

# SOCIAL CAPITAL IN A RURAL CONTEXT

Guest edited by  
Dimitria Giorgas  
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## Social capital in a rural context

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## INTRODUCTION

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Marion Bannister & John Connors

We are delighted to have worked with the Guest Editor, Dr Dimitria Giorgas and the authors over the past year, and thank her for her excellent knowledge of the topic and contribution in shaping this special issue. Beyond the papers submitted from the authors, who presented papers for the symposium, we also would like

to thank the invited authors, some of whom have written extensively in the field of social capital: Professor Ian Falk and Dr Kaler Surata for their paper on social capital in Bali and Professor Jenny Onyx, Melissa Edwards and Paul Bulleen who wrote on social capital and power. It has been indeed a delight to work with all of you and bring this issue to fruition.

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### FINAL ISSUE OF THIS VOLUME

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# GUEST EDITORIAL

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## SOCIAL CAPITAL IN RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

Dimitria Giorgas

This special edition marks a timely opportunity to critically examine our conceptual understanding of 'social capital' and to assess its significance for rural and regional society. It draws together work from both researchers and practitioners from a variety of professional and disciplinary backgrounds. It provides practical illustrations of the value of social capital, as well as its limitations, and we hope it will contribute to debates concerning the formation and sustainability of rural communities.

For over two decades now, there has been an increased complexity in the way we use and misuse social capital. More often than not, social capital has been used interchangeably with related concepts such as 'community capacity' and 'social cohesion'. Thus, adding the increasing problem of providing definitional precision. Despite this, government and non government agencies have come to rely on social capital as an answer to most policy problems regarding community attachment and bonding. The thought has been that members of a cohesive community are more likely to look after themselves and therefore rely less on government support.

This aspect of social capital has drawn much criticism. Critics have argued that social capital has become nothing more than a convenient tool for neo liberal government reforms. Such criticisms however have had the unfortunate consequence of eroding its public good aspect. In other words, the 'positive' potential that enables individuals and groups to improve their socio economic circumstances and the benefits that can be gained for a

community more generally. Nevertheless, social capital remains topical and draws much interest from a variety of spheres.

In December 2004, around 60 delegates with diverse experiences and backgrounds came together in Wagga Wagga to discuss conceptual and practical issues concerning social capital. As convener of this symposium *Social Capital: past, present and future* I felt that a thorough debate on the significance of social capital was well overdue. The main question put to the symposium was whether social capital had lost its appeal, how it compares to other concepts such as community capacity building and to provide a critical assessment of its usefulness as a policy tool. Overall, 20 research papers were presented at the one day symposium, six of which have been included in this volume.

Collectively, the papers in this special edition of *Rural Society* signify an important contribution to current debates on conceptual and practical applications of social capital and further provide a summary and critique of research and policy issues concerning rural social capital to date.

I would like to thank all those who submitted papers for inclusion in this special edition, and to express my appreciation to the referees who kindly undertook the task of reviewing the selected papers. My sincere thanks also to the editorial team at *Rural Society*, Marion Bannister and John Connors, both of whom have indeed been a joy to work with. My special thanks to Marion for her patience and energy during this project, and for the opportunity to compile this volume which has provided relevant papers from the *Social Capital* symposium a 'home' in the public domain.

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

Dimitria Giorgas

## Abstract ]

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*This introductory article defines the concept of social capital, outlines its historical underpinnings, provides an outline of the main theoretical perspectives used, and reviews some of the pitfalls of these perspectives as identified in the literature. A central focus of the research to date is two aspects of social capital, bonding and bridging, which are considered to have both positive and negative benefits for communities and societies more generally. This paper defines these differentiations of social capital, and discusses their significance for research in this area. Applications of social capital enable an analysis of social relations and networks on community and economic well being. What remains unclear within the literature is its significance for rural and regional communities. The contents of this special issue and their bearing on the present understanding of work in this area, as well as their practical implications, are summarised.*

## Keywords ]

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Social capital, rural communities

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## Introduction

Since the 1990s in Australia, there has been considerable debate concerning conceptual understandings of social capital and, in particular, its significance for community development and policy formulation. Although social capital appears to be a relatively new concept, its theoretical underpinnings owe much to the work of sociologists like Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx, with the concept itself stretching as far back as 1916 to Lyda J. Hanifan. The 'public face' of social capital however has drawn some criticism, especially in the context of neo liberal reforms nationally and internationally. Critics have argued against social capital as promoting individualism and individual gain not far removed from criticisms of economic

rationalism generally. Specifically, it has been argued that social capital has essentially been 'hijacked by the right', and become nothing more than a convenient tool for neo liberal government reforms in Australia. This has the unfortunate consequence of eroding social capital's 'public good' aspect, and potentially stifling any further conceptual development.

But what is social capital and why has it drawn considerable attention from government and policy makers? Moreover, why has it become such a global phenomenon and

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taken centre stage in the literature and on the policy agenda for the past decade? We turn to a brief overview of the literature to date in order to put in context the main focus of this special edition: assessing the *relative importance of (bonding and bridging) social capital for rural and regional communities*. My aim is not to provide a conclusive statement, but to identify the key questions or considerations on this issue.

## What is social capital?

As stated above, social capital has drawn considerable attention from government and policy makers. Broadly speaking, social capital is embedded in the structure of social relations, and encompasses norms and social networks which facilitate social action, thus enabling individuals to act collectively. Despite the popularity of social capital in the last decade, the term itself does not convey ideas which are relatively new to sociologists. As Portes (1998, p.2) notes

*[i]hat involvement and participation in groups can have positive consequences for the individual and the community is a staple notion, dating back to Durkheim's emphasis on group life as an antidote to anomie and self-destruction and to Marx's distinction between an atomized class-in-itself and a mobilized and effective class-for-itself.*

Further, Portes (1998, p.2) adds that the source of social capital's popularity is its inherent feature enabling the sociological and economic perspectives to merge. In other words, social capital emphasises the '...positive consequences of sociability...', which is ultimately placed in context of capital and non monetary sources of power and influence. This aspect of social capital is, as Portes suggests, what captures the attention of policy makers who seek non economic (and less expensive) solutions to social problems.

Similarly to Portes (1998), Schuller, Baron and Field (2000, p.35) consider the value of social capital to be its emphasis on social relations, which enables an analysis of the value to be gained from patterns of relations between individuals, social units and institutions. This contrasts with conventional economic analysis which generally focuses on the behaviour of individuals. Further, Schuller et al. (2000, p.2) state that the popularity of social capital in recent times has been largely due to a growing need to '...revalorize social relationships in political discourse; to reintroduce a normative dimension into sociological analysis; to develop concepts which reflect the complexity and inter relatedness of the real world'.

Citing the aphorism that '[i]t's not what you know, it's *who* you know', Woolcock and Narayan (2000, p.225) suggest that there is much to be gained from the membership of exclusive social groups and organisations (for example, securing a highly competitive job). In other words, "...a person's family, friends and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called on in a crisis...and leveraged for material gain" (Woolcock & Narayan 2000, p.226). They further suggest that communities with diverse stocks of social networks and associations are in a better position to overcome social disadvantages, such as poverty and vulnerability. Moreover these communities, through their social ties, are better placed to also take advantage of new opportunities.

The above notions regarding the social and economic assets gained through social capital were captured as early as 1916 by the work of Lyda J. Hanifan who wrote:

*those tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit. ...if [an individual comes] into contact with his neighbor, and they with other neighbors, there*

*will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community (1916, p. 130).*

Such ideas altogether disappeared from public discourse until the 1950s, when theorists began focussing their attention on the significance of community and social ties in improving the living conditions of both individuals and of communities more generally (see for example, Seely, Sim and Loosely, 1956). Since the 1980s, social capital has grown in prominence, and become a central consideration in research on a range of social, political and economic issues.

Although the works of both Bourdieu and Coleman have been the most influential in recent debates regarding social capital, it has been Putnam who has popularised this concept. Drawing largely from Coleman, Putnam has provided an extensive analysis of social capital in his landmark book *Bowling Alone*. Putnam's arguments have a strong grounding in functionalism, but rarely have these origins been acknowledged. The notions of bonding and bridging social capital introduced by Putnam have grown in popularity since 2000, with further expansion of these aspects of social capital undertaken by Woolcock (2001). In the following sections, I briefly define social capital from the perspective of each of these three main theorists (Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam), and contrast their main arguments. I also discuss the work of others who have largely drawn from these perspectives, and have conceptually taken social capital even further.

## **Bourdieu on social capital**

During the 1980s, Bourdieu and Coleman independently worked on notions of social capital. Considering first the work of Bourdieu, he defined social capital as

*...the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition...which provides each of its members with the backing of collectively-owned capital (1985, p.248).*

Thus, for Bourdieu, certain benefits can be accrued to individuals by virtue of participation in groups, and on the deliberate construction of sociability for the purpose of creating this resource (Bourdieu, 1985). In other words, through group membership and social networks, certain benefits can be derived which enable individuals to improve their social position. Voluntary associations, trade unions, and political parties serve as examples of such memberships.

Central to Bourdieu was his focus on 'capital', and its various dimensions: economic, cultural and social. These dimensions, when combined, constitute the social position of an individual. However, greater emphasis was placed by Bourdieu on analysing the cultural aspects of capital and the way that elites present their cultural judgements as universal, thus legitimizing their domination (Bourdieu, 1985). Nevertheless, what we gain from a review of Bourdieu's perspective is that social capital is not independent of the other forms of capital, but actually helps to facilitate economic and cultural capital. In other words, according to Bourdieu, the reason for any solidarity between individuals is the presence of profit, and therefore the structural economic organisation that underlies the creation of social capital. From Bourdieu's perspective, an understanding of the material conditions that drive the formation of social processes are critical in such analyses.

## **Coleman on social capital**

Similarly to Bourdieu, Coleman's work on social capital draws together insights from both sociological and economic theories. However,



in contrast, Coleman's focus is primarily to find an understanding of the relationship between educational achievement and social inequality, rather than to address differential resources of power and the way that these are used by elite groups in society. Thus, for Coleman, the family took primacy in the analysis of social capital.

Key insights gained from Coleman's perspective on social capital are that, firstly, it consists of some aspect of the social structure, it facilitates certain action within that structure, and finally, that it exists and is embedded in the structure of social relations (Coleman 1988). Thus according to Coleman, social capital is a particular form of resource available to an individual that is defined by its function. Further, rather than being a single entity, social capital is multidimensional, with its varying forms having specific value only in particular actions and situations (Coleman, 1988).

