



Mateus Meeting, 15th - 16th October

**Social Capital & Trust
mobilization and demobilization in modern democracies**

Jaime-Castillo, Antonio M.

University of Granada and University of Malaga

Social Capital, Civic Duties and Satisfaction with Democracy

The quality of democracy is a difficult concept to measure, though we can identify two main approaches in the literature. While the first one concentrates on aggregate indicators of institutional performance, the second one focuses on citizens' perceptions of the quality of democracy. Here I will follow the second approach to analyze the causal link between perceived satisfaction with democracy and social capital. According to many theoretical perspectives, we can predict a positive relationship between social capital and satisfaction with democracy, though the causal mechanisms may operate at different levels and on different directions. At the aggregate level, we expect that social and political participation will be higher in consolidated democracies. At the individual level, trust is said to be necessary to promote cooperation and to facilitate collective behavior. Democracy in turn may create an adequate environment for trust to flourish.

This is the 'virtuous circle of social capital' in which high social trust, well established institutions, good government and high political support are strongly connected. On the other side, low social trust is associated with little regard for public interest, tax evasion, political corruption and political disaffection. Indeed, many scholars have argued that there is general decline in political trust in well-established democracies, which has to be explained as a consequence of the decrease in social capital. However, despite the extensive body of research on the topic, empirical studies have found mixed support for the 'social capital hypothesis'. While many studies have reported a weak (or even non significant) relationship between social trust and satisfaction with democracy, a few body of research have found a consistent relationship.

Another related question is to what extent citizens believe that social capital is an important ingredient of democracy; and whether they believe that participating in political or social life is a civic duty (as voting in elections) or just a personal choice. The European Social Survey (ESS) provides comparative data about civic duties in many European countries, which allows to test the hypothesis that social capital is an important element of the normative concept of democracy. Here I will present empirical results showing that, while social capital itself is positively correlated with satisfaction with democracy in Europe, political and social participation are not properly considered as civic duties by Europeans. Additional findings about individual and societal factors that affect the relationship between social capital and satisfaction with democracy will be discussed also.