

Collective Actions and Social Capital: Implication of Concepts*



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Abstract. Collective actions are the basis of social interaction. Collective action is defined as the system of organized individuals, who are included in groups, which have a certain degree of organization. The peculiarity of collective activities is the fact that almost all people are involved in them, in one form or another. One of the first sociologists, who started the study of collective activities, was M. Weber. It was him who designated a collective action as a social one. While studying consumer behavior, economists also paid attention to collective activities of people (E. Ostrom). The result was the emergence of the social action concept in Sociology and the theory of collective action in Economics. Later, the number of researchers and studied problems in the context of a collective action expanded. Economists and sociologists were joined by psychologists, political scientists, anthropologists, biologists, and others. The theory of collective action allows us to explain a wide range of social life phenomena. This concept is closely related to the theory of social capital, which emerged at the intersection of economic and social sciences. Social capital is a factor that determines the intensity, effectiveness, and mass scale of collective actions. However, social capital itself is formed under the influence of collective actions. In foreign science, the problems of collective action and social capital are considered interrelated. In domestic social science, it is yet to be achieved. The theory of social capital has the umbrella effect, which allows searching for opportunities of theoretical and methodological integration of social capital components and forms of collective actions. The purpose of this article is to show, on the basis of the overview of the main research areas of social capital and collective actions in scientific literature, the most promising points of their

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contact for studying social reality in Russia. It includes the research of subjects of collective actions, transformation of their goals, the enrichment of the repertoire due to the emergence of new practices and the usage of virtual space. The important aspect is the environment for the implementation of collective actions, which forms their target orientation. The implication of concepts of social capital and collective action should allow us to identify aspects of mutual influence between them.

Key words: collective actions, subjects of collective actions, repertoire of collective actions, social capital, types of social capital, social reality.

Problem statement

Collective actions are a kind of social actions representing an important phenomenon of social life. They form the basis of people's communities and are included in the everyday life of any person. Collective actions are very diverse and cover almost all spheres of human activity. They include social movements, electoral behavior, membership in interest groups, management of common property, cooperation in defending collective interests, confrontation, idols worship, etc. Despite a rather long-standing interest concerning this social phenomenon, the problem of collective actions continues to be relevant. Due to the fact that the collective action theory explains a wide range of phenomena associated with the achievement of collective public goods, they occupy an important place in social sciences and the humanities. During the last decades, the spread of collective actions and the growing interest in their study have been observed, which is largely caused by the changes from society globalization, expansion of post-industrialism, leveling of the majority of differences among peoples, which gives rise to identical practices. Collective actions cover a lot of various spheres of society, and the development of digital information and communication technology facilitates actors' interaction, allows expanding the number of participants. According to the sociological tradition, collective actions are defined as "joint actions (or inactions) of people pursuing common interests" [1]. In

modern interpretation, collective actions are defined as a system of organized individuals included into groups with a certain organization [2].

The repertoire of actions can be very diverse. The most notable are the overt actions of a direct nature, such as mass rallies, marches, strikes, pickets, flash mobs [3]. As far as new communication possibilities appear, the indirect actions in the form of petitions and appeals, open letters, interviews and video messages, sending of information, sharing of news, virtual discussion platforms, etc. become widespread. The growth of collective actions in the last decade is an evidence of an increasing number of social problems, which are not solved by governments and elites, and the growth of individuals' subjectivity in societies, which are different in the levels of development, cultural traditions, and historical heritage. The fact that, only in our country, in the 2017–2018 period, there had been more than two and a half thousand collective actions, which used methods of direct action, may serve as an example. Most of them were implemented in the form of protests aimed at drawing attention to socio-economic, environmental, labor, and other issues concerning Russian citizens¹.

¹ Rost protestnoy aktivnosti v Rossii: rezul'taty vserossiyskogo monitoringa 2017–2018 gg./ Centr ekonomicheskikh i politicheskikh reform. [Growth of protest activity in Russia: results of the all-Russian monitoring of 2017–2018/ Center for economic and political reforms]. Available at: <http://cepr.su/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/pdf> (accessed 10.08. 2019).

