

# Översikter och meddelanden

## Social Capital and Civic Culture: An Approach to the Thinking of Robert D. Putnam

### Civic Culture, Liberal Individualism and Robert D Putnam

Social capital has become a popular concept in the civic/political culture debate. The extensive literature in the field of political culture has often emphasized the individual autonomy and the independence of modern man in relation to other free and autonomous individuals. In the ideal society, the social structures that the individual becomes a part of are considered as a consequence of a free choice guided by the individual's effort to realize his/her own personal aims (Milner 1990, p. 52). An important effort in such a society must e.g. be to increase the educational level, because this would increase the individual's opportunities to choose and mould his/her own life and social network according to his/her own expectations and taste (Wilensky 1975, p. 3).

The liberal and individualistic standpoint is of course not objective or free of ideological content. The ideal society of this literature is mainly represented by the civic culture of Anglo-saxon countries, e.g. the United Kingdom and the United States, in the same way as the literature in itself is mostly of Anglo-saxon origin. The prerequisites for the appearance of a civic culture in England was the liberation from the catholic church, the by this act acquired cultural pluralism, and the appearance of a new strong mercantile class that was independent in relation to the aristocracy. According to Almond and Verba, the appearance of the "civic culture" in England was not a break with tradition. In Almond and Verbas view, the old and the new is

instead all the time united in an endless process of change (Almond, Verba 1989, p. 5).

What kind of new values are the objective according to important parts of the civic culture literature, and what kind of values have been attained so far? The answers to especially the second question seems to widely differ. According to Inglehart, particularly the younger generations are often said to have developed a new set of values throughout the latest three decades permeated by non-materialistic, internationalistic and altruistic thinking, in contrast to the materialistic values of former generations (Inglehart 1990, p. 66). Other authors like e.g. Bo Reimer have, however, opposed these conclusions, because many investigations concerning attitudes have shown a general decrease of all sorts of values among the young. According to Reimer, there has been a decline of both materialistic and non-materialistic values. The younger generations can rather be characterized by an increasing lack of all types of values (Reimer 1988, pp. 347ff.).

The aim of the literature has been to impose the individualistic civic culture society, despite different signs of dissolution of both traditional and more modern values as the basis for functioning social networks and social relations. In the beginning of this century, Oswald Spengler called this change-oriented, restlessly individual-centred and imperialistic attitude "ethical socialism". According to Spengler, "ethical socialism" is guilty of a high degree of double standard of morality:

Ethical socialism is- despite its illusions in the foreground- not a system of compassion, peace and care, but of the desire for power. The other is self-deception. The aim is totally imperialistic: welfare, but in an expansive sense, not for the sick, but for the energetic, who must be given the freedom to act, and this by the means of violence, without the obstruction

of ownership, ancestry or tradition. Morals based on sentiment, "happiness" or utility have never been the deepest human instinct, even if the persons with such instincts try to persuade themselves that they are (Spengler 1996, p. 375f.).

In fact, the individualistic liberal standpoint has in some cases been taken for granted to the extent that no other theories than different liberal theories have been considered to deserve a priori attention. E.g. Mill, Rawls and Nozick have been compared to each other without reference to any other ideologies or theories than the liberal (see e.g. Slaug, 1996, pp. 147-151).

Robert D Putnam's book "Making Democracy Work" (1993), addresses typical empirical research problems in the tradition of the civic culture literature. Italian society in the period 1970-1990 is analysed in the setting of a reform that implemented regional governments and a high extent of regional independence in the twenty Italian regions in the beginning of the 1970s. Italy had formerly been a highly centralistic state. The study of the reform and its effects highlighted historically inherited differences between the north and the south of Italy. While the regional governments of the north worked in a highly developed and modern social and economic environment, the regional governments of the south had to try to implement their policies in a social and economic environment that was much less developed and highly traditional. Consequently, the same regional reform led to very different results in terms of policy outcome and citizen participation in different parts of the country. Putnam concludes that the south is caught in a political culture that hamper the process of modernisation. The reason for this, according to Putnam, seems to be that the political, economic and social system of the south is authoritarian characterised by vertical power relations, which results in a state of dependence and passivity for the ordinary citizens. In contrast, the system of the north is characterized by interpersonal trust, generalised reciprocity, a rich variety of networks of social participation, and equality of power and influence between citizens, i.e. horizontal power relations. These

characteristics of the north represent different aspects of social capital, according to Putnam.

