

Individual Social Capital and Local Occupational Structure in the United States

Yang-chih Fu¹ and Hui-Ju Kuo²

Abstract

Research on social capital has widely used the position generator to estimate an individual's networked resources. To investigate how individuals vary on getting access to different positional connections, previous studies have examined demographic and socioeconomic background factors at the individual level, while paying little attention to whether and how such resources may also be conditioned by the macro-level occupational structures. By integrating two national data sets in the United States, we analyze the extent to which the position-generated individual social capital varies by local occupational compositions in county, metropolis, and state. The findings from multilevel analyses reveal that in counties where more residents work in education, training, and library occupations and in management occupations, one's chances to get access to *professional-type* resources are greater. Similar structural effects also appear with the case of getting access to the resources embedded in *farming and production* occupations, but turn out to be less evident in *service and management and administrative* sectors. Not only does the association between individual networked resources and local occupational structure vary across different occupations, but the magnitude of such structural effects also varies by scope of geographical areas. This research underscores the importance of the contextual factors and geographical location that may impact how people access social connections, which also brings about the methodological issue regarding structural constraints that may pose a fundamental challenge to studies using the position generator as indication of individual social capital.

Keywords: position-generated social networks; occupational structure; multilevel analysis; United States

¹ Research Fellow, Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica.

² Postdoctoral Fellow, Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica.