Chapter 5
Voluntary Associations and Social Capital—Inclusive and Exclusive Dimensions

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Abstract The term "social capital" has in recent years become a fashionable, even glamorous buzzword in social science and politics. It gained popularity at the end of the 1970s, particularly through the works of Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam. With their varied understandings of this term, they gave inspiration to disparate discussions over the condition and future of modern societies. Based on this framework and with a special focus on the conceptual debates in Germany, this chapter raises the question how voluntary associations might contribute to democracy and welfare.

Keywords Voluntary associations · Theories of social capital · Association's contribution to democracy · Pierre Bourdieu · James Coleman · Robert Putnam

The term "social capital" has in recent years become a fashionable, even glamorous buzzword in science and politics. It gained popularity at the end of the 1970s, particularly through the sociological and political science works of Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam. With their varied understandings of this term, they gave inspiration to disparate discussions over the condition and future of modern societies (see, e.g., Braun 2011; Braun and Weiß 2008; Portes 1998). In this context, Putnam (2000), with his understanding, has had by far the most lasting influence on these broad discussions about civil society and related ideas of voluntary associations with *Lebenswelt* (day-to-day) references, i.e., federations, projects, initiatives as well as other voluntary organizations, all of which are producers of social capital. Since then, Putnam's research and his political activities have triggered a continuous interest, particularly in the social capital created by civil societies—notably in Germany, starting a variety of different discussions.

This contribution is based on an already published article (Braun 2009), which I reviewed and updated for this publication.

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M. Freise, T. Hallmann (eds.), *Modernizing Democracy,*
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4939-0485-3_5, © Springer Science+Business Media New York 2014

In this context, social capital has become a concept open to interpretation, one associated with high expectations on the revitalization of social bonds, relationships, and networks in a dynamic civil society, which might have untapped resources for substantial contributions to democracy and welfare in Germany. Social capital denotes three key aspects: first, *social trust*—making social life more palatable by facilitating cooperation between individuals, something that is indispensable for societal coordination; second, the *norm of generalized reciprocity*—contributing to the solution of social dilemmas; and third, *voluntary associations* (*i.e., secondary or citizens' associations*)—creating social trust and maintaining generalized reciprocity norms (for further details see Braun 2001; Putnam 2000).

Therefore, in Putnam's concept of social capital, voluntary associations—especially the small local clubs, such as sports clubs, choral societies, or hobby clubs—represent the core issue. In these associations, social capital is generated and regenerated, since unlike real or physical capital it is not consumed by regular use. Instead, as a byproduct of collective action, it rather tends to increase (see Zimmer 2007).

Against the backdrop of the conceptual presumption outlined above, this chapter focuses on the question as to what makes a voluntary association so special that it be considered an institution (re)producing social capital: Which structural features does this form of organization have compared with state or private commercial organizations? Differentiating between the two meanwhile popular concepts of "bonding" and "bridging" social capital, which one of these specific forms of social capital do voluntary associations (re)produce? In the following, these questions will be discussed based on a theoretical approach describing voluntary associations as *Wahl-Gemeinschaften* (chosen communities) (Strob 1999). In this context, the chapter draws on German research on voluntary associations in order to conceptualize mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in voluntary associations. Bourdieu's social theory (1996, 1999) provides the framework to first analyze these mechanisms and to then distinguish between "bonding" and "bridging" social capital.

Special Structural Features of Voluntary Associations

In his comparative analyses of private commercial and state organizations, Horch (1983, 1992) systematically carved out the analytic ideal type of the "democratic voluntary association" with its own specific structural features. This ideal type could be described as a freely chosen union of natural persons who jointly pursue their specific goals within the framework of a formal, i.e., planned, organizational structure. This organizational structure is oriented towards the association's goal. A major feature of voluntary associations is the membership structure, insofar as the members—being the top decision-making body—represent the sovereign who is in charge of delegating competencies and organizational constitutional decisions (see also Wex 2004).

Underlying all this are democratic, procedural, and participatory policy-forming and decision-making processes, in which the members negotiate and define their as-

sociation's goals independent of external influences. Through combining different forms of the members' voluntary participation and collaboration, these goals are converted into social practice. The lead principle of this economic system is the adaptation of goals oriented towards subsistence economy, i.e., the goal of production is fulfilling a certain demand rather than generating an income. Demands may be aligned to members or third parties, whereby services for third parties must always match the association's goals and thus correspond with the members' interests (see Braun 2003).

