Study of Social Capital in the North and South Neighborhoods

(The Case of Sari City, Iran)

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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to find answer to this question as whether there is a difference in the social capital between the North and South urban neighborhoods. The data of the current study were collected through a questionnaire. The statistical population of this study included subjects aged 18 and above, and sample size consisted of 450 people.

The findings of this study indicated that there was a significant difference between North and

South neighborhoods of Sari, Iran, with regard to the neighborhood social capital. This means that the mean social capital in the South of city (3.58 out of 5) was higher than that of North of city (1.78 out of 5). The difference was also true for all aspects of neighborhood social capital in North and South urban neighborhoods of Sari. Furthermore, in all aspects of neighborhood social capital, the South neighborhoods had a higher mean value than North urban neighborhoods.

Keywords: social capital, trust, urban neighborhoods, neighborhood system

1. Statement of the Problem

Sociologists and social scholars have always put thinking about the city in their agenda, and they have continually taken the city and social relation changes into their consideration. Scholars like Ferdinand Tonnies (1855-1936), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Louis Wirth (1897-1,952) and Barry Wellman (1942-) have been the first and most important sociologists dealing with the issue of urban development and changes in social relations.

One of the areas within social sciences undergoing substantial changes is the social relations and social capital. In recent years, the notion of social capital has been the subject of extensive and diverse theoretical and experimental studies. In addition, its relationship with the socioeconomic development at macro level as well as with efficiency and individual accomplishment at micro level have been investigated (Tavassoli & Mousavi, 2005, p. 2).

Social capital is a feature of urban fabric and urban neighborhoods (Lindström, 2003: 1111). The notion of neighborhood is one of the most important concepts in urban space, which makes the social communications and interactions possible for people residing in a city. Increased neighborly relations in the cities reinforces and develops the urban cohesion, and consequently, reduced neighborly relations weakens the urban cohesion. Neighborhood is of the most important social units shaping and strengthening the public sphere in cities. Public sphere is an area providing the opportunity for encountering and facing each other and enhances social ties.

Neighborhood is the heart of local community and resist against the collapse resulting from privatization (Talen, 1999: 1365). Moreover, Putnam argues that, in societies with high level of social capital, the citizens feel committed to community affairs, and civic participation is one feature of these societies (Putnam, 1993: 170).

Weakened neighborhood ties and reduced social capital at neighborhood level can be expressed alongside the other urban issues. Many citizens feel fine to live in neighborhood areas or even in an apartment in which different individuals and families have nothing to do with each other and have no interaction with each other in the place they live, while this was not the case in the past.

People residing in urban districts were concerned about each other, had social relations, participated in religious ceremonies and celebrations; to sum up, they cared about each other. Aside from valuation and good or bad judgment of each one, it can be stated that urban life and neighborhood social capital is changing and developing, and the social capital developments at

neighborhood level can be easily distinguished in the cities.

Social capital has various functions at neighborhood level and meets many individuals' needs. For example, there is such a feeling in cities and neighborhoods with extensive profound neighborly relations. At times, some people living in slums (South of city) sense a kind of spiritual feeling in their neighborhood, and in practice, they are satisfied with their collective neighborhood life since they feel sympathy with each other in the cheerful and mourning occasions (Fazeli, 2013: 240-250).

Many urban problems are rooted in reduced quantity and quality of social capital at urban neighborhood level. For example, a study in the United States of America revealed that social capital is negatively correlated with the rate of violent crimes such as murder and severe assaults (Lindström, 2003: 1111). Therefore, by good knowledge and scientific study of social capital developments, social harms and problems in the city can be addressed. In addition, through the study of social capital over time, the important developments can be achieved, and a perspective can be mapped for it. Furthermore, the knowledge and awareness of social capital developments are essential for social and cultural planners to adopt social, cultural, and contextual policies.

Review of literature showed that few studies have comparatively investigated social capital in North and South urban neighborhoods. Thus, this study strived to address this research gap and examine the social capital with its dimensions in the neighborhoods of Sari. Then, it attempted to do a comparative study of social capital in North and South neighborhoods of Sari.

2. Theoretical Foundations

Of the most important theorists investigating social capital at micro level, we can refer to Nan Lin, Barry Wellman, Mark Granovetter, Ronald Burt and Harrison White. In what follows, we explore the views of Wellman, Granovetter, and White.

