

Chapter 3

Social Capital and Social Identity: Friendship and Kinship Connections as a Source of Social Capital

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the relationships between what are complex and shifting socio-economic and political conditions and the role and connection of norms and networks of social cooperation, such as friendship networks and kinship connections within Latvia. These “connections” and “kinships” have long served as a source of “social capital” it is argued, which is beyond the immediate circle of family. Research does suggest these relationships often perform functions usually associated with formal civil society, particularly in times of need. Specifically, this chapter considers the nature and practice of blat which something, it is argued, so naturally it was not even thought about. During Soviet times, it developed into a quiet resistance against the official system making life bearable for citizens, and therefore acting to support the continued existence of the Soviet system. The chapter also considers the links between social network theory, new-institutionalism, and social capital.

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INTRODUCTION

With independence of once Soviet controlled states researchers have sought to take advantage of this opportunity to examine and learn more about communism and post communism effects. Ledeneva (1998), a Russian socialist suggested it was a 'wonder' the Soviet Union did not collapse sooner than it did stating that the existence of, and practice of '*blat*' as the reason for its continuation long after it should have collapsed. The study of *blat* or informal networks and their relationship to social capital is something scholars have ignored despite many studies devoted to the Soviet Unions' informal 'other economy', though it is gathering in momentum now with recent works by commentators such as Onoshchenko and Williams (2014); Williams and Onoshchenko (2014); Rasanayagam (2011) and Cook et al. (2018).

On joining the international community, Latvia has needed to operate under 'fundamentally' different rules in relation to regulation and control and also change the way that 'management of people' is viewed and practiced (Cook et al., 2018), but the question is posed, what of the collective memory?, and the residual effects of occupation and societal norms that had developed. How had occupation developed and changed the social capital?

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND NETWORKS

Social capital perspectives, when studying the nature of networks, were proposed by Putnam (2000) who argued that social capital is about connections amongst individuals in the form of social networks, norms and reciprocity. This also has links then to trustworthiness that can arise from these. Norms, as referred to by Kaasa (2009), are trustworthiness and general reciprocity. Landry, Amara and Jamari (2002) also interpret norms as being trustworthiness. This of course implies that the core theme of social capital theory is about networks of connections and the nature of and features of social organization, such as trust and norms, that can then improve or support society by facilitating co-ordinated actions (Putnam, 1993). In support, Fountain (1998) also refers to social capital and its relationship to innovation as being constituted of networks, norms and trust stating that such norms, networks and trust enable cooperation between individuals and/or organizations. This supposed that this support, goodwill afforded by individuals or groups becomes a resource in itself. Social capital is embedded in networks of shared interaction and recognition and therefore become resources in their own right. Therefore, those that do not have 'connectivity' to networks cannot then gain access (Putnam, 2000). Generic forms of social capital can be seen to be composed of the fundamental characteristics of social capital. The characteristics include the notion that social capital may increase via a

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