



What is...

# SOCIAL CAPITAL

and why is it important in society?

## Social Capital and Trust

The concept of social capital is widely used in sociology and other social sciences. Nowadays it has more than one meaning. Before it started to be used in social sciences, sociologists tried to answer the question of what factors make people cooperate with each other and what type of cooperation helps maintain the existing social order. Theorists of social capital looked at this problem differently. They were interested in how individuals and social groups, by building networks of relationships with other social actors, increase their resources, which allow them to gain a certain position in social, political, and economic structures of society. Apart from this shared approach to the issue, they differed in how they defined capital itself. For some, it is an individual (private) good, while for others it is a social (public) good.

## Social capital includes:



All relationships between people in a given society, which come from the human tendency to build social connections and function within a network of different interdependencies.

Rules and norms that regulate these relationships and define which behaviors are expected and accepted in specific social situations.



The trust that individuals have in one another, meaning the belief that one side of a relationship will act honestly toward the other.



The voluntary creation of communities and organizations, as well as taking joint actions within them.



These elements make it easier to carry out grassroots initiatives and help members of society cooperate effectively. Thanks to this, goals can be achieved that individuals would not be able to accomplish on their own.

## Human Capital or Social Capital

Human capital refers to individuals.

It includes their skills, knowledge, and personal attributes.

The idea of human capital focuses on how people make economic decisions, such as gaining new knowledge or skills to earn more and work more efficiently.

Investing in human capital means developing a person's abilities, which directly affects their own economic situation and, indirectly, benefits society as a whole.

Social capital applies to groups rather than individuals.

It involves the relationships between people.

The concept of social capital looks at the networks and connections within society and the rules that guide them.

Building social capital relies on group cohesion and the group's overall economic success, which depends on trust and cooperation among its members.



## Types of Social Capital (according to Robert Putnam Theory)

**Bonding social capital** – ties among members of the same social group, which strengthen internal relationships but may isolate the group from others. These are connections among people who are similar in certain ways, such as age, gender, ethnicity, or social class.

**Bridging social capital** – networks between people from different social groups. These ties connect individuals who are different from one another.

## Other Criteria for Classifying Social Capital

- **Associational social capital** – voluntary and regular participation of individuals in organizational structures that pursue collective or social goals.
- **Informal social capital** – family, friendship, and neighborhood networks. This refers to private connections, including relationships among family members, friends, and neighbors, based on emotional bonds and a willingness to help one another.
- **Negative social capital** – exists in narrow interest groups, mafia-type organizations, or clientelist networks. It has a destructive effect on the functioning of society as a whole.

## Functions of Social Capital



### Economic function

– contributes to economic growth.



### Social function

– passes on knowledge and experience to future generations and others, prepares people for life in society, and transmits social values.



### Cultural function

– passes on cultural norms and patterns, supporting the development of cultural heritage.

**Social capital is mainly created within private, community-based organizations (non-profits)**

## Trust as a Component of Social Capital

Public trust is the most important element of social capital. It enables the building of lasting interpersonal relationships and strengthens bonds within social groups. Trust is the belief that members of a community act appropriately, in line with accepted norms.

- Private trust – refers to personal relationships between people who know each other.
- Generalized trust – applies to a broader group of people and arises from interpersonal and intergroup interactions.
- Institutional trust – concerns trust in individuals holding public positions or institutions.

The level of trust in public institutions and fellow citizens in Polish society is low, while trust in private relationships is high.

This can be attributed to:

- Experiences from the communist era.
- Criticism of current state institutions, including corruption, lack of transparency in government actions, and low effectiveness of public policies.