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Social capital and education – An attempt to synthesize conceptualization arising from various theoretical origins

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Abstract: The concept of social capital has become in recent decades one of the most powerful ideas in social science. Having its roots in sociology and economics, it has consistently “settled” in almost all fields that deal with human functioning—pedagogy, social work, social anthropology, history, health sciences. This multiplicity of approaches and uses stems, on the one hand, from the diversity of topics and issues to which the term “social capital” is applied. On the other hand, it is the result of different theoretical sources of social capital conceptualization. As a consequence, different researchers, when using the term “social capital”, have in mind slightly different elements of social reality. It has consequences in the educational research, and leads to a large number of studies using the category of social capital in relation to school, but their results do not seem to form a coherent picture, sometimes even leading to contradictory conclusions. The question arises whether it is possible to build a synthesized analytical perspective, using the notion of social capital in such a way as to make this category a really useful tool for analyzing educational reality. The paper is an attempt to present such perspective by development of two ideal types of the structural conditions for education (schooling). First, the author presents the understanding of social capital in regard

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The paper is an attempt to present in a synthetic form key assumptions on the nature of social capital arising from several independently developed social theories. The author presents the understanding of social capital in regard to education in four theoretical contexts: James Coleman’s theory of exchange, Robert D. Putnam’s theory of civil society, Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural structuralism and the network theory. In each of these contexts the concept of social capital is differently conceptualized, which has consequences for conducting research on education. The text presents different analytical strategies resulting from the adoption of a given theoretical perspective. In the last part of the paper attempt was made to construct two ideal types of structural conditions for education, which seem to be possible to read from the results of research conducted with the use of different conceptualizations of social capital.
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**Keywords:** social capital; education; social structure; social theory; community; social networks; educational inequalities

1. **Introduction**

The concept of social capital has become in recent decades one of the most powerful ideas in social science. Having its roots in sociology and economics, it has consistently “settled” in almost all fields that deal with human functioning—pedagogy, social work, social anthropology, history, health sciences. This career of the concept of social capital stems from several sources—for some it is the result of the expansion of economic thinking, for others it is the hope of a synthesizing paradigm for the fragmented research field of social sciences (Halpern, 2005; Cohen & Prusak, 2001, Portes 1998). On the other hand, the multiplicity of conceptualizations and application in empirical works are the reason for criticism as a misleading concept, simplifying the complexity of reality too much (see: Fine, 2001, 2010, Fine & Green 2000).

In the field of educational studies it seems to be an important element of analyses enhancing introduction the wider social environment into analytical models applied to understand education. In the core of the educational studies we can observe two kinds of reductionism—on the one hand focus on individual characteristics of actors in education (pupils’ values, attitudes, aspirations, habitus etc.) on the other hand structural factors determining educational performance and status attainment (educational structures, processes of selection and allocation etc.). However schools do not work in the social vacuum—the meeting of institution and individuals takes place in the frame of certain features of social action of both sides. That sphere could be caught, as it would be expected, by the concept of social capital.

At the same time, disseminated throughout the social sciences social capital category becomes unclear and is applied in very different ways in analytical models. Despite of avalanche growth of writings dealing with social capital, there is no development observed in understanding of relations between education and social structure. The multiplicity of approaches and uses stems, on the one hand, from the diversity of topics and issues to which the term “social capital” is applied. On the other hand, it is the result of different theoretical sources of social capital conceptualization. As a consequence, different researchers, when using the term “social capital”, have in mind slightly different elements of social reality. This is the basic reason for the failure of the idea that social capital would become a synthesizing theory for social sciences.

But what if we try to find such a synthesis? It is possible if we realize the diversity of theoretical sources, understand the specificity of empirical approaches to social reality built on the basis of these different conceptualizations, and look at the results of research carried out using these different research models. An analysis of this type leads to proposals for theses on the social conditions of individuals—in this case according to education (schooling). The question organizing the analyses in this text is: what can we learn about social conditions of schooling from the research on social capital?
This text attempts to synthesize the key elements of the various social capital theories in their relation to educational research. To be more specific, it is an attempt to build a synthesizing analytical frame built on the basis of the research led by different understanding of the social capital, which is determined by different theoretical roots of the concept.

