

POLITICS IN THE GLOBALIZATION: THINKING ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN SOCIAL CAPITAL AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

This study aims at analyzing the relationship between social capital and political participation in terms of new perspectives on the politics in globalization process. Firstly, it explains the new understanding of politics, increasing importance of communication and social interactions for political participation. Secondly, it explains the effects of neo-conservatism on social and political life. This study evaluates the neo-conservatism as a source for many negative situations in the social and political life which constitute obstacles for realizing the new understanding of politics. Lastly, social capital is thought as a potential against to the negative effects of neo-conservatism in relation to political participation with regarding to dilemma of social capital that operates in order to realize neo-conservative politics. And different perspectives are evaluated about this relation.

Keywords: Social capital, political participation, globalization, neo-conservatism.

JEL Classification: F69, D71, D78.

Introduction

This study focuses on the new understanding of politics and political participation which consists of communication and interaction among different social actors such as individuals, social groups or cultural groups. Communication and interaction between individuals or groups in the social networks are the most important requirements of political participation in globalization. Because of the interaction between social differences and deliberation of individuals, different groups have become the main components of contemporary understanding of democracy. Although communication and interaction are the most important parts of political participation, there are some limits for them. Neo-conservatism is the most important obstacle for communication, interactive relations and participative actions. Neo-conservatism causes to the atomization of individuals, affects on the social-economical rights and social securities. It drives the people to introduce or stay in their domestic bounds like family. Competition, atomization and autism

causes the lost of social trust. This situation negatively effects the participation of the citizens to social networks and political processes. This study tends to think on the relationship between social capital and political participation in terms of the meaning of social capital as a source for political participation with its components like communication, interaction and participation.

1. Politics in Globalization

The concept of globalization includes various areas which are related to transformation of social, economic and political terms, issues, rules and values in the process of globalization (Held et. al.,2003; Giddens,2003; Hirst and Thompson,2003; Barber,2004; Lechner,2004; Pasha,2004; Mathews,2004). One of them called as power shift, it means effects of globalization occurred in the political area. It is about the transformation of nation-state. The nation-state lost its autonomy because of the power of supra-national institutions and development of new social and political actors. Lost of autonomy is called as power-sovereignty shift. In this situation, nation-states obey to the international rules, procedures and decision (Spruyt,2002). Also, legitimacy of nation states' applications and decisions are opened to the view of international public. Different actors become important in the decision making process as supranational institutions like international non-governmental organizations or social or cultural movements. Moreover, the homogeneity of population lost its importance in order to realize the idea of multiculturalism and regarding to the differences in society and in the process of decision making. Thus active and complex participation of social actors has become a non-negligible factor on the political processes.

This transformation includes also the blurring of difference among social, economic and political areas (Çakır and Demirhan,2011). Today the social issues become also political. For example, a social action is caused by ecological problem in a local area is also regarded as an issue by global public. This social action in terms of its causes, development and results, creates political and economic effects in local, regional and global levels.¹ In this context of

¹ A case from Turkey shows this relationship (Çakır and Demirhan,2011). In the last years, many HES (Hydro-Electric Power Plants) are constructed on the rivers of Turkey. In these periods, some social movements are organized and people acted against these constructions. At the beginning of these movements, they were spontaneous, local and social. Step by step, movements have attracted public attention at local, regional and global levels. They have become political character as being an opposition power against the government, as sources for the new social divisions and conflicts, and as factors on the determination of international public opinion, as getting attention of national and international NGOs.

globalization, politics has characterized by some features such as critical thinking on the representative democracy which consists of representation and regular elections, supporting of active citizenship, participation of social actors to the decision making processes in different levels of governing, social organizations like non-governmental organizations gain importance, acceptance of different social and cultural identities, setting communication, development of social networks, emerging of global public opinion and development of interrelation between local, regional and global levels (Beck,2005). In fact, all of these features rise on the bases of more interactive communication, social relation and active participation.

The importance of interaction, communication and active participation in society especially stresses in the contemporary political theories which contribute to the meaning of politics. They evaluate the politics as processes of deliberation, participation of actors and conflict among different social powers (Habermas, 1999; Mouffe,2010). Researches of Mouffe and Habermas are the main sources for the contemporary discussions in democracy. In terms of interaction and active participation, Mouffe insists on the pluralism in politics and defines politics as a conflicting process between different benefit groups. Her model of agonistic democracy regards the social area as also political. In this model, social differences are the main sources of conflict process as the main components of politics. Mouffe suggests the importance of conflict among differences regarding the main condition of such an interaction as out of a destroying conflict which is defined as antagonistic. Such an interaction can be realized only existence of common principles regulating the system of conflict and preventing it from violent actions. On the other side, Habermas supports the importance of differences but he stresses the importance of their consensus rather than conflict (Habermas,1999). He suggests a deliberative democracy model that consists of consensus among differences about norms and principles of common life (Habermas,1999).

