

NOTE

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Introduction

This document consists in three sections. The first one provides a description of French surveys that collect elements for a measurement of social capital. Since INSEE is the main provider of large data sets on individuals and households behavior, it focuses on INSEE surveys. These surveys have been the source for many studies, mostly on associational life and sociability; a short annotated bibliography is proposed in section 2. Section 3 brings up some questions about the concept of social capital defined as it is, the difficulties which follow in its measurement, and calls for further and in-depth work on the concept as a first step towards a measurement.

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Section 1 – Information about the surveys

Even though there is not a tradition of measuring “social capital” as such at INSEE, several surveys and studies have approached since the 1960s many themes that are relevant with various aspects of the concept, and as so provide valuable information for the study of social capital over almost the last twenty years.

At the present time, the main source is the “Continuous Surveys on Households Living Conditions” which exists since 1996, and collects information on a systematic and regular basis. There had been before three surveys on living conditions (1978,1986, 1993) that can be considered as its forerunners, and various operations, such as one survey specially designed for the study of people’s social relations (1983), one survey on households lifestyles (1988), and the surveys on leisure, that approached various aspects of associational life and sociability. Other surveys, such as the Time Use surveys, the Housing Condition surveys, and the “Socio-economic panel” may also provide useful information. INSEE also produces data on participation to the elections. A summary of what can be found in which survey is proposed under the form of a general table by main themes and key concepts.

All the surveys developed at INSEE have in common the same method of sampling, that is a sample of households/addresses drawn from a “main sample” itself drawn from the Census. Only so-called “ordinary” households are taken into account, that is households from the non-institutional population.

Almost all the surveys presented after contain one households file and one individuals file. For questions at the households level, the respondent is preferably the reference person or his spouse/partner, but may be any adult member; for questions at the individuals level, the respondent is in most cases one (or several) “Kish” individual(s) among the adult members of the household.

All surveys give contextual information on the household (description of the household members by age, sex, citizenship, relation with the reference person, marital status, education level and occupational status, and some information on its income) and on the respondent to individual questions.

1. Continuous Survey on Households Living Conditions (EPCV)

Name of the survey: “Enquête permanente sur les conditions de vie des ménages”.

Sample size: 8,000 households, response rate 72 %, about 14,000 individuals (aged 15 and over).

Status: Annual; latest available: October 2001.(This system of surveys is probably to be reorganized after 2004).

Department: Conditions de Vie des Ménages

Contact person: Sylvie Dumartin, sylvie.dumartin@insee.fr

The EPCV is an annual system of 3 distinct surveys that exists since 1996; they are conducted in January, May and October. Each one of these surveys is itself composed of two questionnaires: the first one is a “permanent section” and deals with social indicators; the second one, or “variable section” is aimed either at collecting information halfway between two “large” surveys, or updating “small” surveys, or is used to investigate new questions. They are organized as follows:

1.a. - Permanent section (only January and October surveys are relevant)

- “**Quality of residential environment and neighborhood**” (January) deals with:

Local problems of noise and pollution.

Availability of public facilities and resources of the area.

Insecurity, crime, victimization.

Perception of lacks in the local area.

- “**The workplace and social contacts**” (October) develops questions on:

Professional contacts, contacts with family members, friends, neighbors.

Participation or involvement in groups, associations, clubs.
Religious activity.
Participation to elections.
Leisure: type/frequency in a list of activities.

1.b. - Variable sections (selection of those relevant to the approach of social capital)

- May 1996 (M96): “**Domestic services**” (“*Services de proximité*”).
Designed for the study of the use of domestic services. One part of the questionnaire deals with help or services provided or received on a voluntary basis.
- May 1997 (M97): “**Daily life relations and isolation**” (“*Relations de la vie quotidienne et isolement*”).
Aimed at a measurement of social relations developed in daily life activities: talking and meeting with others, exchanging services or help with neighbors, parents, friends and colleagues, and participation in associations.
- October 1997 (O97): “**Networks of relatives and mutual aid**” (“*Réseaux de parenté et entraide*”).
Collects detailed information on the frequency, intensity and motives of contacts between an individual and his/her family members.
- January 1998 (J98): “**Environmental practices**” (“*Pratiques environnementales et sensibilité aux problèmes d’environnement*”).
Centered on the theme of environment, one part of the questionnaire approaches also people’s involvement in several movements or organizations (e.g. human rights), and their opinion on various social and environmental issues.
- January 1999 (J99): “**Insecurity**” (“*Insécurité*”).
Detailed questionnaire focusing on safety/lack of safety: feeling of safety when going out, muggings, insults, intimidation or threats, violence, robberies.
- May 1999 (M99): “**Domestic services**” (“*Services de proximité*”).
cf. May 1996.
- April 2001 (A01): “**You and your neighborhood**” (“*Vous et votre quartier*”).
(January survey, exceptionally collected in April)
Designed for the study of people’s life in their local area: opinion about quality, local facilities and activities, relations with other people. There are also questions on participation in associations, religious activity, electoral participation.
- October 2001 (O01): “**New technologies**” (“*Les nouvelles technologies*”).
Centered on questions about possession and uses of ITC (personal computers, the internet, cell phones); starts with questions on people’s feelings about these tools and particularly whether they think that they make exchanges and contacts between people any easier or not.
- October 2002: the survey will focus on participation in associations.
- May 2003: the survey will deal with participation in cultural and sports activities.

