

The Onward Sweep of Social Capital: Causes and Consequences for Understanding Cities, Communities and Urban Movements

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Only a couple of decades ago urban movements were demanding, usually without much success, increased participation by the grassroots and a democratization of urban politics. Even though they staged what were perceived as 'urban revolts' (Castells, 1983: 65) and 'backyard revolutions' (Boyte, 1980), the structures of local decision-making did not open up very far; established interests in urban renewal hardly budged. Meanwhile, however, the movements' demands appear to have become reality: the way politicians, urban scholars and activists in urban development now all highlight the importance of grassroots empowerment and citizen participation for dealing with urban problems makes it look as if success has finally been achieved. The topic of urban 'exclusion' is finally on the official agenda; policy-makers of all stripes apply not only the rhetoric of grassroots participation, but also a variety of programs addressing urban problems that seek to incorporate and harness community-based interests and local activism.

What might appear as the fulfilment of earlier grassroots empowerment claims is actually part of a new mode of governance that has emerged in and for neglected and disadvantaged areas and communities.¹ Their 'exclusion' is now described as having a new, more multidimensional character than that which inequality or segregation formerly described, and the need for new policies to address this problematic side of neoliberalism seems uncontested. The concept of 'social capital' plays a key role in these new policies, as it presumably connects local participation, based on horizontal networks and reciprocity, with such positive results as economic growth and democratic intensity, even — or especially — in distressed, excluded areas.

Through examining the way 'social capital' has been deployed by researchers and practitioners in the field of urban movements and community development, this article reveals the powerful and in many ways effective role the concept is playing in framing the contemporary reconfigurations in local state-society relations, impacting especially on the trajectory of third or voluntary sector development. It does so by exemplifying a more general trend of dissolving social and political perspectives into economic ones, by painting a variety of different kinds of civic engagement into a single — positively charged — corner, and thereby creating a new framework for dealing with urban inequality and poverty that appears to involve mobilization from below but does so in an extremely circumscribed and biased way.

1 Unlike older modes of governance (i.e. state forms of coordination of social systems), where the state is conceived as 'steering' society and the economy through political brokerage and defining priorities, new modes of governance highlight a variety of formal and informal types of public-private interaction. This, however, is not to imply a decline of the state but rather a process of state transformation (cf. Pierre, 2000).

To develop this argument, the article begins by exploring the added value the concept 'social capital' brings to urban development analysis and to explaining the role and function of local movements. It traces the needs and deficits the 'social capital' perspective responds to, thus explaining its remarkable career and why it looms so large within the urban development discourse. Next, it focuses on some of the blind spots and problematic consequences following from the ambiguities of the 'social capital' concept and shows how its contradictions influence and limit our understanding of contemporary urban change. By prioritizing specific forms of civic engagement (while neglecting others), it filters the contemporary reconfigurations in the relationship of civil society, state and market in a peculiar way, which is conducive to supporting the spread of market forces in areas so far beyond the reach of capital. The third section, finally, explores the functions this new discourse might be playing within the analysis of urban change and justice. Its avoidance of 'traditional' categories (such as power, domination, exploitation) and the picturing of contemporary processes of marginalization as problems of insufficiently mobilized 'social capital' direct attention to the self-activation (potentials) of different communities, whether in the form of civic engagement of well-to-do volunteers or in the form of activation/reinsertion (into the low-wage labour market) of the marginalized. Both types of mobilized activities within the highly inhomogeneous 'third sector' help, as will be shown, not only to unburden the local (welfare) state, but also to support market forces in areas that used to be beyond their reach.

The promise of 'social capital'

The speed with which the 'social capital' concept has swept from academic studies (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993a) into policy, media and activist discourse is evidence of a tremendous appeal. Apparently, it promises to fill important needs in a variety of contexts. Before looking at the needs this concept promises to address, the concept itself should be introduced.

What's in the concept?

Attaching the adjective 'social' to the economic term 'capital' suggests that, next to 'non-social' forms of capital (such as finance capital, material, physical capital or human capital), there exists a social variant of capital, which shares with other forms of capital the capacity to grow through utilization.² Conversely, by modifying 'capital' as 'social', the combination signals the attempt to overcome some of the difficulties of dominant economic models in incorporating non-market variables into accounts of human behaviour and thus drawing attention to neglected non-market conditions of economic growth and social development. Deliberately or not, once associational activities and civic resources are labelled as a form of capital, they appear as economic behaviour/assets — a language effect, which the conceptual debates do not usually make very explicit, but which influences the way the emerging discourse perceives associational activity.

Though the exact meaning of the social capital concept has been transformed and become more differentiated in the course of its career, it has not gained in precision.³ While for Coleman (1988; 1990) a functional, economic definition was still dominant,⁴

² 'Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive' (Coleman, 1988: S98)

³ Cf. Harriss and de Renzio (1997), Edwards and Foley (1998), Portes (1998), Woolcock (1998), Edwards et al. (2001) and Fine (2001).

⁴ Coleman introduced the concept as a corrective to the 'broadly perpetrated fiction' that society 'consists of a set of independent individuals ... and that the functioning of the social system consists of the combination of these actions of independent individuals' (1990: 300). Thus, '[social capital] is defined by its function ... [It] inheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons ... lodged neither in individuals nor in physical implements of production' (*ibid.*: 302), 'it is embodied in the *relations among persons*' (*ibid.*: 304; 1988: S98).

the meaning of the concept was transformed thanks to its export to Italy and re-import to the United States by Putnam into a value-charged, normative category, on whose presence or absence the well-being of individuals, communities, cities, regions and countries has come to depend. While for Coleman 'social capital' meant merely a resource that allows individual and collective actors to achieve specific goals that could not be achieved in its absence,⁵ with Putnam the category gains an additional dimension, that the community as a whole stands to gain, in economic as well as civic and democratic terms, from the presence of this special substance (Putnam, 1993a: 185; 2000: 349). Networks and their norms, reciprocity and trustworthiness, appear as productive and positive; both empirical and theoretical links are assumed between membership rates in voluntary associations and more generalized civic engagement and democratic participation.

At its core, the social capital perspective argues that both the quality of democratic politics and the vitality of a region's economic life depend on the degree to which its people enjoy social capital. This, in turn, depends on the quality of its associational life, because voluntary associations are seen to generate social capital by supporting norms of reciprocity and civic engagement, building social trust and providing networks of social relations that can be mobilized for civic action (Putnam, 1993a; 1993b; 1995a; 1995b; 2000: 19). Compared to Coleman's social capital, the field of what might constitute or generate social capital has thus been narrowed and simultaneously valorized: social capital denotes attitudes and habits conducive to civic engagement. And this kind of social capital can be enhanced or regenerated by state intervention: 'The social capital approach promises to uncover new ways of combining social infrastructure with public policies to revitalize America's stock of social capital' (Putnam, 1993b: 42).

In spite of the normative charge the concept gained through Putnam, it did not lose its original economistic traits. It still reduces, by turning 'the social', i.e. something non-economic, into (a form of) capital, and social relations into context-independent causal relations. Vastly different types of voluntary associations — choral societies, bowling leagues, trade unions, church groups or right wing militias — become theoretically and politically comparable in that all of them constitute a set of social resources shaped by trust and reciprocity. The accumulation of that 'capital', regardless of the specific ends to which that capital is put, is what they share.

