

## Social Capital in the Reorientation of Location Decision

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**Abstract:** The current turbulences occurring in the world economy have resulted in various transformations, often of a revolutionary nature. The reorientation of behaviour has resulted, among others, in the shortening of supply chains and changes in location policies, which necessitate the search for new places to relocate capital. Of particular importance in this process are regions in which there is a developed social capital featuring a high level of adaptation both to the conditions of the digital economy, and to the modern form of organisation in which flexible cooperation dominates.

**Keywords:** social capital, location, digital economy, endogenisation, region

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### 1. Introduction

The current growth in uncertainty in all spheres of life is the result of the turmoil and turbulences occurring across the global economy and related, among others, to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. As a consequence, a process of re-evaluation is underway of the many views regarding the functioning and creation of socio-economic development on many dimensions, including at regional level. This is particularly true of the excessive growth at the turn of the last century and in the first decade of the 21st century in supply chain dependence on a small number of geographical locations, e.g. before the pandemic, 40% of supplies to the electronics industry and 80% of those to the pharmaceutical industry came from China (Ziółkowska, 2021, pp. 81-91). This resulted from the excessive, even caricatured, emphasis in their locations only on optimising efficiency at the cost of security and reliability, with widespread propagation of the *Just in Time* system, in which warehouse stock is eliminated completely (Banaszyk et al., 2021, pp. 53-89). Nowadays, that is in the second half of 2023, one can observe that the newly-forming supply chains are subject to diversification, making them shorter and more geographically compact, while there is a concurrent increase in the role of so-called

critical reserves. This is due to the fact that the above-mentioned negative phenomena that shook the global economy not only temporarily halted production for suppliers, but later also limited the performance of logistics hubs due to transport bottlenecks and the simultaneous imposition of sanctions, which led to the interruption of the supply of many products and raw materials. As a result, hyperglobalisation, in which the overriding goal was to establish a global economy, is in retreat, and one should hope that it will be replaced with a better form of globalisation and not the autarky of nation states. Concerns about *decoupling*, i.e. the severing of existing economic and trade ties, have grown considerably in recent years. However, there is an increasing frequency of references to the rise in two tendencies in investment location, namely *nearshoring* and *reshoring*. The first refers to actions taken by countries to move the supply chains of key goods to countries that are close both geographically as well as politically. The second, meanwhile, refers to the return of production to the home country, a move which is not aimed at deglobalisation, but constitutes the next stage in globalisation focusing on regional networks.

In light of these phenomena, the question must be answered as to what elements are conducive to locating production in a given area, and what other factors exist – apart from distance and costs – that play a decisive role in the location of investments, and which regions benefit from these transformations. The formulated research problem allows for the establishment of an objective, which is the assessment of the significance of social capital in contemporary socio-economic realities as a crucial factor influencing locational decisions. The critical literature analysis method and the analysis of existing information and data were employed to achieve this objective.

## 2. Social Capital as a Factor in the Development of Regions

In analysing the changes occurring in the modern-day economy from a local or regional perspective, it must be underlined that a key role with positive significance is played by **social capital**. As pointed out by Jewtuchowicz, in order to emphasise the nature of social capital as related to social relations, it is increasingly referred to as relational capital (Jewtuchowicz, 2005, p. 119). However, in contrast to other factors (e.g. financial capital or fixed assets) it is characterised by distinct spatial features (local and regional). This means that in the ongoing transformations in production systems in the global economy and in supply chains, companies will take social capital into account in their location decisions as this capital is immobile, and therefore in order to exploit its potential it must be taken into consideration as one of a set of factors used in the search for new places to conduct economic activity.

It should be remembered that in contrast to human capital, social capital, which is clearly based on the resources of the former, extends considerably outside the economic sphere, and includes many phenomena of a sociological, ethnic and cultural nature, amongst others. Despite the fact that these two types of capital complement one another, as indicated by Woolcock (cf. Przygodzki, 2004, p. 97), the difference between them is nevertheless clear and significant. In identifying the principal difference between them, Klimczak underlined that human capital is private, can run out, can be recreated and expanded, and comes into being as a result of individual decisions. Social capital, meanwhile, belongs to a specific group, is not transferable, does not require investment and does not run out as it is used, however it does appreciate (Klimczak, 2006, p. 123). This current approach to social capital allows one to conclude that it is one of the key forms of intangible capital used in contemporary economic processes. As a result, following Matysiak, it can be said that it is the expression of the replacement of individual inputs in order to reduce uncertainties in economic activity and cooperation, wherein it relates to (Matysiak, 1999, p. 62):

1. expenditure on protection of private (individual) resources and goods,
2. expenditure on gathering information about the economic environment,
3. expenditure related to providing information about one's own characteristics to inspire trust in the environment.

