one of the important foundations of cooperatives. Cooperation and trust are intimately related (Good, 1990, p.33) and “cooperation requires trust in the sense that dependent parties need some degree of assurance” (Williams, 1990, p.8).

The common particularities of social capital and cooperatives can be defined as follows (Picture 2):

Picture 2 Common features of Social Capital and Cooperatives



Source: Author’s own

Social capital and cooperatives have common features, such as voluntary association of people, common interests and motives, common goals, necessity of investment, private and direct participation. The operation of social capital and cooperatives is based on common principles, in particular: trust, accepted norms and rules, transparency of relations and business activities.

Proceeding from the common features of social capital and cooperatives, their general characteristics can be described as follows (Table 1).

Table 1 General characteristics of common features of Social Capital and Cooperatives

Features	Social Capital / Cooperatives
Organizational basis	Purposive organization; Voluntary association of people Voluntary membership and voluntary partnership; Mutual acquaintance and recognition; Coordination of actions
Character of interrelationship	Close ties; Mutuality and recognition; Intergroup trustworthiness of relationships; Voluntariness
Basis of interrelationship	Social capital, as well as cooperatives, is a trust-based relation system of human. Norms and intergroup (inter-collective) rules support and provide effective actions for high achievement. Norms and rules forgo selfish interest of actors' behaviour and support common interests of the collective. If the norms and rules are violated, sanctions start to operate. Sanctions could be effective and capable of overcoming the public goods problem and solving free rider issues.
Structure	Within associations (social capital and cooperatives), different types of networks can be developed: with open structure and closure. The open structure of a network means no relations between some members and it can be impacted by negative externalities. In the closure network, there are strong ties between members that provide trustworthiness of social structures and allow various kinds of benefits.
Obtained Results	Social capital, as well as cooperatives, is productive: it provide achievement of certain ends that in the absence of cooperation and voluntary association of people would not be possible; is specific to certain activities; brings an advantage for an association/collective and/or an advantage for its members
Legislative basis, and Transactional costs reduction	Formal norms and bureaucratic rules change because of trust and informal norms. This reduces costs associated with monitoring of business activities and observation of the members' behaviour.
Information and Transactional costs reduction	Acquisition of information is costly. Reciprocal exchange of an information within a tightly intertwined group of people cuts the information acquisition costs to a minimum.
Common interests	Common interests are a crucial criterion for social capital as well as for cooperatives. The existence of common interests is an essential foundation for the social capital and cooperatives' establishing.
Common goals	For social capital as well as for cooperatives, common interest and common goals are important. The existence of common goals contributes to mobilizing of members of coops and social capital participants to solve their common problems.

Investment necessity	For the creating and developing of social capital as well as cooperatives the invest of money, time, own knowledge, own efforts, etc. are necessary.
Social resources	Social capital, as well as cooperatives, refers to individuals within a community and provides value to them and their organizations. Social resources of social capital and cooperatives include common identity, familiarity, trust, reciprocity, knowledge, economic resources, etc. These resources manifest themselves in minimizing the costs, reducing the time and effort associated with obtaining the common goals and reaching the common interest.
Vital elements	Norms, trust, solidarity, trustworthiness, transparency, codes, sharing the common goals and interests, sharing of information, sharing of knowledge.
Information Channels	Information is an important resource and a basis for decision making and action. Social capital and cooperatives are organizations of people that make it easier to get information by use of social relations and social networks, and they distribute the information among the members.

Source: Author's own

Both social capital and cooperatives are “the dense networks of norms and social trust which enable participants to cooperate in the pursuit of shared objectives” (Norris, 1996, p. 474).

Therefore, cooperatives as well as social capital are based on analogical foundations and are characterized by similar particularities. Cooperatives and social capital have the same principles of operation. Cooperatives bring the same benefits as social capital, and people can take the same advantage of cooperative membership as of social capital.

Conclusion

As the given research has found, the social capital and cooperatives are trust-based relation systems of humans that have common organizational foundations, such as voluntary association of people, voluntary membership and voluntary partnership, mutual acquaintance and recognition. Social capital, as well as cooperatives, is a trust-based relation system of humans who recognize common norms and rules of behaviour that are directed towards achievement of common interests and goals, that make it easier to get information by use of social relations, social networks and sharing the information among members, that support reduction of transactional costs and increase efficiency of coordinated actions. Cooperatives bring the same benefits as social capital, and people can take the same advantage of cooperative membership as of social capital.

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