In other words, defining these resources as 'social capital' not only makes their 'productive' capacity akin to similarly productive economic factors,⁶ but regardless of their particular goals and contexts, they are all claimed to have pro-social consequences including 'mutual support, cooperation, trust, institutional effectiveness' (Putnam, 2001: 22), leading to private goods such as better health or career success as well as public goods such as efficient community problem-solving, tolerance and effective democracy, and thereby also to economic growth and prosperity for the community, region or nation they are part of. While Putnam meanwhile acknowledges that 'social capital' can also have anti-social consequences including 'sectarianism, ethnocentrism and corruption' (*ibid.*), it remains the case that through this normative definition of social capital, highlighting mutual support, cooperation, trust and institutional effectiveness as goods (even if they do not always result in wider goods), Putnam makes it difficult to identify networks and relationships that do not enhance democracy, and diverts attention from those forms of sociability that have anti-democratic or oppressive effects.

Even though many of the critical points and blind spots of the original social capital concept have been addressed by newer studies — missing categories, such as political parties or unions, have been integrated into the concept (*cf.* Skocpol, 1996; Foley and Edwards, 1997a) and some conceptual inconsistencies have been ameliorated, for

5 'The function identified by the concept 'social capital' is the value of those aspects of social structure to actors, as resources that can be used by the actors to realize their interests' (Coleman, 1990: 305).

6 The positive consequences of sociability are viewed as 'sources of power and influence, like the size of one's stock holdings or bank account' (Portes, 1998: 2).

example by adding the differentiations of 'bonding, bridging and linking social capital' (*cf.* Woolcock, 1998; Putnam, 2000: 22) — a central definitional weakness continues to pervade the literature: the identification of 'social capital' with the resources obtained through it. Cause, function and consequences are conflated in a circular argument (OECD, 2001: 43):

As a property of communities and nations rather than individuals, social capital is simultaneously a cause and an effect. It leads to positive outcomes, such as economic development, and its existence is inferred from the same outcomes. Cities that are well governed and moving ahead economically do so because they have high social capital; poorer cities lack in this civic virtue (Portes, 1998: 19).⁷

This tautological use of the term as both explanation and object being explained reappears in many of the studies applying the concept. Unsurprisingly, then, researchers find statistical correlations — e.g. 'neighborhoods with higher levels of social capital ... are more likely to remain stable over time ... Both loyalty and attachment to neighborhood are higher in neighborhoods that remain stable over time' (Temkin and Rohe, 1998: 84) — because dependent variables and independent variables measure the same thing.

It has been this ambiguous definition of 'social capital' that has meanwhile been picked up by an enormous tide of scholarly studies, by all kinds of political debates, in the development policies of the World Bank for the South as well as in the new programs for declining urban neighbourhoods in the North.⁸ Even though serious weaknesses in the concept have been pointed out early on (see, e.g., Levi, 1996; Tarrow, 1996; Jackman and Miller, 1998), its essential qualifications and ambivalences have remained 'intact' in its use and application by a multitude of followers.

Why the appeal of the concept?

The speed with which 'social capital' has spread across such a variety of disciplines, as well as political and media contexts, points to a vacuum in the current political and intellectual climate. A demand for usable explanatory approaches in the face of apparent market failure, in addition to state failure,⁹ paralleled by the limited scope of purely economic or purely political perspectives and interventions, has created resonance for 'third way' suggestions that seek to connect 'the economic' with 'the social' (beyond market and state) in new ways. Thus, meso-concepts have risen to prominence that emphasize the embedding of economic and political variables in intermediary social structures, such as neighbourhoods, associations, churches and community organizations (*cf.* Jessop, 2002), as well as 'mixed concepts' that refer to the

⁷ Coleman himself started that proliferation by including under the term some of the mechanisms that generated social capital; the consequences of its possession; and the 'appropriable' social organization that provided the context for both sources and effects to materialize' (Portes, 1998: 5).

⁸ These debates and policies all but ignore Bourdieu's (1983) definition of social capital. Unlike Coleman's and Putnam's, Bourdieu's social capital is not based on neoclassical economics, though it also has little to do with Marx's concept of capital. His interest is in the structures and processes that reproduce power and privilege, and capital — for him a form of power — implies the capacity to exert control over one's future as well as that of others (*cf.* Postone *et al.*, 1993: 4). Social capital presents, for Bourdieu, one of three forms of symbolic capital which individuals dispose of (the other two being cultural and economic capital), which together explain the structure and dynamic of society and the distribution of life chances (Bourdieu, 1986: 252-3). The fact that Bourdieu's work, though published and accessible in English since the mid-1980s, has been so widely ignored in the ensuing social capital debates is likely due to the theoretical incompatibility of class-analytical approaches and pluralist approaches frequently characteristic of European vs North American research (*cf.* Mayer, 1995). Neither Coleman nor Putnam pays attention to how relations among classes or strata constitute the relations among individuals said to embody social capital.

⁹ The state's ability to deliver through 'tax-and-spend' measures is seen as no longer working; this failure can neither be corrected through improved political practice nor by 'more market, less state'. And market failure, i.e. the inability of markets to allocate scarce resources efficiently through the pursuit of monetized private interest, can no longer be corrected either by extending the logic of the market or by compensatory state action.

necessary combination of private, public and civil resources (welfare mix, mixed economy etc.). 'Social capital', too, is a mixed concept that implies bringing economic and social resources together and promises gains from embedding economic activities within a historically grown culture of trust.¹⁰

While the popularity of these new terms may be seen as reflecting a heightened awareness in policy and academic circles of the importance of non-economic conditions, the interest behind this awareness is, of course, in enhanced economic performance. The increasing use of economic analysis by policy-makers and the keener interest in economic output by social scientists both speak to this effect. Urban analysis and urban policy-making have been no exception: a reorientation in outlook as well as language is just as obvious.

If we look at the contemporary debates about the city — for example about sustainable urban development, declining neighbourhoods and community development — they describe not only new problems and, respectively, new approaches and policies to deal with these problems, but they also manifest a shift in language. New terminology has become popular here as well: instead of poverty, the talk is of 'social exclusion'; instead of social 'equality', one talks of 'inclusion'; and instead of 'integration', nowadays the goal is 'social cohesion'. These new categories similarly direct the focus onto non-economic conditions for economic performance: urban problems appear less as symptoms of urban decline, but as barriers to competitiveness and as reducing social cohesion, which in turn leads to social and economic exclusion. In particular the concept of 'exclusion' has gained a prominent place within western social science and policy discourse and increasingly displaced traditional categories of (anti)poverty research and politics.¹¹ Policies no longer formulate social equality as their goal, but 'inclusion', and the instrument for achieving this goal is increasingly seen in the mobilization of residents through comprehensive approaches and the development of 'social capital'.¹²

While scholars are still debating and contesting the adequacy and definitions of these new categories, they appear — in the various realms of practice, from the World Bank to neighbourhood initiatives, politicians and foundations — clear in terms of their normative message as well as their implied causal relations: access to 'social capital' implies improved competitiveness as well as social cohesion; lack of 'social capital', however, correlates with lack of economic success and, consequently, with social exclusion and poverty (*cf.* Harloe, 2001). As such, the concept has entered a myriad of disciplines and areas, where the significance of social networking for the mobilization of growth potentials has been rediscovered as a central variable — whether to explain school performance, (dys)functional families, economic and social development and the quality of life of different communities, or to determine the functioning of collective action, democracy and governance (Woolcock, 1998).

