



## Article

# Not All Social Capital Is Equal: Conceptualizing Social Capital Differences in Cities

Maren Wesselow

School of Computing Science, Business Administration, Economics, and Law/Department of Business Administration, Economics and Law, University of Oldenburg, 26111 Oldenburg, Germany; marenwesselow@uni-oldenburg.de

**Abstract:** Social capital is the basis of community-based action and constitutes an important resource for the poor in urban areas. However, social class, age, ethnicity and gender play an important role in shaping social capital outcomes. This article provides a literature-based framework for the qualitative analysis of the differences in social capital between social groups. This study defines and distinguishes social capital *functions* and *resources* and highlights the importance of taking *negative effects* of social capital and social capital *needs* into account. To test the framework, the social capital portfolios of two exemplary social groups, namely young people and ethnic minorities in urban areas, are presented. The analysis shows that the social capital resources and functions of the different groups as well as the specific needs vary in quality. The study provides a conceptual enhancement to the concept of social capital and recommends that strategies aiming at improving social capital must acknowledge the differences in social capital according to specific groups and environments.

**Keywords:** social capital; urban sociology; framework; inequality; minorities



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## 1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

Social capital (SC) is a critical resource in urban areas, where poor people struggle to earn a living. While well-off residents can purchase formal health services, education, insurance and mobility that create and sustain healthy neighborhoods, vulnerable residents rely greatly on mutual cooperation to fulfil their economic and social needs [1,2]. What is more, SC is an essential resource for forming human resilience and building risk-sharing arrangements in the face of environmental hazards and shocks [3,4]. SC plays a role in local development and forms an intrinsic part of urban culture [5].

The term social capital describes the “linkages of mutual trust and the shared willingness to intervene for the common good” of the community [6]. According to Putnam [7], “Social Capital refers to features of social organisation such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit”. Some of the key constitutive elements of SC include trust, reciprocity and social interaction [8]. It is assumed that SC also plays a pivotal role in increasing individuals’ knowledge and awareness in various ways, which can influence human performance [9]. In urban areas, high levels of SC can be related to neighborhood health, environmental quality, disaster survival as well as neighborhood control and governance [1]. However, the concept of SC is fuzzy, and comprehensive and consistent operationalizations of the concept are rare.

Socioeconomic heterogeneity is especially high in cities, leading to structural inequalities between high-poverty and affluent urban areas [10]. In consequence, it is apparent that differences exist in the ways that SC benefits some communities (ibid.). The importance and nature of SC differ among social groups, and research needs to acknowledge the important role of social stratification in shaping SC (e.g., [11]). The SC of different social groups varies in size, structure and reach [12]. The recent literature has recognized that the foundation of SC is inherently a matter of power, as SC enables access to resources, information and

knowledge [13]. Against this background, the poor can benefit more from group integration and active participation in decision-making than the rich [14].

With regard to SC reach, the literature distinguishes between “bonding”, “bridging” and “linking” social capital. While “bonding capital” refers to the bonds of trust and support between friends and family, “bridging capital” extends to a broader circle of acquaintances [15]. “Linking capital” entails relationships and networks with those in authority and power (e.g., government, the private sector). “Bonding capital” is important to low-income households because these bonds provide emotional and practical support that helps people “get by” in times of difficulties [16]. However, despite this supportive function, close-knit groups facilitate largely redundant knowledge and resources that people already have access to [16–18], which can even become a culturally induced compulsion [19]. Substantial amounts of money or food cannot be accessed through these bonding ties.

In contrast, bridging capital and linking capital facilitate the dissemination of information and resources far more effectively than bonding capital [16], because bridging and linking networks with rather different people will provide access to non-redundant and more strategic resources not available in a rather similar bonding social network [20]. Therefore, this kind of SC performs a “social leverage” function that can be used to “get ahead” [17]. However, while both bridging capital and linking capital are scarce in low-income communities [16], high-income households are able to rely on linking and bridging SC to improve their situation. For example, bridging SC and access to information enable urban citizens to influence the structure of their urban space through the political representatives they elect and trust [21]. As a subtype of bridging capital, linking SC refers to vertical relations that cut across hierarchical levels (such as vertical authority relationships with employers, patrons and politicians) [22]. It addresses the capacity of linking to and influencing power structures.

Despite this powerful theorization, a structured framework for analyzing differences between different social groups is missing. There are only a few attempts to categorize the SC functions into detailed categories. The three-dimensional model of helping by Pearce and Amato [23] includes planned, formal vs. spontaneous, informal help; serious vs. nonserious help; and giving, indirect vs. doing, direct help. However, this categorization does not cover the manifold advantages and disadvantages that people draw from SC. Another helpful conceptualization is made by Robison et al. [24] referring to economic services, social services, validation services and information services which can be achieved through social capital (in combination with other inputs). Bertotti [8] assigns key benefits such as care and health in early childhood and frail old age to the three types of SC.

