

Editorial

## Migrant Capital as a Resource for Migrant Communities

Sanna Saksela-Bergholm \*, Mari Toivanen and Östen Wahlbeck

Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki, 00014, Helsinki, Finland;  
E-Mails: sanna.saksela@helsinki.fi (S.S.-B.), mari.toivanen@helsinki.fi (M.T.), osten.wahlbeck@helsinki.fi (Ö.W.)

\* Corresponding author

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### Abstract

This thematic issue explores the processes and dynamics involved in how different forms of migrant capital are employed and how these relate to processes of social inclusion. Leaning on a Bourdieusian approach, we wish to move beyond existing descriptive studies and theorise the role migration plays in the accumulation, conversion and utilisation of various forms of capital by migrant communities and their members. The articles demonstrate how migrant capital can function as a resource created by migrants during the migration process, or as an outcome of it, and are potentially available to their family members. The articles illustrate via case studies from different national contexts how transnational migrants or members of migrant communities create, accumulate and employ diverse forms of capital in their efforts to achieve inclusion in destination and sending societies.

### Keywords

Bourdieu; convertibility; diaspora community; migrant capital; mobilisability; networks; resources; transnational ties

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

This thematic issue focuses on the creation, accumulation and utilisation of migrant capital in the destination and sending societies among transnational migrants and members of diaspora communities. Theoretically, this issue draws on the Bourdieusian approach to different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and builds on previous literature in which networks were discussed as a form of social capital in the context of transnational migration (Erel, 2010; Faist, 2000; Ryan, Erel, & D’Angelo, 2015; Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008; Wahlbeck, 2018). In this issue, migrant capital is understood as resources that are available to members of migrant communities as a result of migration. Migrant capital consists of resources that are mobilisable, for instance, via transnational networks and ties, and potentially also convertible to other forms of capital by migrants and their family members.

In the empirical case studies are discussions about how migrants and non-migrants sharing the transnational field mobilise social resources that they have access to as a result of the migration process, and how they employ them locally and transnationally. Our aim is to discuss how different forms of migrant capital contribute to the social inclusion of migrants and members of transnational communities, by illustrating how migrant capital operates throughout the migration processes and via transnational networks. We also wish to discuss how this capital can be beneficial for the social inclusion of the broader transnational community, including subsequent generations in the diaspora, return migrants and family members left behind in the sending societies. First we provide a brief literature review of the relevant discussions, before moving forward to introduce the contributions in this thematic issue.

## 2. Migration and Social Networks

Scholarship on migrants' networks have focused on their significance to migrant communities and their members in terms of the migration decision, settlement in the new host society, integration, educational and professional achievements, and the eventual return to the sending country (Castles & Miller, 2003; Haug, 2008; Massey et al., 1998; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000). In the mid-1990s, Portes (1998) linked social capital to discussions on migration and mentioned particularly the significance of social networks in studies about ethnic businesses, entrepreneurship and ethnic niches. He noted that such resources are vital for ethnic firms and entrepreneurs as they set up their businesses and gain access to markets. Coleman's (1988, 1990) approach to social capital, on the other hand, highlighted its importance to the acquisition of human capital, and particularly discussed the inclusionary and exclusionary aspects of social capital. Putnam's (2000) theorisation on different sort of ties (bridging and bonding) and to what extent they represent a form of social capital for migrants has been particularly influential in migration studies. Loosely defined, "bridging ties" refers to between-groups connections, whereas "bonding ties" refers to within-group connections. He identifies dense networks in ethnic enclaves as an example of bonding ties (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). Theorisation in migration scholarship that deals with the linkages between migrants' networks and social capital has been particularly influenced by the literature of Coleman (1990), Portes (1998) and Putnam (2000). Indeed, these strands of the literature have been further elaborated by scholars exploring migrants' and their descendants' networks, and the resources that are embedded in them (e.g., Evergeti & Zontini, 2006; Modood, 2004; Nannestad, Svendsen, & Svendsen, 2008; Nee & Sanders, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1994).

