



Intellectual Capital in Non-Profit Organizations: A Focus on Social Capital as a Marketing Enabler

Journal:	<i>International Marketing Review</i>
Manuscript ID	IMR-01-2021-0029.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Intellectual capital, Non-profit sector, Non-profit organizations, Relational capital, Social capital, International reputation

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Intellectual Capital in Non-Profit Organizations: A Focus on Social Capital as a Marketing Enabler

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Abstract

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Design/methodology/approach: After a literature review about the intellectual capital (IC) and the social capital (SC) in the non-profit sector (NPS), at either national or international level, the study presents a bibliometric-systematic literature review (B-SLR) of the field in question.

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Purpose: The research has the aim of exploring whether and how relevant studies about non-profit organizations (NPOs) have so far investigated the fruitful effects that can be generated by proactive governance, management and marketing of their IC – particularly when considering its extension to SC – with relation to the promotion of corporate reputation.

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Findings: According to a quantitative (more bibliometric) perspective, the scientific interest on this specific issue has not always been constant and methodical, while three themes (institutional scope, human resources and operational functioning) have so far mostly been analyzed according to a qualitative (and therefore more systematic) perspective.

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Originality/value: Despite some recent trends aimed at re-evaluating the effect of intangible assets in any organization, there is still some reticence within the NPS to consider the importance of these resources. This orientation also extends to IC, and more specifically to SC, which should now be considered as relevant factors in the creation of value for any socio-economic organization, both nationally and internationally.

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Keywords

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Intellectual capital; Non-profit sector; Non-profit organizations; Relational capital; Social capital; International reputation.

1. Introduction

The relevance of intangible assets within economic and social organizations has been considered with different emphasis over the years. Initially, limited consideration was given to both profit-oriented organizations and public administrations (PAs), and perhaps even less to non-profit organizations (NPOs) (Guthrie, 2001; Möller and Gamerschlag, 2009). Some studies have tried to acknowledge the importance of know-how and other intangibles in the for-profit sector (FPS) (Penrose, 1959; Bell, 1973; Drucker, 1993). However, the same attention has not been given to the public administration (PA) and to NPOs, whose functioning and above all purposes show totally different characteristics in terms of capitalization and especially of the nature of their intangible assets, also at international level (Dolnicar and Lazarevski, 2009). These resources, however, have tremendous potential as critical value drivers for NPOs (Buonomo et al, 2020; Benevene et al., 2021), particularly with relation to their intellectual capital (IC) and, perhaps more specifically, social capital (SC) components (Buono et al., 2004). Some important studies (Augier and Teece, 2005; Marr, 2005; Marr and Roos, 2005; Porter and Kramer, 2011) have in fact identified IC and SC as key success factors in the strategic and operational activities aimed at the creation of value carried out by any socio-economic organization. In the specific context of NPOs, some reticence to adequately ponder the value of intangibles continues however to persist. That is probably because the absence of a profit orientation in NPOs may lead to some ambiguities in the evaluation of their performance, especially at international level (Civitillo, 2016; Civitillo et al., 2018). NPOs are in fact fundamentally governed on the basis of social interests and values that are ample, assorted and multifaceted (Speckbacher, 2003). Thus, such organizations appear to be ideally built only around their mission and its related value system (Porter and Kramer, 1999) but this does not necessarily imply that intangible assets do not have a specific relevance. By following this approach, the current research aims at presenting a general picture of the progress of the scientific research on IC in general, and more specifically on SC, for NPOs operating either nationally or internationally, which leads to the following research question:

RQ1: *“How have IC, and more specifically SC, been considered in the international scientific literature about NPOs?”*

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3 In this respect, the structure of the paper is as follows: *a)* review of the literature on the
4 subject, by means of a bibliometric-systematic literature review (B-SLR), presenting both
5 quantitative and qualitative results; *b)* analysis and discussion of the results; *c)* detecting of
6 theoretical and practical implications; *d)* identification of research limits and future research
7 paths.
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11 12 13 **2. Theoretical background about IC in NPOs**