Coleman's (1988) thesis on social capital is clearly grounded in functionalism and is considered to be a tool enabling a synthesis of the economist's principle of rational action with the process of social and institutional organisation. In other words, according to Coleman, social capital is created by rational, purposeful individuals who build social capital to maximise their individual opportunities. Thus social capital is seen as a form of a social contract between individuals unconstrained by underlying economic conditions or factors. It is at this point that Coleman's thesis on social capital has been regarded by some as having an economic rationalist flavour (that is, individuals freely choose to build networks to further their self interest). Further, this latter point also illustrates a fundamental difference between Bourdieu and Coleman. That is, from Bourdieu's viewpoint, social processes are constrained by underlying economic organisation, whereas Coleman asserts that they are created by the free will of individuals.

Two significant weaknesses of Coleman's work are identified by Portes (1998). Firstly, Portes (1998) notes the importance of distinguishing between the resources themselves (for example, economic tangibles and intangibles) from the ability of an individual to obtain them when needed. The latter, Portes suggests, refers to social capital itself. Portes further notes that this distinction is made clear in Bourdieu and less so in Coleman. Secondly, he also notes the primacy given to close or dense ties by Coleman, to the neglect of weaker ties. Thus any benefits gained by developing such ties (for example, access to new knowledge) are underestimated (see below for a further discussion on this aspect).

Despite these limitations, Coleman's work has considerable merit and has provided researchers with the means by which an analysis can be made of the economic benefits derived from social relations and social organisation. Coleman's thesis on social capital has been further developed by Putnam, to whom we turn now.

### **Putnam on social capital**

In comparison to both Bourdieu and Coleman, it has arguably been Putnam who, to a greater extent, brought to the public fore our understanding of the concept social capital. Grounded in functionalism, and influenced by the work of sociologists such as James Coleman, Alexis de Tocqueville and Mark Granovetter, Putnam's work has been well cited in the literature, drawing both advocates and critics, and has helped place social capital as a central policy concern for local, state and federal governments, as well as international organisations such as the World Bank.

From Putnam's perspective, networks, norms and trust are central, and it is these three indicators which have dominated conceptual discussions on social capital. In his earlier work, Putnam defined

social capital as ‘...features of social life networks, norms and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives’ (Putnam, 1996, p.56). In his landmark book *Bowling Alone*, Putnam shifted his emphasis to include reciprocity and observed that ‘...trustworthiness lubricates social life’ and promotes the kinds of interaction which reinforce norms of generalised reciprocity all of which are central to social capital’ (Putnam, 2000, p.21). Thus, according to Putnam, social connections are an important means by which mutual obligations are fostered. Considerable emphasis was also given to two fundamental aspects of social capital: bonding and bridging social capital.

Notions of bonding and bridging social capital were initially introduced by Gittell & Vidal (1998), however it is Putnam who has predominantly been associated with such demarcations of social capital. These concepts clearly link in with the classical work of Durkheim regarding social integration, and with Granovetter’s (1973) *strength of weak ties* thesis. Further, Putnam emphasises that bonding and bridging social capital ‘...are not either/or categories...., but “more or less” dimensions along which we can compare different forms of social capital’ (Putnam, 2000, p.23). We now consider each in turn.

### **Bonding social capital**

According to Putnam, bonding social capital relates to the relations among relatively homogeneous groups, that is, the links between like minded people. It is what Putnam refers to as the ‘sociological superglue’ and the process of ‘getting by’ in life (Putnam, 2000, p.23). Bonding social capital therefore promotes homogeneity and emphasises the building of strong ties. However, as Putnam points out, there is also the potential for promoting exclusiveness. Thus, groups that reinforce homogeneity are

more likely to build high social walls and be less tolerant of diversity. It is for this reason that researchers have considered this a negative outcome of bonding social capital, and has been central to debates concerning the ‘downside’ of social capital.

Putnam’s notion of bonding social capital links in with Coleman’s idea of the importance of social closure. However, Putnam differs in saying that bonding social capital ‘...bolsters our narrow selves’ and has the potential to create strong out group antagonism (Putnam, 2000, p.23) (see also Krivokapic Skoko, 2007). For Coleman, social closure is a positive aspect and a necessary requirement for social capital to be facilitated leading to economic advancement.

### **Bridging social capital**

In contrast to bonding social capital, bridging social capital involves the building of connections between heterogeneous groups. Thus, groups that foster bridging social capital develop links to external assets, and therefore encompass greater information diffusion. In addition, bridging social capital generates broader identities and reciprocity. It is what Putnam refers to as the ‘sociological WD40’, the ‘getting ahead’ in life (Putnam, 2000, p.23). The downside of this type of social capital, however, is that the ties developed tend to be weaker, and are generally more fragile. Nevertheless, as Granovetter (1973) argues, there are sufficient benefits to be gained, as weak ties are more likely to link individuals to distant acquaintances who move in different circles, compared to ‘strong’ ties which link an individual to relatives and intimate friends who are more likely in similar social settings.

Further explorations of these distinctions are the focus of this edition, and therefore will be discussed elsewhere. The important point here is that both forms of social capital are necessary, and can have powerful positive

effects. As Putnam argues, the 'right mix' is required for benefits to accrue. Further, bonding and bridging are not interchangeable and there are often tensions and trade offs between the two forms (Putnam, 2000, pp.23-24). Putnam also recognised the limitations of social capital or the 'dark side' as he puts it. In other words, social capital (in either form) may have negative consequences, both externally (for society at large) and internally (for members of the network) (Putnam, 2000).

Portes and Landolt (1996) however criticise Putnam for lacking a clear differentiation between *individual* social capital and *collective* social capital, thus confusing units of measurement. Specifically, Portes and Landolt (1996) state that the resources available at the individual level (the gluey stuff that binds individuals to groups) may differ from those available to the social level of institutions and governments (the gluey stuff that binds citizens to institutions). Thus, aggregating information (derived from social surveys) about individual social capital does not necessarily represent collective social capital, that is, characteristics of the community itself.

A further criticism of Putnam is his failure to adequately address issues of power and conflict (Schuller et al., 2000) (see also Onyx et al., 2007: 215-230). However, a further differentiation has emerged from the literature, *linking social capital*, which helps to overcome this limitation in Putnam's thesis. Linking social capital is concerned with relations between individuals and groups in different social strata, and in a hierarchy where power, social status and wealth are accessed by different groups (Cote & Healy, 2001). This notion is extended by Woolcock (2001) to include the capacity to pull resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond the community.

Overall, what we gain from Putnam's work is that trust and voluntary associations, for instance, create consensus and mutual obligation

which contribute to economic prosperity. However, there remains a lack of critical analysis of the extent to which objectives are 'shared', or of the degree of mutual acknowledgement needed to make another person's objective valid. Nevertheless, as stated above, Putnam's analysis of social relations, and the role that bonding and bridging social capital have played in achieving economic well being, has been most significant in this area.

In summary, the above discussions have outlined the historical origins of social capital and assessed why it has become a central concern for researchers and for policy makers. In addition, as summarised above, there are three main interpretations of social capital by Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam, which have been fundamental in contemporary understandings of social capital. Notable similarities and differences between these perspectives were discussed. Firstly, Putnam and Coleman, who share functionalist underpinnings in their work, have both been criticised for failing to deal with issues of power and conflict adequately. Bourdieu's work, however, differs on this point. Whereas Putnam's and Coleman's perspectives have focussed on an analysis of collective values and consensus to help create economic welfare, Bourdieu's approach, by contrast, takes the viewpoint of actors engaged in struggle to achieve their interests. Secondly, norms, trust and reciprocity, which are embedded in social relations and networks, emerge as central characteristics from a consideration of all three perspectives. These central characteristics and the nature of social capital have provided challenges for researchers to ascertain a clear and precise definition. Given that social capital remains as an abstract, multidimensional concept, encompassing a temporal dimension further adds to the problem of its empirical worth.

Nevertheless, social capital challenges the view that social relations are an impediment to economic development. Further, social capital reminds us of the importance of social relationships in building sustainable communities. As Woolcock and Narayan assert:

*...conceptualisation of the role of social relationships in development represents an important departure from earlier theoretical approaches and therefore has important implications for contemporary development research and policy (2000, p. 227).*

Finally, as Putnam (2000) has argued, horizontal networks (bonding and bridging) and norms of reciprocity and trust are preconditions for economic development and for effective government.

## Summary of contents

The contributions to this special edition of *Rural Society* provide a critical approach to social capital, and demonstrate its practical application within rural and regional settings. The authors present findings from their empirical research, and discuss the conceptual issues which ensue. Six of these papers were presented at the 2004 Social Capital Symposium held at Charles Sturt University, and are included here in their revised form. The remaining papers are invited contributions from authors who have published widely in this field.

Beginning with Onyx et al., the authors examine the relationship between power and social capital within three rural communities in Australia: West Wyalong and Broken Hill, both in New South Wales, and Maleny in Queensland. The relationship between power and social capital has thus far been under researched, and this paper fills the present gap within the literature. Overall, Onyx et al. argue that linking social capital is most clearly connected with structural approaches to power,

and is central to an understanding of how bonds and bridges enable collective agency within community. The later point underlies much of Putnam's focus, and thereby enables a fuller understanding of this process.

Similarly, in the second paper, conceptual issues on social capital are addressed. In this paper, Brooks examines the relevance of alternate interpretations of social capital (synergistic versus society centred) to the role of government in rural prosperity. Brooks argues that the currently dominant interpretation of social capital obscures the role that government can play in generating community prosperity. Further, she states that such interpretations of social capital occur within a political context, and that this relationship helps to address the criticisms of social capital as a meaningless concept. Thus, it is imperative to recognise that varying interpretations of social capital have their own distinct objectives and focus.

The next two papers address social capital within a natural and land management context, and examine group processes in collective decision making. Firstly, Kilpatrick illustrates how groups, when working together for a common goal, are able to develop social capital to effect change. Specifically, Kilpatrick analyses the experiences of four farmer groups, and how they learned to jointly manage local natural resource issues. Overall, two simultaneous processes were found to be significant, one which builds technical competency in natural resource management, and the other which builds social capital to allow groups to collectively make decisions. Both these technical and social processes are imperative for sustainable natural resource management practices.

