



Social Capital as A Factor of Social Cohesion Introduction

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.47134/emergent.v7i3.85>

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Received: 14-02-2026

Accepted: 14-03-2026

Published: 14-04-2026



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Abstract: This article provides a socio-philosophical analysis of the role and significance of social capital in ensuring social cohesion within society. The study examines the mechanisms of social capital formation in the context of socio-economic and political reforms being implemented in New Uzbekistan, highlighting its role in fostering social trust, cooperation, and civic engagement. The main components of social capital – social networks, norms and values, mutual trust, and solidarity relations – are considered as key factors that strengthen social stability and social cohesion. The article also analyzes the factors influencing the development of social capital under conditions of globalization and social transformations, and proposes scientific and practical conclusions aimed at reinforcing it. The research findings are of significant importance for strengthening social cohesion, developing civil society, and ensuring sustainable social development.

Keywords: Social Capital, Social Cohesion, Social Trust, Civil Society, Sustainable Development

Introduction

In the context of contemporary globalization and social transformations, ensuring social stability, strengthening social cohesion, and expanding active civic participation have become issues of particular relevance. Especially at the current stage of New Uzbekistan's development, the role of social capital deserves special attention in implementing the principles of a social state, enhancing an environment of trust within society, and shaping the foundations of sustainable development.

In modern socio-philosophical and sociological studies, the concept of social capital is interpreted as a key factor that determines the effectiveness of social relations through mutual trust among members of society, social networks, cooperation, and systems of norms and values. This type of capital is significant not only for economic development but also for ensuring social cohesion, strengthening the principles of social equality and justice, and promoting societal solidarity. Therefore, there is a growing need for a scientific analysis of social capital as one of the fundamental factors of social cohesion.

The large-scale socio-economic and political reforms being implemented in New Uzbekistan are aimed at increasing civic engagement, strengthening cooperation among social institutions, and reinforcing trust between the state and society. In this process, the role of the mahalla, family, educational institutions, non-governmental non-profit organizations, and other social institutions is steadily increasing. Through the activities of

these institutions, various forms of social capital are formed, contributing to the development of solidarity and cohesion within society.

At the same time, under conditions of globalization, informatization, and cultural transformations, negative trends such as the weakening of social capital, the decline of social trust, and the intensification of individualism can also be observed. These challenges necessitate a reconsideration of the mechanisms for ensuring social cohesion and the search for effective ways to develop and strengthen social capital.

This article analyzes social capital as a factor of social cohesion from a socio-philosophical perspective and reveals its role in ensuring social stability and social development in the context of New Uzbekistan. The research findings are of significant scientific and practical importance for strengthening social cohesion, developing civil society, and formulating strategies for sustainable social development.

Literature Review

The study of the theoretical and practical aspects of social capital is regarded as one of the key research areas in contemporary socio-philosophical and sociological scholarship. Due to the relative novelty of this concept, its multidimensional content, and its interdisciplinary nature, social capital has remained at the center of attention of researchers across different regions of the world. In modern academic literature, social capital is interpreted as an important factor ensuring social cohesion through mutual trust among members of society, social networks, cooperation, and systems of values and norms.

In the concepts developed by Western scholars, social capital is explained in close connection with the quality of social relations between individuals and groups, the level of trust, and the stability of social norms. In particular, P. Bourdieu defines social capital as access to and possession of social networks and the resources embedded within them, while J. Coleman evaluates it as a resource that regulates social relations within society. F. Fukuyama, in turn, emphasizes the level of social trust as a fundamental factor ensuring social stability and social cohesion.

The role of social capital in ensuring social stability has also been widely examined in the studies of scholars from Russia and CIS countries. In the works of S. Ponomar, S. Yegorova, A. Kiykov, A. Konkov, and O. Polyakova, social capital is analyzed as a social resource closely linked to political processes, local governance, and economic development [4; 5; 6; 7; 8]. These studies particularly highlight the importance of social capital in fostering social cohesion and enhancing civic engagement.

The category of trust, as a core component of social capital, and its role in strengthening solidarity relations in society has been substantiated from a socio-philosophical perspective by E. Bondar, M. Melanin, and other researchers. Meanwhile, the transformation of social capital under conditions of globalization and its impact on social relations have been explored in the studies of I. E. Diskin, V. V. Radaev, V. Stepanenko, L. V. Strelnikova, N. N. Lebedeva, and O. A. Lomovtseva.