14 15 16 *2.1. The role of intangible assets in value creation processes*

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18 Business enterprises operate according to a production function in which several (either
19 quantitative or qualitative) resources are constantly processed as inputs to generate other
20 output resources, following the input-output model (Smyczek et al., 2020). In the past, most
21 of the value created seemed to derive from tangible assets, while nowadays intangible assets
22 such as IC are considered the main creators of value, especially at international level (Augier
23 and Teece, 2005).
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29 One of the most critical issues affecting IC is the one regarding its internal composition –
30 which also depends on the perspective adopted – and its consequent disclosure (Castelo
31 Branco et al., 2010; Ousama and Fatima, 2012; Nardo and Veltri, 2014). Even though IC is
32 traditionally articulated into human, structural and relational capital (Roos et al., 1997; Bontis,
33 1998; Kong and Prior, 2008; Kong, 2007; Kong and Thomson, 2006; Festa et al., 2017), with
34 provision also for SC (Reed et al., 2006; Swart, 2006; Hashim et al., 2015), a universally
35 accepted definition has not been provided yet. A similar concern is also reflected in the
36 analysis of the potential differences affecting Pas, FPS and – most relevant to this study –
37 NPOs (Marr, 2005).
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44 It is not easy to provide an orthodox or unequivocal definition of intangibles, probably
45 because they hardly possess ‘common’ exchange value. In this perspective, Hall (1992 and
46 1993) viewed intangible resources both as *assets* and as *competences*. When considered as
47 assets, intangibles include reputation (an essential marketing asset, especially at international
48 level) and intellectual property rights (patents, trademarks, copyrights, etc.). When seen as
49 competences, intangibles include personal know-how (including that brought by employees,
50 as well as by suppliers, service providers, distributors, etc.) and those collective features
51 forming the core of the corporate culture, an aspect that is particularly critical in terms of
52 cross-cultural management (Konwar et al., 2017; Michaelidou et al., 2019).
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3 Such distinction presents however a fundamental limit. While it is technically possible –
4 albeit complex – to measure assets, competences seem on the other hand very difficult to
5 evaluate, because they are intimately connected to the environmental and organizational
6 context in which they are active, and therefore they might not have the same value when
7 considered within another context, especially if cultural differences at international level are
8 taken into account (Pla-Barber et al., 2014; Elliot et al., 2015).

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10 That is why the IC *“held by a firm can be thought of as a form of unaccounted capital within*
11 *the traditional accounting system. This unaccounted capital can be described as the*
12 *knowledge-based equity that supports the knowledge-based assets of a firm”* (Abeysekera,
13 2006, p. 61). Thus, in the current and future scenarios, the value of IC should be considered a
14 direct and/or indirect expression of knowledge management (KM). In a knowledge economy,
15 knowledge-based resources – i.e. intangibles – become generators of differential capability,
16 sustainable competitive advantages and successful strategic thinking (Hall, 1993).

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18 Nonetheless, it is worth stressing that *“extracting value from intangible capital is a much*
19 *more complicated and risky process than extracting value from tangible (physical) capital.*
20 *Intellectual property, standing alone, generates little or no value to the final consumer”*
21 (Augier and Teece, 2005, p. 18). That is why, having detected intangibles as strategic levers,
22 the most critical management issue is then that of how to extract value from such resources.

2.2. Intellectual capital and social capital in the non-profit sector

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24 Most of the academic attention has so far been devoted to for-profit organizations (FPOs),
25 sometimes investigating more specifically the influence of the ownership structure and the
26 related profit expectations (Chouaibi and Kouaib, 2016). Limited consideration has been
27 given on the other hand to the public sector and the non-profit sector (NPS), with the latter
28 representing the focus of the present work.

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30 The relevance of NPOs has hugely increased at international level, in both developed and
31 developing countries (Salamon and Sokolowski, 1999), as they currently represent one of the
32 main suppliers of specific goods and services, as well as one of the main employers (Salamon
33 and Anheier, 1996; Kong, 2010). This situation is essentially due to their *civic engagement*,
34 which has been increasingly gaining favour from communities and institutions alike. The
35 situation is also interesting from an economic point of view, due to the many complexities to
36 be considered in terms of governance, management and marketing. The correct reporting of
37 NPOs has become particularly relevant, as it provides an indication of the value they are
38 capable of generating.

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3 The absence in NPOs of any for-profit aim – although they are inevitably bound to operate
4 within certain economic and financial constraints – implies the lack of specific parameters to
5 evaluate the organization's performance, sometimes leading to an ambiguous assessment of
6 its value (Civitillo, 2016; Civitillo et al., 2018). The organizational, managerial and financial
7 working of an NPO is inevitably affected by its specific value creation system (Najam, 1996;
8 Porter and Kramer, 1999; Putnam, 2001; Speckbacher, 2003; Toepler and Anheier, 2004).
9 Politics, religion, voluntarism, philanthropy or compassion are only some examples of these
10 complex circumstances. Nowadays NPOs must operate in a highly competitive environment,
11 especially at international level (Dolnicar and Lazarevski, 2009; Zhou et al., 2009), with a
12 growing demand for services from the communities and increasing competition from the
13 public sector and the FPS (Ramia and Carney, 2003). This evolution has made necessary for
14 NPOs to also have specific managerial competences (Salamon and Sokolowski, 1999; Stone
15 et al., 1999; Salavou and Manolopoulos, 2019). This means that NPOs are now supposed to
16 extract the best value from existing resources (*exploitation*) and to generate additional value
17 from innovative resources (*exploration*) by adopting a bidirectional approach (Lee, 2017;
18 Kaltenbrunner and Reichel, 2018; Fait and Sakka, 2020). Such innovative approach means
19 employing advanced know-how management techniques, with their consequent impact on
20 relevant issues involving IC governance, management and marketing.

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22 The conceptualization of IC as a fundamental resource for NPOs is a direct consequence of
23 what has been said above about FPOs. Early research developments regarding NPOs'
24 governance, management, and marketing started in fact from the assumption that these
25 organizations should be technically compared to FPOs, with the mainstream literature
26 highlighting the need for NPOs to be more 'business-like'. Without neglecting the specific
27 characteristics of the nonprofit orientation, many studies (Weisbrod, 1991; Austin, 2000;
28 Brinckerhoff, 2000; Frumkin and Andre-Clark, 2000; Moore, 2000; Dart, 2004) have
29 therefore since required the potential adoption of for-profit strategies and operations to gain
30 success in the NPS (Kearns, 2000), with all the related implications this might have on the
31 evaluation of performance and capital, even when this is intangible and/or intellectual (Festa
32 et al., 2020). Scientific research about FPOs states however that profit orientation has mainly
33 to do with the adoption of a common language for managing, measuring and communicating
34 the organization's performance (Sawhill and Williamson, 2001; Speckbacher, 2003). NPOs,
35 at least in normal situations, have on the other hand no financial goals but only – at the most –
36 targets referring to financial variables, to be used as means for evaluating the efficiency and
37 not the efficacy of the organization in question (Speckbacher, 2003).
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3 Any adoption of for-profit managerial techniques would otherwise likely produce
4 institutional, legal and fiscal issues to be then dealt with (Kong, 2007).

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6 If the issues about IC in FPOs are complicated enough, one can say that IC governance,
7 management and marketing in NPOs are even more complex due to their intrinsic diversity,
8 although the employment of such resources seems natural in nonprofit contexts. The IC aims
9 in fact to use at best the organization's intangible assets, often adopting qualitative and non-
10 financial indicators that are now considered as almost indispensable in modern business
11 evaluation practices (Krishnan and Ramasamy, 2011). According to this view, the IC
12 represents a sort of strategic framework, potentially capable of aligning the organization's
13 performance to the peculiar socio-economic environment surrounding the NPS.
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16 More specifically, the IC could contribute to NPOs' strategic positioning by making possible
17 a better resource allocation, thus improving the performance evaluation and providing more
18 meaningful information to all stakeholders involved (Kong, 2007). The IC seems therefore
19 crucial to NPOs, as it promotes change in strategic intentions, operational activities and value
20 perceptions: for example, Roos (1998, p. 151) argues that the *"deeper purpose of an IC*
21 *approach is to change people's behavior, not least through changing the corporate language.*
22 *The concept of IC brings with it a whole set of new values about what is good and what is bad*
23 *management"*. Finally, the relevance of IC for NPOs has also emerged with relation to what
24 is now one of the most critical factors in this sector, that is solidarity. Such factor is crucial
25 not only to potential beneficiaries of the organization's activity, but also with regards to
26 NPOs' collaboration/cooperation/competition issues (for example, software re-use in open-
27 source projects). The economic value of the organization's know-how does not depend in fact
28 only upon its contextual utility but also on its potential for transfer and replication (Augier
29 and Teece, 2005). In this regard, SC can play a powerful role in knowledge-sharing
30 agreements (Ferreira and Franco, 2019), thus making possible further applications in NPOs'
31 IC governance, management and marketing.
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50 **3. Research design**

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53 Moving from the aforementioned considerations, the present work intends to provide coherent
54 evidence about potential answers to the following research question:
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58 *"How have IC, and more specifically SC, been considered in the international scientific*
59 *literature about NPOs?"*
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3 A B-SLR has been developed as the examination method of choice as we feel it represents the
4 most adequate tool with relation to the nature of the research question (Baima et al., 2020;
5 Chaudhuri et al., 2020; Shams et al., 2020). In fact, “a review of the literature to provide the
6 best evidence for informing policy and practice in any discipline, is a key research objective
7 for the respective academic and practitioner communities” (Tranfield et al., 2003, p. 207).
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10 A bibliometric and systematic investigation applied to a literature review requires first the
11 identification of the objects to analyze. Accordingly, the current study examined the two
12 academic databases commonly considered the most reliable for scientific indexing, impact
13 and reputation analysis, that are *Web of Science* (WoS) and *Scopus* (Walters, 2016). These
14 two databases were investigated (up to June 2020) according to the following query syntaxis:
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22 “intellectual capital” OR “social capital” AND “No* Profit”
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25 achieving the following results (Table 1).
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29 **TABLE 1 AROUND HERE**

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32 Having taken into account the differences between the two databases considered
33 (Archambault et al., 2009; Abrizah et al., 2013; Chadegani et al., 2013; Bartol et al., 2014;
34 Sánchez et al., 2017) in order to prevent them from affecting the results of the investigation,
35 only the common documents generated after the filtering were considered. The total number
36 of scientific papers resulting from the query, which were eventually examinable, was 66. The
37 characteristics of such papers are presented in Figure 1, which shows the set of elements to
38 analyze.
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44 **FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE**

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47 The investigation was not carried out on the basis of a mere comparison between *WoS* and
48 *Scopus* results (in fact, this kind of analysis would provide many more results than the 66
49 presented in Figure 1), but using instead a specific open-source software (*Bibliometrix*, to be
50 found at www.bibliometrix.org) which searches for documents according to its specific
51 computational analysis. This application “[...] provides a set of tools for quantitative
52 research in bibliometrics and scientometrics. It is written in the R language, which is an
53 open-source environment and ecosystem” (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017, p. 963).
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4. Findings

As reported in Figure 1, there are 66 documents concerning scientific research on IC or SC in the NPS. They have been published since 1997, and they relate to 61 bibliographic sources. From a qualitative perspective, most of these entries are articles (55), while 11 are proceedings.

The investigation detected 121 authors involved: 21 of them are authors of single-authored documents, while 100 are (co)authors of multi-authored documents. This result highlights the collaboration among different authors. In fact, the number of documents per author is 0.545, and the number of authors for each document is 1.83, with a collaboration index of 2.33. This evidence seems consistent with the interdisciplinary take to be adopted – both theoretically and practically – when approaching this topic. In fact, the connection between intangible assets and NPS cannot be adequately examined if one adopts methodologies based on what might be called academic tunnel vision. Different perspectives are needed to grasp its versatility.

As to the evolution of the research, the investigation (Figure 2) highlights that IC and SC issues in the NPS were covered at the most in 2015 (10 documents) and then in 2019 (9 documents). More in general, these research themes have considerably increased since 2014, and they seem to remain attractive to the academic community, although with occasional fluctuations.

FIGURE 2 AROUND HERE

The analysis in Figure 3 provides evidence about the increase in the frequency of IC and SC issues with relation to NPS in some relevant international journals. The journals in question are those for which it was possible to count at least two publications per year.

FIGURE 3 AROUND HERE

For some of them, a sort of Gaussian distribution of annual entries can be seen, with different peaks (*Technological Forecasting and Social Change* around 2006, *International Journal of Manpower* around 2016, and *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* around 2016).

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3 For the others (*Journal of Intellectual Capital* and *Voluntas*) the evolution is characterized by
4 a constant increase even though, or maybe just because, it seems they started publishing
5 research in this field after the journals from the other group. It is possible that a Gaussian
6 curve will soon take shape also for these two journals, thus marking a sort of ‘swing’ for these
7 topics in the international scientific debate.
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11 After carrying out an initial investigation on the documents, a second investigation (more
12 similar to a content analysis) was performed on the words. The *Bibliometrix* software allows
13 to systematically analyze the metadata in question and is capable of processing the most
14 relevant fields (author, title, abstract and keywords). The few words to be found in titles and
15 keywords could make it difficult to effectively analyze the content of research papers, as they
16 can carry potential ambiguities. In order to reach a more reliable SLR, the preparatory
17 investigation was therefore performed only on the abstracts (and more specifically on the first
18 100 words, the highest figure allowed by the software).
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25 Without taking into account obvious words for the specific research perimeter (for example,
26 *social, capital, non-profit, organizations, IC, paper* and *study*), the investigation found that
27 the most frequently used words are *management, public* and *community* (others are *networks,*
28 *trust, human, knowledge* and *relationship*). This has been graphically shown in Figure 4, in
29 which it is simple to observe the high frequency of *social* and the increase over the years of
30 the words *capital* and *IC*, showing the relevance that IC – and capital in general – have been
31 acquiring within NPS.
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39 **FIGURE 4 AROUND HERE**

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43 Considering the research context in question, the aforementioned words probably allow to
44 place emphasis on some peculiar aspects of the issues under investigation. In fact, the
45 multidisciplinary nature of the theme, the ever-increasing contribution of KM, the constant
46 interaction within the sphere of human relations and the fiduciary component are all
47 dimensions that are greatly relevant here.
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51 Similar findings come from a word-cloud analysis, whose representation is shown in Figure 5,
52 which provides evidence of the frequency of the words that were mostly used in the
53 documents under investigation. In the word-cloud, the massive presence of the word *social* is
54 only too evident, not just because it is part of the complex keyword *social capital* but also
55 because it is intimately connected with the intrinsic nature of NPOs.
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FIGURE 5 AROUND HERE

Continuing the investigation on words, the Conceptual Structure Map in Figure 6 is the graphical representation of the results emerging from the multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) and the cluster analysis (CA): “*as words are more similar in distribution, the closer they are represented in the map*” (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017, p. 969). This assessment provides evidence about the potential proximity of some concepts (‘words’) used in the documents being analyzed and highlights therefore further possible systematic and qualitative interpretations of the factors examined in this research.