In their paper, 'Sites of integration in a contested landscape', Boxelaar et al. deal with the issue of diversity within rural communities. They point out that most rural communities are no longer homogeneous, but rather encompass

a fluid social life, and that sites of integration enable cohesiveness to occur. Further, they state that such diversity remains a positive aspect. Thus, although the agricultural sector, for instance, has increasingly been required to compete with diverse interests and demands on rural land, land management agencies have recognised the importance of bringing together all stakeholders to negotiate sustainable land use, including natural resources. Using a project implemented by the Victorian state government, they illustrate the positive aspects of diversity within rural communities, and argue that social capital is the key to enabling cooperation and competing interests to dissolve.

One of the few institutions still surviving in rural areas, the church, is the focus of analysis in the next paper. Questions addressed in this paper include the contribution of the church to the sustainability of rural communities, and what (if any) does the church contribute to social capital in these communities. Using one country community as a case study, Mitchell examines the relationship between two indicators of social capital, volunteering and community attachment, on religiosity. The relationship between social capital and the church has been overlooked within the literature, and this paper provides a much needed exploration of this relationship. Overall, Mitchell finds evidence for a modest, yet consistently positive, relationship between religiosity and each of the two indicators (volunteering and community attachment).

Also under represented in the literature are issues relating to the significance of social capital for Indigenous based communities. In their paper, Milliken et al. provide a 'real life' example of how social capital is produced, especially by Aboriginal women, and it is therefore a significant contribution to the literature in this area. The authors found that, through a collective identity, networks are

established through which new associations merge and information is readily transferred. Thus social capital is developed through these networks and various associations. It also represents stocks of knowledge which enable learning processes to occur, and a sense of community to develop. Further, Milliken et al. state that leadership is the key to enabling sustainable connections and social ties.

By contrast, Krivokapic Skoko examines the negative consequences or 'downside' of social capital formation. Focusing on ethnic business groups, Krivokapic Skoko provides historical evidence on three distinct farming protests involving ethnic groups in rural New Zealand, and discusses the implications of social closure and exclusivity on business and economic outcomes. Overall, Krivokapic Skoko finds that, although ethnically exclusive networks act as a source of strength for ethnic business communities, they also (potentially) lead to conflicts between these ethnic entrepreneurs and segments of the host business population itself. The anti Asian farming protests, which occurred in New Zealand, serve as an example.

In the final paper by Falk and Surata, the nature of bonding, bridging and linking ties are examined. Using data collected on two Balinese communities, the authors describe the nature of social capital existing within these communities, and compare their research outcomes with notions of social capital found within the literature.

Overall, these eight papers present the most current research on social capital within rural and regional settings. Together, they illustrate the practical worth and significance of social capital within these social settings, and point to the need for continued research in this area. Despite increasing diversity, and the social and economic challenges faced in rural and regional Australia, the papers show that social capital remains an important feature that is central to

community sustainability and economic prosperity.

Social capital refers to our social connectedness, the way in which individuals relate to each other. It emphasises the value of social relations in achieving social and economic well being. However, social capital remains a contested concept. Its multidimensionality and fluid nature contributes to the empirical challenge of providing adequate measures of social capital, ensuring validity in research outcomes. As Schuller et al. (2000, p.14) assert 'social capital offers a purchase on such interaction, but not an unrealistic promise of holding it still'.

To this end, this special edition of *Rural Society* does not end with a formal conclusion as such. The reader is instead invited to collectively consider the papers in this volume, and the evidence provided within each, when assessing the practical and theoretical significance of social capital in rural and regional communities.

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## THE INTERSECTION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL AND POWER: AN APPLICATION TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

Jenny Onyx, Melissa Edwards and Paul Bullen

### Abstract ]

*The central aim of the article is to examine the relationship between power and social capital within the cultural, historical and spatial contingencies of three rural communities in Australia. These communities are West Wyalong NSW, Broken Hill NSW and Maleny Qld. Each has variously experienced the threats of deindustrialisation, revitalisation, and commercial development pressures (Beaver and Cohen, 2004). To understand how these communities have addressed their circumstances we examine each in turn within the overriding analytical framework of social capital. We find that social capital is used in different ways in each community. The article is prefaced by an exploration of the core theoretical concepts: Social capital, bonding bridging and linking and power, followed by a brief analysis of each of the three cases.*

### Keywords ]

Social capital, power, rural communities

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### Introduction

**T**he political economy of social capital has rarely been addressed. In this sense we seek to understand the ways in which various forms of social capital intersect with a multiplicity of power relations that are also contextualised by the particular culture(s), history(s) and spatial location of these settlements.

Social capital is a concept that is much critiqued but nonetheless growing in importance and relevance to rural communities. For some, social capital is seen as a magic bullet that can ensure social and economic sustainability of small isolated rural towns, despite drought, loss of population, and the vagaries of global commodity prices. For others, social capital is at best a con, at worst a serious misrepresentation of structural

imperatives over which communities have little control. We accept neither approach on its own, but find the concept of social capital a very useful conceptual framework for exploring some of the complexities of sustainable community development.

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## The social capital framework

Social capital was defined by Putnam as ‘those features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions’ (Putnam, 1993, p. 167). Since the concept was made popular by Putnam’s work there have been many discussions and various definitions, often reflecting the use of the concept within different disciplines.

Two of the most frequently used definitions of social capital reflect a difference in theoretical emphasis. Bourdieu (1985, p. 248) defined the concept as ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition’. For Bourdieu, social capital was a core strategy in preserving and transmitting the cultural capital of the elite. Because all forms of capital can be converted into other (primarily economic) capital, social capital was simply one way of preserving class advantage. However other theorists including Putnam see social capital as a resource (often the primary resource) that is open to all groups and communities. They see social capital as located within the social structures, the space between people, and not within the individual. Social capital is capable of producing a variety of positive outcomes, beyond economic advantage, such as improved health and well being.

A related issue of considerable current debate is the relationship between social capital and structural bases of power. It is important to recognize from the outset that social capital should not be presented as a kind of ‘spray on’ solution to economic, environmental or social problems. A political economy must be included in any analysis (Fine, 2001). Indeed, as Schuurman (2003) argues, social capital has the potential to help understand the link between the social and the political:

*Explicit attention should be awarded to the extent that power differentials within the social as well as between the social domain and the political domain are related to the absence of social capital and trust.*

(Schuurman, 2003, p. 1008).

If we are to understand the connections between social capital and sustainable development at the local level, we must therefore understand power and conflict and how these are played out in the sub politics of the local (Beck, 1992). However, any such analysis must be contextualized within the historical specificity and the unique dynamics of a particular setting. We know for instance that social capital is most likely to work effectively among equals; inequality, exploitation, and power tactics are highly destructive of working social capital. We also know that social capital can be and is used to establish and maintain a competitive advantage over other groups, as Bourdieu demonstrated (Dale & Onyx, 2005). At a more sinister level, social capital can and is used in the discourse of consensus which supports the status quo (Bryson & Mowbray, 2005).

We therefore concur with much of the criticism that has been levelled against the way that social capital is used. However, we do not conclude that the concept as defined by Putnam should be rejected. The Putnam view of social capital, we would argue, is not incorrect but incomplete. While it is true that social capital can be and is used to support structural privilege, it is also true that it can be and is used to support networks of equality and collaborative action. Social capital is the one resource that is widely available to all communities, regardless of levels of wealth. DeFilippis (2001) highlights the significance of Bourdieu’s (1985) notion of the power relations embedded in social capital in which networks of the elite are used to maintain



privilege and exclude wider access to knowledge and resources. However, the same kind of network formation can be used to empower the wider community. Social capital can be seen as both a private and a public good, depending on the context of its use (Halpern, 2005).

It can therefore also be seen as a resource for the social activist, and is well explicated in such social movements as the Social Forum. Here the focus shifts to positive collective action by the community. This highlights another core component of social capital, which is social agency (Field, 2005; Leonard & Onyx, 2004). Agency refers to the capacity to take the initiative, to be proactive. Social capital can be used to oppress, but equally, it is a very powerful tool of the oppressed. The question then becomes: if given the opportunity, what can be achieved at the local level through people's combined and co-operative actions?

### **Exploring the power dimensions of social capital**

Power is also a multifaceted concept. In relation to social capital, it can be enabling or coercive, liberating or repressive and viewed as both a positive and negative force. A fundamental dichotomy is drawn between 'power over' and 'power to'. The former is often associated with a Marxist view in that 'power is possessed by dominant groups and institutions and used to oppress and control lower status groups' (Hampshire, Hills & Iqbal, 2005, p. 341). This theme is reflected in Bourdieu's conception of social capital retained by power elites for the maintenance of status quo or to control the production of cultural capital. Such conceptions embed power relationships within class structures.

Power to focuses on the productive aspects of power, and suggests that this productive aspect can be mobilized at all levels.. The

outcome is negotiated, complex and diffuse. The empowerment of one party does not necessarily equate with the disempowerment of another party (Hampshire et al., 2005).

However, as Davis (1991) has argued, power cannot be so easily fractured. Power is both enabling and (simultaneously) constraining. Power is located neither within the individual leader, nor within the social structure of the organisation, but is expressed in the dialectic of human action and interaction. This formulation resonates with Foucault's explication of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980) and with Clegg's circuits of power (Clegg, 1989). Davis suggests that this more fluid conception of power is useful for feminist analysis as it enables us to think of power beyond dominance and subordination, and to explore the potential for active restructuring of power relations. We argue that such a conception of power is central to an understanding of some of Putnam's work and in particular explains how bonds and bridges enable collective agency within communities.

### **Power and forms of social capital**

Recent discussions of social capital distinguish between 'bonding', 'bridging' and 'linking' social capital (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock & Narayan, 2001). All three forms of social capital provide necessary sources of power, but with different risks. Bonding social capital is usually characterised as having dense, multi-functional ties and strong but localised trust. Bonding social capital is essential for a sense of personal identity and belonging. The power within bonding social capital is closely related to the notion of empowerment within horizontal networks of equals. However, to the extent that it creates narrow, intolerant communities, it can be oppressive even to those who otherwise benefit.

Bridging is more complex. Bridging, as the name implies, is about reaching beyond these immediate networks of family and friends. Bridging is important for personal and community development (Woolcock & Narayan, 2001). Bridging can be used in at least three different ways; to cross demographic divides, to bridge structural holes between networks (Burt, 1997), and to access information and resources outside the community in question. Bridging too can be empowering as it serves to expand the networks of skills and resources not otherwise accessible. On the other hand, control over the structural holes can be a powerful tool of oppression.

'Linking' social capital is a third type of social capital referring to networks that usually entail vertical connections to sources of money and power outside the group, such as that entailed in connections to government funding sources. Such links invariably entail relations of unequal power; it is this form of social capital that is most clearly connected with a structuralist approach to power.

