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Indice-Sommario 2025, n. 3

Editoriale

La CEDU e la permanente modernità di uno strumento *vivente* secondo il prisma dell'ordinamento italiano p. 1
Angela Di Stasi

FOCUS

Migration and Religion in International law: Research-based Proposals for Inclusive, Resilient, and Multicultural Societies

This focus is the final output of the research project of national interest Migration and Religion in International Law (MiReIL). Research-based Proposals for Inclusive, Resilient, and Multicultural Societies, funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research and by the European Union – NextGenerationEU in the framework of the “Piano nazionale di ripresa e resilienza (PNRR)”

An Introduction to the Focus on Migration and Religion in International Law: Research-based Proposals for Inclusive, Resilient, and Multicultural Societies p. 4
Giuseppe Pascale

The Protection of Migrants' Freedom of Religion in the United Nations System p. 14
Maria Irene Papa

Credibility Assessment of Religion-based Asylum Claims from a Comparative Perspective p. 50
Tarak El Haj

Migration and Religious Freedom in Europe: Searching for Constitutional Secularism p. 71
Elisa Olivito

The Problem of (Racialized) Religious Profiling in Law Enforcement Operations on the Ground and with AI: What Obligations for European States? p. 85
Carmelo Danisi

On Islamophobia and the Religious Rights of Muslims in Europe p. 121
Francesca Romana Partipilo

Religion, Gender, and Migrations through the Lens of Private International Law p. 152
Sara Tonolo

Multiculturalism, Religious Freedom, and School p. 180
Francesca Angelini



Religious Migration, Health, and Healthcare Organization
Davide Monego p. 196

Non-native Religious Minorities in Europe and the Right to Preserve their Faith
Silvia Venier p. 218

Migrants' Religious Beliefs, Social Capital, and Economic Performance
Luciano Mauro p. 239

Saggi e Articoli

Il regime internazionale dello Spazio europeo di libertà, sicurezza e giustizia
Massimo Panebianco p. 263

L'*EU Space Act*: tra economia dello spazio ed esigenze di sicurezza e cbersicurezza
Valeria Eboli p. 277

Il primato del diritto dell'Unione europea nella recente prassi giudiziaria italiana
Matteo Agostino p. 307

La Relazione della Commissione sul regolamento Roma II: profili problematici in vista di una possibile revisione
Pietro Campana p. 333

Commenti e Note

Mandatory integration measures for beneficiaries of international protection and proportionality requirements: insights from the CJEU's recent case law
Alice Bergesio, Laura Doglione, Bruno Zurlino, Stefano Montaldo p. 356

L'evoluzione del concetto di difesa comune europea tra obiettivi, rapporti con la NATO e criticità giuridiche
Vincenzo Maria Scarano p. 371

Will forced displaced persons due to climate changes impact on the EU labor market? Using previous research studies to predict the future
Denard Veshi p. 401

MIGRANTS' RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

Luciano Mauro*

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. – 2 Social Capital and Economic Performance. – 3. Religiosity, Religion Doctrines, Social Capital and Economic Performance. – 4. Migration and Social Capital: Integration or Dilution. – 5. Introduction to Formalization of Economic Performance, Migration and Social Capital. – 6. Conclusions.

1. Introduction

For a long time, economists believed that economic growth was mainly driven by the accumulation of physical capital and technological progress.¹ Subsequently, the role of human capital was recognized as a crucial element for economic growth,² and technology was better understood and embodied in Schumpeterian Growth models,³ implying endogenous and sustainable growth.

Then, Mankiw, Romer, and Weil⁴ extended Solow's model to include human capital, understood as education, and demonstrated that human capital, together with investment in physical capital, significantly contributes to explaining income

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¹ R.M. SOLOW, *A Contribution to the Theory of Economic Growth*, in *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1956, pp. 65-94; ID, *Technical Change and the Aggregate Production Function*, in *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 1957, pp. 312-320; W. EASTERLY, R. LEVINE, *It's Not Factor Accumulation: Stylized Facts and Growth Models*, in *The World Bank Economic Review*, 2001, pp. 177-219.

² R.E. LUCAS, *On the Mechanics of Economic Development*, in *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 1988, pp. 3-42.

³ P.M. ROMER, *Endogenous Technological Change*, in *Journal of Political Economy*, 1990, pp. 71-102; R.J. BARRO, X. SALA-I-MARTIN, *Economic Growth*, London, 1995.

⁴ N. G. MANKIW, D. ROMER, D.N. WEIL, *A Contribution to the Empirics of Economic Growth*, in *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1992, pp. 407-437.

differences between nations, revitalizing the approach of exogenous growth modeling and conditional income convergence among economies.

Subsequently, scholars' focus shifted to the role of institutions in economic growth. Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson⁵ highlighted how formal institutions, i.e., institutional setups embodied in formal norms, account for development gaps among economies. Following the distinction between formal and informal institutions by North,⁶ many economic growth scholars⁷ emphasized the importance of social norms, values, and beliefs that form the social and cultural fabric of a nation and strongly influence its economic performance.⁸

Within this broader institutional approach, our contribution seeks to integrate three dimensions – religion, social capital, and migration – under a unified perspective. This integration clarifies how cultural transmission mechanisms shape economic performance through the social capital channel.

The importance of these factors was already well acknowledged by sociologists such as Bourdieu,⁹ Coleman,¹⁰ and Putnam,¹¹ and subsumed under the successful concept of social capital. In a fortunate convergence, sociology and economics began interacting in a fruitful way, producing extraordinary research about the origins of economic success or failure of economies and their culture.

Very recently, the analytical framework, empirical evidence, and insights on the mechanisms linking social capital and economic growth have also proven useful for analyzing the consequences of migration on receiving economies.

In this contribution, after briefly introducing the literature on social capital and economic performance, we analyze the importance of religion for development and social capital formation. We then discuss how migration can modify the social capital of a community and, in turn, its economy. Finally, we attempt to summarize, in a more formal and ordered manner, the major mechanisms linking migration, social capital, and economic performances, hopefully suggesting avenues for further research. In this sense, the present study traces a continuous causal chain—from religiosity to civiness,

⁵ D. ACEMOGLU, S. JOHNSON, J.A. ROBINSON, *The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation*, in *American Economic Review*, 2001, pp. 1369-1401; D. ACEMOGLU, J.A. ROBINSON, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, New York, 2012, p. 540.

⁶ D.C. NORTH, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 152.

⁷ A. BISIN, T. VERDIER, *Beyond the Melting Pot: Cultural Transmission, Marriage, and the Evolution of Ethnic and Religious Traits*, in *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2000, pp. 955-988; L. GUIISO, L., P. SAPIENZA, L. ZINGALES, *People's Opium? Religion and Economic Attitudes*, in *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 2003, pp. 225-282; L. GUIISO, P. SAPIENZA, L. ZINGALES, *The Role of Social Capital in Financial Development*, in *American Economic Review*, 2004, pp. 526-556; L. GUIISO, P. SAPIENZA, L. ZINGALES, *Does Culture Affect Economic Outcomes?*, in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 2006, pp. 23-48; G. TABELLINI, *Culture and Institutions: Economic Development in the Regions of Europe*, in *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 2010, pp. 677-716.

⁸ A. ALESINA, P. GIULIANO, *Culture and Institutions*, in *Journal of Economic Literature*, 2015, pp. 898-944.

⁹ P. BOURDIEU, *The Forms of Capital*, in J. RICHARDSON (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York, 1986, pp. 241-258.

¹⁰ J.S. COLEMAN, *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital*, in *American Journal of Sociology*, 1988, pp. 95-120.

¹¹ R. PUTNAM, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton, 1993, p. 258.

from civicness to migration outcomes, and from these to growth performance – rather than treating these phenomena separately.