I start from the basic theses organizing the argument:

- there is no single theory of social capital—the concept of social capital is present in several different theories and its understanding each time means considering social phenomena with the use of the whole conceptual repertoire of the theory.
- empirical research carried out with the use of the concept of social capital located in different theoretical traditions implies different operationalization and consequently conclusions about the conditions of the phenomena we are interested in.

Understanding the specificity of each theoretical tradition allows for empirical synthesis—taking into account the conclusions from research conducted within the framework of different traditions. As a result, it is possible to propose two models of conditions of an ideal type (in the Max Weber sense). They can be further used in research projects and/or become a reference system for activities aimed at improving social relations—here: building social capital.

2. Different meaning of the social capital in different theories

In the literature in the field of social sciences we can find a number of conceptualizations of the social capital. However, the multitude of empirical applications can be reduced to four theoretical traditions:

1. The tradition of James Coleman’s social exchange theory
2. The tradition of Robert D. Putnam’s theory of civil society
3. The tradition of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural structuralism
4. The tradition of network theory

James Coleman’s concept originates from the tradition of economic sociology, the theory of exchange, according to which social structures are the result of petrifying interpersonal relations as conditions for effective action of individuals. It is an individualistic concept that places the actions of individual actors located in specific structures of action at the center of analysis. Key elements of social capital as features of the collective are:

- shared values and norms,
- multidimensional social relationships
- effective social control.

These are structural conditions that lead to trust, on the basis of which social actors can act in a given structure. They work to achieve their own benefits—food, work, higher salaries. However, functioning in a given structure, observing norms, expecting from others the obedience of norms and their effective control in this, strengthens the potential of the structure, which in turn serves all individuals (see: Coleman, 1988, 1990; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987).

The key principles of the Coleman approach can be summarized as follows:

- Capital is a feature of the community, although it is analyzed in terms of its use by individuals.
- It highlights bonds, relationships, trust, and therefore a structure that enables individuals to act effectively.
The stronger the bonds, the better—the more closed a community is, the denser the network it has and the more active it is in civic life, the more capital it represents. In such circumstances, people tend to cooperate more for the common good.

Capital is an unexpected result of purposive action—people do not act to build social capital, they act to achieve specific goals. If they work together, they create social structures that help them to meet their own needs.

The second, most prominent tradition of the social capital research has been built on the basis of Robert D. Putnam’s studies of the community and democracy. As in the case of the Coleman tradition, Putnam treats social capital as a community resource. It is a collective characteristic that diagnoses the level of citizens’ involvement in activities for the public good. Social capital equals to the level of social involvement of the inhabitants. It seems that it is the most popular way of studying social capital, based on quantitative measurements of the frequency of membership in associations, knowledge about local self-government authorities, time spent on social life. The greater the social involvement and the greater and better the knowledge of political mechanisms and neighbors, the greater the social capital is (Putnam, 1993, 2000).

The third tradition is founded by social structuralism of Pierre Bourdieu. The concept of social capital in Pierre Bourdieu’s theory is based on a different assumptions than the two previous traditions. The key difference is the indication that social capital is an individual resource and not a structural feature. In order to better understand the concepts of social capital from this perspective, it is important to bear in mind the necessity to consider it as part of a broader theory in conjunction with other important concepts such as habitus, field, symbolic violence and, of course, capital. Among the forms of capital, the French sociologist distinguishes between three—economic, cultural and social. Bourdieu gradually developed a basic distinction between social and symbolic capital and identified social and cultural capital as specific forms of this symbolism. It considered cultural capital to be the most important and social capital to be subsidiary, although it also pointed to certain situations in which social capital became a central explanatory concept (see Bourdieu, 1998; 2005, Portes, 1998).