1.c. - Former surveys on living conditions and occasional surveys

Former surveys on living conditions (“*Enquête sur les situations défavorisées*”)

There have been three of them, in 1978, 1986 and 1993. They were designed to study the variety of households situations in terms of income and assets, but also in terms of health, employment, isolation and so on. The idea was to investigate the combination of unfavorable or “negative” features and whether they are cumulative, and more generally, to deepen the study of inequalities; the survey of 1978 was the first of this sort, “multi-thematic”. It is under a theme “Daily life” that questions were developed on participation in groups or associations, social relations (with parents, neighbors, friends), and leisure.

Survey on Contacts (“*Enquête sur les contacts entre les personnes*”, 1983)

This survey was precisely aimed at the study of relation networks. A first part of the questionnaire dealt with households behavior (some questions at the household as a whole, some questions detailing all the individuals), centered on relations with neighbors, participation in associations or groups and level of involvement, and activities when going out; a second part, at the individual level dealt with contacts and relations with colleagues, neighbors, family and friends, non professional activities and social participation.

Survey on Lifestyles (“*Enquête modes de vie*”, 1988)

This survey was designed essentially to study the households’ domestic production. The aim was to investigate the productive activities of the households, to measure their production, and to distinguish between what is produced for the household’s own use and what is produced for other households. For this, it collected detailed information on the help and services exchanged between households. This survey has not been repeated.

Surveys on Leisure (“*Enquête sur les loisirs*” 1987-1988; 1967)

This survey was conducted twice, at 20 years of interval. It provides a detailed inventory of what people do during their leisure time, including questions on social relations, participation in associations and groups, religious activity.

2. Time Use survey (TU)

Name of the survey: “*Enquête Emploi du Temps*”

Latest available: 1998-1999 (Former Time Use surveys: 1974-1975; 1985-1986)

Sample size: 12,000 households, response rate 79,5%, about 14,000 individuals (aged 15 and over).

Status: decennial.

Department: *Conditions de Vie des Ménages*

Contact person: *Françoise Dumontier*, francoise.dumontier@insee.fr

This survey provides information (on the basis of a self-completed diary) on how people spend their time, detailing by 10 minutes intervals their activity (main and secondary), where it takes place, who they are with, and the aim of the given activity (personal, professional, for another household, for an association or a group). There are also two questionnaires, one aimed at the household (one respondent) that collects information on help and services received by the household detailed by provider, and on the household’s social behavior (invitations, shared activities) and one aimed at the individuals (in the 1998-1999 survey, all the household’s members aged 15 and over), providing information on their leisure activities, participation in associations and social relations, and detailing the help/services provided outside of the household on a voluntary basis.

3. Housing survey (HC)

Name of the survey: “*Enquête Logement*”.

Latest available: 1996-1997 (2001-2002 will be available in 2003)

Sample size: 45,000 households; response rate 78,8%.

Status: quinquennial.

Department: *Logement*

Contact person: *christelle.rieg@insee.fr*

The main purpose of this survey is to provide information on the characteristics of the housing stock and on housing expenditures (rents, mortgages, facilities) together with data on the households. It provides also some information about the local environment (facilities available in the area) and includes some questions about vandalism, safety, etc. in the house/block/area, and perception of the housing environment (neighborhood).

4. Socio-economic Panel (SEP)

Name of the survey: "Panel communautaire de ménages".

Latest available: 1998 (wave 5).

Sample size (1st wave): 6,000 households; response rate 82%, about 14,300 individuals (aged 16 and over).

Status: last wave (8) was collected in 2001.

Department: Revenus et Patrimoine des Ménages.

Contact person: helene.valdelievre@insee.fr

The "Socio-economic panel" is the French part of the European Community Household Panel, launched in 1994 by Eurostat. In France, the experience of collecting longitudinal data had started earlier, with a regional panel in Lorraine ("Panel Lorrain") from 1985 to 1990. The SEP provides multi-dimensional information (incomes, occupational status, living conditions) on individuals first interviewed in 1994 (plus 1993 in retrospect) and annually after (until 2001), allowing to study the changes they experience and how these changes may interact. One part of the questionnaire deals with social relations (voluntary help to other households, membership and activity in an association, frequency of talking with neighbors, meeting friends); it also provides a rating of individual satisfaction with activity, financial situation, housing, health, leisure, and contacts with others.

5. Survey on Electoral Participation (EP)

Name of the survey: "Participation électorale".

Latest available: 1998.

Status: Ad hoc.

Department: Enquêtes et Etudes Démographiques.