FIGURE 6 AROUND HERE

Three main groups/areas emerge from the analysis:

- a) A first terminological and conceptual group is shown as a sort of irregular triangle, whose vertices are the words *NPOs*, *Society* and *Development*. The meaning of this area seems to indicate that, from the evidence gathered, NPOs are strongly linked to social evolution and development, implicitly confirming the intuition at the basis of the present work. This group/area of words (and the related research) seems attributable, from a systematic point of view, to the institutional scope of NPOs;
- b) A second and wider conceptual group is shown as a sort of irregular hexagon, whose vertices are the words *Organizational*, *IC*, *Managers*, *Analyses*, *Paper* and *Employees*. Inside the hexagon are concepts like *Knowledge*, *Intellectual*, *Management*, *Purpose*, *Human* and so forth. This combination seems to emphasize the connection that IC and KM have with the most relevant purpose of NPOs – the human dimension – explicitly confirming the relevance of these factors in the NPS as well. This group/area of words (and the related research) seems attributable, from a systematic point of view, to the role/contribution of human resources;
- c) The third terminological and conceptual group, the biggest in the graph, is presented as a sort of irregular pentagon, whose vertices are the words *Individuals*, *Non-profit/Service*, *Economic*, *Trust* and *Health*. Inside the polygon are concepts like *Support*, *Relationships*, *Networks*, *Community*, *Local*, *Social*, *Public* and *Capital*.

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3 This representation seems to constitute a set of concepts that express the fundamental values
4 of the NPS, which traditionally works to protect situations that normally are not the focus of
5 attention by FPOs or PAs. This group/area of words (and the related research) seems
6 attributable, from a systematic point of view, to the operational functioning of NPOs.
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10 If one goes back to the research question at the basis of the present work (*“How have IC, and*
11 *more specifically SC, been considered in the international scientific literature about NPOs?”*)
12 and tries to answer it on the basis of what has been said so far, it seems there is enough
13 evidence to support at least two considerations, at quantitative (more bibliometric) and
14 qualitative (more systematic) level.
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18 From a quantitative point of view, IC and SC in the NPS have not shown until now a constant
19 and systematic presence in the international scientific literature, following an almost
20 sinusoidal trend over time. Therefore, the current study is not able to indicate a reliable
21 prediction about a potential expansion and consolidation of research in the academic field
22 under analysis. Nonetheless, the substantial increase that emerged from the investigation –
23 specifically related to two journals – could represent encouraging evidence to imagine further
24 development of such kind of research.
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28 From a qualitative point of view, there seem to be three relevant areas of scientific interest in
29 the field: institutional scope, human resources and operational functioning. These aspects are
30 naturally connected in a systemic vision, but from the interpretation of the SLR their
31 boundaries (the triangle, the hexagon, and the pentagon) look still rather distinct in terms of
32 methodological development.
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40 41 **5. Conclusions**

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45 This study has examined the existing scientific literature regarding IC and SC in the context
46 of NPOs. Although the nature of the research is explorative, the findings seem to provide
47 sufficient evidence – considering the number of papers reviewed and the journals that show
48 certain trends according to the number of publications considered – to demonstrate the limited
49 interest displayed by the international community for this topic over the years.
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53 The change affecting society, the economy and the service market at international level has
54 forced NPOs to deal with issues concerning IC in general, and therefore some developments
55 in the field should be considered natural. Nonetheless, the investigation has highlighted that
56 some reticence to adequately investigate this topic persists. The reasons for this can be many.
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3 A possible explanation could depend upon the essential characteristic of NPOs, i.e. the
4 absence of profit orientation, which could be at the basis of the concerns regarding their
5 limited – or non-existent – capability to create value. In this respect, the *nonprofit* dimension
6 of these organizations could have determined the marginality of the research on IC and even
7 SC, in the misleading conviction that where there is no profit there is no capital, but only
8 patrimony at the most. It is worth stressing however that the natural not-for-profit orientation
9 of NPOs does not imply absence of value, since these organizations should be more correctly
10 defined as *non-profit-distributing* rather than *non-profit-making* entities (Anheier, 2014). This
11 means that all incoming monetary flows are naturally destined to their institutional activities
12 and mission (Civitillo, 2020). NPOs can undoubtedly generate benefits in terms of social
13 value production (Porter and Kramer, 1999; Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000; Smith, 2008), also
14 at international level (Bruce, 1995; Eng et al., 2020). In the future, such mission is expected to
15 be even more pursued by the efficient governance, management and marketing of their IC and
16 SC. In fact, what shown above highlights the strategic role of IC and SC in NPOs: the
17 peculiar characteristics of these organizations imply the existence of a very close link between
18 intangible assets and the value creation process. One could argue that IC and SC represent in
19 NPOs key variables in value production processes, as they are able to improve their marketing
20 strategies (Festa et al., 2020) and thus their overall performance and the ability to reach their
21 goals, given any other choice and strategy employed by the organization in question (Kong
22 and Prior, 2008). This strategic relevance should definitely lead to a more thorough analysis
23 of IC and SC in NPOs, while scientific evidence seems to indicate at the moment a rather
24 weak interest in this topic by the scientific community.

