

Network Society

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Vernon Series in Sociology



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www.vernonpress.com

In the Americas:
Vernon Press
1000 N West Street,
Suite 1200, Wilmington,
Delaware 19801
United States

In the rest of the world:
Vernon Press
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,
Malaga, 29006
Spain

Vernon Series in Sociology

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016910433

ISBN: 978-1-62273-040-7

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Network Society. What is it?

Roberta Iannone

1. Defining Network Society

What is a Network Society? Is it an example of “sociological imagination”, or the actual reality of contemporary societies? Is it an innovative term, an already known phenomenon, or a real sociological revolution?

The aspects we can use to describe the Network Society (from now on NS) or to answer these questions are particularly numerous.

First, “the network is the spirit of the contemporary society”. As Barney (2004) notes, “like moths to a flame, ambitious minds seek out the spirit of their age” (2004, p. 1) and “the spirit of the contemporary era is gathered under the phrase “the network society” (2004, p. 2). According to his point of view, “in simple terms, this thesis asserts that the spirit of our age is the spirit of the network: the constitutive principles of networks have become the animating force of individual, social, economic and political life, and this marks the distinction of our period in history” (2004, p. 2).

Castells, a Catalunyan sociologist who has long studied this topic, writes that “as a historical trend, dominant functions and processes are increasingly organized around the network. Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture” (1996, p. 469).

Moreover, we cannot understand this spirit and its specific details without referring to a number of other changes – which anticipate and often accompany the network society –

such as: *the post-industrialism, the information society, the post Fordism, the postmodernism and the globalization*. "This is not to say the network society thesis somehow culminates efforts over the past several decades to name the world as it has become at the close of the twentieth century. It is not - whether as a name or as a condition - the 'successor' to post-industrialism, information society, Post-Fordism, postmodernism and globalization. It is, rather, *one star among these others* in a constellation of relatively recent attempts to understand and characterize an evolving range of interrelated social, political, economic and cultural forces" (Barney 2004, p. 25).

Theories of *post-industrialism* describe some crucial dynamics. Alain Touraine (1971) and Daniel Bell (1973) speak about a definitive shift in the industrial paradigm: "a diversion of post-industrializing societies away from material manufacturing and towards service provision as their primary economic activity and source of wealth, and a corresponding focus of attention on the exploitation of information and knowledge, as opposed to labor and capital, as crucial economic resources" (Barney 2004, p. 6). In 1973 Bell wrote: "A post-industrial society is based on services... what counts is not raw muscle power or energy, but information" (1973, p. 127).

Despite the optimism of some theorists of post-industrialism, others theorists, including Touraine (1971), Marcuse (1964) and Ellul (1964) consider this society as a "programmed" and "one dimensional" society which deepen the forms of alienation of capitalism, because of the exploitation of human life by rational technique.

In 1981, Nora and Minc surmised some dynamics of *information society*, as the fact that "increasing interconnections between computers and telecommunications would alter the entire nervous system of social organization... open radically new horizons... [change] the pattern of our culture... affect the economic balance, modify power relationships, and increase the stakes of sovereignty" (1981, p. 3-4).

Often theories of the information society have extended theories of post-industrialism, especially about the role of computing and digitized information on social, political and economic activities. As is the case for post-industrial theories, also as regards the theories of information society the criticisms are not lacking. Some scholars (Leiss 1989) note that the distinction between the information and industrial economies was a false one. They consider computerization as a part of the old industrial production and of its system. They want to say that there is not any revolution and, if the revolution exist, it has failed its mission about the redistribution of power and knowledge, and about the forms of political participation.

As it is known, *post-Fordism* is a synthetic concept to allude to some transitions "from taylorism and mass production to flexible specialization; from the mass proletariat to a more flexible specialization; from the mass proletariat to a more flexible labor market; from mass, standardized consumption to pluralized customization; and from the Keynesian welfare state to the neoliberal competitive state" (Barney 2004, p. 15). Certainly, all these dynamics are central to the determination of the network society.

Postmodernism, with its *hyper* modern (and not *anti* modern) dynamics, as it is known, is a world where "social and political life is now enacted in the realm of hyper-reality, a realm of intense simulation where symbolic exchange to that exchange - a world of copies of copies with no original referents, where language no longer simulates reality but rather marks its complete absence as a meaningful category", as Baudrillard writes.

The relationship between postmodernism and NS is clear and regards the anti essentialist conception of human identity. In this perspective, identities, but also truth and in general reality are constructed through discourse, so through relationships and networks, language practices.

The last, but not least, process that realizes the NS is the *globalization*. Its contents are known to all, but they can be

summarized in the challenge, often elimination, of borders by international and transnational regimes. Even social practices, identities and forms of solidarity are no longer defined in national containers. In general, as it is known, globalization is often associated with the idea of decline: the decline of national economies and political sovereignty, identity and culture, through hybridization and continuous reshuffling between different realities. "Globalization has become such an inalienable part of our present reality that even the anti-globalist movement has become fully globalized. The revolutionary developments in communication and transportation of the past few decades have created a number of global citizens, people who, seemingly, do not belong to a particular culture, but are, again seemingly, at home wherever their travels bring them" (Kwok-Bun, Peverelli 2010).

If we want to be essential, it might be said that the NS is nothing more than a society of high potential social relationships on a global scale, carried by new communications technologies, and in particular by the digital revolution, and is the product of a new economy. In the NS therefore converge net-societies and new economies with new spatial geometries and with flexible and virtual timing.

Castells well described this process starting from the revolution of the information technology and conceiving this moment as the starting point "for the analysis of the complexity of the new economy, society and culture in the constitution process" (Castells 2002). Like him, many other scholars start with the cyberspace to get to the NS, passing mainly through the transformations of capitalism, the transition from the industrialism to the informationism, the globalization and the new economy.

According to Van Dijk (BOX 1-2-3), we can distinguish mainly three forms of modern society:

- *Information society*
- *Mass society*
- *Network society*

Information society. "A modern type of society in which the information intensity of all activities has become so high that this creates:

- an organization of society based on science, rationality and reflexivity;
- an economy with all values and sectors, even the agrarian and industrial sectors, increasingly characterized by information production;
- a labour market with a majority of functions largely or completely based on tasks of information processing requiring knowledge and higher education (hence, the alternative term knowledge society);
- a culture dominated by media and information products with their signs, symbols and meanings".

BOX 1 Definition of information society (Van Dijk 2012, p. 23)

Mass Society. "A modern type of society with an infrastructure of groups, organizations and communities (called 'masses'), that shape its prime mode of organization at every level (individual, group/organizational and societal). The basic units of this society are all kinds of relatively large collectivities (masses) organizing individuals".

BOX 2 Definition of mass society (Van Dijk 2012, p. 24)

Network society. "A modern type of society with an infrastructure of social and media networks that characterizes its mode of organization at every level: individual, group/organizational and societal. Increasingly, these networks link every unit or part of this society (individuals, group and organizations). In western societies, the individual linked by a network is becoming the basic unit of the network society. In eastern societies, this might still be the group (family, community, workteam) linked by networks".

BOX 3 Definition of network society (Van Dijk 2012, p. 24)

It is very important to understand the main characteristic of the network society as compared to that of the mass society (TABLE 1) below:

| CHARACTERISTICS | MASS SOCIETY | NETWORK SOCIETY |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Main components | Collectivities (Groups, Organizations, Communities) | Individuals (linked by networks) |
| Nature of components | Homogeneous | Heterogeneous |
| Scale | Extended | Extended and Reduced |
| Scope | Local | Glocal (Global and Local) |
| Connectivity and Connectedness | High within components | High between components |
| Density | High | Lower |
| Centralization | High (Few Centres) | Lower (Polycentric) |
| Inclusiveness | High | Lower |
| Type of Community | Physical and Unitary | Virtual and Diverse |
| Type of Organization | Bureaucracy | Infocracy |
| | Vertically integrated | Horizontally differentiated |
| Type of household | Large with extended family | Small with diversity of family relations |
| Main type of communication | Face to face | Increasingly mediated |
| Kind of media | Broadcast mass media | Narrowcast interactive media |
| Number of media | Low | High |

TABLE 1 A Typology of the mass society and the network society (Van Dijk 2012, p. 43)

These analyses reflect an unprecedented level of processing on the main characteristics of the NS and on the differences with the mass society. However, it is essential to look more closely at the social relationships in order to understand what happens to the bonds, what forms and what contents assumes the interweaving of the social relationships, with what character and what implications social networks end up becoming the characteristic feature of contemporary societies. The analyses here proposed have precisely this purpose.

As M.C. Marchetti and L. Mariottini will demonstrate in this book, "the most general characteristic of social science data is that they are rooted in cultural values and symbols. Unlike the physical data of the natural sciences, social science data are constituted through meanings, motives, definitions, and typifications. As is well known, this means that the production of social science data involves a process of interpretation" (Scott 2013, p. 3)

Moreover, in relation to time and space, Marchetti and Mariottini will demonstrate their timeless attribute in the NS context.