Contact person: francois.clanche@insee.fr

This survey provides information on people's registration and participation to various elections: presently, the presidential and parliamentary elections, previously (1995-1998; 1988-1989) the presidential and local elections. In each survey, the same individuals are followed over several elections. The data are based on several registers and composed of two samples:

- a first one results from merging the "Continuous demographic sample", a panel of individuals drawn from the Census (*Echantillon démographique permanent*, EDP, which provides socio-demographic information), with the general electoral register (kept by the regional offices of Insee);

- a second one results from merging a sub-sample of the first one with the signature lists of voters that are kept by local administrations.

The first sample (190,000 individuals in 1995-1998) allows to study registration in the electoral registers, while the second one (43,000 individuals) allows to study the actual participation in each ballot. Adding the information from the EDP on the individuals' socio-demographic characteristics (those provided by the Census), these data are a valuable source for studies on political participation, and also allow to study the bias between actual and stated (in the interviews of the other surveys) participation behavior.

Summary

Theme	Key-aspect	EPCV										TU	HC	SEP	EP
		Permanent		Variable											
		Jan.	Oct.	M96	M97	O97	J98	J99	M99	A01	O01				
Formal networks, social engagement & participation	Participation in groups, associations, clubs, voluntary work		▲		▲		▲			▲		▲		▲	
	Religious activity		▲		▲					▲					
	Political participation		▲		▲					▲					▲
Informal networks, social relations, contacts & socialibility	With colleagues		▲		▲							▲			
	With family members		▲		▲	▲						▲			
	With friends		▲		▲							▲		▲	
	With neighbors		▲		▲					▲		▲		▲	
	Help, services exchanged with others			▲	▲				▲			▲		▲	
Community and local area characteristics	Rating of local area	▲					▲						▲		
	Problems of noise	▲											▲	▲	
	Problems of pollution	▲												▲	
	Local facilities, resources of the area	▲													
	Vandalism, safety, crime, victimization	▲						▲					▲	▲	
Feelings and attitudes	Satisfaction with contacts with others													▲	
	New technologies										▲				
	Environmental protection						▲								
	Fear of crime	▲						▲							

Section 2 – Associational life and sociability: a short annotated bibliography of studies published by INSEE

This short bibliography is centered on studies based on the surveys presented in section A, and limited to those published since 1990. The studies selected have been grouped by theme and key-aspect following those listed in the summary table. The data used are mentioned at the end of each abstract.

1. Formal networks, social engagement, participation

- associations and voluntary work

Le milieu associatif de 1983 à 1996; E. Crenner, Insee 1^{ère} n° 542, 1997.

Shows that at 15 years interval, the number of persons who are member in an association has remained about the same, but there has been a major change in the type of associations. A growing proportion are centered on the individual, a decreasing proportion deal with collective action or objectives. This evolution is associated with a growth in people's level of involvement: for example in parental associations, almost half the members participate actively when 15 years before, about three on four contented with just paying their subscription. (EPCV Oct.1997)

Les différentes façons d'être bénévole, L. Prouteau, Economie et statistique n°311, 1998.

The author studies the various forms of voluntary work, that he first distinguishes into formal (participation in associations) and informal (help, care to others). Either formal or informal, voluntary work tends to be associated with high levels of sociability. But there are differences in the nature of the activities developed as well as in the characteristics of the individuals who participate; sports, culture and leisure activities concentrate 2/3 of the formal forms, and men participate twice as much as women; women participate more in informal forms. The study also suggests that formal forms of voluntary work (particularly in sports, culture and leisure) seem to compensate for lack of resources offered in the living area. (TU 1985-1986)

L'engagement associatif après 60 ans; H. Michaudon, Insee 1^{ère} n° 737, 2000.

The study focuses on the participation in associations of people aged 60 and over; almost 50 % are member in one association, and one half of them at least in two associations. According to the author, this cannot be interpreted only as a consequence of their having more leisure time than on average: it also illustrates an interest for doing things with or for the others. Membership is nevertheless an indication of social integration, and, as it is the case for people in other intervals of age, seems to be linked with other forms of sociability; it depends also on the educational level and the former occupational status. (EPCV Oct. 1999)

La participation associative au regard des temps sociaux, L. Prouteau & F.-C. Wolf, Economie et statistique (forthcoming).

The authors analyze the determinants of individuals' participation in associations. They find a significant role of the occupational status: executives and managers, and also technicians and professional associates tend to be more involved than other workers, or than the unemployed or those who are not economically active. But the study also put this usual conclusion into perspective, and points out a neat influence of the constraints of working hours: flexible hours, part-time work, and even night work play positively on participation, while long hours, or hard working conditions or long commuting play negatively. The study at last shows a lower participation of women, particularly those having children, and a positive correlation between the spouses/partners participation.

- religious activity

La vie religieuse : chiffres et enquêtes, Z. Djider & M. Marpsat, Données sociales, Insee 1990.

Overview of the evolutions of religious membership and practices over 20 years. (Leisure 1987-1988; TU 1985-1986, and registers)

L'état de la pratique religieuse en France; Xavier Niel, Insee 1^{ère} n° 570, 1998.