## **Intersecting theory with the rural communities**

Firstly, we examine a quantitative scale of social capital that provides a snapshot of the relative levels of social capital across eight dimensions within four rural and three urban Australian communities. We then examine three of these rural communities in depth to provide detailed analysis concerning how variations in social capital formations both enable and restrict enabling power structures in different community contexts. We apply Bourdieu's notion of the field (Bourdieu, 1998, as cited in Emirbayer & Williams, 2005) to provide an epistemic notion of community bounded within each of the three localities of the case studies. We argue, with Edwards and Foley

(1998) that the productive effects of social capital, depends on the context of the networks and social ties within the specific local communities studied. This in turn is based upon the history, and location of each study. We draw upon three case studies locating them within such bounds, yet specifically examining the way in which different power relations have impacted upon the development of social capital.

## **A quantitative measure of social capital**

The Onyx and Bullen scale of social capital was developed to test the concept empirically (2000). Since that original scale was published, it has subsequently been adopted in a range of settings, both to measure social capital at the community level and to measure different demographic groups such as volunteers, or family support clients. Data is now available for some 6,000 respondents across nine communities.

The original scale was designed in consultation with the literature, academics, community development workers, and community members. The aim was to measure each of the conceptual aspects of social capital as highlighted in the literature, particular as used by Putnam (2000). While there was much agreement about some of the constituent elements of social capital, there was considerable disagreement about which of these is essential, or core to the concept and which are associated or peripheral phenomena. A review of the literature (see Onyx & Bullen, 2000) revealed that the extensive elements constituting social capital are: participation in networks, reciprocity, trust, social norms and social agency ensuring both individual and collective efficacy.

The five communities chosen for the initial sample included two in rural areas of NSW,

two in outer metropolitan areas of Sydney Australia, and one inner city area. The scale was subsequently used in a variety of other communities, both rural and urban. Actual data collection methods varied slightly in each area, but in all cases a variety of approaches<sup>1</sup> were used to maximize the diversity of respondents.

Factor analysis and inter item reliability analysis were used to identify the component factors of social capital as outlined in Table 1.

The factor structure is extremely robust. In general the factors reflect the theoretical dimensions drawn from the literature. The factor structure reinforces the theoretical argument that social capital is complex and comprises relatively distinct dimensions, which are nonetheless related.

Table 2 illustrates the variation in each factor over different communities. This variation occurs not only on the overall social capital

scores, but also on the primary factors. It is apparent that each community measured has a distinct profile, so that a community will be strong on one factor but much weaker on some other factor that is a second community's strength.

A few examples will illustrate the different patterns obtained. The four rural samples are those shaded on the right. In general, the rural samples demonstrated higher levels of social capital than did the urban samples, with the exception of Broken Hill. By far the highest social capital is evidenced in Maleny, a small rural town in the hinterland of coastal Queensland. This community is remarkable not only for its strong community connections, but also for its strong tolerance of diversity, a quality not normally found in rural samples. Broken Hill, a mining town in outback NSW has high levels of community participation but relatively

Table 1: Social capital descriptors

Factor	Title	Description
Factor A	'Participation in the local community'	Participation in formal community structures (e.g. 'are you an active member of a local organisation or club?').
Factor B	'Social agency, or proactivity in a social context'	A sense of personal and collective efficacy, or personal agency within a social context. Agency refers to the capacity of the individual to plan and initiate action (e.g. 'if you need information to make a life decision, do you know where to find that information?').
Factor C	'Feelings of trust and safety'	Defined by items such as 'do you agree that most people can be trusted'.
Factor D	'Neighbourhood connections'	Concerned with the more informal interaction within the local area (e.g. 'Have you visited a neighbour in the past week?').
Factor E	'Family and friends connections'	Defined by items such as 'in the past week how many phone conversations have you had with friends?'.
Factor F	'Tolerance of diversity'	Defined by items such as 'do you think that multiculturalism makes life in your area better?'.
Factor G	'Value of life'	Defined by items such as 'do you feel valued by society?'.
Factor H	'Work connections'	(For people in paid employment) is defined by items such as 'are your workmates also your friends?'.

Table 2: Social capital scores across seven communities

Location factor	Pymont	Narellan	Green-acre	Deniliquin	West Wyalong	Broken Hill	Maleny
A. Community connections	11.7	12.6	11.0	14.3	15.5	15.9	19.0
B. Social agency	15.8	15.8	14.9	14.3	15.0	15.2	15.8
C. Trust and safety	12.2	13.0	10.6	13.0	16.1	13.7	16.1
D. Neighbourhood connections	11.8	14.1	13.6	15.0	15.2	14.4	15.2
E. Family/friends	9.7	9.4	9.0	9.4	9.1	9.0	9.2
F. Tolerance of diversity	6.4	5.4	5.3	5.8	4.8	5.7	6.8
G. Value of Life	5.5	5.5	5.3	5.8	6.2	5.9	5.8
General SC	79.7	82.6	76.7	84.0	88.2	80.0	94.7
No. of respondents	247	233	256	266	209	635	137

low levels of trust and neighbourhood connections. However the lowest level of trust and safety was experienced in Greenacre, a largely poor, public housing area of outer Sydney. This area also demonstrates lowest overall social capital, and lowest levels of community participation.

### A closer look at three rural communities

Drawing on several qualitative studies (of West Wyalong NSW, Broken Hill NSW and Maleny Qld) we explore how community networks are mobilized to address significant community issues. We explore the arenas in which these mobilizations occur, the role of key stakeholders both inside and outside the community, and any contestation that occurs. We identify both the productive aspects of social capital and how networks are activated or destroyed to block a course of action. Table

3 provides an overview of the main findings revealed in these cases.

The methodology for each case study varies slightly, but in all cases incorporate qualitative interviews of key informants, observation by the researchers, and the use of secondary information sources.

**Broken Hill** is a mining town in outback NSW, an important regional centre, and has a (declining) population of about 23,000. As evidenced from the Onyx and Bullen social capital scale, it has high levels of community participation but relatively low levels of trust and neighbourhood connections. For an outback town, the overall levels of social capital scores are surprisingly low. In particular, it has low levels of trust. People keep their doors locked, and seldom talk to strangers as confirmed through field notes of a two year field study. Broken Hill could be identified as a factionalised community. While there have been

Table 3: Summary of case findings in relation to social capital and power

	<b>Broken Hill</b> <b>History of structures supporting power over</b>	<b>West Wyalong</b> <b>History of role in the wider community – regional centre and linking of geography</b>	<b>Maleny</b> <b>History of the community in the local place</b>
<b>Bonding</b>	Factionalised bonding	Interlinked cross-connected bonding	Interlinked cross-connected bonding Some factionalism
<b>Bridging</b>	Bridges to constituents for 'representation'	Bridges to the places outside for good of community	Bridges to the places outside for good of the local geographic community
<b>Linking</b>	Factionalised connections to the outside world	Minimal linking	Linking with cooperative movement Linking with national media
<b>Trust</b>	Low trust	High trust	High trust and tolerance
<b>Community organisations</b>	Lack of community field organisational structure Community organisations with vested interests	Many small community organisations cross linked	Many small community organisations cross linked Barung Landcare serves as linking organisation
<b>Power relations</b>	Factionalism and historically embedded 'power-over' structures reinforce paternalistic social capital which disempowers bonding and bridging social capital	Traditional power embedded within interconnected bonds and external bridging to access resources during times of need	Power embedded within cooperative structures based upon bonds and inter-connected horizontal bridges empower community to mobilise under adverse external threat

and are strong structures surrounding the mines, unions, government and church organisations, there are no organisations or formal networks that serve to link these organisations. Further, the factions are a product of the historical roots of the town and are still dominated by 'the old guard'. More recently as the power of these old factions have waned, a new set of leaders and organisations have emerged, 'the new guard' who have not to date shown an awareness or capacity to form an effective community field structure.

The old guard still bases its strength on their membership of the union or ALP. They see themselves as fighters, advocates and risk takers.

For fifty years the unions held power in a negotiated arrangement with the mining owners. After the closing of successive mines the power of both the mining companies and the unions decreased dramatically. As a result, power was seen to shift formally (for the first time) to the local city council and to the state politicians:

*The traditional power in [the town] was the BIC [an amalgamation of all the unions in the city]. Power finished there and deliberately so in my time BIC to the Council [meaning City Council] right. So, you can thankfully say that I was the last in the great traditional BIC Presidents. You know with the fangs and everything right? Power transferred to the Council. (Male, Old guard leader)*

Over the past 15 years, there has been a shift of the influence away from mining and towards organisations focused on tourism and business, including art. An increased number of younger men, who are managers of small to medium organisations, are associated with this trend. With the growing numbers of people on unemployment, disability and aged pensions, government took a greater role in the economy of the town. In the eyes of many in the community, 'government' took over the paternalistic role of the union:

*The community historically has lived on the mining. It has had a very strong mining industry, which I know put a lot of money back into local community and created a handout mentality, which unfortunately still exists and people have got an expectation that when the mining companies stopped handing out, that the government should hand out and this absolutely idiotic rationale that the NSW Government took so much money from the mining companies in the early years, there should be a pay back, which I mean, you know; is just a childish, infantile view of how things work and you know, until you destroy that sort of mentality, I don't think you can move to the next level. I see that as a huge challenge.* (Male informant)

A very powerful set of overarching values still dominate the mindset of those born and bred in the town, though not necessarily the new arrivals. It is a culture of solidarity and battle, of paternalism and survival. While these values served to unite the town, particularly in a crisis, they also serve as a kind of social anaesthetic preventing coherent citizen initiative and continuously reinforcing the informal power of 'the old guard'. Principles borne of labour and worker struggle in a highly sex segregated community are historically embedded in masculine attitudes organized around the hard labour of mining. From this worker solidarity came a fundamental valuing of humans, social

justice, appreciation of the community and of the wealth of the earth and its appropriate use for the good of the country.

A positive outcome of these values was a willingness to contribute to the community in a practical, physical way.

*Because Y, once he goes and he makes up his mind he just goes there and he does it and the bloody thing's done straight away. And he will get more done in ten minutes than bloody fifty blokes'll get done in a month. ... And he embarrasses every bugger. I mean, he'll go round, he goes out there and he'll decide then and do something about.*

(Male informant)

One of the negative consequences of this set of values was an entrenched paternalism.

