

Social Capital: A Cradle For Democracy or a Resource for Autocracy?

A normative analysis on the role of
Social Capital and its relation to Civil Society in democratization

Malin Gezelius

Abstract

Social capital is a concept that has gained widespread use and recognition in many academic disciplines. This interest stems from an idea that the social capital produced in the organisations and associations of civil society can be beneficial in the creation and furthering of democratic processes and economic development among many other things. Using normative methods of consequentiality I will examine different theories on the role of social capital and its relation to civil society and democratization in order to be able to make a normative judgment. With the help of various examples I will argue for a neutral original view of the concept and it's various parts to be able to show that there exists possible "good" and "bad" aspects of social capital. This judgment will show that the social capital produced in civil society organisations is not always desirable, and that the nature of social capital in turn be either a cradle for democracy or a resource for autocracy, depending on the wider context of the society in question.

Keywords: Social Capital, Trust, Civil Society, Normative, Democratization

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Table of contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Question and Purpose	2
1.2	Limitations and some thoughts on choices made	2
1.3	Disposition	3
2	Theory, Method and Material	4
2.1	Theory	4
2.2	Methodology	5
2.2.1	Method	5
2.2.2	Ontology, Epistemology and Theory of Values	6
2.3	Material and source evaluation	6
3	Concepts and Definitions.....	7
3.1	Social Capital	7
3.1.1	Bonding Social Capital	9
3.1.2	Bridging Social Capital.....	9
3.2	”Bad” Social Capital	10
3.3	The Relationship Between the Good and the Bad	11
3.4	Trust	12
3.5	Civil Society	13
4	Social Capital and Civil Society in Democratization	16
4.1	Social Capital and Civil Society as Facilitators of Democracy	17
4.2	”Bad” Social Capital at work.....	19
4.3	Bonding and Bridging.....	20
4.4	Social Capital, Civil Society and the Context.....	21
5	Conclusion	23
6	References.....	26

1 Introduction

Many theorists agree on the fact that the development, consolidation and well being of a democracy demand a strong, organized civil society. In order for that democracy to also be strong and legitimized, it needs to be inclusive and embrace a wide variety of phenomena in a diverse society. Examples of this are core democratic values such as freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of the media and trust. As Jean Grugel put forward in her book:

“Democracy [...] is not achieved either through citizenship or through state institutions; it rests on and requires both.”¹

Many additional researchers say that strong and stable democratic institutions also demand trust in these same institutions. That trust in turn is a part of a virtuous circle where mutual trust between citizens as well as between institutions and citizens fortifies that same bond and thereby can stabilize the political climate as well as democracy as a whole. Theories that deal with this potential virtuous circle, what causes it and what it entails are the theories that concern social capital, its creation, destruction and its effects. Many of those theories concerning social capital have emerged during studies of countries that were already more or less democratized², but not that much in authoritarian states or states newly embarked on the long journey to democracy.

This leads me to mention that a variety of other scholars are of a radically different opinion when it comes to the supposed universally good character or virtuousness of social capital. They are making the dominating picture of social capital, as being something altogether good and just, seem very biased. Instead of portraying social capital and trust as factors that are democratizing and good, they point towards a possibility that the nature of the social capital produced depends strongly upon the nature of the context it is set in³. As James Putzel writes in his article:

“Football clubs may indeed establish lasting social network, but it is necessary to examine what determines whether these networks simply breed hooliganism, or serve as the basis for fascist or democratic political movements.”⁴

Thereby I am introducing the notion of a “bad” form of social capital to this thesis, and by that also the possibility of social capital as, for example a stabilizer for authoritarian rule. This is exemplified in a wide range of literature as the sort of trust and social capital that can be formed in criminal associations, or when

¹ Grugel 2002 p.31

² Putnam 1993, Fukuyama 1995.

³ Roßteutscher 2010, García-Albacete 2010 among others.

⁴ Putzel 1997 p.947

engagement in collective action has clearly shown to produce less desirable consequences. Here Margaret Levi points out two striking examples; the violent, organised Hutu part of the population in the Rwandan genocide, and the observation that Timothy McVeigh and his accomplices in the Oklahoma City bombing were in fact part of a bowling league, thus associating regularly with other people⁵.

1.1 Question and Purpose

In this thesis I want to further analyse the relationship between social capital, interpersonal trust and trust in institutions whom all are mostly seen as good and desirable concepts, and their role and relation to civil society in democratization.

The questions I aim to answer in this thesis are:

- *What is the role of social capital in democratization?*

This question is of a more general nature and specifically connects to the democratization aspects of civil society with its organisations, the role of the different parts of social capital such as trust as well as the present political culture within a community. Also, it connects to the potential “bad” social capital and its effects. This question requires me to clearly define the concepts studied as well as what I intend for them to mean in this thesis.

The second question I aim to answer is of a more normative character and connects more to the possibility that social capital might not be altogether good in itself:

- *Should social capital be desired in democratization?*

The broader aim and purpose of this thesis is to analyse and discuss different aspects of social capital and trust in relation to theories on civil society in democratization, in order to be able to make a normative judgment on whether increased social capital in a community can be seen as desirable when it comes to a possible democratization process.

1.2 Limitations and some thoughts on choices made

I find the principally interesting point in the problem area described above to be the possibility that a phenomenon like social capital, that is mostly seen as good and desirable, might not always be so. In order to be able to analyse this I intend to look at different theories on social capital, its main components and its proposed effects from different angles.

⁵ Levi 1996 p.52

A substantial part of this thesis will also be dedicated to discussing the definition of the concepts studied as well as what they comprise, and to view those from different angles. I have chosen to do this, as it lends possibilities of even greater clarity to my argumentation, especially in the normative analysis.

In my analysis I will look to the *theoretical* effects and outcomes of the social capital and trust theories studied. I don't intend to examine empirical results because there are some space limitations to adhere to, and neither do I think it fully fits the purpose or the theoretical nature of my thesis. Even though I will try to keep it on a theoretical level, I still find that I can use some varied examples from real life to clarify what I aim to say when presenting arguments.