The most important role in the world-wide expansion of the social capital perspective has likely been played by the World Bank. When in the course of the 1990s the limits of the purely neoliberal politics of the Washington consensus¹³ became

10 'The potential fungibility of diverse sources of capital reduces the distance between the sociological and economic perspectives and simultaneously engages the attention of policy-makers seeking less costly, non-economic solutions to social problems' (Portes, 1998: 2).

11 Its origin lies in French social policy where it is based on a long tradition of French republicanism, which defines solidarity and inclusion as central elements of civil rights (Silver, 1996). Thus, 'inclusion' originally implied the republican idea of universal, state-guaranteed rights, providing the basis for later 'reinsertion' measures for the marginalized as encouraged by the European Commission.

12 The origin of this category lies mostly in the Putnam-inspired debate on social capital in the US, which has been spread by global institutions such as the World Bank and OECD as well as academic transfer processes (*cf.* Putnam, 2001).

13 The term 'Washington consensus' was coined by John Williamson (1990: 1): "Washington" meant primarily the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the US Executive Branch ... and the think tanks concerned with economic policy. It seemed to me that one could identify 9 or 10 policy areas in which 'Washington' could muster something like a consensus on what countries ought to be doing, and so I labeled this program the 'Washington consensus' or the 'Washington agenda' (*cf.* also Williamson, 1997:

apparent, state interventions to improve social conditions made it back onto the agenda. 'Making markets work requires more than just low inflation, it requires sound financial regulation, competition policy, and policies to facilitate the transfer of technology, to name some fundamental issues neglected by the Washington consensus' (Stiglitz, 1998: 1): 'adjustment with a human face' was the response to the unresolved problems of poverty, gender inequality and environmental problems.

This post-Washington¹⁴ consensus provided the basis on which the World Bank's social scientists have since been promoting the social capital perspective. They use it to argue both the need for market-supporting policies and for interventions in civil society to compensate market deficits. It thus responds to the demand that has grown along with the criticism of the Washington consensus for ignoring the problems of the poor, the women, the environment and for its lack of substantial forms of participation. According to Woolcock, one of the leading social scientists at the Development Research Group of the World Bank, the social capital perspective introduces (in spite of the conceptual weaknesses, many of which he concedes [1998]) a more progressive analytical and policy agenda as part of the post-Washington consensus.

The World Bank's website on social capital, which was established in 1998 (<http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital>),¹⁵ reproduces the positive connotations of Putnam's definition and presents rather romanticized views of family and civil society. Only those forms of social capital that figure in clientelism and corruption are presented as negative. Other civil society actors — political institutions, employer organizations or unions — are hardly present. Under the heading of 'public sector', on the other hand, the issue is basically 'good governance' on the basis of cooperation with, and contracting out to, private sector and civil society.

By highlighting the positive, democracy- and efficiency-enhancing consequences of civil society networks, this conception of social capital has become attractive for policy-makers searching for non-economic (low-cost) solutions to social problems. And by connecting economic with social analysis, it became attractive for social science research, which has found, in comparative research in many different fields, that economic performance depends on a variety of non-economic factors. The popularity was furthered by an intellectual climate of growing distance to postmodern approaches: in this climate, a concept that appears to engage with the real world, with regard to 'capital' as well as 'the social', gains quite an attractive force. Thus the 'social capitalists' succeeded in placing themselves in the vanguard of the swelling reaction against both neoliberalism and excessive statism.

The appeal of 'social capital' in the urban context is especially powerful, both in research and in practice. Scholars as well as policy-makers and activists in the field of urban development have boldly appropriated the concept and incorporated it into their own work. Since social capital unfolds its very own effects particularly on the local/community level,¹⁶ it is hardly surprising that its promise has been taken up in this field

60-1). The Washington consensus was a reaction to the previous interventionist approach to development under the McNamara era of the World Bank, characterized by Keynesianism, welfarism and modernization. Instead, the Washington consensus stressed trade liberalization, privatization and deregulation (cf. Fine, 2001: 134).

14 The post-Washington consensus is most closely associated with its leading proponent, Joe Stiglitz, Senior Vice President and Chief Economist to the World Bank over the last years of the 1990s. He summarized the new approach as follows: 'the choice is not whether the state should or should not be involved. Instead, it is often a matter of how it gets involved. More importantly, we should not see the state and markets as substitutes ... the government should see itself as a complement to markets, undertaking those actions that make markets fulfill their functions better' (Stiglitz, 1998: 25). Thus, the post-Washington consensus comprehends the social as the non-market response to market imperfection (Fine, 2001: 139).

15 Besides this huge website, the World Bank also maintains an 'Email Discussion Group on Social Capital' and a 'Social Capital Newsletter' (Nexus), and it collaborates with the IRIS Center at Maryland University to further social science dealing with social capital (cf. <http://www.inform.umd.edu/iris/soccap.html>).

16 Even though Skocpol *et al.* (2000) criticize the romanticizing transfiguration of local associations characteristic of Putnam's (2000: 153ff) definition of social capital (he contends, still in 2000, that national social movement organizations do not constitute social capital, because they do not work with personal networks), and point to the strong traditional and contemporary role of regional and nationwide

in so many ways. The innovative potentials of the city, of the community, of the neighbourhood and of community-based initiatives are increasingly looked at from the perspective of the social capital approach. This was initially primarily the case in the US, where a broad communitarian tradition had long prepared the ground for such perspectives (Sirianni and Friedland, 1995; 2001; Gittell and Vidal, 1998; Special Issue of *Housing Policy Debate*, 1998;¹⁷ Warren, 1998; Chupp, 1999; Gittell *et al.*, 1999; Chaskin *et al.*, 2000; Rubin, 2000; Silverman, 2001), but applies increasingly to analyses of urban politics in western Europe (Evers, 2000; 2001; Geißel and Kern, 2000; Taylor, 2000; Butler and Robson, 2001; Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Hermann and Lang, 2001; Purdue, 2001). Such studies view the work of civic and community organizations as important sources for the generation of local social capital, as they increase political participation and — either through capacity building and complex public-private partnerships, or by mobilizing public pressure on political representatives and administrations.

While most of these urban and community-focused studies build on Putnam's definition of social capital, some (especially of the American) authors transcend this definition: for them it is less the apolitical voluntary associations that enhance the democratic substance of societies, but rather the activist and explicitly political organizations, whose mobilizations 'are far more likely to generate Putnam's active citizenry than the choral societies, bird-watching clubs and bowling leagues he is so fond of citing' (Foley and Edwards, 1996: 49). A few have become critical of the way community development work has been lapping up Putnam's arguments about the importance of social capital understood as voluntary associations and civic trust (e.g. DeFilippis, 2001).