This article first describes Putnam's definition of social capital, and his interpretation of how social capital works and becomes historically inherited. However, certain aspects of social capital are highly incompatible with the liberal individualistic standpoint of important parts of the civic culture literature. In the second section of the article, I will illustrate and discuss Robert D. Putnam's solution to this problem, which he deals with by using the dichotomy liberal individualism versus republicanism. According to Putnam, a high degree of social capital (generalised reciprocity, social networks that enhance networks of civic engagement- social participation, equality and trust) is the prerequisite for an economically and socially well-functioning society. In a third step, however, this article also discusses the shortcomings of this dichotomy and demonstrates some of the very sensitive preconditions that are required to be able to attain Putnam's republican ideal. The reason seems to be the intermediate status of republicanism between the extreme liberal standpoint of autonomous individuals and the extreme traditional standpoint with almost no room for individuality at all.

### Social Capital: the Concept and its Components

The key concept of Putnam's work is social capital. Social capital is created when the relations among persons change in ways that facilitate social interaction, social participation and cooperation:

Physical capital is wholly tangible, being embodied in observable material form; human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual; social capital is even less tangible, for it is embodied in the *relations* among persons (Coleman 1990, p. 304).

Putnam analyses a society in northern Italy that is permeated by high levels of social capital. But why is social capital so scarce in southern Italy? Why are not all societies characterised by mu-

tual understanding and cooperation? Failure to cooperate for mutual benefit does not necessarily imply ignorance or irrationality. Putnam discusses how several games of the Public Choice theory end up with solutions that are rational for each of the individuals, but suboptimal for the individuals as a collective or as a society.

In the *tragedy of the commons*, no herder can limit grazing by anyone else's flock. If he limits his own use of the common meadow, he alone loses. Yet unlimited grazing destroys the common resource on which the livelihood of all depends. A *public good*, such as clean air or safe neighborhoods, can be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of whether he contributes to its provision. Under ordinary circumstances, therefore, no one has an incentive to contribute to providing the public good, and too little is produced, causing all to suffer. In the dismal *logic of collective action*, every worker would benefit if all struck simultaneously, but whoever raises the strike banner risks the betrayal by a well-rewarded scab, so everyone waits, hoping to benefit from someone else's foolhardiness. In the *prisoner's dilemma*, a pair of accomplices is held incommunicado, and each is told that if he alone implicates his partner, he will escape scotfree, but if he remains silent, while his partner confesses, he will be punished especially severely. If both remained silent, both would be let off lightly, but unable to coordinate their stories, each is better off squealing, *no matter what the other does* (Putnam, 1993, pp. 163-164; see also McLean, 1987).

In all these games, everyone loses by acting only as egoistic individuals. However, the game theory also suggests that cooperation would be enhanced if players were engaged in many repeated games, since this would make possible the use of experience and consequently the punishment of defectors (Putnam, 1993, p. 166). According to Putnam, a high degree of social capital is needed in society to be able to achieve such repeated situations that would identify defectors and punish them.

The definition of social capital implies that this concept covers a much wider set of laws and rules that restrain individual human action than just written laws sanctioned by the official ju-

ridical system. Social capital is a public good, embedded in all activities in a society.

Trust is an essential component of social capital. Trust enhances cooperation, and increased cooperation enhances trust in a process of mutual dependence. This process of mutually enhancing results in an accumulation of social capital, according to Putnam. In contrast to physical capital, more social capital is created when the social capital of a society is used more diligently. Social trust between people in a complex society can arise from two sources, according to Putnam, norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement. Norms of reciprocity capture a wider range of "externalities", i.e. consequences of actions that have positive or negative effects on others. Such norms of reciprocity are sustained by modeling and socialisation, according to Putnam:

An example may clarify: Novembers here are windy, and my leaves are likely to end up on other people's yards. However, it is not feasible for my neighbors to get together to bribe me to rake. The norm of keeping lawns leaf-free is powerful in my neighborhood, however, and it constrains my decision as to whether to spend Saturday afternoon watching TV. This norm is not actually taught in local schools, but neighbors mention it when newcomers move in, and they reinforce it in frequent autumnal chats, as well as by obsessive raking of their own yards. Non-rakers risk being shunned at neighborhood events, and non-raking is rare. Even though the norm has no legal force, and even though I prefer watching the Buckeyes to raking leaves, I usually comply with the norm (Ibid, p. 171).