The theoretical approach I have chosen can give this thesis the appearance of lacking a firm connection to real life or reality, but I find the contrasting relations between the perceived "good" and "bad" interesting enough to make a theoretically based thesis worthwhile. This thesis can also have meaning outside the ivory tower of social science research since social capital, trust and the role of civil society in democratization are concepts of interest for a wide range of actors outside the academic world.

1.3 Disposition

The disposition of this thesis will be presented here, in order to clarify why I am presenting the facts and my analysis in the order I have chosen. In this thesis I will also make a running analysis of the different concepts and theories and their relation to each other.

Chapter 1 deals with the introduction, research problem and choices made for this thesis. In Chapter 2, I present the methodological and basic theoretical choices and considerations I have made in writing the thesis. Chapter 3 will present necessary definitions of various concepts and other notions used in this thesis; among those the concepts social capital and trust. Chapter 4 will be an extended application of the concepts earlier defined, as I will use them in my analysis. Here I will deal with the theories on the role of civil society in democratization as well as social capital and trust in particular and the role of these concepts. This will be done in order to provide a framework for the concluding normative judgement on the desirability of social capital and all it entails in Chapter 5. That chapter will then give way to a list of references I will present in Chapter 6.

2 Theory, Method and Material

This section of my thesis is aimed at increasing intersubjectivity and transparency in my research as well as facilitating for the reader by making it easier to understand how and why I have reasoned as I have. This is very important, especially as I intend to make a normative analysis and judgment, which will be very non-transparent if none other than myself can see the ways of my reasoning.

I give a short outline of my theoretical choices, a description of the methods I use and then some notes on sources and evaluation of those sources.

2.1 Theory

Here I will only give a brief explanation on the theories I intend to use, in order to be able to explain them in detail later without repeating myself. I have chosen to lay it out in this order since I find it will be better for the stringency of the thesis. The reason for explaining them in more detail later is to make it easier for the reader to understand my normative analysis and judgements since the theoretical base is used extensively throughout the thesis.

When looking at the root of the problem I intend to examine in this thesis, in its most abstract form I find it to be a case of a possible wolf in sheep's clothing, since the role and character of social capital has long been seen as something of a "good" nature and as a concept with positive implications. In the theories I intend to use, social capital and trust are described as being beneficial to interpersonal trust, institutional development, stability and efficiency⁶ in some cases, while it may produce the opposite effects in other cases. The theories on social capital and trust that I will discuss are the "basic" ones explained by Robert D Putnam and Francis Fukuyama as well as a lot of reviews, articles and chapters written by other authors from various academic fields. I have chosen the different articles based on what I have deemed relevant for the problem I intend to study, as well as trying to get a wide view of the theories and concepts in focus. The parts of democratization theory I will look deeper into are primarily the ones dealing with the role of civil society and the actors within it when it comes to democratization. Theories about this are presented by Larry Diamond⁷ and Jean Grugel⁸ among others.

⁶ Putnam 1993 among others.

⁷ Diamond 1999

⁸ Grugel 2002

2.2 Methodology

When writing a research paper it is important to clarify which position I have in terms of theory of values; my views on knowledge, reality and how I can obtain knowledge about reality. These factors are producing intersubjectivity by making it easier for someone else to understand how and why I have decided or concluded on different matters in this thesis and if my judgements are sound⁹.

When making a normative analysis, it is also important to consider the internal and external validity of the research conducted because of the abstract character of this form of analysis. Internal validity requires that the object of study, the argumentation and the conclusions and judgments made have to be exceptionally clear so as to minimize the possibility of vagueness and misunderstandings¹⁰. The theoretical nature of my thesis makes the case of external validity a bit harder, since I do not intend to use empirical material extensively¹¹. But still, I will exemplify some of the points I try to make with examples from reality, in order to clarify my argumentation.

2.2.1 Method

The method I intend to use in the major part of my analysis is a normative one. More specifically I aim to make the kind of analysis where I clearly and from a normative position argue for and justify a judgment on the desirability of social capital and all the parts of that concept related to the role of civil society in democratization theories¹².

The kind of normative analysis I want to make is also based on methods of consequentiality. This means that I am making judgements on a basis of the effects and outcomes of social capital and building trust. I chose this method, since the deontologist way of always judging against a predetermined set of principles does not fully fit the purpose of this thesis, and neither does the pragmatic method of suitability; limiting the judgment to the specific context and question studied at the moment¹³. The method of suitability would also be a bit counterproductive in this case, since I am not studying a specific case or context. Instead I am making an analysis based on theories, which in itself gives a more general discussion that does not become as concrete as a few specific cases and contexts. Since I want to discuss more general, possible effects of trust and social capital and not only their outcomes in a particular case or context I chose the consequentialist analysis as the preferable method for my thesis.

⁹ Hollis 1994 p.8ff, Beckman 2005 p.22

¹⁰ Badersten 2006 p.74

¹¹ see Badersten 2006 p.170f

¹² Badersten 2006 p.47

¹³ Badersten 2006 pp. 110, 119

In normative consequentiality, the judgment is made based on the effects and outcomes of the studied phenomenon. The major concept and theory I intend to study and judge is that of social capital, and the different parts of that concept that e.g. deals with trust and the “dark” or “bad” side of it. The possibility of adverse effects of social capital production makes this method of judgment very well suited for this thesis.

2.2.2 Ontology, Epistemology and Theory of Values

When it comes to theory of values, I find the notions of epistemology and ontology useful in describing my view of reality and knowledge. Thereby this small section can still provide some clarification and transparency regarding the point of departure of my reasoning and my judgments.

My position is that the knowledge I can obtain, and the judgements I can make are mostly dependent on myself as a person and how I see the world around me. This gives me a subjective epistemology. As to ontology, my position is somewhat shifting since I still think that some parts of reality exist outside of myself¹⁴.

2.3 Material and source evaluation

The material I intend to use in this thesis consists exclusively of secondary material such as books, articles and reviews published by authors and researchers from a wide variety of academic fields.

