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# Reviewing Social Capital Theories for a Deeper Understanding of Community Development. The Analysis of Italian Community Co-operatives and Their Local Networks.

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## Résumé

Because of their focus on social networks, trust, collaboration, and resources exchange, social capital theories represent a valid framework for analysing the local socio-economic development with a particular focus on community development issues (McClenaghan, 2000; Valentinov, 2004; Svendsen & Svendsen, 2009; Lang & Roessl, 2011; Nilsson et al., 2012; Campbell & Sacchetti, 2014; Sforzi & Bianchi, 2017). This research considers community development from two perspectives, as a factor for economic growth and social cohesion (Wilkinson & Quarter, 1996; Lang & Roessl, 2011; Majee & Hoyt, 2011). However, the literature reveals a vagueness in social capital applicability in these two respects (Evans, Syrett, 2007); thus, a critical examination requires a further investigation.

An in-depth analysis, through a critical assessment of social capital, can reveal limits in local development dynamics and presents a new framework for community development. In particular, the paper focuses on a specific form of community-based enterprise, as examples of organizational forms that may favor the use and creation of social capital (Sacchetti and Campbell, 2018; Euricse, 2016). The analysis aims to examine the emerging phenomenon of the Italian community co-operatives; these are bottom-up initiatives formed to maximise what has been called "the co-operative advantage for community development" (Vieta & Lionais, 2015). One place that Italian community co-operatives are becoming relevant is in the renovation or regeneration of public assets, buildings, and spaces in urban and rural contexts that have been left in abandoned or dilapidated conditions due to austerity-led public sector spending reductions (Micelli & Mangialardo, 2016). These regeneration projects are increasingly seeing collaborations between local residents and public authorities, opening up new local development opportunities centered on the co-operative model. At the core, the various stakeholders involved in these regeneration projects, led by the community, have sought for an organizational model able to give equal decision-making power to all key players. What soon emerged was the adequacy of co-operative's democratic governance structures organizing the regeneration or stewardship needs of local assets while bringing in all stakeholders to the table as equal partners.

As Vieta & Bianchi (2018) point out, an innovative framework has to enlarge the vision on dynamics between community-owned organisations and local stakeholders considering norms and value for collaboration and social cohesion (Putnam, 2000), various forms of capital, such as cultural and economic, and local social conflicts (Bourdieu, 1986). The proposed

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framework considers many dimensions from practical, as exchanges of resources, to abstract, as the shared mission among participants.

This is a qualitative research and results derive from five case studies in different regions which use semi-structured interviews to members, partners, and citizens. Results reveal how these organizations work and how social dynamics, both collaborative and conflictual, shape local development. The paper contributes to the debate on community organizations, their social impact on contexts, and capacity of inclusiveness.

**Mots-Clés:** community, co, operative, regeneration