6. Theoretical and practical implications

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46 The elements brought to light in the conclusions are particularly rich in conceptual and
47 managerial implications. From a scientific perspective, more effort should be made in
48 developing research about IC and SC in NPOs, because of the increasing importance that NPS
49 has and will continue to have in the future, especially at international level (Salamon and
50 Sokolowski, 1999; Speckbacher, 2003; Anheier, 2014). This is even clearer if one
51 acknowledges the fact that methodologies, techniques and tools employed in the management
52 of FPOs are now considered for their application to NPOs (Dart, 2004; Civitillo, 2021).
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3 A more specific focus will be probably applied on governance, management and on the
4 marketing of IC in the NPS, aiming at analyzing not only generic performance margins or
5 ratios related to intangible assets, but rather those margins and ratios more specifically related
6 to the human and social aspects of this particular factor.
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10 From a practical perspective, the three most important themes emerging from the SLR about
11 IC and SC in NPOs are institutional scope, human resources and operational functioning. In
12 order to improve the performance of such organizations, research should ideally focus on
13 these issues, while this would definitely represent a renewed interest in this topic and context
14 by the academic community. If one links these three concepts by ideally drawing a triangle,
15 human resource management seems to deserve specific attention for the enhancement of
16 operational functioning as well as for the achievement of the institutional scope. This would
17 emphasize the double contribution that 'service encounters' can provide in the NPS, also at
18 international level (e.g. call/contact centers located abroad), in the form of human capital
19 (stock that can be accumulated as knowledge assets) and SC (stock that can be accumulated
20 as a marketing asset in terms of reputation, also through the employment of staff who are
21 efficient, transparent and oriented to the pursue of human and social utility). Furthermore, it is
22 worth stressing how the NPS is characterized by a particularly high level of competitiveness
23 which, in a certain sense, is not very different from that typically affecting FPOs. It is well
24 known in fact that these organizations not only struggle to grab public funds, but are also hit
25 hard by an allocation of resources that is often very critical, caused by scarcity of personnel,
26 of technical inputs, etc. (Civitillo, 2021). It is precisely this scarcity of resources that should
27 therefore lead to making IC and SC assets to be carefully acknowledged in NPOs,
28 incorporated and valued with the highest degree of priority (Kong and Prior, 2008; Kong and
29 Ramia, 2010; Bustamante, 2019), as they represent the factors and processes that allow the
30 effective creation of value attached to the services provided by such organizations (Kolte et
31 al., 2021). Finally, one last element that is particularly significant in the context of the present
32 work is represented by what the potential enhancement of intangible assets in NPOs can
33 generate in terms of implications for the territory involved. Some authors (Festa et al., 2020)
34 have highlighted in fact how the territory can represent a sort of deposit of localized
35 knowledge that can be shared by several stakeholders, but also acts as a catalyst for locally
36 produced externalities based on the sharing of tangible and intangible assets related to it
37 (Rullani, 2004).
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3 This makes the concept of territory a real tool for competition, marketing and active
4 functioning in all incremental knowledge-building processes, thus significantly improving the
5 capacity of NPOs to succeed in their institutional activities.
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10 **7. Research limitations and future avenues of inquiry**

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13 The most relevant constraints affecting the present study inevitably regard the criteria for the
14 investigation leading to the SLR. Further directions of analysis should be therefore pursued in
15 future in an attempt to overcome such limitations.
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18 *First*, the investigation was carried out by considering only two scientific databases (*Web of*
19 *Science* and *Scopus*) which, although the most authoritative, can be limited in terms of
20 quantity of items to process; therefore, other sources could be considered (*Google Scholar*,
21 for example, with all its specific drawbacks). *Second*, the analysis adopted a specific syntax
22 (“intellectual capital” OR “social capital” AND “No* Profit”); other keywords and/or other
23 syntax would provide different results, perhaps starting from the keywords that are located in
24 the three fundamental groups/areas emerging from the SLR (institutional scope, human
25 resources and operational functioning). *Third*, the documents under investigation are common
26 to both *Web of Science* and *Scopus*; extending the analysis to the other documents indexed in
27 these two sources and responding to the aforementioned syntax would automatically enlarge
28 the research perimeter. *Fourth*, the investigation considered only the abstracts in order to
29 widen the range of words being analyzed, although only the first 100 words were processed,
30 at the same time excluding other metadata and, more in general, the content analysis of the
31 whole text of the papers; further research could loosen these criteria, thus generating bigger
32 data to process. *Fifth*, the period under analysis ranges from 1997 to 2020. Another temporal
33 interval could be planned, although this one seems sufficiently solid, as it considers only
34 common documents; more attention should probably be devoted to the two journals showing
35 a rising publication trend in the field (i.e., *Journal of Intellectual Capital* and *Voluntas*). *Sixth*
36 and last, the application software that was adopted is very specific, which is certainly a strong
37 point, considering the scientific references supporting it; at the same time, it is quite clear how
38 other packages displaying different technical features can provide different results, especially
39 in terms of their qualitative interpretation.
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International Marketing Review