Analysis of religious activity and comparison between 1987 and 1996. It shows that religious practice is more frequent among older people, and for all groups of age, more frequent among women and persons that are not French nationals. The main determinants of religious practice seem to be the parents' beliefs and practices, then the age. In terms of the evolution in ten years, there has been an increase of religious activity only among the elderly; on the contrary, the proportion stating neither practicing nor seeing themselves as being part of a religious community has grown, especially among the young. (Leisure 1987-1988 & EPCV Oct. 1996)

- political participation

La participation électorale d'avril 1988 à mars 1989, J. Morin, Données sociales, Insee 1990.

Analysis of people's electoral behavior over three diverse elections (presidential, parliamentary, local) and one referendum. It shows that there are two stable groups: one of permanent abstainers (about 8 %), one of permanent voters (about 25 %). In the in-between, the others fluctuate from one election to the next one, a total of 37 % having participated to all the elections but to the referendum. (EP 1988-1989)

La présidentielle à contre-jour ; abstentionnistes et non-inscrits, F. Héran & D. Rouault, Insee 1^{ère} n°397, 1995

La double élection de 1995: exclusion sociale et stratégie d'abstention, F. Héran & D. Rouault, Insee 1^{ère} n°414, 1995.

Les intermittences du vote - Un bilan de la participation de 1995 à 1997, F. Héran, Insee 1^{ère} n°546, 1997.

These three studies analyze the electoral participation in the presidential, local, and parliamentary elections between 1995 and 1997. They show first that systematic abstainers represent about 8 % of the registered electors, and point out the relationship between systematic abstention and some features of social exclusion (low educational level, unemployment or precarious jobs). They also show that abstention differs by type of election (abstention is generally at its lowest rate in the presidential election), but also depends on the perceived certainty or indecision of the outcome of the election. (EP 1995-1997)

2. Informal networks: social relations, contacts, sociability

Trouver à qui parler : le sexe et l'âge de nos interlocuteurs, F. Héran, Données sociales, Insee 1990.

Study of the interlocutors in discussions outside of the workplace. The author finds that almost two times on three, one talk with another person of the same sex, and very often also with another person that belongs to the same generation (twice more often than it would be in the case of random contacts). Nevertheless, this tendency is counterbalanced by relations with parents and family, that contribute to diversify the characteristics of the people we talk to. (Contacts 1983)

Les français se parlent de moins en moins; N. Blanpain et J.-L. Pan Ké Shon, Insee 1^{ère} n° 571, 1998.

Study of the evolution and composition of non professional conversations. Authors find that, telephone excluded and out of the workplace, people tend to have fewer conversations in 1997 than in 1983. This is observed in the frequency of talking to shopkeepers, or with friends or neighbors and relatives, and there has also been a decrease in non professional conversations on the workplace. They analyze this evolution as the effects of several changes: growing proportion of supermarkets, hardened working conditions, growing individualism. They also point out three types of sociability, associated with the lifecycle the students' sociability, centered on friends, that of the economically active, centered on colleagues, and that of the retirees more often reduced to relatives. (Contacts 1983 & EPCV M97)

La parenté : un réseau de sociabilité actif mais concentré; E. Crenner, Insee 1^{ère} n° 600, 1998.

Examines family networks; counting all the relatives, family constitutes an environment of 24 persons on average; only one person on ten has less than 8 relatives. The more dense relations are those between parents and children. These relations resist to distance, and are reinforced by phone calls. (EPCV O97)

D'où sont mes amis venus ?...; J.-L. Pan Ké Shon, Insee 1^{ère} n° 613, 1998.

Analysis of the determinants of friendships; they appear to depend greatly on the individuals social environment: school, university, local area, workplace. As a consequence, friends often present same or close characteristics.

In general, women tend to state a fewer number of friends than men. The composition of the individuals' network of friends changes over the lifecycle; friendships with neighbors are at their most among the elders, and are less frequent in high density areas; the young are the more likely to develop their network with friends of friends. And generally, friendship goes as the other forms of social relations: the number of friends grows with the income level and social position. (EPCV M97)

Famille, je vous aide; E. Crenner, Insee 1^{ère} n° 631, 1999.

Focus on family solidarity; the author shows that it takes multiple forms but goes mostly towards close relatives, and in priority those the persons have been living with. Wealthy households are more likely to provide some help, and generally, women are more inclined to help, whether they are working or not. (EPCV M97)

La sociabilité des personnes âgées; N. Blanpain et J-L. Pan Ké Shon, Insee 1^{ère} n° 644, 1999.

Centered on the elder's sociability; authors show that retirement tends to reorient social relations more towards children and grand-children, and also towards neighbors. Over the years, the extent of their social network decreases, women sociability, higher on the average, falls down and becomes comparable to that of men, and health problems reduce social activity. (EPCV M97)

A chaque étape de la vie ses relations, N. Blanpain & J.L. Pan Ké Shon, Données sociales, Insee 1999.