Regarding the theories on social capital, trust and democratization, I will use already existing theories presented regarding these concepts. These theories have been developed and extended during some time, providing different angles on the role of civil society in democratization, social capital and trust. A few examples of contributors to this theoretical field include Robert D. Putnam, Francis Fukuyama, Larry Diamond, Jean Grugel, Sigrid Roßteutscher, Jan W. van Deth, Margaret Levi and Valerie Braithwaite among many others.

Regarding source evaluation, I find that these sources can be considered as being of certain value since they often use and mention the same references, they use similar definitions and they share these traits even though they have approached the various concepts from different angles. Because I have chosen a more theoretical angle of my thesis, I think that most of the material I find and use can be considered as being of a good value and from credible sources.

¹⁴ Badersten 2006 p.59f, 76f.

3 Concepts and Definitions

In this chapter I will explain and lay out different definitions of terms and concepts that are central to this thesis.

Thereby I aim to clarify which definitions I have chosen to use, as well as what I think these concepts include. This is important since I can otherwise fall into the trap of conceptual stretching, as I risk including notions in the concepts that do not really fit there or aren't meant to be there from the beginning. This part of the thesis is also very important since it reduces any risk there might be of ambiguity; that is the possibility that the reader interprets a concept and its meaning differently than what it means or what I aim for it to mean. I also aim to somewhat clarify the intension and extension of the concepts I will use¹⁵.

3.1 Social Capital

There are various definitions available of the concept social capital. Different definitions highlight different aspects and emphasises different views of what it includes or not. Robert D. Putnam identifies the concept as follows:

*"...features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions."*¹⁶

Putnam places a strong emphasis on the stabilizing effects of social capital on institutions and democracy. He also highlights reciprocity and holds that the social contract that fosters reciprocity is a moral one, with the punishment for not adhering to it being exclusion from the solidarity and cooperation of the society in question¹⁷. The tendency in a society to abide by that social contract is one aspect of the broad term social contract, while the expectation that others also abide by it is another. Pamela Paxton shares this view and explains social capital as having two different dimensions; objective ties and bonds that are present between individuals of a society, and for those ties and bonds to be characterized by trust and reciprocity as well as for them to be judged as emotionally positive¹⁸. This is shown in that when people in a community realize that the reciprocal relationship actually works, the tendency to continue with cooperation and trust increases at

¹⁵ Badersten 2006 p.86f

¹⁶ Putnam 1993 p.167

¹⁷ Putnam 1993 p.183

¹⁸ Paxton 2002 p.256

the same time as defections from that same cooperative behaviour become more costly in terms of exclusion and lost benefits. Thereby, social capital is critical for political stability and government efficiency according to Putnam¹⁹.

David Halpern sees basic social capital as consisting of a network, a collection of norms, sets of values and expectations shared within that network and a set of sanctions that helps to maintain the character of the network by rewards and punishments passed out to those who adhere to or defect from the shared norms and values²⁰. Thereby he adds the dimension of sanctions to the definition, which would mean the possibility of an inherent, regulating control mechanism of sorts in the networks and groups that make up a certain society.

While previously mentioned theorists have emphasised the networks as well as the norms that can be found within them, the World Bank goes further and also includes institutions in the social capital concept.

“Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable. Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together.”²¹

In their notion of social capital in its broadest sense they argue for an inclusion of social and political climate. This would mean that a multi-level view of social capital would also include corporate- and state representatives and by that, possibilities to create wider forums where people from different parts and levels of society can meet²².

Since this thesis concerns the theoretical aspects of social capital and its relation with the trust concept as well as civil society in democratization, I intend to use a wide definition of the concept on an intermediate level of abstraction. This leads me to include the space between the public and the private as well as the relations between the associations occupying that space and the state that governs it in the definition. I am well aware of the risks of conceptual stretching when using a wider definition, but since I am making an analysis on a relatively high level of abstraction by keeping to theoretical arguments and reasoning, I can also increase the extension of the concept just because of that level of abstraction²³.

¹⁹ Putnam 1993 p.183

²⁰ Halpern 2005 p.10

²¹ World Bank, "What is Social Capital" 2010-12-30

²² World Bank, "What is Social Capital" 2010-12-30

²³ Badersten 2006 p.87f

3.1.1 Bonding Social Capital

The concept of social capital encompasses even more dimensions as it can be viewed as being divided into two subtypes. The first one of these two to be explained is the bonding social capital.

Bonding social capital can be seen as the result of association between people with some dominating feature in common; ethnicity, religion, some radical political views etc. This part of social capital is characterised by involving organisations and groups that are including similarity, e.g. the same ethnicity, religion or radical opinion, while they are excluding everyone else²⁴. Bonding associations are more isolated and inward oriented with a greater degree of homogeneity among their members and they often have really strong internal links. These associations can also increase already existing social cleavages through their marked distance from- and exclusion of- people or other associations that do not share their characteristics²⁵. Examples of bonding social capital at work can be seen in the large Chinese Diaspora networks established among Chinese immigrants outside of their homeland. Language barriers and perceived differences led these groups to establish trading networks and commerce amongst themselves, thereby building strong exclusive networks where people from other groups often could not gain admittance because of them lacking those similarities²⁶. Bonding social capital has been seen to reduce cooperation with relative strangers and is also considered to break down much slower than social capital is deemed to do in general²⁷.

3.1.2 Bridging Social Capital

The inward turning effects described when talking about bonding social capital provides a picture of isolated associations with closely connected members and an exclusive group of participants or members. Bridging social capital on the other hand, provides a radically different picture.

So-called bridging associations are characterised by an inclusive membership that often spans across various groups and levels of society. Examples of this can be seen in youth movements, civil rights movements or gender equality movements where the participants share few other characteristics than the will to e.g. fight for a common cause, and all that want to join the cause are welcome²⁸. Bridging associations are also said to have an ability to bridge social cleavages by their connection to other groups and associations and thereby they facilitate the creation of more norms of reciprocity and trust amongst the citizens of a society²⁹.