To analyze differences in SC, a framework is needed that addresses both SC resources and SC. The assumption that resources acquired through networks are necessarily positive and empowering has been proven wrong, as such networks can also reinforce existing relations of power and lead to coercive and disempowering dynamics [25]. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that enhancing SC may have a different impact on different groups and in different settings [26]. Differential access to SC is an empirical issue and, especially, qualitative evidence on concrete groups is lacking. This knowledge would be extremely valuable when designing interventions tailored for specific groups. This article poses the research question: how can qualitative differences in SC between different groups in urban areas be researched?

To answer this question, this article presents a framework for investigating these differences and the resulting inequalities of social capital. In a second step, the framework is applied to two exemplary social groups in urban areas. This approach aims at making SC differences tangible, while shedding light on the mechanisms that disadvantage certain groups. Thus, the article contributes to understanding socioeconomic inequalities in urban areas.

## 2. Research Approach

The analysis of survey data is the most prevalent approach to studying SC [27]. For example, Marshall et al. [26] use survey data to show differences in SC among urban youth in five global cities. To pay respect to the complexity linked to the context, however, this study employs a qualitative approach that is based on the literature.

First, a literature search was carried out in the Web of Science database using the search terms “social capital” and “urban area” in the article title (results: 28) as well as “social capital” and “city” in the article title (results: 77). The following criteria were used to select studies to be included in the review:

- The results of the study provide generalizable evidence about SC that exist in relation to different social groups.
- The article was published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Using these criteria, abstracts were screened for relevance and 54 studies were pre-selected from the total body of the literature. These 54 studies comprised the foundation for a subsequent analysis that began with reading the full papers and categorizing them in an Excel table. This preliminary overview showed that some social groups (e.g., low income) and regions (Europe and USA) were overrepresented. To densify data on specific groups, new studies were added by tracking references from key papers via the snowball method. Simultaneously, irrelevant studies were excluded from the analysis and data gaps were identified. From the remaining 30 studies [1,8–11,20,27–50], passages discussing the character of SC of one or more social groups that were found to be relevant for qualitative analysis were extracted from each eligible study. The content of the collected studies was analyzed qualitatively using a simple coding scheme [51]. The results were then summarized qualitatively with the aim of detecting categories that exist in the nature of SC among different social groups in urban areas. In addition, iterative and unstructured research of the literature on SC definitions frameworks was conducted using different literature databases (Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar) as well as the snowball method. This general literature search led to the categorization in SC functions, SC resources, negative effects of SC and SC needs.

Still, this study does not claim to be exhaustive. Its strength lies in the development of a framework to make qualitative SC differences in urban areas tangible and the unravelling of the complexity of this topic.

## 3. Designing a Framework to Study Social Capital Differences

One major theoretical difficulty is the vagueness of the concept of social capital, especially regarding bridging and linking SC. The reviewed articles used a wide variety of definitions and categorization schemes to outline the concept of SC. To make these differences clear, they were subjected to analytical categorization. The literature review found that substantial differences exist in relation to (1) SC functions, and (2) SC resources. I define SC functions as both advantageous and disadvantageous outcomes experienced through SC, while SC resources denote the circle of people reached through SC.

Many scholars focus their research on the outcomes of SC such as lifestyle or health effects (e.g., [28,29]), schooling outcomes, education (e.g., [30]) and, increasingly, resilience [10]. However, the qualitative differences in social capital of different groups remain under-researched. One major theoretical difficulty is the vagueness of the concept of social capital, especially regarding bridging and linking SC. The reviewed articles used a wide variety of definitions and categorization schemes to outline the concept of SC. To make these differences clear, they were subjected to analytical categorization.

### 3.1. Social Capital Functions

To gain clarity about the meaning and operationalization of this concept in the literature, the various functions ascribed to SC in the literature were reviewed. While most studies focus on the benefits that people draw from SC (such as help, support, etc.), negative effects of SC are studied less frequently. The operationalization of the concept ranges

from feelings (e.g., “feelings of trust”) and norms to relationships in general and concrete behavior (“helping out”) (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Social capital functions and examples from the literature (umbrella terms for subsequent terms in bold).