Castells believes that the NS "is made up of networks of production, power and experience, which construct a culture of virtuality in the global flows that transcend time and space" (Castells 1998, p. 370). According to Barney, the "localized experience of time and space - the constraint of place - no longer limits the growing volume of increasingly significant human activity expressed in the communication of information via global network media. The network society is 'always on' and the placement of its members in territorial space is less important than their existence in the 'space of flows' where crucial economic and other activity occurs. It is in this sense that the human beings experience time in the network society as timeless, and space as placeless. In cultural terms, one effect of this dynamic is the generation of a globalized (albeit with regional variations) mainstream consumer culture, constructed by a pervasive and globally inte-

grated media system, which, while superficially hybridizing and incorporating some elements of diverse international cultures, remains highly inorganic, dislocated, and hyper-real. The culture of timeless, placeless network society exists everywhere, but comes from nowhere; in provocative post-modern phrasing, Castells (1998, p. 1) labels it a 'culture of real virtuality' (Barney 2004, p. 30).

In the NS, *power* and *conflict* change.

First of all, "power and powerlessness are a function of access to networks and control over flows" (Barney, 2004, p. 30). So, network access and the presence in its flow become the condition of inclusion and exclusion, of dominance and subjection. Access becomes the keyword.

Moreover, "the principal source of conflict and resistance in the network society is the contradiction between the placeless character of networks and the rootedness of human meaning" (Barney 2004, p. 31). So, while social processes and power are organized in the space of flows, human experience and meaning are still locally based. This fact creates a tension between the abstract placeness of the network and the human need to live in particular places.

2. Networks

An interesting aspect of the network, perhaps explaining its applicative success, is the fact that it can be used to explain the connection between actors who are very different from each other (on these aspects, see the contribution of E. Ferri). This demonstrates the potential – or even metaphorical – explanations of the concept in relation to the different relationships: between families and between groups, between organizational moments and between the workers, between the units and in the production processes, between the governments and between the states, etc.

The social sciences have traditionally favored its interpretation, using that image to simplify the scientific figuratively reflections on the social structures. In this sense, for exam-

ple, McIver talked about the networks of relationships between people as *weaving of social relationships*, and Radcliffe-Brown defined the social structure as a *network of relationships actually existing*.

However, the approach of the economic and social sciences has changed over time because we realized that, no matter how beautiful it could be, the image of the network possesses a heuristic value which is stronger than the one suggested by a metaphorical representation. In other words, focusing on its effectiveness and its empirical concreteness, it was found that the network was, on the one hand, a true instrument of knowledge of the observable reality, and on the other hand, the latent structure of the latter; on the one hand, an operational concept and a descriptive knowledge of the reality, on the other hand, its very source. Here, the immediate reference is to the sociologist Barnes (Barnes 1954), the first to introduce the concept of network in scientific and systematic terms in 1954 and to Bott (Bott 2001) that three years later used that term to carry out a research on marital roles in some London families.

Starting from this moment – namely from the analytical-empirical connotation of the concept – the network knew such in-depth analysis that it now opens new analytical spaces of theoretical development that range from the structural analysis (Boissevan & Mitchell 1973; Burt and Minor 1983) to the exchange theories (Homans 1975), to the relational theory (Donati 1991) and the studies on the social capital (Coleman 1990, Portes & Vickstrom 2015). Obviously, we should not forget the contribution given by the classics of sociological thought and all those who, at the dawn of sociological knowledge, had already glimpsed the network, as in the case of Simmel's *social circles*.

Metaphor, operational concept, latent structure, analytical perspective, these are the clothes worn by the network in order to represent and simplify, explain and express the complexity of the reality to which it refers and from which it comes.

According to Van Dijk, "the concept [of network] appears in both natural and social sciences" (Van Dijk 2012, p. 28.) We can therefore distinguish many types of networks (TABLE 2):

- *Physical networks* Natural system of higher complexity: ecosystems, river networks
- *Organic networks* Organisms: nervous system, blood circulation, strings of DNA in cells
- *Neuronal Networks* Mental systems: neuronal connections, mental maps
- *Social Networks* Social systems with concrete ties in abstract relationships
- *Technical Networks* Technical system: roads, distribution networks, telecommunication and computer networks, etc.
- *Media networks* Media system connecting senders and receivers and filled with symbols and information

TABLE 2 Types of network (Van Dijk 2012, p. 29)

Although lacking in the scheme of Van Dijk, the economic networks are cardinal due to the centrality of the economy in the late modern era (Mongardini 1997) and the effects that these networks seem to have on the local and the overall development of a country, and in particular on the employment. "They reflect a blurring of boundaries between state economy and civil society" (Healey 2015).

Actually, we can say that the networks are imposed primarily by the developments of the economy and then by the acquired technical, social, communicative and above all political characteristics.

We should therefore add at least two types of networks to the before recalled scheme:

- *Economic networks* Economic system with commercial and productive ties
- *Political networks* Political system at local, national, European, transcontinental and world level.

In fact, the organization of the enterprise-network, unlike the traditional vertically integrated company, is characterized by a relatively high concentration of strategic functions (design, marketing, management and production control) and a dispersion of productive activities in autonomous business units, linked to the main enterprise through various contractual and functional forms. It is based on the constant comparison between what should be done within the enterprise and what should be externalized, through a comparison that exceeds the limits of the generic and the traditional distinction between *make* and *buy* to cover choices such as: *who* should do it, *with whom* should be done, *when and how* should be done. The relationality between the enterprises applied to the various levels of production enables the collaboration between independent companies with different skills.

No matter how central it may be, the relations between the enterprises are neither the unique factor of determination of the reticularity on an economic plan, nor probably the most important. What most directly affects the production of networks is the “re-coupling” between the enterprise and the external and local environment. As Boschma argued, the proximities “reduce uncertainty and solve the problem of coordination, and, thus, facilitate interactive learning and innovation” (Boschma 2005, p. 62). The cooperative interaction characterizing the new paradigm of production does only refer to the enterprises between them but, mainly, to the enterprises with the external factors and land resources. The production is deeply-rooted to the territory, to the local system, to the new - because continually redrawn - geographic boundaries and to the productivity, which depends not only on the more efficient combinations of the factors of production within the enterprise perimeter but also on the integra-

tion between the production methods and the socio-cultural dimensions of the context of settlement. The network assumes a new and more meaningful centrality because today economic development, which is both local and global, depends not only on the cooperation with which the enterprises efficiently combine the stages of the production, but also on the capacity of the parties to enhance the fabric relational, social and cultural places of production. The social capital of an enterprise is the civic, political, social and environmental capital combined. The enterprise becomes itself a node in a wider and heterogeneous network of enterprises carrying a specific degree of tradition and innovation typical of each region.

This is the reason for most of the instruments Italy employed in view of economic development, the instruments of the "negotiated planning" for example. Beyond the success or the failure of their objectives, the negotiated planning constitutes an exemplary method of work indicative of the new concertized needs emerging by forcing many people to combine the diversity of their interests in view of the local development. There is no room for individual or parochial logics, for particularistic purposes to be pursued conflictually, but only for forms of cooperation and diffusion of trust between public and private entities who are able to identify the common interest and the local public good.

In this kind of reticular production – concerning not only the enterprises but also heterogeneous actors – the network of relationships that is realized and that "brings them together" seems to be a reformulation of the relation between the public sphere and civil society. In most of the local economies of northern Italy, this process took place spontaneously and informally (Putnam 1993); in the Southern regions the combination of resources and actors is an objective to be achieved in a more sophisticated and somewhat "artificial" way. For example, local economic development cannot be achieved without a mobilization "from above" and an accountability of the local actors from the "bottom", as well as

without the necessary information resources and the consensus. However, the public institutions often lack the information needed to act locally and are held back by the fragmentation of the responsibilities between the apparatuses and by the restrictions in the management of the monetary resources. The private actors, on the other hand, often have few tools for the enhancement of the local resources and few tools related to the cooperation even when it would not be convenient to act *uti singuli*. This is reason why the agreement between public and private actors would enable an easier circulation of information and consent. The relatedness desirable among these actors is not intended as a mere decentralization of powers and resources – between a less identifiable center and a more central periphery – but as new relations between local actors and non-local actors, stimulated and guided by the higher institutional levels: EU, State, Regions. This would ensure a healthy competition between territories and would avoid merely collusive coalitions.

In particular, this last point represents the main risk of an economic development connected to the networks of relationships. The risk of misuse, i.e. a particularistic use of the networks, and an unjustified reproduction of bonds, as in the case of networks exclusively aimed for maintenance of power, is in fact a danger inherent in the combination social networks/economic development. The risk is always present, even when the actors are motivated by the best intentions of collective enjoyment of an asset. "Healthy" intrinsic motivations (Sacco and Zamagni 2002) do not always remain such when put to the test, that is, in the process of translation of the identity into work, or after a confrontation with other people's the motivations. What follows is a sort of "evaporation" of the *nomos*, of the *diktat* that should guide the action and the progressive "flattening" on the instrumental reasons that often coincide with the monetary reasons. In these cases, family networks, kinship, friendship, rather than being a tool of growth, perpetuate a nefarious relation between

community and society, and this generates a manipulation of membership, roles and institutions. Therefore, Should we speak of network also in those cases? Alternatively, are we passing from the network to the communities in the most binding idea of “collective cement” they may contain? Certainly, the networks are not a guarantee of cohesion and social integration upon which to base an optimal economic development, and the interactions, the connections and the contacts typical of the networks are not always able to translate into social relationships, cooperation and exchanges. The potential of a network is frequently blocked by the contingency and episodic nature of the relations, which are not protractible over time, and not repeatable relation experiences. They cannot therefore constitute a key substrate for confidence – or everything that comes when actors' expectations are met over time and when we go beyond the *hic et nunc* of the simple interaction, as in the case of the relationships of reciprocity.