*One of the cultural things in Broken Hill is that big money's gonna look after us. But it means that 'She'll be right mate', this view of life, means that somebody else is going to look after you.*

(Male informant)

Historically, women were expected to remain in the domestic sphere, and to provide (often considerable) volunteer labour to maintain the many clubs, charities and other organisations in town. The same is still true despite the increased participation of women in politics, small business and the welfare sector. Indeed the image painted of an extreme masculine hegemony in rural towns in New Zealand and Australia is certainly reflected in this outback mining town (Alston, 1995; Campbell & Phillips, 1995). To be a man is to be tough, crude, and to show contempt for women. Violence is commonplace. For instance the rate per 100,000 of domestic apprehended violence orders in 2000 was 776 compared with the average for NSW of 241. Assaults increased from 313 in 1998 to 477 in 2002, despite the drop in population. Rape is common; for young women in particular this makes even walking in their own street unsafe. In a recent survey of youth in the town, girls

rated sexual harassment as one of the greatest issues (Onyx, Wood, Bullen & Osburn, 2005). Nonetheless women demonstrate a silent strength and resilience in women's networks and organisations such as the Housewives Association.

These values held the old town together. They still dominate the mindset of many, but they no longer hold the town together. New fractures have emerged between the old and the new guard. Challenges to the old guard are emerging among those 'from away', the young, the Indigenous, educated women. They do not accept the old values nor their continued exclusion from the arenas of negotiation. Those 'from away' are now often the most active members of the community. Many of the young have been disenfranchised by the loss of employment and the opportunities that these bring. Women were never part of the old guard, and many now actively campaign for a more women friendly set of values. The number of Aboriginal people has increased rapidly in the past 25 years largely because of the availability of government services. They too, have been excluded from the old guard.

Nonetheless while many people are now seeking a wider field of influence, they are not trusted or accepted by the old guard. The new guard has not yet established a real presence in the old arenas of negotiation, nor have they yet established a viable alternative community field organization. Old hostilities and distrust may continue to dismantle every new attempt to establish a broad community vision.

### *Bonding, bridging and linking in Broken Hill*

While there is no formal community field organisational structure which spans the whole community, a great deal occurs outside any formal structure. Underlying all the formal

organizational structures are other less definable bonds created by extended families with a history of five generations in the town. Bonds between family members and work teams remain strong. Bonds within the union are also still very strong. Bonding social capital can be found in the sporting organizations, clubs and adult community education classes. The extent and strength of the bonding social capital is essential for Broken Hill.

Bridging social capital is also allusive, but nonetheless occurs through the spaces provided by the arenas of negotiation. Pubs and clubs in particular continue to play a central role in developing bridging social capital within the negotiation of power. Even a small organisation can have a voice within these arenas. Thus, those who are required to vote in another forum have been effectively lobbied and can represent their 'constituency'. As a result the well networked organisation 'has the numbers'. The town operates, with well networked representatives who quietly lobby in covert places. While there are several such places, the most important is the pub/club.

Linking social capital is enabled through structured organizations like the Labour Party, Local Government Council, boards and committees of large organizations and the Executive Officers group. As in the past the unions, churches and government organizations constitute the places where linking social capital may occur. It is these formal and highly visible centres where resources and power from the outside world are lobbied, negotiated and translated into power and influence within the town.

**West Wyalong** is a small town on the Western slopes of NSW. It was also formed as a mining town following the gold rush of the 1890s. However it subsequently became an important regional centre for wheat and



sheep farming. In the early days, transport was difficult; nevertheless the community spirit developed the infrastructure of a thriving town, which today forms an important transportation node on the highways north to Queensland, and west to South Australia. The population of approximately 3,500 is ethnically and culturally highly homogenous, with just a few families of Indigenous or non European origin. The town has recently received a boost with the opening of a new gold mine close to the town. It demonstrates very high levels of social capital for most factors except for tolerance of diversity and social agency. It has the highest recorded levels of 'value of life' that is a strong belief that life is indeed worth living. There is also a very strong sense of trust within the town; doors are left open, and strangers readily greeted. While the town, like others of its kind, are suffering from the effects of the drought, there is nonetheless a sense of economic stability and support from the local Shire Council. Community participation is high with very high levels of volunteering, as indicated by the Bland Shire Council Community Services Directory. For 1999 there were listed 112 community based organisations for West Wyalong alone, with double that number for the other small towns that are included in the Shire. Strong connections exist between organisations as individuals belong to several organisations simultaneously.

This pattern was confirmed in 2001 in a follow up qualitative study of social networks involving interviews of key informants within the town (Leonard & Onyx, 2003). The networks of people interviewed in the country town of West Wyalong were all contained within the narrow confines of the geographic area. These networks did not extend to other towns, or even to the rural area surrounding

the town. Nonetheless they crossed most demographic divides within the town. Thus, one set involved a drug education program for children, children's sport, and a disability group. Another included a cancer support group, a bowling club, and hospital auxiliary. This confirmed the density of intersecting networks within the town, as revealed continuously within the interviews:

Respondent: *See, well I guess I've been involved in Domestic Violence Committee as well, so, you know, I've had lots of dealings with the police and, there is a connection with the others somewhere along the line outside of their organisations as well, generally speaking.*

Interviewer: *So those groups, most of them, you would have had contact with.*

Respondent: *Yes, yes.*

Interviewer: *Because of those other things that you're involved with as well. And do you think that helps?*

Respondent: *Oh yeah. I think you have a broader idea of where that person is coming from. Like M. a Masonic Lodge person and... he is also a councillor. R. also happens to be our town Friar and the radiologist at the hospital. You know what I mean...?*

The town manages much of its affairs through this dense network of voluntary and professional associations. The various organisations tend to support each other in fundraising efforts as illustrated in the fundraising for a cancer support group, in which the local Masons organise a car rally and the Porcelain and Doll Group have a Display Day with proceeds going to the Cancer Support group.

### **Bonding, bridging and linking within West Wyalong**

Bonding is strong. Factionalism was not apparent; people in the town pull together. As expected, it is the strong and not the loose ties



that provide a sense of emotional support, of belonging, and personal identity. These strong ties demonstrate a thick trust built up over a long history of interaction. This is perhaps best illustrated by Joel:

*... Yes a strong tie I think has to be built up over a period of time, over numerous experiences, that means that you get to a point where no matter what happens the tie can't be dissolved.*

(Male, aged 50)

The extent of personal involvement and trust appeared to be the same for men and women. A strong connection required at least 20 years:

*I would have known B. for um, forty years. G., probably fifteen. Oh, J., twenty five. J., all my life really, yep, fifty. D. probably twenty. B. and J., over thirty years. ... N. not so long, maybe ten years at least and J. about the same.... Well, it takes time doesn't it? It takes time to build a relationship.*

(Female, aged 50)

In West Wyalong, this length of association becomes a problem for newcomers. While people readily accept and talk to strangers and newcomers, those newcomers are not really accepted as insiders or strong ties for a long, long time:

*There is a saying, you have to live here 50 years before they will call you a local (young woman who married into an established family).*

Bridging links do, however, exist. Many organisations were federated to a larger state wide or national organisation. In this case there was some periodic contact with the central unit or with other sister organisations. This kind of federated link becomes quite important in the rural area, as noted in the following exchange:

*Interviewer: So that was N as the regional coordinator of basketball. So she took it upon herself to be pro active and go out to these small towns and get things happening?*

*Yeah she did. She was wonderful, she was full of beans and actually, I think ... Cobar have*

*only just built a stadium within the last couple of years and they would come all the way down here, six hours drive I think, and she would go up there and conduct clinics with them.*

(Older woman resident)

While West Wyalong may be characterized as politically conservative, stable, maintaining the status quo, this should not be taken as reflecting passivity. When the citizens perceive a need, they are quite capable of acting. The following quote illustrates a form of social agency to address a perceived community issue:

*Concerned Residents was formed about, four years ago, I guess, when our [last] doctor decided to leave town. There was myself and three others. We got together, had a meeting [to discuss] what the problem was. Why the doctors were leaving town. Because the doctors had spoken to me and just said that you people need to do something about the situation. So we surveyed all the doctors that had been here in the last ten years and asked them why they left and what was good about the place. And then we went to a council meeting and I addressed council on the matter and we challenged them to do something about the situation... We've disbanded, because we have three, four doctors in town now.*

(Female informant)

In this example, bonding, bridging and linking is evident. Social capital was used to bring the town together, to bridge with several medical professional networks, and to galvanize local Shire Council to act. Similar bridging/linking mobilization is used to expand economic opportunities for the town.

**Maleny** is a different town again. It is a small town, population of approximately 5,000 in the hinterland of Southeast Queensland. Maleny grew out of a struggling dairy farming area, which was revitalized by an influx of new residents in the 1970s who held a commitment to an environmentally sustainable lifestyle, and developed a number of Co operative organisations to serve the

community. Survey data revealed that Maleny recorded the highest social capital factor across nine different communities. We find that the respondents in Maleny have the highest overall score for general social capital (94.7). This is well above the other surveyed communities. Maleny scores high across all the social capital factors. In particular, Maleny records the highest score across the other communities for *community connections*. It has levels of *trust and neighbourhood connections* that were equal to the scores of West Wyalong. It also has among the highest score for *tolerance of diversity* and for *social agency*. This is an outstanding result for a rural community as it is generally the urban centres which record higher scores for these factors.

For a small population Maleny has a large number of community organisations spanning diverse functions. According to the database created through the local Maleny Working Together (MWT) project involving a survey of 411 households as part of a community audit, there are 136 community groups within the Maleny local area (MWT, 2003, p. 14). A significantly large core of cooperatives operates within the town providing an important form of social and product exchange. Many people (40%) volunteer their time in some capacity and there are strong interconnections between community organisations as over 90% of local community groups dialogue with others locally (MWT, 2003, p. 14) indicating a tightly interwoven collection of community organisations. These interconnections are partly due to individuals belonging to many different organisations simultaneously. Informally this provides a flow of information between different organisations and sharing of resources. There are several important occasions when the organisations cooperate for the organisation of large

community wide events. 87.5% of the sample strongly agreed or agreed that it was easy to be involved in the community (MWT, 2003). These results are mirrored in the interview transcripts, as the openness of the local community was one of the major themes identified that makes this town special. According to one interviewee:

*It's an energy thing you just seem to tune in to. It's vibrant, it's interesting, it's very diverse and to a large extent it's the people. It is very accepting. It doesn't matter what your background is, age, sexual preference whatever, it makes no difference.*

(Female informant).