International events in recent years also indicate a high level of collective actions: the movement of “yellow jackets” in France² or the events in Chile³. The UN emphasizes the growth of protest movements all around the world⁴.

The study of collective actions is possible on the basis of different conceptual foundations. The theories of collective actions, relative deprivation, rational choice, resource mobilization, new social movements are most frequently used. At the same time, the concept of social capital is less demanded. The purpose of this article is to show the heuristic possibilities of synthesis of the concepts of social capital and collective actions to explain the actual phenomena of collective actions.

Social capital: The concept basis.

By the end of the 20th century, a powerful scientific direction, defined by a popular and successful metaphor of “social capital”, has formed in the field of social sciences. This concept, interpreted in the context of social relations that affect personal interactions, is successfully used to explain many phenomena. There is a significant number of publications proving that social capital is important for understanding the differences existing at individual and group levels, and that political decisions should be made taking into account their impact on communities’ social capital.

² “Zheltые zhilyety” podderzhali protestuyushchih v Chili [“Yellow vests” supported the protesters in Chile]. Available at: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/7049801> (accessed 28.10.2019).

³ Pochti 900 tysyach chilyjtsev prishli na aktsiyu protesta v Sant’jago [Almost 900 thousand Chileans came to protest in Santiago]. Available at: <https://rg.ru/2019/10/26/pochti-900-tysyach-chelovek-prishli-na-aktsiyu-protesta-v-stolice-chili.html> (accessed 26.10.2019).

⁴ V OON otmetili rost protestnyh dvizheniy po vsemu miru. [The UN noted the growth of protest movements around the world]. Available at: https://ria.ru/20191025/1560222133.html?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fyandex.ru%2Fnews (accessed: 26.10.2019).

However, despite the significant amount of research, there is still no unambiguous interpretation of social capital. Moreover, there is the view that it is overly optimistic to assume that it is possible to create a unified concept of social capital which is able to explain the processes in such diverse areas of society as economy, politics, social sphere [4]. It would be more appropriate to assume that social capital is a concept that is able to form an interdisciplinary research and combine scientific studies which are isolated and intertwined.

The first reference of social capital in the works of L. Hannifan, D. Jacobs was more metaphorical in its nature. A fundamental contribution to the concept generation, made by J. Coleman, R. Putnam and P. Bourdieu, allows us to consider these researchers as the classics of the concept. J. Coleman and R. Putnam have focused on the values and networks, P. Bourdieu drew attention to the problems of inequality and social justice.

The concept appeared due to the comparative study of regions. R. Putnam and J. Halliwell managed to reveal differences in the regions’ development on the basis of comparative analysis of their economic indicators [5]. The main result of the research was the conclusion about the presence of close relationship between government structures and civil society structures in the regions of Northern Italy. Later, R. Putnam overviewed the situation in the American society where he noted a decline of social capital stocks [6]. The scientist believes that the weakening of social ties leads to the fact that Americans are less inclined to participate in the activities of various public associations, their electoral activity is reducing, trade union membership is declining, neighborhood ties are becoming

weaker, education system is being destroyed, etc. He came to the conclusion that social capital loss can adversely affect the prosperity of the American community.

Putnam used the concept of social capital to shed further light on this difference in the performance of civic duties. He argued that “social capital refers to the properties of social organization, such as trust, norms, relationships networks, which can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” [6]. Since social capital facilitates collective actions, strengthens the rules, necessary for interaction, provides opportunities for obtaining and disseminating information, including information about the reputation of network members, Putnam describes it as the embodiment of positive results of previous joint actions and as the model for future cooperation. Thus, Putnam has identified relationships networks, norms, and trust as basic components of social capital. In his opinion, the essence of the social capital theory lies in the recognition of the value of relationships networks and the influence of contacts on the performance of the interaction between individuals and groups.