The authors analyze the extent and composition of individuals' relations measured as the number of discussions and characteristics of the interlocutors; the authors find that they are linked to lifecycle, and are at their peak for people aged around 35. They also show that the occupation but also the parents social position have significant influences, that women seem to have a stronger sociability than men, that the retired persons have a more locally concentrated relations network than the economically active, and that unemployment induces a drop in the individuals' relations with others. They also notice a significant drop in the number of non professional conversations on the workplace between 1983 and 1997, and suggest that it could result at the same time from the growth of temporary and part-time employment and from hardened working conditions. (EPCV M97)

Les réseaux de relations de la vie quotidienne, A. Degenne & Y. Lemel, Données sociales, Insee 1999.

In this study, the authors focus on relations developed in daily life activities, and mainly on help and services exchanged between households. They first point out their great variety, from care to the others' children to loans. They distinguish 18 types of them, and separate one-way help (provided or received to face needs), from reciprocal exchanges (sociability); they show that one-way help is mostly the case within the family network, while reciprocity is mostly observed in the case of other relationships. They notice a correlation between the global extent of the household's exchanges and their income level, and for economically active households, significant differences between the self-employed and the salaried, the latter having larger non-family networks than the first ones. (Survey on Lifestyles 1988-1989)

Vivre seul, sentiment de solitude et isolement relationnel; J-L. Pan Ké Shon, Insee 1^{ère} n° 678, 1999.

The study shows that to live alone doesn't mean a lack of contacts with others ; on the contrary, compared to those who live in couple and other things being equal, persons living alone appear more likely to develop social relations, and less likely to feel isolated. It also shows that relational isolation affects mostly the underprivileged: other things equal, those with a low educational level, the unskilled manual workers, the unemployed show a higher probability of social isolation. Social isolation goes with the feeling of being lonely; this feeling concerns also divorcees or widowers, and women tend to be more concerned than men. (EPCV M97)

Le téléphone : un facteur d'intégration sociale, C.A. Rivière, Economie et statistique n° 345, 2001.

This study focuses on the phone as a means of sociability. It shows that telephone contacts are more restricted than face-to-face contacts, more utilized within small circles of relations (parents, close friends) ; it also shows a high geographic concentration of telephone contacts, almost as high as for other contacts. Telephone contacts seem at the same time to reinforce and to replace face-to-face contacts: they play a compensatory role in the case of isolated people, and, for those who have a high educational level, add again to their other and dense forms of sociability. (Insee: Survey on Contacts 1983 & EPCV M97; France Telecom survey)

3. Community and local area characteristics, feelings and attitudes

Le cadre de vie, E. Crenner, Insee 1^{ère} n° 476, 1996.

In 1996, two households on three state to be living in noisy, polluted or unsafe areas. Noise and pollution are mainly a problem of cities, Paris combining all the problems; high income households can avoid noisy or

polluted neighborhoods, but then are more concerned by robberies. Younger households are more concerned than older ones, who prefer to settle in quiet neighborhoods and have the income level that allows them to. (EPCV Jan. 1996)

Insécurité et sentiment d'insécurité; E. Crenner, Insee 1^{ère} n° 501, 1996.

The study shows that about 5 % of the individuals aged 25 and over declare to have been victim of mugging or other violence during the past two years. The more in danger are those living in collective units, and in rural areas as well as in cities, the young (and mostly men). Going alone at night is presented as a problem by 13 % of the persons interviewed, whether they have been previously a victim or not. The feeling of insecurity is greater among the less privileged. (EPCV Jan. 1996)

Insécurité et préoccupations sécuritaires, E. Crenner, Données sociales, Insee 1999.

The author investigates the feelings of insecurity; she shows that it is particularly strong among people who have already been a victim, and those who have witnessed acts of violence or delinquency. It is also generally increased if the place of living is in a state of disrepair, or the local area is vandalized. Fear of crime is lower among higher income levels than on average; but rich and poor areas are not subject to the same crimes: more robberies in the first ones, more physical or personal violence in the second ones. The study also shows that not all the victims report to the police or insurances (the first reason they give is that it wouldn't have any effect); nevertheless, former victims change their behavior, but even more when their assets were concerned than when it was their person. (EPCV Jan. 1997)

Le cadre de vie des plus de 60 ans, H. Michaudon, Insee 1^{ère} n° 760, 2001.

The study shows that senior citizens tend to be more often satisfied with their living area than on average: they are in fewer proportions to state they suffer from noise, pollution or vandalism. In terms of what is lacking in their local area, they point out more the lack of shops than a lack of safety. (EPCV Jan. 1998-1999-2000)

Summary

The studies presented in this section consider mostly social capital from the angle of its determinants and its characteristics at the individual level. They generally show that the size of the individuals' networks and the individuals' propensity to participate in associational life tend to correspond to the following patterns:

- 1) higher levels of education, of income, best occupational status are associated with denser sociability and greater propensity to participate in associational life or voluntary work. Unemployment has a significant negative impact. These factors play also in the same sense on political participation.
- 2) the size and composition of relational networks changes over the individuals' lifecycle: in terms of size, it grows to a peak around the age of 35, then decreases; in terms of composition, it tends to tighten around the family and the neighbors when people grow older.
- 3) men seem to be better at membership in organized groups than women, and conversely, women are better at informal interactions. Women's lower participation rates in formal networks appears even lower when they have children.
- 4) working time arrangements and working conditions seem to have an impact on participation.
- 5) involvement and voluntary work in some types of associational activity (sports, culture) may reflect the lack of local public (institutional) resources.