Hence, without expressly making it an issue, the research on social capital evidently starts from this ideal type in order to back up the specific role of voluntary associations as institutions for (re)producing social capital in modern societies. Offe and Fuchs (2001, p. 423 ff.), for example, note, "In the training of skills and social competences crucial for dealing with these features of secondary associations, we see their contribution to the formation of social capital"; since voluntary associations would lack both "the certainty of authoritatively defined goals representing the special feature of 'tertiary' formal organizations as well as the certainty of a 'given' membership which is the special feature of families." This is why voluntary associations would have a high potential to "make their members practice the use of virtues and moral conduct, allowing them to demonstrate helpfulness, ability to judge as well communication and cooperation skills beyond the circle of those immediately involved" (Offe 1999, p. 114), virtues that would have a lasting external impact.

Voluntary Associations as Chosen Communities

The central idea behind this concept, which is not further explained, is based on two assumptions that build upon one another. They can be simply summarized as follows: Due to the interactive processes taking place in the normative field of the respective social system, voluntary associations produce a particular value sphere in which the members acquire far-reaching civil competences ("acceptance of socialization"). According to the "transfer assumption" upon which it is based, voluntary associations would then transfer these competences as habitualized dispositions to other areas of life. This would then ultimately mean that voluntary associations produce a "competent citizen" (Münkler 1997), one who has relevant cognitive and moral qualities, which could be considered to be the minimum requirements for attaining a citizenship status (see Buchstein 1996).

These two core assumptions are so significant and comprehensive that their empirical plausibility can only be verified based on differentiated empirical studies of voluntary associations. However, this requires first and foremost theoretical assumptions explaining why voluntary associations are of all things the ones able to make these socialization processes possible for their members. So far, the research on social capital has not dealt with these assumptions sufficiently; on the other hand, against the background of the ideal type of the democratic voluntary association outlined earlier, different rationales could be developed that would offer clues for the special importance of such associations for the (re)production of social capital.

In this context, the notion of *Wahl-Gemeinschaft* (chosen community) used by Strob (1999) is especially helpful. He amended the structural analyses of voluntary associations conducted by Horch (1983, 1992) by adding an action theory conception, thereby reconstructing a genuine action logic of voluntary associations. Strob is doing this by taking the model of the four social sectors—state, market, third sector, and informal sphere—commonly used in third-sector research, in order to carve out the specific action logics predominant in the individual sectors. The actual innovative element in Strob's model theory framework is his attempt to reconstruct an independent ideal-typical action logic in voluntary associations of the third sector: referring to the mutual goal-oriented benefit and the emotional, personal commitment which explains the voluntary limitation of individual benefit expectation. In Strob's conception (1999), voluntary associations represent "chosen communities," whose members join together out of their free will to make a joint effort to commit to the realization of their interests.

These terms denote significant and innovative elements of Strob's model: first, referring to Weber's (1980) action-oriented concept of collectivization, Strob develops his own and convincing definition of "chosen communities." The term community is marked by a double commitment: on the one hand, joint goals (goal commitment), on the other, emotional, personal commitment to the community members (membership commitment). While goal commitment is a sign of that particular individual benefit expectation which causes every single individual to voluntarily join a chosen community, the membership commitment serves as a basis for all members to align their own benefit to that of the other members, thereby voluntarily limiting their own benefit: "For today's (chosen) communities is, therefore, exactly that feature constitutive, which is considered a special criterion of the association: the free union of citizens. So the term *community* can be absolutely brought in line with how an association or a club could be described. Using the term *community* though offers the advantage to be able to come up with more precise propositions over the actions taking place in communities" (Strob 1999, p. 144).

With this, we have already addressed a second relevant element in Strob's approach. He uses the term community as a starting point for examining services and how they are rendered in chosen communities: "joint work" in the sense of "civic engagement," referring to goal- and purpose-oriented commitment which every single individual offers to the group. "To count as joint work, work has to fulfill the criterion of serving the common good or to be of general interest. Such an understanding of joint work does not preclude that in other respects this work can also be of personal value to the individual. The original meaning of 'common' in terms of 'benefiting several persons on a rotating basis' refers to the alternating benefit which both the community and the working individual can draw from joint work" (Strob 1999, p. 144). In contrast, the notion of joint work would fall short if limited to mutual benefit. The special emotional quality of a community as an expression of inner closeness explains, according to Strob, why an individual will participate in joint work even without the expectation of immediate benefit.

Structure-Immanent Forms of Interaction in Voluntary Associations

Ideal-typical forms of interactions essential for the formation of social capital result from the structural condition of voluntary associations and the immanent action logic in chosen communities. These forms of interaction can be subsumed under five dimensions outlined as follows, referring to fundamental works on voluntary associations by Horch (1992).

