



RESEARCH ARTICLE

CRITICAL VIEWS ON GRANOVETTER'S THEORY OF "THE STRENGTH OF WEAK TIES" BASED ON THE ANALYSIS OF THE LOCAL LABOR MARKET IN THE COMMUNE OF YOPOUGON

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ABSTRACT

The general observation on a local labour market is the meeting between labour supply and demand. Far from being so rational, the economic law of supply and demand applied to the labour market is largely influenced by social relations developed and maintained by job seekers, particularly at the Yopougon town hall. However, the effectiveness of the weak link as stated by Granovetter (2000) in finding employment seems to be limited, unsuited to the socio-economic context of our localities. This article takes a critical look, while demonstrating the limitations, on the theory of the "strength of weak links" developed by Granovetter to obtain a job in the context that is ours. To do this, we did a search with the town hall of Yopougon. It consisted of a documentary review, supported by a collection of empirical data using a questionnaire and an interview guide from the staff and local elected officials of the municipality of Yopougon. It is mainly apparent that more than 80% of the recruits at the town hall come from the social relations developed between employer (town hall and job seekers. As a result, they have strong ties (relatives, friends and belonging to the same community. These links directly have a higher effectiveness compared to the weak links (professional link, simple acquaintance) for obtaining the job.

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INTRODUCTION

The decentralizing reform in Côte d'Ivoire has so far resulted in 201 municipalities and 31 regions. These reforms are in line with the 3rd Ivorian constitution, promulgated on November 8, 2016, which stipulates in its article 170 that "local authorities are the regions and the municipalities" (Jorci, 2016). These communities are decentralized entities of public power, enjoying administrative and financial autonomy; which allows them room for maneuver in the management of local affairs. One of the important margins concerns the recruitment of personnel to work within the municipal administration. At this level, local authority personnel are governed by law no. 2002-04 of January 3, 2002 on the status of local authority personnel. This law distinguishes between two types of personnel, namely, civil servants and agents made available by the State (generally 4 to 5 executives, and agents governed by the Labor Code recruited by local elected officials themselves. In addition, Decree No. 2013-476 of July 2, 2013 setting the terms for establishing the organic framework of local government jobs, regulates jobs and sets the limits not to be exceeded in terms of recruitment.

But, under what social determinants are recruitments made on the labor market in a local public administration? What resources do job seekers mobilize to obtain them? One could answer that they obey the law of supply and demand between the employer (commune) and the potential employees from the presentation of their skills and qualifications and this, according to the needs expressed. However, on closer examination, social relations intervene in the labor market at the local level. Is this a new or old phenomenon? The analysis by Degenne A., Fournier I., *et al.* (1991) suggests that it would be very difficult to point out who was the first to introduce social relations into the study of the labor market. Many monographs (including some old ones) have revealed corporate strategies that rely on family relationships for their recruitment: one hires one's son, one's daughter, one's parent, the son or nephew of an employee of the House. It is at the same time a kind of sponsorship by the person introducing the newcomer. You can't recommend just anyone for lack of losing their own credit with their boss. The employee thus recruited, for his part, is bound by the sponsorship granted to

him. In short, the advantage is twofold for the boss who employs this recruitment policy (Degenne, Duplex, 1984).

There are also cases where the employer delegates control of the workforce to the traditional leader of a highly structured immigrant community (Maurice *et al.* 1972). It is this customary chief who regulates the entries and exits of the company. This situation is also indicative of recruitment practices within the municipal administration. These practices, by hypothesis, are based on the "social" and the "political" where the mayor seizes the opportunity to honor his campaign promises vis-à-vis these voters and members of his community. The analysis of obtaining a job based on social relations has been theorized by Granovetter (1983). He concludes, from a survey conducted in the USA (Massachusetts, Newton) in 1973, that weak ties are more effective than strong ties in job search. What does it mean? What is a strong link, a weak link, a social relationship?. According to Granovetter (1983), individuals are embedded in relational networks and are in constant contact with each other. They are not isolated, they are in communication and they are constantly exchanging. In this case, man is truly a social animal, as Aristotle said, quoted by R. Guremen, (2013).