In the ideal society, these norms of reciprocity involves all citizens in order to achieve a state of "generalised reciprocity", according to Putnam. This generalised reciprocity reconciles self-interest and solidarity (Ibid, p. 172). The social networks that are characterised by generalised reciprocity are also characterised by horizontal power relations in the interpersonal communication and exchange within these networks. Horizontal power relations means that the persons involved in these formal or informal forms of communication are equal in power, i.e. one

individual is not above or below the other in any form of hierarchical power relationship. Instead, every participant is equal in their status as citizens. In contrast, vertical networks of social relationships means that one of the participants is more powerful than the other. A society characterised by many vertical relationships of power has a low level of social capital, whereas a society characterised by many horizontal relationships of power has a high level of social capital. Small farmers in e.g. a feudal society with many vertical relationships of power cannot easily band together to oppose the landlord, because their only firm relationship is with the landlord and not with each other.

Networks of civic engagement, e.g. neighbourhood associations, cooperatives, sports clubs, political parties, represent intense horizontal networks. They constitute an essential form of social capital, because

Networks of civic engagement increase the potential costs to a defector in any individual transaction.

Networks of civic engagement foster robust norms of reciprocity.

Networks of civic engagement facilitate communication and improve the flow of information about the trustworthiness of individuals.

Networks of civic engagement embody past success at collaboration, which can serve as a culturally-defined template for future collaboration (Ibid, pp. 173-174).

Kinship ties also play an important role in creating social capital. Family firms and some closely-knit ethnic minorities were e.g. important as sources of social capital in the early stages of the commercial revolution. As we will see in more detail in the next section, Putnam also regards loss of family and kinship ties as one of the important reasons for the declining social capital of many Western countries in recent decades. The strong kinship ties of smaller groups are regarded by Putnam as an important prerequisite for the weaker ties that are represented by the social networks of civic engagement. These weaker ties constitute the social networks of much larger groups of people.

Weak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups than are strong ones, which tend to be concentrated within particular groups (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1376).

However, as in southern Italy, strong family ties in a society characterised by vertical power relations might foster "asocial familism", i.e. strong within-group ties without the weak ties of social networks of civic engagement. The norms of generalised reciprocity and the networks of civic engagement also generate social capital in a process that is self-reinforcing and cumulative, according to Putnam. The accumulation of social capital creates a stable social equilibrium of mutually reinforcing cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement and collective well-being that permeates a society, and can be inherited throughout the history of that society. Furthermore, the importance of social capital increases as economic development proceeds. However, another historical equilibrium is also possible. This equilibrium is characterised by the lack of trust, reciprocity, civic engagement that also permeates society and is inherited in a similar way of "path dependency" (Putnam, 1993, pp. 176ff.).

These are the principal traits that separate the historical and the contemporary characteristics of the north as opposed to the south of Italy. The aim, according to Putnam must be to leave the state of affairs that characterize the south of Italy in order to achieve a state of society characterized by 1) engaged citizens (civic engagement/high social participation), 2) political equality, 3) solidarity, trust and tolerance, and 4) social structures that serve to enhance cooperation between the citizens (Ibid, pp. 87ff.).

Social capital has often been defined and operationalised (Kawachi et. al. 1997, pp. 1491ff., Putnam 1993 (The Prosperous Community), pp.35-42) as the 1) (social participation) and 3) (trust in others) points mentioned above. However, unlike many other authors in the civic culture tradition, Putnam realizes that at least some of these goals are problematic or even completely incompatible with the individualistic aims of important parts of the civic culture tradition. There seems to be an inherent contradiction. How can individual autonomy (and indi-

vidual utility maximization) be compatible with a society characterized by solidarity and mutual trust? Why is the social participation of ordinary citizens in organisations, unions, political parties, political elections etc. declining throughout the Western world, despite Francis Fukuyama's statement that liberal democracy is on its way to conquer the world (Fukuyama 1992, pp.42f.)? This discussion is not new. It traces its origins back to the original version of the book "The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations" (1963) by Almond and Verba (Almond, Verba 1963, p. 65). However, the questions concerning the relationship between the potential anarchy of liberal individualism and the social cohesion of society seems to be gaining in importance.

