

## The reproduction of regional inequalities through social capital

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**Abstract:** The vast extent of the social capital bibliography points out its collective and individual dimensions. In this regard, stands out the collective level for the study of regional development dynamics. This paper discusses and attempts to outline that: a) not only the collective social capital concept but also the individual social capital have heuristic value for regional development studies and b) both levels (individual and collective) can contribute to the reproduction of existing regional inequalities, or even to amplify them. The first section of this paper will examine the interconnections between social networks, individual social capital, migratory movements and regional inequalities. These interconnections are supported by data on migration and profile of migrants of Meso-regions of the Rio Grande do Sul state in Brazil. Secondly, this paper will argue that the collective aspect of social capital can increase the reproduction of regional inequalities already existent. In this regard, it is discussed that the logic of reproduction of social inequalities presented by Pierre Bourdieu can also be valid to understand the effects of collective social capital in the different dynamics of regional development. This argument is illustrated by data about the distribution of the world's wealth and population according to selected regions and countries.

**Key words:** Social Capital; Reproduction of Social and Regional Inequalities; Pierre Bourdieu; Robert Putnam.

### A reprodução de desigualdades regionais via capital social

**Resumo:** A vasta literatura sobre capital social aponta suas dimensões individual e coletiva, destacando-se esta última no âmbito dos estudos de dinâmicas de desenvolvimento regional. Este artigo discute e busca evidenciar que não somente a noção de capital social coletivo, mas também a de capital social individual possui valor heurístico para estudos sobre desenvolvimento regional e que ambas as dimensões (coletiva e individual) podem contribuir para a reprodução das desigualdades regionais existentes, ou até mesmo para ampliá-las. Neste sentido se aborda, primeiramente, as relações entre redes sociais, capital social individual, movimentos migratórios e desigualdades regionais. Tais relações são ilustradas com dados sobre o deslocamento e o perfil de migrantes entre Mesorregiões do estado do Rio Grande do Sul - Brasil. Em seguida estrutura-se o argumento de que a versão coletiva de capital social pode contribuir para a reprodução das desigualdades entre regiões. Para tanto, discute-se que a lógica de reprodução das desigualdades sociais apresentada por Pierre Bourdieu também pode ser válida para se compreender os efeitos do capital social coletivo nas diferentes dinâmicas regionais de desenvolvimento. Tal argumentação é ilustrada com dados do *Credit Suisse Research Institute* quanto à distribuição da riqueza e da população mundial, segundo regiões e países selecionados.

**Palavras-chave:** Capital Social; Reprodução de Desigualdades Regionais; Pierre Bourdieu; Robert Putnam.



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## Introduction

One of the used theoretical frameworks to approach regional development inequalities has been the social capital theory. Notably, the approach developed by Robert Putnam founded fertile soil in the academic environment from his publications about Italy (PUTNAM 1993a e 1993b) and the United States of America (PUTNAM 2000a). Through such approach, social capital is the outcome of regional culture and would have an effect creating better political's institutions operation and generating more significant socio-economic development.

However, there is another investigative perspective – based above all in Pierre Bourdieu (BOURDIEU 1983, 1998) thoughts – that highlights this capital's individual aspect in particular. In other words, instead of being treated as a collective attribute belonging to communities, regions, etc., it is seen as

an individual attribute, which results from the individual's relationship networks and the sense of belonging to a group. The individual benefits that would come from these relationship networks would make the latest a form of capital available to its owners.

Such conceptual distinction between collective social capital and the individual one is what makes authors like Portes (2000), Gabriel *et al.* (2002), Esser (2000, 2008), among others, highlighting the bipartite character on recent investigations which work with this concept. The last two authors point, for example, the distinction between relational social capital (*Beziehungskapital*) and systemic social capital (*Systemkapital*). The first form refers to a micro level or individual's scope. The second concerns the macro level or collectivity's sphere.