Another strand of studies with the aim of understanding how social, cultural and human capital is utilised by migrant communities has drawn on the Bourdieusian understanding of different forms of capital. An advantage of the Bourdieusian perspective on migrant capital is that it can be adopted to analyse how the utilisation of resources depends on migrants' social positioning (e.g., Anthias, 2007; Erel & Ryan, 2019). According to Bourdieu (1986), people's positions in society are determined by their economic, cultural and social capital. Economic capital refers to the value of economic resources, such as money and material goods. Cultural capital comprises the skills and competence acquired through education and the socialisation process. Social capital is defined as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). In the theory of Bourdieu (1986), the concept of capital is closely linked to his theoretical concepts of "field" and "habitus."

According to this theory, society consists of fields that structure our social world, while the concept of habitus refers to the outlook, habits and dispositions of individuals, which are usually relatively stable, and shared by people with similar backgrounds, i.e., social actors operating in specific fields.

One of the key characteristics of Bourdieu's capital theory is the convertibility and interplay of economic, social and cultural capital. Social actors in specific fields may be able to convert one form of capital into another. Yet, this convertibility depends on the rules of the field, and the possession of different amounts of cultural, economic and social capital reveal inequalities in society and how they are maintained (Bourdieu, 1986). Yet, to some extent and depending on the rules of the field, all forms of capital can be accumulated and transferred from one field to another.

The Bourdieusian approach has been employed in discussions on migrants' networks. Anthias (2007), for instance, suggests that the earlier theorisation and assumptions about networking (and by extension of social capital) cannot be directly applied to migrants. She has criticised the division of migrants' ties into bridging and bonding ties and suggested that this division is potentially essentialist as it is based on the assumed similarity in terms of ethnicity (see also Ryan, 2011, 2016). Drawing from the Bourdieusian approach, she has suggested that such an approach ignores migrants' social positionings and the differential power relations based on gender, class and generation, within the allegedly homogeneous groups. Furthermore, Ryan et al. (2008) suggest that Putnam and Coleman focus on the "stability" of social relationships, whereas migrants' ties are particularly characterised by the dynamism of (transnational) networks (see also Erel & Ryan, 2019; Ryan et al., 2015). The authors also suggest that the earlier focus has been on the local contexts, on "local associations, communities and networks," with little consideration to the fact that migrants' networks often extend beyond one particular geographical region or nation-state (see Keles, 2015; Molina, Valenzuela-García, Lubbers, García-Macías, & Pampalona, 2015).

## 3. The Transnational Context and Migrant Capital

We wish to build on these observations and suggest that it is also significant to include a focus on the transnational context when discussing social resources and how those are potentially capitalised by migrants and their descendants both locally as well as in the transnational space. The transnational perspective has been included in migration scholarship since the 1990s, introducing an emphasis on migrants' social relations and ties that extend beyond nation-states' boundaries (Bauböck & Faist, 2010; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc (1992) famously defined transnationalism as "processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country

of settlement,” and immigrants as transmigrants, who “develop and maintain multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously” (Glick Schiller et al., 1992, pp. 1–2).

Scholarship on transnationalism has emphasized migrants’ agency to operate in the transnational field (Köngeter & Smith, 2015; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004), while it has also been pointed out that migrants’ positioning in the transnational field is shaped by social hierarchies and power (Anthias, 2012). The transnational ties and networks of migrants and their communities are also related to processes of belonging and inclusion in their societies of origin and settlement (e.g., Wahlbeck, 2002; Waldinger, 2015). Yet, the early celebratory enthusiasm for migrant transnationalism has in recent years shifted towards a more sober interest in how transnationalism is related to other social processes, including intersections with traditional hierarchical societal structures and inequalities (Glick Schiller, 2018). Also, migrants’ transnational social networks have been shown to constitute a social capital, which can be utilised for a variety of positive purposes (Faist, 2000; Ryan et al., 2015), provided they compensate for structural forms of disadvantage (Anthias & Cederberg, 2009).