When speaking about what it is that makes Maleny special in the interview data two themes are outstanding; the people and the environment. One of the most outstanding examples of this social and environmental commitment was demonstrated when the Maleny community received an award for Environmental Citizen of the Year. This is significant as it pays tribute to the connectivity between all members of the community who were involved in the Obi Obi campaign and illustrates how these community connections can be used successfully to preserve the environment. Additionally, the central significance of Barung Landcare as a community organisation for the Maleny citizens highlights this environmental and social connection. Barung Landcare was the most frequently mentioned as a key community organization by people from all parts of the community. The central purpose of the Landcare movement is the preservation and restoration of the natural environment. Socially, the organisation provides an opportunity for the development of social capital across demographic divides.

The Obi Obi campaign signalled a general community resistance to the development of a shopping centre by a large national retail chain.

The resistance involved most groups in town, including the cooperative movement and local business owners, as well as environmental and social groups. Their interests are to create as near as possible self sufficient communities based upon local cooperation and place bound networks.

### *Bonding, bridging and linking in Maleny*

Bonds provide the platform of solidarity for building the progressive sustainable community development vision. The bonding networks were essential in enabling the community to resist the corporate retail giant within a dominant culture which continues to promote 'unsustainable' development. There are also the necessary bridges between sections of the community to other local progressive communities, and some links for instance to national media. However it is the bonding ties at the local level which helps preserve the unique nature of this individual community (Edwards & Onyx, 2007).

### **Discussion**

Social capital is not generated in a vacuum. In each case existing levels and types of social capital can be traced back to their historical roots, contextual factors and economic pressures that occur. We do not claim that our cases are all inclusive; indeed we would question the capacity of any study to reveal every empirical contingency. But they do draw out the main themes as revealed by respondents in each community at the time of the studies. In this sense we find that while the qualitative data supports the findings of the quantitative study, rich descriptions reveal the unique complexity of each community and emphasise that no singular notion of social capital will always apply. We are suggesting that the power relationships

evident within the community networks determine how social capital is enacted in each circumstance.

The Broken Hill case supports other studies that conclude 'paternalistic' power structures can have a negative impact upon the development of horizontal capital which empowers local communities (Schulman & Anderson, 1999). These authors in fact conclude that the workers in their study:

*... may be 'bowling alone' not because they lack the community ties and civility, but because historical and institutional processes anchored in the local form of paternalist social capital prevented alternative forms of social capital from emerging* (Schulman & Anderson, 1999, p. 369).

There is significant bonding social capital in Broken Hill within the factions, but the locus of power remains largely within the 'old guard' and this concentration blocks alternative emerging forms of collective action. The old 'leadership' and tradition of these power structures has been carried through in the culture of the wider community, producing generally high levels of conflict and low trust.

In West Wyalong there is little conflict and little factionalism evident. Social dominance remains with the old established families. The Shire Council appears to be not a site for contestation, but an arena for collective mobilisation. Bonds across the community are strong, with multiple cross cutting ties that bridge across organisations and serve to bond the wider community. There are high levels of consensus, trust and personal support. While there are some bridging links to organisations outside the community, in general the community is inward looking and conservative. Politically, socially and economically it is relatively stable.

Maleny demonstrates strong bonding social capital throughout the community. The dominant power relations lie within an alternative view of progress based on a dynamic concept of localised development, co-operation and environmental sustainability. This powerful integrating set of collective values is then mobilised as a political force to resist externally imposed structures and which is enabled through the strength of local bonds.

Conflict and struggle for power is evident in both Broken Hill and Maleny, though the form it takes is very different in each town. Broken Hill is torn by internal factions, each effectively dismantling the others initiatives. The Local Council itself is an arena for such factional battles. In Maleny, social capital is used to bond citizens together to fight externally imposed regimes of domination. Local Council is not local, but is located on the coastal strip and is seen to represent external (economic) interests and not the community interests or desires.

There are many examples of collective agency, the productive power of social capital, across all three communities; to engage the community to create new forms of organisation, and to mobilize action to meet a need, such as bringing new doctors into West Wyalong. Such social capital is also used to mobilize against a perceived common enemy, as evident in the union struggles of the past in Broken Hill, and the current struggle against a multi national retail giant in Maleny.

The point is that social capital is a source of power that can equally be positive (enabling) and negative (oppressive), often both at the same time. Embedded within the social capital networks is an enabling capacity and not simply in economic terms. It is this potential as a power resource that makes social capital so attractive. For those who can mobilize social capital, it is also a major power

resource of resistance. 'People power' has always been an effective base for resistance and the overthrow of corrupt regimes. In this context, 'people power' can be seen as the successful mobilization of social capital on a large scale. In this sense we argue that social capital as a source of power aligns with the earlier description of Davis (1992).

Social values are a common ingredient in many analyses of both power and social capital. While the positive enactment of social capital, or empowerment is based on shared values and their derivative norms, power may also be constructed around the dominance of one set of values over another. Power is exercised when dominant groups or individuals devote energy to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to those in dominance (Bachrach & Baratz, 1977). Values, beliefs, rituals and institutional procedures that operate systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain groups at the expense of others are seen to be strategies of the exercise of power.

The activation or deactivation of social capital is one consequence of the locus of control relating to the power relationships within the specific community context in which it arises. One way in which these different power relationships can be explored is through a separation of the different forms of social capital. Bonding social capital strengthens the locus of control within the group in question but may set boundary conditions that disempower those who wish to negotiate across the boundaries. Bridging usually empowers those who bridge and who are bridged, except where control over structural holes is used to disempower. However, bridging is always relative. The

multiple, intersecting ties between people, organisations and social categories, all serve to 'bond' the wider community. And while people generally prefer to maintain close ties with those most similar to themselves, most people are located at the intersection of multiple social categories. Thus close ties may be formed between people of the same church but different socio economic backgrounds, or between people of the same age and geographic location, but of different ethnicities. Such multiple, overlapping social identities also serve to bond the wider community in which they occur. It is only when there is a lack of such overlapping connections, that isolated and factionalized sub communities occur.

Linking social capital involves relationships that are inherently unequal. While it is possible that such relationships may benefit the subordinate, as in the successful application for funding, there are usually strings attached to such a relationship which ultimately reinforces the power of the dominant party.

The locus of power can have a relative impact upon whether social capital is seen as 'good' or 'bad'. If there is a sense in the community of power over located within the community bonds then this could be quite destructive to the overall collective formation of social capital (as in the case of Broken hill), thus creating a vicious circle to the point where people will not feel empowered, but rather imprisoned by their social networks. If the power relations are evenly distributed within the bonding networks, then it is more likely that people will feel empowered and this will have a virtuous effect for the local community (as in West Wyalong and Maleny). In general we argue that communities with higher levels of all forms of social capital are more able to mobilize in the face of adversity or to block a course of action. However, the case studies

highlight how external stakeholders and internal factions can undermine or destroy the social capital networks. We conclude that while external economic and political events will partly shape the social relations of the community, so too the particular configuration of local power and social capital will partly determine the capacity of the community to respond to the challenges facing it.

The devil is in the detail. Whether or not social capital is used to empower or disempower will depend on the particular intersection of social capital and power relations within specific rural networks

### Endnotes

- 1 Methods to obtain respondents included street stalls, residential door knocking, public events, work places, snowball sampling through community members, members of community organizations.

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## SOCIAL CAPITAL: ANALYSING THE EFFECT OF A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PERCEIVED ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN COMMUNITY PROSPERITY

Kate Brooks

### Abstract

*Social capital has enjoyed a surge in popularity in recent years, however debate continues over the concept in policy and community renewal strategies. This paper explores how different interpretations of the concept may affect the role that government is perceived to have in developing 'social capital'. Empirical research findings are used to explore the relevance of different social capital interpretations to the role of government in rural prosperity. The paper argues that the current dominant interpretation obscures the role that government can play in generating community prosperity. Additionally, this paper argues that the dominant interpretation of the concept does not acknowledge the effect that government actions may have on social networks and, therefore, social and economic outcomes. The paper comments on the implications of different social capital interpretations for policy development focused on the social and economic sustainability of rural Australia. It concludes that the political context of the use of social capital affects how it is interpreted. Further, the interpretation utilised affects government policy responses to the renewal of rural communities, a factor largely unrecognised in social capital debates.*

### Keywords

Social capital, resilience, prosperity, community renewal

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## Introduction

Social capital, while being a widely used concept, has been so loosely employed as to have lost its meaning and ability to assist policy development and implementation (Farr, 2007; Halpern, 2005). The dominant interpretation of 'social capital'<sup>1</sup> in Australia has perhaps led to this justifiable criticism. This paper maintains that the focus has been on the measurement validity of 'social capital', rather than its interpretation and assessment. This obscures the underlying importance of identifying the objective and paradigms

framing its use. It is proposed here that the real cause for critique is this lack of clarity in interpretation, rather than the value of the concept itself. It is necessary to refocus the debate on the paradigms that give rise to the use of 'social capital'. Further, the paper explores, through empirical research, the relationship between different interpretations and community prosperity. In the light of this, the discussion then turns to the political paradigms that underpin these different interpretations, and the implications that these may have for policy development.

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Initially, the benefits of 'social capital' are examined to establish why we continue to pursue this contested concept. It goes on to highlight the common problematic elements with it. These, along with the disagreement over the value of the concept are, however, explained through recognising the implications of different interpretations of the concept.

The effect of different interpretations of 'social capital' on prosperity and perceptions of government action is examined using the results of empirical research undertaken between 2003 and 2005 in rural New South Wales. The objective of this research was to explore the validity of different interpretations of the concept, in the context of factors in rural prosperity. Further, it sought to explore the role of government in generating rural communities' 'social capital' to support economic and demographic 'success'. The majority of the data indicate that greater network interaction with government (local, state and federal) coincides with higher levels of the type of 'social capital' associated with economic growth.

The categorisation of social capital interpretation by political perspective – a neoliberal<sup>2</sup> or a deliberative democratic<sup>3</sup> (or synergistic) one – is framed by the likelihood that one of these two political paradigms motivates its employment. This is a significant issue that has not received adequate treatment, considering the profile of 'social capital' in the Australian political landscape in the last eight years (Abbott, 2000; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000, 2002b, 2004; Costello, 2001, 2003; Department of Family and Community Services, 2000, 2005; Department of Transport and Regional Services, 2001; Government of Victoria, 2002; Howard, 1999; Latham, 2000, 2001; National Economic and Social Forum, 2003; NSW Department of Community Services, 2004; Productivity

Commission, 2003; Social and Economic Research Centre (SERC), 2002; Tanner, 2004; The Centre for Independent Studies, 2006; Tonts, 2005). It is explored here in the light of the empirical research that highlights the connection evident between community prosperity and government interaction.

