

Social Capital Definitions

Academics and Scientists argue about the social capital concept. Is it important to find one global definition? Does the variety of definitions help to understand what social capital is? The Western Cape Province used the World Bank definition as a starting point for their social capital work. But through the social capital work further working definitions arose.

We don't want to take a strong position for one definition because we believe social capital is a living and vibrant concept. The core elements of social capital are networks, norms and trust which one finds repeated in most of the definitions. Social capital still needs many debates and discussions. We want to provide a space for various social capital definitions to heat up the debate and contribute to the discussion. How would you define social capital? Send us your social capital definition or comments: cgomulia@uwc.ac.za

Do you want to find out what people around the world say about social capital? Just look at our website links and find publications and websites from all over the world about social capital.

World Bank (2002):

"Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together." or "it is not what you know but who you know".¹

(www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/whatsc.htm
www1.worldbank.org/prem/poverty/scapital/SChowmeas1.htm)

Pierre Bourdieu:

SC is the aggregate of the actual and potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, or, in other words, to membership in a group.

(Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The Forms of Capital*, in: John G. Richardson (ed.), Handbook of Theory and Research in the Sociology of Education, New York, Greenwood Press, p. 248)

James Coleman:

Social capital is a variety of entities having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspects of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure. Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of the relations between persons and among persons. It is lodged neither in individuals nor in physical implements of production.

¹ The World Bank Group on social capital, 2002.

(Coleman, J. (1988). *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital*, In: American Journal of Sociology 94, pp. 95-120, Chicago, p. 98)

Robert Putnam:

SC refers to features of social organization, such as networks, norms and trust that increase a society's productive potential. SC refers to the connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness. The core idea of the SC approach to him is that social networks have value; social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups.

(Putnam, R.D. (1993). '*The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public life*'. The American Prospect. Volume 4, Issue 13, p. 167).

Francis Fukuyama:

Social capital is an instantiated informal norm that promotes co-operation between two or more individuals. The norms that constitute social capital can range from a norm of reciprocity between two friends all the way up to complex and elaborately articulated doctrines like Christianity or Confucianism. They must be instantiated in an actual human relationship: the norm of reciprocity exists *in potentia* in my dealings with all people, but is actualised only in my dealings with *my* friends. By this definition, trust, networks, civil society, and the like, which have been associated with social capital, are all epiphenominal, arising as a result of social capital but not constituting social capital itself.

(Fukuyama, Francis (2001): *Social Capital, Civil Society and Development*. In: Third World Quarterly (2001), Vol 22, No. 1, pp 7-20, London, p. 7)

Carolyn Gomulia:

Social capital is the capacity of networks to mobilize resources to obtain beneficial outcomes for individuals. These networks are built between individuals and they are able to mobilize resources if individuals have developed the following common features in relating to one another. Firstly, the most important feature is trust, secondly, individuals must have instantiated common norms, (reciprocity, solidarity, honesty, mutual support) and thirdly, they need to communicate frequently with each other. Depending on the level of trust and the norms that mobilize networks the relationship between the network actors and the desired beneficial outcomes vary. Networks are the key term in defining social capital because social capital can only become tangible through these networks.

(Gomulia, Carolyn (2006): "*State-society networks: A case of political participation in the Western Cape Province, South Africa.*", Cape Town, unpublished, p. 9)