For Bourdieu, social activities take place in socially constructed fields of interaction. Generally speaking, the basic assumptions can be summarized as follows:

- Actors in the field are equipped with various resources that can be recognized and used as capital in a game with other actors in order to gain an advantage in certain conditions.
- The actors recognize the field and the resources/capitals through their habituses, that is, their socially shaped nature, their disposition to interpret the world and to act.
- Depending on the social position and the biographically shaped habitus, the actors recognize the field differently and apply their actions in it. The result is a hierarchy of influence and power in the field and a balance between the benefits of playing in the field. (see: Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Cultural capital is the competence of using cultural symbols, functioning in three forms: embodied, institutionalized and objective. Social capital, on the other hand, is belongingness to a group, social relations that can become the basis for providing social legitimation to an individual in his or her actions aimed at achieving a specific goal in a given field. Social capital is a relationship that can be referred to or gives access to other resources—economic and cultural. Thus, the greater the economic, cultural and symbolic resources of the group which individual belongs to and to which it can refer, the greater the social capital he/she possesses (Bourdieu, 1998).

The forth source of social capital conceptualization is the network theory, derived from the concept of the strength of the weak ties by Mark Granovetter (1973). It was transformed and expanded by Nan Lin, who additionally used Ronald Burt’s economic theory of structural holes (see: Burt, 1992, 1997; Lin, 2001). This concept arises from the research on the processes of getting
a job and locating oneself in the professional structure. Therefore, it is firmly rooted in the tradition of economic research on the processes of the status achievement. Lin and Burt analyses concerned the strategy of employees on the labor market or the activities of corporate members. These authors tried to show how an economic players can use their networks to gain valuable information—to change jobs or to win in a market game.

In this tradition, social capital is a resource that an individual has access to through networks of relationships with others. A distinction is made between individual capital—resources held by the individual—and social capital—resources held by others to which the individual has or can have access because of the relationships with them. Imaginatively, my bicycle is my individual capital. A neighbor’s bicycle is my social capital—I can borrow it from him.

Analyses in this tradition focus on characterizing the networks of social actors and the possible resources available to them through these networks. The key resource here is primarily information that can be used to satisfy one’s own needs and/or multiply one’s own individual capital. Key to this analysis are: network density, network span (how wide our contacts extend) and the highest available social status we have thanks to our networks. The analysis is based on the assumption that the resources of higher status persons are larger (more valuable) and that the resources to which we have indirect access are more effective for our purposes. The principle of the strength of weak ties applies here, arising from the analysis of access to and use of information. People with whom we have close relationships have a similar amount of information to us. A significant difference in (information) resources can be gained through contacts with people distant from us, whom we can reach—through other relationships, or through the so-called “bridge crossing a structural hole”, i.e. building a connection with members of a network other than ours (see Burt, 2005).

The specificity of the network approach is that researchers focus on the measurement of network density, rather than on the observation of real processes taking place in these networks. There are clear paradigmatic links with the rational choice theory. Besides, Nan Lin directly recognized his approach as an example of the theory of rational choice. Although the original definition of social capital in Lin-Burt theory indicates that these are resources owned by others, to which we have access through social networks, in research the emphasis is placed on the characteristics of the quality of the network, and not on the characteristics of the resources to which these networks lead. The quality of the network is described mainly quantitatively, using so called “position generators”. We are therefore dealing here with the use of indirect indicators, assuming that access to a position equals access to resources. From this perspective, it seems more important to ask how people build networks, rather than the description of the resources to which these networks lead.

3. Application of different conceptualizations in educational research

Educational research carried out from the perspective of James Coleman theory focus on formal education as a tool for shaping human capital—building competences, skills and knowledge. The effects of this process can be measured in the school results, further educational and professional careers. The difference in school achievements of young people may be determined by the difference in the features of the social structure in which students operate. The features of this structure are characterized by the family model, different level of parents’ involvement in helping a child in education, the quality of contacts with relatives, the degree of control over the child. Moreover, if one looks at social capital outside the family, one should pay attention to social networks, membership in organizations, religious practices. In addition, we can also look at the quality of the school and the perceived quality of the neighborhood (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987)

Following this approach, researchers study family relationships, the quality and nature of parents’ and children’s contacts, the family structure and the support young people can receive from their families. In addition, extra-family social capital (extra-familial), i.e. community relations, must also be taken into account. The relevant research question is: Are there clear norms and rules
shared by the members of a given community and do the mechanisms of social control function efficiently? (see: Dufur et al., 2013, Dika & Kusum 2002)

The analysis of the relationship between social capital and education is subordinated to the search for the importance of community in educational processes. Building community on different levels of people’s functioning is to be a tool for solving problems and increasing efficiency. The community is to be a family, a community of which the family is a part, a school in its relationship with the family, and a school in itself.