### **Liberal Individualism versus Republicanism**

Putnam observes that the participation in organisations, political parties, political elections etc. has declined in American society in recent decades:

... the advanced Western democracies and above all the United States have typically been taken as models to be emulated. There is striking evidence, however, that the vibrancy of American civil society has notably declined over the past several decades (Putnam 1995, p.65).

This statement sharply contrasts the observations of Alexis de Tocqueville when he visited the United States in the 1830s:

Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition, are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types—religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute... Nothing, in my view, deserves more attention than the intellectual and moral associations in America (de Tocqueville 1970, p. 72).

Putnam finds several reasons for this recent and obvious decline in civic engagement. In his view

U.S. social capital is eroding for four reasons. First, the recent movement of women into the labour force has significantly increased the average American working hours. Putnam regards this as the main cause. Second, the increased mobility of people (the "re-potting" hypothesis) has had the same effect. Mobility, like frequent re-potting of plants, tends to disrupt root systems. The possibility to punish defectors disappears. Third, the demographic transformation of the American family meaning fewer marriages, more divorces, fewer children, lower real wages etc has also led to a decline of social capital. Finally, the technological transformation of leisure (television, computers) has enabled individual tastes to be satisfied more fully, but at the cost of the more positive social externalities associated with more primitive forms of entertainment (Putnam 1995, pp.74f.).

The solution suggested by Putnam first and foremost is to conduct more research and scientific investigations concerning the nature of social capital (both social participation and trust), and how social capital can be promoted in modern society (Ibid, p. 76f.). But suggestions to conduct research to improve the understanding of a phenomenon is not a solution in itself. Putnam consequently hints at a plausible and more definitive suggestion. This comprises the dichotomy liberal individualism as opposed to republicanism.

Putnam suggests that the tradition of republicanism has its origins in sixteenth century Florence and the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli and some of his contemporaries (Putnam 1993, pp. 86f.). The ability of the citizens to cooperate, the virtue of citizenship, was by far the most important factor that determined whether the institutions of society would succeed or not. According to a well-established interpretation, this "republican school" that stressed community and citizenship lost the battle against liberal authors like Hobbes, Locke and their successors who stressed individualism and individual rights (Ibid, pp.86f.). However, in later decades, a renewed interest in the virtues of modern community and citizenship has manifested itself (Herzog 1986, pp. 473ff.), but it has not remained unopposed by authors in the liberal tradition

(Hirsch 1986, pp. 423ff.). According to Putnam, the liberal authors have not been able to contradict that

As the proportion of nonvirtuous citizens increases significantly, the ability of liberal societies to function successfully will progressively diminish (Galston 1988, p. 1281).

The modern authors of what Putnam calls the republican tradition have stressed the importance of a high degree of both social participation and trust in society. E.g. Michael Walzer emphasizes the interest in public issues and the devotion to public causes as the key signs of civic virtue (Walzer 1980, p. 64). Even acts of self-interest have a different characteristic in societies with a high degree of trust (Putnam 1993, pp. 87f.). Ties of confidence and trust can help society overcome situations where individuals out of self-interest would otherwise choose not to cooperate.

Putnam derives the political traditions of northern Italy back to the Middle Ages. For reasons that have yet not been completely answered by historical research, a system of small city republics developed and persisted throughout the centuries from the Middle Ages onwards in northern Italy, while the centralised authoritarian monarchy became the characteristic of the political and administrative system of the south. Even when the authoritarian monarchy became weaker, this only meant a rising influence for the landed aristocracy, and a deepening of feudal bonds. A culture of distrust and egoism developed over the centuries in this part of Italy, according to Putnam. In northern Italy, on the other hand, a mercantile system of trade and merchandise developed. The citizens of the republics constantly traded and made contracts with each other. The administration of the northern republics was run by professionals. Respect for the law, for written contracts and for agreements as well as a combination of individual freedom and devotion to the common interests of society characterised these republics, which also meant that they at a very early stage had found a non-violent solution to the dilemma of collective action. Even if the republics lost their independence during the seventeenth century, the

political, social and economic cultural traditions persisted to some extent throughout the centuries. This fact explains the differences between the north and the south even today, according to Putnam, and why the north has managed to seize new economic, international and technological opportunities (Ibid, pp. 121ff.).