The essence of social capital and its resulting increasing importance in contemporary economic phenomena, including those related to investment location, manifests itself, among others, in the fact that in undertaking initiatives the individual makes use not only of their own resources, but also relies on the opinions, experience and also attitudes and behaviour of other members of a given community. As a result, this creates feedback that mobilises the members of the community to increase their participation in socio-economic life by strengthening various types of informal ties. Additionally, in the region where it occurs, such capital of economic and political activity takes place in a dense network of social interactions, which limits opportunism and the abuse of power (Stawasz & Sikora-Fernandez, 2021, pp. 64-77). This is naturally related to the principle of closeness or even neighbourliness which strengthens social capital and its principle of reciprocity (linked to permanent and repeated relations between the members of a given community) (Korenik, 2011, p. 54).

It is widely considered that the source of social capital lies in the traditions of civic engagement, in the positive experiences from cooperation with local and regional communities, in organisations and associations that work for the benefit of the local community, in the attitudes of local leaders, and also in the education system. The most widely used definition was proposed by Putnam, according to whom “social capital refers to the organisational features of the community, such as trust, norms and networks, which can increase the efficiency of the community by facilitating coordinated action” (Putnam, 1995, p. 258).

One of the first authors to use the term social capital in their work was Coleman in the 1980s (Coleman, 1998, pp. 95-120), although it was first mentioned in *The Rural School Community Center* by Hanifan in 1916. Coleman began with the assumption that relations between individuals can be treated as a resource, stating that “as in the case of other forms of capital, social capital adds value, making it possible to achieve certain results” (Coleman, 1998, pp. 95-100). Importantly, social capital is an attribute of a defined social structure with a spatial reach, and is manifested in trust and norms, as well as relations and the attitude of the authorities. Therefore, social capital conditions to a significant degree the character of the economy, among others by encouraging the development of entrepreneurship in specific locations. However, it should also be remembered that “not all forms of social capital are conducive to economic development” (Grosse, 2004, p. 53). Ties and relations that are too stiff, combined with significant mistrust, e.g. towards people from outside or public authorities, can hinder the development of entrepreneurship in the form of various new socio-economic initiatives. Only flexible social cooperation that facilitates access to knowledge or learning encourages innovations and their spread among a given community, thus enabling economic development. For these reasons, the commonly accepted means for measuring social capital is that of participation in various forms of civic engagement in the local community (e.g. participation in associations, volunteering, or foundations and organisations for the benefit of the community) (Jewtuchowicz, 2005, p. 120).

In *Making Democracy Work*, Putnam analysed regional development in Italy and named such features of the functioning of a community as trust, social norms and networks of associations, that is features characteristic of social capital. In addition to specific features such as knowledge, experience, qualifications and skills, human resources are also characterised by features that are created in the relations both between individual human resources separately, and at the same time among all such resources together. The skill of cooperation and coordination for the common benefit strengthens the specifics of this group of resources. According to Putnam, “trust, norms and ties [...] can increase the efficiency of a community by facilitating coordinated action. Just like other forms of capital, social capital is productive because it enables the achievement of certain goals that would not have been achievable without it [...] For example, a group whose members demonstrate that they are worthy of trust and trust others will be able to achieve considerably more than a comparable group in which there is a lack of trust” (Putnam 1995, p. 258).

It therefore follows from Putnam’s considerations that social capital is the totality of norms, networks of common trust and ties that facilitate cooperation in order to obtain mutual benefits (Klimczak, 2006, p. 117). The author also reached such conclusions on the basis of individuals’ increasing individualism, with

decreasing social capital (Swianiewicz, 2005, p. 16). In particular, he considered as the base norm, the so-called rule of generalised reciprocity, which generates an increase in trust. The next rule concerns networks of civic engagement (e.g. neighbourhood associations, amateur groups), characterised by voluntary involvement and adopting the form of horizontal organisational structures. According to the author, the more such relations occur in a given community, in addition to strong reciprocated trust, the more this translates into economic growth. Central Italy was given as an example,, colloquially known as the Third Italy, in contrast to Southern Italy, whose existing social relations were described “abnormal familism” based on trusting only the closest family members. While these considerations and concepts regarding social capital in the development of regional Italy would seem to be correct, research on the USA, in which Putnam pointed to decreasing social trust and a reduction in the number of associations, does not fully explain the rapid development of many regions. Therefore, trust and honesty play a fundamental role in the model describing the communities in the studied regions. However, these relations and attitudes can be replaced with formal and informal institutions (the legal system, the internal rules of conduct applied by professional associations, efforts to maintain a good reputation). Yet, such replacement is costly and only the richest regions or countries can afford it (e.g. the USA), otherwise such institutions do not become trustworthy.