Social Capital Functions	Examples from the Literature
<b>Attitudes, lifestyles, feelings and norms</b>	<p><b>Generalized norms</b>, togetherness, everyday sociability, volunteerism [29]; adoption of cultural norms [31]; reciprocity norms [32]; perceptions of mutual concern [32]; socially favorable environment [33]; prosocial norms [34]; community sentiment and cohesion [35]</p> <p><b>Trust/trustworthiness</b> [9,11,27–29,32,35–38]</p> <p><b>Safety/security</b> [10,31,35,38], e.g., feel safe walking after dark, allow someone in your home if their car breaks down, area has safe reputation [10]</p> <p><b>Life quality/value of life</b> [28,35]</p> <p><b>Self-confidence/dignity</b> [31], e.g., feel valued by society [10], satisfied with life meaning [10]</p> <p><b>Sense of belonging/identity</b> [33,39]; community feels like home [10]</p> <p><b>Acceptance of differences</b> [28]; tolerance for diversity [10], e.g., multiculturalism make things better, enjoying living among different lifestyles, feel free to disagree with others [10]</p>
<b>Social activities</b>	<p><b>Relationships or connections</b> [10,28,29,35]</p> <p><b>Joint activities of common interest</b> (e.g., batches, classes, spending time, playing sports) [36]; pleasurable/shared experiences [31]; meeting and interacting [8]; doing exercises [8], travel ([8], having a party [20]; interpersonal relationship network and neighborhood cohesion [38]; neighborhood connections such as visiting a neighbor or running into friends when in area, phone conversations with friends, talking to people, eating a meal with others, visiting family outside community ([10]; big gathering of relatives [10]; involvement in ethnic and cultural festivities [32]</p> <p><b>Membership in specific networks</b> [31]; reciprocity; building networks [40]</p>
<b>Sharing knowledge and information</b>	<p>Providing guidance, advice and tangible assistance [52]); information flows [30,53] finding information if needed [10]</p>
<b>Giving/receiving material and monetary resources</b>	<p>Giving a donation [41]; generating disposable income [31]; sending money to help family members buy a house [32]; remittances [37]</p>
<b>Giving/receiving services</b>	<p><b>Social/reciprocal support</b> [35,38,39]); mutual protection [39]; babysitting and child care, transportation, repairs to home or car, household tasks, advice or moral support, picking up fallen envelopes, helping a person who collapses and is injured on the sidewalk, correcting inaccurate directions which you have overheard being given to a stranger [41]; reading to children, engaging with children in educational and cultural activities, mutual aid, amassing SC and converting it into institutional support [30]; willingness to assist children in need [11]; cooperation [27]</p> <p><b>“Cushion the fall”</b> [33]; emotional support [52]; help in emergency or when needed [10], e.g., asking for help with child or doing a favor for sick friend [10]</p> <p>Practical resources and coping strategies in the face of discrimination [39]</p> <p><b>Means of control</b> [33]; social control [42]</p> <p><b>Access to work</b> [33], volunteering and job opportunities [8]</p>
<b>Collective representation, participation in decision-making, leadership</b>	<p><b>Participation in local community</b> [10]; social participation [28,38]; participation in neighborhood activities [35]; volunteering, attending an event, being a member of group, on a committee, community project, organizing a new service [10]; interaction in the neighborhood [11]; local solidarity [28]; social agency or proactivity, e.g., picking up trash in public [10]; participation in community services, community work [43]; participation in religiously based organizations [32], social participation in formal and informal groups in society [44]; in tenant association [34], in parent association [30], memberships in informal groups and networks [29]; voluntary work for within-group community organizations [32]; collective action found in civic engagement [30]“self-governance” of urban neighborhoods [1]</p> <p><b>Intervention in disputes and misbehavior</b>, seek mediation for dispute [10]; willingness to intervene in acts of delinquency [11]; willingness to intervene in acts of child misbehavior [11]; help solve some community problems within residential community [8]</p> <p><b>Mobilization and political action</b>, neighborhood development, mobilization through community organization [45]; informal links (including clientelistic relations) with powerful groups [45]; protest [45]</p>

### 3.2. Social Capital Resources

Based on the literature review, Table 2 summarizes the different people who can be reached or activated through SC. The overwhelming majority of studies focused on bonding SC (connections with family, friends and neighbors), whereas bridging (and especially linking) social ties to influential organizations and structures were rarely studied, even though this type of SC is theorized as the most important for disadvantaged groups.

**Table 2.** Social capital resources and examples from the literature (umbrella terms for subsequent terms in bold).

Social Capital Resources		Examples from the Literature
Bonding capital	<b>Kin/family</b>	<b>Family</b> [8,10,28,32,33]; kin/relatives [9,26,31,35,38,52]; parent–child relationship [30,35]; transnational family networks [39]; primary social contacts [2]
	<b>Friends, neighbors, coworkers, community</b>	<b>Friends</b> [9,10,31,35,38,46] <b>Peers</b> [26,31,32] <b>Neighbors, local residents</b> [1,9,10,26,29,34,35,37,46,47] neighborhood [11,39]; tenant associations, a building’s formal organization [33] <b>(Local) community</b> [10,32,35,36,39,47,48]; ethnic community [33]; community organizations [45] <b>Workplace, coworkers, colleagues</b> [9,28,35,40] Connections to others outside of the household <b>Informal groups in society</b> , e.g., study circle/course at place of work, other study circle/course [44]; parental networks [49]; parent–parent relationship [30]; regional and diaspora racial connections [39]; existence of and participation in community or local organizations [50]
	<b>Random people/strangers</b>	Random people, strangers [29,41,47]; contacts between migrants and hosts [37]; residents of different neighborhoods [1]
Bridging capital	<b>Formal authorities and organizations</b>	Charity, government [41]; school [26,30]; teachers, counselors, healthcare providers and other adults in their community [52]; key service providers [29]; networks/civil associations [33]; formal organizations or networks [46]; civic organizations [40] voluntary organizations, governmental bodies [53]; non-profit and faith-based organizations, governmental agencies [43]; meeting other organizations, theatre/cinema, arts exhibition, church, sports event, letter to editor of newspaper/journal, demonstration, night club/entertainment [44]; powerful groups [45]; external agencies and levels of government [50]; formal groups in society e.g., union meeting [44]