Communication in the Mouffes' theory consists of emotional process and includes social identities. Mouffe stresses the particularity of social and cultural subjects and the importance of the variety of interpretations. Habermas supports a rational communication process (Kappinen et al.,2008). He explains it in the term of communicative action which indicates a coordinated action consists of a linguistic

agreement on various groups (Habermas,2001:294-299).² Both agonistic democracy and deliberative democracy insist upon the activity of social actors, political character of social issues and, interactive and communicative relationships of groups and individuals. In this context of politics, social capital gains importance both as a product of interactive social relation and as a reason of interactive social relations and social networks. In this study, social capital with regard to its potential to realize social interaction, it can be thought as a source for political participation in context of the new understanding of politics.

2. The Meaning of Social Capital

The concept of social capital is used in different meanings in the literature (Prakash and Selle,2004). Basically, it explains a capital that consists of the relations between individuals in social networks (Lake and Huckfelt,1998:569). Bourdieu and Coleman's approaches exemplify the sociological meaning of social capital. These thinkers explain the concept as stock of resources to use getting benefits by individuals being the members of social networks or social groups (Bourdieu,1986; Coleman,1988:98). Bourdieu defines the social capital as "network of relationships is a product of investment strategies... is usable in the short or long term" (Bourdieu,1986). Coleman (1988:98) evaluates the social capital as the structure of relations which are functional to the members of social groups. Bourdieu and Coleman's approaches on social capital explain why individuals are willing to be a member of a social group. Briefly, the concept in sociological perspective "...the form of networks of association and involvement in social activities as pivotal to accomplishing goals". These explanations indicate the importance of social capital for setting the social relations and interactions.³

Political science perspective on social capital is discussed in terms of the examinations of Robert Putnam (Ravanera,2008). Putnam (1993:167) insists upon the potential of social capital on the improvement of civic engagement, collective action and social collaboration. These are seen in his approach as the results of

² Habermas explains the rationality of communicative action with its function of deliberation that prevents the differences from governmental interferes and provides them an independent area out of the control of central power (Habermas,2001:618).

³ There are some other definitions towards the concept in terms of social relations, interactions and participation. For example, Ostram (2009) evaluates the social capital as a capacity of realizing collective action which consists of interpersonal-trust among people in a community, family, associations or groups etc. Portes (1998:9) explains the concept in terms of three main functions of social capital that are "as a source of social control", "as a source of family support", "as a source of through extra-familial networks". This examination also indicates the importance of social relations and interactions in terms of sociological and political perspectives.

trust, common norms, and information and communication networks between individuals or groups in society. According to Putnam (1993), trust between individuals is the most important base for strengthening the social links, social consciousness and collective action. Social communication and interaction creates common trust and networks which provide to the development of common norms and maintaining of them (Ostram,2009). Social capital consists of social relations, but it also creates social relations. There are different types of social capital called as bridging and bonding social capital (Svendsen and Svendsen,2009:28). Bridging social capital is inclusive (like voluntary associations) and bonding social capital is exclusive (like family bounds). “Different forms of social capital have the potential to promote community solidarity and reciprocity among its members, while other forms offer a springboard to outside communities and a sharing of diverse resources. Bridging social capital, in contrast to bonding social capital, links people coming from different social groups. It creates broader identities” (Kay and Johnston,2006:24).

Although social capital has positive features, there are attentions about some of its problems. Portes (1998:15) explains the main sources of these problems. These are mostly caused by depending on the bounding type of relations which are mostly bounds individuals to social groups. Socially integrated individuals could not be independent in their activities, and they mostly exclude other social groups or people. This situation can be mentioned as the dilemma of social capital because of its two sided character. On one side it can improve new relations between people but on the other side it can restrict the relations between people outside the groups. Exclusive form of social capital is focused in this study in the context of neo-conservatism. Neo-conservative policies are evaluated as main factors of the restrictions of social relations bonding people to each other and do not give independency to its members.

3. Neo-Conservatism and the Dilemma of Social Capital

Neo-conservatism, which is a combination of conservatism and liberalism, is the dominant ideology on the politics in the world, especially in the USA and in England (Dubiel,1998; Yanardağ,2004). The sentence of Margaret Thatcher that “There is no such thing as society” explains the opinion on the idea of society. The ideology of neo-conservatism rejects the society as a unity of people who are linked with each other; also reject the differences in society, regarding only individual goals or domestic social institutions like family. Neo-conservative policies negatively affect to the social communication and relations among people.