Clark did not fully agree with the assumptions of Putnam. In developing the New Political Culture concept, he noted that it is not possible to concentrate solely on traditional community organisations with regard to the societies of highly-developed countries, and that informal movements should also be analysed (cf. Swianiewicz, 2005, p. 16).

Bourdieu also understood social capital differently – as a collection of actual and potential resources linked to the possessing of permanent networks of institutionalised relations supported by mutual knowledge and recognition. This concerns belonging to a group that provides its members with support in the form of the capital possessed by the group. Important concepts introduced by this researcher are *field* and *habitus*. The concept of *field* cannot only be used to refer to place, but also to various dimensions of social life, while *habitus* means the totality of individuals’ acquired dispositions to act in the social dimension. Tying these two concepts together, it can be assumed that every individual can function in many *fields*, while their engagement is the result of *habitus*; a change in *habitus* causes a change of the *field* itself in which they are exemplified.

To sum up, it can be seen that in the literature there are various approaches used to explain and describe social capital. These can be collated into three sets of definitions, the first can be described as functional (such an approach was used by Coleman), while the second is related to the paradigm of collective action, cooperation and networks of connections (Putnam’s approach), and the third is structural in nature (Bourdieu) (cf. Herbst, 2007, pp. 69-72).

As noted by Bartkowski, none of the above approaches can be considered fully sufficient (Herbst, 2007, p. 72), and bearing in mind their shortcomings, their various aspects can be applied depending on the requirements, necessity, situation etc.

Additionally, it must be underlined that social capital cannot be automatically linked to socio-economic development. Assumptions cannot be adopted *a priori* that this capital has a beneficial influence on socio-economic development, whereas even if such a relationship does exist, it should be taken into consideration that contemporary social capital has a tendency to be eroded due to civilisational development and increasing individualistic attitudes. At the same time, overly strong ties within a given group can have an isolating effect and subsequently lead to stagnation or even social and economic regression.

As emphasised several times, social capital is currently being assigned increasing importance, especially as an answer to globalisation. The importance of the local scale is increasing in the issue of social capital. As noted by Jewtuchowicz, by causing, among others, a growth in uncertainty and a blurring of the concept of the nation state, globalisation has an activating effect on local communities, stimulating them to strengthen various types of local ties in order to protect their own

culture and identity (Jewtuchowicz, 2005, p. 38). Meanwhile, Castells (2000) claimed that a reaction to the increasing disintegration of spatial units and the virtualisation of borders can be seen in the mobilisation of local communities and their integration around local resources, thus creating the basis for the development of social capital. However, the aim of these processes is not alienation, but a certain reorientation of local socio-spatial structures in order to become actively involved in the ongoing processes of a globalising world while taking into account specific local values. Reorganisation and involvement in economic networks based on knowledge result in the creation of new, or maybe rather radical, changes on the existing local scale, with a growing empowerment of the local community, and as a consequence, it takes on an ever-greater degree of responsibility for the fate of its spatial unit. At the same time, local resources are reevaluated and the image of a given spatial unit is changed, and hence the creation and development of social capital. This favours the phenomenon of the endogenisation of external resources flowing into the region, for example in the form of the location of greenfield investments through the process of embeddedness (Wojtasiewicz, 2007, p. 310). This is linked to bringing in mobile development factors to the region, and then under the influence of one's own specific resources, imbuing them with a combination of relations and a different unique character, which to a large degree is an attribute of the region. Crucial in this process are the region's endogenous resources, both tangible and intangible, especially those with a unique character and constituting a source of competitive advantage for the region on the market. In this context, one should note *social embeddedness*, linked to the phenomena that occur in the regional community and cannot be quantified, such as entrepreneurship, innovative attitudes, trust, attitude patterns, self-identification and other features directly related to social capital itself. Another key concept is that of *institutional embeddedness*, which refers to research and development or financial institutions. As a consequence of the phenomenon of *embeddedness*, there is a blurring of the line between entrepreneurship and the surroundings within the region. In the context of these considerations, the lock-in effect and the network effect are important as the lock-in effect causes a deterioration in the attractiveness of alternative locations due to the costs of abandoning existing ones. Moreover, the network effect is directly linked to entry barriers, i.e. by joining a given network one has the possibility to make use of a specific package of services and products – this is similar to the concept of club benefits. Therefore, locating activity in a given region provides full access to benefits (specific, unique resources of the region) that are not the subject of competition and which cannot be fully internalised (Markowski, 1999, p. 105). This shaping of the process in the region results in the grouping of independent entities operating within its borders into coherent cells, wherein by adapting to the specifics of the region through *embeddedness*, regional solutions are created for the needs of operating in this area that are not transferred on a broader scale as overarching patterns. While it is true that technical progress or innovation are exogenic in nature, in the process of diffusion they become 'endogenised' through the use of the specific intangible resources of a given region. As indicated by Davides in his model regarding the innovation diffusion process, during diffusion, innovations themselves are subject to modifications, which through a growth in their value leads to an increase in spatial propagation of these improved innovations (cf. Gomułka, 1998). This improvement is undeniably linked to endogenisation, namely the use of the intangible resources of the region. For such a phenomenon to occur, certain internal resources are of course necessary, including above all developed social capital, ideally of a unique nature, which is able to attract external capital and transform it so that it becomes embedded. Naturally, not every external investment will be beneficial for a given area, and in practice, as can sometimes be observed, may generate many negative phenomena. Hence, social capital is vital, as it will counteract this type of negative phenomena. To paraphrase Robinson, it can be said that what is even worse for a region than 'bad' social capital is the lack of such capital<sup>1</sup>. To sum up, it is difficult for any development policy to be pursued when there is no social capital in a region.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Robinson wrote that, "the only thing worse than being exploited by capitalism is not being exploited by capitalism", see (Ratcliffe, 2016).