2. Social Capital and Economic Performance

Social capital is sometimes understood as networks of relationships among individuals, cultural values that shape behavior, and expectations about others' behavior that induce strategic responses. When interpreted as a network of interpersonal relationships, as suggested by Bourdieu,¹² social capital requires individuals to invest time and resources to function effectively, yet it can significantly reduce transaction and information costs in economic exchanges, thereby enhancing efficiency and productivity.

The network can serve as a resource for its members, though it does not always produce positive effects at the group level. In fact, Putnam¹³ distinguishes between bridging and bonding social capital: the former connects people across different social groups and promotes civic engagement, while the latter strengthens ties within homogeneous groups, which, although beneficial for individual members, may lead to segregation and exclusion.

When understood as shared culture and values, social capital is well described by Guiso et al.¹⁴ as those customary beliefs and values transmitted fairly unchanged across generations within ethnic, religious, or social groups. Bisin and Verdier model the intergenerational transmission of such values in a dynamic framework of individual preferences and investment decisions.¹⁵ These values define coherent behavioral codes, and their violation results in psychological costs or disutility, as described by Guiso et al.¹⁶

Here, it becomes clear that social capital is not only an economic facilitator but also a cultural asset that binds generations through shared beliefs and practices. This cultural continuity is precisely where religion and migration exert their deepest effects, as discussed in the following sections.

The multidimensional nature of social capital and the diversity of its interpretations make measurement difficult, yet various methods have been developed to capture its key dimensions. Indicators of social capital generally include measures of social trust, civic participation, social networks, and shared norms.

Trust is among the most frequently used indicators and is commonly assessed through surveys asking people how much they trust others in their community or society

¹² P. BOURDIEU, *The Forms of Capital*, cit., p. 241.

¹³ R.D. PUTNAM, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, 2000, p. 540.

¹⁴ L. GUIISO, P. SAPIENZA, L. ZINGALES, *Does Culture Affect Economic Outcomes?*, cit., pp. 23-48.

¹⁵ A. BISIN, T. VERDIER, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, cit., pp. 955-988.

¹⁶ L. GUIISO, P. SAPIENZA, L. ZINGALES, *The Role of Social Capital*, cit., pp. 526-556.

more broadly (e.g., “How much do you trust other people?” or “Do you think people can generally be trusted?”).¹⁷

Civic and political participation is another important dimension, including voting, involvement in civic associations, NGOs, volunteering, and religious groups. High civic participation is typically associated with greater cooperation and collective well-being.¹⁸

Social networks refer to the quantity and quality of interpersonal relationships, measured by the density and frequency of social interactions within a community. Stronger and more frequent connections suggest higher levels of social capital. Informal group involvement, such as in local associations or sports clubs, also serves as a sign of social cohesion.

Social norms represent another essential aspect of social capital; societies with strong norms of cooperation, mutual respect, and solidarity tend to have higher levels of social capital. Measuring these norms involves analyzing shared values regarding justice, cooperation, and civic behavior.

In empirical studies, social capital is often measured using composite indices combining trust, participation, cooperation, and relational indicators. Tools such as the World Bank's Social Capital Index are commonly used to assess social capital at the national or regional level.¹⁹

Social capital has gained growing attention in economics and other social sciences, having been used to explain a wide range of phenomena from national and regional economic performance²⁰ to institutional quality,²¹ firm size,²² financial development,²³ innovation,²⁴ and even crime and corruption.²⁵

If GDP growth depends on capital accumulation, technological progress, labor force expansion, and efficiency improvements, then social capital can have a significant influence because it fosters the very mechanisms that drive growth.

¹⁷ S. KNACK, P. KEEFER, *Does Social Capital Have an Economic Payoff? A Cross-Country Investigation*, in *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1997, pp. 1251-1288.

¹⁸ R.D. PUTNAM, *Bowling Alone*, cit., p. 541.

¹⁹ C. GROOTAERT, D. NARAYAN, V. N. JONES, M. WOOLCOCK, *Measuring Social Capital: An Integrated Questionnaire*, World Bank, 2004.

²⁰ S. KNACK, P. KEEFER, *Does Social Capital Have an Economic Payoff?*, cit., pp. 1251-1288; G. TABELLINI, *Culture and Institutions*, cit., pp. 677-716.

²¹ R. PUTNAM, *Making Democracy Work*, cit., p. 540.

²² R. LA PORTA, F. LOPEZ-DE-SILANES, A. SHLEIFER, R.W. VISHNY, *Trust in Large Organizations*, in *American Economic Review*, 1997, pp. 333-338.

²³ L. GUIISO, P. SAPIENZA, L. ZINGALES, *The Role of Social Capital*, cit., pp. 526-556; L. GUIISO, P. SAPIENZA, L. ZINGALES, *Does Culture Affect Economic Outcomes?*, cit., pp. 23-48.

²⁴ S. AKÇOMAK AND B. WEEL, *Social Capital, Innovation and Growth: Evidence from Europe*, in *European Economic Review*, 2009, pp. 544-567; H. M. PYLYPENKO, Y. I. PYLYPENKO, Y. V. DUBIEL, L. G. SOLIANYK, Y. M. PAZYNICH, V. BUKETOV, A. SMOLIŃSKI, M. MAGDZIARCZYK, *Social Capital as a Factor of Innovative Development*, in *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 2023, pp. 395-408.

²⁵ E.L. GLAESER, B. SACERDOTE, J. A. SCHEINKMAN, *Crime and Social Interactions*, in *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1996, pp. 507-548; C. BJØRNSKOV, *Corruption and Social Capital*, in *Aarhus School of Business working papers*, 2003, pp. 3-13; C. BJØRNSKOV, *Combating Corruption: On the Interplay between Institutional Quality and Social Trust*, in *Journal of Law and Economics*, 2011, pp. 135-159.

When understood as trust in others, for example, social capital reduces transaction and monitoring costs for firms, thereby increasing their profitability and size.²⁶ In the context of quality of institutions, Putnam²⁷ and Helliwell and Putnam²⁸ argue that social capital can enhance the quality and performance of public administration by increasing accountability and improving the productivity of the private sector as well. Along the same lines, Mauro et al.²⁹ show that high levels of civic-minded social capital reduce corruption and promote contract compliance among firms that win public procurements, thereby increasing public infrastructure and encouraging private investment. The negative relationship between social capital and inefficiency in public resource allocation due to corruption is a robust pattern observed in many cross-country studies.³⁰ Bjørnskov formalizes and empirically confirms the inverse relationship between trust-based social capital and corruption.³¹

But how these values, and beliefs and norms are built, diffused and transferred from generation to generation? There are clearly many institutions in charge of this function: family, school, media, but one important role is clearly played by religion and religiosity. This question leads naturally to the role of religion as a major source of civic norms and behavioural codes that sustain trust and cooperation. The next section introduces this link explicitly.

3. Religiosity, Religion Doctrines, Social Capital and Economic Performance

Religiosity, defined as the intensity of religious practice, plays a key role in shaping all dimensions of social capital: social trust, civic participation, social networks, and shared norms.

Its impact depends on the ability to generate trust and cooperation, but also on the nature of religious institutions and their degree of openness to the outside world. One of the main ways in which religiosity contributes to social capital is through the dissemination of ethical norms and pro-social behaviors.

Moreover, religiosity also acts as a catalyst for civic participation. Religious organizations provide spaces for interaction where individuals can develop social

²⁶ R. LA PORTA, F. LOPEZ-DE-SILANES, A. SHLEIFER, R.W. VISHNY, *Trust in Large Organizations*, cit., pp. 333-338.

²⁷ R. PUTNAM, *Making Democracy Work*, cit., p. 540.

²⁸ J. HELLIWELL AND R. PUTNAM, *Economic Growth and Social Capital in Italy*, in *Eastern Economic Journal*, 1995, pp. 295-307.

