

# Reviewing the cross-cutting reach of social capital in expatriation research: main trends and implications

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The increasing reach of economic globalization since the early 1970s has facilitated a range of unprecedented changes in the global labor landscape, resulting in a substantial acceleration of permanent and temporary labor mobility across the world (Dowlah, 2020, p. 244). In parallel to these transformations, International Business (IB) and Human Resource Management (IHRM) scholars began paying more attention to Multinational Corporations (MNCs), given their role as beneficiaries and agents of globalization (Hart, 2017, p. 333). In doing so, these internationally-oriented authors also fuelled a renewed interest in expatriate studies, which coincided with the launch of the *Journal of International Business Studies* in 1970 (McNulty and Brewster, 2017, p. 30).

Two decades later, the notion of social capital would also rise to prominence in management discussions, particularly through the seminal publications of Robert Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000). And, while social capital theory had mostly been tied to anthropology (Bourdieu, 1986) and sociology (Coleman, 1988) in the previous decades, the expatriation and social capital fields finally collided at the turn of the century, as researchers began to focus on the social relationships of expatriates from different perspectives.

Since then, the number of international career scholars integrating social capital into their contributions has continued to grow at a steady pace. Nevertheless, only a few authors have ventured out to try and review the existing literature on this particular topic, likely due to its fragmented nature, and the absence of an integrative and cohesive framework, with some honorable exceptions (such as van der Laken *et al.*, 2016, 2019).

With this conference paper, I seek to provide a brief overview of the topic, which is lacking in the literature, to take a first step in presenting the notable contributions that have integrated social capital theory in expatriation research in a simple and intuitive way. To do so, a literature review of expatriate literature in relation to social capital theory was undertaken through desk-based research. A total of 26 papers were considered in the review.

In this way, an overall classification of social capital and expatriate research will be proposed for dissemination purposes at the Työelämän Tutkimuspäivät 2020 conference in Tampere, Finland. This classification consists of 5 macro-categories (Psychological approaches, Cultural approaches, Adjustment/Performance approaches, Careers approaches and Knowledge transfer approaches) that subsequently contain 15 proposed subcategories, highlighting current research trends and gaps within the field. By delineating the most important trends that have been explored and classifying previous research into clear and simple categories, the expected result of this review is to inform the

general public and improve future academic contributions from up-and-coming researchers interested in social capital and global mobility.

**Keywords** Social capital, Expatriate, MNC, Social networks, Knowledge Transfer, Expatriate careers, Psychological approach, Cultural approach, IHRM