However, it should be remembered that the creation of this type of solution in regional structures is a selective process which occurs with varying intensity in various points within the region. Areas that have suitable resources of knowledge and capital, including social capital, become leaders in this process, and places where network nodes are formed (these are usually large urban centres with a modern structure). The new spatial structure of a region brings a new quality, but it also features discontinuity, and the phenomenon of internal preference occurs. At the same time, such a course of events is not given 'once and for all' due to the logic of development processes shaped by the new economy, which is changeable, and where transformations occur continuously and are of a sudden nature. This means that areas that were previously unattractive can suddenly become desired elements of development in the future, e.g. due to their unique character, location advantages, or for other reasons not yet known.

In light of the considerations so far, it can be said that the basic task of the authorities of local government units at various levels is to take action directed towards activating endogenous social potential, above all by creating a local atmosphere of entrepreneurship. This is all the more important as a simultaneous drop can be observed in the influence of the central authorities, with all of its ensuing results, even including the erosion of the authority of the elites. As a result, spatial units are gradually taking over some of the competencies previously reserved for the centre – a change that is occurring in a slow process of decentralisation. This process is not linear as such, and encounters many often formal (sometimes even utilitarian) and structural barriers, however it appears inevitable due to the changes occurring in the contemporary economy. This inevitability is the result of a greater flexibility in the structures of such spatial units, and a great potential adaptiveness as a response to increasing multi-directional changes in the surroundings and growing competitive pressure. Meanwhile, such a unit becomes a new participant in the marketplace alongside economic entities, and must independently face increasing competition on the market using its own resources, including social capital. For these reasons, competition as an element of the functioning of spatial units has become not only a reality, but also a standard in their activity. At the same time, in light of the weakening role of the state, it is necessary at the level of the local community (region) to restore social ties and as a result build and strengthen social capital. This is not only a response to the blurring of state structures, but also to the increase in turbulence in the surroundings, and hence to the rise in uncertainty of action.

In view of the above arguments, it would seem justified to claim that the ability of local communities to create and adapt innovations, adopt information technology, and make use of specific endogenous resources, have become the basis for success, expressed in the level of socio-economic development: both permanent and sustainable. It should be emphasised that social capital, which is the result of growing interdependence and mutual influence, is a fundamental element of these phenomena (processes).

Additionally, a phenomenon that has recently become particularly important is the ongoing dematerialisation of the course of economic processes undertaken in regions. In addition, in regions with a developed and also stable socio-economic situation and clear economic rules, as well as developed social capital in economic relations, a key role is played by trust, which considerably lowers transactional costs, and additionally stimulates a greater exchange of information, data and innovations. A certain regional structure is created, which Sztompke called a moral space endowed with such attributes as loyalty, trust, solidarity, reciprocity, respect and justice (Sztompke, 2016, p. 12).

As a consequence, within regions there are also two concurrent effects, namely *backwash* and *spread*. It should be underlined that they do not cancel out or exclude one another, as in the majority of cases they affect different socio-economic phenomena. However, in cases where one of them dominates (irrespective of the cause) or where one can begin to eliminate the impact of the other, unfavourable processes in the region are observed.