²⁴ Halpern 2005 p.19ff

²⁵ García-Albacete 2010 p.694

²⁶ see Putzel 1997 p.942

²⁷ Halpern 2005 pp.20ff

²⁸ Halpern 2005 p.19

²⁹ García-Albacete 2010 p.693

Fukuyama suggested that people who share norms, values and notions of good and evil are critical when it comes to the creation of social capital³⁰. This opinion is seconded by Larry Diamond who says that an organisation or association will be most effective when it has a clear and defined purpose, structure, equality and identity that is shared among its members³¹. This observation paired with the described nature of bridging associations and organisations can reinforce the picture of them as being based on norms and values that are promoting inclusion of diverse elements. García-Albacete also emphasizes that inclusive, bridging networks in a diverse society help reduce stereotyping of other groups and networks in that society³².

David Halpern summarizes the bonding-bridging discussion very well by referring to Robert Putnam when saying that bonding social capital can be seen as a sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital on the other hand, can be seen as the equivalent lubricant³³.

3.2 "Bad" Social Capital

Paxton argues that individuals may change their individual values and preferences when participating in an organisation. But these changes do not automatically mean something positive for the society as a whole, since they might stem from an anti-democratic agenda in the specific association. She also argues that these kinds of groups often experience high trust and association among its members, while not trusting and associating with other organisations³⁴. Examples of this can be seen among ethnic diversity groups in a country with high division and polarization amongst such factions, or nationalist and protectionist groups in segregated societies where the tendency to interact with other or opposing organisations is quite low or not existent at all.

The importance of the cultural and political context and setting of a society is also shown by García-Albacete:

*"Social capital is expected to increase democratic health because it develops links of cooperation and trust that cross-cut social cleavages. However, if the structure of social capital is just a reflection of its context, in the existence of a political cleavage, social capital will reproduce the societal fragmentation—or line of division—instead of healing it."*³⁵

³⁰ Fukuyama 1995 p.270

³¹ Diamond 1999 p.229

³² García-Albacete 2010 p.694

³³ Halpern 2005 p.19

³⁴ Paxton 2002 p.259, 271

³⁵ García-Albacete 2010 p.692

Portes and Landolt highlight the possibility that the social capital produced in associations might have beneficial or otherwise positive outcomes for some, while others may be put at disadvantage due to that same process. They exemplify this by pointing to possible exclusion of outsiders, that the associational membership might restrict individual freedoms or that the culture within the association might produce what they call "downward levelling norms"³⁶, where this last argument connects with Paxton's observation that individuals might change when entering a membership of an association or organisation. Further, they claim that a high amount of social capital does not mean that there is no possibility that the strong associational ties that produce it can be associated with negative results³⁷.

Examples of this can be seen when strong, closed networks might reinforce traditionalism and thereby maybe hinder emancipation and evolvement of e.g. women or ethnic minorities. Margaret Levi mentions strong community networks of stay-at-home mothers where encouragement and maintenance of these networks might produce adverse effects from a gender perspective³⁸. Daanish Mustafa seconds Levi's opinion and holds that Putnam doesn't consider the negative externalities that might arise from some kinds of associations such as racism, exploitation or misogyny, thereby showing a possible production of a kind of "bad" social capital³⁹.

3.3 The Relationship Between the Good and the Bad

My conclusion of the different notions of a possible "bad" social capital is that it cannot be considered a concept entirely on it's own. Instead I hold that it should be seen as something akin to the "other side of the coin" thereby making it a concept related to- or part of- the wider social capital concept as a whole. I draw this conclusion since I find that the definition of the original social capital, the one that has been mostly seen as "good", can be considered to lack charging as to values; both positive and negative.

I support this argument by pointing to the previously mentioned points saying that association or cooperation are not necessarily considered to be intrinsically good, but rather that the degree and presence of these two factors among others might produce effects that are reinforcing anti democratic, oppressive or exploitative structures. These effects will be dealt with in more detail in a later chapter of this thesis.

The reverse, or "bad" side of the perceived gleaming social capital coin is mostly described as a result of social capital building going in the "wrong" direction when seen from a virtuous circle-perspective. Bad or dark social capital

³⁶ Portes & Landolt 2000 p.533

³⁷ Portes & Landolt 2000 p.536

³⁸ Levi 1996 p.52

³⁹ Mustafa 2005 p.331

as a negative externality of a neutral concept, where good social capital is the positive externality, is a wider definition of a complex concept. This definition extends the meaning of social capital to include and potentially explain other phenomena in a society than just the concepts that are usually positively charged ones as development, progress, prosperity or strength of democracy.

3.4 Trust

A community that express a regular, collaborative, open behaviour based on a set of norms that is prevalent throughout that community, develop mutual expectations⁴⁰. These expectations are trust; a trust that the members of the community are working towards the same goals and that they are abiding by the rules that are set up within that community. This view is also shared by Robert Putnam, who claim that generalised social trust comes from inherent norms dealing with reciprocal relationships as well as norms developed within networks where members of the community are engaged⁴¹. David Halpern introduces what he calls “linking” social capital. This is something he considers to be a special form of bridging social capital that deals with unequal power relations. Thereby he is engaging trust relations and mutual respect as a form of counterbalance to the power distribution. This trust and respect form a sort of vertical bridge between e.g. the state and it’s citizens⁴².

The concept of trust is comprised of shared norms and values, where values are defined as lasting beliefs that a certain behaviour or goal in life is preferable no matter what the situation or object of concern might be. Norms on the other hand can be seen as a set of shared or common values that define socially accepted standards of behaviour⁴³.

People in a society dare to cooperate and associate – with each other as well as the authority, because they trust that the same other actors will reciprocate and provide something in return for them⁴⁴. This can be exemplified by the fact that in a calm, stable and peaceful society most people adhere to the law and thereby respect the authority, the rule of law and the rules set by the community in which they live. In return they expect the protection of the authority as well as the law if someone decides not to respect the same rules. Another example is that people pay taxes and expect them to be used for reciprocal purposes such as schools, roads, sewage systems and so on.