In recent years, the issue of social capital has also become an important object of academic research in Uzbekistan. The works of Q. Abdurahmonov, J. Ataniyazov, T. Jalilov,

D. Rahmonov, and B. Usmonov analyze the role of social capital in socio-economic development. The sociological and socio-philosophical aspects of social capital and human capital have been examined in the studies of M. Sodirjonov, X. Akramov, E. Abdullayev, F. Qosimov, and M. Muxammedov.

In the post-independence period, particularly in the context of New Uzbekistan, the role of social capital in ensuring national cohesion and social stability has been analyzed from socio-philosophical and political perspectives by M. Norqobilov, S. Saidov, and D. Ernazarov. These studies provide a scholarly justification of social capital as a key factor in the sustainable development of society.

Methodology

This article aims to identify the role and significance of social capital in ensuring social cohesion and to analyze its impact on the sustainable development of society in the context of New Uzbekistan from a socio-philosophical perspective. In the course of the study, a comprehensive methodology based on an interdisciplinary approach was applied.

Socio-philosophical, sociological, and political analysis methods were used in an integrated manner. Within the framework of theoretical analysis, the scholarly views of foreign and domestic researchers on the concepts of social capital, social cohesion, trust, civil society, and social stability were systematically examined and synthesized. This approach made it possible to reveal the essence of the phenomenon of social capital in greater depth.

Using the methods of analysis and synthesis, the structural elements of social capital – such as social trust, social networks, cooperation, values, and norms – were examined separately, and their interrelations as well as their role in shaping social cohesion were clarified. The comparative analysis method was employed to compare the manifestations of social capital across different societies and historical periods, thereby identifying the specific features of social capital in the context of New Uzbekistan.

Based on a structural-functional approach, the functions of social capital in ensuring social stability were analyzed. This approach enabled social capital to be considered as an important institutional resource of the social system. In addition, the principles of historicity and continuity were applied to analyze consistently the stages of formation and development of social capital.

During the empirical analysis, general conclusions were drawn on the basis of existing statistical data, official documents, research findings, and normative legal sources. Throughout the study, the principles of logical consistency, systematic analysis, and objectivity were strictly observed.

This methodological framework made it possible to provide a scientifically grounded explanation of the role of social capital in strengthening social cohesion and its impact on the sustainable development of society, as well as to formulate conceptual conclusions and practical recommendations within the scope of the research topic.

Result and Discussion

Globalization processes are reflected not only in specific economic practices but also in traditional systems of values at the micro, macro, and mega levels, thereby exerting a

significant influence on the formation of national identity. The analysis shows that language, culture, and the economy – core elements that constitute the national distinctiveness of any state – are undergoing the most profound transformational changes. Therefore, special attention should be paid to developing a system of measures aimed at institutionally regulating the impact of globalization and creating protective mechanisms to preserve the most vulnerable aspects of national identity.

In the course of this study, the prospects and contemporary trends of social capital development were examined within the framework of the “family–mahalla–education–development” context. Ensuring that New Uzbekistan joins the ranks of developed democratic states with stable socio-economic growth and a high level of human capital constitutes the essence and core objective of the national strategy for sustainable development.

In recent years, numerous reforms have been implemented in Uzbekistan to promote state development and improve social life. Notably, on April 30, 2023, a nationwide referendum was held to adopt amendments to the Constitution. The very first article of the revised Constitution indicates the growing need for social capital in modern Uzbek society, defining Uzbekistan as a sovereign, democratic, legal, social, and secular state with a republican form of governance. This reflects the country’s commitment to comprehensive transformation, one of the key priorities of which is the construction of a social state. If society is to be built on the principles of a social state, it necessarily requires social capital, as the foundations of a social state are largely constituted by the segments of social capital. As noted, “the state has a clear objective to encompass the social structure of society, social groups, social institutions, and human social relations – in short, all spheres of social life – by prioritizing their interests and acting accordingly”.

Within a social state, the future directions of social capital are expressed through the following key dimensions:

Supporting socially vulnerable segments of the population in need of social protection;

Developing and encouraging the activities of charitable organizations;

Ensuring employment and creating new jobs;

Protecting the institution of the family, motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood, and providing assistance to them;

Providing citizens with decent incomes and wages;

Creating favorable conditions for free and high-quality education;

Improving the level of healthcare and strengthening public health.

All of the above contribute to fostering relations of solidarity within society, enhancing cooperation among social strata, implementing the principle of social justice, and encouraging activity based on diligence and patriotism. Strengthening social capital among the younger generation is not only of great importance for their future lives but also enables them to find their place in society, adapt to rapidly changing conditions, and maintain emotional well-being.

