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Ljubiša Despotović<sup>1</sup>  
Institute for Political Studies, Belgrade

## Negative Aspects of Social Capital (Non-Social Capital) as Factors of a Slow Development of Institutional Capacities in Serbia

### Abstract

This paper attempts to examine mutual relations between pre-modern and modern forms of social capital, as well as their impact on the overall social capacities of a society in transition, as Serbian society is today. It also examines the relationship and the correlation between the so-called democratic values and civil society and the total flow of democratization of the modern political order emerging in Serbia. The ways a semi-peripheral and pseudo-modern society can, based on some pre-modern forms of social capital, build a community that should become modern and prosperous according to its projected capacities. And whether it is possible to build and adopt the values that raise the capacity of the democratic political system and the general level of political culture in Serbia through political socialization and interiorisation.

Key words: social capital, democratic values, civil society, modern political order, political culture, Serbia.

A part of the authors who belong to the neo-Tocquevillian tradition open very interesting questions regarding relations and the role of civil society and nature of the democratic order in a country in their critically intoned discussions, particularly the issues focusing on the problem of the civil society, which in some cases (e.g. transitional societies, etc.) produces more non-social than social capital, i.e. contributes to its

<sup>1</sup> Senior research fellow  
despotlj@stcable.net

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fragmentation, creation of nondemocratic relations and greatly endangers the achieved level of institutionalization of the state and society. In such cases, civil society appears as a factor of disintegration and the instability maker and not as an agent of support to the much-needed democratic constitution of the modern political order, especially at its institutional level. Transition societies, as a rule, belong to the type of society where the emerging civil sector aggravated the processes of democratic consolidation at the institutional level by producing surplus of non-social capital, thus further aggravating the already difficult and slow pace of social reforms and changes.

The modern political order, emerging for at least the past two centuries, essentially incorporates several important pillars that carry and maintain it. In addition to the nation state, civil society and citizens, these are certainly democratic values, the rule of law, and the system of positively perceived social capital. They fuse this order, reinforce it and make it functional and self-supporting. A system of political, legal and social institutions could not create and provide a cohesive-legitimate basis for functioning and efficiency of the modern political order on its own, without integrating functions of democratic values and political culture based on deeply rooted social relationships and a positive basis of social capital. Without them, it would have remained a stiff skeleton with little functional strength and mobility. Therefore, it is quite clear why F. Fukuyama determines and defines social capital as a specific series of informal values and norms that are valid among the members of a group or society that promote social cooperation. A part of values that inevitably constitute the network of positively perceived social capital are trust, honesty, reciprocity, solidarity and readiness to cooperate. However, possessing the same values and norms does not necessarily imply positive social capital. Its negative implications are also possible as part of regional or traditional religious forms that create the opposite effect and reduce the amount of social capital in the community. For, according to Fukuyama, norms and values can be also misleading, and when that happens we have a situation of social capital deficit, which in turn creates bad and undesirable social relations in itself (mafia, racism, sexism, etc.). "Southern Italy is a region of the world that is almost universally characterized as lacking in generalized social capital and trust. This does not mean that there are not strong social norms" (Fukujama 2004: 172).

An increase in positive social capital is contributed to only by those norms that contain virtues. M. Weber formulated it in a similar way in the case of impact of Protestant ethic values on shaping the spirit of

modern capitalism. Therefore it is not surprising that a strong source of social capital can usually be found in the family, particularly the one of the patriarchal type, that strongly influenced its youngest members' interiorization and acquisition by the body of values and virtues that has been passed down to them. By the destruction of the old and the formation of a modern type of family this primary source of positive social capital is largely lost. "Families are obviously important sources of social capital everywhere" (Ibidem: 173). "This confirms the correlation between the family and civil society, mediated by social capital. For neo-Tocquevillians, especially Robert Putnam, this is more than an obvious fact. A dispersed network of social interaction leads to strengthening of trust and an increase in social capital. It is followed by the strengthening of civil society, and in turn, without strong civil society there is no successful democratic rule, as the ultimate goal. "A strong society makes for a strong state" (Vintington 2004: 33).