Establishing Behavioral Expectations

As convincingly presented by Horch (1983, 1992), behavioral expectations and rules in voluntary associations are established in a completely different fashion than in state organizations or commercial enterprises. According to Horch (1983), rules and behaviors in ideal-typical voluntary associations are not established through formalization, but rather through stabilizing interactions; not through specialization but personalization; not through formal, but informal control; through voting among the members instead of centralization and through influences via personal relationships. All these forms of control could be conceived of as functional equivalents of the common elements *norm, position* and *role* as known from the sociology of organizations.

Between Formal Organization and Informal Group

Against this background, ideal-typical voluntary associations differ from formal organizations and informal groups in that they, on the one hand, leave space for immediate diffused relationships while at the same time pursuing specific supraindividual goals. On the other hand, they may well be formally and rationally organized in order to pursue these goals, however, without entirely separating motivation from goals and structure. They unite "purpose with purposelessness, obligation with voluntariness, seriousness with exuberance, distancing with approximation, publicity with privacy" (Horch 1983, p. 146). In this respect, voluntary associations are oftentimes also described as institutions, in which sociability plays a crucial role as a "form of play of socialization" (Simmel 1999 [1908]).

Interaction, Social Trust, Social Networks

This structural condition in turn provides the basis for promoting those particular social actions in voluntary associations, with which individuals mutually orient themselves towards one another, thereby developing close social ties among them.

Based on these social relationships, there is not just a dense social network with "strong ties" (Granovetter 1973) developing among the members of an association (in everyday language, this is commonly referred to as "clubbiness" and has a negative connotation). Rather, these close relationships, which are integrated in a densely woven network and normally exist on a sustained basis, also produce social trust, which results from the fact that people are used to depending on promises being held and other members not defecting. The constant interactions between members assure that the information flow within the association's network continuously rises, which is why the motivation to defect clearly decreases, since the costs of a breach in trust or the risk of losing one's reputation as a trustworthy partner would otherwise increase.

Consensus Building on Conflicts

However, this constellation of the "trustable other" does not mean that a voluntary association consists of a group of like-minded people demonstrating homogenous interests and a consensus vis-a-vis heterogeneous interests and conflicts. In contrast, the existence of democratic decision-making structures requires the legitimacy and necessity of conflicts. Conflict and consensus are conceived as reciprocally interdependent processes, i.e., conflict solutions require a consensus, and the acceptable consensus in turn has evolved from conflicts (see Reinhardt and Tillmann 2002, p. 44 f.).

In voluntary associations, consensus building through conflict resolution can occur at two major levels: first, at a more formal level within the framework of periodical elections and general meetings; second, at a more informal level by having a "cracker barrel democracy" (Baur and Braun 2003). The latter is quite significant in this context, as voluntary associations tend to "shift conflicts to the informal level in order to resolve them in a sort of familial atmosphere among members by finding a compromise" (Zauner and Simsa 1999, p. 409).

Joint Actions Through the Motivation for Double Commitment

In addition to democratic decision-making processes, which Horch (1983, p. 16) refers to as "the primary control mode" and by means of which members are able to influence the association's goals, the members' collaboration on a free-of-charge basis represents the prime resource for generating the association's services. At the same time, the association's dependency on this resource forms the members' "secondary control mode" (Horch 1983, p. 16), which also serves to control the association's goals. Certainly, the willingness to voluntarily contribute to service production cannot be taken for granted. According to Horch (1985, p. 260), membership requirements are oftentimes so low that it is necessary to encourage members to voluntarily commit, since collective goods produced by voluntary associations also always elicit free-riding behavior.

The fact that members do not choose to act upon a potential free-riding opportunity, but instead will voluntarily opt to make a joint effort, makes sense in terms of the conception of voluntary associations as chosen communities and is founded on the twofold goal orientation and membership loyalty, based on commitment. These "expressive motivations for loyalty" imply a positive intellectual connection to the associations and its members (see Strob 1999). Yet, from these feelings of loyalty may also emerge an affective-habitual willingness to commit to the association and its members' interests without being driven entirely by strategic cost-benefit calculation.

This is exactly what explains the unique capability for cooperation that is a trademark of chosen communities: "The reason why individuals are devoted to an association is not because they expect to gain advantages (or avoid disadvantages) based on collective decisions and actions implemented, but because the collective and/or the individuals constituting it are the way they are, i.e., they have their own quality and dignity that are ascribed them" (Kirsch 1983, p. 111).