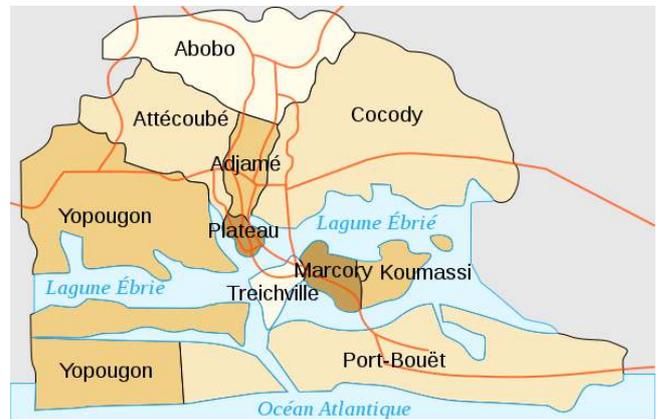
In other words, social relations are the channels through which information flows between members of this network. Therefore, the more diversified an individual's network, the richer the information available to him. The larger a person's network, the more diverse it is likely to be. The size of the network is therefore another indicator of potential wealth, which P. Bourdieu (1980) calls social capital. However, how can we appreciate the intensity of the relationship between individuals? Granovetter then speaks of interpersonal ties. This link can be strong or weak. It therefore defines the criteria for classifying these links. Four criteria are retained according to the authors. These are: i) The frequency of contact, ii) The emotional intensity, iii) The importance of the services rendered and iv) The degree of intimacy of the exchanges (confidences). In the vast majority of relationship networks, there are strong ties and weak ties. The more an individual's network is made up of people with whom he has strong ties, the more this network tends to be transitive and to constitute a closed environment. Weak ties are those that can build bridges between these isolates. It is through them that certain information can circulate and that individuals belonging to different backgrounds can come into contact. The share of weak ties therefore matters a lot according to Granovetter. However, can we accept the meanings and meanings of weak tie strength theory wholeheartedly in our context? From the above, the article proposes to take a critical look, while demonstrating the limits of the theory of the "strength of weak ties" to obtain a job, developed by Granovetter, in the context that is ours. Specifically, it will i analyze whether the effectiveness of strong ties is decisive or not in obtaining employment at the town hall of Yopougon, ii identify the limits and weaknesses of the theory of the "strength of weak ties" with regard to local labor market practices.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Geographical and social fields of the study

Geographic field: The study focuses on the "strength of weak ties" for obtaining employment, in a decentralized public

administration. This administration concerns the municipality of Yopougon. The choice of this municipality is justified because it is the largest, given the number of population (1,071,543 habitants and the area (153 km²) according to the RGPH (2014). In terms of status and municipal longevity, Yopougon is the largest municipality in Ivory Coast and is one of the oldest municipalities. It was thanks to Law No. 78-07 of January 9, 1978 creating full-service municipalities in Côte d'Ivoire that Yopougon became a territorial community in 1980.



Source : https://fr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Abidjan_Communes.svg

Map 1. Overview of the municipality of Yopougon in the DAA

Social field: The social field of the study concerns the staff of the town hall of the municipal administration. This field also concerns personnel made available to other external services.

Sampling and sample characteristics: The staff of the Yopougon town hall on May 31, 2022 was 810 agents in all categories, taken into account in the municipality's operating budget. For the purposes of the study, we stratified the agents by socio-professional category. We therefore favored stratified probability sampling by considering the percentage of each stratum of the overall workforce. By applying this percentage, we retained 82 people drawn at random for the survey from June 20 to 24, 2022. However, the execution of the survey produced an execution rate of 81.70%, or 67 people actually surveyed out of 82 planned. The basis of the survey) was the list of agents (permanent agents and contract agents included in the municipal operating budget. The table below gives actual values and estimates.