Besides the risk of finding ourselves connected without being aware of it, being close to the others but not communicating with them, and being at the same time the nodes of a network and a monad, in the case of the economic development there is the opposite risk: an excessive stiffening of the network in its community bond and a distortion of it in closed realities such as those of the clans or of the familisms.

The institutional political system and its universalizing logic plays a key role here balancing the particularism of the networks, so that they constitute an effective resource for development. "The impression", we want to remark here "is that the charm of immediacy and transparency of social relationships can lure them into a poor society of mediation, with raw nerves, [...] beset by uncertainty, [...] and fundamentally hostile; where a too direct contact with the others could be devastating. We could say: an *adversary society*" (de Leonardis 2001, p. 161). Therefore, the network of the economic development arises not only from a smoother and less hierarchical reformulation of the relation between the public

and civil society and a stronger responsibility of the latter, but also in opposition to the *governance* rhetoric against which "we must emphasize the fact that no system lives without *government*, without some iron cage, especially when it comes to operate on a large scale (in the resources, projects, in the times)" (Donolo 2003, p. 38).

3. Networks and circles. The contribution of Sociology classics

The fact that the concept of network is present does not mean it does not have a history or that its matrices are circumscribed in the contemporary economy. On the contrary, sociological classics thought is a mine of ideas and anticipations explaining its origins, meaning and functions. In this sense, they become central all the currents recognizing as an object of the sociological knowledge the fabric and the social interactions that characterize it. In order to exemplify, here the focus will be on the thought of G. Simmel, which is paradigmatic of a basic orientation.

The social relationships and their reticular schemes are, in fact, at the basis of G. Simmel's sociology. At the beginning of the last century, in the German cultural context, the sociologist conceived sociology as the "geometry" or the "grammar" of a society, based on the analysis of relational microcircuit and of "invisible threads" holding the individuals together. "In the same way as grammar does not deal with the semantic meaning of a language and geometry studies the shapes of objects regardless of the material they are made of, Sociology studies pure forms of relationship" (Cavalli 2001). The so-called "formal solution" given to Sociology comes from the same analytical choice: to isolate the *forms of association* from their particular content within the infinite diversity of the social phenomena. The latter, in fact, could be considered in relation to their "relational" form - for example if it is a "couple" rather than a "triad" and regardless of whether the actors in the game are actors, States or organizations. Similarly, we can investigate the relations on the basis of

their "typology", such as subordination and domination, alliance and conflict, solidarity and competition or competition and imitation.

In this context, the concept of *social circle* seems to be the main hub between an analytical conception - formal sociology - and society, which is an expression of a given social experience: the network and its possible concrete expressions. "Society is just the name that refers to a circle of individuals, *connected* to each other by various forms of *reciprocity*, whose unit is the same that the one observed in a system of bodily masses influencing each other and acting according to the determination received [...]. In this continuous fulfillment as a living entity, the society prescribes the *bounding* of the individuals by *reciprocal determination and flow*. Therefore, it is something *functional* which individuals relate to *active and passive sense* and, given this character, we should speak of association (*vergesellschaftung*) rather than society" (Simmel 1983, p. 55).

From this first look at the concept of circle, some typical features of the network emerge. They can be summarized as follows:

1. The centrality of the social bond
2. The form of reciprocity and its meanings
3. The functionality
4. The active and passive character.

1. The centrality of social bond is the centrality of the *forms of belonging* but in a completely new and different sense if compared to pre-modernity. As the most famous dichotomies between communities and societies summarizes, this is a bond that:

is increasingly being chosen by the individuals rather than being given *a priori* by the community in which we are born or where we are socially situated;

is based on the personality of the individual and is less and less the result of other (further and previous) forms of belonging;

depends on the *quantum* of personality that the individual is willing to bring into the relationship rather than merely rely on the predetermined role of the behavior patterns;

is plural by definition, in the sense that each of the pre-mentioned characteristics can exist just as and to the extent that the circles are different and the possibilities to belong to them are different;

this does not exclude but necessarily involves the possibility of overlap and/or conflict that will overlap or conflict between links and membership systems.

As Hörl noted, Simmel was the first who tracked down in the plural belonging to many circles the hallmarks of modern society: "these groups intersect and overlap with a particular individual; all social groups are linked, directly or indirectly, through their members. Then, several groups can facilitate the integration with the community" (Hörl 1988).

2. To recognize the fundamental link of the circle as a reciprocal link means to identify a well-determined "social field" in a network of potentially infinite relations. Reciprocity is a type of bond based on a particular form of *do ut des*. As proved by the vast literature of reference (we can only recall here), reciprocity is very similar to an exchange market. In both cases, the actors give "something", maybe with the right hand, "waiting to take something else", perhaps with the left hand. This makes this type of exchange dynamic and adaptable depending on the circumstances. However, beyond the similarities, reciprocity and market exchange have at least three fundamental differences:

1. the degree of obligation
2. the degree of contemporaneity
3. the actor to which is addressed the consideration.

Reciprocity, unlike market exchange (also known as exchange of equivalents: price against asset) is not mandatory. The receiving entity may also decide not to reciprocate at all, or may decide not to reciprocate immediately (but in a deferred time onwards), or reciprocate with another actor (perhaps a generalized you). These aspects are essential characteristics of the reciprocal exchange in the sense that they do not undermine the possibility of its existence, but rather permit the enucleation and differentiation compared to any other form of exchange. Reciprocity exists precisely because it is optional, delayed, potentially generalized and indistinct in its possibilities of concrete realization. No one would ever think to sue a mutual friend who does not or did not immediately return the favor (or does not provide the expected performance); it is not said that he will reciprocate exactly to the one from which he received the original performance. On the contrary, it is likely that he will reciprocate towards others giving birth to the formation of the – not surprisingly called - "long chains of reciprocity".

Reciprocity is so similar, and yet so different, from the market exchange: similar, because it is founded on an exchange; different, because the exchange market is mandatory (price against asset), contemporary in two performances (in fact, the postponement requires the existence of a contract) and internal to specific partners.

For these reasons the reciprocity, unlike the exchange of equivalents, is based on a game of expectations and trust. These are the typical ingredients of the social experience and of its civil and voluntary associationism, whose "spontaneity" or "effervescence" depends on the being the realm of the possibility – with the risks and the courage it entails – rather than of the certainty (as happens in the realm of law or of the economic "securities"). In reciprocity, there is a person who gives and a person who "expects" because he trusts the other will eventually reciprocate.

3. In this sense, the social circle – and the reciprocity sustaining it – is functional. In it and with it the social bond be-

comes a function of something else: getting a *quid pro quo*, for example, but also reaffirming the belonging to certain relations or sharing certain symbolic and cultural values. The functionality of the social bond is the aspect enabling it to become reality, but this is possible only if the bond is recognized as a resource. Only in this way, the bond is going to get cured and maintained over time, increased and from time to time also spent in appropriate situations. The *functionality* should not be confused with the *instrumentality* – in the sense of an instrumentalisation – of the social bonds. Instrumentality, unlike functionality, concerns the improper use of a particular resource or element not recognized and used for what it is but whose nature and/or characteristics are degraded. To make friends for material reasons or other types of interests which bring “advantages or disadvantages” to reiterate, subjecting it to another kind of logics (right or wrong) that end up becoming the real *raison d’être* of the same relation, is very different from asking a favor to a friend or benefiting from the knowledge of a specific person. The functionality is one of the most recurring aspects of the network that makes society as whole an efficient and functional reality. Therefore, it seems to derive from Simmel’s social circle.

4. By virtue of this functionality, which acts as a sort of categorical imperative, the bonds, like the circles, turn on and turn off. We open and close the tap, acting as protagonists in some cases and reacting more or less passively in others. Sometimes it is the activism of the bonds to bring the desired results, other times is its passivity and submissiveness to the decisions to determine the endings. In the social circles, as in the nets, there are no strict criteria – in a dichotomic or in a Manichean manner – suggesting what is good or what is bad. It is well-known, for example, the study with which Granovetter showed the strength of weak (rather than strong) ties in the occupational mobility (Granovetter 1973, p. 74).

We can try to systematize Simmel’s thought (Simmel 1998) concerning the social circles in some points. They constitute

an anticipation of today's society and the lenses through which to read its reticularity.

1. The origins of the social circles and modern society are in the passage from "external coexistence" to "associations founded on relations of content": in the first, the physical proximity and the local and physiological closeness (parental bond) prevail; in the second, what matters is the intrinsic individual objective. This interest ties or unmerges the individuals.

"The development that takes place here is an analogy between the representations in the mutual relations between the individuals. The individual is initially seen in an environment that, relatively indifferent to its individuality, ties him down to his fate and requires close co-existence with those next to which the case of the birth put him; and "first" means the initial state of a development both phylogenetic and ontogenetic. But its continuation aims to relations of association between homogeneous constitutive elements drawn from heterogeneous circles. In this way, the family includes a certain number of individualities coming from different species, initially depending upon these relations in the tighter measures. With the progress of the development, however, every individual weaves a bond with personalities, which are outside this original circle membership, and instead have a relationship with him resulting from an objective equality of disposition, tendencies, activities and so on; the Association resulting from the external coexistence is increasingly being replaced by an association founded on relations of contents. As the superior concept ties together what is common to a large number of very different complex intuitive, so the superior practical points of view gather together equal individuals taking them from absolutely not connected or unrelated groups; this creates new circles of contact, intersecting with the previous, relatively more natural and held together by more sensitive relations" (Simmel 1998, p. 348).