The explosion of this literature and the widespread, mostly uncritical, embrace of the concept signal, however, that 'social capital' must be bringing some added value to analysis in the field of urban revitalization and development. It seems specifically valuable with regard to explaining the role and function of community movements within this context. It allows third-sector organizations and local movements to be described as particularly competent for local problem-solving and networking and brings into focus their skills in (re)vitalizing local participation. By mobilizing trust and community networks, they are seen to develop latent social economy potentials, to mobilize credit and other tangible and intangible resources, or to manage the insertion of unemployed residents into different forms of employment (in the low-wage sector, micro-enterprise or the associational economy). The social capital concept thus captures an increasingly important function of this type of contemporary urban movement. It not only points analytic attention to the embeddedness of cultural factors in meso-level social structures such as neighbourhoods, churches, voluntary and community organizations, but, by bringing the mediating levels of social structure into the analysis of contemporary democracy, it also helps our understanding of collaboration and cooptation processes and of the emergence of the basis of entrepreneurialism in urban social movements. However, as will be shown, in doing so it also distracts attention from how social and political conditions structure that associational life.

Omissions and neglects of the social capital perspective in reading urban movements

The ambiguities and intrinsic contradictions of the social capital concept lead to a number of problems when it is applied to concrete empirical analysis, and end up by

associations, it is primarily the civil society activities at the local level that are subsumed under the social capital approach. Incidentally, besides national movements, *transnational* movements have also been included within the social capital perspective (Minkoff, 1997; Smith, 1998).

17 Putnam himself marked the importance of social capital for community development in his preface to this Special Issue: 'Foreword to social capital: its importance to housing and community development' (1998: v-viii).

actually obstructing our understanding of contemporary restructuring processes and the newly emerging relationships between civil society, social movements and the state. Especially when applied to the local level, these immanent tensions come to the fore concretely. The perspective has difficulties with certain forms of civic engagement: new types of urban activism and movements involving protest and other forms of disruptive repertoires do not appear on the radar screen of most social capital scholars and never on that of policy discourse. This exclusion betrays the one-sided normative conception of state-civil society relations so characteristic of the social capital perspective. The perspective also tends to downplay the built-in risks of innovative capacity-building approaches of community-based organizations in the context of current restructuring; overlooking how present economic and political processes structure and transform contemporary forms of civic engagement has problematic consequences illustrative of the concept's presumed independence from context. Though state-society relations have been significantly reconfigured, the social capital perspective does not reflect on these reconfigurations, although they provide the basis for its emergence as such an attractive framework.

A blind eye to adversarial movements – contemporary varieties of civic engagement reveal non-harmonious civil society

Urban and community research working with the social capital concept deals, empirically, with a kaleidoscope of third sector initiatives and civic activities, but a particular group of urban activism remains systematically excluded. Adversarial movements and protest mobilizations are, save for a few exceptions,¹⁸ filtered out. While viewing certain historical movements as social capital,¹⁹ Putnam initially excluded from his definition of 'civic engagement' contemporary movements that pursue policy change or that advance a cause, arguing they neither cut across social cleavages nor display evidence of real civic engagement (Putnam, 2000: 152–60; cf. Foley and Edwards, 1996: 43–4; 1997a: 554). He responded to criticism by minimizing the significance of 'grassroots social protest'.²⁰ But even those of his critics who explicitly see political movements as important actors for enhancing democracy or contributing to effective governance, have difficulties with the attribution of the social capital label to protest milieus, even though contemporary social movement research has shown how they, too, build trust and civic action among their members and often even build their own economic base (cf. Kreutz *et al.*, 1984; Roth, 1994; Cress and Snow, 1996; Rucht *et al.*, 1997; Heider, 2002). Such milieus might even contribute to enhancing democracy and improve the lot of the disadvantaged beyond their own group, as Piven and Cloward (1995) have shown for conflictive, non-collaborative movements.

This blind spot in the social capital perspective — the avoidance of adversarial movements — certainly has to do with the ambivalence of protest milieus which represent, on the one hand, social networks shaped by trust, cooperation and shared values, allowing them to unfold high levels of action, i.e. to mobilize 'social capital',

18 One of the few exceptions is Warren's (1998) study of the QUEST campaign by COPS in San Antonio, Texas.

19 In retrospect, social movements that have succeeded in democratizing society (and been transformed in the process), such as the civil rights movement or parts of the labour movement, are described by Putnam as wielding social capital: 'Historically, social capital has been the main weapon of the have-nots, who lacked other forms of capital. 'Solidarity forever' is a proud, strategically sensible rallying cry for those, such as ethnic minorities or the working class, who lack access to conventional political clout' (Putnam, 2000: 359).

20 'The evidence for grassroots involvement in 'progressive' social movements is weak' (Putnam, 2000: 161). These days, 'movement-type' political actions are accepted as 'standard operating procedure' across the political spectrum, unlike three or four decades ago. On the other hand, 'actual involvement is limited to a small and ageing fraction of the population' (*ibid.*: 165). 'I know of no evidence that actual participation in grassroots social movements has grown in the past few decades to offset the massive declines in more conventional forms of social and political participation' (*ibid.*: 166).

while on the other hand, towards the 'outside' world they articulate conflict and use disruptive action repertoires, thus challenging relations of trust and reciprocity (with other social groups) and 'social capital'. Movement groups thus pose, unlike bowling clubs or choral societies, the question 'social capital for whom and to what end?' (as well as 'inclusion for whom?') and thereby problematize a concept of civil society free of conflict and neutral about different interests. Not all movements fit into the peculiar understanding of a (harmonious) relationship between civil society and the state inherent in the social capital perspective.

The 'bonding/bridging' differentiation of social capital (Putnam, 2000: 22–4) does facilitate clarification of certain movement effects: during the initial phases of movements small groups usually coalesce in order to highlight a social or political problem and to mobilize broader protest. These small groups that are essential for the beginning phases of a movement and that are characterized by 'strong ties', do not yet have any democratizing effects, since they generate mere 'bonding' amongst homogeneous group members. But over the course of the following phases, as broader discontent gets constructed via framing processes and mobilization (Raschke, 1985: 118), increasingly more outside contacts, media work, and expanding connections with different support and mediating organizations will contribute to the generation of more open and inclusive networks. Through this 'bridging' process 'social capital' gets mobilized on the basis of 'weak ties'; within 'social capital' discourse a gain in terms of democracy is achieved.²¹

A close-up look at unfolding movements, especially contemporary movements within cities, cannot, however, confirm such a development. If we take the case of German new social movements of the 1980s, we may read the turn of the alternative protest milieus towards green electoral strategies as indication of an emerging shared politics across milieu boundaries, along with the mobilization of new resources. Similarly, the incorporation of many urban movement organizations into public-private partnerships and new municipal programs in the course of the 1990s, which aided many of them in their transformation into service and development agencies, did enhance their 'bridging' functions — but that did not go hand in hand with enhancing their democratizing potential. The movement scene and its intermediary environment have meanwhile developed, in North American as well as European cities, a rather complex profile, where a growing number of community-based organizations, now partnering in the implementation of service delivery, community management and welfare-to-work programs, has emerged next to an equally growing panoply of fragmented, frequently small-scale, but increasingly networked initiatives and struggles that have arisen in response to the exclusionary practices and effects of the 'entrepreneurial city' (Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Mayer, 1998). Both the — by now — rather institutionalized development and employment organizations that work with comprehensive programs, and the newer political movements, ranging from movements of the unemployed, 'Reclaim the Streets' groups and 'Inner City' actions, all the way to so-called poor people's movements of the homeless, react to the intensifying, spatially concentrated forms of urban poverty, un- and underemployment, and marginalization (Mayer, 1999a; Hamel *et al.*, 2000).