²⁹ L. MAURO, F. PIGLIARU G. CARMECI, *Decentralization, Social Capital, and Regional Growth: The Case of the Italian North-South divide*, in *European Journal of Political Economy*, 2023, Vol.78, pp.1-21.

³⁰ S. KNACK, P. KEEFER, *Does Social Capital Have an Economic Payoff?*, cit., pp. 1251-1288; R. LA PORTA, F. LOPEZ-DE-SILANES, A. SHLEIFER, R.W. VISHNY, *Trust in Large Organizations*, cit., pp. 333-338; S. KNACK, *Social Capital and the Quality of Government: Evidence from the States*, in *American Journal of Political Science*, 2002, pp. 772-785.

³¹ C. BJØRNSKOV, *Corruption and Social Capital*, cit., pp. 03-13; C. BJØRNSKOV, *Combating Corruption*, cit., pp. 135-159.

relationships and accumulate social capital.³² This phenomenon is particularly relevant in migration contexts, where religious communities act as support networks for newcomers, facilitating their economic and social integration.³³

However, as Putnam³⁴ emphasized, social capital can take two distinct forms: bonding and bridging. While bonding can strengthen internal cohesion, it can also foster exclusion and closure toward outsiders, limiting opportunities for intergroup interaction and potentially hindering the integration of migrants into the host society.³⁵

Thus, religion operates as both a unifying and dividing force: it can sustain social capital within communities, yet sometimes at the cost of reducing intergroup trust. This ambivalence becomes crucial when analysing migration and the coexistence of diverse faiths within the same economy.

Religions differ in the doctrines and values they promote. Since Weber (1905),³⁶ there has been an intense debate on how different religions influence development through the values and beliefs they foster.

Karl Marx considered religion a phenomenon that diverts the masses from recognizing economic and social inequalities, serving the interests of the ruling class: an “opium of the people,” as he defined it in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). For Marx, religion is not a force that promotes economic development but rather an obstacle to social and economic progress, perpetuating the status quo regardless of the specific doctrine professed.

In contrast, Max Weber, in his famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), argued that one particular religious doctrine – Christian Protestantism, especially Calvinism – had a decisive impact on the development of capitalism. According to Weber, the Protestant ethic promoted values such as saving, frugality, and work as a vocation, all of which favored the emergence of capitalism. Religion, in this sense, is not just a spiritual matter but a force that fosters modern economic practices, such as capital accumulation and innovation. Weber thus attributes a positive role to religion in encouraging economic development by creating a favorable environment for capitalism.

Despite criticism of Weber's theory on the historical origins of capitalism in Europe,³⁷ the influence of Weber's main message remains: religion shapes cultural traits that can be crucial for the development process.

³² R. IANNAcone, *Introduction to the Economics of Religion*, in *Journal of Economic Literature*, 1998, pp. 1465-1496.

³³ A. BISIN, T. VERDIER, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, cit., pp. 955-988.

³⁴ R. D. PUTNAM, *E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century*, in *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 2007, pp. 137-174.

³⁵ A. BISIN, G. TOPA, T. VERDIER, *Religious Inter-marriage and Socialization in the United States*, in *Journal of Political Economy*, 2004, pp. 615-664.

³⁶ M. WEBER, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. and notes by Stephen Kalberg, Oxford, 2010, p. 448.

³⁷ R. IANNAcone, *Introduction to the Economics of Religion*, cit., pp. 1465-1496; DELACROIX, *A Critical Empirical Test of the Common Interpretation of the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in *International Association of Business & Society*, 1992, p. 23.

This emphasis on values and beliefs that are either pro- or anti-development is clearly the perspective we are most interested in.

In fact, as Guiso et al. explain,³⁸ the most recent economic debate does not focus on whether different religious norms are more or less conducive to development—especially since such norms are also subject to endogenous evolutions and/or to exogenous changes.³⁹

Instead, the focus is on the cultural values, norms, and beliefs crystallized within religions that show statistically significant correlations with economic development outcomes.

For example, Guiso et al. consider several cultural traits relevant for development and their associations with major world religions, as detected by the World Value Survey.⁴⁰ These traits include: general trust in others, trust in government and the legal system, willingness to pay taxes, attitudes toward women's work and university education, views on income inequality (as either an incentive or a disvalue), opinions on private property and competition, and judgments on thrift and the fairness of markets or the interest rate.

In their analysis, they control for other factors, typically country-specific variables that could obscure the religion-development link, including education levels. This correction is particularly important in our context as we aim to understand whether religion itself, independent of migrants' country of origin, shapes cultural traits, or whether it is primarily the characteristics of the country of origin that are transmitted by migrants.

The results of Guiso et al. show that “Overall, we find that Christian religions are more positively associated with attitudes conducive to economic growth, while religious Muslims are the most anti-market”.⁴¹ In particular, Islam is consistently associated with lower levels of trust, civic participation, pro-market values, and female labor force participation. Conversely, Protestantism often ranks at the top.

Even a simple graph showing the average level of trust across religious groups confirms the more sophisticated results of Guiso et al.⁴²: trust is generally lower in countries where Islam is the dominant religion.

³⁸ L. GUIISO, L., P. SAPIENZA, L. ZINGALES, *People's Opium?*, cit., pp. 225–282.

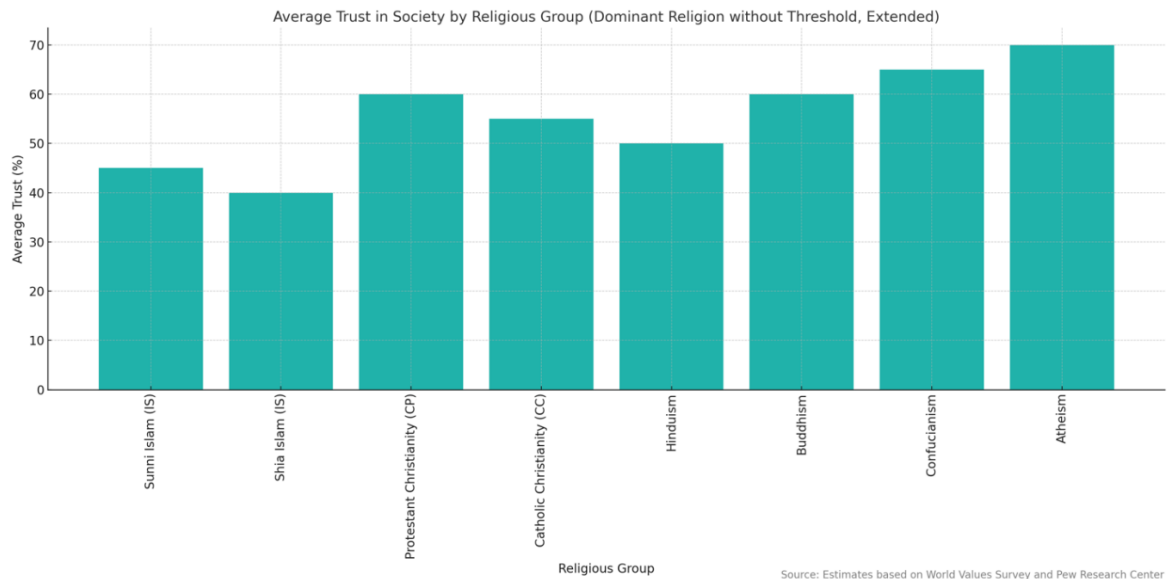
³⁹ In this regard, D. WEIL, *Economic Growth*, IV ed., New York, 2024, p. 698, points out that this resistance to the adoption of non-native technologies has distant historical roots, for example the “printing press in the Ottoman Empire was not established until 1728, some 275 years after Gutenberg's invention”. At the same time, Weil points out, this closure has not always been a feature of Islam, which until the thirteenth century acted as a bridge between Eastern and Western cultures. The rupture is traced back to the Mongol invasion culminating in the sack of Bagdad 1258 which represents an incredible example of destructive culture shock. See F. FRAZIER, *Invaders. Destroying Baghdad*, *Annals of History*, in *New Yorker Magazine*, 25 April 2005.