R. Putnam’s contribution to the concept is also associated with the beginning of his structural analysis. Based on identified functions, he identified different types of capital. The first type bridges or overlaps social capital; it is focused on connecting people, creating widespread relationships outside the group. The second type, bonding or bonding, is focused on creating strong group relations aimed at strengthening the identity and homogeneity of the association. The identification of these types has an important semantic value, since each type engenders completely different external effects. In the first case, networks uniting different people are formed, and effects are more likely to be

positive, and, in the second case, networks unite similar people. Effects here are less significant and the risk of negative consequences is higher [6]. Other researchers also noted this difference. In particular, M. Granovetter revealed strong and weak ties, considering the last to be more efficient, for example, for the searching for work, because they make the required information more available [7]. Weak ties create conditions for effective exchange of information and facilitate collective action. There is another vision of social capital structure. F. Pichler and C. Wallace proposed the following types of social capital, formal, informal, and family [8]. According to their interpretation, formal social capital is based on a generalized trust and participation in NPOs, the informal one arises from relationships with relatives, friends, colleagues. Finally, the family type means strong orientation toward the family and getting its assistance.

P. Bourdieu describes social capital as one of the forms of total capital [9]. He set it along with economic capital, which he considered to be basic, but understood it as a set of resources, real or potential. According to P. Bourdieu, this form of capital can exist only in the “practical state”, in the form of an exchange that contributes to its maintenance. Social capital can be seen at the level of individual agents, but it manifests itself only in interaction, at the level of relations. But it becomes most noticeable “when various individuals get too unequal profits with virtually equal capital (economic or cultural)” [9, p. 66]. P. Bourdieu recognized the importance of individual’s ties (“the volume of social capital”), represented by the number of connections that he or she can use later. Individual social capital in this form requires investment which is expressed in the contacts support [9, p. 67]. The aim of the support, according to P. Bourdieu, is the

transformation of random contacts that occur among friends, relatives, colleagues at work, into such social relationships which can be used directly in the near future. "These relationships can be directly applied in the short or long term periods of time when the transformation of casual relationships (e.g., in case of relationships in a workplace, a neighborhood, or even kinship) into the ties which are both compulsory and selective and demand a long commitment perceived on the subjective level (e.g., feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.) or institutionally guaranteed (rights)". [9, p. 67]. By studying social capital, P. Bourdieu faces the issues of social inequality, generating and perpetuating it. N. Lin also identified two social mechanisms preserving the inequality in the distribution of social capital. The first one is associated with unequal access to valuable public resources (money, influence, information), which is caused by different positions in socio-economic hierarchies. The second one is based on social-psychological tendency to the formation of contacts with people with similar characteristics (gender, education, values, attitudes, socio-economic status). Collectively, these mechanisms support the existing inequalities [10].

J. Coleman took a different approach to the interpretation of social capital, which could be described as a resource one. According to him, social capital is "...a set of resources inherent in family relations and community social organization that can be useful for the cognitive, or social, development of children, or young people. These resources are different for different people, and they could be an important advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital" [11]. Social capital becomes

a resource due to the presence of trust as of reciprocity expectations. It, in turn, creates prospects of inclusion in a wider network of interaction, based on common values, for an individual. A resource, in particular, is "commitment", "the level of confidence". This also allows interpreting social capital as a public good available to everyone included in the appropriate structure, not just those who take the action to implement their capital [11]. It is a kind of by-product of human activity. J. Coleman used the concept of social capital to study cooperation mechanisms, especially when searching for a choice of cooperation strategy instead of competition [12].