The 'social capital' and 'capacity building' discourse deals almost exclusively with the first variant, the rather institutionalized community-based organizations that have routinized their collaboration with local as well as other levels of government and/or with funding agencies (Cortés, 1993; Laville and Gardin, 1996; Wallis, 1998; Wallis *et al.*, 1998; Sampson, 1999; Evers *et al.*, 2000; Taylor, 2000; Chaskin *et al.*, 2001; Silverman, 2001). Where foundations have made the social capital perspective a central component of their anti-poverty or community development work, the literature shows how this has directly enforced the spread of 'non-confrontational

21 Of course there are also many instances where mere 'bonding' remains the predominant form of movement networking, when in-grown communities or 'scenes' establish themselves, which reproduce more or less incestuously — thus no longer fitting the strict definition of 'social movement'.

methods' and consensus organizing, displacing advocacy or conflict orientations (*cf.* Gittell and Vidal, 1998). The fact that 'social capital' formation is seen as particularly important for resource-poor groups — more important than for middle-class groups that enjoy access to a broad variety of options to articulate their interests and influence decision-making processes — is certainly commonplace in the development debate.²² But the fact that the *movements* of resource-weak groups, too, have social capital generating effects is rather negated. Groups using confrontational repertoires such as the homeless protests studied by Wagner (1993) or Wright (1997) do, however, occasionally succeed, in the process of resisting efforts to drive them out of the downtowns, their setting up of encampments, holding public forums and making demands on the city's political representatives, to develop solidarity, political consciousness and organizational infrastructures — i.e. not only 'social capital', but also collective consciousness. This process becomes facilitated where resource-rich, political advocacy groups dedicate themselves to the problems of the homeless or where professional activists make their resources available to such 'poor people's' organizations (*cf.* Cress and Snow, 1996).

Other local networks of movements that generate, in the process of protest mobilization, the substance nowadays labelled 'social capital' also fall outside the purview of the social capital perspective. Movements of the unemployed or worksite organizing amongst the precariously employed, low- or sub-minimum waged, often immigrant workers (*cf.* Aguiton, 1998; Combesque, 1998; FALZ, 1998; Rosenberg, 2002), initiatives of welfare recipients and networks against workfare programs, as well as the protest mobilizations of 'workfare' workers as organized by new organizations such as WEP Workers Together! (WWT!) in New York (since 1996) or older organizations such as ACORN (formed in 1970), together with unions and community organizations (Krinsky, 1998; Harvey, 2000: 128; Peck, 2001: 365), all fall outside the 'social capital' framework, even though a causal relation between the work of such groups and democracy effects might be more clearly demonstrable than with the associations and NGOs so dear to the World Bank. These movements take up neglected and repressed demands, hold politicians accountable and don't shy away from conflict with corporations or state power. They show that society does not cooperate as harmoniously as suggested within the world of social capitalists, where categories of exploitation and power have no space, where in fact neither multinational corporations and banks nor oppositional movements ever appear as actors.

Contemporary restructuring processes threaten the promise of local social capital

While the reading of community-based development activism suggested by the social capital perspective facilitates our understanding of its institutional innovations and its potential for empowering marginalized and/or poor communities, this gain comes at a price. As the social capital discourse valorizes civic engagement in a social economy, it distracts from political-economic processes currently transforming these forms of civic engagement. Even though we have little systematic research and, hence, a lack of statistical data about trends in urban movements and voluntary associations, the evidence we have indicates that the quality and dynamic of these groups and organizations is far from static; they seem to evolve and transform in tandem with changes in their social and political environments. Thus, the tendency of market forces to generate more inequality since the early 1980s and the subsequent or, in some

22 See, for example, the website of the World Bank, where the importance of social capital formation for the poor is emphasized, as it is here to function as a substitute for lacking human and physical capital (<http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/sources/index.htm>). However, the claim that it is primarily the poor who lack social capital is contested. DeFilippis, for instance, shows that 'the problem in inner cities ... is not that there is a lack of trust-based social networks and mutual support, but rather that these networks and support are unable to generate capital' (2001: 797).

countries parallel, transformations of the welfare state, as well as changes in labor market and employment policies in North America and western Europe,²³ have not only contributed to the problems of deprived urban areas, but they tend to jeopardize the very qualities that are the basis of the success and valorization of community-based initiatives: their empowering and solidarity-creating capacities.

Evidence is mounting as to how projects and initiatives, which have multiplied in number and variety in response to growing social needs, and which service marginalized populations or revitalize declining neighbourhoods, have significantly transformed in orientation and in the way they work (Fisher and Kling, 1993; Halpern, 1995; Pickvance, 1995; Rich, 1995; Kingsley *et al.*, 1997; Stoecker, 1997; Amin *et al.*, 1998; Mayer, 1993; 1998; 1999b; Hamel, 2000). While their service and advocacy activities initially mostly complemented state-sponsored programs and social services, they are increasingly coming under pressure to substitute for such public services, or are co-producing and partnering in the delivery of such services. Whether this kind of upgrading is contributing to civic betterment, appears highly contested.

If we look, for example, at grassroots organizations that have turned into mere service providers, we observe that most no longer make any claims about empowering the poor or transforming social relations. They support their clients more in 'getting by' (i.e. somehow coping with their marginalized situation) than in 'getting ahead' (i.e. overcoming and getting out of the marginalized position). Where they directly target the 'side effects' of contemporary economic growth (such as structural unemployment, environmental problems or urban blight) through new institutions of an associational economy revolving around the provision of 'proximity services', they scarcely achieve the assumed 'sustainability'²⁴ (Stoecker, 1997) and often end up stuck in 'ghetto economies, where they contribute to isolating disadvantaged communities further by drawing them into a localized circuit of capital disconnected from the mainstream economy' (Amin *et al.*, 1998). And where their strategies target the social disintegration processes that traditional state activities cannot address, they increasingly develop innovative strategies that not only acknowledge but possibly reinforce the new divisions within the city. This problem is well-known from the stigmatizing effect of the exclusion paradigm: it is manifest in German 'neighbourhood management' programs (Walther, 2002) as well as in US urban projects that, e.g., help recent immigrants find jobs and places to live by training them to find work in the growing informal sector as day labourers rather than channelling them into job-training programs (Hopkins, 1995). Precarious labour conditions and new marginalization processes thus tend to get reinforced rather than countered, undermining the solidarity within the groups as well as the empowering effects for the 'clients'.