In the light of Robert D. Putnam’s theory, the relationship between social capital and education is two-way. On the one hand, social capital resources are the basis for certain educational achievements—the level of passing exams, school drop-out, the length of school years. On the other hand, education and its expansion can be seen as a tool for raising the level of civic participation, strengthening political activity and increasing and building a participatory culture. The greater the culture of civic participation in the community (commune, region, country), the better the educational results, and at the same time the better the educational conditions, the greater the culture of participation (see Halpern, 2005).

The general scheme for analyzing education with the use of social capital in this tradition can be presented as follows:

- Education is one of the institutions established to respond to social needs.
- Its effectiveness depends on the level of citizenship.
- Through participation in civic activity networks, citizens influence the institution and make it more effective in meeting their needs (Putnam, 1993).

When trying to answer questions concerning the role of social capital in educational processes, researchers focus our attention on estimating the quality of civic culture of a given community. Research projects focus on finding an answer to the question whether the inhabitants of a given community have a great deal of civic knowledge—whether they know the mechanisms of functioning of democracy and local authority and whether they know the possibilities of influencing these mechanisms. Do they engage in political life, take an active part in elections, or are they members of local organizations? Do they often meet other residents and do they have a rich social life? In other words, are the structures of mutual relations in the community dense and strong, are there strong social bonds in the community or do people isolate themselves and the bonds are weak?

The authors carrying out research based on the theory of Pierre Bourdieu focus on social capital as a resource used mainly by the middle class, a privileged group that, through its cultural practices, seeks to distinguish itself from the usurpers of the lower class (Lareau, 2003; Ball, 2003). In their studies of classroom strategies in the education market, they stress the importance of social capital as a tool used by middle-class parents to ensure the reproduction of their social position by providing their children with an adequate level of education. Social capital is fundamental to the ability to mobilize the cultural and economic resources of the family or individual. Therefore, the social capital analyses in the light of Bourdieu’s theory are always the “status” and the “class” analyses. As commented by John Field (2003, p. 16): “Thus, in its characteristics, social capital functions to reproduce inequalities, but it does so partly independently of economic and cultural capital, from which it is inseparable”. It can be said that other forms of capital mask only the differences in economic capital. Therefore with similar resources of cultural and economic capital, social capital will make a difference. It is the capital of belonging, recognition, authentication received from the members of the group to which we belong, or we usurp membership in it. Bourdieu was interested in how the different types of capital jointly distinguish the “main classes of living conditions” on the basis of the different distribution of their total capital among the different types of capital (Field, 2003, p. 16; see also Bourdieu, 2004).
Education was not of direct interest to either Lin or Burt in application of the network theory. For the former, education as an indicator of the level of human capital appears in the model primarily as an independent variable—it determines the achieved status, determines the level of social capital both available and mobilized (see Lin, 2001, pp. 97–98, 116–117). However, in the literature we find many attempts to use this conceptualization of social capital in the field of educational research. They ask how players in the education market build and use their relationship networks.