Both SC resources and SC functions can enhance the advantages derived from SC. With regard to attitudes, a sense of identity and community can be accessed through bonding capital, while bridging capital leads to the acceptance of differences. At the same time, other SC functions are dependent on a person’s attitudes and feelings.

### 3.3. Negative Functions of Social Capital

With regard to SC inequality, one must be aware that SC has also negative functions that might aggravate the disadvantage for specific groups. Negative functions have been discussed in various contexts and classifications and reviews of negative functions of SC exist, e.g., [54–56]. Portes [54] used four categories of negative effects of social capital: (1) exclusion of outsiders; (2) excess claims on group members; (3) restrictions on individual freedoms; and (4) downward leveling norms [54].

As social groups are often based on homophily, they naturally imply the tendency to exclude others. Participation in groups produces identities, preferences and habits that may foster unfavorable behaviors. At the same time, group norms tend to reinforce each other, leading to othering, boundary maintenance, negative social comparisons, stigmatization and network exclusion [57]. In addition, to outsiders, it is often opaque who has the authority to define who is a member of a community and who is not. Participation in

peer networks and neighborhoods with negative SC functions can encourage criminal involvement (e.g., [31,42] and poor health [55]). Kinship relations may define obligations for its members and several studies show the negative effects of sharing obligations [58]. For example, the obligation to send remittances might restrict the sending person from investing in his/her own development [19]. Bonding capital can also contribute to self-reinforcing narratives that lead to a lack of prevention and legitimise a reactive approach [59]. A study on preparation for heat waves in the UK found that false risk perceptions among the elderly are primarily shaped and transmitted by social networks that rely on bonding SC [59]. Arneil [60] notes similarly the role played by bridging SC in enabling dominant groups to protect their self-interests.

### 3.4. Social Capital Needs

The accessibility of SC functions and resources in combination with potential negative effects of SC alone cannot explain inequalities and differential outcome of SC. In addition to the accessibility, the literature from studies of social capital (e.g., [61,62] and inequality [63] stress that the *needs* of specific SC functions differ across specific social groups. However, while most research concentrates on the accessibility of social capital, differential needs are being widely neglected. For example, the poor often (have to) rely more upon SC than the better off, using SC as a substitute for private capital [64]. Thus, receiving social support is clearly needs-based [61]. However, the poor usually receive only little financial and physical support from their social networks, which cannot help them to escape poverty [2].

Robison et al. [24] differentiate four areas in which services provided by SC can meet human needs: (1) economic services, (2) social services, (3) validation services, and (4) information services. The needs and preferences in SC are highly individual; they depend on individual traits and cultural values, context, but also on the individual embeddedness in a social network [13]. Within a social network, some people may assume critical positions and become leaders with a high degree of centrality that can broker between groups and networks [65]. Even though these people belong to a similar social group and network to other people, they have different needs in SC due to their degree of centrality. Individuals with higher closeness centrality reach all other individuals in the network more directly and can thus transfer information faster (*ibid.*).

These conceptual thoughts show the complexity of the topic, which can be best assessed by a qualitative approach. This article follows a structural approach and focuses thus on qualitative differences between different social groups. In this context, both their *access* and their *needs* should be taken into account.

## 4. Social Capital Differences between Two Groups in Urban Areas

Two social groups were chosen to exemplify SC differences as they are seen as especially relevant for urban areas. Since urban areas are often characterized by young and heterogeneous populations, the literature on “children and adolescents” and the literature on “ethnic minorities” was studied. In addition, these groups appear to be frequent subjects to research and sufficient information on these groups is documented in the literature. A literature review on these groups in urban areas was conducted to identify their SC needs, their access to SC and negative functions of SC for these groups.

### 4.1. Children and Adolescents

The literature on children and adolescents in urban areas often focuses on the impact of SC on academic performance and involvement in delinquency. Social capital is also especially salient for self-reported health among young men and women [26]. The literature offers indications that young adults in urban locations tend to have a better chance of accessing sources of support than those in rural settings [9]. Many scholars focus on youths from economically disadvantaged or migrant backgrounds. For young people who live in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods (e.g., with high poverty rates, community

violence, etc.), greater SC is linked with increased rates of academic performance [66] and socioeconomic success [67,68].

