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Teaching Scenario: Study and Valuation of Social Capital With ICT Tools in the Research Work Framework

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Abstract: Social capital is about the quality of relationships and bonds in a society. It can be understood as a resource related to collective consciousness and action, with significant implications for the economy and human well-being. The interest of the academic community in social capital has intensified in recent years, and one of the reasons for this intensity is its importance in the governance, operation and economic development of a society. The concept of social capital is a relatively new idea. Although the conceptual origin is old and part of similar ideas appear in the works of Adam Smith, Alexis de Toqueville, John Stuart Mill and Max Weber, in the modern literature the concept is associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986), James Coleman (1988) and Robert Putnam (1993), while the latter was the one who made the concept widely known. The bibliographic sources will be searched through online databases, the primary research will be done through electronic questionnaire circulation and the data will be processed with statistical software. The research work with its completion will be a contribution to the study of social capital.

Key words: social capital, research, goods, ICT

1. Introduction

The concept of "social capital" has a high weight both in the modern interdisciplinary analysis of the world and in economics in particular, for the following reasons: a) It places social relations and social networks on the same level as other forms of capital, such as economic capital, physical capital and human capital. Thus, it connects and unifies the social, political and economic scientific fields without necessarily opposing the rational view of things supported by economic science. b) It has features in common with other forms of capital since, for example, someone (person or collective) can invest in it and reap benefits later (Bullen & Onyx, 1999). It is certainly a more modern, more comprehensive and more "institutional" term (in the logic of the Authentic Institutional School) to describe 21st century economics.

2. Social Chapter: Literature Documentation

Social capital is a modern and complex concept that focuses on the relationships of people and the networks they develop in an organized society (state, region, city, community, business). Key features of social capital are the trust between individuals and their participation in collectives with joint actions. These characteristics help

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individuals to solve common problems, to effectively organize the governance of the society in which they live, and thus to know economic growth and prosperity. Because the concept of social capital is used by various disciplines, such as political science, economics, sociology, etc., various definitions have been developed depending on the context and purpose used. Thus, there is no commonly accepted definition of what exactly social capital is, which creates a problem in the way the concept is measured and valued. In order to overcome this problem, many scientists focus, record and evaluate specific aspects of social capital.

This section presents the concept of social capital as it is theoretically shaped by the literature. First, the views of the keynote speakers of the concept are formulated and then the relationship of social capital with the economy and economic development is investigated. In the modern literature the concept of social capital is developed and highlighted by Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam. Bourdieu (1984, 1986) defined social capital as the total real or symbolic resources of the people of a community, which are connected by multiple networks that are maintained over time and involve relationships of mutual understanding and acceptance. In this sense, social capital is a collective asset for a collective (or social class) insofar as its members function in a specific way to create it. This is achieved by creating bonds and relationships between them, in a framework of reciprocity, with the aim of strengthening the privileges of their team. Furthermore, social capital is a personal asset that provides benefits to an individual, who is connected to (participates and contributes or simply belongs to) the relevant network. The social capital that each person enjoys depends on the size of the network, as well as on the intensity and quality of the relationships, which are a function of the size of the capital that each person has for the formation and development of the network with which he is connected (Bourdieu, 1984).

Another theorist of social capital, Coleman (1990), argues that social capital is essentially an individual characteristic. Although it derives from the relations of society, it is a resource that individuals use for the benefit of their individual aspirations and not for the whole community. Social capital develops more easily in cohesive societies because individuals know each other better, participate in structures and the same social mechanisms, and build relationships based on common social, cultural, and moral standards, creating a sense of local identity (Coleman 1988). Coleman (1988) distinguishes two aspects of social capital. Firstly, the trust, which is built through social networks and ensures that members' obligations are carried out smoothly, and secondly, the information provided through social networks and the regulations imposed on members of the networks dictating specific behaviors. Thus, social capital is not a single entity but a set of elements that contain two characteristics: they are a dimension of the social structure, and they facilitate specific actions for the individuals within the structure. These actions are of an economic nature. Thus Coleman (1990) sees social capital as a set of rules and expectations that promote economic activity in a free market environment. Individuals and groups with high social capital can make a profit in terms of financial capital, while individuals in groups with low social capital are less successful in raising financial capital.

The one who is mainly associated with the spread of the concept of social capital is Putnam (2001). In Putnam et al. (1993, p. 167) social capital is defined as manifestations of social organization, such as trust, norms, and social networks, that can improve the effectiveness of a society by facilitating coordinated effort. In the same work the concept is used to describe and interpret the different effectiveness of local governments in Italy, placing great emphasis on the political status of the individual, considering that it helps citizens' participation in the public and allows the consolidation of trust, creating favorable conditions for political, cultural and economic development (Putnam et al., 1993). One of the key parameters of social capital is trust (Stolle, 1998, 2001; Uslaner, 2002). It concerns members of the community and does not extend to foreigners. However, there is a correlation between generalized trust and "special" trust and it is reflected in the fact that people who generally trust others tend to trust acquaintances, friends and institutions and can more easily join local groups and networks.

According to Putnam (2000), social capital is a collective characteristic of societies, not individuals. Thus, social capital cannot and should not be measured on an individual level but on a collective level. Studies show that in communities where social capital is high, raising children is safer and healthier, education is better and the institution of democracy and the economy work more efficiently (Putnam, 2000; Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Knack & Keefer, 1997). Overall, scientists conclude that social capital, while belonging to the micro-economy, has implications for migration and trade, economic reform, economic growth, security, and even how new technologies are impacting.

Social capital is basically a sociological concept, emphasizing the networks and relationships of people and the role they play in politics and economics. Thus, it was embraced by modern (institutional) economic thought as the "lost link" in economic analysis. Today, social capital is considered one of the most important factors for the prosperity of a society, influencing important parameters — from productivity and collective action to education and health of citizens. Some governments even have expert experts who deal with this issue — such as, e.g., in Britain, where David Halpern is the Prime Minister's Special Adviser on "Social Capital".

Conventional maps of the world economy divide the big players into three groups: the United States and its partners in the North American Free Trade Agreement, the European Union (EU), and East Asia, which includes Japan, the four "tigers" (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) and the People's Republic of China. This three-dimensional geography is said to correspond to the political economy approach: at one pole are the new industrial economies of Asia, which have relied heavily on industrial policy to guide their development, while at the other end are the United States, with its commitment to free market liberalization. Europe, with its extensive welfare policies, is somewhere in between. In each of these areas we meet different relationships between members of each society, different degrees of cooperation and participation in groups and networks, i.e., different social capital.

Studies conducted by the World Bank and other organizations show that social capital and especially trust have a significant impact on a country's productive structure and economic development. Many even claim that it has a greater impact on growth rates than education (Milios, 2008). This explains the economic performance of countries of high social confidence, such as the Nordic countries, the "tigers" of Southeast Asia and China. Social capital and trust, say researchers (Fukuyama, 1999; Halpern, 2005), are the grease on the wheels of the economy, accelerating the flow of information and reducing transaction costs. In markets where there is no trust between parties, transactions are delayed by fear of risk-taking and complicated legal procedures, and the economy slows down. The effects on education and crime are similar. Research from the US and Britain shows that in areas where there is a high level of public engagement and a high level of trust, children are performing better in schools. At the same time, areas with a high degree of social cohesion and trust have lower rates of violence and crime (Halpern, 2001). Even health is affected by social capital. Longevity and mental health are affected by the size and quality of social networks. According to Halpern (2005), a US study found that men and women who were socially isolated were much more likely to die in the following years than those with stronger social ties.

Also, the social capital is related to the possibility of collective action and the management of externalities caused by semi-public goods and services. When property rights cannot be precisely defined, problems and inefficiencies arise in the allocation of resources (Varian, 2006). Communities with a high degree of trust, reciprocity and solidarity can better manage such issues by building institutions that reduce (or, better, internalize to some degree) externalities and know prosperity and growth (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008). The study of social capital contains an exemplary cooperation between the private and public sectors, especially when it brings multiple benefits without burdening any social group (satisfaction of the Pareto criterion) and is based on the relations of cooperation and trust that develop between them. It also transfers energy from micro to macro level of economic activity. The study of social capital is done with institutional and developmental criteria for society through synergy economies, purpose economies and finally economies of scale that develop between its members. Synergy and goal economies will cause economies of scale created by social capital and the achievement of maximum social prosperity (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Leana & Van Buren, 1999).

This influence concerns both the operation of the company and its relations with others. Inside the business, social capital can reduce the cost of transactions by facilitating the flow of information and thus the creation and accumulation of knowledge (Burt, 2000) but also improving the creativity of its people (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003). In its relationships with other companies, strong social capital increases the chances of creating and succeeding synergies and thus access to resources and markets (Koka & Prescott, 2002; Hitt et al., 2002).

3. Purpose and Objectives of the Research

The didactic scenario is part of the course “Research & Experimentation” — Technology of the 3rd Gymnasium. Through empirical research, the multidimensional character and dynamic nature of social capital is highlighted. The purpose of this research effort is to study the concept and importance of social capital in the local economy. In this context, the research aims to: formulate a methodology for the optimal measurement of social capital at local and operational level, to explore the determinants of social capital and to evaluate the factors that contribute to the creation, development and change of social capital, in exploring the relationship between institutions and social capital, and in assessing the importance of social capital in the local society and economy, both as a whole and on a case-by-case basis, examining various productive sectors, institutions and organizations of the economy (e.g., public administration, education, business, etc.).

4. Methodology

The steps that the research team will follow to achieve the research goal are the following: 1) Bibliographic documentation using online databases. At this stage, the concept of the social will be investigated and documented as it has been developed and used by economics and other related sciences. 2) Theoretical formulation and development of methodology with electronic archiving of information. At this stage we will try to formulate a detailed definition of the concept and to formulate a methodological framework for its evaluation and measurement at various micro-levels (local, operational). 3) Empirical expansion through electronic circulation of a questionnaire in a random population of respondents. At this stage we will try to assess the value that social capital creates at the community (city, neighborhood) or group (organization, business) level. To this end, we will study social capital in specific areas or collectives and link it to their performance and well-being.

In the same context we will try to explore the relationship of social capital with the institutional characteristics of society and the ability of individuals for collective action, cooperation, creativity and prosperity. In general, our aim is to contribute to the current scientific debate, trying to investigate the issue in depth both theoretically, composing an appropriate conceptual and methodological framework, as well as empirically, by conducting research in cases of micro-economic scale (city, district, institution, organization or business) to improve and complete our model and apply this knowledge to the formulation of principles and policies.

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