

A Holistic Review of Homelessness & Capital

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Abstract—In most cases of homelessness, the cause is lack of economic capital as well as symbolic capital. There are three types of symbolic capital: cultural (social assets), human (personal attributes) and social capital (networking). This research paper attempts to analyze what role each of these capital plays and what is most effective in helping homeless people improve their situations.

Index Terms—Homeless, economic capital, social capital, human capital, cultural capital.

I. INTRODUCTION

When you walk around in a major city in the United States, most likely you will see homeless people wandering or resting upon the streets. Usually these people are harmless, but in some encounters, they can cause discomfort and even harm. Once, for example, I was given the middle finger and called racial slurs by a homeless guy as I walked down a street in Seattle. While I was upset about that experience, I understood that those people were suffering and many of them needed help. They do not have access to shelter, food or job opportunities. Homelessness has been a problem in big cities for a while.

In most cases of homelessness, other than money, the cause can be lack of symbolic capital. There are three types of symbolic capital: cultural (social assets), human (personal attributes) and social capital (networking). Symbolic capital is basically resources available to an individual. When these resources are scarce, the possibility of becoming homeless becomes high. *Cultural capital* comprises the social assets of an individual, such as one's speaking manners, education background or dressing style. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction offers a compelling explanation why some children are more successful in an educational system than others. Bourdieu argued that cultural capital, which is familiarity with the dominant cultural codes in a society, is a key determinant of educational success as it is often misperceived by teachers as academic brilliance and rewarded as such [1].

Having this capital implies that you have class and manners and that you are aware of the acceptable social behavior. *Human capital* refers to attributes of an individual, such as intelligence, knowledge, and social skills, that can potentially make them stand out. *Social capital* includes the networks amongst a society and the relationships that an individual has in his or her life. Social capital provides a sense of belonging and diversity.

Every community—no matter how rich or how poor—has assets that can be identified and mobilized in community

work. Assets are untapped potential which can be put into action to improve conditions.

Kretzman and McKnight (1993) originally identified three kinds of assets essential in community work—individuals, associations, and institutions. Several years later, Flora, and Fey (2012) expanded the list from the original three to seven, including some associated with people and others associated with place [2].

Most of the historically important systems of social inequality were 'harmonious' in the sense of effective traditional legitimation and wide social acceptance. This changed under the impact of the notion of 'natural equality of men' popularized by the French philosophers in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment movement. Since then, social equality has become the universal ideological aspiration of lower classes, strata, and minorities in all modern societies, and social conflicts have been seen as attempts to reduce privileges and redress social discriminations [3].

Next, I'll dive into more specifics of these three forms of symbolic capital.

II. DIFFERENT TYPES OF CAPITAL

A. Social Capital

Social capital plays an important role in homelessness among young people. In order to account for social capital in a family, family members must have access to valued resources, shared norms of trust and mutual benefits. If all three above components are absent in a family, that family has basically failed to create social capital. Families are the bed rock of social capital. A study by Justin Barket shows that most homeless people lack the support of their family and can only depend on themselves, in which case families don't function as social capital. Barket's study also suggests that in most cases, homelessness people come from chaotic, neglectful and unstable families unable to create social capital (Barket, 2012) [4].

Sports is a good way to create social capital for those in need of it, especially the youngsters. Sports teams create social capital because it unites a group of people with similar interest and give them a sense of belonging. When a group of homeless people get together as a sports team, organized by a company or an organization, it creates the first step of social capital which is bonding networks (a group of similar social background people interacting with each other). A homeless man may feel inferior to people of other social backgrounds, but when they have completed the bonding network stage (UMN, 2018) [5], they feel a part of something, not an outcast from society. This will then give them courage to interact with different social classes, and this is the next step of creating social capital. For example, a homeless man might

go to a McDonald's and talk to its manager for a job. Later, if he does a good job and builds more trust with his co-workers, the homeless man may become a manager. There is a non-profit organization called "Homeless World Cup Foundation", whose goal is to create a positive community through sports (soccer) around homeless minors and adults. They successfully changed some isolated homeless people by merging them with a community.

Social capital theory contends that social relationships are resources that can lead to the development and accumulation of human capital. For example, a stable family environment can support educational attainment and support the development of highly valued and rewarded skills and credentials. In evolutionary terms, social capital can be defined as any feature of a social relationship that yields reproductive benefits. According to Savage and Kanazawa (2002, 2004), humans have evolved preferences for companionship in general, and specific preferences for cues that signal higher levels of social capital [6].