Lastly, the paper provides an overview of the implications of categorising 'social capital' interpretations in the context of government culture and operation. It concludes that using a neoliberal interpretation of the concept in the policy domain remains significantly problematic, in contrast to that of a synergistic interpretation. It concludes that greater clarity, as to which interpretation of the 'social capital' is being employed, is imperative when used in policy development. This is particularly so if the objective of a policy is to assist communities to generate prosperity, while adjusting to changing circumstances.

## **Benefits of 'social capital'**

The benefits of 'social capital'<sup>4</sup> are well accepted as touching many aspects of private and civic life. It is commonly agreed to increase participation and citizens' access to information, provide a social safety net of supportive relationship networks, allowing individuals to take risks, and is also credited with expediting communications and economic exchanges due to the accepted norms of social networks. The effect of these is deemed to be a reduction in the costs of community interaction in terms of time and money, immediately and in the future (Offe & Fuchs, 2002; Pretty, 2001; Putnam, 2001). Work undertaken by Knack and Keefer (1997), Szreter (2001), the Organisation for Economic Co operation and Development (OECD) (2001) and Fukuyama (2001) amongst others, supports these connections. It has also identified evidence that 'social capital' is related



to measurable economic performance. In addition to 'social capital' being a resource explicitly recognised as benefiting private actions and operations, economic rationalists also see it as an efficient market operation through its provision of access to all available information through social networks. Across all political domains, the reduced expenditure and bureaucracy required in the public sphere as a consequence of greater 'social capital' is seen as a significant contributor, in fiscal terms, to the efficiency of the market. For this benefit alone, aside from those of smoother social interactions, decreased crime and greater community 'health', 'social capital' continues to feature on political, as well as social, agendas.

The policy domain has, in recent years and in regard to rural Australia, focused on identifying keys to the renewal and sustainability of communities (Lawrence, 2005; Robison & Schmid, 1996; Selman, 2001). In this regard, 'social capital' and 'community capacity' are often seen as fundamental components to achieving this. They have also often been used interchangeably in the context of community growth and development. As Cavaye (2000) has identified, however, the term 'community capacity' comprises the very separate and distinct concepts of both human and 'social' capital. He defines 'community capacity' as 'the ability, attitudes, organisation, skills and resources that communities have to improve their economic and social situation' (p.3). Such a definition clearly refers to both human ('ability, skills and resources') as well as social ('attitudes and organisation') capital. Both types of capital are created, developed and eroded by quite different mechanisms. Therefore, to conflate these two concepts in discussions of how to develop community capacity leads to a potential disregard for essential elements of the whole. It is in this context that a failure may occur to undertake a precise clarification of why and how such

elements as 'social capital' are being used and interpreted. Despite this, 'social capital' is recognised as one of the essential elements in developing the capacity of communities to be adaptive and innovative in times of physical or economic stress. This, in addition to the economic benefits credited to social capital, will cause it to continue to feature prominently on the policy and community agendas of rural Australia. Further clarification of how we are interpreting the agreed definition of the concept is, therefore, necessary. This involves both its parameters and how different interpretations of the concept might be appropriate to different applications.

### **The problematic nature of 'social capital'**

Although it is agreed that 'social capital' is a resource that exists in the connections between people, it is what is *not* stipulated in the OEDC definition that is problematic. These omissions include the flow of benefits from social relations to the individual or the community at large and, by extension, the boundaries of the communities being focused upon, the source of trust and reciprocity, the use of vertical and horizontal ties in relation to bridging, bonding and linking relationship networks, and power. The lack of clarity over the elements of social capital arises from the interpretations of it being used for different purposes. Unfortunately, often *an* interpretation of the concept is posited as 'social capital', rather than being acknowledged as only *one* interpretation of the concept that can be employed. Dependent upon the interpretation, 'social capital' can support several and quite diverse practical, as well as political, objectives.

One feature of 'social capital' the flow of benefits to either individuals or to the community receives quite a different emphasis from each of the three main theorists of the concept: Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam.

Bourdieu talked of the benefits that employing social capital, in the form of social networks, can provide to individuals (Callhoun, LiPuma & Postone, 1993). Coleman discussed social capital from the perspective of the benefits not only to the individual, but also those it may provide in the corporate sphere (1986). In contrast, Putnam's focus was on the collective benefits to society at large that can be derived from 'social capital' (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993). The flow of benefits from 'social capital' that we seek to focus upon will change which interpretation of the concept is utilised. That is, are we focusing on potential individual benefits, or those collective benefits which could accrue to the larger community? The parameters we put on the scope of social networks investigated will shift, dependent upon the focus of benefits. A focus on individual benefits will entail an examination of those networks directly associated only with the individual(s) of concern. This contrasts with a collective focus, which must take a broader scope of reference, considering the direct and indirect networks affecting group relations. This is due to the effect of an action on community members who are not necessarily participant(s) in that action. A detailed examination of the conceptualisation of 'social capital' by Bourdieu and Coleman highlights the problems with scoping the networks to be evaluated in assessing 'social capital'. Although it will not be discussed in detail here, this is particularly evident in their discussions of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1990) and the effect of corporate life on 'social capital' (Coleman, 1988).

It has been suggested that the benefits ascribed to concepts, such as 'social capital', have changed over time in line with the prevailing political climate (Everingham, 2001). In regard to 'social capital', this relates specifically to the shift in focus from the sovereignty of the individual to maximise

personal benefit (suggested by a neoliberal perspective) to those of the community benefits which mediate individual actions (suggested by a deliberative democratic or synergistic perspective). That is, is the responsibility on individuals to maximise their personal benefit from social networks? Or, alternatively, is 'social capital' a resource of the 'commons' to be nurtured and developed by the community as a whole? The particular focus adopted will direct the interpretation of 'social capital' and how it should be operationalised.

Much of the focus on 'social capital' in recent years has been on measuring trust and reciprocity. This has been prompted by Putnam's focus on these as proxies for 'social capital' (1995). As discussed by Woolcock (1998), the component of analysis absent in Putnam's earlier work is the source of trust and reciprocity. Putnam argues that trust and reciprocity are not necessarily naturally occurring within communities or individuals. Woolcock (1998) argues that it is the nature and extent of relationships networks that give rise to trust, reciprocity and shared norms. It is, as a result, these relationships that must be investigated to identify 'social capital'. It is not, as Putnam has promoted, trust and reciprocity (the outcomes of 'social capital') that should be the focus of measurement or assessment, if we are to get at the reasons behind its generation.

As an extension of Woolcock's perspective, the concepts of horizontal as well as vertical relationship networks required to build 'social capital' have been introduced. This distinction recognises the position of relative power in relationships. Horizontal ties refer to those relationships between individuals similarly situated in the power structures of a community. By contrast, vertical ties refer to relationships between individuals at different levels in that power structure. The mix of

horizontal and vertical networks in a community will illuminate the degree to which there is access to power structures to change or modify circumstances. Generally, there are two common perspectives of where the power to develop social capital resides, and how it initiates and develops trust and reciprocity.

The first perspective in regard to the locus of power is supported by Putnam's interpretation of 'social capital'. Putnam maintains that the power to employ networks resides with the individual (1993; 2000; 2001). Individuals can use their networks as a resource to the benefit of not only themselves, but also society overall. This is Putnam's earlier interpretation of the concept, which deems individuals to be in control of their ability to employ networks to enjoy the benefits of 'social capital' (1993; 1995). Therefore, an examination of the ability to deploy 'social capital' should be focused on the networks and actions of the individual, without reference to the broader social networks in which they operate. Putnam's interpretation of 'social capital' has been used extensively by neoliberals to justify policies of service withdrawal from the civic domain. Such policy approaches purport that government intervention inhibits civic social interactions and network development (Scanlon, 2004).

The second perspective on power employs the theories of Coleman and Bourdieu. Their interpretations maintain that 'social capital' is a collective resource, inhering in the relationships between individuals (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Coleman, 1988). In their opinion, 'social capital' can only be employed through the interaction of multiple individuals with the resources to communicate. Coleman and Bourdieu maintain that the environment, or 'habitus' in Bourdieu's terms (Calloun et al., 1993), in which an individual operates affects the ability of individuals to access

networks and generate 'social capital'. This interpretation is inclined to be employed by democratic political proponents to support, in varying degrees, a greater role for the state in civic affairs. Such an employment of the interpretation is, however, perhaps contrary to the intention of either theorist. The objective of employing 'social capital' in this manner is based upon the objective of smoothing civic interactions and ensuring equal access to social networks, through such resources as education and employment. The significance is that this interpretation of social capital recognises that the power to maximise benefits does not lie with an individual alone. Rather, an individual's environment can impede or facilitate their access to networks which can generate social capital.

Although these issues with the concept of 'social capital' have persisted, the dominant discussion about 'social capital' remains the ability to measure it, assessing whether communities have more or less of it. Putnam's method of measuring 'social capital' uses quantitative assessment, focused on the number of bonding<sup>5</sup> networks in a community. This approach has been the dominant measurement method employed, to date, in Australia. It has been achieved by 'counting' the number of civic networks that individuals participate in, within geographically defined communities, to determine the level of 'social capital' in a community (Onyx & Bullen, 1997; Stone, 2001). This has been criticised as it creates a measurement technique exclusive of external civic, government or corporate resources, which might support or develop the abilities of that community. This particular interpretation and measurement of 'social capital' has been referred to as 'society centred' social capital<sup>6</sup>. The effect of this interpretation is the potential to 'blame the victim', due to the power over 'social capital' being ascribed to individuals only in the civic domain (Putnam's thesis). Accordingly,

individuals are deemed to choose whether or not they participate in developing community 'social capital' and, therefore, its development is their responsibility alone. This interpretation aligns with a neoliberal perspective of political social structures.

By contrast, Woolcock's examination of 'social capital' questions the extent of networks affecting trust and reciprocity in a community (1998). He maintains that, in addition to micro (individual bonding) relationships, meso (civic bonding and bridging) and macro (government and communities' external linking) relationships are also essential to the development of community trust and reciprocity. It is the combination of these that is necessary to form the type of 'social capital' that is both available to individuals and also facilitates development. The necessity to incorporate bridging<sup>7</sup> and linking<sup>8</sup>, as well as bonding, networks in any assessment of 'social capital' in relation to economic advancement and change has been discussed by a number of authors, including Aldridge, Halpern and Fitzpatrick (2002), Cuthill (2003), Edwards Cheers and Graham (2003), Everingham (2001), Granovetter (1972), Gray and Lawrence (2001), Lowndes and Wilson (2001), Siggers, Carter, Boyd, Cooper and Sonn (2003), and Spies Butcher (2002; 2003a; 2003b). Woolcock and Narayan (2000) built upon Woolcock's original thesis, synthesising previous discussions to develop an interpretation of 'social capital' which they have termed the 'synergy view'<sup>9</sup> of social capital. This interpretation does, however, require measurement techniques that can effectively incorporate the meso and macro structures of the 'community' whose 'social capital' is being assessed.