At the micro level, with some variations and conceptual adaptations, the notions of interpersonal networks and the social

capital attached to them have been applied to different empirical scopes. Of these empirical applications stands out their utility and efficiency to find a job and progress on professional career (GRANOVETTER, 1995; BURT, 1992); to the reproduction of social inequalities (BORDIEU, 1983; LOURY, 1977; WEISS, 2005) and to facilitation and migration flows viability (DE HAAS, 2009, 2010; THIEME, 2006; MASSEI e AYSA, 2005; PORTES 1995; PORTES/SENSENBRENNER, 1993; FAIST, 1997).

This article argues that not only the notion of collective social capital but also the individual social capital owns heuristic value to researches about regional development, mainly when considers the connections between migrate movements and regional inequalities. Furthermore, it argues that both approaches (collective and individual) can contribute to the reproduction of existing regional differences, or even to expand them.

Therefore, the text is divided into two sections. The first presents the individual face of social capital from Pierre Bourdieu's perspective and seeks to show its consequences in the context of migratory processes, according to Thomas Faist's interpretation. Some practical implications are illustrated with data on migratory movements in Meso-regions of Rio Grande do Sul (RS) - Brazil. The second section tries to emphasise that, to the collective social capital (as Robert Putnam understands it) can subjugate the logic of effects in the regional development similar to the one elaborated by Bourdieu in what concerns its potential of reproduction of inequalities. If for Bourdieu social capital can contribute to the propagation of social inequalities, it

is argued that collective social capital can contribute to the reproduction of regional disparities. This argument is illustrated by empirical data from the Credit Suisse Research Institute on the distribution of world wealth and population according to selected regions and countries. It is concluded that both versions of the concept may have heuristic value to study regional inequalities of development and that in both approaches there is a need for theoretical insights and, above all, empirical studies.

### **The individual face of social capital and the territorial inequalities of development**

For Bourdieu (1983 and 1986) it is impossible to explain the structure and functioning of the social world without bearing in mind the notion of capital in all its forms. Thus a general science of the economics of practices should “[...] endeavour to grasp capital and profit in all their forms and establish the laws whereby the different types of capital (or power, which amounts to the same thing) change into one another” (BOURDIEU, 1986, p.46).

For the author, there are three basic forms of capital: economic, cultural and social, each of which is convertible into others. Economic capital examples would be material goods, property titles, among others. Cultural capital would be presented in three forms: embodied state (knowledge, skills, aesthetic taste); the objectified state (books, works of art) and institutionalized state (academic titles, certificates). Social capital, in turn, means the

[...] aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or

in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the world (BOURDIEU, 1986, p. 51).

With such a definition it is clear that for Bourdieu this capital is a resource belonging essentially to individuals and not to collectivities. From the theoretical point of view, this form of capital would have its existence independent of the others, in the empirical field, however, could not be dissociated from the economic and cultural capitals. Therefore, the possession of the social capital of an individual would be dependent on the possession of the other forms of capital.

That is to say, the quantity of this capital would be dependent both on the extent of the network of relations that an individual can mobilise and on the quantity of the different types of capital that he and the members of his network possess. In this way, social capital would have a multiplier effect on the other available types and amounts of capital.

From the convertibility of one form of capital to another, and from the unequal distribution of the different capitals, according to social classes, unequal advantages (profits) would follow. This would deploy a mechanism for the reproduction of social inequalities. Table 1 shows schematically how this reproduction would take place.

**Table 1: Forms of capital and reproduction of social inequalities according to Bourdieu**

Class structure	Amount of economic capital	Quality of cultural capital	Benefit from social capital
High	Large	High	High
Middle	Moderate	Average	Medium
Low	Small	Low	Little

Source: Roßteutscher, Westle & Kunz (2008, p.23).