2.1 Barry Wellman (1942)

Wellman maintained that society and social networks formed between friends and relatives provide social supports for members of the society, and this is something beyond the reciprocal superficial and arbitrary interactions (Wellman and Wortley 1990: 559).

In his studies on the analysis of social networks, Wellman explores the society. Therefore, in a paper published in American Journal of Sociology, he deals with the existence, non-existence, or transformation of societies (Wellman, 1979). Wellman presents three models for the nature of societies (networks) including preserved society, lost or missing society and liberated society (Wellman, 1979: 1204-1206).

2.1.1 Preserved Society

Preserved society means that society exists like before, and its features have not been changed. In other words, preserved society refers to the cohesive communities existed in traditional small societies (Wellman, 1979: 1205). Advocates of this model including Herbert Gans, argue that the changes and developments happening in the modern world cannot change societies and

lead to the disintegration and rupture of individuals' relation and communication networks.

2.1.2 Lost or Missing Society

Max Weber, Karl Marx and Engels, Durkheim, Park and Wirth, and, to some extent, Tonnies believe that "*no longer society exists*". Lost society means that there is no societies as well as deep ties and relations any longer, and that only arbitrary relations exist. Advocates of this model believe that broad social changes and developments have devastated societies, and human relationships in peoples' life is nothing but impersonal relations, and loose social ties and networks.

2.1.3 Liberated Society

Many sociologists introducing themselves as proponents of postmodernity are among the supporters of this model. They argue that the societies neither have been completely destroyed nor existed as local communities present in the past. Liberated society indicates changes in social characteristics. For example, through virtual networks, people can create society. Today, individuals posses their own professional occupational communities. Individuals become member of groups who form a community based on their interests. These communities may be considerably different from traditional ones in terms of spatial dimension. In other words, it can be said that the societies no longer accept traditional boundaries and have transformed to dispersed and transboundary ones. The distinction between preserved and liberated society is that the former has spatial restrictions while it is not the case for the latter.

Among the above-mentioned three models, social network analysis approach puts emphasis on the liberated society model. Barry Wellman is, therefore, a supporter of this model of society. Network analysts are seeking to find out the impact of structural features and characteristics on individuals' norms and relationships (Wellman, 1983: 157). Wellman explains the emphasis of network theorists as follows: "Network analysts begin with the simple but efficient concept that the main task of sociology is the study of social structure. The most straightforward method for analyzing a social structure is analysis of patterns of those bonds which bind members of society together. Network analysts look for deep structures, those regular network patterns which can be often found under the surface of complex social systems. Actors and their behavior should be examined under the requirements of these structures; as such, they do not stress willful actors but structural requirement" (Ritzer, 2010: 577).

2.2 Mark Granovetter (1943)

One fundamental aspect of network analysis is that it tends to direct sociologists from studying social groups and classes to studying the ties between actors who are not so much interwoven and interdependent to be treated as a group. A good example in this area is the work of Granovetter on 'the power of loose ties'.

Granovetter differentiates between "strong ties" such as links between humans and their close friends and "weak ties" including the bonds between humans and their acquaintances. Sociologists have been more inclined to put emphasis on the strong ties between individuals and social groups. They regarded strong ties as decisive while placing little sociological

importance on weak ties. By demonstrating that weak ties can also be of great importance, Granovetter made a great contribution to sociology (Ritzer, 2010: 578-577). For example, weak ties between two actors can serve as a bridge between two groups with strong inner ties. Without such weak ties, two groups are likely to stay apart. This, in turn, can bring about a more flexible social system. An individual without weak ties finds himself detached from a strongly interwoven group and is kept unaware of what is happening in other groups and in a broader community (Kameli et al., 2009: 167). Therefore, one advantage of weak ties for individuals is that it prevents them from seclusion and permits members of the group to be better merged in a broader society. Although Granovetter stressed the significance of weak ties, he immediately asserts that "strong ties are not also valueless." For example, people with strong ties are further motivated to cooperate with each other and can better assist each other (Ritzer, 2010: 578).

Granovetter's theory of weak ties is, to a great extent, a strong theory and is based on the assumption that local bridges and weak ties not only display opportunities for incidence of cohesive phenomena and situations but also propagate them (Granovetter, 1983: 219).

People with restricted weak relationships will be deprived of information derived from distant social systems and rely solely on the information from their close friends. Such deprivations not only divest them from useful information and social relation networks, but also put them in a situation deprived of occupation (Granovetter, 1983: 202). In his doctoral thesis entitled 'job -seeking', Granovetter has investigated social networks and their role in job-seeking.