Problems of trust in a society can be connected to a downward spiral where distrust breeds the same between individuals or between individuals and the state.

⁴⁰ Fukuyama 1995 p.26

⁴¹ Putnam 1993 p.171

⁴² Halpern 2005 p.25

⁴³ Braithwaite 1998 p.48

⁴⁴ Rothstein 2003 p.81

Distrust can, from the beginning, come from a difficulty of solving dilemmas of collective action, where people have entered the tragedy of the commons and risk falling into the social trap⁴⁵. An example of this can be that in a society, physical security as provided by the state and social security or welfare mechanisms such as schools and roads etc. could be seen as public goods. This is possible as they are in theory available to the greater part of the citizenry, and they depend on financial resources from that same society. Situations like these frequently produce opportunities of free-riding, since individuals may still only see to the short-term gains of acting in self interest, thus some of the citizens do not e.g. pay taxes or abide by other laws but can still profit from other people's contributions. Here, compliance with existing laws on obedience and tax payments is a way to solve the collective action problem at a cost of the individual short-term higher gain of seeing to your own interests first. The long-term gain on the other hand is a possibility to also enjoy a high reputation, position and status in that society as well as being free from the sanctions imposed on defectors from the shared norms⁴⁶. This solution to the potential problem of defection from shared norms, rules and expected behaviour takes the possible role of the state into consideration.

Margaret Levi argues that state institutions can play a major part in facilitating the creation of generalized trust among its citizens, as certain types of government can limit phenomena like nepotism and corruption, which would otherwise undermine the confidence in the state and its representatives. She also states that governments can influence the behaviour of the citizenry by bringing about trust or distrust toward themselves through certain actions or modes of operation⁴⁷.

Mauricio Rubio holds that one of the key factors that must be taken into consideration when talking about a capacity of social capital production is trust. The trust he wants to highlight is the one that develops between strangers and that can facilitate a formation of organisations outside the private sphere⁴⁸. Thereby he links the two concepts trust and social capital. This is something I also intend to do in this thesis; I will see trust as a vital component of the social capital concept already defined.

3.5 Civil Society

In the following chapters of this thesis, I will explain the relation between the concepts examined and defined above as well as their role in- and relation to- democratization processes. Since the concepts defined above all have to do with societies, associations and organisations, I have chosen to limit the

⁴⁵ Rothstein 2003 p.21

⁴⁶ Scholz 1998 p.136, 161

⁴⁷ Levi 1996 p.50f

⁴⁸ Rubio 1997 p.809

democratization discussion to the role and relations of civil society within those processes. This choice requires me to also present and define the concept of civil society as well as to place it on a level of abstraction that corresponds to the one that dominates this thesis.

Larry Diamond describes civil society as being the space occupied between the public and the private sphere. Further he emphasizes that it involves citizens acting collectively, it limits state power and that it exists autonomous of the state, it facilitates a flow of information and ideas and concerns itself with public matters rather than private ones. Civil society and its organisations also distinguish itself by promoting pluralism and diversity on different levels through the pluralism and diversity reflected in the multitude of organisations.⁴⁹

The final characteristic might lead one to think that several of the bonding associations mentioned when defining social capital are excluded from civil society. Diamond argues that this exclusion occurs only if for example racist associations try to occupy a political space on the expense of others, thereby excluding the same others from said political space or place in society⁵⁰. On this subject, Daanish Mustafa holds that civil society contains a wide range of goals and agendas, but that when one agenda leads an association to leave the civil sphere for e.g. a violent and/or armed struggle, it is legitimate to start discussing the place of that organisation within civil society⁵¹. The difficulty of that discussion can be related to the well known argument that one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist, thereby highlighting the subjectivity of what can be deemed "civil" or not.

Sigrid Roßteutscher presents the argument that the civil society will reflect dominant values that are prevalent in a society. This would mean that a higher degree of association and a more vibrant civil society could solidify whatever norms and values that might be dominating at the moment in said society⁵².

Putnam puts great importance in the difference between what he calls "civic community" and "*uncivic* community". The civic community is characterised by a virtuous circle with high levels of trust, cooperation and social, collective well being resulting from a vibrant associational society. The *uncivic* community on the other hand is lacking the traits of the civic community and therefore represent a vicious spiral of corruption, defection, distrust and exploitation⁵³. Thereby he reserves a solely positive notion for what could otherwise be deemed neutral characteristics and results of associations, such as trust and cooperation. Margaret Levi shares this criticism and points out that vertical relationships within hierarchical organisations might also foster these traits; trust, cooperation and reciprocity. She puts Mafia-like organisations as an example and holds that organisations like the Mafia certainly operate with an efficiency that can be

⁴⁹ Diamond 1994 p.5f

⁵⁰ Diamond 1994 p.7

⁵¹ Mustafa 2005 p.335

⁵² Roßteutscher 2010 p.753

⁵³ Putnam 1993 p.177

similar to what Putnam solely ascribes to “virtuous” associations⁵⁴. Putzel uses the following words:

*“...it should be remembered that democratic exercises can be conducted towards non-democratic ends”*⁵⁵

Thereby reinforcing the arguments of a substantial adverse side to Putnam’s civic associations. On the other hand, the “civicness” and “*uncivicness*” described above reconnects to Roßteuschers argument that some organisations tend to reproduce internally the wider cultural context they are set within⁵⁶.

In this thesis I intend to use a neutral approach to the civil society concept that makes possible a discussion of civil society and social capital in the “good” as well as the “bad” sense. Density and presence of civil society organisations are often considered to be indicators of social capital production⁵⁷, which also goes well with a neutral notion of the concept since the nature of the social capital produced isn’t specified. I can understand that the argument presented above poses some difficulty when trying to judge where to place e.g. terrorist organisations; inside or outside of civil society. But since making that distinction is not relevant for this thesis, I save that discussion for other research that deals more specifically with those kinds of questions.