Table 1. Staff numbers by socio-professional category, selected sample and actual respondents

Socio-Professional Category	Actual numbers	% of numbers (VR)	Sample selected (VA)	Actual respondents
Executives	91	11,24	9	5
Supervisors	116	14,32	12	8
Skilled Workers	16	1,98	2	5
Unskilled Workers	461	56,91	46	45
Laborers	126	15,55	13	4
Total	810	100	82	67

Source: survey data, 2022

Data collection techniques and tools: The diagnostic survey was done by the technique of documentary research and under two complementary approaches. These are the quantitative survey and the qualitative survey. The quantitative survey more concerned enforcement agents (supervisors, workers and labourers) using a semi-directive questionnaire. As for the

qualitative survey, it concerned the general secretariat and the human resources department, using an interview guide.

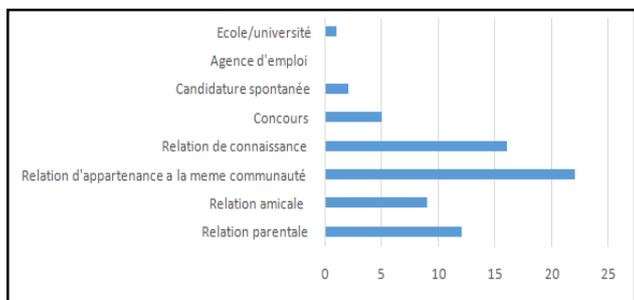
Data processing and analysis: The digitization of the survey allowed data to be entered digitally during the data collection process. The quantitative data thus collected was processed and analyzed. The qualitative data collected was transcribed. The method of thematic content analysis (condensation of data, presentation and conclusion) was used to analyze and categorize the data into meaningful units. The quantitative data entered were processed and analyzed with Sphinx plus 2 software, in relation to the research questions.

The approach followed makes it possible to present the results obtained.

RESULTS

Structuring, characteristics of agents: It concerns the gender, age, status and qualification of job seekers. The survey reveals that the workforce of the Yopougon town hall remains strongly dominated by men with a proportion of 76.10% of the workforce against 23.90% among women. The employability of women is a problem, a major challenge raised in the local context. Several factors should therefore be explored in order to promote gender in jobs. Regarding age groups, job seekers are young. Most of them are between 21 and 41 years old (constitutes more than 60% of respondents). They are also single (over 55% of respondents) and 91% have permanent contracts. According to the workforce, employees remain largely dominated by skilled and unskilled graduate workers, constituting more than 70% of respondents.

Social capital mobilized by agents to obtain a job, “employer-employee” social relationship: The analysis of the logic of obtaining a job in a decentralized public administration suggests several significant results according to the survey. The method of recruitment obeys three interrelated logics against a background of networking: the logic of relational networks, which depends heavily on the social capital of the job seeker; the logic of the “supply and demand” job market through open or restricted applications and the logic of spontaneous application. The graph below shows the proportions.



Source: survey data, 2022

Graph 2. Method of obtaining a job at the town hall of Yopougon

Of all these logics, the one that takes precedence according to the survey is the logic of relational networks. The more the job seeker has an expanded social capital, the chances of obtaining employment are higher. P. Bourdieu (1980) defined social capital for the first time in 1980 to refer to one of the types of resources available to individuals and social groups. They can

mobilize them at any time to benefit from privileges or advantages of all kinds in a given situation, in particular that of the job market. Conversely, obtaining employment via the market or spontaneous applications are less significant and the town hall devotes few resources to it. This practice is less prosperous because it is legally influenced by the dual status of local authority staff (Law No. 2002-04 of January 3, 2002 on the status of local authority staff), where the local elected representative has the possibility (power to hire or fire staff. It is also important to know that spontaneous applications and those from the market are generally co-opted, beyond the normative aspect presented. Conversely, obtaining employment via the market or spontaneous applications are less significant and the town hall devotes few resources to it. This practice is less prosperous because it is legally influenced by the dual status of local authority staff (Law No. 2002-04 of January 3, 2002 on the status of local authority staff), where the local elected representative has the possibility (power to hire or fire staff. It is also important to know that spontaneous applications and those from the market are generally co-opted, beyond the normative aspect presented. However, it has been found that these ties (strong or weak cross all relationships (interacquaintance, friendship, parental and even community) to varying degrees. For example, the employee may find himself in a strong connection with a member of his political community who is the mayor, the deputy mayor or the municipal councillor. Yet, according to Granovetter, this strong bond should be in a parental or friendly relationship. This critical paradox is widely present in the relational network system developed between job seekers and job providers at the local level.