⁴⁰ L. GUIISO, L., P. SAPIENZA, L. ZINGALES, *People's Opium?*, cit., pp. 225–282.

⁴¹ L. GUIISO, L., P. SAPIENZA, L. ZINGALES, *People's Opium?*, cit., pp. 225–282.

⁴² L. GUIISO, L., P. SAPIENZA, L. ZINGALES, *People's Opium?*, cit., pp. 225–282.

Figure 1



On the contrary, some authors argue that Islam can have positive effects on economic development, mainly through the promotion of social cooperation, human capital formation, and economic justice. Iqbal and Mirakhor, for instance, highlight that Islamic principles – such as promoting social justice, prohibiting speculation, and preferring fair trade – can contribute to more inclusive and sustainable economic growth.⁴³ The concept of *zakat* (mandatory almsgiving) is seen as a mechanism for wealth redistribution and reducing inequality, thus enhancing economic stability. Becker points out that Islam, by fostering an ethic based on honesty, justice, and cooperation, can strengthen social capital and thus institutional functioning and economic growth.⁴⁴

However, the negative correlation between Islam and development found by Guiso et al.⁴⁵ could reflect some cultural practices that inhibit economic modernization. Bergh and Henrekson⁴⁶ (2011) argue that more conservative interpretations of Islam could restrict economic freedom and the adoption of modern technologies and entrepreneurship.

Another critical issue concerning Islam is gender inequality. Kuran notes that in many Muslim-majority societies, religious norms limit gender equality, leading to a loss

⁴³ Z. IQBAL, A. MIRAKHOR, *An Introduction to Islamic Finance: Theory and Practice*, Singapore, 2007, p. 332.

⁴⁴ S.O. BECKER, *Religion, Culture, and Economic Growth*, in P. AGHION, S.N. DURLAUF (eds.), *Handbook of Economic Growth*, Vol. 2, Amsterdam, 2014, pp. 1179-1207.

⁴⁵ L. GUIO, L., P. SAPIENZA, L. ZINGALES, *People's Opium?*, cit., pp. 225-282.

⁴⁶ A. BERGH, M. HENREKSON, *Entrepreneurship and Institutions: A Review of the Empirical Literature. Foundations and Trends*, in *Entrepreneurship*, 2011, pp. 73-110.

of human capital and lower growth compared to societies where women enjoy equal access to education and employment opportunities.⁴⁷

Although Islamic finance seeks to address some challenges, Ghosh points out that the prohibition of interest (usury) in some Islamic economies hampers full financial liberalization, limiting investment and access to capital essential for growth.⁴⁸ Furthermore, strong links between religion and politics in some Islamic countries may foster authoritarianism and corruption, which hinder development.

Barro and McCleary found that, holding other factors constant, countries with a higher proportion of Muslims tend to have lower per capita incomes compared to countries dominated by other religions.⁴⁹ However, correlation does not imply causation, and many other factors—such as political institutions, colonial legacies, and economic policies—may also explain these differences. A significant part of the variability in Islam’s economic effects stems from the diversity within Islam itself. Islam is not monolithic but encompasses a variety of branches with differing views on issues critical for economic development, as shown in the following table.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ T. KURAN, *Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism*, Princeton, 2004, p. 194.

⁴⁸ S. GHOSH, *The Paradox of Islamic Banking: Why It Matters*, in *World Economics*, 2013, pp. 67-82.

⁴⁹ R.J. BARRO, R.M. MCCLEARY, *Religion and Economic Growth across Countries*, in *American Sociological Review*, 2003, pp. 760-781.

⁵⁰ Processing with AI based on: J.L. ESPOSITO, *Islam. The Straight Path*, iv ED., Oxford, 2011, p. 352; S.H. NASR, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*, San Francisco, 2002, p. 350; Z. MIR-HOSSEINI, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*, Princeton, 1999, p. 305; F. MERNISSI, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, Massachusetts, 1992, p. 195.

Table 1
**Currents of Islam and Attitudes towards Secularism,
 Women, Savings, Capitalism and Interest**

Current/ Branch	Secularism	Role of women	Work Ethic/Savings	Compatibility with capitalism	Attitude towards interest (ribā)
Alevi	High	Active	Moderate (Community)	Average	Tolerant
Bektashi	High	Active	Moderate	Average	Tolerant
Ismailis (Aga Khan)	High	Active	High (modern values)	High	Tolerant
Ahmadiyya	High	Active	High (progress, education)	High	Reformist
Sufism (in general)	Variable	Flexible	Spiritualized	Variable	Tolerant
Twelver Shi'ism	Average	Mixed	Moderate (depends on context)	Compatible	Forbidden
Zaiditi (Yemen)	Low	Traditional	Conservative	Traditional	Forbidden
Orthodox Sunnism	Low	Traditional	High (strong work ethic)	High	Prohibited (with modern exceptions)
Salafiti/ Wahhabiti	Very low	Restrictive	High (religious austerity)	Capitalism with religious constraints	Strictly forbidden

This evidence on Islam is critical not only in itself but also for the debate on migration.

The large migration flows that spark public concern in Europe are often from predominantly Islamic countries. According to Pew Research Center data, between mid-2010 and mid-2016, about 3.7 million Muslims and 3.3 million non-Muslims immigrated to Europe. Among refugees, 78% were Muslim, and among legal migrants, 46% were Muslim. Overall, Muslims made up about 53% of all migrants to Europe during that period.

While formal institutions can, in principle, be changed relatively quickly—through migration-driven political shifts (if migration were large enough to alter voting equilibrium) – there are institutional constraints such as citizenship laws that prevent rapid change.

In contrast, informal institutions, like culture, are highly inertial. Since Putnam,⁵¹ it has been widely accepted that social capital is historically rooted and changes through long generational processes.⁵²

However, studies on migration to the U.S.⁵³ show that migrants' levels of trust and other cultural traits are significantly influenced by their country of origin and that these traits persist across generations.

On one hand, this suggests that cultural integration is a slow process. On the other hand, it implies that migration can serve as an accelerator of cultural change, affecting social capital much like any other production factor, especially if migrants' social capital endowments differ from those of natives.

In the following section, we will review some contributions on the impact of migration on the host country's social capital.

4. Migration and Social Capital: Integration or Dilution

As mentioned above, while inertia in social capital can be strong in closed economies, as documented by several contributions,⁵⁴ in economies experiencing large inflows of migrants, social capital can change more rapidly. The precondition for this to occur is that migrants preserve their culture or most of their cultural traits.

Evidence supports this view. Jones explores how migrants bring with them not only skills and labor but also deep-seated cultural attitudes—such as the propensity to save, interpersonal trust, and views on the role of government—that can shape the economic and political institutions of host countries for generations.⁵⁵ He argues that the idea of full cultural assimilation within one or two generations is a myth, and that the cultural roots of migrants have lasting effects on the economic potential of the nations that receive them.

In line with this, many scholars have found that migrants retain their culture in host countries. Algan and Cahuc⁵⁶ use data on immigrants in the United States to measure the trust inherited from their home countries. They find that trust is passed down through

⁵¹ R. PUTNAM, *Making Democracy Work*, cit., p. 540.

⁵² A. DI LIBERTO AND M. SIDERI, *Past Dominations, Current Institutions and the Italian Regional Economic Performance*, in *European Journal of Political Economy*, 2015, pp. 12-41.