This, for neo-Tocquevillians obvious, correlation was not without critical observations especially in the part of American expert public that points out that this seemingly logical and obvious connection is not necessarily confirmed. Civil society can often undermine democratic political institutions and their functioning, when it acts too strongly towards their destabilization. For "A well-functioning democracy depends not only on social relations, but also on political institutions and on constitutional order that structures the relationship between them" (Ibidem: 34). Destabilization of political institutions and constitutional order that can come from the sphere of civil society is aimed at reducing the level of loyalty and functionality of political institutions, because associations that constitute an extensive network of civil society can largely substitute the work and significance of political institutions. "Since the ultimate touchstone of political legitimacy in a democracy was the faithful representation of the will of the people, then government officials were particularly vulnerable to being undermined by voluntary associations that could make their own claims to popular representation. (...) As modern analysts have observed in the American context, 'interest groups' gain leverage over elected officials precisely because of the former's representative authority. Civil society was not merely a foundation for democratic governance; it was also a potentially disruptive force, subversive of regime legitimacy. Democratic governance risked deteriorating into mere anarchy" (Ibidem: 37).

Harmful influence of civil society on the functioning of political and legal institutions is possible in the domain of conflicts of interests and goals of various groups and associations of civil society. Selfishness

and egotism of partial interests may, in their extreme forms, jeopardize what is reported as public interest and the common good of the entire community, especially the part relating to the national interest. And although Tocqueville believed that political associations are an important counter-balance to the tyranny of the majority and alienation of political institutions' interests, a situation with completely reversed value and functional prefix is possible in the modern society, with the general jeopardized by the partial, especially if the partial is well networked and organised as it usually happens in a strong civil society of the Western type. This is particularly dangerous in the communities with the concept of common good not clearly defined, especially when the common good is not additionally protected as the public interest and verified by the most important legal documents such as the Constitution and organic laws, as well as other individual positive legal regulations. In these situations Tocqueville believes, "the state must also play a socializing role", direct the competition of social interests, regulate and bring them to the level of lawful conduct. Otherwise, there would be a strong risk of bringing the division of the state and society in democracies to a situation where "government and social institutions would advocate different or even contradictory" (Ibidem: 43). The role of political institutions and legal system is particularly important in regulating potential or actual conflicts when they arise due to the overstated need to achieve and impose partial interest, substantiated by the strong support of social capital, as general. Such a risk is not unique to countries with the developed civil sector; it is equally if not more strongly emphasized in countries of transition type such as Serbia. Weak state institutions, without convincing democratic legitimacy, without strong functional capacity and tradition, most often are unable to solve social problems and conflicts arising within civil society in the making, that threaten, like a reactive volcano, to destroy modest crops of political freedom and emerging democracy with its eruptive force. "The potential of civil society has been reduced to intellectual circles and NGOs, supported by foreign donations, in comparison to which a vibrant civil society can not get a word in edgeways, in addition to losing the will to engage because it does not see the point. It is about the subordination of the state to a simulacrum of civil society, that is, to small groups of 'experts' whose expertise has not been verified anywhere, whom no one ever, anywhere, elected, and who ensure that their legitimacy is not verified before the citizens at the polls. Therefore, although they don't want to be political parties, they behave as if they were" (Brdar 2007: 278). And the thing, as a rule does not end there, it is not only that they (NGOs) do

not have the original forms of democratic legitimacy, but they also represent a kind of condensed non-social capital, whose negative charge is directed to the destruction of the institutional framework of the state. This so-called civil sector in Serbia has for almost two decades, systematically attacked and destroyed what little is left of national institutional framework still attempting to make a decent political community out of Serbia. Political order here can not be constituted as competent, another reason being that in this dim zone pressures, aimed at the institutional area of the state, constantly occur, repudiating it and making it nonsensical. Take, for example, a devastating but also huge impact an NGO and its president have had to the scope of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, that, supported by influential circles from abroad, de facto have taken the initiative in determining strategic moves of Serbian diplomacy. In this context, it is about the absence of valid political and legal institutions in transition societies, accompanied with possible misuse of social capital embodied in the fabric of civic associations, hungry for affirmation of their own (and often others') interests (uncontrolled privatization processes, formation of a tycoon structure, crime and the like). "It comes, of course, from the fact that poor countries can hardly have strong democracies" (Antonić 2006: 34).