Analysis of social networks has been proposed as a tool for establishing communication between micro and macro levels of sociology theories (Granovetter, 1973: 1360). Granovetter is, therefore, of the belief that micro interactions (interpersonal networks and powers) can be attached to broader social phenomena. Thus, by using social networks and relations. individuals can find suitable job opportunities and create mobility in their social status (social mobility).

3. Main Hypothesis

- The mean neighborhood social capital is different between North and South neighborhoods of Sari.

3.1 Sub-Hypotheses

- Average trust is different between North and South neighborhoods of Sari.
- Average intimate relation is different between North and South neighborhoods of Sari.
- Average religious participation is different between North and South neighborhoods of Sari.
- Average neighborhood participation is different between North and South neighborhoods of Sari.
- Average cooperation is different between North and South neighborhoods of Sari.

4. Methodology

The study is a cross-sectional survey, and the rationale for choosing this approach lies in its

specific characteristics. It allows the researcher to collect the required data in a short period of time, it's measurement degree is precise, it can be generalized to a larger population, and it enjoys a limited likelihood of error.

The statistical population of this study included all individuals over 18 residing in Sari. Multi-stage cluster sampling based on the sample size was applied in the current study. This means that four quarters were randomly selected among Northern and Southern quarters of Sari. Then, four neighborhoods were selected from among the different neighborhoods situated in these quarters. Finally, the sample size was estimated according to PASS (note 1) software, and 418 samples were estimated. The sample size was raised to 450 to reduce the error resulting from sampling and the likelihood that some questioners may be incomplete. In addition, amongst the data gathering techniques, the most widely used technique, i.e., questionnaire along with interview was employed.

5. Introduction of Variables and Indicators

5.1 Operational Definition of Social Capital

In this study, in order to measure social capital, such dimensions as trust, intimate relations, religious participation, neighborhood participation, and cooperation have been utilized, the operationalization of which is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Operational definition of social capital

Variable	Dimension	Statements
Neighborhood social capital	*Trust*	Neighborhood members are trustworthy, we should trust people provided that we do not see their bad behavior, for example, trust in neighbors and local shopkeepers, reminding your neighbor of keeping an eye on your house before traveling.
	intimate relations	Sense of friendship with neighbors, sense of intimacy with neighbors, intimate relationship between your family and neighbors, going to neighbor's home to attend the party, counseling on different issues with your neighbors, paying a visit to your neighbors when they are sick.
	Religious participation	Attending the mourning ceremonies or celebrations of neighbors, participating in congregational prayer at a neighborhood mosque, participating in Komayl, Tavasol, or Nodbe prayers in the neighborhood and between neighbors, attending the Quran sessions in the neighborhood, participating in Ghadr Night ceremony, participating in Eid al-Fitr prayer at neighborhood mosque, attending Tasua and Ashura ceremonies, participating in Fatemiyeh-day ritual, participating in the first ten days of Muharram rituals.
	Neighborhood participation	Taking part in neighborhood decision-makings, sense of duty to solve the neighborhood problems, participating in solving the neighborhood problems, taking part in the group work carried out in the neighborhood.
	partnership	Asking for help from neighbors in the case of disease, sharing one's problems and difficulties with neighbors to seek their help, accepting your neighbor's request of financial assistance, borrowing from neighbors if you lack any appliance at home.

5.2 Reliability and Validity

Validity refers to different errors present in the measurement tools; that is, the errors stemming from one observation to another for an analysis tool and two or more measurements with a measuring tool making slightly diverse results. This kind of error emanates from the measurement tools (Frankfort & Nachmias, 2002: 242). There are several well-established techniques to test the reliability of the indicators; in the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed, the results of which are presented in Table 2. Furthermore, the validity of this study is based on the face validity.

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha coefficient

Variable	major dimensions	number of items	Cronbach's alpha	
	trust	5	0/932	0/975
	Intimate relations	6	0/933	
Neighborhood social capital	Religious participation	9	0/850	
	Neighborhood participation	4	0/917	
	cooperation	4	0/924	

6. Findings

6.1 The Status of Social Capital Dimensions in the South of City

Table 3. Percentage distribution of respondents in South of city in terms of social capital

Dimensions	Very low	Low	Average	High	Extremely high	Mean	SD
Neighborhood participation	0.0	0.0	23.6	49.8	26.7	4.03	0.71
Cooperation	0.0	0.0	37.3	45.8	16.9	3.79	0.71
Intimate relations	0.0	0.0	36.4	55.1	8.4	3.72	0.61
Trust	0.0	0.0	43.1	46.7	10.2	3.67	0.65
Religious participation	0.0	0.9	56.9	40.4	1.8	3.43	0.54