When civil society is discussed here, it will henceforth refer to the associations and organisations that take up the space between the public and private sphere. That space is by this definition characterised as being neutral in terms of values, as different organisations promote different agendas, and that diversity can be deemed as being of importance to a society as it might keep the power of the state in check, instigate debates as to various phenomena occurring in that society and also carry out many other functions that can only be resolved by an active citizenry of a society.

⁵⁴ Levi 1996 p.52

⁵⁵ Putzel 1997 p.945

⁵⁶ Diamond 1999 p.226

⁵⁷ see Diamond 1996 p.233 among others

4 Social Capital and Civil Society in Democratization

Putnam strongly emphasized the healthy and stabilizing effects of trust and social capital when it comes to democracy and democratic societies. However, there are others who present facts that are directly opposing these supposed positive effects and instead claim that social capital in the form of trust and some types of associations actually can be disadvantageous to democracy depending on the cultural and political context that is present in the society at the moment⁵⁸.

When talking about democracy and democratization, it is also necessary to define these concepts to some extent. After 1945, democracy has become a synonym to a justified way to rule a society. More specifically, a liberal notion of the concept is presented as the only kind of democracy and thereby making it a Western one as it is modelled after governance systems in Western Europe and North America. Democracy is widely conceived as being an institutionalized version of the fight for power and it emphasises a level playing field for a diverse society where all socially constructed groups and all individuals are seen as equal. Worth mentioning though, is that through its westernized nature, the liberal democracy is in danger of becoming the new form of colonisation, as states and international organisations alike strive to spread this version of democracy and its values⁵⁹.

A liberal democracy demands, among other things, a state monopoly on violence, a system for vertical accountability of the governors to the governed, an oversight of the supporting bureaucracy, possibilities of both political and social pluralism and diversity, a rule of law system ensuring individual and group freedoms and rights, free and regular elections with universal suffrage, freedom of speech and association and freedom of the media⁶⁰.

But democracy doesn't start automatically nor does it uphold itself. Rather, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, it requires both stable institutions and an active citizenry⁶¹, which brings us to more closely examine the role of social capital and the civil society in democratization.

Regimes are procedures in a society for dealing with and regulate the access to power. These kinds of procedures and the acceptance of them evolve over some time and are in turn separated from the concept of the state. The state is the apparatus that is used for exercising power over the public. In democracies the

⁵⁸ Paxton 2002, Roßteutscher 2010, García-Albacete 2010

⁵⁹ Grugel 2002 p.17-22

⁶⁰ Diamond 1999 p.10f

⁶¹ Grugel 2002 p.31

one is markedly distinguished from the other, while in an autocracy the relationship between the two is a bit unclear as the fusion of regimes and the state is used to preserve the incumbent regime⁶². Here the rule of law is reserved as an instrument of power for the government to control the governed.

4.1 Social Capital and Civil Society as Facilitators of Democracy

The role of social capital and civil society when it comes to facilitating a transition to democracy is something widely discussed in various publications on the matter.

Larry Diamond argues that the more the practices of civil society organisations are based on political equality, rule of law and reciprocity in both actions and communication, the more their members will be socialised into democratic norms and codes of conduct. Thereby they will in turn increase a generation of trust, cooperation, knowledge and tolerance which results in a democratising “good” spiral that can reinforce a democratic development⁶³. Voluntary associations will also initially spark conversations and ideas that may differ from the existing state ideology. Because of the network these associations provide, ideas are allowed to spread thus facilitating information dissemination that might lead to coordinated protest activities or other means of making the opinion of the citizens heard⁶⁴.

In an environment where there already is some measure of freedom of association and where civil society is allowed to operate as an autonomous body free from the state, civil society can also function as a watchdog regarding regime performance through the ability to reveal actual conditions. Here, the exposure of misconduct or otherwise bad compliance or broken promises within state institutions and among elected officials can actually increase trust in the same institutions. This is possible through insisting that everyone is equal before the law, so even state officials. But these kinds of revelations may also decrease trust, since it might highlight the extent to which exceptions have been made for the same officials⁶⁵.

Tom R. Tyler holds that there are many cases in which citizens actively choose not to free ride on the benefits of community, even though they can be almost certain to escape detection. This is a behaviour based on norms prevalent throughout the community, and it also shows the importance of social capital and trust when it comes to upholding a functioning democracy based upon the rule of

⁶² Way 2006 p.169

⁶³ Diamond 1999 p.228

⁶⁴ Paxton 2002 p.257

⁶⁵ Levi 1998 p.95, Grugel 2002 p.115

law. Democratic governments require trust⁶⁶. This view is shared by other authors who show that less trust require more involvement from the state in upholding rule of law⁶⁷. If you look at that statement from the other way, it also becomes clear that the citizens of a society who do not trust their government or the institutions need to place a lot of effort in monitoring institutional performance. This would be costly for a society, since this time needs to be taken from other activities that might instead have increased trust if the original distrust had no reason. Or as Putnam writes

*“For third party enforcement to work, the third party must itself be trustworthy”*⁶⁸

A statement that of course is relevant from a state perspective as well as a citizen one.

The functions and aims of civil society described above combined with the associational and trust aspects of social capital can give examples of the importance of the civil society and the tendencies of the society members to involve in the different organisations and movements formed in this space between the public and the private

So what is the role of civil society in democratization? When either democratic or authoritarian institutions start to break down, and/or a society starts to polarize as a result of division and/or a weakening of the authoritarian role, the civil society movements can bring about a downfall of the authoritarian regime. This should not be interpreted neither as the civil society bringing about the transition, nor as the civil society being bringers of democracy all the time. As has already been argued, some civil society organisations tend to reproduce tendencies of the wider cultural context they are active in. This context can involve considerable undemocratic features and structures, and thereby the organisation cannot be considered to bring about democracy⁶⁹.