The concept of social capital is actively used for various studies. The regional context is widely represented in it. Thus, S. Panebianco used it to explore the German regions [13]. L. Blum and D. Zak showed the influence of social capital patterns on the pace and nature of economic growth in West Germany [14]. J.-M Callois and B. Schmitt [15] relied on the concept of social capital while analyzing the data for rural areas of France. J. Dzialek [16] described spatial structures of the identified social capital in Poland. On the European material (world values survey), S. Knack and P. Keefer, R. La Porta examined the relationship between trust and economic growth of several countries, having identified the relationship between these parameters [17; 18]. The issue of social capital continues to expand thematically and geographically. This includes a comprehensive study of social capital in the American society and in Britain [19; 20]. There are other similar country-specific studies [21]. Attention is paid to the problems of interaction between social capital and its other types, the influence on the solution of economic and environmental problems [22; 23; 24].

Advantages of social capital are analyzed well enough on micro-, meso- and macro-levels. Thus, the works of S. Moore, S. Daniel, and others were devoted to the micro-level of this phenomenon. On the micro-level, social capital is viewed as individual's quality or property [25]. Meso-level of social capital is defined by scientists as social capital of an organization, or a group, or a community [26]. Some researchers define it as a "corporate social capital" widely interpreting the corporation [27]. The role and importance of social capital for the sustainable development of society as a whole is overviewed on the macro level. For example, H. Lowry interprets social capital in the context of market relations, drawing attention to its investment components [28]. The economic value of social capital for the society's development is emphasized by F. Fukuyama [29].

Recognition of the fact that social capital facilitates the solution of problems of collective action has become a well-established position today. This is caused by the fact that this concept has a basic idea that social relations and social norms can provide access to valuable resources that can improve the well-being of individuals, families, communities, regions, or countries [30; 31].

One of the established points of view in the literature is the assertion that social capital can facilitate the solution of problems of collective actions. For example, in the sphere of politics, citizens, based on generalized trust and other civic mindsets, unite in social and political groups which allow them to rally for the implementation of civil initiatives. The research of the problem has shown that effects of social capital, of course, generate social benefits for individuals. Thus, a direct link between certain aspects of social capital and large-scale impacts of social development was established. First

of all, it concerns economic growth [32, 33; 34], crime rate reduction [35], the increase of authorities' responsibility to the society [36]. E. Ostrom, one of the founders of the theory of collective actions, argues that "social capital is the shared knowledge, understanding, norms, rules, and expectations about patterns of interactions, which groups of individuals bring to a recurrent activity" [37].

Collective actions: A theoretical analysis.

Research interest in the study of collective actions has deep roots in the history of science. As human society has always assumed collective behavior and collective actions, we can find mentions of them, attempts to describe and analyze them in the writings of thinkers of various historical periods. However, a proper scientific approach to the study of the phenomenon of collective actions should be sought in the history of economic and political studies in the period of industrialism. A lot of interesting thoughts on the nature of collective actions can be found in classic theories. Many scholars of this period tried to explain, how the structural changes gave rise to the patterns of collective actions, how industrialization and trade development, urbanization and concentration of population, changes of the political system and the system of legislation, old and new ideological trends, etc. facilitated their formation. Such attempts can be found in the works of researchers on the "economic man's" behavior driven by an "invisible hand of the market" in order to achieve personal and public goods (A. Smith, J. Bentham, J. Mill, K. Marx, T. Veblen, etc.). A distinctive feature of these philosophers' views is their understanding of collective actions as a product of structural changes in a particular institutional environment. It is the institutions that act as a collective subject whose actions are rational in

nature. Institutional approach later became the basis of paradigm of collective action.

It is no accident that an economist, a representative of new institutional economics M. Olson was one of the first modern researchers of collective actions [38]. He identified and described the connection between collective actions and material benefits, and also linked the possibility/impossibility of collective actions with a kind of a good, obtained as its result. As it turned out, the type of good, which causes a collective action, is important. He also indicated the problem of a “free rider”, who receives public benefits but does not participate in collective actions. M. Olson considers the individual’s view of a good to be an essential condition for the provision of a collective good. The effect of a particular individual on the view of this good within the borders of a large group is of low value for the groupwide representation, while the possibility of influence depends on the personal contribution or individual’s costs while creating the good. According to M. Olson, an individual’s contribution should be encouraged and the size of a benefit should be related to the size of the contribution.