Description	Results
Documents	66
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	61
Keywords Plus (ID)	214
Author's Keywords (DE)	247
Period	1997 - 2020
Average citations per documents	14.44
Authors	121
Author Appearances	137
Authors of single-authored documents	21
Authors of multi-authored documents	100
Single-authored documents	23
Documents per Author	0.545
Authors per Document	1.83
Co-Authors per Documents	2.08
Collaboration Index	2.33
Document types	
ARTICLE	55
INPROCEEDINGS	11

Figure 1. Characteristics of the items, common to WOS and Scopus, under analysis (Authors' calculation).

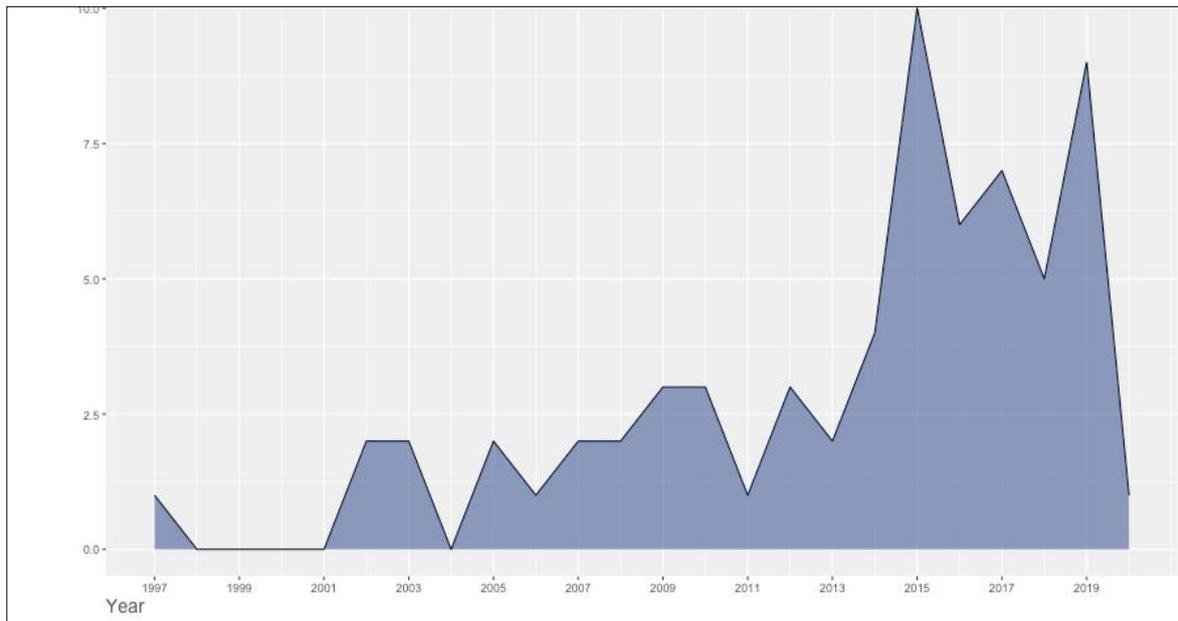


Figure 2. Annual scientific production (Authors' calculation).

