

# The value of social capital in a learning society

John Field

Capitale sociale e stili di leadership nel terzo settore

Facoltà di Economia -Forlì

12 dicembre 2008

*ideas everywhere*

# A theory of co-operative action

*“Social capital” refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit.*

Robert Putnam

*ideas everywhere*

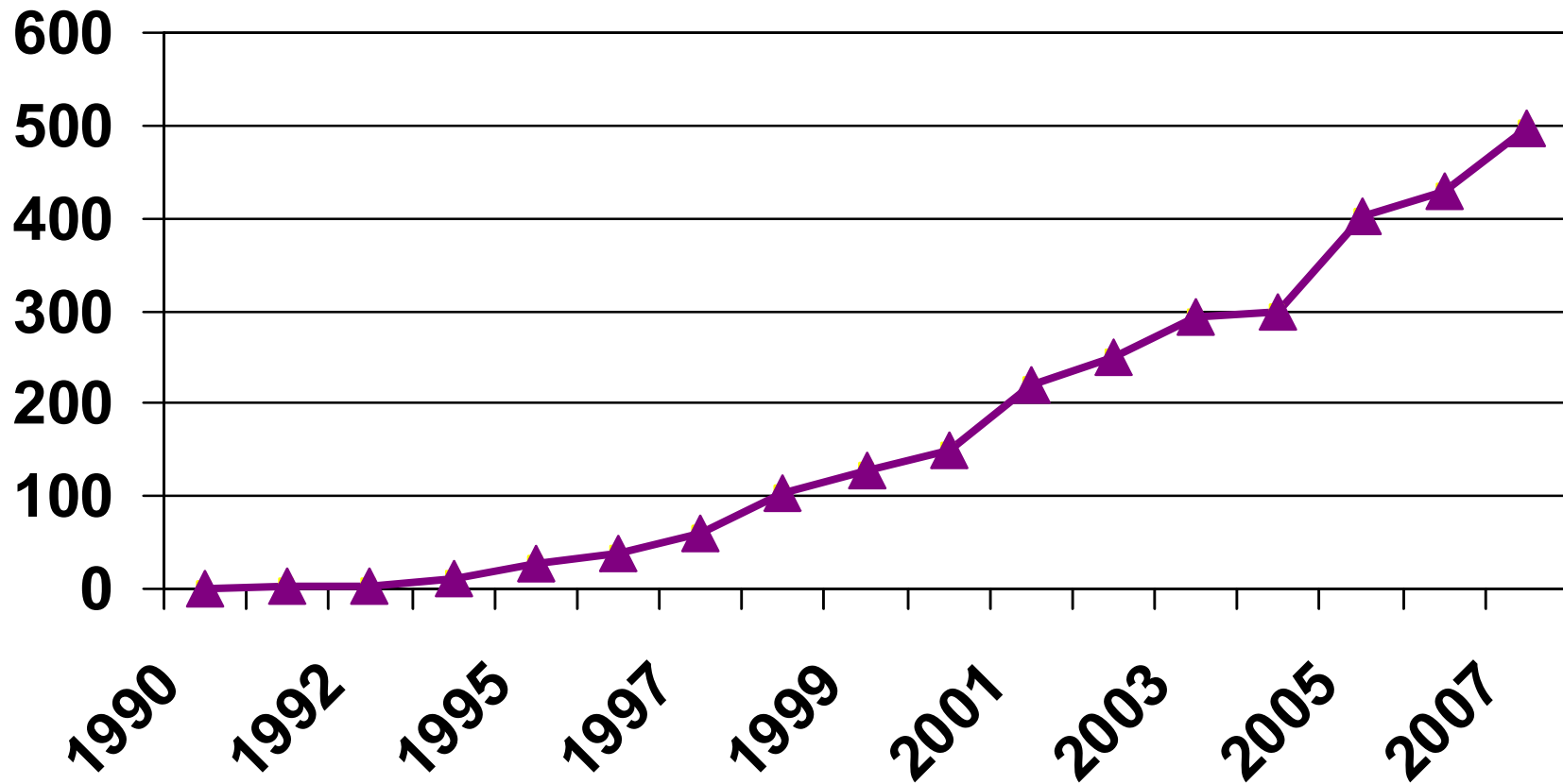
# Widespread evidence of its importance

For example, with respect to:

- Education
- Health + mental health
- Crime
- Subjective well-being
- Job seeking
- Economic growth
- Innovation and knowledge transfer

*ideas everywhere*

## "Social capital" in SSCI



*ideas everywhere*

# Two approaches

1. Social capital as a normative “cure-all” – Durkheimian or rational action traditions - Coleman, Putnam
2. Social capital as a resource (which may also maintain inequality) – conflict and interactionist traditions - Bourdieu, Granovetter

G. M. Fulkerson and G. H. Thompson  
‘The evolution of a contested concept’  
*Sociological Inquiry*, 2008

ideas everywhere

# Measurement issues

*Measurement of social capital is difficult. . . .  
Much of what is relevant to social capital is  
tacit and relational, defying easy  
measurement or classification.*

OECD 2001,43

*ideas everywhere*

The connection between human capital and social capital has been described as “one of the most robust empirical regularities in the social capital literature” (Glaeser, Laibson and Sacerdote 2002, 455).

*ideas everywhere*

# Initial education and social capital

- Generally, high pupil performance in school is associated with high participation in civic activity
- Equally, high participation in civic activity is associated with high performance in school
- At population level, there is a very close association between education and civic engagement

*ideas everywhere*

# Adult learning and social capital

- Cross-sectional survey data - England, Northern Ireland, and EU member states
- Strong positive association between civic engagement and participation in learning
- Strong positive association between civic engagement and favourable perceptions of lifelong learning
- Important role of networks in informal exchanges of information and competencies

Field 2005

*ideas everywhere*

# Adult learning and social capital

- Longitudinal cohort survey data - England, UK
- People who participate in adult education are more likely to volunteer
- People who participate in adult education are more likely to gain in optimism, self-efficacy, and sense of agency
- People who participate in adult education become more tolerant and less likely to share racist views

Schuller, Feinstein and others [2004, 2006]

*ideas everywhere*

# Adult learning and social capital

- Negative consequences are also possible
- Participants sometimes report that learning damages 'bonding ties' (Tett + MacLachlan 2007, Field 2008]
- Some learning experiences damage confidence and undermine agency (Barton and others 2006, Field 2009)
- 'Bonding' ties can foster a culture of low aspirations and create a 'social distance' from adult education (Field 2005)

*ideas everywhere*

# Social capital and the 'learning society'

- Flexibility and adaptability are generally expected in work (and other spheres of life)
- Responsibility and planning for own future in welfare
- Increasing role for information derived from social networks (related to change and to choice)
- Trust as a basis for judging knowledge and evaluating its applicability
- Heterogeneous networks of growing importance for the cosmopolitan and service professional class
- Homogeneous networks of growing importance for those at greatest risk from modernising tendencies

*ideas everywhere*

# Social capital and transitions

- Some social network assets are portable between different contexts
- Some social connections are an asset in one context but incur penalties in other contexts
- The value of a given social connection may also change over time
- Through use, social capital can lose value or gain value

*ideas everywhere*



<i>Investment strategies</i>	Bonding	Bridging	Linking
Maintain existing ties, no new ties			
Maintain old ties, add new ties			
Abandon old ties, add new ties			
Abandon old ties, no new ties			

*ideas everywhere*

# Social capital in late modernity

- Individualisation tendencies
- Weakening intergenerational ties
- Decline of social movements, particularly among manual workers
- Mediated communications and online sociability
- “Liquid identities” - including imaginary identities

*ideas everywhere*

# Implications for the third sector

1. Investment in building capacity for inclusion
2. Particularism helps to motivate and may also set limits
3. The importance of diverse partnerships
4. The possibility of changing partnerships

*ideas everywhere*