E. Ostrom (Nobel laureate) continued to study the problem, aiming to identify the quality of the good and the institutional arrangements that accompany the usage of this good. E. Ostrom identified a number of factors that, in her opinion, contribute to the possibility of a collective action. She included “...the number of participants, the type of received goods, participants’ heterogeneity, the need of “face to face” communication, the form of the production function, the availability of information about past actions, the method of communication between individuals and the possibility of individual way-out” [39]. Her significant contribution to the theory

of collective actions is associated with the substantiation of the importance of rules and regulations for this type of social action [40]. In addition to the rules and regulations, the role of intangible incentives for collective actions was established. Thus, K.D. Opp in his study [41], on the basis of empirical data, showed the importance of the group engagement factor for the participants of collective actions.

Further development of the collective action theory is connected with the inclusion into its explanation of the category of identity which became a significant variable in the theory. This gave the opportunity to reveal how the actor identifies himself or herself with the group [42]. An important aspect of the theory is presented by a thesis about the actors’ acquisition of subjectivity in the participatory process. The effect shows itself in the implementation of the right to vote, the requirement to take into account interests in decision-making [43]. The researchers note the need for freedom and the institutional capacity as conditions of collective actions to start this category [44].

Rather stable concepts have gradually formed, which allowed analyzing existing and emerging collective actions. A powerful impetus to the development of the theory was given by social processes that took place in the 80–90s of the 20th century. This time is characterized by the institutionalization of many social movements and the acquisition of clear organizational forms by them, which resulted in the creation of many non-profit organizations, which became the basis of civil society and had the opportunity to initiate collective actions. A significant contribution to the development of a collective action paradigm was made by J. McCarthy and M. Zald. They interpret collective action as “a set of opinions and perceptions, which expressed a desire to change social institutions or social structures

of a society” [45]. They propose the term “countermovement” understanding it as “a set of opinions and beliefs, having an opposite direction to the movement”.

When studying organizational forms of social actions, the scientists emphasize their network nature. It was noted that the majority of participants in collective actions had various social connections with other participants that contributed to their involvement [46].

A major contribution to the study of forms of collective actions was made by H. Tilly who enriched the theory with the “repertoire of a collective action” [1]. He understands the repertoire as different ways of committing collective actions including processions, meetings, rallies, pickets, strikes, appeals, petitions, etc. The repertoire is formed under the influence of the institutional and cultural context, accumulated experience, traditions and historical circumstances of a place and time of the event, etc. The study of the repertoire of actions is useful and relevant, because, as society developed and experienced revolutions, wars, changes of government forms, and expansion of democratic trends in the increasing number of countries, the formation of civil society structures, new patterns of collective actions emerged. Consequently, the scientific knowledge of this phenomenon was deepening, new conceptual approaches, showing that social activity has different nature, were forming.

Collective actions and social capital

Today, collective action theories and social capital are integral parts of human behavior explanations and are applied to a wide range of different phenomena. The concept of collective action explains social movements, protests, electoral behavior, membership in interest groups. It is effective while analyzing

volunteering and political action in the absence of the interested group or coordinators; it is demanded while understanding its attachment to a wide range of online organizations outside formal procedures, “membership” incentives and while explaining personal, voluntarily contributed information “benefits” for common usage through the creation of web content, etc. One of the focuses of its development is the discussion of “problems of a collective action” arising in connection with the temptation of dependency which may interfere with mutually beneficial collective efforts.

The modern theory of social capital describes the reasons for cooperation and its avoidance in the situations of collective actions. Various aspects of social life are analyzed on the basis of this concept. Researchers pay attention to the issues of sustainable development, the relationship between social capital and its other types, the importance of regional and local social capital as a factor of survival in a situation of economic structural crises, solutions of environmental problems. The diversity of reviewed issues suggests a significant heuristic potential of concepts that led to the formation of ideas on the necessity of synthesis of two concepts, which was proposed by E. Ostrom, who was one of the first to speak about it [37].