In this regard, the American sociologist James Coleman expresses the following view: “By social capital in child upbringing, I mean the norms, social ties, and relationships between adults and children that are important for a child’s development. Social capital exists not only within the family but also beyond it”. As is well known, the family constitutes the primary unit of any society. It is the first and most important agent of socialization, and its role in human development is invaluable. All social relationships begin within the family, and fundamental values are first internalized there, later manifesting themselves in the formation of a mature individual.

In essence, all positive qualities – such as benevolence, solidarity, and mutual assistance – originate in the family. The time and trust that parents devote to their children represent one of the most important forms of social capital. Among young people, certain values accumulate and contribute to the formation of shared values. The presence of common values, in turn, improves relationships among individuals. Expanding social ties – not only among peers but also within new communities or groups – fostering mutual support, striving to establish stable positive relationships, and respecting shared values play a crucial role in young people’s career choices and their ability to find their place in society.

Since the 1970s, developed democratic states have placed significant emphasis on institutions of self-governance in defining their paths of development. Even today, within civil society, self-governing bodies play an essential role in analyzing the lifestyles of populations within administrative-territorial units, addressing social differences, adopting innovative ideas, closely examining events occurring within local communities, and enabling citizens to express independent civic positions.

According to researcher G. Malikova, “the mahalla has always struggled to survive like a living organism. It has consistently adapted to difficult conditions. For this reason, it has shaped the daily lifestyle of the people, created systems of social relations, moral norms, and rules, and, possessing deep historical roots, functions as a coherent moral system based on mutual assistance, hospitality, respect for elders, and the principle of equal rights for all members of society”.

Undoubtedly, the mahalla serves as an important socio-cultural factor in the formation and development of social capital. Historically, families have sought to resolve the outcomes and challenges arising from their social relations primarily through the mahalla. By fostering social solidarity, cohesion, tolerance, friendship, closeness, and mutual support, the mahalla has continuously functioned as a socio-cultural mechanism.

Attention should be given to the quality and development of social capital within mahallas in our society. For example, the long-standing tradition that “houses in Uzbek mahallas are not locked” serves as evidence of social trust. Being aware of ill neighbors and offering charity to those in need also exemplify social capital. Recalling scenes involving locked gates in Abdulla Qahhor’s short story “The Thief” or the film “Suyunchi” vividly demonstrates the strength of trust in Uzbek society.

The conducted research indicates that as equality of opportunities declines, problems related to access to education, employment in one’s field of specialization, and fear of losing existing jobs are becoming increasingly acute among young people. Due to the mismatch

between labor market demands and the specializations in which higher education institutions currently train graduates, issues related to youth employment are intensifying.

The education system, like social capital, can be viewed from two perspectives: as a resource for the individual and as a collective asset for society as a whole. "At the individual level, education, like social capital, is a personal benefit. As social interactions expand and rise to the level of a social group or society, both education and social capital acquire the characteristics of public goods. Therefore, both education and social capital are of great importance".

In recent years, the life orientations and aspirations of the younger generation have changed significantly. Modern Uzbek youth consider the "desire to do interesting work" as one of their core values. Goals such as "earning money" and "acquiring extensive knowledge" are not ends in themselves for young people, but rather serve as means for achieving their primary life plans – namely, "finding employment" and "creating a good family."

Social capital can play a decisive role in improving educational outcomes. At the stages of preschool, secondary, and higher education, relationships "from family to mentor" develop effectively on the basis of accumulated positive social capital. In this context, social capital functions as an important mechanism for achieving educational success. By fostering positive social relations, it also serves as a key resource for enhancing the effectiveness of exchange programs and other forms of educational cooperation.

Furthermore, the ability of pupils and students to unite into stable groups in order to address shared problems and tasks through social capital is of great importance. First and foremost, trust between students and teachers, as well as an understanding of collectively accepted methods and norms for jointly resolving educational and developmental challenges, is essential. In developing social capital in education, moving beyond "entropy" toward intensive and inclusive cooperation within groups enhances social solidarity and cohesion, while also promoting contemporary social capital functions such as regulatory, integrative, socializing, and communicative roles.

A social state is a model of governance aimed at providing high-quality education, qualified medical care, comprehensive support for families, children, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, ensuring housing for those in need, guaranteeing employment, creating safe working conditions, and reducing poverty.