Chosen Communities of Taste

One can, therefore, understand the active participation and voluntary commitment of members of a chosen community as a manifestation of a certain intertwined set of values and norms in a voluntary association, which at the same time contributes to maintaining and advancing this set of values and norms. This can be interpreted as an "imperative for the conservation of resources," which exists in voluntary associations: first, for establishing the association's product or service offerings and second, for producing and reproducing the socio-integrative services. It appears then likely that through the members' voluntary commitment they be "on the one hand inevitably and in an objectively comprehensive manner drawn into the normative field of the social system (1), but may also have the possibility of exerting a slight yet significant influence on the shaping of the structure and functional services of the collective (2)" (Geser 1980, p. 208). These two processes will in turn contribute to supporting and strengthening the special action logic in chosen communities: the attachment of the members to their chosen community's common goals, the attachment among the members themselves, and the attachment to the chosen community itself (see Strob 1999).

This demonstrates that voluntary associations are always "closed relationships" (Horch 1992, p. 23). These closed relationships inevitably have specific access regulations and conditions to maintain the socialized in-group character via a specific norm and value system. By awarding individuals a more or less formalized affiliation and membership status, they are included into the values and norms of this social system. Thus, with this membership status a dividing line is created between all those individuals constituting the social system, and those who do not strive for a membership status, or to whom this status is denied. By the same token, those who are not members also represent a vital aspect of the environment for the association, in order to enable the mutual integration within an association as a social

system. An individual seeking to become a member in a voluntary association must therefore always negotiate specific access regulations as well as fulfill certain access prerequisites.

This process of inclusion and exclusion refers to varied studies of social structure research, all of which demonstrate that in particular an individual's socio-structural features (i.e., sex, age, migration background, education, occupation, income) explain all of the processes of social closure with which "social collectivities seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles" (Parkin 2006, p. 125). These processes of social closure may be based on formal reasons, in that voluntary associations explicitly limit accessibility for certain social groups. However, research has been pointing out for some time now that even in light of the vast number of voluntary associations considered to be socially open at the formal level, social closure may nonetheless occur via more subtle mechanisms, behind the members' backs (see Zimmer 2007).

For example, Bourdieu's structuralist class theory draws attention to such subtle closure mechanisms, which occur in the process of entering voluntary associations. According to Bourdieu, *habitus* as a structuralized system makes sure that there is "a process of scanning and assessing […] in relation to others" (Bourdieu 1996, p. 375). Habitus as a manifestation of the individuals' entire external and internal mindset comprises their perceptual, intellectual and action-oriented schemata, personal taste, lifestyle and everyday cultural practices as much as their mind–body relationship and the action patterns or social relationships, which the individuals prefer based on the "elective affinities of taste" (Bourdieu 1996). This is why there is a unifying principle, which, mostly subconsciously, indicates to us whether someone is our type or at least "speaks our language" (Vester et al. 2001, p. 169). Social cohesion (re) produces itself in communities of action, which result from a similar habitus, and manifest themselves in voluntary associations as "chosen communities of taste."

Especially in freely chosen memberships, the particularly distinctive "tendency to create homogeneous circles from heterogeneous environments" may exist (Horch 1983, p. 44). This tendency of self-attribution according to similarity can be explained by the fact that one feels more "comfortable" and "in good hands" in socio-structurally homogeneous groups rather than in heterogeneous groups, the reason being that based on a similar habitus, individuals are neither considered out of place by others, nor do they themselves feel this way. Such subtle selection mechanisms and associated processes of closure can be indeed labeled as unintended results of intended actions, since these mechanisms are not the actors' intended goals, but merely a byproduct of their own undertaking (see Merton 1995). This way, voluntary associations are always able to reproduce social structures that are valid far beyond the association, because membership is created through the performative production of distinctions, i.e., segregation and conformity. The research on social capital refers to this as "bonding social capital," which is something that voluntary associations generate only if they unite "similar individuals in terms of some aspects (ethnicity, age, sex, social class, etc.)" (Putnam and Goss 2001, p. 29).

Bourdieu's comprehensive analyses of France's elites, persons who enjoy informal and well-established associations like elites in no other Western nation, of-

fer an extreme example of such closed forms of collectivization. A high esprit de corps, almost identical golden paths in education, and similar, mostly bourgeois social backgrounds sustain the homogenous self-propagating elite, taking on a class character beyond political affiliation (see Braun 1999; Hartmann 1996). The social capital of such an elite does not just manifest itself in promotion and solidarity obligations, or in the coordinated exclusion of non-group members. It also contributes to lowering transaction costs in the state or commercial sector by generating trust in terms of "creditworthiness" that serves as a guarantee for loyalty, independent of the respective top position. Nevertheless, this social capital may also create mistrust outside of this favored network (see Braun 2001).