At country level, three main trends are identifiable:

- 1) Associational life (1983-1996): participation in associations has remained rather stable in terms of the "level" of membership but not by types of associations: higher share of those offering resources for individual purposes, lower share of those centered on collective action.
- 2) Religious practice (1987-1996): decreasing proportion of persons stating religious practice.
- 3) Political participation (1988-1997): rather stable proportion of systematic abstainers.

C – Definition and measurement issues

One problem with social capital is that the idea might seem obvious -as Portes (1998) puts it: “That involvement and participation in groups can have positive consequences for the individual and the community is a staple notion” (he meant in sociology, but the quotation remains valid on a larger scale)-, and the prospects attractive -as a contribution to the recognition of a social dimension in economic activity-, the concept remains vague. There is nevertheless one of its features that seems to be generally agreed: that it is multidimensional. Unfortunately, multidimensionality seems to reside in its sources, in its forms, and also in the nature of its outcomes; and at the same time, sources, forms and outcomes are not neatly distinguishable; this makes the task of measuring it appear as a real challenge.

1. Uneasiness with social capital as a concept

What is social capital? The concept is attributed to several “fathers” (the most often cited are Coleman,1988; Bourdieu,1980-translated 1986; Putnam,1993; Fukuyama,1995), and the literature abounds in definitions, since almost every author finds it necessary to provide his/her own (after a ritual introduction stating how SC attracts a growing interest, or provide a growing body of evidence). Most of the time, the definition adopted is either a variation on R. Putnam’s definition: “*SC refers to features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit*”, or –less frequently-, a variation on J. Coleman’s definition: “*SC is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but many entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures; they facilitate certain actions of actors within the structure*”. The definition adopted by the OECD “*Networks, norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups*”, borrows from the two former ones, relaxing the clause of “mutual benefit” from the first one, and extending the area of the second one to “among groups”. In the end, the various definitions (we deliberately put Bourdieu out of the picture¹) lead to the idea that SC is made of almost all and every form of social relations plus trust, on the account that the outcome must be good.

A methodological weakness of this line of definition, pointed out by several researchers, is that of a functional definition, that leads to circular reasoning, where the outcome is the proof of the resource

¹ Bourdieu defines social capital as “the entirety of present or potential resources resulting from the possession of a long-lasting, more or less institutionalized, network of relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (“Le capital social: notes provisoires”, 1980, my translation). The definition might appear close, but the concept is developed in a radically different framework. In a few words Bourdieu develops an approach in terms of class strategy; in this framework, SC has the status of an instrument (as well as economic and cultural capital) for rational agents to maintain and reinforce social status and power.

(see Portes & Landolt, 1996; Durlauf, 1999; Manski, 2000; Sobel, 2002). But there are other ambiguities that result in social capital being too broad a “concept”, some sort of a carryall notion, which could lead nowhere if it remains in such a raw state.

One factor of uneasiness is the wide range of its ostensible explanatory power: SC seems able to explain growth, well-being, investment, health, human capital, democracy, crime. To utilize Sobel’s title, “Can we trust social capital?”

Can we trust it to be a “capital”? Usually, a capital is produced intentionally, for a definite purpose; there are identifiable stocks and flows of it, identifiable outcomes in the form of products and income; there are investments, depreciation, and returns. Is social capital a capital in this meaning? Is it produced intentionally, or does it just “happen”? Would it then be some sort of a particular natural resource, inherent to human beings living in society ? or is it to be thought rather as some sort of an externality? Portes (1998) proposes an interpretation that could be useful to go farther: he distinguishes between “instrumental” sources of SC, that is relations that are purposive, and “consummatory” sources, that result either from being thrown together in the same situation (including identification), or from belonging to a common social structure. This interpretation could help to conceptualize SC as a capital.

Can we trust it to be “social”? Is it “social” because it is related to social relations and interactions? or is it “social” because it is a collective resource? or because the outcome is collective? or because it is a substitute for institutions or public services? According to Coleman, SC is not the property of the person who utilizes it. But it seems that the frontier of the “social” dimension might be that of the group: then SC is its private property, collective in the sense that members have privileged access to it. One important improvement, that might help to comprehend the production and the outcomes of social capital, would be to clarify whether it is conceptualized basically as an individual feature or basically as a collective feature, and whether it is a resource for collective action or for individual achievements.

Another factor of uneasiness is that it is difficult to disentangle the nature, the sources, the forms and the outcomes of social capital. It is an important question of self-discipline if we want to understand what we are able to measure, not to say what we are talking about: if SC is a resource inherent to human relations in social life, then one form taken by these relations is not in itself SC; one form is not a source; sources have to be explained (as the determinants of investment in social capital). Then there’s the question of the outcomes: what are they actually? income, welfare, well-being, growth?