The ways that civil society organisations might function to promote democracy is by spreading organisational characteristics based on equality, reciprocity, mutual respect and respect for the law. This can foster members in democracy as a concept and generate social capital of a pro-democratic kind as well as trust⁷⁰. The organisations can also have a pro-democratic function in the long term as they can instigate a systematic struggle to develop social capital- especially of the bridging kind- at a grassroots level and thereby increase chances for democratization in a society in the future⁷¹.

⁶⁶ Tyler 1998 p.271, 287

⁶⁷ Fukuyama 1995 p.361

⁶⁸ Putnam 1993 p.165

⁶⁹ Diamond 1999 p.225ff

⁷⁰ Diamond 1999 p.228

⁷¹ Diamond 1999 p.238f

4.2 "Bad" Social Capital at work

In autocratic societies, the regime often controls and/or oversees organisational life and sometimes even encourages or enforces organisational participation. In these settings the social capital promotes participation, while stemming the tendency towards protests. Lucan A. Way shows an example of this by explaining that the power and capacity of the autocratic leaders to control subordinate individuals or groups in such societies is crucial to whether authoritarian consolidation will occur or not⁷². Roßteutscher also states that people are more prone to protest against the incumbent authoritarian regime in regions low in trust and social capital, while regions high in social capital experiences a higher participation in organisations in a form that does not promote democratization⁷³. This gives that the supposed positive effects of civil society and especially social capital in some cases are not working or are not present at all. More interaction will increase contact with major cultural and societal trends. Thereby people will learn to think and act according to generally accepted norms and rules that exist in the society. This explains why social capital can enrich and stabilize democratic norms in democracies, while antidemocratic habits and norms still can prevail in non-democracies⁷⁴. It also shows that the current setting is crucial for the character of the social capital developed in organisations and other types of associational groupings.

The opinion on the importance of the current context is also reinforced by the observation that social capital in the bad sense is present if trust and association in networks are affecting the stability and continued existence of the authoritarian regime in a positive way⁷⁵. A stabilizing effect like this can be shown through the fact that citizens of a strong authoritarian society often are negatively inclined towards the idea that a democratic way of ruling can be preferable to the authoritarian alternative⁷⁶. This is another example of how ideas that are spread through networks or voluntary associations might either be influenced by the state that seeks to control them, or reinforced through the membership or association itself. In democracies on the other hand, people are mostly considering a democratic way of ruling to be the better alternative. Here, involvement in associations also increases the support for democracy while the effect is the opposite in autocracies⁷⁷.

Rubio provides another angle in arguing that the institutional environment is important for people's decision to invest in social capital⁷⁸. Examples of this can be seen in states with a considerable amount of corruption in the institutions, in

⁷² Way 2006 p.179

⁷³ Roßteutscher 2010 p.749

⁷⁴ Roßteutscher 2010 p.753

⁷⁵ Roßteutscher 2010 p.739

⁷⁶ Roßteutscher 2010 p.742

⁷⁷ Roßteutscher 2010 p.751

⁷⁸ Rubio 1997 p.815

enforcing agencies as well as among citizens in general. In these kinds of environment, one could imagine that the social capital produced in voluntary associations is not of the “good” kind.

4.3 Bonding and Bridging

Movements that have been strong before a transition to democracy or democratization, often find that they are weakening or disbanding after that transition has occurred. This can be seen as a result of the unifying characteristics earlier experienced during e.g. a pro-democracy campaign under a more authoritarian rule, are not seen as unifying any longer. The weakening or disbanding of said movements might be a result from the shift in societal context or the transition itself as it might have made the members of the various movements realise that they no longer share the same agenda because of class, hierarchy, gender, ethnicity or other identities. Thus they begin to reassert and reorganise themselves⁷⁹. This process gives at hand a possible shift in associational type from the inclusive bridging associations spanning over a wide area of society, to the more exclusive bonding societies that unite in a struggle towards a narrower goal that better suits a more homogenous group. A shift like this one; from bridging to bonding, does not necessarily have to also mean a weakening of the organisation in question, but rather a change.

Van Deth and Zmerli argues that the capacity of a community to avoid the social trap lies in the amount of bridging social capital that is prevalent because the bridging associations provide their members with more chances of socialising with people from different levels of society, thereby increasing trust and reciprocity. The bonding associations instead tend to reinforce existing social structures to a greater extent than associations in general, and can therefore be considered to produce more negative externalities than their bridging counterpart⁸⁰. Further, they argue that even though studies show that social capital can effectively function as a stabiliser of democracy, it might just as well help to bring it down, or stabilise autocracy through the fact that the kind of social capital produced in an association can not be guaranteed to be the benign kind⁸¹. Paxton argues the value of an overall measure of caution from funding agents when choosing which kind of association they want to support and why. If the goal is to promote democracy and/or stability and development, a bonding association might not achieve these goals⁸². How to determine this on the other hand, is a discussion big enough for another thesis.

⁷⁹ Grugel 2002 p113

⁸⁰ van Deth & Zmerli 2010 p.633

⁸¹ van Deth & Zmerli p.638

⁸² Paxton 2002 p.273

4.4 Social Capital, Civil Society and the Context

Even though there can be some undoubtedly adverse or “bad” sides to social capital, the assessment of the externalities or other effects produced has to be made while taking the current context into consideration. Important is also to consider who is making the judgment on the character of the effects from the social capital, as differences in background, culture or e.g. political preferences might affect that judgment to a great extent.