2. In them, and with them freedom increases, not because of the decrease of constraints but because we insert the element of the "choice": you choose whom to be bound. Hence it strengthens, the freedom "to" do or not do (positive freedom), but it does not eliminate the freedom "from" the constraints that entail to do or not do something (negative freedom).

"All the developments mentioned are generally subject to the tendency to increase the freedoms: this does not eliminate the untying, but it makes a matter of freedom to decide to whom to be bound. In fact, in front of the untying local, or other untying originated without the participation of the subject, as a rule, the freely chosen will result in reality the effective establishment of who chooses and will permit to the grouping to form out on objective relations, which are based on the essence of the subject" (Simmel 1998, p. 349).

3. The following types of union, and the various circles gradually coming together, will not be always rational, but will continue being organic and natural. Quite often, the circles are the product of a primary organic and natural element that becomes the subject of mediation, reflection and action. The example given by sex equality – already anticipated by Simmel – is illuminating in relation to the "role conflicts". They can originate by virtue of the plural belonging to the circle (or network), and will be stronger the stronger the natural "organic recall" of the belonging will be. In this sense, the circles and the networks redefine the two poles of "community" and "society" by combining them into a kind of dialectical synthesis.

"The next type of union that grows intertwining with a more original union, must not necessarily have a rational nature. [...] When, for instance, in disputes of a married couple is called into question man's mother, her instincts - that act a priori and regardless of all the individual particularities of the case – on the one hand, will tilt toward the son as blood relative, but on the other, will also tilt towards the daughter-in-law who belongs to the same sex. Gender equal-

ity is one of the causes of social life perpetually crossing the sociological life, which intersect with the others in the most varied ways. [...] Gender equality sometimes reveals the particular type of union that is absolutely fundamental, primary, in his reality, as opposed to arbitrariness, but often becomes effective only in virtue of mediations, reflections, and an aware application" (Simmel 1998, p. 350-351).

4. However, the circles growing "later" usually constitute a rational character in the sense that they are the result of a conscious reflection and a rational conformity to the purpose. It was with the prevailing of the economic, political, war, sentimental, religious criteria, etc., and with the advent of the criterion of "intellectuality" that such secondary meaning of formal associations finds its most complete expression: now, is the cognitive interest itself that creates the circles. Translating Simmel's insights to this days, today is the interest in the relationship as a resource (and not only as such), that creates networks and multiplies the circles to which we belong.

"[...]The criterion of intellectuality can work as a differentiation and formation basis for the circles. These policies were first voluntary (economic, warfare, political in a wider and narrower sense), or sentimental (religious), or a combination of both elements (family). The fact that now the intellectuality, the cognitive interest of the circles, selecting their members from various circles formed otherwise, is like an intensification of the phenomenon whereby the group formations growing relatively late have often a rational character, so that their content is created basing on a conscious reflection and a compliance to the rational purpose. This formal essence of the secondary formations found in the interweaving of circles around the interests of the most powerful intellectuality its manifestation, determining the content itself" (Simmel 1998, p. 353-354).

5. Culture, therefore, changes, and in a sense evolves, even with the growth of the circles to which the individual belongs. Their multiplication, in fact, can be considered an ex-

pression of the aspects of the individual personality the original circles leave out, excluding them from any form of recognition and accomplishment. The circles arise in reference to those qualities the individual owns but cannot express in the original circle and which will push him towards different circles and distant from the previous one.

“The number of different circles in which the individual is located is one of the metrics of the culture. [...] When he is conscious of his nationality and of his belonging to a particular social class, and is a reserve officer, he belongs to a couple of circles and social relationships that touch different circles - this is already a great variety of groups, some of which are indeed coordinated but others leave their coordination in such a way that the one looks like the more original union from which the individual, according to the special qualities with which he differentiates himself from other members of the first circle, addresses to a more distant circle” (Simmel 1998, p. 354).

6. These considerations appear much clearer if you keep in mind what was the situation during the pre-modernity. In that case the assumption was: a circle call another circle in the sense that it was the union to form other unions and the individuals ended up belong to one of them just because they belonged to another circle. At the beginning, the circles were “equal” to each other (for example cities with cities, corporations with corporations, etc.). Subsequently, they became alliances between different unions. In both cases, we did not arrive to modernity, which is a union of individuals “as such” and not “as members”.

“The latest configurations had the peculiarity of taking the single not as an individual, but as a member of a circle and to place it in other circles. The union formed with the other unions puts the individual in many circles but, as they do not properly intersect, they have the problem of individuality, of their relation, separated from the sociological constellations of the latter – we will examine later. In the medieval union there was the idea – even if the practice often deviated from

it - that only the equals could meet, in connection with the completeness with which the medieval man gave his life for the union. [...] But as members of the corporation they were equal to each other, and the alliance was only in that they were, not as they were then differentiated individually. But even when that mode broadened to embrace different unions, these alliances were yet still feel as equals, that is, just as unions, as factors of power within the new complex; the individual as such remained outside the further union, so that his membership in it did not give any personally individualizing time" (Simmel 1998, p. 355).

7. Each circle is a system of coordinates determining the individual. The more accurately and decisively these coordinates will be, the more numerous will be circles to which the individual belongs. The singularity of the individualities, their personality and uniqueness depend on the number of coordinates and the number of participants.

"The groups to which the individual belongs constitute a system of coordinates, so that each new coordinate added determines him more precisely and unambiguously. Participation in each of them from time to time leaves a wide space for individuality; but, the more numerous they become, the more likely it will be that more people will have the same combination of groups, namely that these numerous circles intersect in a point" (Simmel 1998, p. 355).

8. Just as the individual gives himself to the circle, the circle acts on the individual. Therefore, the relation is twofold or rather circular. For these reasons, we can assume that there is not only a process of "dispersion" or fragmentation of individual personality in the various contexts, but also of "enrichment".

"After the synthesis of the subjective generated the objective, the synthesis of the objective in turn produces a new and higher subjective element - like personality given to the social circle and get lost in it, in order to regain its specificity by virtue of the individual intersection of the social groups" (Simmel 1998, p. 356).

9. We can read the next step in this same sense. Simmel emphasizes the way the plurality of memberships, and their possible conflicts, are not only a source of destabilization for the individual unit, but also a possibility to strengthen the ego and reaffirm the self. Membership plurality implies a strong consciousness as one that knows how to combine spiritual and different material/ideal/real memberships.

“[...] Precisely because the personality is unity it is susceptible of cleavage; The more numerous are the interest groups who want to meet and find a settlement in us, the more resolutely the ego becomes conscious of its unity” (Simmel 1998, p. 356).

10. The determination of the different individualities made by the circles grows when the concentric circles become increasingly parallel. This phenomenon lasts as long as the distance of sense and claims of each circle are not excessive.

“The sociological determination of the individual will be greater when the determinant circles are more parallel than concentric” (Simmel 1998, p. 359-360).

“When the circles are too far from each other for their sense and for the claims they address to the individual, there is in general, or at least in relation to the purposes, any intersection. And a circle that wants to restrain in itself without reserve one of its members is - besides the reason of jealousy - a formal contradiction with respect to the purpose of the individual differentiation, which should guarantee the simultaneous participation in other circles” (Simmel 1998, p. 359).

11. Remarkable is also the aforementioned point of intersection of the circles. It depends on the degree with which a circle does not refer to another circle – an inevitable phenomenon in the case of concentric circles.

“[...] the more the participation in a circle refers to the participation in another, the more the person is defined by the fact that at the point of intersection of both” (Simmel 1998, p. 362).

12. The individualization increases with the different positions the person can take in the various circles.

“The possibility of individualization grows disproportionately since the same person can assume relative positions quite different in the different circles to which he belongs at the same time” (Simmel 1998, p. 363).

13. Equally significant for the individualizing experience is the *equality* that is created within the recently formed circles, disregarding the existing hierarchies in other circles.

“The same characteristic effect can also result precisely by the equality reigning within a recently formed circle, that is, when its members occupy and retain, in circles that hitherto included them, extremely different positions. Therefore, the very fact that a person who occupied a lower position in his original circle and another who occupied a higher position are now on an equal footing under a social profile is, for each of them, a very significant sociological training” (Simmel 1998, p. 364).

14. In line with these assumptions, the circles “give” to individuality – which is differently “combined” in each circle – the possibility of *cohesion* and *competition*. The selection of the circles to which the individual belongs will be dictated by this policy of individual choice.

“A huge number of individualizing combinations opens to the fact that the individual belongs to a multiplicity of circles where *competition* and *cohesion* are various. It is a trivial observation that the instinctive human needs are addressed in two fundamental but mutually opposed directions that is to say, man wants to feel and act with the others and against the others: a measure of their proportion is for man a purely formal requirement, that man meets by virtue of various contents - and precisely in such a way that often the assumption certain contents is not totally understandable based on their objective importance, but only on the basis of the satisfaction that those formal impulses found in them. Individuality is defined, both with regard to its natural aspiration and

in his becoming history, and the relation between cohesion and competition that is decisive for it. And precisely here is also the opposite direction, namely, that the need for a clear position of unequivocal development of the individuality pushes the individual to select certain circles in whose intersection can ask and from which he can acquire – as a circle offers essentially the form of aggregation, the other that of competition – a maximum in individual determination” (Simmel 1998, p. 365-366).