DISCUSSION

The analysis will critique Granovetter's approach that weak ties outperform strong ties in job search. For him, the weak link concerns the relations of knowledge, the professional relations between the job seeker and the employer. As for strong ties, they concern parental and friendly relationships. In the context of local authorities (supply and demand of jobs for the public service in a decentralized environment), the study has shown through the results that the Granovetter hypothesis is not always verified and contains within it limits.

Limitation and confusion in “weak ties” conceptual approaches; “strong ties”; “characterization and dimensions of the ties associated with social relations”: What is a weak link? What is a strong link? According to his works, Granovetter (1974) gives the definition by the classification of links. Indeed, for him, interpersonal ties are composed of weak ties and strong ties. The criteria used to classify them are: i) the frequency of contact, ii) the emotional intensity, iii) the importance of the services rendered and iv) the degree of intimacy of the exchanges (confidences). In the vast majority of relationship networks, there are strong ties and weak ties. He goes further by saying that family and friendly relationships are strong ties and professional and acquaintance relationships are weak ties. On analysis, this definition is ambiguous, geocentric and connects a combination of intuitive ideas found in the notion of “strength” of an interpersonal relationship. In several countries in Africa, for example, the strength of a link between individuals can be found in belonging to the same community (ethnic, political, professional, religious, etc). which shares values and objectives without them necessarily having friendships or family ties. The

alignment of such criteria seems purely theoretical and linear, whereas the links are multiple, positive/negative, symmetrical/asymmetrical, variable and are transversal to all social relations. Another aspect that creates confusion concerns the measurement of the four criteria/factors and the respective weight to be attributed to them in a relationship. This is why some anthropologists define strong ties based on the concept of "multiplexity", that is to say the fact that a relationship has multiple contents (Kapferer, 1969, p. 213). However, if, in certain circumstances, this criterion is indeed satisfactory, we note however that certain strong links only have a single or diffuse content (Simmel, 1950, p. 317-329). With this approach, most multiplexed links will indeed be strong links, without multiplexity being a necessary condition of link strength. A general theory on the "strength of weak ties" could not be constructed apart from all these considerations.

Inadequacy of the "strength of weak ties" theory in the context of the labor market in municipalities: The limit and inadequacy of this theory is felt in the context of the labor market at the municipal level. The administration of local authorities is a particularity because it is the combination of "political", "technical" and "social". The conditions for obtaining employment differ from other administrations. The method of recruitment evolves under a double constraint: the legal and regulatory framework and the almost permanent influence of the supervision on these decisions. A text of law (law n°2002-04 of January 03, 2002 on the status of local authority staff) and a decree (decree n°2013-476 of July 02, 2013) setting the terms for establishing the organic framework of local authority employment authorities govern the status of staff and jobs in local authorities. These texts authorize local elected officials to recruit agents in addition to those made available by the supervisory authority.

Thus, the recruitment of personnel does not always obey the law of the labor market, the orthodoxy of organizational engineering and respect for the procedures for the forward-looking management of jobs and skills. The survey showed that the majority of contract agents are recruited by the local elected representative via relational networks. These networks are for the most part crossed by strong ties (see survey results, graph 2) and not weak ties as highlighted by Granovetter. Indeed, the co-option, the recommendations by intermediaries of job seekers are made by individuals maintaining strong relations with local elected officials and municipal administration officials. In short, this staff is recruited by local elected officials, whom they justify by a political fee (voters, supporters and by social assistance vis-à-vis their populations, their community, by socio-economically integrating a person in working age (C. De Visscher and G. Le Bussy, 2001, p. 61)

Social capital: a rather relational rather than quantitative wealth to maintain: The concept of social capital in which the strong and weak ties between members fit and are evaluated is broader than we think. The concept is used for the first time by P. Bourdieu (1980, to refer to one of the types of resources available to individuals and social groups. These mobilize in fact, according to his analyses, three types of resources, in order to increase or maintain their position within the social hierarchy and benefit from the material and symbolic privileges attached to it: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. The latter brings together relationships and support networks that can be mobilized for socially useful purposes. In this context, "social capital" appears as the

property of the individual and of a group, both stock and the basis of a process of accumulation which will allow people who are well endowed at the start to better position themselves in the competition. Social capital refers to the resources that derive from participation in networks of relationships that are more or less institutionalized. It was in a slightly different sense that J. Coleman (1988) developed the concept in the 1980s, but it was above all with the work of Robert Putnam that it gained media coverage and really took off. According to D. Méda (2002), the notion of social capital is closely linked to that of civic virtue, but Putnam notes that civic virtue is all the more effective when it is inserted into a dense network of social relations, which generate general trust and reciprocity. He notes that the notion of social capital has been used independently several times during the 20th century. The first "inventor", L. J. Hanifan, for whom social capital is "those tangible substances which matter most in people's daily lives, i.e. goodwill, camaraderie, sympathy and social relations between individuals and families that form a social unit. Subsequently, Jane Jacobs, Glenn Loury, Pierre Bourdieu and Ekkehart Schlicht used and theorized this notion. While referring to Coleman, Robert Putnam redefines the individual and collective, private and public dimensions of the notion of social capital. Social relations support the rules of social life by producing social capital, which benefits individuals, but also the community. Social capital can therefore simultaneously be a "private" and a "public" good. Social networks are based on mutual obligations, they are not simply contacts. They produce a specific reciprocity and, above all, a general reciprocity: "I do this for you without expecting an immediate counterpart from you, but I am confident that on occasion someone will reciprocate".

According to Putnam, "a society characterized by generalized reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society, in the same way that money is more efficient than barter". The most important distinction he draws between the multiple forms of social ties, formal, informal, professional, family, associative, etc., creating social capital, is that which differentiates "open" ties from "closed" ties (that unite equals). Bonds between people moving in different circles are more useful than strong ties that connect me to my loved ones. Strong ties are good for recharging one's batteries, comforting oneself; weak ties are good for moving forward, evolving. The social capital that unites acts as a sociological "glue"; the capital that connects acts as a sociological "lubricant". It is she who must be maintained and not kept as a "stored" wealth. The links, whether strong or weak, must be maintained so that they serve, are useful at the right time, especially when it comes to job search. Their effectiveness depends on it and is not exclusively reserved for the strength of weak ties.

CONCLUSION

This study critically analyzed Granovetter's theory of the "strength of weak ties" in obtaining employment. The starting hypothesis developed by the author is that weak ties are more effective than strong ties in job search. To confront this theory, we carried out a survey among employees of the Yopougon town hall. The results reveal the limits of Granovetter's theory. Indeed, it cannot be applied everywhere, especially in the context of local authorities. It is true that relational networks are mobilized by job seekers, but these networks are based on strong ties rather than weak ties according to the survey. The

definition and content of weak ties, which are similar to professional networks made up of acquaintances, and "strong ties", which are more akin to personal networks bringing together friends, family and relatives, is not always verified. It has been found through the study that the links (strong or weak cross all social relations (interacquaintance, friendship, parental and even community to varying degrees. This is why some anthropologists define strong ties based on the concept of "multiplexity", that is to say the fact that a relationship has multiple contents (Kapferer, op, cit.). This critical paradox is widely present in the relational network system developed between job seekers and job providers at the local level. Granovetter's theory, to be effective, must be contextualized and even be studied on a case-by-case basis. At the community level, for example, what prevails in the job market is a logic of political and social royalty vis-à-vis voters, supporters, members of the siblings and the community, on maintained social capital fund.

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