In foreign literature, there is a certain cooperation of concepts of collective action and social capital, which allowed expanding and diversifying the repertoire of studied issues. Quite a lot of publications have been devoted to the economic approach to the reviewing of the connection between social capital and collective actions. Collective actions are reviewed in the framework of the theory of institutional change [47], the approach of new institutional economics is used in the study of strategies of collective action [48], and collective actions

are studied in the connection with cooperation [49]. In general, the problems of environmental management (environmental economics) are reviewed [50]. Most of researches are based on the examples of interaction practices in developing countries [21]. Social capital is described as the condition for collective actions [51, 52]; its role in overcoming the barriers to collective action among poor population is being studied [24]. The environmental sphere is also the intersection of social capital and collective actions, especially considering the fact that the problem becomes more global [53]. The theme of collective actions is widely represented in psychological science studying its various aspects [54, 55].

Researchers' attention is also attracted by the opportunity to create and strengthen social capital through collective action in the sphere of health care. An example is the analysis of the situation with HIV-infection [56].

Scientists noted the productivity of the connection of two concepts for the study of political aspects of society. Political scientists review collective actions primarily in connection with the functioning of civil society. The search for new formats of collective action in the political sphere in the context of globalization and urbanization is in process [57].

The concept of social capital is now widely used in studying different aspects of Russian society. Domestic researchers of social capital L. Polishchuk and R. Menyashev analyze this phenomenon in detail and describe its impact on the economic development [58]. Its effect on social relationships [59], the formation of boundaries and spheres of local communities' responsibility [60, 61], the interaction in network structures, etc. are studied [62, 63]. Scientists also pay a lot of attention to various forms of collective actions [64, 65].

However, the explanatory power of the concept in the analysis of collective actions' practices in Russia is definitely underestimated. One of few Russian researchers' publications is an attempt to compare available Western European and Russian experiences of collective actions and relate it to social capital, to show the influence of historical and cultural context [66]. The paper is an attempt to understand the historical experience of collective actions that emerged in different cultural and historical context and does not contain any research data, which would allow judging the mutual influence of collective actions and social capital in modern conditions.

Conclusions

The study of collective actions in relation to their participants' social capital seems to be a field requiring urgent attention. Research tasks, which scientists face in this context, could cover a number of areas.

First, there is a change of actual subjects of collective actions. It is manifested in the number of facts. The social base of movements changes. The working class, operating in the manufacturing sector, is in many cases replaced by the "new" middle class, existing in the non-manufacturing sector. The layers and groups, occupying a specific place in the social structure of society (students, pensioners, representatives of professional communities), become activists. The emergence of online organizations, operating outside formal procedures, and lack of "membership" in them lead to the fact that their borders sometimes become quite blurred. It is not always possible to identify the subject due to the actual absence a concerned group.

Second, there is a change of goals of social movements, which are subjects of collective action. The focus of their interests is increasingly affected by issues of identity, autonomy,

solidarity, etc., while the basis of their formulation is the objective scientific evidence (environmental movements).

Third, it is necessary to study collective actions in different spheres of life (labor, social, cultural, political, environmental, etc.) and factors, influencing their occurrence and determining the development direction, as well as the presence of barriers while involving into an action, into the coordination, and accomplishment.

Fourth, the repertoire of collective actions expands and changes. Traditional forms of public actions are complemented by new ones, emerging due to the opportunities, provided by virtual communication channels. This is largely caused by the weakening of the usage of rigid organizational forms of interaction, based

on a hierarchy of relations, their replacement with more flexible forms, focused on horizontal connections.

Fifth, we need to further study the interconnection between collective actions and social capital of their subjects, their impact on social capital formation, and its impact on the improvement of their performance and the overcome of barriers, preventing their functioning.

Given the fact that collective actions are natural for any sphere of human activity, it might be argued that the concept of social capital allows implementing integrated and interdisciplinary approach to studying the most urgent problems, appearing in networks of human relations, within boundaries of everyday interaction.

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