The SC acquired through family is essential for young people's development [42]. Two-parent families have a higher socioeconomic status than single-parent families [30] and transmit greater SC to their children [42]. A family's migratory history or national origin only has an impact on SC when migration causes family imbalances [42]. Nevertheless, in families in challenging situations, youths often do avoid burdening their families with their issues and rather tend to rely on themselves [52]. Independent of family and child characteristics, neighborhood economic disadvantage and low neighborhood social cohesion are associated with poorer child cognitive and behavioral outcomes [11].

In their study of at-risk youths aged 15–25 years in the Netherlands, Schenk et al. [52] report that these individuals receive emotional support primarily from their mothers and sometimes from "extended family members" (e.g., aunts). When in need of help, youths tend to turn to people who have had experiences similar to their own. Hedge et al. [69] found that adolescents with higher levels of bonding SC are more willing to seek both informal and professional help. Bridging SC is limited for many at-risk youths compared to adolescents from higher-income families [70]. Seeking help is also less difficult for adolescents when knowing who is available [52].

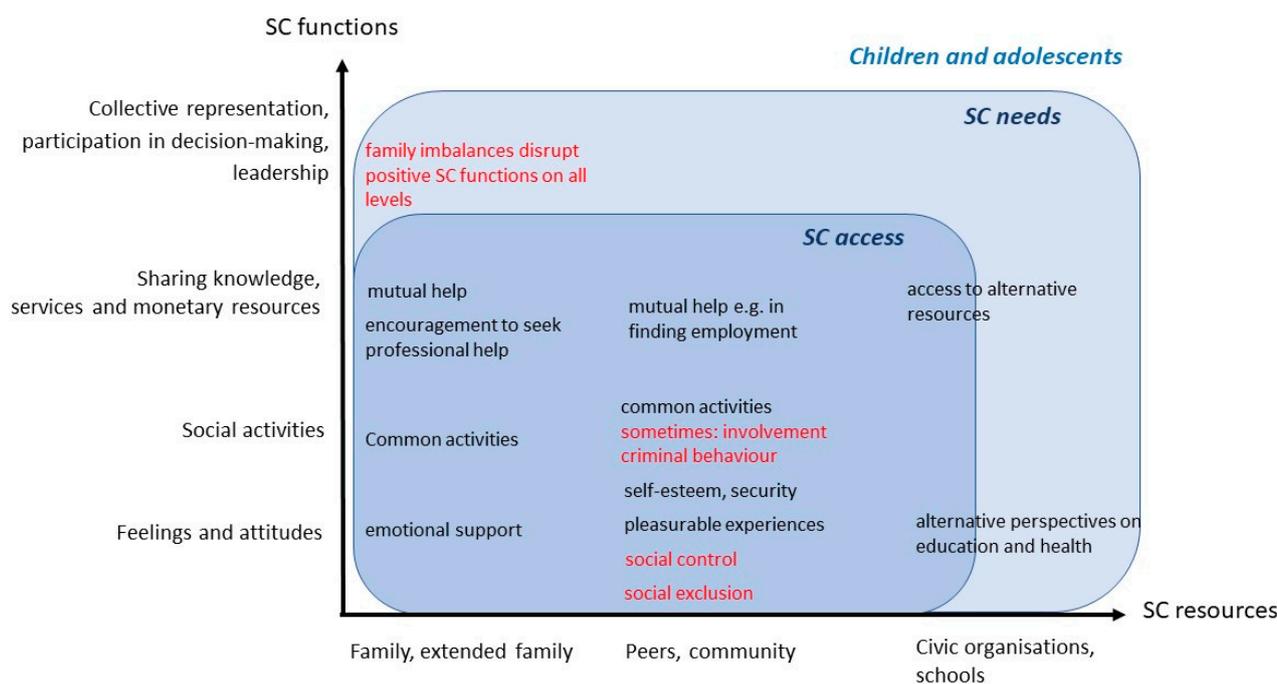
Ethnic belonging can be a source of both self-esteem and social exclusion. Immersion in an ethnic community can be a source of SC that provides help in finding employment, for instance, but also exerts social control, sometimes in negative terms of drug use or involvement in petty crime [42]. In his study of disadvantaged young males in Ireland, Illan [31] draws attention to urban mobility and the importance of the ability to adopt "a street cultural identity" in a context of "rugged masculinity, crimino-entrepreneurialism and the recourse to violence". The social networks on the streets provide these adolescents with security in foreign parts of the city [31]. Despite their spatial and socioeconomic exclusion, disadvantaged young people find here a sense of existential security, pleasurable experiences, disposable income and a notion of dignity, but this often demands behaviors that distance the group members from other groups [31].