Putnam's discussion of liberal individualism versus republicanism is close to the liberal versus communitarian discussion. The participants in this discussion have ranged from very clearly anti-liberal communitarians to very consequent liberals. For some communitarians, e.g. Alisdair MacIntyre, the communitarian standpoint is a part of a broad attack on liberal society. According to MacIntyre, modern man

...is a citizen of nowhere, an internal exile where he lives... Modern liberal political society can appear only as a collection of citizens of nowhere who have banded together for their common protection (MacIntyre 1981, p. 147).

This lack of interest in community as a basis and a prerequisite for the existence of human society has been admitted even by a liberal author like Hirsch:

It is not an accident, no failure of imagination, that causes liberalism to have no strong theory of community, for the conditions that would bring a community into existence, or maintain it over time, are precisely those conditions that liberalism is designed to avoid, or the absence of which create a void that only liberal politics can fill (Hirsch 1986, p. 435).

It appears that even Putnam's work represents a step away from the individualistic and liberal standpoint. The reason seems to be that liberal individualism has become less tenable in Western societies that are increasingly characterised by the dissolution of social cohesion.

The republican ideal of active and participating citizens rests on the assumption that the right of the individual as opposed to majority decisions are based on political and social participation in public matters. Discussion and participation is thus the core ingredience of republicanism. On the other hand, the democratic ideal and citizenship of liberalism states in advance the rights of the individual against majority deci-

sions. To liberalism individual rights come prior to any social or political concerns. Consequently, the liberal concept of citizenship a priori requires no common social environment or shared values (Miller, 1995, p. 449). The republican and liberal citizens are two different creatures:

The liberal citizen is not the same as the civic-republican citizen. In a liberal polity there is no duty to participate actively in politics, no requirements to place the public above the private and to subordinate personal interests to the common good systematically, no commitment to accept collective determination of personal choices (Galston 1988, p. 1284).

This description of the liberal citizen sharply contrasts the republican standpoint represented already by Niccolò Machiavelli:

Politics, according to Machiavelli, is not something you can avoid if you want to live well, even if one happens to prefer the private sphere of life. Political action to Machiavelli is an existential condition for the welfare of man in modern society. And modern society according to his stance, was a society where the organisational conditions were compelling conditions for living a vigilant and assertive life, that is, according to Machiavelli, a successful life (Bryder, 1990, p. 126).

We have now illustrated that the ever ongoing discussion and participation of republicanism require a common social setting, a set of shared norms and values among the citizens. The individual is not entirely autonomous in relation to society. The individual is socialised into a specific society and a specific culture which sets the limits for his opinions and values (Bevir, 1996, p. 108). This limitation also constitutes the common frame of references for the discussion that is so essential to republicanism. At the same time these limitations provide the basis for the republican discussion, the common references without which no republican discussion or political participation could take place. What might the contents of these shared values required to obtain the republican ideal of citizenship be? It has been suggested that the most prominent weakness of the communitarian literature is the hard-

ness to find a basis for a common set of norms or values shared by all citizens in modern Western society (Näsström, 1998, p. 273). However, this difficulty to find generally shared norms and values, from which e.g. the norms of generalised reciprocity can be derived, might just as well be regarded as a weakness of modern Western society itself, rather than an inherent weakness of the communitarian literature. MacIntyre suggests that the citizens of modern Western societies have lost the uniform sense of virtues and norms that were formerly shared by all citizens (MacIntyre 1984, p. 149). These virtues and norms were inherited from generation to generation throughout the history of Western society. Galston also stresses that in the sense that modern liberal virtues exist, they differ from the classical virtues of Western society:

The liberal virtues demand less self-discipline and sacrifice than do the virtues of classical antiquity, of civic republicanism, or of Christianity, and the practise of many of these social virtues will simultaneously make it easier for individuals to succeed within liberal communities (Galston 1988, p. 1281).

It seems that the republican ideal requires a source from which the norms and values to be shared by all citizens can be derived. This is necessary in order to achieve a state of generalised reciprocity instead of the autistic and asocial responselessness of liberal individualism. The generalised reciprocity that is obtained through repeated similar situations needs to be institutionalised by norms and values that have their basis in a common culture. The arguments for this are historical and empirical as well as theoretical. Christianity is an example of such a cultural basis for society. Christian tradition and religion represents an essential basis for the inherited virtues of the culture of Western society. However, this inherited moral basis is ambiguous in relation to republicanism as discussed by Putnam. On the one hand, the Christian tradition with its ethical and moral contents has historically provided the basis for Western society. On the other hand, the same tradition might hamper all forms of free discussion or participation, if the tradition is too strong and characterised by vertical instead of horizontal power relations be-

tween individuals and groups of individuals. In the next section, I will discuss this problem with particular reference to Putnam. It also appears that some contradictions are inherent in Putnam's works. According to Putnam, social capital has been declining in the USA and throughout the Western world during later decades. The reasons seem to be the decline of the family and the consequent demographic decline, the increased mobility of individuals, and the technological progress. How can the social system of the north of Italy that is characterised by these changes be recommended as an example of a society to be copied?