15. The social differentiation may also lead – through the division of labor – to a splitting of the mechanical and of the spiritual element. This may be functional for the cultural progress and to the inner unity of the whole, which, at this point, will be fulfilled when the various social groupings will end up subordinating themselves to a higher social purpose. For these reasons, they do not retain the spirit and sense for themselves and become more mechanical and external.

“On the other hand, there is often a differentiation that separates the spiritual element of the task, so that the mechanical things and the spiritual receive a separate existence, such as the working lady working at the embroidering machine performs a less spiritual activity with respect to the embroiderer, while the spirit of this activity passed to the machine and is objectified in it. Thus, institutions, gradations, social groupings may become more mechanical and external and yet serve the cultural progress, for the inner unity of the whole, when it emerges a superior social purpose that they simply have to be subordinated, and that no longer allows them to preserve for themselves the spirit and sense with which a previous situation concluded the teleological series” (Simmel 1998, p. 391).

16. However, this situation seems to affect larger groups rather than the small circles. The large group may find its own unit only by virtue of a separation process of the individualities and of their particularity that, in contrast, has an effective and immediate consideration in the life of the small circles.

“Person-to-person relations, which constitute the vital principle of the smaller circles, are not compatible with the distance and coldness of objective abstract rules, without which there can be no great circle” (Simmel 1998, p. 49).

17. Beside this character, there are the *decision-making* circles. For Simmel, they seem to depend on the size of the group, so that the large circles are less radical than the small, but for the same reasons even less cohesive. The first element depends on the fact that the more the masses of individuals are large, the more the ideas concerning them should be simple in order to constitute a common denominator. Similarly, cohesion will be more difficult to be realized the greater the versatility of the elements to be combined.

“[The large circles] compared to the smaller ones seem to have a lesser degree of radicalism and the decision on the position taken. [...] The unconditional cohesion of the elements, on which sociologically rests the possibility of radicalism, is more ephemeral when there are many individual elements introduced by the numerical increase” (Simmel 1998, p. 47).

18. It is extremely topical the compensation mechanism that emerges when the circle widens lowering the common point between the individuals and among their motivations and interests. This means a renunciation “of the aspects provided with more value” and more “intimate in their being”. In fact, when this happens, we have to find something that compensates the loss. It is often found in what is external and sensitive because perceived as synonym of joy and gratification common to everyone.

“But to the extent that the amount of the elements no longer leaves a place to the superior psychic-individual element, we must try to compensate the lack of these attractions through the enhancement of outward and sensible ones. [...] If eating and drinking are the means of meeting of the large circles, for which it would be difficult to reach a State of mind and an interest in the other direction, a society shall accentuate, because of its quantitative element, excluding the

commonality and the relationship of the moods and the spiritual purposes, these sensual joys and certainly common to all” (Simmel 1998, p. 62).

19. Finally, the size of the *traditions* is central in the determination of the social groups. The tradition emerge between law and ethics, occupying a position that no other form of coercion could meet. Not surprisingly, the tradition generally regulates the social groups and the traditions – as a set of rules – fundamentally emerge from networks of interpersonal relationships.

“When the coercion is inadmissible and the individual ethics is unreliable, a circle ensures the appropriate behavior of its members through the costume. The costume acts today as integration of these two systems, as it was the only regulation of life at a time when those forms differentiated standardization did not exist, or existed only in embryonic form. We already mentioned the sociological position of costume: it ranks among the wider circle, as a member of which the individual is subject to the law, and absolute individuality, which is the only carrier of ethical freedom. It belongs therefore to more limited circles – in order to intermedate between those two” (Simmel 1998, p. 53).

4. Networks and social capital. The contemporary sociological literature

Contemporary literature often amplifies the theme of the network using other labels – thereby making it even more redundant – as for example the already mentioned “social capital” (from now on SC). In fact, as evidenced by the most accepted literature, net and SC are not the same “thing” and this is inferred by the otherwise inexplicable need to coin a new term, the SC precisely. Usually this difference is tracked in the potentialities of a network or in its opposite: marking a plausible evidence, a network that is also resource is SC.

However, evidence alone is not enough. In order a network to be SC we should not only tap into it as if it were a resource

among many others. As we will try to demonstrate, its use is not a sufficient condition to make the network a resource. Its employment alone is not enough; indeed, it is not nearly enough and could be detrimental to the maintenance of the network itself. We should rather consider that:

the net, like the moral virtues, grows and does not impoverish when used, unlike many other resources and/or forms of capital; however, to be fulfilled, the growth should be consistent with the culture of the network and compliant with the sense and the meaning of the relationships that comprise it.

The network *has* its own culture and a specific social network of relationships (mostly of reciprocity and trust).

To understand the network means, therefore, to a certain extent to understand the SC and the exchange that takes place between the two poles in question, the network on one hand and culture on the other. Where the relations of reciprocity and trust tend by their nature to determine a reticular social experience the latter, in order to exist, cannot help but certain values, such as loyalty to the commitments, correctness or spirit of collaboration.

The idea of the network to which reference should be made when it comes to SC is, therefore, that of social relationships of reciprocity staying between network and culture, in a continuous tension between these two poles and a mutual osmosis of cause and effect between the structure (the network) and its representation (culture). If properly recognized and valued, the SC feeds itself with the contacts and the sties, playing them without running out in them, but confirming them through the cultural dimension - honesty and fairness, just to make an example - typical of its constitutive social relationships.

The network is a resource, and therefore SC. We must recognize it not merely as a plot of links, or only as a legacy of shared values. We should rather consider it as a continually in progress and reticular intermingling of social relationships

of reciprocity and trust. Relations that create the network and transmit culture.

The dimensions of the SC are essentially three:

- structural;
- cognitive;
- relational.

a) The structural dimension is the network, in the strict sense of links that tie different actors. The main distinction concerns the opening or closing of these interactive circuits that can influence the type of resource being conveyed as well as the specific social relation. In this case, the SC is a sort of complement to the contextual backdrop of the individual and collective action determining the content.

It is an idea of SC whose origins are in the concept of embeddedness and that was endorsed by studies on economic sociology. According to them, the economic action, like any other social action, is conditioned by the network of relationships (structural embeddedness) and not only by the resources conveyed (cognitive dimension) or the dyadic relations between the actors involved and the nature of such relations (relational dimension).

Network's structural conditioning takes place primarily on the basis of the horizontality that links the actors, or the nodes of the network. In fact, the net is, by definition, the replacement of the typical verticality of the State, or even of the market, the horizontal dimension of the typical relations of the civil society. Rather than by power relations and the use of the bargaining power, in this case, the actors are nodes because their action is conditioned – both in the resources conveyed and in the chances of success – by the bonds they share. Therefore, the exchange is done on the basis of these same ties and by virtue of their durability and stability over time – which is one of the prerequisites for the development of trust (the relational dimension itself). The exchange does not depend, therefore, by something external to it as the

price in the typical market relations, or the positions of authority of the State, but by the relation itself.

References to the structural dimension of SC lie both in the studies carried out by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1972; 1980; 1995; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) and in the perhaps best-known studies carried out by Coleman (Coleman 1988, pp. 95-120). For the French sociologist the SC is the "sum of resources, actual or virtual, that result to the individual or to a group by virtue of the fact that they have a stable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 25). In this view, it is evident the importance of the structural dimension of the network for the determination of the resources involved, and the nature of the social relationships. On this same line of reflection arises Coleman's analysis that emphasizes the importance of the structural elements in the determination of what is and what does the SC do. In particular, the author notices that "the SC is not a single entity but a variety of different entities that have two characteristics in common: they all have some aspect of social structure and facilitate the actions of the individuals who are within that structure" (Coleman 1988, p. 98).

4. 1 Procedural aspects of the structural dimension

As far as the "structure", at least nominally, seems to be something dialectical with respect to the social process, this dimension of the SC is in need of a procedural analysis in the sense that, in order to understand what the SC is, we should verify the nature of the network, the constraints and the opportunities within it. In particular, we should pay attention to the type of network – dense or dispersed – but especially to the bonds working as bridges. These are the bonds defining the creativity of the subject and thus the dynamism of the structural dimension.

Therefore, in this case, the SC is nor given by the "graphically" considered net, neither by a generic concept of embeddedness, but by subject's capacity to tap into the (open

or closed) network to pursue his own ends, retroacting on the very structure of the network in dynamic terms, which continuously *in progress*. In this sense, we can explain both the perspectives of analysis of the SC known as *bonding and bridging*, and the theory of the structural holes, and even the references to Giddens' theory of the structure (Giddens 1990).

4.2 The cognitive dimension

The cognitive dimension of the SC is a set of values, norms, guidelines that guide the action within a given community and a social structure. As Van Maanen and Schein notice, it is the interaction – our structural dimension – that promotes the development of a set of common goals and values, by sharing them within a given organization (Maanen J. Van and Schein, 1979, pp. 209-264).

The author who more than any other understood the importance of the cognitive dimension is Fukuyama who believes that the SC “differs from other forms of human capital as is usually formed and bequeathed through cultural mechanisms, such as religion, tradition or well-established habits” (Fukuyama 1999, p. 42). Taken to the extreme, the cultural dimension constitutes the SC, while the nets and the fiduciary properties of the relations can be considered mere epiphenomena.

