

The role of bonding, bridging and linking social capital in life satisfaction

A case of migrants in Spain

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Abstract—This paper approaches the relation between social capital and subjective well-being from a migration perspective. This analysis is based on three types of social capital, and examines their relationship with the individual's perceived life satisfaction. The existence or absence of social networks as well as the nature of ties are considered key factors in the success or failure of an immigrant's life project. The empirical study results suggest that bonding, bridging and linking social capital are significantly related to the perceived life satisfaction. That is, immigrants' life satisfaction is associated with the structure of their social capital.

Keywords— migration, bonding, bridging and linking social capital, life satisfaction

I. Introduction

The complex, enormously dynamic and multi-faceted phenomenon of migration has been studied for a long time from different perspectives in relation to many different aspects and characteristics in an attempt to capture and fully understand it. One of the approaches gaining strength in recent years aimed at deepening our understanding of migration is the social capital approach. Therefore, all though most immigrant integration studies have focused on objective parameters, there has also been an increase in subjective parameters such as social mobility, well-being [1] or subjective life satisfaction [2]. Our study joins this line of works in analysing subjective life satisfaction in migrant communities, but, as indicated above, from the social capital approach.

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The rest of the paper is structured as follows: the following section provides a short literature review of the main concepts such as social capital, migration networks, social ties and subjective life satisfaction. Section 3 presents the methodology, data, justification of the sample and the variables for the empirical work. Section 4 presents the outcome of the relationship between types of social capital and subjective life satisfaction and is followed by the conclusions.

II. Social capital, migratory networks and life satisfaction. Short literature review

A. Social capital

Social capital is a multidisciplinary concept used in the social sciences such as economics, sociology, politology and psychology to explain the importance for individuals of belonging to social networks and the values generated in them such as reciprocity, cooperation and trust in view of the benefits they bring ([3] [4] [5]). In short, the premise behind the notion of social capital is *investment in social relationships with expected benefits* ([6]:6).

Despite the above obstacles, as the impossibility of capturing it concretely, the social capital concept has been significantly successful for economists, because it has provided a clear explanation of variables such as economic growth and personal satisfaction or well-being. The recent, but extensive economic literature on social capital evidences a general consensus on the goodness of its impact on individual well-being, measured mainly by economists through life satisfaction ([7]). The findings suggest, however, that social capital has a different role when there is in-depth analysis of networks: strong relations or bonds versus weak relations or bridges ([8]).

B. Migration networks

In the successive stages of the process, migrants make use of their social networks, family resources, neighbours and friends' knowledge, and the unstable or consolidated social structures created by previous migrants. The set of all these "*interpersonal ties that link migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in origin and destination area through the bonds of kinship, friendship and shared community origin*" is what [9:448] define as *migration networks*, which allow migrants to go across supranational territories and provide them with resources that are inaccessible through official channels.

The migration literature points to the significant role of migration networks as an information source for important

decisions such as the decision to emigrate or the choice of destination ([10]), as basic support in the initial stages of arrival and settlement ([11]) and also for the success or failure of integration with the host society ([1] [3]). As pointed out above most immigrant integration studies have focused on the objective characteristics of immigration to explain the success or failure of the process (mainly education, occupation or salary), although some recent works ([3]) include other subjective variables linked to the process such as subjective life satisfaction.

C. *Well-being and subjective life satisfaction*

Life satisfaction is one of the main components of individual well-being, relating to individuals' overall evaluation of their own lives [12], and is popular with economists. The other components, according to the same author are, the satisfaction associated to important properties (e.g. job satisfaction), positive affect (experiencing many pleasurable emotions and moods) and low levels of negative affect (experiencing few disagreeable emotions and moods). Explanatory factors for individual well-being with the greatest consensus among authors in this field are income, age, marital status, unemployment and health. [9] examined the integration of immigrants in the United States through a series of socio-economic variables together with their life satisfaction in that country, finding that immigrants with greater life satisfaction are more likely to integrate and remain in the host country. This study and some others on the same lines ([3]) show that objective parameters (such as level of income) are insufficient for evaluating immigrant integration in the destination country and it is necessary to examine immigrants' perception of their own integration and satisfaction.

In this context, this paper focuses on the social variables and its contribution lies in the inclusion of variables to collect information on the type of relationship immigrants establish in the destination country with those around them and the degree of those relationships. These variables reflect the level of individual *bonding*, *bridging* and *linking* social capital.

D. *Bonding, bridging and linking social capital*

[5] differentiates two types of social capital. Firstly, affective, compact social capital, constructed by bonds between family, close friends and neighbours (*bonding* social capital) and secondly, social capital that establishes connections between dissimilar groups (social capital that builds *bridges*), composed of more heterogeneous collectives where relationships are more formal. The distinction between strong ties (*bonding* social capital) and weak links or bridges (*bridging* social capital) is important because from the economic point of view their effects are different according to whether economic development or personal well-being/life satisfaction is being explained. However, the distinction between bonds and bridges in social capital networks is less frequent in the field of happiness economics, that is, in the study of individual well-

being and life satisfaction, although it is becoming more common according to the literature review by [14]. [15] presents the third social capital. He indicates that linking social capital includes the capacity to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond the community. In other words, linking social capital is built supporting networks of poor people and to enhance their potential by linking them to intermediary organizations. Broader markets, and public institutions. It consist of the vertical ties between poor people and people in positions of influence in formal organisations ([16]), e.g. politics parties. The theoretical framework presented in this section is the reference for the analysis below and aligns this present study with studies that take the network approach to migration, and in particular, migrants' life satisfaction, attempting a deeper examination by distinguishing between bonding, bridging and linking social capital, an aspect where the literature is scanty.