### **Putnam's Republicanism between Liberal Individualism and Traditionalism**

A group of people must apprehend and interpret phenomena and events in a fairly similar way to be able to function together as a community or a society. There must be a common set of references or, to put it in another way, a common culture. Daun defines culture as a combination of conscious rules founded on reason, unconscious values founded on reason and irrational symbols (Arnstberg 1991, p. 71):

Culture is the common rules, values and symbols of a group of people.

The similarity between this definition of culture and the definition of generalised reciprocity according to Putnam is striking. To be able to apprehend and rightly interpret the unwritten rules of society and the norms of the generalised reciprocity there must be a common culture.

In "The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy" (1995) Christopher Lasch argues that the new political and, maybe even more, economic elites of the Western world increasingly act in an asocial way against the rest of the population and society as a whole. Companies, factory plants and capital are moved across borders without any social or human considerations. Earlier, traditional Christianity played an important role by providing society with a common basis of morals and ethics. The

new elites of the Western world are, to the contrary, often clearly hostile to Christianity and religion:

The elites' attitude to religion ranges from indifference to active hostility (Lasch 1995, p. 215).

Furthermore, the new elites have not in any deeper sense tried to build any new moral and ethical basis for common values to be shared by everyone in a living community:

The postmodern sensibility rejects much of modernism as well, but it is rooted in the modernist ideal of individuals emancipated from convention, constructing identities for themselves as they choose, leading their own lives (as Oscar Wilde would have said) as if life itself were a work of art. (Ibid, p. 234)

Robert Bly highlights the same problem in "The Sibling Society" (1996). Modern economic, individualistic and secularised man has lost all ties to former and coming generations, all cultural roots, by denying the culture of his ancestors without replacing it with any new fabric that ties people together in mutual understanding.

When colonialist administrators take over tribal society, their first task is to prove to the indigenous population that nothing in their culture works. It is important also to prove that tribal ways, such as consensus, do not work, and the old ways of talking with the gods, the ways the shamans practise, do not work...

... We can say that our destruction of the tribal systems, their elderhood and religions, has now come back on us. We now see an entire generation of students living in an impoverished landscape. The elders are without power, and the Christian religion is no longer vigorous. The young, black or white, tend to be rationalists and sceptics, and have nothing to live up to; the mutual dependence of generations breaks down. (Bly 1996, p. 161)

In contrast to this view, Putnam argues that religion, and especially the Catholic church, is one of the alternatives, or even one of the enemies, of the virtues of citizenship. As late as during the period between the two world wars, the Catholic church advised its members to abstain from in-



volvement in political engagement. In the post-war era, the Catholic church cooperated with the Italian Christian Democratic party, although the pattern of low civic engagement in areas and regions of high religiosity and clericalism among the citizens remained. Vertical bonds of authority also remained more typical for the Catholic church than horizontal bonds of community, according to Putnam (Putnam 1993, p. 107). But is Christian religion really in absolute terms the enemy of the republican ideal, as Putnam himself states?

Putnam's own description of the northern republics of Italy during the Middle Ages includes a high level of religiosity and Christian beliefs (Ibid, p. 127). The republics of the north seem to have been permeated by virtues of citizenship and shared values that were well anchored in a tradition of religion and metaphysical beliefs (Pocock 1975, pp. 31ff.). The republican ideal represented by the small city republics of northern Italy in Putnam's "Making Democracy Work" are in fact a remarkable example of the interdependence between on the one hand the cultural roots inherited from Antiquity and Christianity, and on the other the ideal of republicanism. The sources from which the shared norms and values are derived could of course be other than Christianity, but this tradition all the same seems to be the historically inherited. Christian religion also preserved and fostered many of the characteristics of Greek and Roman Antiquity in juridical, political and social matters that are close to the republican ideal.