6.2 The Status of Social Capital Dimensions in the North of City

According to the mean value of neighborhood social capital dimensions, it can be inferred that the dimensions are placed from the highest to the lowest level of importance in Northern neighborhoods as demonstrated in the Table 4. Based on the data in this table, the highest average belongs to religious participation (1.81%), and, in contrast, the lowest average is dedicated to trust (1.34%). In addition, intimate relations of 59.1% of respondents are very low, 32% of respondents is low, and 8.9% is average. The mean of the degree of intimate relations is 1.49 % out of 5, which is estimated as very low. The mean of neighborhood participation is also evaluated as very low (1.47 %); as such, neighborhood participation of 63.1% of individuals is very low, 26.7% is low and 10.2% is average. Moreover, the extent of cooperation in 68.9 % of

individuals is very low, in 20.4% is low, and in 10.7% of respondents is average. The mean of cooperation was 1.41 % out of 5, which is evaluated as very low. It should also be further stated f that none of the neighborhood social capital dimensions is high and extremely high among respondents in the North of city.

Table 4. Percentage distribution of respondents in North of city in terms of social capital

Dimensions	Very low	Low	Average	High	Extremely high	Mean	SD
Religious participation	24.9	68.4	6.7	0.0	0.0	1.81	0.53
Intimate relations	59.1	32.0	8.9	0.0	0.0	1.49	0.65
Neighborhood participation	63.1	26.7	10.2	0.0	0.0	1.47	0.67
cooperation	68.9	20.4	10.7	0.0	0.0	1.41	0.68
Trust	72.9	20.0	7.1	0.0	0.0	1.34	0.61

6.3 Social Capital Status in the North and South of City

According to the Table 5, distribution of social capital of respondents inhabiting in South neighborhoods of city is estimated as high (3.44%). In contrast, social capital in North neighborhoods of city is low l (1.78%). The highest frequency in the North and South urban neighborhoods is low and average, respectively. Accordingly, the neighborhood social capital of 71.1% of respondents in North neighborhoods is low, and 58.2% of respondents in South neighborhoods keep an average degree of neighborhood social capital. Neighborhood social capital of 25.3% and 3.6% of respondents in the North of city is very low and average, respectively. Moreover, neighborhood social capital of 39.1% and 2.7% of individuals in South of the city is high and extremely high, respectively.

Table 5. Social Capital status of Total Respondents in Terms of Urban Neighborhoods

Social capital in North urban neighborhoods	Number	Percent valid	Social capital in South urban neighborhoods	Number	Percent valid
Very Low	57	25.3	Very low	0	0.0
Low	160	71.1	low	0	0.0
Medium	8	3.6	Medium	131	58.2
High	0	0.0	High	88	39.1
Extremely High	0	0.0	Extremely high	6	2.7
Sum	225	100	Sum	225	100
Mean		1.78	Mean		3.44
SD		0.49	SD		0.54

6.4 Comparison of Social Capital Dimensions in the North and South Urban Districs

Table 6 indicates the comparison of respondents' social capital dimensions in terms of residence area. The results of *t-* test suggest that there is a difference in the mean dimensions of neighborhood social capital in the North and South urban neighborhoods, and based on the significance level, the observed differences are statistically significant. In all aspects of neighborhood social capital, South neighborhoods show a greater mean value than North urban neighborhoods.

Table 6. Comparison of dimensions of neighborhood social capital in terms of urban neighborhoods

Variable	Urban district	Number	Mean	T	sig
Trust	North	225	1.65	-40.833	0.000
	South	225	3.66		
Intimate relations	North	225	1.69	-42.534	0.000
	South	225	3.62		
Religious participation	North	225	2.08	-38.308	0.000
	South	225	3.36		
Neighborhood participation	North	225	1.72	-38.499	0.000
	South	225	3.78		
cooperation	North	225	1.63	-37.354	0.000
	South	225	3.62		
Total social capital	North	225	1.78	-56.438	0.000
	South	225	3.58		

6.5 Analysis of Variance of Neighborhood Social Capital Dimensions in North and South Urban Neighborhoods in Terms of Gender

Table 7 represents the mean difference of social capital in the North and South urban neighborhoods based on the gender. The findings reveal that religious participation in North and South urban neighborhoods is not significantly different between men and women. However, the mean of trust, intimate relationships, neighborhood participation, and cooperation is different between men and women in North and South urban neighborhoods. With respect to the significance level of each dimension, it can be said that this difference is statistically significant, while there is not a difference in the mean of each of the above dimensions between men and women in Southern urban neighborhoods. Additionally, neighborhood social capital is not significantly different between men and women in Southern urban neighborhood, but neighborhood social capital is different between man and women in Northern urban neighborhoods. In all dimensions with significant difference, women demonstrated a greater mean than men.