This study applies the Community Social Report Questionnaire from [17] which has been used before ([18]), to a stratified sample of immigrants to determine whether different levels of social capital affect immigrants' perceptions of their own life satisfaction.

III. Methodology

A. *Data and sample: Immigrants in Valencian Community*

The object of the empirical study is the Romanian, Latin American and Moroccan immigrants collective in the Valencian Community. With the consolidation of a development model based on an industrial district specialising in the production of ceramic tiles and reinforced by a strong boom in construction as well as the development of services and tourism, the Valencian Community experienced unprecedented economic and social growth. In demographic terms this led to a strong expansion of the population mainly with the influx of immigrants ([19]). In 2010 after the crisis began, Romanian immigrants formed the second largest foreign community (16.0%) in the self-governing region of Valencia after immigrants from the United Kingdom (16.1%). Then next foreign communities were Morocco (8%), and the Latin Americans communities: Bolivians (3%), Colombia (5%) and Ecuador (5%). This work goes deeper into the findings of [18] study of social capital in migratory flows which took a representative sample, stratified in four levels (sex, age, territory and seniority) of 724 immigrants distributed over The three provinces of Valencian Community (Alicante, Castellón and Valencia).

B. *Variables and hypotheses*

This section proposes an exploratory analysis to distinguish the variables that reflect aspects of immigrants' social relationships in their surrounding environment. These relationships are what the recent socio-economic literature calls social capital. The questionnaire reflects aspects of the strong bonds established by Romanian, Latin American and Moroccan immigrants in the Valencian Community (bonding social capital), the weak ties (bridging social

capital) and the relationship with political institutions. The theory provided the basis for choosing a series of variables that are normally used in similar analyses to represent bonding, bridging and linking social capital (Table 1):

The task of determining or "defining" social capital and its typology is highly complicated because the intangible, very subjective nature of the concept means that no data can accurately measure what it expresses. To overcome this difficulty, three different variables were used for the empirical analysis to contemplate different aspects of social capital:

TABLE 1 SOCIAL CAPITAL VARIABLES

<i>Bonding social capital (NBHD)</i>	<i>(1) Sense of community and Partial participation in social life</i>	Person takes part in community or neighbourhood activities frequently and voluntarily. (Person has a trusting relationship with neighbourhood: 1=Yes, 0= no).
<i>Bridging social capital (TRUST)</i>	<i>2) Trust in different groups</i>	Person has a trusting relationship with people with different religious beliefs (1=Yes, 0=No)
<i>Linking social capital (INSTIT)</i>	<i>3) Trust in institutions</i>	Politics parties can be trusted (1=Yes, 0=No)

- **Bonding social capital variable (NBHD):** A bonding social capital variable was elected in order to carry out the analyses presented in the latter part of this work. As noted above, there is no consensus in the literature on the definition of social capital. We had chosen the variable “I take part in cultural, sporting, religious, etc. activities in my community or neighbourhood”. It’s reflects satisfaction level with the individual's relationships and interaction with the neighbourhood. At the same time, it refers to the degree of active participation in actions carried out in the individual's neighbourhood by including variables that reflect the individual's activity to benefit the area. It could be said that the social capital variable presents integration with the neighbourhood, the degree of feeling settled or uprooted in the neighbourhood, that is, the feeling of identification with neighbours.

- **Bridging social capital variable (TRUST):** It provides information on weak relationships, which expand beyond the neighbourhood and the family environment. Unlike the bonding social capital variables which reflected strong relationships between an individual and other individuals around them, these variables reflect weak ties individuals have in the same environment. These type of variables can be considered on the understanding that the more an individual attends and takes part in activities in the corresponding group or association, the more contacts they will have with the other individuals in the group and therefore it can be considered that they will also have a higher level of this type of social capital.

- **Linking social capital variable (INSTIT):** It reflects trust in the local, national and international institutions and refers to the degree of trust in the less close environment, outside

the new nuclear family, including friendship, even neighbourhood. It reflects third level trust and also represents an individual's trust in their medium environment, and people in positions of influence, e.g., political parties.

- **Life Satisfaction:** Until recently, studies have attempted to explain life satisfaction using socio-economic variables. According to [19], however, such variables can only explain 15% of the variation in the scores for well-being. Variables reflecting personal characteristics have been included in this type of study since the 1980s and the 1990s saw the addition of what are known as intermediate variables such as those of a social, environmental, cultural and biological nature.
- **Some control variables are included:** Age, Gender, Status marital and Education.