Educational research inspired by network theory is primarily quantitative in nature. The network nomenclature makes it possible to track the actors’ connections with the items enabling access to educational and institutional support resources. The emphasis on the activity of parents is of great importance. They are the main actors, social capital brokers, intermediaries in accessing their children’s resources. In contrast to research based on Bourdieu’s theory, network analyses do not focus exclusively on indicating the advantage of students and families from the upper classes in the social hierarchy, but allow to see the strategies and possibilities of networking available to the members of the lower social strata. The complete elimination of the element of stratification differentiation—as happens in research inspired by Coleman and Putnam’s theories—is not possible here, as Lin’s theory clearly indicates the hierarchical differentiation of social capital. However, it is not the status, but the access to resources that is the main focus of analyses. For network theoreticians, the process of gaining access to resources and parents’ involvement in children’s education is analyzed regardless of the class position of the respondents. What is more, it seems that this is a way to go beyond socio-economic limitations and interrupt social reproduction. Particularly important here may be the operation of the school as a resource of social capital—as a broker facilitating access to information inaccessible to families (see Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

The stratification connotations of network theory bring to mind the analyses carried out by researchers using the Bourdieu theory. The social class determines the chances of access to diverse positions offering support, but also determines the strategies for building networks and their use. Therefore, it is particularly interesting to see attempts at qualitative analyses that show the specificity of the processes of building and using networks. From this perspective, qualitative research is particularly valuable, in which at least attempts are made to capture the processes taking place thanks to such networks rather than other networks. However, such research is rare (see: Kim & Schneider, 2005).

3. What do we learn about the relations between education and social structure through different conceptualizations of social capital?

The use of different concepts of social capital causes the fact, that the research focuses on different problems. This is the result of a different view of reality, which is imposed by the theoretical background of the category of social capital. Each time a different area of activity of individuals is highlighted. Assuming a certain understanding of social capital—consciously or not—we choose theoretical background, which suggests us what questions about the relationship between education (schooling) and social structure are worth asking. Consequently, by analyzing the results of research, we learn various things about school and society.

In the case of the James S. Coleman’s concept, the attention is focused on the structural conditions of individual activities. The defined structures of action, characterized by a structural closure, stable in terms of composition, equipped with an ideology stimulating social involvement, create the conditions for the development of effective norms that ensure that social actors implement the actions as expected. This in turn increases trust and reduces the phenomenon of “free riding”. Coleman illuminates the social space of relations between family and community structures. The question, which appears to be worth putting in this perspective, is: to what extent do specific structures of activity support the realization of individual goals? In the case of
education, the aim is to build as much human capital as possible, i.e. competences that will allow the individual to succeed in adult life. Education is here a tool for building these competences, a source of positive developmental stimuli. At the same time, the school is an element of the structures of a wider social system.

Although the theoretical basis itself provides an opportunity to ask questions about the nature of relations in the local community, school and family, the analysis of empirical applications shows that the main subject of diagnosis is the family. It is considered that the characteristics of family relationships, the level of intimacy of these relationships and the parents' control over the child's actions are responsible for the child's learning outcomes. This “family-centrism” of analyses is also visible in the nomenclature used to describe structural conditions of activity in the public sphere. Social capital determinations of the “extra-familial” and “intra-familial” type show that what happens within the family and between families is perceived as the most significant for the effectiveness of actions in the field of education.

The research inspired by the theory of social capital by Robert D. Putnam put emphasis on different aspects. Here, not what is in families, but what is in the public sphere, in the space of community activities of a supra-individual character, turns out to be the most important for understanding the effectiveness of educational institutions. This is also where the fundamental analytical difference reveals itself. In the case of Coleman, it is about looking for reasons for better or worse results of individual students, whose activities, including involvement in education, are conditioned by the structures of activity in the family and in relation to other families. In the case of Putnam’s theory, the question is not about the effectiveness of the individual, but about the effectiveness of the institution. Schools work better where people are active in the public sphere, where they cooperate for the common good. In this way, the institution can count on support and, at the same time, is subject to control. As a result, it performs its tasks more efficiently, increasing the level of human capital.

Educational research based on Coleman and Putnam's theories has three features in common. Firstly, the school appears in them as an institution that does not differentiate, but treats students in the same way, regardless of their origin. There are no questions about the nature of school selections in research from this trend. Whole local communities seem to be the unit of analysis. Its quality (of family structure in the case of Coleman, or of participation culture in the case of Putnam) makes the pupils achieve better or worse results. This is the reason why from the perspective of these theories we can only analyze so called “community schools”—related to a specific social environment understood rather as a geographically settled community: a housing estate, a town, a village. The conceptual apparatus offered by these two theories offers very few tools in the case of schools that bring together students from different backgrounds such as secondary schools in large cities or universities.