Table 7. Analysis of variance of neighborhood social capital in North and South urban neighborhoods in terms of gender

Variable	Urban area	Gender	Number	mean	T	sig
Trust	North	Male	116	1.46	31.693	0.000
		Female	109	1.85		
	South	Male	112	3.66	0.004	0.949
		Female	113	3.65		
Intimate relations	North	Male	116	1.47	50.212	0.000
		Female	109	1.92		
	South	Male	112	3.60	0.261	0.610
		Female	113	3.63		
Religious participation	North	Male	116	2.07	0.110	0.741
		Female	109	2.09		
	South	Male	112	3.39	1.985	0.160
		Female	113	3.32		
Neighborhood participation	North	Male	116	1.52	30.381	0.000
		Female	109	1.94		
	South	Male	112	3.79	0.005	0.947
		Female	113	3.78		
Partnership	North	Male	116	1.39	43.163	0.000
		Female	109	1.88		
	South	Male	112	3.56	2.729	0.100
		Female	113	3.67		
Total social capital	North	Male	116	1.63	43.751	0.000
		Female	109	1.94		
	South	Male	112	3.58	0.000	0.985
		Female	113	3.59		

6.6 Correlation Coefficient Test Between Neighborhood Social Capital and Personal Information

Table 8 displays the correlation coefficient between neighborhood social capital dimensions and demographic information of respondents. The results of Pearson's test indicate that there is a significant correlation between all dimensions of neighborhood social capital and education, period of residence, and respondents' age. Among these three mentioned variables, education level of respondents has a negative relationship with different dimensions of neighborhood social capital, but period of residence and age have a positive correlation with neighborhood social capital dimensions. Furthermore, the lowest correlation belongs to the age and dimensions of neighborhood social capital.

Table 8. Correlation coefficient test between neighborhood social capital and demographic information

variable		Pearson correlation coefficient	Significance level
Trust	Education	-0.238	0.000
	Period of residence	0.447	0.000
	Age	0.151	0.000
Intimate relations	Education	-0.234	0.000
	Period of residence	0.435	0.000
	Age	0.132	0.005
Religious participation	Education	-0.276	0.000
	Period of residence	0.413	0.000
	Age	0.120	0.011
Neighborhood participation	Education	-0.252	0.000
	Period of residence	0.441	0.000
	Age	0.131	0.006
cooperation	Education	-0.240	0.000
	Period of residence	0.420	0.000
	Age	0.136	0.004
Total social capital	Education	-0.255	0.000
	Period of residence	0.441	0.000
	Age	0.142	0.002

7. Conclusion

The findings of the present study suggested that there was a significant difference between neighborhood social capital in North and South of Sari.

Given the severe erosion of neighborhood social capital in North of Sari, the public sectors including district municipalities, municipal departments, and neighborhood councils should try to increase neighborhood social capital of residents in North of Sari by planning and preparing a formulated schedule in short-, medium-, and long-term.

Enhancing social capital in the community has such positive outcomes as decreasing the cost of achieving the common objectives, facilitating social interaction and collective actions, enhancing social participations, increasing the degree of social trust, establishing strong and cohesive social ties between members of society, improving the mental and physical health of community members, increasing social control and relative decline of social deviations, and so on. In addition, many urban problems are rooted in the reduced quantity and quality of social capital at urban neighborhood level (Lindström, 2003: 1111). Therefore, with respect to whatever was mentioned, we can find out the importance of high levels of social capital in the urban neighborhoods.

One of the key institutions contributing substantially to the increase of neighborhood social capital is neighborhood House. In the neighborhood houses, different fields are taught at diverse levels. Through careful planning, these houses can help to enhance the amount of neighborhood social capital. With an increase in the neighborhood social capital, the number of problems present in urban neighborhoods will be diminished and eliminated in the most optimistic case.

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Notes

Note 1. Power Analysis & Sample Size.

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