"Social capital can be used in many ways, and that often means in a way that is at odds with social order and democratic aspirations. For suspension of social conflicts and keeping natural tendencies of civil society under control, successful state institutions are essential" (Ibidem: 46). Social capital and its role in civil society and interaction of the latter with the political order are inseparable from ways of its formation and political use. Without well-balanced use of social capital in the formation of the value environment, political aims and interests of civil society, its mission can easily be reversed from the positive to the negative field of political action. Then it can be used against other members of society, or public interest of the government community. In such situations, the role of the very institutions of the political and legal order in establishing proper functioning of democracy is indispensable. In transition countries like Serbia, where such institutions are underdeveloped and of modest democratic capacity, or even belong to the old regime and the order of uncontrolled political power, the situation is additionally complicated and confusing. According to Sheri Berman, it would be possible for civil society in transition countries to produce more so-called non-social than social capital. This occurs because civil order corrodes the order of political institutions.

On the other hand, S. Huntington cited the low level of political institutionalization, unable to meet the needs of rapid modernization and industrialization, as the reason for failures of modernization projects of countries in transition (countries of the periphery and semi-periphery). "In this view, the more complex and diverse a society, the greater the need for strong political institutions capable of bringing together people with a wide variety of interests and associational affiliations and mobilizing them in the service of societal, rather than individual, goals. 'Civicness' could not be created by civil society alone because this sphere remained tied to the varied and particular interests of citizens; only strong political institutions worked in the service of society as a whole and not its individual components" (Berman 2004: 57). Even Berman herself notes that this type of analysis and argumentation, as suggested by Huntington, cut against the grain of much of the existing literature on development. The problem of these societies did not only lie in the low level of development of their institutional field (undoubtedly the fact), but primarily in the low capacity of modernization, political modernization in particular, as well as the fact that the industrial and overall economic development was not in line with the real needs of these societies. In addition, it should be noted that these societies were further exposed to constant economic plunder and borrowing from the core countries, which further contributed to the rise of authoritarianism and non-democracy in their political fields.

In confusing conditions of transition, with a new order being created on the ruins of the old one, with strong counter-modernization strikes, in Berman's opinion, civil society will not be a promoter of liberal democracy as neo-Tocquevillians would have it, but will rather lead to destabilization of the current system and provide means for its demolition. At this point, we have to express doubts regarding the correctness of this argumentation. It seems that both directions in the post-Tocquevillian tradition of political sociology in the west rather freely apply their theoretical matrix to societies outside that tradition, as well as to transition societies in Europe, and even more problematic, to societies of peripheral nature, such as those in Asia or Africa, accusing them, like S. Huntington for example, for the failure of modernization and industrialization endeavors.

Slow modernization processes in transition societies relate to many aspects. One of them is certainly related to the social capital deficit aspect, as defined by Western standards. By structure, these societies are anti-modern in many aspects, hence the fact that modern forms of social capital relating to forms of corporate culture in these countries

are more than meager. Richard Rose highlights the data from a survey saying that more than ninety percent of Russians do not belong to any voluntary association, that by their nature raise the most modern social capital. "Altogether, 91 percent are not members of any of the face-to-face organizations often described as the building blocks of a civic democracy" (Rouz 2004: 97). Therefore, as a recommendation for such a situation he suggests – "If post-Communist governors want people to rely less on personalistic or antimodern tactics, they should reform public sector organizations that reward individuals for using social capital against the modern state" (Ibidem: 98). In places with predominant anti-modern practice, the immediate objective can not be the change in values and positions of the majority of the population, but the change in the method of government. One can not agree with the author's claim on the whole. In addition to changing the method of government, working on changing the citizens' value system and the position is essential, for without that no change made at the institutional level will produce positive effects on the democratization of the country. In that case, the change of the type of government will remain hanging in the air, with no real social foundation to monitor and strengthen the resulting political reform.