In Anglo-Saxon countries, where both foundations' and governments' funding programs have emphasized labour market integration in urban development programs for some time, community-based development organizations have learned to differentiate their role as employment and training agencies for welfare and other transfer payment recipients for some time. They place 'clients' into various (frequently exploitative) forms of the social economy or into the low-wage service sector, where — especially in metropolitan areas — the demand for building and other services has exploded. For example, *Wildcat Service Corporation* and *Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation* in the Bronx train welfare recipients for what they

23 Though comparative research on welfare state retrenchment seems inconclusive (cf. Clayton and Pontusson, 1998; Castles, 2001), there is consensus about reorientation in social policies and restructuring of the welfare and labor market institutions in the OECD area. As to the depth and quality of this restructuring and retrenchment, individual country studies, using more precise indicators and measurements, tend to reveal significant cuts in welfare payments as well as services along with a growing emphasis on workfare policies (see, e.g., Hadjimichalis and Sadler, 1995; Mingione, 1996; Hanesch, 1997; Giloth, 1998; Gebhardt, 1999; Voges *et al.*, 2000; Wiseman, 2000; Peck, 2001; Seeleib-Kaiser, 2001; Danziger and Haveman, 2002).

24 That is, the capacity to continue to deliver services and social outcomes in the long term and without ongoing public funding.

have identified as growing sectors of the local economy: 'in computer software, Business English and math and various life skills, like dealing with an unpleasant supervisor. The trainees then go to Salomon Smith Barney for a 16-week internship, after which the company can hire whomever it chooses' (Finder, 1998). In other words, both the quality of the labour process as well as the social usefulness of the products, which used to be high on the agenda of community-based organizations in addressing their clientele's problems, have slipped off the agenda. Former demands for self-determined working conditions and socially useful products have become replaced by 'work first' approaches.

EU-programs funding comparable organizations do emphasize, in the policy rhetoric, the goals of a new social economy, but what matters in the de facto implementation and practice of 'neighbourhood management' and community revitalization programs is the instrumentalization of the innovativeness and local knowledge of these organizations in order to mediate the new ('reinsertion') programs to poor and underprivileged urban residents. Embedded in informal exchange, reciprocity and redistribution, they are seen as uniquely disposed to organize and provide local needs and resources (the 'social capital') as well as job access and survival (Europäische Kommission, 1993; 1995; 1996; Evers and Schulze-Böing, 1997; Evers *et al.*, 2000). However, while providing these goods and services, it becomes difficult, in fact increasingly rare, for them to continue to succeed in creating solidarity and empowerment, or to challenge the defects and biases of state or other funding programs (Mayer, 1999c). The groups and agencies most successful in job creation and innovative services are either transformed into competitive firms in the mainstream economy, or else are swallowed up by larger private businesses. The number that succeed in simultaneously challenging the paucity of public programs and use them to pursue their own goals of creating solidarity and empowerment has been dwindling. Many more exhaust themselves — under-funded and under-staffed as they typically are — working as repair networks against the intensifying economic and political disintegration (Stoecker, 1997; Amin *et al.*, 1998; Mayer, 1999c; Wilder, 2001).

The absence of (the reconfiguration of) state-society relations

The diversion of attention from the contemporary political-economic context, which actually helps explain the rise of the social capital narrative, but whose effects threaten the very promise of civic engagement which it purports to further, is characteristic not just of policy proposals but even of some urban scholarship. For example, when the Urban Affairs Association (1998) conference announcement declared,

As cities have responded to new economic, political, and policy contexts, they have begun to develop a portfolio of strategies for institution building and community revitalization. These efforts have developed what can be seen as social capital, a partner to financial capital ... ,

the need for the social reconstruction of the city was never once related to processes of deindustrialization, real estate speculation or other effects of (financial) capital, which have contributed to the new urban problems and eroded existing forms of what is now termed 'social capital'. In fact, this connection is systematically left out of the myriad accounts of new activities around institution building and community revitalization. The changing political-economic context and the impact these reconfigurations of market, state and civil society have had on (urban) social movements are screened from view by the social capital lens.

Underlying both types of omissions just outlined is the disregard for concrete and specific historical context. This apparent 'context-independence' pertains not only to the social relations of specific associations and their particular goals (civil rights movements or militias, choral societies or mafia groups, service-delivering CBO or adversarial protest organization), but more broadly to the political-economic context underlying the phenomenal rise of the social capital perspective. As we have seen in the

case of movements and voluntary associations, the approach is in fact neither neutral nor devoid of normative content: by highlighting trust and connectedness, it prioritizes 'positive', consensus-oriented types of civic action and makes it difficult to associate positive consequences with conflictive and non-collaborative forms of sociability. Nor is the approach independent of the current political-economic configuration, which provides the breeding ground for making it such an attractive framework.

Globalization, neoliberalism or the 'new economy' rarely matter, likely because the 'social capital' approach has shown its economic usefulness across time and place: phases of economic prosperity — whether in East Asia or northern Italy — always occurred as a result of flourishing social networks and trust.²⁵ The state, however, gets mentioned as a relevant actor both in social capital theory as well as practice, but in fact both attribute a subordinate role to the political (and tend to exclude, as we have seen, political and especially oppositional movements). Putnam mentions a role for state intervention to enhance or regenerate social capital (see above); EU papers and the World Bank emphasize, at least rhetorically, an 'enabling social and political environment,' and occasionally even a role for the market and the 'corporate sector' in the production of 'social capital'. On the website of the World Bank, however, one learns more about what civil society can do for state and market than what either states or markets can do for enhancing 'social capital' in civil society (*cf.* Rankin, 2001: 7). Generally, there is a stronger interest in identifying and mobilizing the 'potentials and resources' of problem neighbourhoods²⁶ than in analysing and addressing the contemporary causes and agents behind the new forms of exclusion and polarization (*cf.* URBAN 21, 2001; OECD, 1998; Campbell, 1999; Lloyd *et al.*, 1999).

The deprioritizing of the role of the state is unfortunate, because the 'productivity' of civic engagement in terms of enhancing the vitality of civil and political society depends in large measure on the responsiveness of (local) government. The production of a vibrant civil and political society requires both: civil society *and* the state. Just as the intensity of 'social capital' varies across nations and regions, state institutions vary in terms of institutional capacity as well as in terms of responsiveness to civil society.

An analysis of such prerequisites and conditions of 'social capital' usually remains outside of the social capital perspective. The present conjuncture, characterized by fundamental economic restructuring and a parallel reconfiguration of the (nation) state,²⁷ has meant that the state has redefined its tasks with regard to many of the social and economic problems facing cities and poor communities: it has contracted out or devolved to local and sub-local levels what used to be more centrally organized and state-delivered public policies and services. In terms of institutional reorganization, consequences have been the growing role of sub-national levels as well as the growing inclusion of non-state actors, the emphasis on 'good governance' including civil society forms of self-organization, all held together by the 'activating' state (Kooiman, 1993; Streeck, 1994: 7; Heinelt and Mayer, 1997; Jessop, 1997; Le Galès, 1998). In policy terms, the emphasis has increasingly shifted to measures designed to enhance competitiveness, and even social cohesion programs have become subsumed under this heading. None of these shifts matter in the social capital narrative, even though they have important effects on the assumed positive features of civic engagement. As devolution and contracting-out have intensified competition and divisiveness between

25 With regard to Italy, Putnam wrote: 'These communities did not become civic because they were rich. The historical record suggests precisely the opposite: They have become rich because they were civic' (1993a: 37), and with regard to East Asia: 'Studies of the rapidly growing economies of East Asia almost always emphasize the importance of dense social networks, so that these economies are sometimes said to represent a new brand of 'network capitalism'' (*ibid.*: 38). 'Where trust and social networks flourish, individuals, firms, neighborhoods and even nations prosper' (2000: 319).