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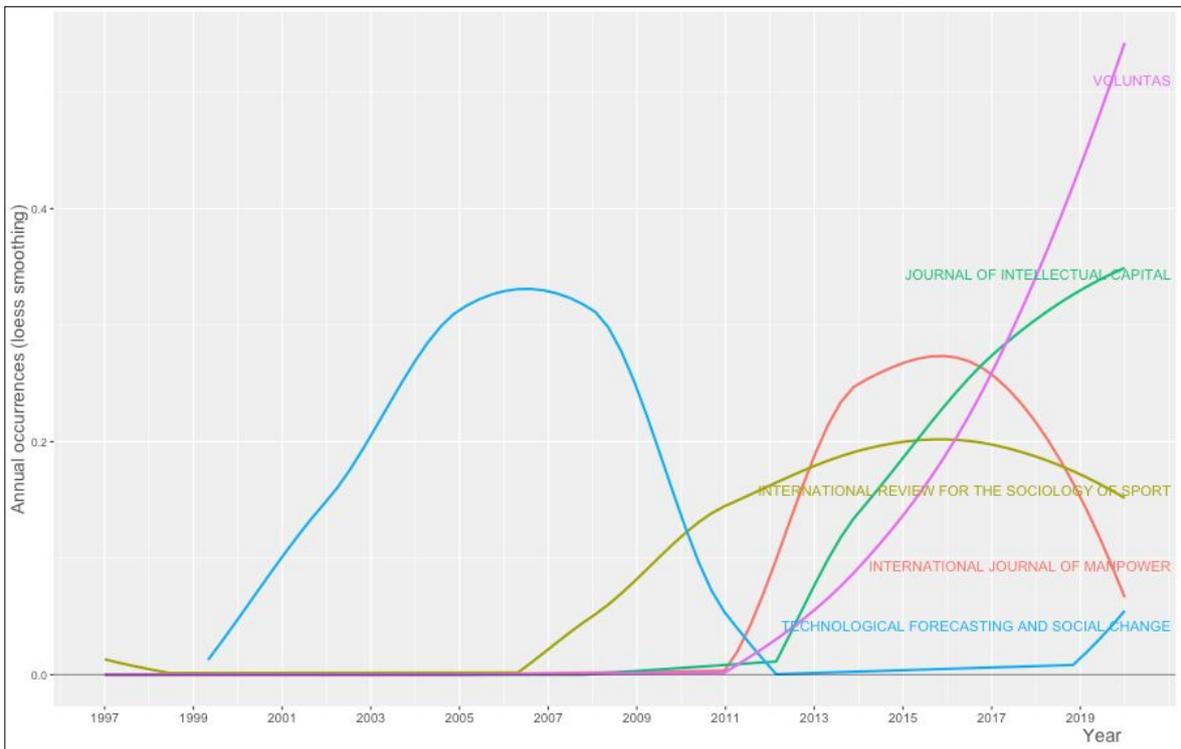


Figure 3. Word source dynamics (Authors' calculation).

International Marketing Review

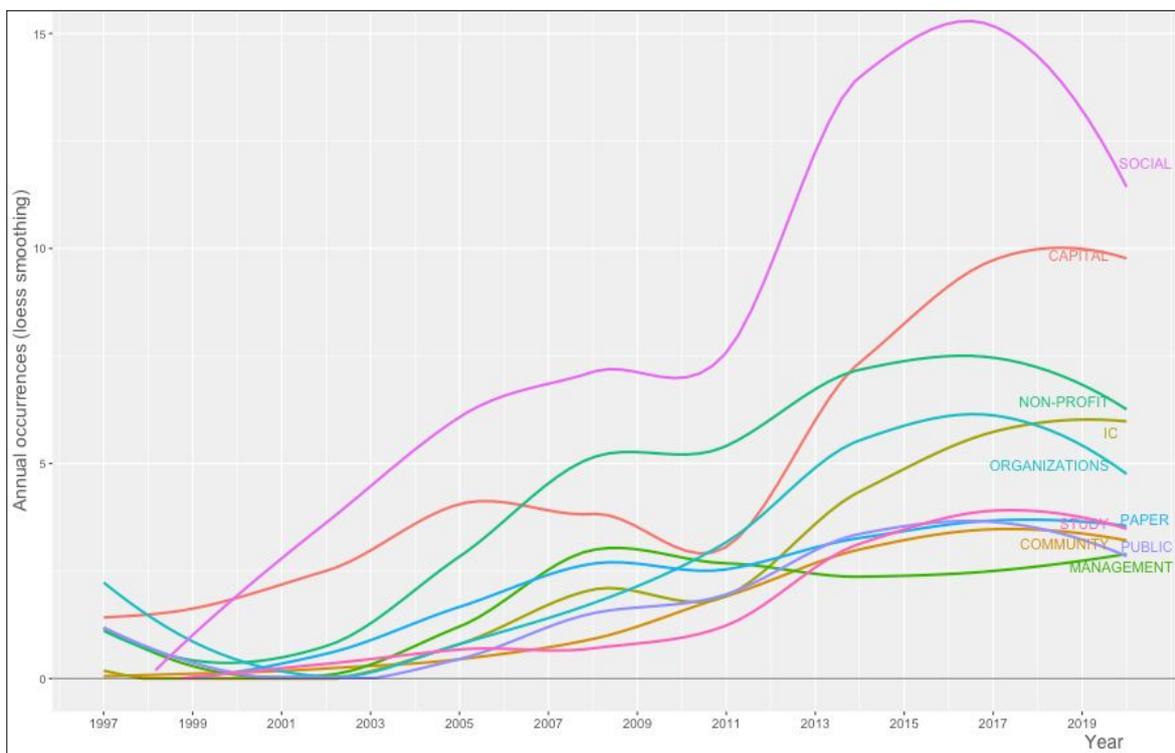


Figure 4. Words dynamics analysis (Authors' calculation).

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Figure 5. Word-cloud analysis (Authors' calculation).

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Table 1. Results from the query on WoS and Scopus (Authors' calculation).

Scientific database	Results from the query
Web of Science (WOS)	95
Scopus	155

International Marketing Review