From numerous examples of the transition period in the Russian Federation, it was clear that without fundamental changes in the nature of the society (especially its political culture, values and positions of its citizens) democratic order can not be established solely on the strengthening of political institutions or a change of their personnel. A classic Schumpeterian solution that includes expulsion of thieves from institutions, general elections, giving the opposition a chance to occupy the ruling structure, showed the inability of democratic transformation, because for most people, even the very social and political order, the matter was reduced to the change of the so-called thieving structures. "But what is to be done if a sequence of elections simply results in the "circulation of rascals", as one unpopular government is replaced by another that appears no better?" (Ibidem: 98).

There is no successful democratization that is not accompanied by strong and fundamental changes in the sphere of political values and positions that underlie democracy. Without changing the type of political culture, no democratic reform will be able to get more deeply rooted, and to last for a longer period. Political socialization of democratic values (in addition to changing the type of governance and an institutional reform) is in our opinion the key factor for the survival and success of the democratic system and the construction of its insti-



tutions. This is particularly important for the type of transition changes that have been taking place in Serbian society and state in the last decade and a half. For Serbian society is burdened with all kinds of deficits, especially those related to civiness and continuity of democratic tradition. Serbia as a semi-peripheral society of general scarcity, on its way to the constitution of the modern political order, necessarily has to perform the task of abolishing the old regime. On its way, it needs to build a network of civil institutions, initiatives and associations, namely the infrastructure of civil society, as the second important part of the modern political order, and thirdly, it needs to work on changing the type of political culture from authoritarian to democratic. Also, it needs to make a thorough political socialization and interiorization of the corpus of democratic values, the end result of which should be the creation of citizens with full awareness of their civil and political subjectivity as an irreplaceable factor in creating a democratic order. The end result would be Serbia as a modern national state and a modern civil society.

In such a specified context, the role and task of the civil society in Serbia may focus on three important fields. First of all, civil society must play an important defensive-constitutional role, which means that it needs to build all necessary constitutional limits on political power, especially those relating to the protection of human and minority rights. In the next phase the so-called offensive-participatory role of civil society is important, and it should be directed to the area of concentrated political power by focusing civil initiatives and interests to the field of political decision making. And the third, but no less important the role of the so-called civil education and self-education, has the goal to achieve change in the type of political culture, from the old submissive-patriarchal to the new democratic type of political culture, through the processes of changing citizens' values and positions.

It is also important to note that the difficulties in the formation of the civil society in Serbia could be linked to the so-called pre-modern forms of social capital that are formed within the family, in the wider kinship structure, tribal and small-town culture, guild associations and so on. In such an environment, it is difficult to create modern forms of social capital, especially those linked to corporate and civil identity and organizational culture; without it, it is not easy to establish a consistent value system that will imply a stronger identification with the (post) modern community and loyalty to its interests and goals. Part of the problem is also related to the deficit of social elites in Serbia, and in the opinion of M. Brdar it is related to the problem of diffusion of neces-



sary capital (among them social capital is particularly important) "The main reason for low work-reform potential of transition societies coincides with the reason for the thesis on absence of real elites. The fact is that groups that would otherwise account for elites are scarce owing to the diffusion of necessary capital" (Brdar 2006: 146). The absence of a competent elite in Serbia is a huge problem of our society- without it is difficult to build a basis of systemic development and establish standards of decent national community. Hence such resistances and a slower pace of democratic change than what we need and what the majority of citizens want.

Between needs and reality, in addition to other factors of political and institutional nature, the problem of social capital deficit in Serbia surely also achieves negative impact to the depth of democratic changes and the velocity of forming competent institutions. Ultimately, good functioning of democratic institutions and procedures largely depends on proper and balanced interaction between civil society and political institutions, and not simply on their mere existence and everyday activities. The total contribution of civil society to democratic changes in Serbia, among other things needs to be measured by the quantity of generated social capital or lack of non-social capital as products of its activity.

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