Beyond the tendency to absolutize the cognitive meanings of SC, the culturological approach strives to capture those elements of value that are likely to define the social climate in which the individual and collective actions originate and are realized. However, going beyond the concept of psychological climate – which is a social environment in Lazarsfeld (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1948) and in the traditional sociology – the emphasis here is placed on the specific forms of sharing that determine actions or collaborative practices. Therefore, determinants of the SC are neither the shared social climate, nor the generic idea of culture but a set of values, symbolic

references, and regulatory issues that are likely to determine joint actions.

Fukuyama informs us about these aspects when explicitly defines the SC as "an informal practiced norm that promotes cooperation between two or more actors" (Fukuyama 1999, p. 42).

The reflections of Putnam (Putnam 1993a; 1993b) can be interpreted in the same way. Although this author finds the SC in a very heterogeneous reality made up of diverse aspects of the social experience – as networks, norms and trust – his perspective in considering these constitutive elements of the SC betray a clear culturological conception, attentive to the political and civic traditions as transmitted and practiced.

4.3 The relational dimension

Among the dimensions of the SC, the relational is certainly the acceptance that more than the others gives an authentic meaning to the term – although often confused with a generic concept of structural network (that is, with a network of contacts and ties) or with mere expressions of confidence not always anchored to the social relationships. Consistent with what so far expressed, to talk about social relationships means to refer to real exchanges going beyond the contact established by the relationships of interaction. The social relationship expresses a structured and lasting bond that goes beyond the *hic et nunc* and for this reason, while feeding on the initial stage of the interaction, does not possess the same characteristics of contingency but is defined and continually fed by the recognition of the other (Mongardini 2001, p. 56). In this sense, to talk about a relational dimension means to allude to something different, but strongly complementary and similar to the "structural" dimension of the network. In fact, as Donati noted – leading to the extreme the role of relatedness within the paradigm considered – "despite the appearances, the difference between the terms relational and reticular is huge: the networks are lattices or struc-

tural connections, while the relations are reciprocal actions. They are very different in quality, consistency, causes and effects” (Donati 1991).

In addition, although supported by economic studies and economic sociology, the constitutive exchange of the SC is not a “market” exchange. Its basic components cannot be found in the contract or in the formal rationality, but in the trust and in reciprocity.

To get a clearer idea of the already mentioned differences between the two types of exchange, consider the reflections of Kolm analyzed by Zamagni:

“Serge Kolm formalizes the reciprocity as a set of bi-directional transfers, independently voluntary from each other, but related. The characteristic of independence implies that each transfer is voluntary in itself, that is, free; as to say that no transfer is a condition for the occurrence of the other, since there is no external debt for the transferring entity. It is precisely this characteristic to distinguish the reciprocity from the familiar market exchange, which is a set of bi-directional voluntary transfers, but the voluntariness is, so to speak global, in the sense that it applies to the entire set of transfers, and not to each isolated transfer. Otherwise, the transfers involved by exchange of equivalents are the condition of the other, and law can always intervene to give enforceability to the contractual obligations. This does not apply to the reciprocity, although market exchange and reciprocity, as both presupposing the element of voluntariness, oppose to the relations of command. At the same time, however, there is more freedom in relations of reciprocity than in the exchange of equivalents, because in the latter the transfer in one direction is made mandatory by the transfer in the opposite direction. In this precise sense, we can say that, with respect to the category of liberty, market exchange occupies a position midway between coercion and reciprocity” (Kolm 1984, p. 178-180).

With respect to market exchange, the exchange to which the SC refers conciliates different degrees of voluntariness

and independence. For this reason, we can say it is based on different rules, mostly spontaneous and informal, that are based on trust or on the a-rationality of the waiting for a return that may not take place (Coluccia 2002, p. 21).

From this point of view, the SC can be considered as a capital of reciprocal relations based on trust. Among the authors emphasizing the importance of the interpersonal relationships there is Donati. He believed that "the value of the new concept of SC derive(s) from the relational meaning, the one that shows the existence of sui generis social relationships whose primary function is not to be a tool to achieve something, but to promote social relatedness, i.e. the exchangeability producing shared good, from which derive particular resources as side effects" (Donati 2003, p. 49). Mutti refers to this approach SC when "a relatively long-lasting structure of relationships between people" (Mutti 1998, p. 8). Trigilia does the same thing when, freeing himself from the too rigid concept of structure, simply locates the SC "in the set of social relationships a person individually or collectively (private or public) has at a given time" (Trigilia 1999, p. 419-440).

Therefore, the reciprocity is mostly specified in terms of cooperative action, while the trust is considered and valued in its emotional components more than in the cognitive. It is in this sense, for example, that Mutti speaks of the structure of interpersonal relations "consisting in formal and informal networks and trust that stimulate reciprocity and cooperation" (Mutti 1998, p. 8); or Barbieri who considers the SC "made of trust, not of immediately utilitarian exchanges" (Barbieri 1997a, p. 67-110; 1997b, p. 343-370).

The author that mostly focuses on the analysis of the importance of these aspects is Pizzorno (Pizzorno 2001, p. 19-45) with the famous distinction between SC of solidarity and SC of reciprocity. In particular, the author notes that the SC of solidarity, "is based on the kind of social relationships that arise, or are sustained by cohesive groups whose members are linked to each other in a strong and durable manner, and is therefore expected to act in accordance with the principles

of group solidarity" (Pizzorno 2001, pp. 27-28), and in the SC of reciprocity "one should not assume the presence of a cohesive group that intervenes to ensure the operability of the social relation to certain ends [...] [but] it will only be necessary to assume that when a person establishes a relationship of some duration with another person certain passages of aid and information between the two are likely to occur" (Pizzorno 2001, pp. 29-30).

Although simple and intuitive, these definitions of SC can pave the way to very articulate reflections. The relational aspects of SC are often much more problematic and highly dynamic than how the static labels, or pictures, would represent it. For these reasons, to reflect on the SC as a relational capital does not mean to question about what but about how, that is, how the social relationships of reciprocity and trust can actually raise the level of the real capital; why in some cases it is necessary the presence of the SC of solidarity rather than of reciprocity and vice versa; why certain types of bonds – of solidarity and reciprocity but also strong or weak – are formed in some contexts and not in others; what is the relationship between the trust and cooperation? When trust is a prerequisite for cooperation and vice versa?

The point is that each of the following definitions, as each of the questions proposed, has at least a twofold merit. On the one hand, they remind us of the growing importance of the interpersonal relations in a society evolving in reticular terms and becoming an active and updated (Iannone 2003, pp. 36) interaction; on the other hand, they bring out the nature and the specificity of these social relationships, reporting the differences with the relationships that cannot be considered of SC and, forcing us to ask ourselves why we cannot establish certain rules in a definitive manner. For this reason, SC is not synonymous of vaguely considered social relationships, fiduciary relationships or simple reciprocity, but of relations, based on trust and reciprocity, that can lead to very numerous implications – often different even at equal initial conditions – for whose identification is

necessary to follow the procedural path under which these aspects are combined and resolved. In the words of Piselli, the SC, even in its relational dimension, "is not an object, a specific entity, identifiable and identified, circumscribable in a formula, definable with precision. Is a general concept embodied in the creative action of the actors, in the implementation of practical projects (...) and every move, every action changes the international context, changes the strategic situation, and channels subsequent choices of the actors" (Piselli 1995, p. 52).

What is significant for our reflection is the ability to understand, through the analysis of the interdependencies between these variables, the decisiveness the actor expresses and the course they follow: in a word, the process by which these resources are acted out. Again, if we talk about SC we do not allude to a social relationship of trust or reciprocity/cooperation individually and statically considered, but to the possibility that the actor has to "process" these resources: cultivating relationships, nourishing and gaining confidence, opening to forms and modes of reciprocity, combining these resources.

On the basis of these considerations, more attentive to the procedural element inherent – albeit often only *in embryo* – in each of the definitions given, it is therefore appropriate to try to understand the creative concatenation of the variables identified and the dynamism that can give us information on the uniqueness of the experience we subsume under the concept of SC.

Going beyond a static reading of the considered relational definitions (a reading they only apparently suggest), we should therefore start from the image of SC that more than any other is able to overcome the static nature. In a relational perspective, that image is once again suggested by Piselli who defines the SC as "the result of intentional or unintended investment strategies oriented to the constitution and the durable social reproduction, capable of procuring material and symbolic profits in time" (Piselli 1995, pp. 47-75).

4.4 Interdependence between dimensions

The specific processuality of SC is clear when considering the interdependencies between its various constitutive dimensions, which, as is known, are the structural, the relational and the cognitive.

Here, the creative role of the agent to "constructively" combine the resources available is expressed in all its potential and in a more marked way compared to what occurs within each dimension, where the interdependence of variables plays a strategic role. The concatenation of these aspects in their diachronic succession, but above all in their sense and meaning, will push from time to time the actor to impact differently on the process itself, for example through actions guiding the course of the events consistent with a given intentionality, retroacting on the initial conditions of their social experience. Within this circular movement that feeds on itself, which is the mutual structuring of the dimensions involved, the individual acts starting from the network, the rules and the relations at his disposal in order to retroact on them, at the same time and continuously.