Schenk et al. [52] state that bridging SC could be especially important for at-risk youths because it offers them a wider array of resources and different perspectives on education and health. Civic organizations can play an essential role for juveniles and children. These organizations can provide a "retreat" from the school and family routine, which may be perceived as difficult. In these more neutral settings, young people are given the chance to "change their behaviour, develop new connections and contemplate other alternatives for entry into the educational and work environment" [42]. Associations can constitute neutral spaces and especially for children of immigrants they offer a "space between two shores" (Originally in Spanish: "un espacio entre dos orillas".) [45] (p. 35). This intermediate and multi-ethnic space helps to bridge the gap between their family, community of origin and host society [42].

Figure 1 illustrates the SC portfolio of children and adolescents including SC functions, SC resources, SC access and SC needs as well as negative functions of SC (in red).

#### 4.2. Migrants and Ethnic Minorities

Migrants and ethnic minorities constitute a vulnerable social group as they are often disadvantaged by their socioeconomic and residential status, with consequences for access to formal health care and education services (e.g., as described for China by Gao et al. [35]). In light of these disadvantages, the hypothesis regarding racial/ethnic differential return of social capital must be examined with rigor [71]. It must be stressed that this group encompasses not only newcomers to a city or country but also people who were born there but identify as an ethnic minority. In this study, I chose to unite these two groups because they often overlap, such as when migrants are also part of an ethnic minority.



**Figure 1.** Social capital functions and resources of children and adolescents. Negative SC functions are marked in red.

For this group, bonding SC is strong and important. Research shows that family bonding serves as a buffer against feelings of loneliness and isolation for people who are geographically separated from their families [32]. For this reason, migrants' primary SC resources are in the contexts of family, peer and community networks. In a study about Indian immigrants in New York, Bhattacharya [32] found that this group receives informational, instrumental and emotional peer social support. Ethnic minorities often take advantage of an "augmented family" in their direct surroundings, which some scholars call "ethnic SC" [10]. Consequently, this group has strong communication and connections with family and friends (ibid.). In a study on Indian immigrants in New York, participant groups with low socioeconomic status valued certain forms of social support more than those with high socioeconomic status. For people with low socioeconomic status, job-related and emotional social support were needed and received, while socializing and adjustment in the new culture was important for participants at both low and high socioeconomic levels [32]. The literature suggests that many ethnic minority groups live according to the cultural construct of collectivism [10]. A shared cultural or ethnic background can help to create a community feeling and bridge within-group differences. Upholding traditions such as festivals fosters this feeling of community connectedness. In their study on black neighborhoods in London, Reynolds [39] affirms that a range of bonding SC resources are generated in these neighborhoods, including ties of reciprocal trust, solidarity and civic participation.

Migrants and ethnic minorities often feel excluded from the "host community" as they fail to navigate social relationships in the unfamiliar sociocultural environment [32]. Kilpatrick et al. [48] affirm that it is common for established migrants to assist newcomers in making bridging SC connections. The bonding ties that exist within ethnic-specific neighborhoods encourage residents to participate in ethnic-specific community associations within their neighborhoods [39]. A recent study from the US [10] shows that engagement in the local community is significantly higher among people from ethnic minorities than among members of the ethnic majority. The study further shows that contributing to and being a leader in the community is highly salient to the identity of ethnic minorities (ibid.).

Migrants tend to be fairly mobile with translocal relationships and lifestyle and often stay in a neighborhood for only a short time, which is one reason for lacking a sense of