These effects can be listed in relation to its main features: Firstly, neo-conservatism consists of competition among individuals (Özkazanç,2007). It includes importance of individual benefits, understanding of negative freedom, and economic principles like “laissez faire”. Individuals following their benefits negatively affect the interpersonal trust which is the sources of social interaction. Secondly, the source of any action consists of individuals’ self-confidence and their social and economic potentials. Neo-cons support the idea that welfare state caused to the crises depending high purchases for public goods (Barry,1989) and they restricted the purchases like in the field of social security. They are regarding citizens as only consumers and state does not regard common goods. Citizens become indebted to the banks and assurance agencies as a result of these policies. This caused to the lack of self-confidence on individuals. People lost the interpersonal-trust and participation potential. For individuals, only family or specific community relations (like regional) become accessible which consists of bounding type of social capital. Thirdly, dominancy of private goods rather than public goods causes to the lost of legitimacy of laws and common institutions. Corruptions increased in governmental processes; staffing is determined using social relations like kinship. Fourthly, neo-conservative discourses on the enemies of country (Özipek,2005) cause to the intolerant actions to differences which is an important barrier for the emerging social relations. Moreover, social control has increased by political authority in relation to this discourse. It causes much restriction on the social networks and communication. Fifthly, welfare state had been criticized by conservatives because of its negative effects on traditional social institutions like family, community or religious groups. They claimed that welfare state policies caused to increase in public costs (Hirschman,1994). Neo-cons support the existence of traditional institutions bounding individuals with community norms and relations. By neo-conservative governments, these relations are regarded as functional resources for social welfare, political stability, social order and social control. Such a social capital can be thought against the active citizenship, social movements, and participation of differences rather than social capital which consists of bridging, pluralist and participative social relations.

4. The Relation between Social Capital and Political Participation

Social capital is seen as a resource for political participation with its potentials to emerge social relations and social networks which enhance social actions. Different studies focusing on the relation between political participation and social capital evaluate the social capital as a product of social relations. They suggest that social networks are the main component of social capital and there is

a strong relation between social capital and political participation (Lake and Huckfelt,1998). Mostly, studies considering the relation between social capital and political participation focus on the works of Robert Putnam. He suggests that social relations are sources for the development of civic engagement and they improve the political participation. Putnam (1995:5; 1993:5) insists upon that decreases in the social communication are caused by the loss of activities providing interaction between people. In his book of “Bowling Alone”, Putnam claims that people improve relations, communication and interactions with each other by means of some social activities like bowling. With the end of this league, the potentials for emerging social relations have disappeared. This situation creates important restrictions on the development of social relations. His researches concentrate on realizing independent and bridging social relations rather than bonding. He claims that membership on an association or civil society organization is much more suitable than a bonding relation in the process of political participation. Because bridging social capital includes extensive identities and emerges interaction among different people in civil society organizations or other social organizations (Prakash and Selle,2004:27).

Although Putnam’s researches are the basic works in political science perspective on social capital and political participation relation, his findings does not completely coincide with this study. It has a centralist approach to the politics. In this context, it focuses on the problem of good government and researches on the providing efficient government. Neither social capital is not seen as potential for opposition to the government nor is politics regarded in terms of its social bases. Moreover, in the Putnam’s works, social capital is seen as a functional tool to realize social control and order in society (Foucault cf. Field,2006:172). Individuals are not seen as independent from the society such as a cultural subject because of their civic responsibilities. This study considers the politics in the globalization process as a participative and interactive process rather than a centralist approach. Also it considers both differences in society and their unity. Therefore, it is open to regard different social actors in political processes, it emphasis on the political character of social actions and issues, and uniqueness in the society which consists common norms and values which are products of a new political processes.

In this context of study, on the side of sociological perspective, Bourdieu and Coleman’s thoughts on social capital is mostly related to the structures of relationships and limitedly open to the evaluations by the side of political participation that see the society as a unity of people. However, they explain the features or factors of social relations which leads to individuals engage to a group

or closure feelings of them to group or community. This is important when the social groups are thought as a source of participation of differences like cultural or social groups. On the side of political perspective, in context of Putnam's approach social capital includes social communication, interaction and thinking society as a unity. His views consist of importance of bridging social relations and he has a positive understanding on the public goods. In this approach, society is thought as unity social relations and citizens are thought as responsible to act in political processes in terms of their civic virtue. Social capital is thought as a source for providing social unity and active participation of citizens. According to Lake and Huckfelt (1998), political is seen as different from social and politically relevant social capital is a form of social capital.

Conclusion

As a result of this study, it can be said that, the relation between social capital and political participation gains a new significance regarding sociological and political approaches together. Because, today neither politics can be regarded as affairs of central government nor the society can be regarded as outsider to the politics. Moreover, in terms of the views regarding the political and the social affairs in terms of multi-cultural and multi-auctorial processes, it is not possible for any social group to see itself as a hegemonic power overall the other groups or social actors. Social capital in context of the relationship between society and political interaction can be thought as a source for active political participation if it consists of social interaction, communication, independency of individuals and, participative and pluralist processes.

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