It's not an easy goal to achieve, though. In a study conducted by Fred Coatler, he explains that sports clubs may only have small effects on social capital and there is a difference between the social capital distributed to administrators and participants. In the case of the Homeless World Cup Foundation, for example, people who gain more social capital, i.e., connections, are the ones organizing it, not necessarily those participants or the homeless. The administrators gain social capital by conveying the message to the public that they are helping the homeless. Sports contributes capital, social capital, to society. Coatler mentions a study conducted in England by "group 10s" where they state participation in arts and sports has a beneficial social impact. Sports build confidence and encourage strong community groups. In general, Coatler believes that only the more socially and educationally advanced citizens will volunteer. His idea of social capital is that it's a property only the socially elite can control, and they do so to secure their social positions. Coatler makes an interesting point in his article about social exclusions - "not about gradations of inequality, but about mechanisms that act to detach groups of people from the social mainstream." Coatler also believes that social trust is more down to the type of people who participate than the participation itself. "Sports programs need to be complemented by other measures to stimulate social regeneration." (Coatler, 2007) [7].

B. Cultural Capital

Cultural capital generally relates to higher education, linguistic skills, and command of high culture. It's the gathering of knowledge, behaviors, and skills, and it reflects one's cultural competence and social status. The term was coined by Pierre Bourdieu, who states that the accumulation of knowledge reflects the class difference. Cultural capital is broken down into three parts: firstly, an embodied state, knowledge that people acquire through socialization and education; secondly, an objectified state, material objects one might pursue for educational purposes; thirdly, an institutionalized state, the way cultural capital is measured and ranked, like job titles and social positions.

Cultural capital is often used to separate the different classes of people. According to Bourdieu, people in the

high-volume ends of the social space, with congestion of cultural and/or economic capital, have access to conversion of these assets [8]. It's hard for poor people to gain cultural capital, for example, a poor student needs to work, hence unable to study. Students who were taught manners will have a better chance in things like interviews. Students born to high-level classes tend to get higher grades, giving them a better chance to get into a good college, which would then connect them with a strong network of people and companies. In contrast, most homeless people failed to obtain cultural capital. Without basic and essential interaction skills and manners, it is extremely hard to thrive in such a competitive era (Cole, 2019) [9].

Sports may not necessarily benefit the homeless by giving them *social* capital, but it may do so by giving out *cultural* capital. Being part of a sports team generate many positive effects, some of which may shape the future of a youngster. For example, an article published by ABC News Network (Carollo, 2012) [10] talks about how participation in sports leads to a higher GPA, leadership on and off the field, and higher graduation rates. This is because sports tend to develop character, as athletes are usually more disciplined and hardworking as a result of their rigorous physical training. They will then convert those characteristics obtained from sports into education, which would eventually result in the development of more advanced education and symbolic goods translating to cultural capital.

Both Bourdieu and his successors use the notion of cultural capital in a vast number of ways. Cultural capital generally relates to higher education, linguistic skills, and command of high culture. According to Bourdieu, people in the high-volume ends of the social space, with congestion of cultural and/or economic capital, have access to conversion of these assets. The classic example of conversion is that of children of educated parents (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990 [1970]), whose childhood environments facilitate academic achievement. According to Bourdieu (*Distinction*), cultural capital gives proximity to legitimate culture. This proximity confers advantages [8].

C. Human Capital

Human capital is a complex term that eschews a simple definition and measurement and is a concept that has been investigated from a variety of perspectives by social scientists. The importance of human capital to economic well-being cannot be overemphasized. Human capital is a collection of resources, comprising all the knowledge, talents, skills, abilities, experience, intelligence, judgment, and wisdom possessed individually and collectively by individuals [11].

Social and personal attributes help produce economic value. Human capital is essentially the value of a person to an organization, typically a company. Examples of human capital include education, technical skills, problem-solving skills, and communication skills, basically assets that set an individual apart from his or her peers. Human capital directly correlates to cultural capital. They both comprise the assets of an individual. Cultural capital is a source of human capital (Kenton, 2020) [12]. Once one gains cultural capital like self-esteem, this newfound confidence enables an individual to develop human capital, which can be developing new

skills.

In the classical theory of economic growth, labor productivity is regarded as an exogenous factor which depends on the ratio between workforce and physical capital, plus other factors (technical progress), but the beneficial effect of education on potential growth of productivity is not taken into calculation. The new theory of economic growth developed in the early 80s comes to correct this shortcoming of the classical theory emphasizing the importance of education and innovation, (elements of human capital) in long-term economic growth [13].

III. METHODOLOGY

After I analyzed the different types of capital, I researched on websites such as solutionsu.org for successful homelessness assistance programs. Solutions U is a non-profit organization that provides Journalism Network. I searched by keywords like “homeless programs” and “homeless organizations” and found some literature on this topic.