Then there is the question of “good” and “bad” SC: implicitly, social capital is something positive. There is the “mutual benefit” in Putnam’s definition, the property to “facilitate” in Coleman’s

definition, that lead to envisage SC as something desirable. Portes & Landolt (1996), or Durlauf (1999) discuss extensively this problem (and Putnam and Coleman acknowledge it), but there remains always vaguely the feeling that “bad” SC is just not SC. The problem is not that producing something “bad” disqualifies SC as a capital (physical capital produces medicines as well as guns -or pollution); the problem is that in the rhetoric of social capital, the outcomes are always envisaged as benign. Hence a somewhat “messianic” nature, that might disqualify it as a concept.

And finally, what is it that we want to explain with social capital? In which theoretical framework does SC function as a concept? So far, it has mostly functioned in regressions, with no explicit hypothesis on how it is supposed to play a role in an articulate causal relationship, or which other explanation it is supposed to improve or replace; when the parameter utilized as a measure of SC is significant, then SC is taken to have an explanatory power, when it is not, then SC is said not having this power².

All these questions about SC lead to many questions about its measurement, questions that in turn sum up in “what is it exactly that we want to measure”?

2. What is it exactly that we want to measure?

First, what *is* being measured? On the account of it being multidimensional, but also probably for *ad hoc* and practical reasons, such as data availability, there are various measures which correspond to the various forms and manifestations of social life plus trust: participation in associations, groups and clubs, voluntary work, social contacts and sociability, services exchanged with other people, civic engagement, political participation, trust in other people, in the institutions, etc. But is it social capital which is measured? yes if SC is defined as a stock of relations or an aptitude to trust, but it seems that it is defined rather as the resource emanating from it. If it is so, what is actually measured is not SC, but the production factors of SC.

If we now turn to the measures, it seems that they can be grouped broadly under two options for a measurement: as people’s propensity to participate in various forms of relations; as people’s propensity to trust other people / groups / institutions. In the first case, practices are being measured, and in the second one, perceptions or representations are being measured.

² Hendry (1993, p.21), tells about a nice variable C he has found to explain prices: “the fit is spectacular, the parameters ‘highly significant’ (...) but alas, the whole exercise is futile as well as deceitful since C is simply cumulative rainfall in the UK”.

It would be useful to better understand the reason for this dualism: are practices or perceptions two approaches to a measurement, or two conceptualizations of social capital? Or is it because they approach two different concepts, and maybe one phenomenon is a “production factor” or an outcome of the other, the problem being that of the causal way, and leading to some sort of the chicken and the egg exercise. If we start from empirical work, Knack & Keefer (1997) results indicate a weak correlation between trust and associational life. But if we look at the “theory”, and follow Fukuyama, then it seems that SC sums up in trust (rooted in culture, habits, norms, etc.); but if we follow Putnam, it seems that trust would be rather an outcome. In the practical perspective of measuring, another question is whether practices and perceptions are on the same ground in terms of temporal horizon: are practices rather a long-lasting phenomenon, while trust could be volatile, more depending on when it is measured (*e.g.* trust before and after the anthrax crisis or before and after Enron’s disaster in the United-States), or on the contrary, trust would be an invariant feature of a country, then a better way of approach to a country’s stock of SC? The question of the articulation between the different measures does not stop at the level of these broad “dimensions”: what of indicators as civic engagement, political participation or voluntary work? are they indicators of SC, of its sources, of its outcomes?

Whether the option, a second question is that of the degree of heterogeneity admitted within each particular measure: is it the general principle of relation or the general principle of trust (or both) we are interested in, or does quality count? For example, if we take participation in organized groups, does the kind of group matter (are a golf club, an association of stamps collectors and Amnesty International to be considered as equivalent)? Does the level of involvement matter? By virtue of membership, you may have access to the resource of a gym club, but never talk to anybody: are we interested in the proportion of people who are potentially connected or in that of people who are actually engaged in relationships or active participation? Same questions if we take the other forms of social relations: how to consider daily small talk between neighbors *vs.* an evening from time to time with friends? And if we take trust, is it a general disposition or aptitude that we seek to measure (“do you generally trust other people?” yes-no), or is it a degree, or is it who/which group-institution you trust and who you distrust: in the perspective of approaching SC, is it useful to know that you trust your neighbors, or your fellows diamond merchants - as in Coleman’s example -, but not the press?

All this leads, backwards, to the lack of hypothesis about the production (intentional or not) of SC, and the conceptual entanglement of sources, forms and outcomes. In doubt, as long as we don’t know what counts and what does not count since we are not clear with what we seek to measure, the punishment is that there is no other alternative than that of very detailed measures, because one never know.