A growing body of research has linked the transnational frame to discussions on migrants’ social resources and capital (Faist, 2000; Nowicka, 2013). For instance, Faist (2000, p. 200) points out that:

Transnational social spaces involve the accumulation, use, and effects of various sorts of capital, their volume and convertibility: economic capital, human capital, such as educational credentials, skills and know-how, and social capital, mainly resources inherent in or transmitted through social and symbolic ties.

These resources, he suggests, can potentially be transferable to another context, across nation-states’ borders. For instance, social capital has been considered as one form of remittance that migrants transmit back home (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Empirical studies have also described how the transnational practices and contacts of migrants can provide significant support when migrants settle in a new country (Saksela-Bergholm, 2013, 2018; Valtonen, 2015) or how they can replace or work as additional support to the welfare system of the receiving country (Martikainen, Valtonen, & Wahlbeck, 2012).

As mentioned above, the study of transnationalism has highlighted the opportunity to transfer forms of capital in transnational social fields. Migrants can use various types of capital in the transnational spaces they are embedded in (e.g., Faist, 2000). The transferability of resources between different geographical locations is eased by diverse transnational social relations and by

transnational migration as such. Yet, a Bourdieusian perspective on the social position of migrants also needs to consider the dynamics of inequality. Unequal power relations significantly influence the opportunity for migrants to utilise resources in a new field. For example, Anthias (2007) points out that not all resources are necessarily mobilisable by all social actors and she convincingly argues that the notion of social capital should be confined to mobilisable social resources. Thus, as Wahlbeck (2018) has explicitly argued, there is a need to make an analytical distinction between the *transferability* and the *mobilisability* of transnational social resources among migrants. While transferability describes “the ability of a resource to be moved across borders, mobilisability describes the actual value that the resource has in each given social context” (Wahlbeck, 2018, p. 237).

The Bourdieusian perspective on forms of capital can easily be seen as a relatively deterministic perspective, since both the rules of field and individual habitus are regarded as being relatively stable (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, there is also a need to highlight the dynamic opportunity for social actors to generate new capital (Erel, 2010). In this thematic issue we also wish to highlight the fact that a key aspect of Bourdieu’s capital theory is the conversion of one form of capital to another. In addition to the transferability and mobilisability of capital, there is also a need to analyse the convertibility of capital by migrants. Therefore, the authors of this thematic issue have deployed the concept of migrant capital to describe how migrants are able to utilise and convert various forms of capital. For example, several of the contributions to this issue describe cases of a conversion of social capital into economic capital, and there are also clear cases of a revalorisation of cultural capital of migrants into a positive resource that can be converted into social or economic capital.

Thus, the innovative theoretical contribution of this thematic issue is to pay attention to the convertibility of capital in the transnational context from the Bourdieusian perspective. This focus on convertibility helps us to see migrants as social actors that can generate and mobilise various forms of migrant capital. From this perspective, migrant capital can be understood to be resources that are available to migrants as a result of migration. This migrant capital is mobilisable, for instance, via transnational networks and ties, and potentially also convertible to other forms of capital by migrants and their family members.

#### 4. The Contributions

The aim of contributions to this thematic issue is to understand how resources consisting of economic, social, political and cultural transnational ties, practices and networks are used and mobilised into social action among members of migrant communities. They explore how transnational resources can be mobilised and capitalised upon, and the political, societal and institutional

factors that shape the mobilisation and capitalisation of transnational social resources in different contexts. They broadly engage with the following research questions focusing on different ethnic groups, generations and national contexts:

1. How are transnational ties and networks mobilised as a social resource by members belonging to migrant communities, and what strategies are employed in this regard?
2. What role do institutional, political and economic settings play regarding the mobilisation of transnational ties and networks?
3. What processes and dynamics underline the transformation of transnational resources into migrant capital?