4.5 The structural and cognitive dimension

Let us consider for example the relation between the structural and the cognitive dimension in the sense of the determination of the connections, of their density and of the positioning of the subject in the network, on the shared values and the rules. Most of the time a dense network provides best but at the same time smaller and potentially less innovative opportunities for sharing than those suggested by a dispersed network (Hargadon and Sutton 1997, pp. 716- 749). It will be relevant the number of direct or indirect links facilitating the dissemination of forms of belonging and identification, both in the sense that through direct links will be easier to make them move within a network, and in the sense that the indirect links can facilitate the spatial spreading "across the borders" (Tsai 2000, pp. 925- 939). Similarly, if a person has a central position in the network, will probably be

more emotionally involved in relation to the *idem sentire* of that particular network than those who, in contrast, are at its margins. However, for the same reasons, these may have a greater chance of contact with the other lattices – inside which is acceptable to assume a position of greater importance compared with that of the first network – and hence to introduce innovation and creativity, rather than to strengthening, in the membership forms of the first network. If that were the case, it does not seem unfounded to believe, a central actor would trade more and better within his network while a peripheral actor with the other networks. However, both will contribute to the shared values of the original network albeit in a different way: the first, in the meaning described by the strengthening of the shared meanings; the second, in the sense of their innovation and rediscovery. At the same time – and by virtue of these mechanisms – the need for communication between the central and peripheral actor will become stronger than *ab origine*. If the peripheral actor wants to introduce his creative contribution in the sphere of values to which he participates with the other nodes, he must strengthen his ties with the central actor (Knocke & Burt 1983, pp. 195-222), and because of his position, he will assume the responsibility for the adoption and interpretation of the new instances (partially or totally, entirely or by lightening their tone, etc.). Moreover, compared to the dispersed networks, the dense networks seem to facilitate the sanction mechanism (Walker, Kogut & Shan 1997, pp. 109-125), and the valorization of the rules because control can take place more easily. However, if compared to the reification of values typical of the consuetudinary practices and *routines* of the dense networks (Coleman 1988, pp. 95-120), the dispersed networks have an increasing need for the clarification of the shared norms securing them in a clear and defined manner. These cognitive aspects, in turn, will be able to feed back on the structure itself.

4.6 The structural and relational dimension

The exchanges by a similar mechanism also occur between the structural and relational dimension. For example, dense networks are those that tend to develop collaborative and fiduciary practices between nodes but this effect, if radicalized, could in turn cause the isomorphism of net restricting the access to new ideas. With respect to the latter case, we can foresee the importance of the relational and cognitive dimension retroacting on the structure of the network, perhaps preventing the density to fold in itself and to constitute a constraint, rather than an advantage, for the action. More exactly, what makes the difference in the retroacting on a structure is the type of bond, its being strong or weak. While the former tend to facilitate more circumscribed and dense structures, the latter facilitates the dispersed networks. In this sense, we can say that the relation between the structure and the social relationships depends on two things: the density of the connections, and the strong or weak nature of the relationship.

Some interesting studies show that when these two aspects coincide, for example in the form of high density and strong ties between the nodes, the effects are not advantageous and the SC will be recognizable with some difficulty. Since both the high density of connections and the strong tie are incisive mechanisms of social control, in order to become resources, they need to be uncombined. Lipparini notes that "trying to access the dense network through strong ties, will divert resources from other functions and other links with non-redundant actors that can generate value" (Lipparini 2002, p. 83).

Furthermore, the production or the absence of SC will also be the result of the combination between the stability or instability of the environment, the strong or weak bonds as well as the sphere of realization in which these dynamics take place. For example, while in the world of entrepreneurship, if the environment is relatively stable, strong ties are associated with superior *performances* – (and vice versa: if

the environment is unstable, weak ties will allow more opportunities to adapt to the change) – if we consider the experience of the common man acting in his own microcosm of reference, made of lattices of identity and symbolic membership circles, the instability of the surrounding environment will mean the development of strong ties or the strengthening of the weak ties, whereas in the case of more stable bonds, the weak tie will certainly be a stimulus for the innovation of the certainties and of the established memberships. Similarly, contexts marked by pronounced uncertainty will tend to increase the necessary doses of confidence requesting more pills compared to more reliable and predictable contexts. In general we can say that, for some authors, beyond the type of bond (strong, weak, trustee, etc.), is the same investment in the social relationships that ensures the stability and continuity of the structure.

4.7 The cognitive and relational dimension

The relation between the cognitive and relational dimension is equally important. The most emblematic expression of this relation is the possibility that common visions and languages encourage the sharing of the experiences. This means that the symbolic and cognitive level of the SC produce not only relations of interaction but real social relationships of reciprocity and trust. To the extent that this occurs, connectivity is synonym of community in its various specifications, and the members are united not only by their actions but also by the meaning such actions possesses both for them and for the wider community (Lave, Wenger 1991). In turn, these relationships will make effective the action by retroacting both on the perception and representation the actors give of themselves (cognitive dimension) and on the maintenance of the social context (Orr 1990) (structural dimension) accelerating the interpersonal interactions. Furthermore, as the expectations are largely based on past experiences, it is natural that the orientation towards the others and the sense of the action is based on the history of each person (Jones &

Gorge J. M. 1998, p. 531-546). The relation of trust will influence the spread of values such as honesty, integrity and fairness (Olson & Zanna 1993, p. 117- 194), which in turn will help determine the division between desirable behaviors and not desirable behaviours (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995, p. 709- 734).

What emerges is that: on the one hand, it is indubitable that the capital grows through its use, and we are richer the more we depend on each other or the more we are forced to interact, but, on the other hand, the cognitive condition that facilitates this union – that is a "continuous effort to socialization" (Bourdieu 1980, p. 3-5) – shows the always incumbent danger of closure towards the community or the networks. In this case, as we will see later, the active role of the actor inside and especially between the networks can be crucial to prevent the crystallization of the links even if in a context of mutual dependence and in view of the maintenance of "tightness of the group" (Schein 1996, p. 229- 240).

In addition, the cognitive dimension can act as social deterrent (Hagen and Choe 1998, p. 589-600) reducing the symbolic incentives to interrupt a behavior or as a catalyst for certain behaviors in place of others.

The combinations summarized are only few examples of the typical process of the SC and we could add many more to them. Here we tried to take into account only the fundamental combinations with the aim of fixing the peculiarities of the training, the maintenance, the growth and the destruction of the SC in its constitutive parts and in the different levels it can actually happen. The dynamism of the concatenations constituting the SC appear in these exchanges in all its fluidity and this brings out the importance of continuous transformations (Boudon 1980, p. 123- 125), both of the interaction system and of the social environment in which the individual is part.

These processes are reassessing the intentionality of the actor who discovers new resources at his disposal and tries to

hack on them determining the change and directing them towards forms of growth.

5. The governance of the network

Our analysis should clearly indicate, as C.M. said, that one of the problems of the NS is caused by the "government" of the networks, or rather, by their governance. It is known that this term has varied meanings.

Governance, for example, is a fashionable term used for a symbolic and ideological representation; for government activities in the broadest sense; a conceptual area and a theoretical figure; is *empowerment* of the social actor and self-organization of the inter-organizational networks; is a theoretical perspective of the institutional exchanges and of the "combinatory" approach – as a strategy for the management of the interdependencies –; is the democratization of the expertise and of the method through which obtain the information; is the effect of the social acceleration and of the functional specialization of complex societies and is horizontality, or better, transversality of the social relationships; is the politics of the problems and of the mechanical production of public policies; is a cooperative process and a communication partnership; a multicentric system of norms attentive to the quantitative dimension of the issues and at the additive needs of regulation.

Each of these meanings refers to varied phenomena, susceptible to many interpretations: each of them is related to the idea of a network and a networking society to be managed, administered, and governed.

The problem of the *social order* comes out through the evocation of the primordial, and irresolvable, dilemma between authority and freedom, unpredictability and security, conflict and social control. They are now exacerbated by the emergence of a *free* – or *horizontal* (Friedman 2002) – *society* (Panebianco 2004; Hayek 1998) and its oscillations between need for protection and the research for a meaning on the

one hand, and the softening of the limits and of the constraints on the other. The concept of Governance reiterates the theme of the "governance" of the social order, of the increasing expectations, of the "increased insecurity" (Offe 1982, pp. 46-47) or of the "structurally induced need" (Offe 1982, pp. 46-47), as well as of the "potential to generate conflicts of the institutions of the democratic regimes exceeding their ability to resolve the conflicts" (Offe 1982, p. 46-47). The result of modernity is not certainly annihilated, but its distinction between spontaneous order (*cosmos*) and organization (*taxis*), and between law (*nomos*) and command (*thesis*) are repeated and combined differently.