For those of the affluent classes, the gain from their networks in the form of social capital would be more significant than that which individuals of lower social classes could obtain. In this way, social capital would have the effect of reproducing and therefore maintaining social inequality manifest in the class structure. Table 1 shows the benefit of social capital according to social classes. However, the expected benefits of other forms of capital follow the same logic.

From the sociology of migrations' point of view, Faist (1997) developed a theoretical model in which the relations between migration, development and

individual social capital are considered. For him, the concept of social capital is seen as the fundamental meso level and can thus connect the approaches that deal with the relationships between migration and development focused on macrostructural factors to the approaches focused on individuals. The author summarises the set of discussions on migratory processes at three levels of analysis: Macrostructural, Relational and Individual. In both origin and destination sites, macrostructural factors would include economic (job opportunities, different wage levels), political (conflicts, legislation) and cultural (affinities, historical connections). Among the



micro aspects would be the expectations, resources and values of each person or family. This set of elements would create a gradient of degrees of freedom regarding the possibilities of each person to concretise the migratory movement. For slaves, children and war refugees, for example, the degree of freedom over decisions of mobility or immobility would be quite restricted. On the other hand, there would be individuals with a higher degree of autonomy in such decisions, given their control over resources, possession of information and membership in social networks.

The relational level, in turn, would be precisely the link between the two previous ones - macro and micro. To that end, the author draws on the concepts of social bonds and social capital inherent to them and applies them to the context of migrations as: "resources available to potential movers and stayers by participation in networks and collectives through weak, strong and symbolic social ties" (FAIST, 1997, p. 200). That is, the author works with these three categories of social ties (strong, weak and symbolic) and with the concept of social capital as a notion that through these ties migrants can have access to possible resources useful in the migration process.

Strong ties are family and kinship relationships. Weak links include networks of potential migrants, contacts with intermediaries in the migration process and links with people who remain at the place of origin. Symbolic ties are related to connections with ethnic and/or religious organisations. With regard to the concept of social capital, the author points out that the resources that constitute it would have the effect of reducing "[...] both the direct monetary costs of movement and

the opportunity costs (that is, the earnings foregone while moving, searching for work and housing, learning new skills), and also decrease the psychological costs of adjustment to a new environment in the receiving country" (FAIST, 1997, p.193).

Investigations into the role of social networks and individual social capital are, to a large extent, focused on the analysis of international migratory movements. The same is not the case, especially in the Brazilian's one, in the context of internal migrations (interstate). Regarding this, the following passage is found in a publication by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) - "Reflections on population displacements in Brazil" (IBGE, 2011) - when it presents a panorama of internal migration in Brazil in the last five years of the century. It claims that "in this period, São Paulo still attracted population from the Northeast, **probably** influenced by social networks [...]" (IBGE, 2011, p. 32, emphasis added). In the same publication, this institute highlights the growing importance of considering the role of interpersonal networks by saying that "both in internal and in international movements, the role of social networks in supporting and directing migratory flows is determinant." (IBGE, 2011, p. 16).

That is, it is possible that the emigration movements in less developed regions are made possible to a great extent by the action of the individual social capital of the migrants. Moreover, as Faist (1997) points out, this social capital can be used to find work and housing, as well as for "adaptation" in and to the place of destination. In the example above, the reference is to migrations from one Brazilian region

historically with lower development indicators (Northeast) to another with higher indicators (Southeast).

One has to consider that there may be remittances from the emigrants to those who have remained. However, the social capital that enables emigration can represent a factor that acts against the development of less dynamic regions. This contradiction happens because the exit of people can represent, among other aspects, loss of human capital, reduction of the local consumer market and, at the same time, a

concentration of these factors in regions already more developed.

Taking as an example the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Bandeira *et al.* (2014) point precisely in the direction of this migratory selectivity. Table 2 shows that the Northwest Meso-region of Rio Grande do Sul has accumulated, for a long time, a negative balance of migrations in comparison with other meso-regions in Brazil. In the Northeastern Meso-region, the reverse is true, the reception of migrants.