Yet Christian men continued, in one way and another, to be Romans: civic beings, intensely concerned with the events of political history, the civil and military happenings which befell them and of which they from time to time asked God the meaning (Pocock 1975, p. 36).

Similarly, Christian religion had particular traits that in the long run served to facilitate active political and social participation in public matters among the citizens. In contrast to some other religions, matters concerning the material world and society on Earth were already in the middle ages to some extent left to the citizens and not to the priesthood.

In Medieval Europe, on the other hand, the validity of secular laws was always fully recognised, indeed Roman law was sometimes accorded almost scriptural respect (Black 1993, p. 61)

This fact does not exclude the possibility that even Christianity had and in some cases still have its own metaphysical traditionalists. The strive for a complete union between the religious dogmas and their total implementation in society is of course possible even in Christian religion. Had these aspirations succeeded, it would have meant almost total social cohesion and the absence of almost all individual freedom. However, such aspirations did not succeed in the particular Christian cultural setting:

Certainly, concerted attempts were made to subordinate one wholly to the other; in the West, popes made a bid for political leadership of a united, almost *umma*-like "Christian commonwealth (*republica christiana*)", but this failed (Ibid, p. 62).

Even during the first decades after the second world war, there was a strong Catholic movement mainly in the north of Italy, the Catholic Action that Putnam mentions as an example of religious horizontal civic engagement. The Catholic Action has now almost completely disappeared because of recent secularisation. However, the republicanism of northern Italy, manifested in a high degree of coherence and sense of community, is now a secularised society, according to Putnam (Putnam, 1993, pp. 107ff.).

The society of northern Italy is obviously still working well in terms of economical and technological progress, trust in financial institutions and material prosperity. Putnam also stresses that not all forms of social capital are benevolent to society, i.e. highly traditional forms of tightly knit social cohesion and social capital might produce discrimination and intolerance (Putnam 1995, p. 76). But how much of coherence and sense of community is really left in a society like the one in northern Italy, where the total fertility rate in later decades has been as low as 0.8-0.9 (2.1 is the required number for reproduction in a modern society)? Is a society that is socially arranged in such a way that the population will be

demographically eliminated in only a few generations really something that should be recommended or copied? As already mentioned, these are demographic factors that Putnam himself has put forward as the main explanations to the observed decline of social capital in the United States and most of the rest of the Western world. Advanced stages of secularisation first and foremost means that a non-economic, cultural basis of society has been lost, without having been replaced by any other basis of equal importance. The demographic decline means that the economic strains on the working population due to an increasing proportion of old-age pensioners will increase continuously and immensely in the future, causing antagonisms and a lack of solidarity between generations never experienced before. Both the increased rapidity of secularisation and the demographic decline seems to be logical consequences of the individualistic and liberal standpoints themselves. Although Putnam acknowledges the dissolution of the family and other social networks as a causal factor behind the declining social capital, he does not draw any further conclusions from this observation. In fact, Putnam's republican ideal seems to represent a very sensitive intermediate standpoint between extreme liberalism/ liberal individualism and traditionalism. Western society developed from a mainly traditional and tightly knit form of social cohesion towards a liberal and individualistic organisation. Christianity possessed preconditions for a republican society that were inherited from Greek and Roman Antiquity. The republican ideal seems to have been possible to maintain during an intermediate period of varying longevity in different countries and regions during this continuing process. But the sensitive equilibrium of on the one hand individual freedom and on the other social cohesion seems to be about to be lost as the progress of liberal individualism of Western society continues.

## Conclusion

The civic culture literature has often professed the ideal of liberalism and individualistic free-

dom. This ideal is incompatible with some of the components of Putnam's definition of social capital. These components of social capital are engaged citizens (civic engagement/ high social participation), solidarity and trust, and social structures that serve to enhance cooperation between citizens. Putnam's dichotomy liberal individualism versus republicanism in itself suggests that the liberal and highly individualistic standpoint is increasingly difficult to defend in a Western world where the basis of a common culture and a functioning social cohesion seems to be about to be lost. However, even Putnam's republican ideal appears hard to maintain in the long run in the historical process of advanced secularisation and modernisation. It may be that this republican combination of a high degree of civic engagement in politics, organisations, elections, sports clubs etc, a high degree of participation, and at least some degree of preserved sense of traditional virtues and anchorage in religion, implying a high degree of shared values as the basis for participation and discussion, represented the ultimate height of civic culture.

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