



THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL AND
CIVIL SOCIETY IN PUBLIC POLICY,
SOCIAL CHANGE AND WELFARE

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OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

- Mainstream economics reduces concepts of social capital and civil society to means for profit and competition, reproducing inequality and power.
- Alternative approaches identify social capital with state-society synergy relations and generalized networks of cooperation, which enable the civil society to promote solidarity, democracy, public policy, social change, and welfare.
- Similarly, Post-Keynesian Institutionalism (PKI) recognizes the narrow conception of homo economicus, on the one hand, and the creative role of the state, democratic institutions, and civic values, on the other hand.

OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

- However, questions remain:
 - How do social groups organize and mobilize collectively to voice social needs and concerns?
 - How do they make state officials accountable and responsive to social demands?
 - How do they challenge and resist powerful groups that pursue particularized interests via clientelistic relations with state officials and policymakers?
- This article seeks to fill that void by connecting studies on social capital and civil society with the literature on the commons and participatory and deliberative democracy.

STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

- Social Capital and Civil Society and their Relationship with the State and Public Policy
- Galvanizing Civil Society: Commoning and Democratic Participation and Deliberation
- Conclusions

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CIVIL SOCIETY AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STATE AND PUBLIC POLICY

- Since the late 20th century, we have witnessed a resurgence of academic and political interest in the concepts of social capital and civil society.
- **Social capital** is usually identified with *social norms and networks of reciprocity, trust, and cooperation*.
- **Civil society** consists of *non-governmental and not-for-profit self-governing organizations and informal groups*.
- Elements of social capital were considered crucial for civil society, as social norms and networks of cooperation and trust appeared to *enhance civil society's ability to cultivate solidarity, democratic ideals, public policy, and social welfare*.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CIVIL SOCIETY AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STATE AND PUBLIC POLICY

- National governments and international organizations introduced these concepts in their development policies and programs to *stress the role social groups play in achieving the programs' economic and political objectives*.
- However, under the influence of Third Way politics and the post-Washington Consensus, *social capital and civil society were reduced to a mere means for serving market objectives of profit and competition, which reproduce social inequalities and power structures*. The “dark side” of social capital – powerful economic and political groups in pursuit of particularized interests – was ignored.
- There are studies on social capital and civil society that aim to unravel those conditions under which *individuals and groups can build norms and networks of cooperation and mobilize social forces to scrutinize and challenge the social injustices and inequalities created by power relations, market competition, and undemocratic states*.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CIVIL SOCIETY AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STATE AND PUBLIC POLICY

- The first step is to provide alternative conceptions of social capital and civil society that break with the underlying individualist and consequentialist assumptions of homo economicus.
 - **Social capital** is also pursued for its intrinsic value. Social norms and networks of reciprocity and cooperation derive *from social, political and moral motivations and processes* and create *common identities expressing peoples' commitment to shared values, and their responsibility toward others*.
 - **Civil society** is valued for the possibility of *building a counter-hegemony*, emanating from the *collective efforts of the working class, intellectuals, and social organizations, with an aim to transform economies and societies*.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CIVIL SOCIETY AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STATE AND PUBLIC POLICY

- **The second step is to acknowledge the potential of social capital and civil society to build synergistic relations and generalized cooperation, which transform economies and societies toward the social goals of equality and justice.**
 - These relations consist of synergies across diverse groups and with the state, so as to combine *“embeddedness” (bonding social capital, intra-group ties)* with *“autonomy” (bridging social capital, inter-group ties)*.
 - *Embedded social relations need to be combined with autonomous social ties* at the micro level to explore different opportunities, practices and visions of collective action, participation, and welfare; and at the macro level to overcome the domination and exploitation of powerful groups and clientelistic relations with the state at the expense of broader social welfare objectives.
 - This is particularly crucial within a *context of authoritarian governance and sectarian societies* in order to *mobilize social forces within civil society and sustain the struggle* to inform and reform public policy, and to pursue collective goals against power and inequality.

GALVANIZING CIVIL SOCIETY: COMMONING AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND DELIBERATION

- **The third step is to discover ways social capital and civil society can build their potential for synergistic relations and generalized cooperation by connecting with the literature on the commons and participatory and deliberative democracy.**
 - Mainstream economics focuses on **competitive democracy** – voting as a mechanism for aggregating political preferences – with little attention to participatory and deliberative modes of democracy.
 - **Participatory democracy** stresses the *direct involvement of all those affected* by certain activities in processes of political discourse and decision-making.
 - **Deliberative democracy** highlights *rational discussion and deliberation in the public space* in order to solve conflicts of interest by *means of transformation rather than preference aggregation*.
 - PKI focuses on *mediating structures*, such as family, church, voluntary associations, neighborhood, and subculture, which operate *beyond the market and the state; take an active role in economic planning; and promote values and institutions of participatory, democratic decision-making*.

GALVANIZING CIVIL SOCIETY: COMMONING AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND DELIBERATION

- This article seeks for *a more active role for civil society in creating the social values and prefigurative relations that will promote a truly participatory and deliberative democracy and transform economies and societies*. A more active role may further require a process of commoning.
- **Commoning** is a process that does not rely solely on the management of common pool resources; rather it is a *process of social interaction, struggle, and transformation*, where production and reproduction take place under collective labor, equal access to resources, and egalitarian forms of decision-making.
- Moving beyond conventional institutions of civil society and public policy is not as difficult as it seems. In fact, it is argued that *collective values and institutions already exist in the form of a diverse economy of alternative, non-capitalist subjectivities, rationalities, and imaginaries* founded on values and practices of participatory and deliberative democracy, e.g. hybrid research collectives.

CONCLUSIONS

- Our discussion focused on how *social capital and civil society can impact public policy* by trying to shed further light on *the dynamics of state-society interactions* and thus enriching the analysis of other alternative economic approaches, such as PKI.
- We observed that a kind of social capital, founded on *state-society synergy and generalized norms and networks of cooperation and trust*, can enable civil society organizations to scrutinize and challenge the injustices and inequalities created by power relations, market competition, and undemocratic states.
- We suggested that social capital and civil society can develop the capacity to create synergistic relations and generalized networks by *employing the values and institutions of the commons and democratic participation and deliberation*.
- Nowadays the civic space has been severely restricted by violations of freedoms and human rights, social and environmental protection. Though these conditions shape the market-state-civil society nexus in ways that increase inequality and injustice, *they have also created social groups and movements to counteract these trends and protect social values of participation, democracy, welfare, equality, and justice for all*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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THANK YOU
FOR YOUR ATTENTION!