⁵³ A. ALESINA, E. LA FERRARA, *Who Trusts Others?*, in *Journal of Public Economics*, 2002, pp. 207-234; Y. ALGAN, P. CAHUC, *Inherited trust and growth*, in *American Economic Review*, 2010, pp. 2060-2092; Y. ALGAN, A. BISIN, A. MANNING, T. VERDIER, *Cultural Integration of Immigrants in Europe*, Oxford, 2013, p. 368.

⁵⁴ See, among others, R.D. PUTNAM, *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*, in *Journal of Democracy*, 1995, pp. 65-78.; L. GUIISO, P. SAPIENZA, L. ZINGALES, *Does Culture Affect Economic Outcomes?*, cit., pp. 23-48.

⁵⁵ G. JONES, *The Culture Transplant: How Migrants Make the Economies They Move To a Lot Like the Ones They Left*, Stanford, 2022, p. 228.

⁵⁶ Y. ALGAN, P. CAHUC, *Inherited Trust and Growth*, in *American Economic Review*, 2010, pp. 2060-2092.

generations, suggesting that trust is a persistent cultural component, and inherited trust has a significant impact on economic growth. Weil and Putterman analyze how the ancestral origins of populations influence current income disparities between countries, indicating a strong persistence of historical and cultural effects, including religious ones.⁵⁷

In the same avenue, a well-known contribution by Fisman and Miguel analyzes the parking behavior of United Nations diplomats in New York City to investigate how cultural norms influence compliance with laws when the environment changes.⁵⁸ They found that diplomats from countries with higher levels of corruption tended to accumulate more unpaid parking tickets, despite enjoying diplomatic immunity. This suggests that cultural attitudes toward corruption and lawfulness persist even when individuals are outside their home countries and immune from legal enforcement.

Similarly, Ichino and Maggi⁵⁹ examine how regional cultural differences within Italy affect employee behavior, specifically shirking, in a large firm. They find that workers from regions with weaker civic traditions are more likely to shirk, suggesting that cultural norms significantly impact workplace behavior even in different environments.

Taken together, this evidence implies that the social capital of host countries can change due to migration since migrants are endowed with different social capital and they retain part of it when they move.

However, this is not necessarily because newcomers are endowed with lower social capital, but simply because migration increases cultural diversity. Putnam himself warned that migration could erode social capital, noting that diversity might lead to lower trust in neighbors and local leaders, reduced political efficacy, lower levels of voter registration, diminished expectations of cooperation on collective problems, and less likelihood of community engagement.⁶⁰ Alesina and La Ferrara (2002) find that individuals in communities with greater racial and income heterogeneity report lower trust in others.⁶¹ Dinesen and Sønderskov, in a meta-analysis covering 87 studies, find that although the effect is quantitatively modest, “the overall meta estimate of the relationship between ethnic diversity and social trust is negative and significantly different from zero; trust is on average lower in more ethnically diverse contexts”.⁶²

Nevertheless, other scholars emphasize that migrants' cultures do not remain static but instead interact with those of host countries, often leading to mutual influence,

⁵⁷ L. PUTTERMAN, D. N. WEIL, *Post-1500 Population Flows and the Long-Run Determinants of Economic Growth and Inequality*, in *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2010, pp. 1627-1682.

⁵⁸ R. FISMAN, E. MIGUEL, *Corruption, Norms, and Legal Enforcement: Evidence from Diplomatic Parking Tickets*, in *Journal of Political Economy*, 2007, pp. 1020-1048.

⁵⁹ A. ICHINO A. AND G. MAGGI, *Work Environment and Individual Background: Explaining Regional Shirking Differentials in a Large Italian Firm*, in *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2000, pp. 1057-1090.

⁶⁰ R. D. PUTNAM, *E Pluribus Unum*, cit., pp. 137-174.

⁶¹ A. ALESINA, E. LA FERRARA, *Who Trusts Others?*, cit., pp. 207-234.

⁶² P.T. DINESEN, K. M. SØNDERSKOV, *Ethnic Diversity and Social Trust*, in *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2018, pp. 441-458.

though not necessarily convergence. Algan et al., in their edited volume *Cultural Integration of Immigrants in Europe*,⁶³ offer an economic perspective on how immigrants culturally integrate into European societies. The book examines the formation and evolution of cultural identities among immigrants, focusing on factors such as ethnic background, religion, and host-country institutions. The main message is that values such as attitudes toward gender roles, trust, family structure, and religion show strong intergenerational persistence, and that the children of immigrants often reflect a mix of parental culture and host-country norms—but convergence can take a long time. They also find that schools play a central role in shaping cultural values, especially for second-generation immigrants, but that school quality and neighborhood diversity influence the pace and direction of integration.

Religion, in their studies, emerges as a major axis of cultural distance, with religious identity—especially Islam in Europe—playing a significant role in shaping attitudes toward gender equality and political institutions. The religious gap can persist across generations and may become a source of friction in integration processes.

The book also highlights that European countries vary widely in their strategies for integrating immigrants, shaped by historical, institutional, and ideological contexts. For example, France emphasizes assimilation into a secular national identity, minimizing ethnic and religious differences – often generating tension around religious expression. Germany initially adopted a guest worker model but has since evolved toward more structured integration policies. Italy and Spain, as newer immigration destinations, have focused more on labor market needs and less on cultural inclusion. Sweden, by contrast, promotes multiculturalism supported by welfare provision, although it still faces issues of segregation and exclusion and has recently shifted toward stricter hosting procedures. Switzerland’s federalism creates regional variation in integration policy, and the UK, once a champion of multiculturalism, has moved toward a stronger emphasis on civic integration.

Finally, Kesler and Bloemraad argue that the impact of immigration on social capital is not uniform but depends on the host country’s integration policies.⁶⁴ In countries with inclusive policies, immigration does not significantly reduce social trust or participation. In countries with less inclusive policies, higher immigration correlates with reduced social capital.

These findings are somewhat questioned by Bisin and Tura, who analyzed the Italian case using administrative data on marriages, births, and separations from 1995 to 2012.⁶⁵ They estimate a structural model of marital matching along ethnic lines and find that ethnic minorities tend to socialize their children within their own culture, while

⁶³ Y. ALGAN, A. BISIN, A. MANNING, T. VERDIER, *Cultural Integration*, cit.

⁶⁴ C. KESLER, I. BLOEMRAAD, *Does Immigration Erode Social Capital? The Conditional Effects of Immigration-Generated Diversity on Trust, Membership, and Participation across 19 Countries, 1981–2000*, in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 2010, pp. 319-347.

⁶⁵ A. BISIN, G. TURA, *Marriage, Fertility, and Cultural Integration of Immigrants in Italy*, in *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 2021, pp. 3263-3305.

Italians display high cultural intolerance toward minorities. These dynamics, combined with fertility and homogamy patterns, slow cultural integration—especially for migrants from Latin America, East Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite these challenges, they find that approximately 75% of immigrants integrate into the dominant Italian culture over a generation.

Interestingly, and somewhat counterintuitively, their analysis suggests that lower levels of cultural intolerance among Italians could actually slow integration by allowing greater retention of origin languages and norms within mixed marriages.

In conclusion, the evidence discussed highlights that migration affects social capital through processes of cultural transmission and interaction that are both persistent and conditional. Migrants bring with them not only human capital but also deeply rooted cultural traits—such as norms of trust, family structure, and political attitudes—which often endure across generations and influence the civic fabric of host societies.

Among these cultural dimensions, religion stands out as a particularly enduring and sensitive axis of identity. As shown in several contributions, religious beliefs—especially when they differ markedly from those predominant in the host society—can shape attitudes toward gender roles, institutions, and collective life, sometimes generating friction or slowing down integration. At the same time, religious communities can also provide support networks that facilitate adaptation and civic engagement.