26 Representative for many such formulations: '[Neighborhoods of the poor] are characterized by various conflicts and problems, such as racism, poverty and marginalization, but – and this is frequently overlooked – also by potentials and resources' (Herrmann and Lang, 2001: 18; translated by the author).

27 *Cf.* footnote 22.

cities and regions as well as between different social groups (Fainstein *et al.*, 1992; Mingione, 1996; Dangschat, 1998; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000), civil society and the forms of civic engagement embedded in it are no longer, if they ever were, only of the benign and democracy-enhancing kind.

Movements that grow directly out of the newly competitive strategies of cities and their aggressive ways of marketing themselves or of pursuing forms of urban development with frequently negative impacts for residential populations, increasingly reflect this divisiveness.²⁸ Local mobilizations nowadays tend to include the illiberal and particularistic kind that is not at all contributing to public problem-solving and the greater common good (even though for its individual members they may very well be producing social capital). They illustrate how ill-suited the social capital concept is to capturing conflicts amongst and ambivalence in contemporary movements.²⁹ Urban movements that seek to protect their home environment from the new forms of urban development or its consequences (whether increases in traffic congestion, gentrification or specific unwanted facilities — so-called NIMBYs such as toxic waste facilities but also public housing projects — which people don't like to have in their backyards) range from defensive, pragmatic efforts to save the prevailing quality of life or existing privileges (which are sometimes progressive, environmentally conscious and inclusive, but other times selfish, xenophobic, racist or anti-immigrant), all the way to politicized and sometimes militant anti-gentrification struggles or movements against other growth policies. Frequently, a middle class-based, quality-of-life type of movement succeeds in averting an unwanted facility in the neighbourhood, with the effect that a poor or minority neighbourhood (possibly with a lower degree of social capital at its disposal to mobilize effective resistance) is then targeted (Mayer, 1999b).

To sum up, the social capital focus does not help in understanding the source and dynamic of the new forms of incivility and conflict resulting from contemporary economic and political restructuring. In fact, it screens from view how society-state relations have been reconfigured. There is no self-reflexivity in the social capital narrative about this context, in which *certain* state functions are contracted out or privatized and *certain* civil society actors (cooperative community-based initiatives, faith-based congregations) are identified as better able to carry out the functions of producing social cohesion and enhancing economic performance. The social capital narrative would need to reflect its own embeddedness in this context in order to play a more helpful role within the analysis of urban change as well as within the politics of urban change.

The current career of the concept and its role in urban (development) politics

In order to explore the role the new discourse is playing in contemporary restructuring processes, it is useful to first take a look at the context within which concepts such as 'social capital', 'third way' or 'social cohesion' have arisen. When the limits of state and market became evident with the break-up of the post-second world war settlement in the 1970s, a broad search for solutions in all the OECD countries was triggered that

28 Some argue that also outside of this current framework of competitiveness, local forms of governance tend to be vulnerable to the distinctive weaknesses of communities, to the specific 'community failure'. When insider-outsider distinctions are made on divisive and morally repugnant bases such as race, religion, nationality or gender, community governance is more likely to foster parochial narrow-mindedness and ethnic hostility than to address the failures of markets and states (Bowles, 1999).

29 It has been pointed out early on that the social capital concept downplays such differences by pointing to the fact that groups like the Mafia fall well within Putnam's definition of trust-building and network-providing associations (cf. Portes and Landolt, 1996). Putnam suggests this problem is resolved by the bonding/bridging distinction, implying that only networks ranking high on the bridging type of social capital have the desired positive consequences (2001: 22).

reached a first climax under Reagan and Thatcher and continues with the various efforts at welfare reform and labour market flexibilization. To counter the weakness of the market as a basis for social cohesion, efforts arose to (re)embed market forces in a rescaled market *society*. To counter the limits of the Keynesian national state, individual governments as well as the European Commission, UNESCO and World Bank have adopted policies of regeneration at the community level so as to manage the social costs of the neoliberal project. Both of these strategies involve local third sector and social economy programs that aim to compensate for the simultaneous fragmentation of the traditional structures of market and state, thus fundamentally altering the (centralist, corporatist) relation between social, economic and political institutions. It is this current conjunction which attributes a key role to such concepts as 'social capital', 'third way' or 'social cohesion', all of which imply a closer cooperation between local state, civil society and private sector, as well as the activation of local self-organization.

Beginning with (neo-Keynesian) local economic development programs in the US and Great Britain in the late 1970s, within the context of neoliberal deregulation and privatization, strategies of non-market coordination and of localism moved onto the policy agenda in order to address market failure and to develop active cooperation between the state, capital, labour and residents. Based on the experience of these local economic initiatives, authors such as Eisenschitz and Gough (1996) have already elaborated some of the contradictions of such strategies. They show how these strategies, in spite of, or possibly precisely because of, their neo-Keynesian design, while compensating for some of the negative effects of (national) neoliberalism,³⁰ actually help neoliberalism better to achieve its aims of creating fluid labour markets, encouraging capital flow between sectors and areas, and fostering new enterprises.

At the same time, the class discipline imposed by neoliberalism has forced different groups and actors at the local level to collaborate in the face of external competitive pressure: localism was employed both to better compete for mobile capital and to foster endogenous enterprise. This has implied bringing civil society stakeholders into governance arrangements in order to achieve integrated efforts of local government, civil society and the private sector. In disadvantaged areas and 'problem neighbourhoods' the call to mobilize and activate local self-organization has crucially involved local movement organizations. While thus gaining more voice and representation in the new structures of governance, the movement and other third sector organizations simultaneously find their input restricted to local capacity building and productivity competition.

The current 'social capital' discourse and the programs flowing from it serve well to frame contemporary urban activism and forms of self-organization in this direction. By focusing on the marginalized and excluded themselves — and not on the causes of their inequality and marginalization — and by defining them as 'agents' of their survival, it mobilizes these groups to work towards their (re)integration into the labour market (whether the low-wage sector, micro-enterprises or into the social economy), where market and productivity criteria replace the social rights and welfare state criteria that used to apply to them. Urban disadvantaged groups are thus transformed from potential social movement actors demanding recognition of their social rights into 'social capitalists', whose 'belonging' is conditional on their mobilizing the only resources they have as a form of capital.