The second common feature of these two approaches is that they value strong bonds within the family and the local community. It is also a subject to criticize these concepts by pointing out that strong group ties can be anti-developmental if they force individuals to implement actions that contradict school logic or are negative from the point of view of the educational ideal.

The third aspect of the analysis that links the approaches discussed here is the recognition of social capital as a feature of the structure, as a characteristic of the community. Communities have structural features that determine individual action. Social capital is not owned or created by individuals—social capital is an unintended outcome of their intentional actions, which result in creation of emergent social structure. It is a dialectic relation between action and structure—individual actions create structures and emerged structures of action condition actions of individuals.
The relationship between school and social structure appears differently when using the concept of social capital embedded in Pierre Bourdieu's theory. The researchers using this notional apparatus direct their attention towards the determinants of social inequalities in education and the processes of reproduction of class divisions by educational mechanisms. Social capital is one of the tools for building and maintaining social differences, and more specifically, it is a way of maintaining the advantage of the dominant class. Education is an arena of class struggle, in which middle and upper class members threatened with downward social mobility defend themselves against usurpers from lower classes. School is not a culturally and morally neutral tool for building human capital here. It is an institution that imposes cultural arbitrariness and selects students according to the cultural logic of the dominant classes. Social capital is used primarily by members of the middle and upper classes. Even the analysis of the use of social capital in the form of contacts and links between members of the working classes and certain positions in the social structure is conducted from the point of view of the logic of the middle classes—usually lead to the conclusion that the practices of representatives of working class families are ineffective from the point of view of the rationality of the field of education (rationality of the middle class).

From the perspective of network theory, social capital—located in networks of relations and resources to which it opens access—is also embedded in a hierarchical structure. However, the narratives conducted from these positions are not as “overpowering” as in the case of research inspired by Bourdieu's theory. First, the difference is that not only middle- and upper-class members can create useful social networks. Also, members of dominated classes or cultural minorities can use social networks to achieve their goals, including finding ways to support their children's education. Research narratives using the category of social capital in this trend show the specificity of functioning of social networks and conditions of their use. The school is an institution of opportunity opening, a potential source of information resources and institutional support.

Analyses conducted through the perspective of these two theories are similar in that they take into account the network character of individual relations. Moreover, what they share is that the use of the category of social capital causes the focus not on the processes of achieving school results (at least not only), but also on the mechanisms of building connections and transitions between the successive elements of the structure. Therefore, it is not so much the educational effect in the form of the final exam result that is important, but rather the creation of ways to achieve subsequent positions—either by building a specific relation of belonging or by gaining valuable information (e.g. knowledge of the recruitment procedures for higher education institutions). Both theories talk about the benefits of parental involvement in networking processes, i.e. building connections with others and using them to support the education of one’s own children. In both concepts, attention is drawn to the diversity of networking opportunities due to the initial position in the hierarchical social structure. Finally, in both concepts—unlike in the previous two—social capital is invested as a resource of individuals: students or parents, to be used in specific activities in the field of education. In this way, we can talk about targeted or purposeful creation of social capital by individuals.

Table 1. summarises differences between above elaborated research approaches.

