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Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research, and Policy

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Abstract

In the 1990s the concept of social capital—defined here as the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively—enjoyed a remarkable rise to prominence across all the social science disciplines. The authors trace the evolution of social capital research as it pertains to economic development and identify four distinct approaches the research has taken: communitarian, networks, institutional, and synergy. The evidence suggests that of the four, the synergy view, with its emphasis on incorporating different levels and dimensions of social capital and its recognition of the positive and negative outcomes that social capital can generate, has the greatest empirical support and lends itself best to comprehensive and coherent policy prescriptions. The authors argue that a significant virtue of the idea of and discourse on social capital is that it helps to bridge orthodox divides among scholars, practitioners, and policymakers.

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