

Summaries

John Harriss

The Conceits of Social Capital

The idea of social capital, referring to resources inherent in social relationships, which for those who are able to access them, enhance the possible outcome of their actions, is a compelling one. But the particular concept of social capital that has been most influential so far, that of Robert Putnam, who treats it as a synonym for „civic involvement“ respectively the „density of voluntary associations“, suffers from serious flaws. It systematically downplays the significance of state action, and of ideas, and hence of politics, assigning causal primacy to social networks in a way that appears untenable in the light of the history of the particular societies that Putnam himself has studied. It ignores the significance of the context and of the content of the relationships in social networks, and thus evades questions of power. It offers a consensual view of social relationships, down-playing conflict. Yet these features are precisely the ones that have made this particular idea of social capital so attractive to development agencies, both practically and ideologically. The question remains, however, as to whether a conceptualisation of social capital that is in line with Bourdieu's ideas, is not a valuable contribution to social science.

Erhard Berner

Utility Fetishism: „Social Capital“ and the Economisation of the Social

The concept of social capital, developed by sociologists and political scientists and incorporated by some branches of economic theory, has received broad and enthusiastic acceptance by development scholars and practitioners. However, it is severely criticised on at least four counts: as a misnomer of the worst kind; as an undertheorised, essentially empty umbrella term; as being used in tactical disciplinary games rather than enabling insight; and as an instrument of economising the social in line with the neoliberal paradigm. The paper corroborates the theoretical weakness and empirical infertility of the term, not remedied by the various attempts to „save“ it. It is suggested to revisit the rich heritage of interdisciplinary social theory and research instead, including prominently (new) economic sociology and (new) institutional economics.

Luciano Martínez Valle
Social Capital and rural Development

This work discusses about the social capital concept and his application in the rural society. In the last ten years some rural studies had used this concept to the analysis of the irrigated land projects in the context of the Ecuadorian Andes rural development. Nonetheless the social capital concept is today influenced by the World Bank framework in the indigenous community's development practices. Our purpose is to analyse this concept in the context of the one of the most important Second Level Peasant Organisation (OSG) in the south of the highlands in Ecuador. In this case, the social capital is analyzed from bottom to top especially in the communitarian practices and the bonds with the external non profit organisations. We believe that is the way to look the social capital in action and the best method whereby we will understand the limits and the future of this concept.

Jörg Meyer-Stamer
Social Capital and Cooperation Among
Local Entrepreneurs: Experiences from Industrial Clusters in Brazil

The 1990s have seen a surge of discussions around the potential of promoting the competitiveness of companies in industrial clusters through inter-enterprise collaboration. One of the concepts that are relevant in this context is social capital, i.e. the possibility to overcome the intrinsic distrust among local competitors, for instance by building on trust in the non-economic sphere. This article provides a case study of two clusters in Southern Brazil which illustrate the difficulties in mobilising and transferring social capital. It highlights the evolution of social capital as an industrial cluster grows and matures. It concludes that local upgrading strategies have to be carefully designed in a way that stimulates the generation of specific social capital in the business community.