Protection against unemployment, guaranteed access to quality education, provision of qualified healthcare, and comprehensive support for children, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, migrants, and their family members remain among the permanent priorities of state policy. The fact that a significant portion of the state budget is allocated to these areas serves as practical evidence of this approach.

Placing special emphasis on solidarity in the education and upbringing of young people and developing their innovative skills from an early age is crucial for their future success. As a social being, an individual cannot function without cooperation under any circumstances. Therefore, collective actions, interpersonal relations, and social interactions play a vital role at every stage of life. By creating opportunities for young people and

strengthening their solidarity, it is possible to enhance national potential and overall social well-being. For this reason, the development of human capital is regarded as a primary task for any state that seeks sustainable development.

In the interaction between social capital and the social state, the following assumptions contribute to societal development:

privatization of public property and liberalization of social services;

expansion of private sector participation in healthcare;

increasing competitiveness with non-governmental organizations in education reforms;

applying the experience of democratic states in public administration and delegating high-level authority to lower-level officials;

improving the system of self-governance institutions and strengthening the family as its core element.

“Social capital, in ensuring social development, primarily facilitates the comprehensive development of individuals. Improving social life and increasing mutual trust among people reflect the productivity of social capital, manifested in high levels of social solidarity”. Today, effective management and development of human resources on a global scale serve as one of the key determinants of national development. This not only ensures sustainable growth but also plays an important role in shaping a competitive environment. Alongside human capital, social capital has become one of the most significant forms of capital in national development.

At present, the primary goal of any state is, first and foremost, to improve the living standards of its citizens. Enhancing the role and significance of social capital makes it possible to objectively assess economic growth rates, analyze inflation levels, and develop scientific forecasts aimed at preventing potential future challenges, as well as to increase the economic importance of small businesses and private entrepreneurship. In addition, the influence of various forms of social capital – including horizontal ties, trust, social norms, and values – is subject to analytical consideration.

It should be noted that social capital is a highly multidimensional concept. There is neither a single universally accepted definition nor a unified system for measuring and evaluating it, which consistently creates methodological challenges for researchers.

As a rule, sociological survey data are used to measure the level of social capital. Systematic data collection in this area is currently carried out through large-scale international projects such as the European Values Study (EVS), the World Values Survey (WVS), and the European Social Survey (ESS) (Table 1).

Conclusion

The conducted research demonstrates that in countries with a high level of social capital, all major spheres of society – economic, social, and political – tend to be significantly more developed compared to those in other countries. In such states, indicators such as gross national product, gross domestic product, and the average income of citizens are also notably higher. Conversely, countries with low levels of social capital are often observed to

be lagging behind in many areas and, in some cases, gradually transforming into third-world countries.

An analysis of attitudes toward values in countries where social capital constitutes a strong foundation reveals that societies with higher levels of social capital are characterized by strong family ties, stable interpersonal relations, the significant role of religion in social life, consistent and well-established relations between citizens, society, and the state, as well as pronounced feelings of national pride and dignity. In such societies, rates of euthanasia and suicide are comparatively low. In contrast, in states where the role of social capital is weak or insufficiently visible, negative consequences become increasingly apparent. These include high levels of corruption, poorly regulated relations between the state and citizens, growing public distrust, and the erosion of national values.

Over many years, analyses of social capital in different countries have made it possible to highlight both their positive and negative characteristics. The conclusions drawn from these studies aim to identify the key catalysts of social development, improve the quality of social life, and assess socio-political and cultural-educational factors that influence citizens' standards of living.

Social norms and values play a crucial role in ensuring human and societal well-being through social capital. The interpretation and assessment of social capital can be carried out on the basis of the following functions:

Tolerance function – uniting citizens of society on the basis of ideas of tolerance and fostering a worldview grounded in trust;

Information function, which is increasingly regarded as a key force today – shaping a culture of transmitting, storing, and accessing information;

Educational function – preserving moral relations within society and facilitating the transformation of contemporary ethical values;

Social control function through universally shared social norms – regulating social behavior and strengthening the role of non-governmental organizations, groups, and associations;

Identification function – creating opportunities for choice, particularly within youth communities, by supporting multiple forms of identity such as professional, ethnic, religious, age-based, and others;

Social support function – facilitating assistance and simplifying the exchange of resources among multiple identities and group members;

Creative function – ensuring unity in action and fostering collective activity.

In sum, social capital emerges as a multidimensional phenomenon that plays a decisive role in promoting social cohesion, strengthening societal stability, and supporting sustainable development. Its effective formation and utilization remain among the most important conditions for improving the quality of life and ensuring long-term social progress.

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