This thematic issue consists of empirical case studies that have been conducted with a strong micro-level approach and with qualitative methods, including multi-sited ethnography. The articles comprise studies relating to Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, the Philippines, Turkey and the United Kingdom. The articles present discussion on how migrant capital can be a resource during the migration process or an outcome of transnational migration itself. What combines all contributions is the fact that migrant capital and its role in strengthening the inclusion of members in migrant communities to the destination or to the sending societies is discussed.

The contributions in this issue explore different mechanisms and processes of social inclusion that the accumulation of migrant capital entails, emphasising the strategies and opportunities used by the members of migrant communities during the migration process. The authors approach migrant capital as a resource that becomes available to migrants during their migration process (Atasü-Topcuoğlu, 2019; Glorius, 2019; Hiitola, 2019) and as one that is created by migrants because of their migration (Koikkalainen, 2019; Wahlbeck & Fortelius, 2019). Migrant capital is also shown to be available to migrants' family members via their transnational ties (Dís Skaptadóttir, 2019; Saksela-Bergholm, 2019; Toivanen, 2019). Overall, migrant capital can constitute a source of community cohesion, economic advancement, informal social protection or for professional and educational gains for members of migrant communities.

Koikkalainen's (2019) article explores diverse socio-economic aspects of social inclusion among highly skilled Nordic migrants living in London. The article examines how the migrants see their social position in the local job market at a time of uncertainty brought on by Brexit. The article stresses the importance of Nordic background and cultural capital embodied in the migrants' habitus and their utilisation of social capital in the form of ties and networks both locally and transnationally.

Wahlbeck and Fortelius (2019) explore the social inclusion of Swedish migrants into the work force in

Helsinki, in particular the highly skilled migrants' access to the labour market. The authors build on a Bourdieusian perspective to illustrate empirically and analytically how migrants utilise and convert existing forms of capital into novel forms (Erel, 2010; Wahlbeck, 2018). These forms of capital comprise an explicit migrant capital that is mobilisable only because the migrants have moved to a new field in which they can benefit from their existing knowledge and skills related to the Swedish language and Nordic culture. The authors argue, in line with Anthias (2007) that migrants' resources do not comprise beneficial forms of social capital if these are not mobilisable in a certain social context.

Hiitola (2019) examines recently arrived refugees' experiences on family reunification among some of the refugees who arrived in Finland during 2015. Her article investigates how forced migrants residing in Finland create and allocate different types of resources in their efforts to become reunited with their families. Hiitola shows how the use of different forms of resources as such is not enough for successful reunification. In addition to individual strategies to allocate resources, institutional issues such as legal status and decision-making power among authorities influence the forced migrants' opportunities for reunification.

In her exploration of Syrian refugees' strategies to become entrepreneurs in Turkey, Atasü-Topcuoğlu (2019) intersects Bourdieu's forms of capital with Kloosterman's formulation of opportunity structure. Her study shows how diverse forms of capital are beneficial to the refugees in their attempt to become entrepreneurs. She argues that these entrepreneurs have been affected by macro-level factors (both informal and formal policies in Turkey), meso-level factors (e.g., time and space specific opportunities), and individual level factors (e.g., education and social networks). She shows how the newly arrived refugees can gain occupational independence as entrepreneurs by re-accumulating diverse forms of capital.

Dís Skaptadóttir (2019) examines the transnational mobilisation of migrant capital among Filipinos residing in Iceland. In her analysis she combines Bourdieu's concept of capital with a transnational approach. Her study, based on a multi-sited study shows how the mobilisation of capital is influenced by both structural factors, such as discrimination and racialisation in Iceland and by migrants' economic position and cultural capital in the Philippines. Migrants' ability to mobilise social and cultural resources shows how their different class positions both prior and after migration guide their access to social, economic or cultural capital.