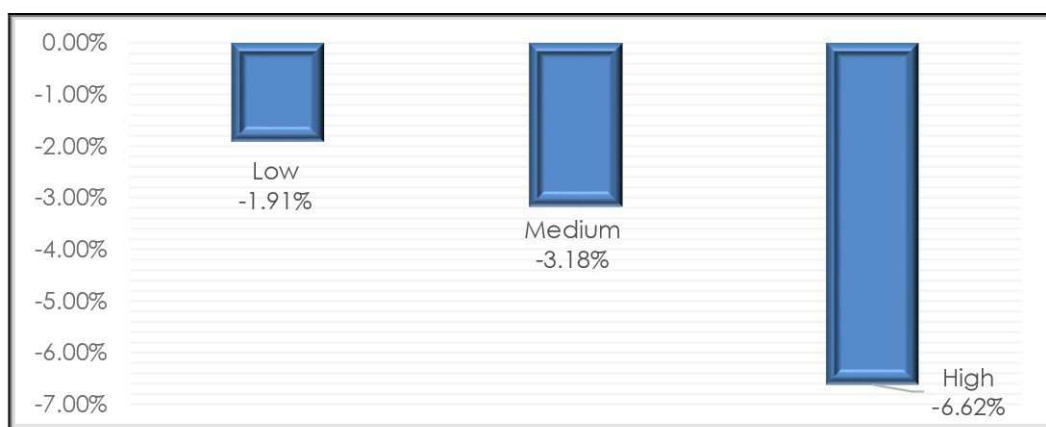
**Table 2:** Migratory balance of RS meso-regions with the others from Brazil, including RS 1986-1991, 1995-2000 and 2005-2010

Meso-regions	1986-1991	1995-2000	2005-2010
Northwest	-114.597	-99.266	-50.748
Northeast	11.586	19.414	21.230

Source of data: Bandeira *et al.* (2014, p.262).

Figures 1 and 2 present data from the Northwest Meso-region for the years 2005-2010. In them, the net migration rate by education (Figure 1) and by income brackets is shown (Figure 2).

**Figure 1:** Net migration rate by literacy – Northwest Meso-region (RS) 2005-2010



Source of data: Bandeira *et al.*, 2014.

In the first case, it is clear that this region loses mostly highly qualified people. The other data from the mentioned research indicate that there are 2.4 times more people with high literacy skills coming out than entering the mesoregion. Regarding the income brackets of the migrants, it is also seen that the region loses people with higher incomes.

**Figure 2:** Net migration rate by income groups – Northwest RS Mesoregion – 2005-2010



Source of data: Bandeira et al., 2014.

This clearly shows, among other aspects, a loss of human capital and potential consumers with high income for regional parameters. Also, the data

[...] support theories of migrant selectivity, which indicate that migrants are positively selected from the population of origin, that is, they have a proportionately higher level of education than the inhabitants of the place of origin. The same can be observed among immigrants, who also present positively selected characteristics in relation to the resident population (BANDEIRA *et al.*, 2014, p. 288).

If these migrations are mediated or, to the extent, made feasible by social networks and by individual social capital, as the literature points out, it is possible to infer that there may be an ambivalent effect concerning development. On the one hand, individual social capital can improve the living conditions of individuals who migrate to regions that, in theory, offer better opportunities for work, education, leisure, etc. On the other hand, on the

collective level, the same social capital can serve to consolidate and reproduce existing spatial disparities due to migratory selectivity. It is thus a driving force for development in the winning regions and an obstacle in the losing areas.