This analysis considers that different levels of individual life satisfaction may be determined, in addition to the usual socio-economic and cultural variables, by the existence of individual differences reflected in the relationships each individual has with their surrounding environment, that is, due to differences in their personal stock of social capital.

The study variable, which is individual life satisfaction, is present in the survey by the question “To what extent are you currently satisfied with your life?”. The response was structured in ten levels to enable the analysis presented below. We have taken this question from the World Value Survey Questionnaire, and we have converted it from ten levels to two levels (upper the mean and under the mean), in order to run different logit models. The differences between them come from the social capital variables in the equation.

Hypotheses:

The analyses here attempt to shed light on the different role of strong or weak relationships (bonding, bridging and linking) in migrants' life satisfaction and therefore the following hypotheses are proposed for verification. So, consideration of types of networks in individual relations requires the testing of four different null hypotheses:

- H₀: Bonding social capital affects individual life satisfaction
- H₁: Bridging social capital affects individual life satisfaction
- H₂: Linking social capital affects individual life satisfaction
- H₃: The different structure (bonding, bridging or linking) of the social capital affects individual life satisfaction (meaning the stock of general social capital affects individual life satisfaction).

iv. Results

This study presents an explanation of the influence of factors such as income and social capital on immigrant’s life satisfaction in Valencian Community using a logit model. The logit model is a particularly useful and informative approach for understanding life satisfaction or others qualitative variables with two selections such a high and low life satisfaction. When de dependent variable has two values, the logit model is often appropriate. Bonding, bridging and linking social capital were evaluated with the three variables above indicated.

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TABLE II. LOGISTICS MODELS

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3	MODEL 4	MODEL 5	MODEL 6
Sex	-0.888 (0.000)*	-1.205 (0.000)*	-1.155 (0.000)*	-1.262 (0.000)*	-1.238 (0.000)*	-1.250 (0.000)*
Lat	-0.258 (0.747)	0.024 (0.906)	0.045 (0.874)	-0.130 (0.968)	-0.025 (0.939)	0.029 (0.919)
Age	0.102 (0.790)	0.131 (0.773)	0.253 (0.610)	0.057 (0.812)	0.042 (0.898)	0.265 (0.407)
Gender	1.297 (0.100)	0.003 (0.950)	0.189 (0.664)	0.000607 (0.993)	0.195 (0.643)	0.217 (0.642)
Status	0.451 (0.542)	1.581 (0.211)	0.159 (0.709)	0.451 (0.502)	0.013 (0.998)	0.398 (0.328)
Etnia	0.185 (0.001)*	0.605 (0.487)	0.250 (0.550)	0.414 (0.523)	0.312 (0.577)	0.238 (0.595)
Income		0.001 (0.093)*	0.001 (0.901)*	1.307 (0.069)**	0.001 (0.804)*	1.971 (0.080)***
WBHD			0.647 (0.004)*			6.656 (0.005)*
TRUST				0.662 (0.001)*		0.459 (0.004)*
NETWT					0.635 (0.009)*	1.272 (0.132)
Constant	-0.289 (0.357)	0.541 (0.081)	0.240 (0.584)	0.661 (0.005)	0.080 (0.894)	0.445 (0.880)
-2Loglikelihood	893,726	969,503	954,188	115,580	548,351	508,816
N² Cox & Snell	0,848	0,072	0,060	0,007	0,080	0,103
N² Nagelkerke	0,965	0,120	0,118	0,118	0,117	0,143
Hosmer-Lemeshow						
χ²	22,006	4,908	13,990	0,663	7,772	5,998
Sig.	(0,805)	(0,767)	(0,062)	(0,553)	(0,436)	(0,649)
N	724	724	724	724	724	724

* Indicates the estimated coefficients are significant at the 1% level
 ** Indicates the estimated coefficients are significant at the 5% level
 *** Indicates the estimated coefficients are significant at the 10% level

The results from the logistic regression estimations are shown in the models in the next table. Models 3, 4, and 5 show that the variables representing the three social capital types keeps the positive sign attributed in the literature thereby indicating a direct relationship between having social connections and the likelihood of having a high level of life satisfaction. The variables are significant, so we can say that maintaining the social capital networks (bonding, bridging and linking) guarantee increased life satisfaction. Therefore, H₀, H₁ and H₂ are accepted. However, hypothesis H₃ is partially confirmed because only two of the three variables collecting information on bonding and bridging social capital are significant: person has a trusting relationship with neighbourhood and person has a trusting relationship with other religions people. The income level has the appropriate and positive sign, as the happiness literature indicates, and it is significant in the models that present social capital variables.

v. Conclusions

This present work contributes to the migration literature with a deeper examination of the impact of immigrants' different social capital structures or levels, considered through the components of *bonding*, *bridging* and *linking*, on perceived life satisfaction in the host country. As several authors suggest, this variable can in turn be considered, to a certain extent, as a subjective indicator of immigrant integration in the host society. The findings suggest that an important part of the success or failure of the integration process depends on the three types of social capital, bonding bridging and linking, as well as the

absolute income level. Also important is the nationality of immigrants, being Romanians the only significant nationality variable in the equation. But it should be noted that the income used in the all the models is absolute income, so we expect to confirm the same results with relative and perceived income levels.

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