In this respect, the research on social capital also emphasizes that it is relatively simple "for densely woven and homogeneous groups to turn to 'shady' goals if they lack the natural restrictions resulting from the fact that members bring along their different views and intersecting connections" (Putnam and Goss 2001, p. 29). However, this "unsocial capital," which in terms of mutual promotion and loyalty obligations serves the targeted internal information distribution and coordinated exclusion of non-group members, can also easily be found beyond groups having such "shady goals." As an example, there are forms of solidarity of "ethnic communities," which—due to their exclusion from the labor market—are looking for special niches with chances for specialization and organizing their economic activities via a network based on traditional relations, which may lead to significant economic advantages compared to competitors.

So for this research perspective, there is no lack of incidences in day-to-day experience and social practice. To the same effect, Weber (1924, p. 445) had already pointed out at the first German *Soziologentag* in 1910 that everyday voluntary associations are capable of producing the "good citizen" within the immediate *Lebenswelt* (literally, "lifeworld" or social environment) of the people. However, he meant this in the passive sense of the word: "'Wo man singt, da lass dich ruhig nieder' (Where people are singing, don't hesitate to settle down). Great passion and strong actions are lacking there." Against this backdrop, it seems imperative to bring up the issue of the complex correlation between goals and structures of voluntary associations as chosen communities. On the other hand, the question of emerging community relations, trust, and reciprocity norms should be made a key issue of the research on social capital, in order to take a differentiated look at the many voluntary associations' potential for accumulating social capital.

Conclusion

Forms of collectivization are a constitutive part of voluntary associations, so that as chosen communities they are able to place their services above their members' joint work (Strob 1999). To put it in the words of Max Weber, the basis for this is social relations, in which the members' social actions and thus the meaningful orientation towards one another rest upon a "subjectively *felt* (affectual or traditional) *common*

bond among persons concerned" (Weber 1980, p. 21). These feelings, based upon common bonds and affinities, may easily and sustainably develop due to specific structural characteristics in voluntary associations. These structural characteristics build the core for making sure that voluntary associations are considered key institutions for (re)producing social capital in modern societies.

Yet, it also lies in the nature of voluntary associations as chosen communities that the habitus, being the sum of an individual's perceptual, intellectual and action schemata, normally selects the associations corresponding to it. Colloquially put, "birds of a feather flock together"; in his terminology Bourdieu (1996) refers to this is as "elective affinities of taste." Since the social taste of the habitus and, therefore, the choice of certain lifestyles, leisure time as well as personal politics are all closely linked to a person's living conditions, the free choice of a membership is thus significantly influenced by socio-structural factors. The argument that voluntary associations could also produce "unsocial capital" through these unintended effects of social selection is therefore not quite unjustified.

To this effect, with the term "bridging social capital" the research on social capital offers quite an important research perspective that can be understood as a normative attempt to respond to this concern. Individuals of different social milieus and social groups belong to voluntary associations producing this specific form of social capital, so that they may contribute to overcoming "social cleavages." Therefore, "the external impacts of bridging groups […] are likely to be more positive, whereas networks with bonding social capital (that restrict themselves to specific social niches) more likely carry a risk of having negative external impacts" (Putnam and Goss 2001, p. 29).

It cannot be ruled out that these cross-border forms of social affiliations in the field of voluntary associations could increasingly gain in importance. Already, the ideas of "bridging social capital" implicitly refer to the conditions discussed by Simmel (1999 [1908]) concerning the growing individualization in modern societies. According to those, people develop their individuality by mixing increasingly wider social circles, something that advances both people's individualization and society's social integration. On the one hand, individuals become more and more unique and independent; on the other hand, the individuals are less and less able to derive their identity from that of a dominant collective. Instead, the identity has to develop out of a combination of different values and interests.

Hence, more and more frequently, voluntary associations are likely to be able to represent their members only within the limits of particular interests, since they can no longer depend on their alliances in questions of essential, far-reaching life orientations. In this respect, it may be assumed that the members' interests within their respective associations will increasingly diverge, no matter whether it is a sports club, choir, or museum society, an environmental or business association or a soup-kitchen initiative. This would also mean that individuals have to learn to deal with conflicts themselves and demonstrate in public the necessary willingness to compromise. In fact, the more conflicts individuals have to resolve themselves, the more they are willing to accept other viewpoints, values, lifestyle ideals, and interests. All this gives hope for a "strong and vibrant civil society characterized

by a social infrastructure of dense networks of face-to-face relationships that cross-cut existing social cleavages such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and gender that will underpin strong and responsive democratic government" (Edwards et al. 2001, p. 17).

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