Peter Graeff points to the cultural setting, political situation and social structures and aims when trying to determine whether “dark” social capital is at work or not. He also mentions the factor of norms and trust as a form of social control that facilitates the rule of law, but he also highlights the fact that such norms and social control might severely limit personal freedoms and that they can increase free rider problems in a community⁸³. An example of this is communities where a strong notion of solidarity is the prevailing norm and where group achievements are the only ones that matter; a distinction made on the expense of personal preferences and individual performance. The difficulty in determining the type of social capital produced lies here in a difficulty of determine whether the effects are positive or negative; is the judgment being made on a basis of economic development, social and political cohesion or something else? In the example described here, the context might mean that individual achievements are suppressed, while the community as a whole are given a possibility of a society without major cleavages as to income or benefits. It might also mean that the citizens are kept at a low level as to resources like money or education and therefore an oppressive regime can still rule without being questioned or threatened through mass protests. Or as Portes and Landolt puts it:

*“Social capital[...]consists of the ability to marshal resources through social networks, not the resources themselves. When the latter are poor and scarce, the goal achievement capacity of a collectivity is restricted, no matter how strong its internal bonds”*⁸⁴

Putnam’s notion of path dependence⁸⁵ when it comes to the creation of social capital is also highly dubious. He describes the Po valley in northern Italy as the home of a flourishing social capital developed during centuries, while Mussolini nominated the same region as the cradle and home of fascism. Apparently, the associational environment or legacy of northern Italy couldn’t manage to prevent the rise of modern fascism. The same can be said for the apprenticeship system developed in Germany that became one of the sources for the economic development, as well as a way of associating and spreading knowledge. Even though these possibilities were created, they were also characterised by a closed

⁸³ Graeff 2009 p.146f

⁸⁴ Portes & Landolt 2000 p.546

⁸⁵ Putnam 1993 p.179

and exclusive membership that can have been one of the factors facilitating the rise of National Socialism⁸⁶.

⁸⁶ Putzel 1997 p.943

5 Conclusion

I find it very important to reconnect to the definitions of the different concepts that I presented in this thesis. As I argued for a neutral definition of social capital, this conclusion and the normative judgment will be based on an understanding of the “good” and “bad” sides of the social capital concept as the extremes of a scale that goes from positive to negative. Regarding civil society on the other hand, I have argued for a definition that lacks charging entirely. I have done this as I find that the role of civil society in the situations I have described, is dependant on the nature of the social capital produced within those organisations.

The questions posed in the beginning were of two different natures. The first one was of a more general nature asking, “*What is the role of social capital in democratization?*”

This question can be answered when looking at democratization from two different perspectives. The first is democratization as a furthering of a process already set in motion. From this perspective, social capital through civil society can play the role of moving the process further by the effect that it seems to create. This is a chain of effects that drives the society in question towards more pro-democratic qualities such as intrapersonal trust, generalised trust, respect for the rule of law and a more transparent society where the civil society organisations and associations are active and by their existence are promoting diversity of opinions and pluralism and overseeing democratic institutions and the government. The chain of effects in turn produce more trust and strength in the associational ties of the society, thereby strengthening the social capital as well as the positive feelings for democracy as a way of governing the state. This chain of events and effects are visible in societies where democracy is already present and thus social capital can be viewed as furthering the virtuous circle also mentioned in the introduction and thereby be a major factor in a deepening and consolidation of democracies that are already on their way towards that goal.

The other perspective of the role of social capital in democratization is the eventual change of an autocracy into a democracy. As has been argued above, it is neither right nor sufficient to stick to social capital and trust as factors fostering democracy, or those factors as being the ones that bring about a change to democracy. A strong authoritarian regime can be stabilized by the occurrence of social capital in the civil society and among the individuals. This has been shown in cases where the tendency of people to associate in different types of organisations furthers the existent non-democratic culture through the increased exposure of individuals to the prevailing norms in the society.

When it comes to the possibility of social capital as being a potential democratizing force, the social capital in itself is not the major factor. The important factor here is once again the context where the social capital is present.

As stated above, the possible stabilizing effect is obvious in the case of a strong authoritarian regime with a low presence of internal friction. An unstable authoritarian regime weakened by internal division or other causes seems more likely to be overthrown by civil society activities or a mass public uprising in a setting where there is little trust and low social capital, since the low-trust populations seem to have a higher tendency to protest against the authoritarian regime.

The second question I wanted to answer in this paper was the more normative one of “*Should social capital be desirable in democratization?*” Since I aim to make a normative judgment based on consequentiality, I look to the presented effects and outcomes of social capital and trust in democratization. Also here a division of the answer is necessary in accordance with the pattern above. If we first look to democratization in terms of an already commenced process, then the analysis undoubtedly points to a positive answer to the question of desirability. The possible virtuous circle described is clearly desirable in a society struggling for democratic progress and the outcomes of such a process must be seen as beneficial, both for the individual and for the society as a whole. This benefit can be seen through the increased security that comes with respect for the rule of law and citizens who trust each other, the increased development associated with a more reciprocal relationship between the state and the citizens and the increased transparency that comes with lower corruption and higher accountability. With a high amount of “good” social capital, the social trap remains open.

If we instead turn to the aspect of democracy as a possibility in an autocratic state, then the desirability of social capital is highly dubious. This is backed by the tendency of the social capital to work as a stabilizer of non-democratic sentiments and the non-associational characteristics of bonding associations when it comes to interaction with other groups and organisations. In this aspect, the cultural setting and context is very important in judging whether it is desirable or not. Since consequentiality requires a focus upon the outcome and effects of social capital, the bonding form of social capital must be viewed as being clearly not desirable in an autocratic context and setting, while the bridging variety might still produce enough cooperation to maybe instigate a removal or unsettling of an authoritarian regime. But, as argued above, the effects of social capital in an autocratic setting can reproduce, in the individual or organisation, the authoritarian pattern prevalent in the society at large. Thereby it is creating a high risk for a non-democratic outcome that cannot be judged as desirable or “good” in terms of democratization.

But is there then no hope for democracy at all in authoritarian states? As shown, the possibility of bringing about this radical change is greater in a case where the autocracy is beginning to divide or in other ways weaken. This does not mean that the unstable, insecure conditions for the general population in a society where governance is breaking down should be encouraged. But it is highly important to add the observation that neither should one encourage a strengthening of the social capital in a society with a stable authoritarian rule, without knowing what kind of social capital is actually produced. A final point I want to make is that the discussion and arguments presented above show that Putnam's argument that “building social capital... is the key to making democracy

work⁸⁷ might be true in some cases, but that one has to be careful to see what sort of social capital is actually formed.

⁸⁷ Putnam 1993 p.185

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