### Collective social capital and Bourdieu's logic at the regional level

The idea of collective social capital has in Putnam (1993b and 2000a) the primary reference. Its well-quoted definition of this concept is that "social capital refers to characteristics of social organization, such as trust, norms and systems, that contribute to increasing the efficiency of society, facilitating coordinated actions" (PUTNAM, 2000b, p. 177). In general terms, the central element of the notion of social capital would be the culture of a region, precisely the fact that there is a tradition of civic engagement in public issues and participation in associations of the most diverse. In such a scenario rich in association involvement trust and norms of generalised reciprocity would

flourish. Consequently, collective actions aimed at the common good would be facilitated. This would result in stronger regional economies and more responsive governments.

Assuming that the existence of regional inequalities is a given reality and accepting that the social capital of a region can have positive effects on its own development, it is reasonable to suppose that the logic of the reproduction of social inequalities arising from convertibility of one type of capital in others, as Bourdieu (1983) teaches us, can act in a very similar way if we have as a unit of analysis a specific territory characterized by regional inequalities. This is because it is necessary to ask who forms the social capital of a region and, regardless of cultural characteristics, under what socio-economic conditions these people live, to think about the potential of the social capital of each area.

According to what Putnam's works allows us to conclude, the formers of the social capital of a region are the inhabitants of that region. This may be an obvious answer, but not unimportant. Seeing that, if local actors are those who form social capital, it is precisely in the most deprived territories that this capital will be formed by individuals with less power and control, with less capacity to impact the world. Despite cultural differences, it is possible and necessary to question ourselves on some fundamental questions. What is the possession of other resources that each regional population has? Do people speak several languages? Do they have free time to participate, or do they need to spend much of their day travelling from home to work? Do they have the means of communication to organise collective activities? These are some of the questions that could be asked.

As Portes and Landolt (2000) recall, if a community is poor, no matter how cohesive it may be, its ability to influence the world and its surroundings may also be proportionally restricted. Said by the authors themselves: "social capital consists of the ability to marshal resources through social networks, not the resources themselves. When the latter are poor and scarce, the goal achievement capacity of a collectivity is restricted, no matter how strong its internal bonds." (PORTES & LANDOLT, 2000, p. 546).

Usually, references to collective social capital focus only on the most favourable side of participation and engagement, without paying attention to what Bourdieu had taught us in the early 1980s. That is to say, the fact that the different capitals (economic, cultural, and social) add up, become more potent and that one form of capital can be used to acquire others (BOURDIEU, 1983).

It is not a question here of focusing on the different resources of each region, such as natural resources, but on the different capitals of the people who form the social capital. This is because the social capital of a poor and currently underdeveloped region is necessarily made up of poor people. On the other hand, the social capital of richer and more developed regions will be made up of people with more material possessions, higher education, more mastery of languages, and so on - consequently, with higher power and capacity to influence the world.

As a result, in regions that are more prosperous the respective social capital can be more productive than in areas where the people who form it are lacking in respect to other capitals. This, in turn, constitutes, for the poorer regions, a significant limitation of the



supposed benefits derived from this capital. For the more developed regions, it may be a factor with more significant potential for positive effects on its development. As a consequence, it may result in a mechanism for reproducing

regional inequalities, for which collective / community social capital may be contributing. In schematic terms analogous to that shown in Table 1, Table 3 allows visualising this reasoning.

**Table 3: Reproductive potential of regional inequalities via collective social capital**

Regional inequalities	Amount of economic capital of the population	Quality of the cultural capital of the population	Potential of collective social capital
High development region	Large	High	High
Medium development region	Moderate	Average	Medium
Low development region	Little	Low	Low