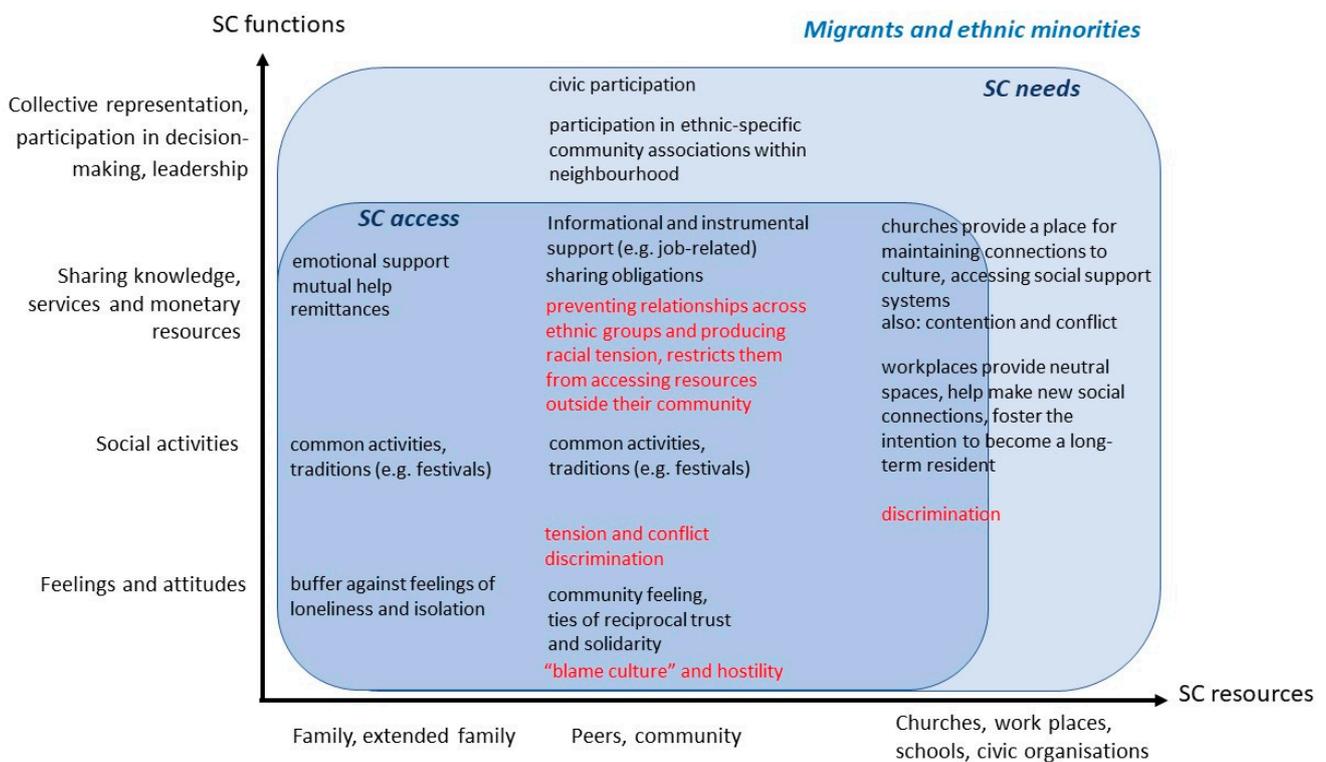
community and social support in some cases [35]. Translocal and transnational financial linkages become apparent in remittances to someone outside of the city or country [37] and in information flows enabled by communication technologies [38]. Several scholars indicate that an ethnic minority family status is associated with diminished SC in general, directly and indirectly due to a lower socioeconomic status [30]. The aforementioned study reveals that even minority families from the middle and upper class have access to less SC than members of the “host” community (in this case, white families) (ibid).

Compared to bonding SC, bridging capital is much weaker for ethnic minority groups [72]. The literature suggests that racial and socioeconomic minorities have less bridging SC because of the socially stratified nature of the society, resulting in fewer advantages for those minorities [30].

The restriction of benefits to particular ethnic or other groups has negative impacts on bridging SC [73]. Bertotti et al. [8] state that “when relationships are based on ethnic homogeneity, bonding social capital might be too strong, preventing relationships across ethnic groups and producing racial tensions which counter the proposed benefits of social capital”. Bonding SC in ethnically separated neighborhoods entrenches ethnic minority youths into these economically deprived urban spaces, restricting them from accessing resources outside their community [74].

However, despite a heterogeneous conviviality, the existence of tensions and conflicts cannot be denied. Local concerns about additional competition for sometimes already scarce public resources are often expressed in a “blame culture” and hostility towards new migrants [38]. These misgivings work against the often religiously underpinned bridging SC (ibid.). In their study of a deprived part of inner-city Birmingham, Karner and Parker [38] describe a “pluralist mosaic of communities” with negative outside perceptions. They corroborate that tensions, incidents of racism, violence and ideological “undercurrents” exist within the neighborhood.

Figure 2 illustrates the SC portfolio of immigrants and ethnic minorities including SC functions, SC resources, SC access and SC needs as well as negative functions of SC (in red).



**Figure 2.** Social capital functions and resources of migrants and ethnic minorities. Negative SC functions are marked in red.

## 5. Discussion

SC is a highly context- and culture-bound concept, and its manifestation and meaning differ across cultures and countries [2]. This study reveals several conceptual difficulties linked to the concept of SC rendering the structured analysis of SC differences difficult. The ambiguity in terms and definitions leaves room for interpretation and makes the operationalization of the concept inconsistent. This study partly overcomes these difficulties by presenting a framework for structured analysis of SC differences while acknowledging the complex interrelations among all components and thus lays part of the groundwork to analyze SC inequality.

The literature reviews led to the categorization of SC resources and SC functions. While the categorization for SC resources is in line with the theorization of bonding and bridging SC [18], the categorization of this paper provides a more detailed and differentiated overview of types of resources. The literature reviews on SC functions confirmed Pearce and Amato's [23] distinction between "giving" and "doing" (giving/receiving material and monetary resources; giving/receiving services). They also correspond to the key benefits determined by Bertotti et al. [8], but go beyond these by emphasizing also functions such as human resilience, social control or conflict mediation. Unlike previous concepts (e.g., the three-dimensional model of helping by Pearce and Amato [23], the four services by Robison et al. [24]) the SC functions category takes account of attitudes, lifestyles, feeling and norms.