Concluding the considerations on social capital, it should also be noted that at the turn of the centuries, it began to be suggested that this capital can be not only a positive element (a guarantor), but also a negative element (become a barrier) to the creation of development, and that stiff frameworks (e.g. of mentality or culture) may not be conducive to the absorption of new ideas. In the subject

literature, new concepts began to appear as the next step in the knowledge-based modification of the economy. There were also increasing numbers of references to creative capital. The first person to draw attention to creativity as a factor in regional development was the Swedish geographer Törnqvist, in his *Creativity and the renewal of the Leif region* (1983) (Törnqvist, 1983, pp. 91-112). He introduced the concept of the *creative milieu*, which featured considerable information resources, their ease of transference, and the accumulation of knowledge (e.g. in university environments), as well as decision-making personnel with a high level of competence in particular types of activity. The result of the co-occurrence of these elements is creativity, understood as the ability to create tangible and intangible value. However, this would appear rather to be a new form of the functioning of social capital, resulting from the forming of the digital economy, as well as the turbulences and uncertainties occurring in the world economy, and in individual states or regions. Despite all this, it should be expected that social capital will long remain an important factor in the development of regions, although this will be subject to change, just as the modern-day economy is subject to transformations.

### 3. Conclusion

According to the latest analyses, regions in which a modern economy has emerged based on social capital relatively mildly experienced the turmoil of the pandemic (with small exceptions) and other disruptions, and have in many situations begun to 'acclimatise' to such a state. This was confirmed by Budner and Gorynia (Budner & Gorynia, 2021) who indicated that during the pandemic some regions in Poland showed medium-term economic resilience, which was then maintained, "this involved regions with a large share of innovative, high technologies. The situation is similar in the services sector, especially of a higher order (e.g. shared service centres, finance, insurance, marketing)". In the search for ways out of the current turmoil in the economy, there is an emerging predominance of location decisions driven by security issues. This is particularly true for sensitive sectors related to the functioning of the digital economy. In such a situation, regions in which social capital is engaged in creating a modern economy are becoming more attractive. These are regions that demonstrate significant stability and an increased absorption of modern investments. As emphasised by Stawasz and Sikora-Fernandez, "a high level of social capital is important during crisis situations because the national/local authorities responsible for combatting the crisis can implement decisions that complicate normal everyday life. These authorities have the consent of society to engage public funds in initiatives related to limiting the scale of the crisis, and to undertake action that aims to restore the state of relative balance that existed before the crisis" (Stawasz & Sikora-Fernandez, 2020, pp. 64-77). It is therefore natural that social capital not only becomes a guarantor of rapid 'acclimatisation' of investments, but also constitutes a certain external influence limiting the costs borne by investors. As a result, social capital is an important strategic resource in the modern economy, and can contribute to stabilising economic processes. Naturally, investments can be made in areas where social capital is not fully developed or, for example, where it is reactive in nature, however in such a situation the costs will be higher, the effect may not be fully satisfactory, and the implementation time may be too long for current needs and expectations.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that social capital is and will continue to be an important factor in the process of making location decisions in the field of economic activity. Amid the increasing uncertainty and perturbations in various spheres of the economy, it continues to act as a stabiliser and a factor that strengthens security. However, with the ongoing development of the digital economy, expectations with regard to social capital will be subject to change. There will be an increase in the importance of its qualitative components, often of an intangible and additionally unquantifiable nature, together with an appreciation of pro-innovative attitudes and the skill to rapidly adapt to the changing surroundings.

In summary, the conducted analysis of source information indicates that in current circumstances, human capital emerges as a significant determinant of locational decision-making, and its importance is expected to grow. It should also be noted that the quality of this capital constitutes a vital element in the stability of socio-economic situations within various spatial units.

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## Kapitał społeczny w reorientacji decyzji lokalizacyjnych

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**Streszczenie:** Perturbacje występujące współcześnie w gospodarce światowej skutkują różnymi przeobrażeniami, często o rewolucyjnym charakterze. Reorientacja zachowań dotyczy m.in. skracania łańcuchów dostaw oraz zmiany polityki lokalizacyjnej. Takie przekształcenia wymuszają poszukiwania nowych miejsc dla realokacji kapitału. W tym procesie szczególnego znaczenia nabierają regiony w których występuje ukształtowany kapitał społeczny cechujący się wysoką adaptacją do warunków gospodarki cyfrowej i nowoczesną formą organizacji, w której dominuje elastyczna kooperacja.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kapitał społeczny, lokalizacja, gospodarka cyfrowa, endogenizacja, region

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