I would look for successful programs that are still running and summarize what they do. I would categorize each program by scoring it (from 1 to 3) in terms of different forms of capital (economic, human, social, and cultural). If a program is focused more on giving out money to the homeless and the result for the homeless participants is financial, for example, it would have a high score on economic capital, and lower score on human, social or cultural capital. In total, I found six homelessness alleviation programs and implemented my scoring mechanism on each of them.

The first program is called Project HOME. It’s an organization that mostly offers economic capital to the homeless population in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Since 2015, Albuquerque’s solid waste department formed a program with the local homeless. Paying 9 dollars an hour to clean up trash, the program employs around 7000 homeless people a year. I assigned the following scores for Project HOME: Economic - 3; Human - 1; Social - 1; Cultural - 1. As the program offers money as a reward, it has a higher score in economic capital (Project HOME, 2021) [14].

The second program was The Coffee Oasis. It targets the homeless youth as their main audience. It pairs up homeless young people with caring and well-inspected host families, allowing them to have access to education or career. The Coffee Oasis has placed 17 young people from ages 16 to 25 in homes with a safe environment. This program’s score in terms of capital was: Economic – 1; Human – 2; Social – 3; Cultural - 1. This program gets a high score on cultural capital because important bonds and relationships can be built within a host family, having a major impact on their future careers and lives (The Coffee Oasis, 2021) [15].

The third program, Better Way Anaheim, connects homeless people with corporate employers. Offering 9 dollars hourly wage, lunch, and a place to sleep at when they complete their work. 1700 jobs have been handed out cleaning up over 117,000 pounds of liter and 1,700 jobs have been provided. I scored this program as follows: Economic – 3; Human – 1; Social – 1; Cultural - 1. The most significant

capital given out is financial (Better Way Anaheim, 2021) [16].

The fourth program, Wheels of Change, is an organization based in San Diego created by a 16-year-old named Kevin Barber. This organization pays homeless people 11.50 dollars an hour to clean up trash in the city of San Diego. The program was founded in 2018 and its ongoing success has gained support and funding from San Diego’s city council. Score assigned: Economic – 3; Human – 1; Social – 2; Cultural - 1 (Wheels of Change, 2021) [17].

The fifth program, Robs Barbershop Community Foundation, provides free haircuts to homeless veterans in the Baltimore area. Being around for two decades, it’s a successful program well-funded by the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training. They believe that one’s appearance plays a big role in important things like getting a job. Robs Barbershop even teaches some homeless veterans hair-cutting skills and provide them job opportunities. Scores assigned: Economic – 1; Human – 1; Social – 0; Cultural - 3 (Rob’s Barbershop Community Foundation, 2021) [18].

Finally, Dreamkit is an app that pays to teach homeless youngsters life skills. SBA bank indirectly sponsors the organization, and the government has shown its support by funding them with 100,000 dollars. A lot of young, homeless people just need some advice. The app rewards people with things like restaurant gift cards for completing activities such as watching a Ted talk or completing a meditation guide. Most of those activities result in some sort of cultural and economic capital to the user. Scores assigned: Economic – 2; Human – 1; Social – 1; Cultural - 3. Compared to the other programs mentioned above, Dream kit offers the most significant form of capital. Cultural capital teaches homeless people by making them watch guides and motivational speeches as well as completing a survey by enticing them with rewards like gift cards. The homeless can learn new life skills, for example, the etiquette expected during a job interview. This newly gained cultural capital could perhaps again land them a job (DreamKit, 2021) [19].

This process was helpful, because it gave me an idea of which types of capital are more commonly produced. Then I’d like to see which form of capital would be the most effective and beneficial for homeless people. This information can be implemented by organizations and governments trying to help the situation of homeless people by creating projects around different forms of capital (Table I).

TABLE I: SCORING FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF CAPITAL

	Economic	Human	Social	Cultural
0 point	0	0	1	0
1 point	2	5	3	4
2 points	1	1	1	0
3 points	3	0	1	2
Total Points	13	7	8	10

IV. CONCLUSION

To conclude, in order to help homeless people to advance into a better situation, we must not just think of giving them money or economic capital. Instead, we should devise programs that help them gain both economic capital and cultural capital. Economic capital may meet their immediate financial needs, but obtaining social capital will have more lasting effect, because it allows them to get out of the streets and eventually climb the social class ladders. Along the same line, if a homeless person wants to get out of his or her plight, he or she should look for assistance programs that can provide them cultural capital, not just economic one.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Brandon Guo conducted the research, analyzed the data, and wrote the paper.

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