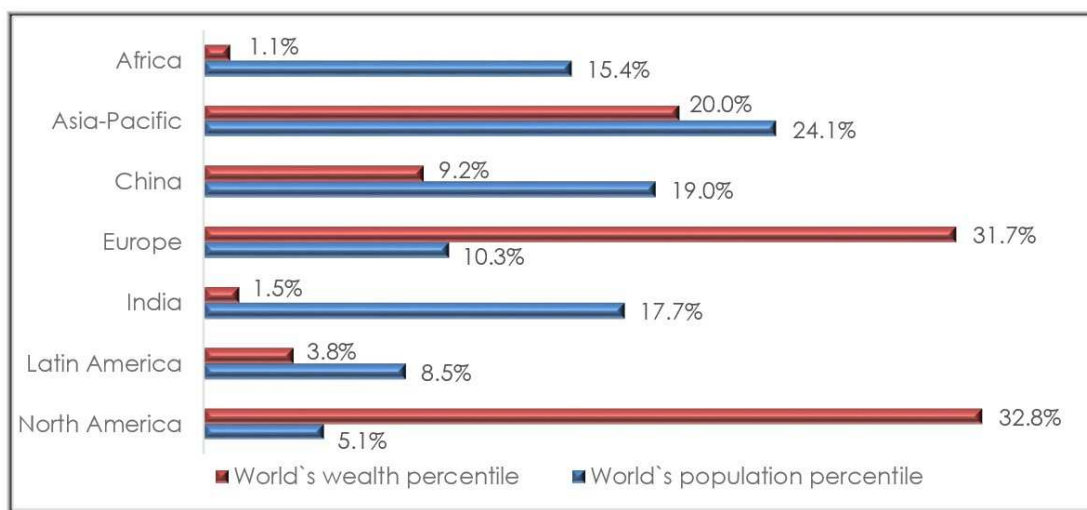
Source: Rossteutscher, Westle & Kunz, 2008, p.23.

One way to illustrate what I am discussing is to show some of the results of a study released by the Credit Suisse Research Institute (CSRI), which presents data on world wealth distribution. The study estimates world wealth (mid-2013) at 241 trillion US dollars, which would amount to an average of \$ 51,600.00 for each of the world's approximately 7.2 billion people. However, in the same study we read that: "Our estimates suggest that the lower half of the global population possesses barely 1% of global wealth, while the richest 10% of adults own 86% of all wealth, and the top 1% account for 46% of the total "(CSRI, 2013a, p.11). In addition to this general information, aggregate and absolute

data are presented regarding the global distribution of wealth and population according to selected regions and countries. Based on these data, Figure 3 shows a comparison between the world distribution of population and wealth according to regionalisation previously adopted in that study.

North America accounts for approximately 33% of the world's wealth and only 5% of the population. Europe concentrates 32% of the wealth and only 10% of the population. At the same time, all African countries together have only 1% of global wealth. There, however, live more than 15% of the global population. Obviously, internal inequalities also need to be taken into account in each case.

**Figure 3:** Distribution of population and world's wealth according to selected regions and countries, 2013



Source of data: CSRI (2013b, p.140).

However, in the face of such circumstances, it is not difficult to imagine that individual or collective engagement on the part of Europeans or Americans may be much more likely to succeed than that of an African individual or collective. Also, this may be unrelated to cultural differences. Still, it is easy to imagine that Europeans and Americans tend to explain their own wealth and well-being from endogenous elements (such as culture and social capital) and that they tend to suggest that other peoples should seek endogenous solutions for its development.

Nevertheless, given the above, would it be reasonable to expect that through social capital formed by people from the areas with the lowest wealth and capital, what, for Bourdieu (1983) is power, could there be significant developmental changes in those places? Could it be that, if all people in these areas were to be actively involved in voluntary associations, would development be achieved? How to solve the problems of countries with the

lowest Human Development Index (HDI) and more specifically of their "communities" with Putnam's social capital approach? Civics x familism, voluntary engagement, bonding and/or bridging networks, etc. (PUTNAM, 1993b, 2000a), are these the solutions? Possibly the answer would be no.

Anyone who tries to explain development via Putnam certainly does not pay much attention to what Chart 3 lays out. At present, the ability to influence and change the world are starkly unequal. Therefore, it seems to be practically impossible to imagine that the inhabitants of these low HDI countries, even if they were particularly engaged and civic, could really influence the world or even their nearest environment in a meaningful way. It could be objected that it is not a matter of focusing on individuals, but rather on collective actors, such as associations, unions, social movements, etc. and that "together we are stronger". However, this does not change the fact that it is the inhabitants themselves that form such organisations.