Cultural integration, therefore, is not a process of rapid convergence but rather a gradual and selective negotiation between traditions, in which religion often plays a central role. Whether this interaction strengthens or undermines social capital depends crucially on the policy environment: inclusive and well-designed integration policies can mitigate tensions and transform diversity into a resource, while exclusionary approaches risk exacerbating mistrust and social fragmentation. Migration, in this light, should be understood not merely as a demographic or economic phenomenon but as a profound cultural encounter—one that reshapes both migrants and host societies over the long run.

It remains to investigate how all this affects the economic performance of the host country. In this respect, according to the economic approach, we feel the need to systematize formally the above considerations. In the following section, we therefore aim—while keeping technicalities to a minimum—to mathematically discuss migration and economic performance, explicitly incorporating in the standard Solow growth model the role of social capital.

5. Introduction to Formalization of Economic Performance, Migration and Social Capital

In search of an ordered and formal framework, we may begin with a production function. Formally, economic performance—measured by GDP per capita or per worker

productivity—can be expressed as a function of several inputs and efficiency parameters:

$$(1) \quad y = f(T, E, k, h, y_0, S)$$

Where T stands for technology, E for efficiency, k for physical capital per worker, h for human capital per worker, y_0 the initial level of backwardness to capture decreasing returns, and last but not least, Social capital, the set of informal institutions we discussed and that is the focus of the present contribution.

These inputs are not constant over time; their dynamics are central to both positive and normative economic theories (e.g., why do some countries invest so little in education? what is the optimal investment rate in physical capital?). Increasing any of these inputs typically entails trade-offs and costs. Investment in physical capital implies foregone current consumption; investment in education reduces current labor income; technological progress requires R&D expenditure; and improvements in efficiency may involve significant institutional reforms.

This trade-off can be captured by the following relationship:

$$(2) \quad \dot{x} = s_x f(T, E, k, h, y_0, S) - \delta_x x \quad 0 \leq s_x \leq 1 \text{ and with } x = T, E, k, h, S$$

This equation states that the accumulation of each input requires allocating a share of output to that specific input, rather than to others or to consumption. Therefore, aggregate consumption is:

$$(3) \quad C = (1 - \sum s_x) f(T, E, k, h, y_0, S) \text{ with } x = T, E, k, h, S$$

Maintaining the stock of any input at a constant level also requires resources proportional to its current level—a sort of maintenance cost.

As for social capital S , it may seem counterintuitive, but informal institutions also require time, effort, and resources to accumulate, maintain, and transmit across generations. This process can involve individual-level time investments (e.g., family education) or more complex collective structures—such as churches, associations, or political parties—which require sustained investments to function effectively.

The returns to investment in each input are measured by the marginal gains in y and generate the incentives to undertake such costly investments. Moreover, investing in one variable (say, h) can increase the marginal returns of others (such as k or T), fostering a virtuous cycle. In a nutshell, growth theories aim to describe, explain, and quantify these interactions in the long run, where these forces shape the path of sustained economic growth.

In normal times, the determinants of per capita income evolve slowly, either because rapid accumulation is too costly or because of technological and institutional limitations. For example, due to adjustment costs, optimal investment in physical capital is finite, and human capital accumulation often spans generations.

In general migration can significantly alter this picture. Since both human and physical capital are measured per worker, changes in the number of workers (the denominator) can swiftly affect capital intensity. Migration can thus rapidly alter an economy's average levels of physical and human capital.⁶⁶

We distinguish two migration scenarios:

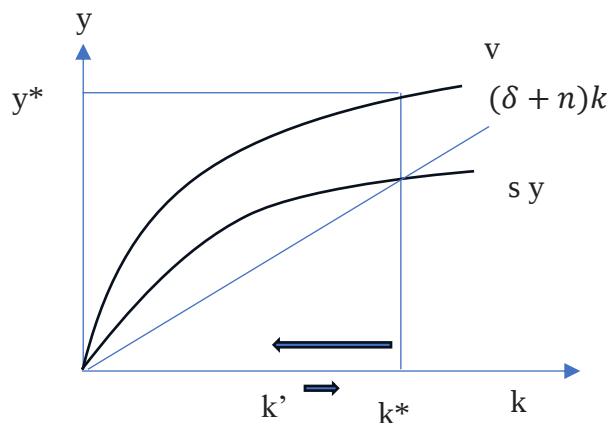
- 1) Lump-sum migration, i.e., a one-time mass inflow of migrants;
- 2) Sustained migration flows, occurring in each period.

These scenarios differ in their long-run effects, especially if migrants differ from natives in terms of their endowments or investment behavior.

In the standard neoclassical model, a one-time mass migration has only transitory effects.

In order to discuss this case, let us consider a simplified Solow model with only one cumutable factor that is capital⁶⁷ in Figure 2. If migrants are, realistically, poorly endowed in human or physical capital, they will reduce average per capita income, (how much depending of the relative-to-population migrant inflow) although, when employed, they raise aggregate GDP as in Figure 2.

Figure 2



⁶⁶ Shocks to the numerator are also possible indeed. One can think of shocks like natural disasters or wars that destroy physical capital. Shocks to the denominator besides migration can also take place such as the ancient pandemic known as the “Black Death” in 13th century that halved the European population and signed the development of Europe.

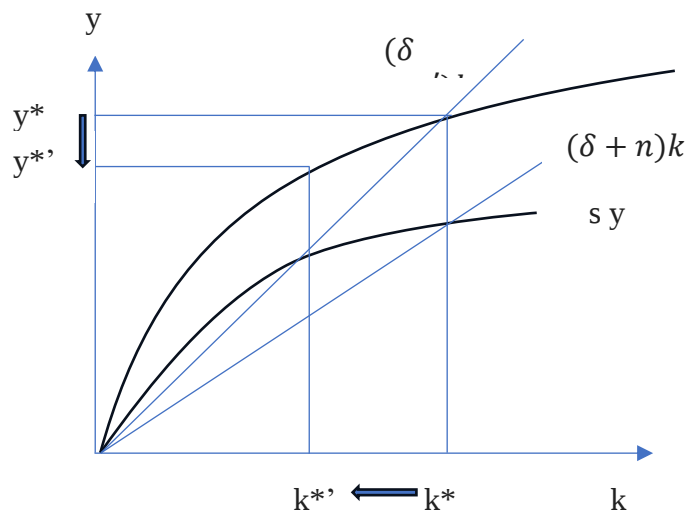
⁶⁷ It is not uncommon to assume private capital to have an enlarged definition that could included human and physical under certain assumption of non arbitrage condition about the two private capital returns: see J. DOLADO, A. GORIA, A. ICHINO, *Immigration, Human Capital and Growth in the Host Country: Evidence from Pooled Country Data*, in *Journal of Population Economics*, 1994, pp. 193-215.

Graphically the Solow model dynamics can be derived analyzing the distance between the savings curve ($s y$) and the depreciation line ($(\delta + n)k$). When the two crosses at k^* the system is in equilibrium at zero growth with a per capita income level of y^* . One time mass migration changes the ratio K/L or dilutes capital intensity k .

Assuming newcomers are identical to natives in all respects and do not alter the savings and fertility rate nor the efficiency and social capital the economy initially jumps to the left, y drops, aggregate GDP, Y , rises, but in the long run the old equilibrium y^* is reached again. In the convergence process the economy will present higher aggregate above the average but declining growth rates in y .

Differently, in Figure 3 the sustained inflow of migrants, to the extent that it alters the long run income determinants will have long-lasting effects. In a sense the sustained inflow of migrants adds up to the fertility rate of natives increasing the growth rate of population and shifting upward the depreciation line.