In addition, this study stresses the ambiguity of SC. It draws attention to *negative functions of SC* that can aggravate the disadvantage for specific groups. These negative functions of SC are particularly emphasized in contexts of urban poverty (e.g., [75]) and with special regard to bonding capital (e.g., [19]). In the literature, this "bad" SC is associated with violence [76], crime [30], "rugged masculinity" [31], alcohol [77,78], and unhealthiness (e.g., [26]). Yet, these associations cannot be generalized, and results may vary according to different communities, cultures and customs [28]. Hence, there is no standardized way to assess at which point bonding capital is too strong or under which circumstances it turns negative. The same SC resources may have both positive and negative functions. This is why the evaluation and distinction remain difficult and case-specific and should be examined qualitatively.

Finally, this study argues that not only differential access to SC, but also differential SC *needs* must be taken into account. This fact seems crucial when investigating SC inequality as SC as a substitute for financial capital [64], but has been widely ignored in the SC literature. That means that people with sufficient resources of financial capital can afford services such as professional childcare, repairs and advice and thus have a lower need of SC than economically disadvantaged groups.

In general, this study supports the assumption that disadvantaged groups lack linking SC [16]. Many studies have shown the importance of neutral spaces such as churches, workplaces and business organizations as well as open spaces such as parks and space for urban agriculture [1,79] where diverse people sharing activities can help to create meso- and micro-level SC [48].

However, the framework presented in this study makes clear that inequality is not caused only by the absence of certain SC resources or functions. Both examined example groups (young people and ethnic minorities) report high importance of bonding capital (especially family and kin) and experience many SC functions received (particularly the emotional and practical support in difficult times) as very beneficial. At the same time, the discrepancy between SC needed and SC accessed becomes evident with both exemplary groups. Therefore, this study underlines the importance of bonding SC. This type of SC has the potential to increase the level of small-scale support systems. As Foster [1] states, over time these relationships transfer into established networks of "small-scale, everyday public life and thus of trust and social control" necessary to the "self-governance" of urban neighborhoods. This feature of bonding SC can be an essential asset in towns and cities where formal governance structures are weak. The fact that in urban areas

many heterogeneous groups of people live close together offers an opportunity for such formalized groups. Therefore, community groups should be supported and accompanied in their processes of formalization and professionalization.

Moreover, for both exemplary groups, negative functions of SC are reported (such as social exclusion, social control, involvement in criminal behavior, tension and conflict).

In terms of methodology, attention should also be drawn to the intersectionality encountered between social groups. For example, ethnic identity and young age are features that often overlap and also may include other sources of disadvantage (e.g., socioeconomic status). This shows that focusing on just one of these social categories has only limited explanatory power and all characteristics of the disadvantaged group should therefore be considered. Moreover, we must be aware that SC is not static throughout people's lives. Life events and aging as such bear influence on the resources and functions of SC. Another limitation of this study lies in the fact that context (e.g., geographical features of residential area or city) are neglected. However, other studies (e.g., [26]) stress the importance of the context.

## 6. Conclusions

This literature review has shown the difficulties linked to SC research and casts light on the gaps and shortcomings of research on this topic. Similar to other studies (e.g., [26]), this article highlights that there are significant differences between the SC of different social groups especially in the urban space where social heterogeneity tends to be high. In contrast to quantitative approaches, this study provides a qualitative analysis, which leaves room to acknowledge complex interactions. The SC differences studied concern the access to SC resources and functions, negative functions of SC as well as the needs in SC. The framework could be applied and confirmed by data from a literature review for two exemplary groups revealing the manifold qualitative differences in SC of young people and ethnic minorities. This approach enhances the existing theoretical frameworks of social capital by highlighting the importance of differential SC capital *needs*, which have been widely ignored in the literature on specific groups.

As implications of these results, I assert that strategies aimed at building social capital must be designed in accordance with the *needs* of different groups. Moreover, such strategies must acknowledge that some types of SC may have negative consequences. Since children and adolescents tend to lack bridging and linking SC, organizations engaged with capacity development need to focus on supporting these types of SC. However, this study shows that help building SC should not be the only string of intervention. Reducing SC needs by providing professional support where needed or counteracting negative functions of SC could represent alternative intervention strategies. However, the question of how to form bridging and linking SC remains an under-researched topic. Further research is needed on how privileged groups succeed in forming bridging and linking SC. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of research on differential SC *needs* for specific groups. More studies from different societal groups in this field would advance our understanding of SC inequality. The framework developed in this study could help to structure and guide such research endeavours.

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