Saksela-Bergholm (2019) analyses the role of remittances and caregiving arrangements as practices of informal social protection among Filipino labour migrants in Finland and their family members left behind in the Philippines. This multi-sited study illustrates the importance of transnational ties and networks in the negotiation of welfare practices and care arrangements among

the members of transnational families. The author shows how migrant capital is transferred to informal social protection through meaningful reciprocity between the senders and recipients of remittances. She stresses the importance of reciprocity and its social context for successful mobilisation of migrant capital among the members of transnational families.

In her article, Glorius (2019) examines student migration from Bulgaria to Germany, as well as the return migration of some of the migrants. She explores how migrant students utilise and convert social capital in a beneficial way in their efforts to access the German labour market, but also after return when some among them look for new occupational opportunities in Bulgaria. The social capital consisting of family, peer and professional networks are also useful when the return migrants adapt to the societal changes taking place in Bulgaria.

Toivanen's (2019) article examines transnational mobilities, networks and practices of second-generation Kurds in France. The aim in the article is to understand better the extent to which second-generation members are able to mobilise upon such resources for professional and educational advantage. She argues that as a result of second-generation members being raised in a transnational diaspora space, transnational networks based on diasporic bonds can constitute a form of "migrant capital" for them. Indeed, her study illustrates how the mobilisation and convertibility of migrant capital operates in the case of migrants' descendants.

The analysis in the articles considers both strategies and opportunities utilised by migrants and members of transnational communities in diverse economic, social and political context. As the articles show, transnational networks can be used by migrants and their family members to achieve occupational, economic and educational advantages (Atasü-Topcuoğlu, 2019; Dís Skaptadóttir, 2019; Glorius, 2019; Koikkalainen, 2019; Toivanen, 2019; Wahlbeck & Fortelius, 2019). They can also be useful in their attempts to reunite with family members (Hiitola, 2019) or to have access to informal social protection and care arrangements (Saksela-Bergholm, 2019) in both the sending and receiving societies. The contributions also consider the societal structures and unequal distribution of power that enable or prevent a utilisation of migrant capital. Simultaneously, they pay attention to the agency of transnational migrants and members of transnational communities.

## 5. Conclusion

In this thematic issue we suggest that it is not enough to assess the existence of transnational resources. Instead, the question that needs to be addressed is how and via which processes the existing transnational social ties and networks can be mobilised as a resource by specific social actors in a given social context, which is not merely limited to the context of the nation-state. Leaning on a Bourdieusian approach, we wish to move beyond de-

scriptive studies and theorise the role migration plays in the accumulation, conversion and utilisation of various forms capital by migrant communities and their members. We posit that the question of how such resources are accumulated over time, mobilised towards capital, transferred from one context to another and converted to other types of capital deserve more scholarly attention and empirical inquiry.

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## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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#### About the Authors



**Sanna Saksela-Bergholm** received her PhD from the University of Helsinki. Her doctoral dissertation dealt with the role of immigrant associations in the integration of immigrants into the Finnish civil society. Her previous study explored the transnational ties and practices of Filipino labour migrants and their access to the Finnish working life. She is currently studying the social inclusion of adult migrant students into the work force. Her published work includes articles on migrants' inclusion into civil society labour markets, amongst others.



**Mari Toivanen** works as a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Helsinki. Her earlier research focused on the second generation of people of Kurdish background in Finland, whereas her current research project deals with the political and civic participation of Kurdish diaspora communities in the Kurdish regions in the Middle East. She has written scholarly articles concerning political activism, diaspora participation, Kurdish diaspora and identity. She holds a PhD degree in Social Sciences from the University of Turku.



**Östen Wahlbeck** is a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at the University of Helsinki, Adjunct Professor of Sociology at the University of Tampere, and Professor II in Human Rights and Multiculturalism at the University of South-Eastern Norway. He holds a PhD in Ethnic Relations from the University of Warwick (1997). He has published widely in the field of international migration and ethnic relations. His research interests include integration and asylum policies, transnationalism, multiculturalism and minority rights.