Does empirical work help to sort among what matters and what doesn’t? If we look at Costa & Kahn (2001), it seems that not all “aspects” of SC vary in the same way or extent over time. If we look at the

review of results presented in Temple (2001), who refers to tests of the association of “social capital” and growth, it is rather unconvincing: La Porta & Al. find a weak correlation between trust and growth, but Knack & Keefer find that trust has a potential explanatory value, while membership in organized groups is not associated with a better economic performance, which is in contradiction with the results obtained by Putnam; and Helliwell shows that in some cases, trust has a negative impact on growth. Unfortunately, Sala-I-Martin (1997) had not thought of introducing many SC dimensions in his “two million regressions”, but his results suggest that some religions are better at growth than others³. Of course, there may be many reasons for diverging results: from classical measurement errors to what is controlled for or not; but for the time being, it seems that we lack the empirical evidence which could help to decide among different measures. It is also possible that the measures are only poor proxies for SC, possibly overestimating its level: a large stock of relations (or a high level of trust) may be the indication of a large potential, but only actual SC matters. Or maybe it is not only a question of quantity, but also of the quality and structure of relations (or trust) that count when it comes to turning it into SC? Other empirical results, such as those obtained by Glaeser & al. (2000), or in some studies published by Insee (presented in section B), would incite to think about it.

Then there is also the question of the level of functioning of SC as a resource. Is social capital some global, indistinguishable, resource, or are there different types of SC, functioning at different geographical levels or different social levels, or only under certain conditions? This can be questioned in several ways, and leads to be rather doubtful on the meaning that the level of SC could have as a national aggregate (to say nothing of the complexity of the process of aggregating). First, some networks may function on very small scale areas and generate resources available only locally, while some others will be more widely spread and generate *ipso facto* a resource more generally accessible. Second, different forms of social interaction may produce resources of very different nature; can we add the resource that is the information you gather at your golf club about what to buy on the stock market and the resource that is the lawn mower your neighbor lends you? If we turn to Coleman’s examples⁴, can we add (and obtain something meaningful) the costs saved within the diamond market thanks to merchants trust in each other, and the peace of mind gained by the mother after moving from Detroit to Jerusalem.

³ In terms of a government policy, the prescriptions that could emerge from his results are rather funny, or frightening: if you want growth, you have to move the country the farthest away from a latitude of 0, to incite people to become Confucian, Buddhist or Muslim, to avoid revolutions, military coups or wars....

⁴ Coleman (1988) gives several examples to illustrate what SC consists of. One of them is that of the wholesale diamond market, where trust allows the merchants to hand each other bags of stones for examination with no other necessary insurance. One other example is that of a mother of six, recently moved from Detroit to Jerusalem, and who feels safe in letting the children go to school or play unsupervised in a park, things she could not have done in Detroit.

This latter example, which might appear a rather bad one in the present circumstances, is at the same time a good illustration of the possibility for the same SC to produce various amounts and types of outcome, depending crucially on the circumstances.

Then there is the question of the quality of SC: is it comparable between high education level groups or high income areas, and poor areas, and does the “social structure” of SC matter? For example, if we take physical capital, returns can be higher or lower depending on the quality of the tools and equipment, or of the way production factors are combined. Is it the same with social capital?

To finish, what to expect of international comparisons of SC? do we assume that the forms it takes are the same anywhere, or that the forms it takes do not matter, or on the contrary that they may be different and that it matters, and even that it is precisely what we are interested in ? How to deal with institutional differences as various as the tax system, the Constitution, working hours or association law, with social stratification, with a greater or lesser extent of public services, etc.? Or may be it is, contrary to the habit, that cultural, institutional differences and other specific features are for once not to be considered as “biases”? And again, in which problematic, to answer which questions, under what hypothesis on the role of SC (forms or level?) in an explanatory framework?

At this point, a provisional conclusion is that if the idea is to promote eventually social capital as an instrument in economic or social policies, a long road is ahead. Worthy as it is because it calls attention on the importance of the “social side” in our economies, there is also a great need to call for more thought, and perhaps cautiousness when it comes to the proliferation of applications with no precise hypothesis in no theoretical framework. A greater concern for social facts, social practices, what people value, and an effort to improve their measurement would no doubt shed more light on the inequalities, and their interaction with economic growth; measuring “social capital” is another story.

Let's end with quotations from one economist and one sociologist, since for once they come to the same (skeptical) conclusion:

“As I see it, the relevant question for economists is whether ‘social capital’, ‘community’ and other sociological concepts convey ideas that are missing in modern economic thought -ideas that cannot be expressed using the core concepts of preferences, expectations, constraints and equilibrium. If so, the ongoing efforts to interpret ‘social capital’ may be productive. If not, economists should use ‘social capital’ only as a lesson in the ambiguity of words.” (Manski, 2000, p.123).

“Current enthusiasm for the concept (...) is also partially exaggerated for two reasons. First the set of processes encompassed by the concept are not new and have been studied under other labels in the past. Calling them social capital is, to a large extent, just a means of presenting them in a more

appealing conceptual garb. Second, there is little ground to believe that social capital will provide a ready remedy for major social problems, as promised by its bolder proponents.” (Portes, 1998, p.21).

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