

Julia Häuberer

Social Capital Theory

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Social Capital Theory

Towards a Methodological
Foundation

With a foreword by
Prof. Dr. Hynek Jeřábek

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Foreword

This monograph by Julia Häuberer focuses on the issue of how social capital is measured and the theoretical principles the methods used to measure social capital are based on. The author has embarked on a difficult task. At least two generations of theorists have been examining the theoretical justifications and bases for different ways of looking at this complex and ever changing social phenomenon.

The difficulty that has plagued every empirical study on social capital measurement is that the authors always tend to adopt, sometimes too uncritically, a particular theoretical concept to create their measurement scales and batteries of questions, construct their questions on the basis of that concept, and then found their perspective on social capital from those questions. In my view, there has been a shortage of thorough critical analysis of the theoretical postulates that measurement concepts are based on. Comparative analyses of the assumptions and principles behind different theories have also been lacking.

An important asset of Julia Häuberer's monograph is that it contrasts the basic concepts of social capital and subjects them to a thorough and systematic critical analysis. In doing so she is able to uncover the set of reasons (the rational) that lead to the decision about which theoretical principles future measurements of such a complex phenomenon as 'social capital' should be based on.

Using clear, comprehensible, and well-established argumentation, Julia Häuberer sets the theoretical foundations of her concept of social capital measurement on an elaborated version of Nan Lin's concept and calls it the 'refined social capital model'. Her concept consciously negates the civic perspective of Robert D. Putnam's social capital but holds great value of his introduction of formal networks in the social capital discussion, and adds some aspects of Ronald S. Burt's theory to Nan Lin's resource perspective. She takes Pierre Bourdieu's very general theory of economic, cultural, and social capital and James Coleman's concept of social capital only as her sources of inspiration. In the introductory chapter she discusses both of these theories, and, seeing that neither one of these authors tried to formalise his theory, she takes their work as just the theoretical framework for her model constructs.

Julia Häuberer's measurement model is based on making a distinction between access to social capital provided by networks and accessed social capital

or social resources. To measure the former, she further distinguishes between 'formal networks' and 'informal networks' and measures these with 'network size' and 'network density'. She measures 'openness' and searches for 'structural holes'. To measure the latter, she applies the so called 'resource generator'. The next main task Julia addresses is an analysis of the validity and reliability of the batteries of questions used. She uncovers those elements and aspects of social capital that the proposed measurement model identifies well in the Czech Republic and, conversely, those areas where the proposed scales do not attain the necessary degree of reliability. To this end she uses a panel study that she designed herself and for which she obtained a grant from the Grant Agency of Charles University. By operationalizing the social capital model especially with the 'bridging social capital item battery' and the 'resource generator', Julia Häuberer is able to describe very differentiated reality and to analyse in detail the varying degrees of success achieved in the effort to find, construct, and verify measurement scales for the different dimensions of social capital. I find especially valuable the way the entire study is boldly founded on a relatively general and flexible model of several dimensions of social capital and their gradual, differentiated verification.

Although Julia Häuberer was unable to arrive at a definitive and satisfactory solution for every aspect, the batteries of questions she proposes and the scales they are based on for measuring 'strong ties and relationships among family members' and the resource generator measures can be recommended for further application in the conditions of the Czech Republic and, with some caution, in other post-communist countries. Of no less significance is her identification of problem areas and the limited reliability of the proposed scales for other dimensions.

The cultural context always complicates the conditions for developing standardised measurement scales. In the case of social capital measurement, this applies generally and twofold. Julia Häuberer's study examines how the cultural dimension complicates the construction and verification of measurement scales and makes it difficult to determine the degree of universality of their future use. The added difficulty and limitations associated with the cultural dimension of social capital stem in part from theory, as the biggest differences between the various theoretical approaches to social capital are their cultural perspective, and in part from the construction of measurement scales, as the various indicators of social capital applied in proposed measurement instruments occupy very different positions in different cultural contexts and are viewed and interpreted in very distinct ways. As a consequence, the scales proposed to measure social capital may record and measure something slightly different in different cultural environments. This general problem added to the difficulty of Julia's work. In my

opinion, however, she has addressed this problem very well in this monograph. Especially considering all these difficulties, it must be said that Julia Häuberer's monograph is a methodologically sensitive and theoretically well-grounded study of the complications involved in measuring social capital.

I wish Julia Häuberer's book much success and am sure it will serve all its readers as a source of inspiration.

Professor Dr. Hynek Jeřábek

Preface

This book is the result of a doctoral thesis defended in April 2010 in Prague. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people and institutions I am indebted to for their support that made the successful completion of this book possible.

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Dr. Julia Häuberer

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