Figure 3



The magnitude of long-run effects depends on how much migrants differ from natives in their capital endowments and investment behavior.⁶⁸ For instance, if sustained flows of migrants lack physical capital, this would lower capital intensity and the long-run equilibrium.

What about institutions, our S factor, and migrations? In our stylized neoclassical model, S is treated as an efficiency-enhancing parameter. If migrants alter S , migration can shift the production function up or down, permanently affecting per capita income. Assume now that migrants differ only in social capital and are initially less endowed with it, consistent with evidence on lower general trust in many countries of origin (and persistent to migration).

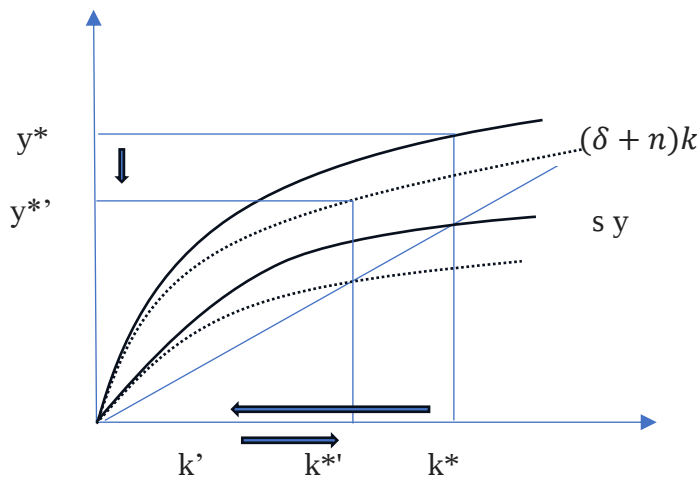
Again, we can distinguish different cases:

⁶⁸ J. DOLADO, A. GORIA, A. ICHINO, *Immigration, Human Capital and Growth*, cit., pp. 193-215.

- 1) a massive lump sum migration endowed with lower social capital with no integration;
- 2) a massive lump sum migration with integration;
- 3) a sustained inflow of migrants with evolving integration dynamics.

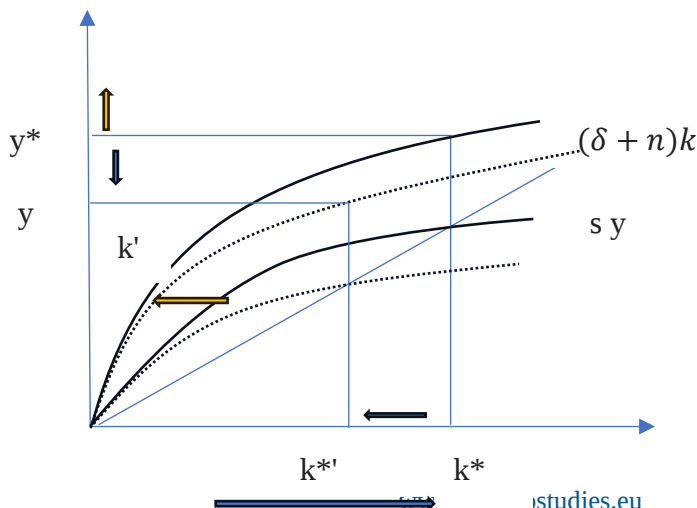
In Figure 4 below we graphically described case one where the massive one-time migration is assumed to dilute capital intensity to k' and at the same time drop down the production and savings functions. Afterward, the economy converges to k'^* and since the social capital has permanently lowered per capita social capital due to the absence of integration the combined effects will drop y^* or $y^{*'}$ permanently.

Figure 4



Differently from the former case in Figure 5 we assume here that integration occurs and migrants' social capital, S_m , converges toward the level S_n of the natives. Therefore, after the initial drop to k' the economy quickly reverts to k'^* ; then, depending on the speed of integration, it converges to k^* as the production and the savings function shift upward due to the integration effects.

Figure 5



When the integration is completed, the economy will be back to the original steady state value of y^* . Clearly the speed of integration will determine the speed of convergence to the pre-migration equilibrium.

For what we have discussed in the preceding chapters the speed of integration will depend on several factors: the relative distance of values and beliefs between migrants and natives, differences in religion both in terms of religion values as well as religiosity of migrants, the spatial concentration of migrants that favors the bonding social capital and discourage the bridging social capital, the integration policies (education investment, welfare) and more generally the attitudes towards migrants.

We could model the evolution of migrants' social capital over time using a convergence framework along the lines of Mankiw, Romer, and Weil.⁶⁹ In our setting, migrants' social capital converges to a long-run equilibrium level characteristic of the host country. The speed of this convergence is determined by the degree of cultural proximity between migrants and the host population.

Let S_m denote the social capital of the migrant group at time t , and S_n^* the long-run social capital level in the host country. The relative cultural distance between the migrant group and the host society is captured by a parameter $CD \in [0,1]$, where $CD = 0$ represents full cultural similarity and $CD = 1$ maximal distance.

The law of motion is given by:

$$(4) \quad d \ln(S_m)/dt = \lambda(CD) \cdot (\ln(S_n^*) - \ln(S_m))$$

where $\lambda(CD)$ is the convergence rate, defined as:

$$(5) \quad \lambda(CD) = \lambda_0 \cdot (1 - CD)$$

with $\lambda_0 > 0$ representing the maximum potential speed of convergence.

This formulation captures the intuitive idea that the more culturally distant migrants are, the slower their convergence in social capital. Conversely, integration policies and institutional support can accelerate convergence. The greater the cultural distance CD , the slower the convergence toward the host society's social capital. When $CD = 0$, convergence occurs at the maximal rate λ_0 . When $CD = 1$, convergence is effectively zero.

Solving the differential equation yields:

⁶⁹ N. G. MANKIW, D. ROMER, D., D.N. WEIL, *A Contribution to the Empirics*, cit., pp. 407-437.

$$(6) \ln(Sm_t) = \ln(Sn^*) + (\ln(Sm_0) - \ln(Sn^*))e^{-\lambda_0(1-CD)t}$$

or equivalently:

$$(7) Sm_t = Sn^* (Sm_0/Sn^*)e^{-\lambda_0(1-CD)t}$$

This solution describes a monotonic path toward SC^* , with speed determined by the initial cultural distance. This basic model can be extended to incorporate additional frictions or supports:

$$(8) \lambda(CD, IS_t, D_t, RD) = \lambda_0 \cdot (1 - CD) + \gamma \cdot IS_t + \varphi \cdot RD + \delta \cdot D_t$$

where:

- IS denotes institutional support (e.g., integration programs, education);
- D measures discrimination or exclusion- γ, δ, φ are parameters capturing their effects on convergence possibly including spatial segregation;
- R measures relative Religion Distance, Rm/Rn in the same fashion as Cultural

Distance we can imagine a value of zero when the two religions coincide and 1 when they are at the maximum distance with respect to several dimensions such as pro market values, gender discrimination, education and so on.