For similar reasons the governance, like the network, refers to the problem of *legitimacy*, of its *sources* and the course of *legitimation* followed by the actions that substantiate it. The problem is not so much to "go beyond" the Mosca's political formula or recover – by combining them – the antithetical couples implicit in the three unifying principles of Will, Nature and History such as the classical formulas of legitimacy. The node does not consist of the contents of legitimacy, but of its approach. This is because the governance, bypasses – reinterpreting them – the classical political formulas and the principles that animated the legitimacy, assuming a particular "positivistic" approach concerning the *effectiveness*. In the context of the governance, the *legitimate power* becomes the *effective power*, hence the reference to the substantive rationality, and to the *efficient power*. By transposing to the governance what applies to the legal positivism, we can say "the issue of legitimacy took another direction, it is no longer that of the axiological criteria, but the one of the reasons of effectiveness" (Bobbio 1985, p. 83). For these reasons it seems to recall, on the one hand the Weberian methodology on the opportunity to understand, not only and not so much the "principles" or the "political" formulas, but the different reasons why, in a given society and in a particular historical period, they formed stable and continuous relations subsumable under the category of the "legitimate power"; on the

other hand, in line with Weber, if we look not only to the axiological criteria but to the *actual process* of legitimation, interesting suggestions come from Luhmann and the relatively recent debate on his theory. As it is well known, it calls into question the idea of legitimacy typical of the complex societies as effect, not of the reference values, but of the application of the procedures. In fact, the same Luhmann is, in some ways, outdated and it would be more correct to speak of neopositivism, where legitimacy is not exhausted in the effectiveness of the procedural formalism but converts such effectiveness in the efficacy of the participation in the proceedings. In this way, the governance adopts the substantial point of view of the discourse on legitimacy as *a posteriori* rationalization of the effectiveness. The governance implies an idea of *legitimacy through the organization* (Bettini 1983) as an "essential tool [...] to ensure the goodness of the effectiveness of policies through organizational and administrative efficiency of the equipment concerned to implement them" (Cipriani, Cotesta, de Nardis and Landi 1983).

Inevitably, the issue of legitimacy brings with it that of power, authority, and domain. Without "empowering" too much the governance – and the networks providing the backdrop and the assumption –, it is certain that we cannot speak of "direction and piloting" without evoking the theme of power. Triepel would say that the governance is a matter of *hegemony*, of its essence and of its changes. Narrowing the observation focus, we should speak about "the essence of the direction by means of the collectivity" (Triepel 1949) aware of the group organization of this community, of the Sombartian existence of *pseudo-groups* and of the fact that "only the group that has a will, can [...] direct" since "not every «social élite» [and] not even every «political élite» is a true leading group" (Triepel 1949, p. 87).

Therefore, what is the relation between governance and network or pluralism and the concerted actions? How, and in what sense, governance proposes the themes of democracy and the need to "rethink the same" (Mongardini 2002)? If we

speak of governance, are we remaining within the properly understood framework of the political democracy? Or, are we inevitably entering the "social democracy"? The impression is that if we speak of "democratic changes", especially in terms of governance, the mistakenly emphasized transition from the representative democracy to an alleged direct democracy is not relevant, "but the transition from democracy in the political sphere, i.e. the sphere in which the individual is considered as a citizen, to the democracy in the social sphere where the individual is considered in the multiplicity of his statuses, for example as father and son, husband, manager, student, teacher and worker, and also as parent of a student, doctor and patient, officer and soldier, administrator and administered, manufacturer and consumer of public services and Manager etc.; in other words, the extension of the forms of ascending power, which hitherto almost exclusively occupied the domain of the great political society (and of small and often politically irrelevant voluntary associations), to the field of civil society in its various forms, from school to factory" (Bobbio 1985, p. 147).

We pass from the political democracy to the social democracy, but also from the political democracy where the instances raised by governance – regardless of the cognitive paradigm adopted and the sense it recognizes – involve the democratization of the political leadership *through* the democratization of society. Governance therefore becomes a synonymous of potential socio-political democratization not necessarily creating new forms of organization but definitely occupying new spaces, i.e. those networks so far dominated by bureaucratic and hierarchical organizations and subject to the logic of horizontality, transversality and informality. The same references to new forms of participation and social capital are its explicit proves.

Similarly, can we speak of governance without referring to the principle of subsidiarity and of federalism? The relation between these phenomena and their conceptual categories is so tight that we speak of "subsidiary governance" (Donati

2005) as a social fact implying a "coordination between actors placed in different networks that follow different symbolic codes (political, social, economic, cultural)" (Donati 2005, p. 109-110). The governance becomes a subsidiarity beyond politics and federalism, beyond the State, through a process of pulverization of the authority in new political forms and under a profusion of terms ranging from *multi-level governance* to *multitired governance*, from *polycentric governance* to *multiperspectival governance* (Bache and Flinders 2005, p. 15).

This makes evident the connection between governance and globalization exemplified by the concept of *global governance* as a "multilayered, multidimensional and multi-actor system" (Held 2005, p. 112). In fact, as suggested by the most accredited international literature, governance is first and foremost an attempt to respond to the local and global challenges caused by globalization, given that, "in principle, globalization does not exclude the possibility of adjustment and control. However, it is difficult to underestimate the profound institutional and regulatory challenges that it poses to the current organization of the political communities" (Held 2005, p. 119).

As just said, albeit in a certainly not exhaustive way, governance is a *study* of instances and reflections and a *construction site* of in the making phenomena. More than a gateway for the explanation of heterogeneous phenomena, governance seems to be the result of varied and complex processes, which are its prerequisite.

In relation to the State, Bobbio notes that "the choice of a definition depends on opportunity criteria and not on truth" (Bobbio 1985, p. 59). In this sense, the contemporary society, multiplying the relations, amplifies the communicational processes and deteriorates the uniqueness of the definition. This creates the not final and exponential need in late modernity, to clarify, to limit, to try to thin out the haziness of the truth. However, by analogy with what Bobbio expressed in relation to the State, governance would not receive much

credit if answering only to the lexical requirements of clarity and not "to the need to find a new name for a new reality" (Bobbio 1985, p. 57), or to needs to be empirically verified and strategically exploited. Indeed, it is plausible to assume that just because the truth can no longer be unique and irrefutable, or generally recognized as such, under the weight of cultural relativism and the prevailing de-ideological policies, it is destined to become a synonym for "opportunities", the appropriate, effective, and relevant truth, relevant to the incumbent needs.

Still on this subject, continuing the already partially mentioned reflection, Bobbio argues "the more numerous are the connotations of a concept the more narrow is the field it denoted, i.e. its extension" (Bobbio 1985, p. 59).

Perhaps the problem of the governance lies precisely in this aspect: to discover its constitutive originating nucleus, the boost animating it. To discover the feeling or need inducing the individuals to appeal to the same conceptual category even without knowing perfectly the meaning, aware of its vagueness and despite the mistakes and misunderstandings that it may cause; aware of the doubts rather than solutions it causes and the uncertainties it implies while looking for theoretical and practical reassurances.

Governance cannot be explained extrapolating the individual, the citizen as a heterogeneous social actor. The governance crosses the reticular society investing the individual, his or her needs, values or behavior patterns, his/her microcosm, the entire planet and its organizations.

The governance denounces the need to demonstrate the potential of the subject and its protagonism. Operational recovery of the myth of self-determination not reflected in the reality where next to the prevailing cultural subjectivism arises the feeling of loss of control and incisiveness in the social experience. Governance thus becomes a reaction to the growing intrusiveness of strong but invisible powers; an initial boost to reduce the polarization resulting from the processes of globalization, and the fluidity of the social inter-

locutors. It is a way to shorten the distance and to know an increasingly mysterious and distant power.

After all, the "promise not (yet completely) maintained" of the democratic republic, or of the western democracies in general, compared with principalities, the monarchies of divine right and the various forms of despotism, is to be found in the *visibility of the power*. Let us think to Schmitt's words. According to him, "the representation can only take place in the sphere of advertising [and] there is no representation that takes place in secret and in private, for this reason, a Parliament has a representative character because its activities are public" (Schmitt 1928). But, "the victory of the visible power on the invisible is never completely accomplished: the invisible power resists the advance of the visible, invents new ways to hide, to see without being seen" (Bobbio 1985, p. 21). The problem then is right here: the power, which is always mysterious and elusive, becomes even more mysterious and elusive in late modernity, when it strengthens citizen empowerment and the ideal self-determination. Positive freedom aimed to self-determination, strongly undermines each constraint colliding with the resistances but a blinded positive freedom is like Don Chijote fighting the windmills. The *arcana imperii* reified in the centers of social power are back, concentrated but not centralized and evaporated in the forms of accountability, detached from the social relationships and destined to wander in the anonymous and faceless limbo of the hyperuranio,. When the ring that once connected the systems of interactions with those of interdependence is broken, what remains is the effort to restore it. The governance is similar to it because makes visible the invisibility of power.

On the other hand, if it is plausible to assume that through the governance the public sees the power, recognizes it and is realized through it, it is even more certain "that the use of electronic computers, which is expanding and will increasingly expand in the future, for the storing of personal files of all citizens, permits and will increasingly enable those in

power to control the public much better than in the past" (Bobbio 1985, p. 21).

Therefore, the governance cannot be exempted from engaging in *micro* analysis recognizing the individual's weight and that of his social relationships – both formal and abstract – he weaves in everyday life as those that guide him: in a word, the networks. In fact, as Cornell notes, "the closer you get to the micro level of analysis, the fewer the studies are accurate. It is hard to find as changes, these new constraints and opportunities take place and through what mechanisms operate in a concrete system of actions. What are the logical nexuses connecting the global changes to the reality of the daily interactions within the collective action at the level of cities and regions? There is a new economy of the political and social relationships and of concrete collective action processes, a new production of knowledge-based economy, capable of directing the action resulting from these changes? It seems to us that most studies on governance provide an answer to these questions, but – frequently – too much implicit or not enough structured. Governance is exposed then to the reproach of being allusive with respect to how these macro and meso phenomena materialize at the micro level and to infer changes within the political and social interactions from global change considerations without proceeding to precise analysis of these changes and their effects on the concrete action" (Pinson 2005, p. 56).

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