4. Ideal Types of social conditions for the operation of individuals for their education
Each of the theories described here, using a specific definition of what social capital means to it and what functions it performs, allows us to see certain conditions determining the actions of people. Each of them allows to somehow understand how the effects of the functioning of education and the functioning of individuals in education are connected with their functioning in different social systems. Within each of the theoretical traditions, research procedures are constructed and empirical findings are collected, which can then be attempted to be compared with those resulting from the application of a different model. This type of practice
| Theoretical background            | Collective or individual feature | Key elements                                                                 | How social capital is created | The meaning of the social capital as a resource | How social capital is used in education (schooling) |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Social exchange theory (James Coleman) | collective                      | • Shared values and norms,                                                   | Unintended consequences of purposive actions in the community | Affects the structural conditions of individuals’ actions | • Conditions the process of shaping a culture of engagement in education |
|                                   |                                  | • Multidimensional social relationships                                      |                              |                                               | • Conditions effective control and students in the process of gaining knowledge |
|                                   |                                  | • Effective social control                                                    |                              |                                               | • Provides effective control over educational institutions and their staff |
| Theory of civil society (Robert D. Putnam) | collective                      | • Trust                                                                      | Unintended consequences of purposive actions in the community | Affects the structural conditions of individuals’ actions | • Conditions effective control over educational institutions |
|                                   |                                  | • Reciprocal norms                                                           |                              |                                               | • Conditions support of the local community in the activities of educational institutions |
| Theory of cultural structuralism (Pierre Bourdieu) | individual                      | • Social relations giving the access to other forms of capital: cultural and economic | Intentional individual actions to get legitimation from and credit from the (elitist) group | It is a tool in the purposive action of individuals | • Enables the use of symbolic capital in the form of group authentication in the educational field |
|                                   |                                  | • Membership in the group giving the legitimation and the credit             |                              |                                               | • Facilitates the conversion of capital—the exchange of economic capital into cultural capital and thus determines students’ school achievements |
|                                   |                                  |                                                                              |                              |                                               | • Provides social support from the group of origin in school field activities |

(Continued)
| Theoretical background | Collective or individual feature | Key elements | How social capital is created | The meaning of the social capital as a resource | How social capital is used in education (schooling) |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Network theory (Nan Lin) | individual                      | - Network of the relations with its characteristics: network density, network span (how wide our contacts extend) the highest available social status thanks to the networks | Intentional individual action to build the network and use social ties | It is a tool in the purposive action of individuals | • Enables access to valuable information useful in the process of social mobility |
requires consistency and caution in data analysis and construction of conclusions, but it is possible.

It seems that the empirical findings on the relationship between social structure and education, resulting from each of the streams of analysis discussed above, can be simplified as follows:

- From the perspective of the analyses carried out using the conceptual apparatus of James S. Coleman’s theory individuals perform better in education if they function in structurally closed communities, live in families with strong ties between their members and strong ties with the families of other students in the school.
- From the perspective of analyses carried out using the conceptual apparatus of Robert D. Putnam’s theory schools work better and, as a result, students achieve better educational results when they operate in communities with a high level of social activity.
- From the perspective of analyses carried out with the use of the conceptual apparatus of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory middle and upper class pupils are better supported by the social network of their parents than pupils from families with lower social status.
- From the perspective of analyses carried out with the use of Nan Lin’s theory of conceptual apparatus students whose parents are able to build effective network connections leading to resources (especially informational and institutional support) useful for their children’s education, achieve better results and better (leading to higher social rewards) educational and social trajectories, while the effectiveness of creation of these networks is conditioned by the placement of families in the social hierarchy.

Taking into account the empirical conclusions from research conducted in separate theoretical traditions, we can try to build an “ideal types” (in Max Weber sense):

(a) an ideal type of positive structural determinants of the educational trajectory
(b) an ideal type of negative structural determinants of the educational trajectory.

Those two conceptual models constitute two ends of the continuum of social conditions of individual action or to be more specific, to individuals’ education (school) performance and outcomes.

4.1. Ideal type of positive structural conditions for education
The individual has a high level of structural support if he or she lives in a family with high economic (earnings) and cultural (education) resources, in which there are strong family ties. The family is part of a compact, structurally closed community whose members are middle or upper class. Through their position in the community and through access to the resources of other members of the community, parents provide their children with access to informational and institutional support that stimulates the competence, attitudes and values to succeed in school selection processes (school examinations and assessments) and to obtain guidance and support (referrals) to get into their preferred educational and professional environments that give them the opportunity to achieve high social status. The community additionally supervises the functioning of educational institutions, motivating them to carry out tasks in accordance with the assumptions and expectations of the community. The community supports the institutions in their control and socialization activities to which pupils are subjected. This control is strengthened by the participation of parents in activities for the public good, which stimulates the internal integration of the community and the flow of information between its members, and this can result in the creation of further effective connections and social networks.