In case the hosting country is experiencing a sustained inflow of migrants that represents a sort of “depreciation rate” alike in the case of physical capital where new workers dilute the average capital intensity. Therefore as in Mankiw, Romer, and Weil the speed of convergence will include the immigration rate in the formula of the speed of convergence to account for the negative effect of the new incoming migrants with low endowment of social capital which could possibly halt or revert the re-equilibrium tendency if the incoming flow is too large to prevent the integration process to take place.⁷⁰

This represents the most challenging in terms of modelling, yet realistic, case. Graphically, in

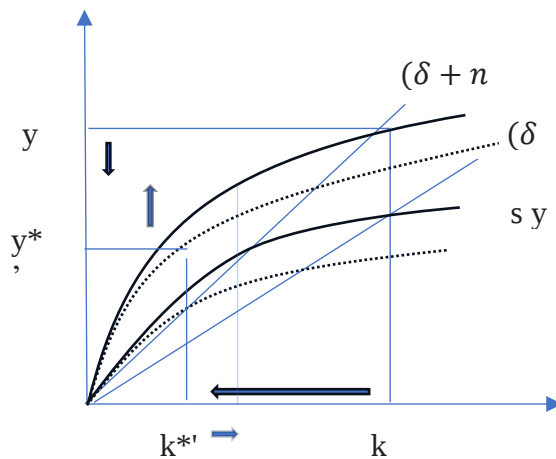
Figure 6 the economy that allows a sustained inflow of migrants experiences a shift in the $(\delta + n)k$ line since now to n we must add the inflow m of migrants. The initial drop of the steady state level of k^* and the relatively transitional dynamics must be combined with a downward shift of production and savings functions possibly slowed down and contrasted by the integration. In the figure we assume the integration was not able to prevent the downward shift of the production and saving function stabilizing the

⁷⁰ N. G. MANKIW, D. ROMER, D.N. WEIL, *A Contribution to the Empirics*, cit., pp. 407-437.

social capital level to a lower level. However, it is not impossible to assume the integration to be so strong and rapid to leave the two curves intact moving the equilibrium to the right corresponding to the semitransparent line.

The main message is that the interplay of the forces in action is very complex and clearly, we are taking the simple Solow model to its limits, nevertheless we believe that it was useful to indicate the direction of the formal investigation; in this respect the flexibility and the didactical power of the Solow model remain unbeatable.

Figure 6



An important point in terms of policies and possible extension to the model concerns the role of migration policies in shaping not only the quantity but also the quality—understood in terms of cultural compatibility—of incoming migrants. While the baseline framework so far assumes that migrants arrive exogenously with given social capital endowments, in reality, migration decisions are endogenous and strongly influenced by the institutional and normative environment of the receiving country.

In particular, if destination countries clearly articulate and enforce civic integration requirements—including respect for core societal values such as gender equality, tolerance, secularism, and the rule of law—then migrants’ self-selection processes can be significantly affected. Potential migrants whose values are more closely aligned with those of the host society are more likely to undertake the costly migration process, while those holding incompatible beliefs may self-select out, choosing either not to migrate or to favor destinations with weaker civic expectations. This mechanism mirrors the classical theory of self-selection in migration,⁷¹ extended beyond economic traits such as skills and education to include cultural and civic dimensions. Recent theoretical and empirical contributions⁷² suggest that migrants are not randomly drawn from origin populations but represent a culturally selected subset—partly in response to host-

⁷¹ G.J. BORJAS, *Self-Selection and the Earnings of Immigrants*, in *American Economic Review*, 1987, pp. 531-553.

⁷² F. DOCQUIER, J. MACHADO, K. SEKKAT, *Efficiency Gains from Liberalizing Labor Mobility*, in *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 2017, pp. 303-346.

country policy signals. Incorporating cultural self-selection into the model implies that the effective cultural distance between migrants and natives becomes a function of policy design.

At this stage, the role of legal science becomes essential. Law is not only the instrument through which civic norms are codified and enforced, but also the medium by which host societies signal their normative boundaries to potential migrants. The legal system defines eligibility criteria, rights and duties, and integration requirements—serving as both a filter and a framework for civic convergence. Legal norms thus contribute directly to shaping the incentives that underpin cultural self-selection and institutional adaptation. Moreover, the perceived legitimacy and fairness of legal frameworks influence migrants' trust in institutions and their willingness to integrate.

As a result, by credibly signaling a legal and civic commitment to shared values, governments can improve the average cultural compatibility of incoming migrants, accelerating social capital convergence and minimizing transitional frictions. However, excessively restrictive or exclusionary policies—especially when grounded in legal uncertainty or perceived discrimination—may deter migration altogether or produce unintended adverse selection effects.

Empirically, understanding and measuring cultural self-selection remains a challenge. Preliminary evidence suggests that destinations with well-defined legal-institutional integration frameworks, such as Canada or Australia, tend to attract migrants whose values are more closely aligned with liberal-democratic norms.⁷³

In summary, self-selection mechanisms open an important policy margin: migration management is not only about controlling the size of inflows but about designing legal and institutional environments that shape the cultural and civic profiles of those who choose to migrate. In this perspective, legal science is not ancillary, but foundational to the construction of successful integration trajectories and, by extension, to the long-term stability of social capital and economic performance.

6. Conclusions

This paper has examined the complex interrelations between religious beliefs, social capital, migration, and economic performance. By integrating insights from sociology, economics, and growth theory, we have highlighted the centrality of social capital – conceived as a combination of trust, civic norms, networks, and shared values that help to limit opportunistic behaviors and instead foster civicness – as a fundamental determinant of long-term prosperity.

⁷³ G. PERI, *Skills and Talent of Immigrants: A Comparative Analysis of Selection Processes*, IZA Discussion Paper, 2005; G. FACCHINI, A. M. MAYDA, *Does the Welfare State Affect Individual Attitudes Toward Immigrants? Evidence Across Countries*, in *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 2009, pp. 295-314.

Religiosity and religious doctrines play a crucial role in shaping the cultural foundations of social capital. Historical and empirical evidence suggests that different religious traditions foster distinct economic attitudes.

Migration introduces an additional layer of complexity. Migrants carry with them cultural traits and religious identities that persist across generations and can reshape the informal institutions of host societies, accelerating cultural changes that without migration would be characterized by remarkable temporal inertia. While such diversity may initially reduce trust and challenge social cohesion, inclusive and well-designed integration policies can transform cultural heterogeneity into an asset for civic vitality and economic performance.

To better understand these dynamics, we used a stylized Solow model incorporating social capital and migration. This framework helped illustrate how mass migration shocks or sustained inflows of culturally distant migrants can lower economic performance if integration fails. Conversely, successful integration fosters the convergence of social capital and enables long-term gains in per capita income.

Critical factors influencing this process include cultural and religious distance, the quality of education systems, the spatial distribution of migrants, and the policy stance of the host society. Moreover, the states that clearly articulate and enforce civic norms—such as gender equality, democratic participation, and tolerance—can induce self-selection mechanisms whereby culturally compatible individuals are more likely to migrate, thereby facilitating smoother integration.

Beyond economics and sociology, these findings point to the importance of law and legal institutions in shaping both the rules of inclusion and the boundaries of acceptable diversity. Legal science plays a foundational role in defining the rights and duties of migrants, protecting minority freedoms, and enforcing anti-discrimination measures in a proactive framework that signals civic values, mediates conflicts, and enables the construction of shared norms in pluralistic societies.

Future research is needed to explore the complex interplay between migration, religion, social capital, and economic performance through a multidisciplinary lens. This necessarily includes law, as legal norms and institutional designs condition the very possibility of integration, social trust, and sustainable development in diverse societies. In policy terms, this means that integration policies should not be viewed merely as social assistance but as long-term investments in the country's stock of social capital, with measurable implications for growth.

ABSTRACT: This paper examines how religious beliefs, social capital, and migration interact to shape economic performance. Social capital—understood as trust, civic norms, and social networks—emerges as a key informal institution influencing development. Religion plays a foundational role in shaping these civic traits, with different doctrines fostering varying economic attitudes. Migration introduces

persistent cultural traits that can either strengthen or erode the host country's social capital, depending on integration dynamics. Using an extended Solow growth model, we explore the impact of both lump-sum and sustained migration flows, accounting for cultural distance, institutional support, and religious compatibility. We discussed the convergence of migrants' social capital over time and emphasize the role of legal institutions and integration policies in shaping this process. The paper highlights how migration is not merely a demographic or economic phenomenon but a cultural process with long-term implications for social cohesion and economic growth. Policy design, particularly around civic norms, plays a central role in these dynamics.

KEYWORDS: economics – growth – development – religion – migration – social capital.