Thus, while focusing on 'the excluded', the language of social capital implies that 'all parties can gain access to capital, just different forms, and that appropriate investment in social capital will compensate for gross inequities in financial capital' (Smith and Kulynych, 2002: 167) — as if the resources embodied in community organizations can mend what financial capital has torn. Since civil society is basically

³⁰For example, by addressing gaps in infrastructure provision and training, by creating and nourishing more difficult and innovative investment paths than the low-risk strategies in finance, property and infrastructure investment which neoliberalism encourages, and by maintaining the infrastructure and labour power in areas of decline for future investment opportunities (Eisenschitz and Gough, 1996: 441).

conceived as without divisive material interests, and with everyone sharing interests in economic expansion, community capacity, joint problem-solving and individual self-realization, the trick is to both address and suspend the fundamentally different situation of the poor/excluded within it, to both raise social and political issues and dissolve them into economic perspectives. The imprecision of the concept of 'social capital' is helpful in squaring this circle, as its simultaneously normatively charged, as well as seemingly neutral, character allows it to do both at the same time.

The goal of the accumulation of social capital is not economic security for the poor or the reduction of inequality, but 'empowerment' and 'inclusion'. While these terms resonate with demands of oppositional movements, the meanings have switched. Both the discourse and its associated programs invoke histories of transformative movements which tended to challenge oppressive power relations and their respective ideologies. For example, microfinance programs in the World Bank's development programs in the South, which seek to promote women's entrepreneurship, draw on feminist, anti-colonial and union traditions when they create 'solidarity groups' for the collectives women form to qualify for credit collateralized by group guarantee (*cf.* Rankin, 2002); and community programs in the North hark back to former movement struggles and solidarities. Self-help, grassroots participation, and sustainability are recurring clichés in European programs for urban revitalization as well as in American 'empowerment zones'. The evocation of solidarity makes the microfinance programs and the social capital generated through it look as if they would mobilize and empower the women for the struggle against gender oppression.³¹ In the 'third' as well as the 'first' world, the programs implicitly make promises about the capacity of local networks to empower poor and marginalized groups and to transform the social relations that exclude them. While the desired 'mobilization from below' rhetorically invokes the tradition of oppositional movements, it does so by redefining that tradition in a specific, restricted, formal way. One of the leading social capital proponents in the US, William Schambra (who is featured in *The Essential Civil Society Reader*, Eberly, 2000), is quite clear in his definition of grassroots initiatives. He describes them as 'too busy working with the poor to join coalitions against poverty' (Schambra, 1998: 49).

This 'working' message has reached former social movement organizations. For example, Ernesto Cortés, regional director of the Alinsky-inspired Industrial Areas Foundation, writes that social capital is:

crucial to the resolution of crises and the alleviation of poverty ... To create capital we must invest labor, energy, and effort in the here-and-now to create something for later use ... Investment requires the ability and discipline to defer gratification, to invest energy not only in the needs or pleasures of the present, but also in the potential demands of the future (1993: 305).

Even in the eyes of an advocacy oriented organizer, the poor and powerless are disadvantaged because they don't have enough (social) capital, but they can increase their 'stock' by becoming more competitive, hard-working and disciplined.

As a further effect, the language and central categories of the social capital discourse have the tendency to naturalize the macro changes currently impacting on cities (globalization, intensifying regional competition etc.). Thus, phenomena such as the welfare crisis or the urban crisis appear as results of objective, inevitable developments, and all actors appear as equally confronted with these changes and challenges. Communities, neighbourhoods, women and workers as well as the unemployed — all must adapt to these forces, must flexibilize, learn, empower themselves and put pressure on urban administrations, in short: develop their social capital. Then, urban poverty — which tacitly became constructed as the product of ineffective local governance and of underdeveloped social capital — can be alleviated. A judicious combination of

31 In fact, the solidarity groups rather serve the goal to implement financial discipline and the guaranteed repayment of credits (Rankin, 2001: 18).

mobilization from below and capacity building from above can solve the problems of uneven development and marginalization, and create the virtuous circle of social capital, economic growth and social cohesion.

However, as has been shown, we cannot simply assume the positive effects of local civic networks and of the corresponding stimulus and funding programs. In fact, we must even raise the question to what extent these political strategies in development policies, as well as in urban revitalization and innovative employment policies, do not rather destroy than generate 'social capital'. The US urban renewal experience in the 1950s and 1960s may be instructive in this regard: while infrastructure and renewal programs promised to trigger new growth and employment effects, in fact — as has been conceded in retrospect — they ended up destroying vibrant neighbourhoods (*cf.* Judd and Swanstrom, 1994: 138–45; Putnam, 2000: 214–5, 413). In the protest against the 'urban removal' measures (as they came to be called at the time), new bonds and networks were formed, or, in modern language, new 'social capital'. Thus, we need to examine contemporary territorially-oriented development programs and employment pacts for their unintended effects as well. First impressions in this regard indicate not only improvements in the living situation and in access to participation for marginalized groups, but also displacement and gentrification effects and a tendency for participation of specific urban groups to go hand in hand with the simultaneous exclusion of 'undesired' groups (*cf.* Lanz, 2000). The fact that certain communities, e.g. those of so-called 'problematic' groups, are frequently destroyed in the course of implementation of such programs, is generally made a taboo, while the furthering of participation and articulation options for desired groups is widely discussed and celebrated.

Never before have civil society networks, local activism and civic engagement been so prominently incorporated into political programs furthering sustainable (urban) development and economic growth. The definition of these resources and potentials as 'social capital' makes them usable for efforts seeking to better anchor the neoliberal project in society and to better manage its costs. The definition not only allows the subordination of social and political goals to market priorities and economic competitiveness, but also helps shape local activities so they won't obstruct but rather aid and promote the emerging competitive, workfare-oriented, post-national regime (Jessop, 1993; 1999; Peck, 2001). Cities and the local level play a crucial role in this model:

- They are central agents for the production of competitiveness and function as motors of economic growth, thus articulating the *Schumpeterian* element of the new regime;
- As social policies are shifting away from transfer payments towards a flexibility-enhancing labour market orientation, including the upgrading of the informal or social economy, municipalities acquire the task of developing innovative social and employment policies to further endogenous human capital and thereby improve their locational advantage (the *workfare* element);
- Finally, the model is characterized by the active cooperation between civil society, state and market organizations on the local level: these public-private partnerships, which include, on the civil society side, community-based as well as faith-based NGOs, stress working *with* market forces (hence regulations speak of the transition from the Keynesian welfare *state* to a Schumpeterian workfare *regime*).

This emerging regime, its dynamic and its characteristic tensions, form the context within which contemporary urban activism — the whole spectrum from civic engagement to protest movements — takes place. If today's forms of local activism and civic engagement are indeed to contribute to enhancing democracy rather than to lead to new forms of exclusion, we need to take account of the pressures and effects this context exerts on their development. That would imply that both the social science and the political debates address the blind spots and contradictions within the currently

hegemonic 'social capital' discourse; they would need to take account of the interests of political and oppositional movements as much as those of less conflictive civil society groups. And the distinctive capacities of community problem-solving and governance abilities of communities would need to be complemented by a supportive legal and governmental environment. Then the concept might have a chance to contribute to strengthening the vitality of the 'civic community'.

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