Said in Putnam's terms, it means that even if all the inhabitants of one of a deprived town in Brazil, for example, participated in some association, even if these citizens trusted each other fully and all the internal problems of collective action were solved, many of the aspects that affect local development would still not be solvable by local social capital. In short, social capital may not have the potential to solve the problems of the poorest regions or the potential to be a resource for reducing distances between regions. It can, more likely, increase them.

### **Concluding remarks**

This article discusses regional development inequalities through the concept of social capital, mainly from the contributions of Pierre Bourdieu and Robert Putnam. If this latter author is often associated with the theme of regional development, the same does not apply to Bourdieu, especially if the analytical perspective is derived from his concept of social capital; as since, unlike Putnam, who focuses on the collective dimension of the concept, Bourdieu constructed it by focusing on the individual and his networks of relationships.

Firstly, it is sought to show that this notion of individual social capital can also have heuristic value when studying regional development, especially if regional inequalities and migratory movements linked to them are in mind. In this sense, it is emphasised, anchored in Thomas Faist, that social capital can act as a meso link that connects (individuals) emigrants from a region with individuals and institutions from other regions, especially with those regions that receive migrants. Thus, the ambiguity of the role of this social capital in development is highlighted. If viewed from the perspective of migrant

individuals, it is likely that this resource will have a positive impact on their well-being. If increased welfare, is taken as a synonym for development, one can speak of a positive relationship between social capital and development promotion.

However, depending on the characteristics of those who emigrate, the losing regions may be losing important subjects for the development of the region — for example, concerning consumption power, labour market, and innovative potential, among others. If the departure of people can be disadvantageous to some region, the coming of these same people will be advantageous to another. Moreover, if this was made possible by individual social capital, there is a clear implication between this capital and the development dynamics of the different regions. Those regions that lose population lose development potential via social capital and those that receive the populations receive this potential together. If this is valid, the social capital in question can be seen as an element that acts to reproduce and eventually expand regional inequalities. Furthermore, it is pertinent to think about deepening knowledge about the roles of interpersonal networks and social capital regarding migratory movements in interregional terms.

About the putnamian's collective social capital, it is argued that this too can have undesired implications if the objective is to reduce regional inequalities - undesired in the sense of also promoting the reproduction or expansion of regional inequalities. In order to understand this possibility it is necessary to be clear that the collective social capital of a region is mainly formed by its own inhabitants and that, in addition to possible regional cultural

differences, it is necessary to show the differences in terms of socioeconomic conditions among the inhabitants of the various regions. In general terms, it means that poor/underdeveloped regions will have their social capital made up of poor people. On the contrary, rich/highly developed regions will have their social capital formed by rich people.

Such a basic idea can be developed if we keep in mind Bourdieu's (1983) teachings on the plurality of capital, the convertibility of one capital in others, that social capital would have a multiplier effect on the other available types and quantities of capital and that different capitals can be seen as equivalent to power. In this sense, civic engagement, associativism, participation in public life in general and collective actions will have higher chances of success if the people who give them life are more endowed with different capitals. The obvious corollary of this is that collective social capital in already more developed regions will have a potentially positive impact on development higher than that of less developed regions. Therefore, it is a mechanism of reproduction and/or amplification of the regional inequalities.

It is reiterated that what I claim here is not the same as focusing on the different resources of each region itself, such as natural resources, this can also be the subject of discussion. However, here we want to emphasise the need to keep in mind the different capitals of the people who form the social capital of each region. This highlights a fundamental qualitative aspect of collective social capital, which is not necessarily determined by culture, but it is something concrete and should not be

ignored if we are to deal seriously with social capital.

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