4.2. Ideal type of negative structural conditions for education
The individual has little structural support if he or she functions in a family with low economic (earnings) and cultural (education) resources and poor family ties. The family is a part of
a community with a low degree of compactness, structurally uncluttered, whose members belong to the lower class. Due to their low position in the social structure and lack of access to the resources of other members of the community (because there are no relationships and the resources of other members of the community are still low), they cannot provide their children with access to informational and institutional support that stimulates competences, attitudes and values to succeed in school selection processes (school examinations and assessments) and to obtain guidance and support (referrals) in order to get to their preferred educational and professional environments that give them the opportunity to occupy positions of high social status. The community does not control the functioning of educational institutions, which does not motivate these institutions to carry out their tasks in accordance with the assumptions and expectations of the community. The community does not support institutions in their control and socialization activities to which pupils are subjected. The lack of parents’ participation in activities for the public good hinders or even prevents the internal integration of the community and the flow of information between its members, which makes it impossible to build effective connections and social networks.

The models of structural determinants of educational trajectories described here are obviously simplified and exaggerated characteristics. According to the logic of creating ideal types as defined by Max Weber, we present a model in which particular variables achieve the maximum possible parameters. In reality such a situation does not happen—it is an abstracted, hypothetical situation of conjunction of maximised status of variables in a given model. Let us add here that a model always means a reduction of the complexity of reality in order to be able to say anything about the relations between the features that a given theory considers crucial for the explanation of a given phenomenon.

The two ideal types outlined above are therefore the two ends of a continuum, representing maximally favourable and maximally unfavourable conditions for individuals’ schooling. Each actual family, school or community will never reach such “maximised” states of functioning. However, we can understand the functioning of individual communities, schools, families, etc., by relating the real conditions of their existence to the indicated ideal types. In other words, the indicated ideal types provide tools for observing particular social arrangements in order to determine how close they are to one end of the continuum or the other. However, in real-life situations, within the particular dimensions indicated by the ideal types, we may observe diverse characteristics that are not always coherent — e.g. there is strong social control in a given community, but families do not engage in activities for the public good; or we may observe a rich neighborhood of middle-class members who do not form a cohesive community and do not create pressure on educational institutions. Between poles of the continuum we will find intermediate types, in which the particular elements will be at different levels.

The described models provide criteria for a qualitative description of each individual situation in order to understand it and thus explain to a certain extent the educational results of pupils. Ideal types constructed in this way can be used to analyze the social pathways of individuals based on their educational careers. The effect of these structural interactions will be, firstly, the result achieved at school, and secondly, the place achieved in the stratification system, i.e. social status. In this way, the ideal types identified in this text become tools for understanding both social reproduction and cases of breaking the circle of reproduction—explain the conditions of social advancement or unexpected degradation. Analyses inspired by social capital theories thus make it possible to observe and better understand the mechanisms of social action in the constant dialectic of agency versus structure or dialectic of the individual versus the social system in which he or she functions.

5. Conclusions
The paper attempts to propose effective use of the multitude of the research on the social capital. It is not a proposal of the different conceptualization, but rather an attempt to put all logic consequences of different conceptualizations together and see what picture of empirical reality we can describe according to relation between social structure and education.
It is important to notice, that the idea proposed in the paper do not aspire to become the one and only understanding of the conditions of schooling or school effectiveness. I do no question the importance of economic conditions of education—both from the perspective of individuals or families who invest in education and the perspective of states as a bodies responsible for organization of the school system. The social capital concept does not capture the entire realm of conditions of schooling. The approach proposed in the paper is an attempt to synthesize the outcomes of the analyses using social capita as a category—what can we learn from the research?

This proposal is very synthetic and require more detailed elaboration. The two ideal types of structural conditions of educational pathways also need to be operationalized and tested in empirical research.

Ideal types constructed in this way can also be a good reference framework for social projects aimed at stimulating the living conditions of individuals in order to reduce social inequalities. It seems to be an interesting starting material for studies in social pedagogy and social policy.

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