Therefore, dependent upon the interpretation of 'social capital' adopted a 'society centred' or a 'synergistic' one a

significant difference in focus evolves. This difference involves both what is being measured and the scope of that measurement. What is notable in reviewing these problematic aspects of 'social capital' is the resolution that a clarification of the concept's interpretation can provide to many of the criticisms raised in regard to its application or measurement.

## **Applying different interpretations of 'social capital'**

Within Australia, the majority of case study research to date has used a society centred interpretation, focusing only on the 'social capital' of civic networks in a geographically bounded community (Onyx & Bullen 1997; Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Stone, 2001). As a result, the author undertook Australian research to explore if the synergistic interpretation of 'social capital' has a different degree of association with economic prosperity than the dominant 'society centred' interpretation. The objective of the research was to use quantitative and qualitative indicators, and separate them into the categories of society centred (community civic) and synergistic (meso and macro) relationship networks. The latter networks included community interactions with State and federal government bodies or their representatives. The assessment of bonding, bridging and linking networks incorporated those within the communities, and those between community and government structures, both within and external to the communities. Interestingly, the quantitative component of the research showed no difference in association between prosperity and the interpretations of social capital. The qualitative data did, however, uncover distinct differences in the depth and value of the relationship networks, when viewed from the two perspectives.

## Using mixed methods to study two communities

The empirical research used two geographically similar communities, located in New South Wales. Both communities had the same socio-demographic profiles in the 1991 ABS Population and Housing Census, but had diverged in their indicators of prosperity<sup>10</sup> by the Census of 2001. Between 1991 and 2001, Shire A demonstrated the average growth rate for rural NSW, while Shire B, the more westerly Shire, was the fastest growing shire in the State (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002a). The research techniques employed included an historical review, a media analysis of key issues and how social networks were utilised to manage them, a quantitative survey of resident ratepayers to assess levels of 'social capital', based on previously tested surveys, and 42 qualitative semi structured interviews across the two communities. The interviews were undertaken with community, Council and corporate leaders, association participants in the community, and external consultants and government representatives who dealt with both communities. The quantitative survey was based on questions developed by Onyx and Bullen (1997, 2000) and the World Bank (Grootaert, Narayan, Jones & Woolcock, 2004), and was distributed to all resident ratepayers by each Shire Council with their regular rate notice. Of 4,800 surveys distributed, a total of 805 valid surveys were returned. The survey was divided into six sections, of which the first four were aimed at assessing levels of internal and external bonding, bridging and linking relationships at the community and institutional levels. The fifth section aimed to identify bonding and bridging networks within work relationships. The last section sought demographic information to allow comparisons between the communities and with Australian Bureau of

Statistics regional averages. The data were collated on a community basis by section, so that both communities could be assessed independently and comparatively.

The following graph (Fig. 1) presents the results of the first four sections of the survey. The fifth section was not reliable due to an inadequate response and, of those who did respond, the majority were either self employed (farmers) or retired. The graph does illustrate, however, the lack of difference in the types of social capital between the communities in their aggregated scores in each of the four categories of questions<sup>11</sup>.

The respondents in both communities were not representative of the demographic mean of the community, being older and including a higher number of retirees than the general population. The survey sample in each community did, however, diverge from the general population in the same manner in each case and was, therefore, deemed comparable. The quantitative data here suggest that the level of 'social capital' in a community, regardless of how it is interpreted, has no bearing on economic or demographic prosperity.

The qualitative data suggest, however, that in fact the economically stronger of the two communities (Shire B) has higher levels of bridging and linking networks, generating greater social capital. In the qualitative data, Shire B demonstrated higher levels of *active* interaction with external resources in terms of community and family bridging and linking networks beyond the immediate region, as well as a higher level of 'bonding' with their local government. Shire B was perceived by its community to have higher levels of regional government interaction and effectiveness than Shire A was perceived to have by its community.

The interview data indicated that the difference between the two communities related largely to the Shire Councillors' approach. This was

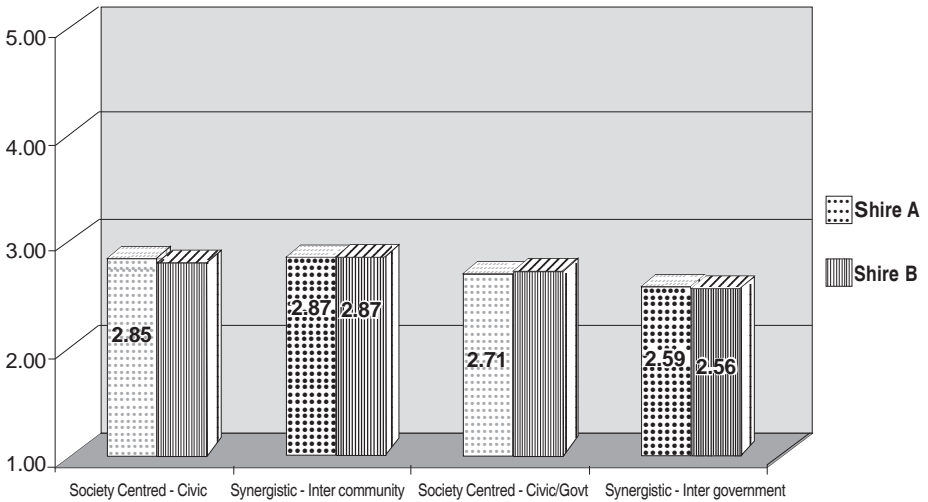


Figure 1: 'Social capital' of the two communities

Note The lighter dotted and striped bars relate to the measurement of 'society centred' social capital in the Shires A & B; the heavily dotted and striped bars relate to the measurement of 'synergistic' social capital in both communities. For full details of the survey implementation please refer to the author.

demonstrated in their appreciation of their role as community motivators and instigators, not just the managers of 'roads, rates and rubbish'. A further difference that emerged from the qualitative data related to community attitudes toward their border locations. Both Shires and their respective largest towns are located on the Murray River, with the bulk of the Shires extending to the north. Both Shires also have active tourism and economic regions immediately adjacent to them on the Victorian side of the border. Shire A, the stable Shire, is dismissive of any opportunity provided by the proximity of the successful tourism region, because it is interstate. By contrast, Shire B is actively co operative with its Victorian counterpart, due to the possibility of reaping the benefits of 'playing off' State governments against each other to get the best 'deal' for the region. Consequently, although the quantitative data indicate no relationship between prosperity

and the different interpretations of 'social capital', the qualitative data tells a quite different story. Synergistic social capital is indicated to have a much higher association with prosperity than is society centred. This is despite society centred being the most commonly employed interpretation of social capital in Australia.

### Potential limitations of assessment

The quantitative data indications may, however, reflect the nature of the instrument. Surveys are a static measurement of circumstances at a particular point in time, which lend no context or illumination as to the nature of relationship networks that generate trust and reciprocity. Consequently, although the two communities are demonstrating the same levels of the different types of social capital now, they may in fact be at different stages of reaping its benefits. For example, Shire B has already

developed and is maintaining the levels of both types of social capital, and is already enjoying the benefits. Shire A may have only just achieved a balance of the different types of social capital, and may be yet to reap the benefits. The survey findings do strongly indicate, however, that society centred social capital is associated with feelings of well being and resilience, which was evident in the qualitative data in both communities. Further verification of the survey instrument would also be required to confirm the findings from it, as it was an amalgamation of Onyx and Bullen's and the World Bank's instruments (Grootaert et al., 2004; Onyx & Bullen, 1997).

### What the data suggests

The data from the empirical research detailed here supports the hypothesis that there is a role for government in the generation of community 'social capital' in the context of a synergistic interpretation. There is, however, no indication of a connection with government action and policy, and community 'social capital', when a 'society centred' (or Putnam's) interpretation is used. Shire B exhibits greater levels of inter community and government, and community/local government 'social capital', in the form of active bridging and linking relationship networks (thereby breaking down or negotiating power boundaries), when assessed qualitatively. The significance of these relationship types is that, despite disparity in people's relative positions of power, these networks have the ability to generate trust and reciprocity, due to the sharing of that power. This allows a greater number of individuals in these communities to access knowledge and resources, which can change their circumstances.

The qualitative data suggests that different interpretations of the concept identify specific types of 'social capital', which are useful

dependent upon the objective. The 'society centred' interpretation identifies that 'social capital' which generates a sense of well being and resilience. By contrast, a synergistic interpretation of social capital is useful to also identify the social resources of a community which can generate prosperity. Consequently, the paradigm in which 'social capital' is employed, and therefore interpreted, will affect both how we measure it, and whether 'social capital' can be effectively nurtured by government action. Accordingly, it will also affect the factors taken into account in the development of policies to address social and economic circumstances of communities.

### Interpreting the concept of 'social capital' - politically

The concept of 'social capital' has been employed extensively to support, nurture, punish, cajole, criticise, impinge upon or redefine communities who are not classified as 'successful', usually in economic terms (Cheers & Luloff, 2001; Cox, 2002; Gray & Lawrence, 2000; Herbert Cheshire, 2003; Holm, 2004; Lawrence, 2005; O'Toole, 2000; O'Toole & Burdess, 2004; Stewart, 1999; Winter, 2000; Worthington & Dollery, 2000). In most cases, the objective for which social capital is employed depends upon the political perspective of the discussant. Therefore, 'social capital' must be understood as an often politicised concept. This is contrary to its origins, which were concerned with understanding the effects of individual relationship networks on educational opportunities (Hanifan, 1920; Jacobs, 1961).

As discussed earlier, it has been the application of the concept in the broad areas of civic benefits, which propelled the concept into the political sphere. This came to the fore with the publication of Putnam's research in Italy (1993) and his subsequent work in



America with the publication of 'Bowling Alone' (1995). Due to this profiling of the concept, the last fifteen years have seen a plethora of interpretations incorporating, to varying degrees, the components of bonding, bridging, linking, horizontal and vertical relationship networks. The result is that now, and as demonstrated by the empirical research detailed here, we cannot talk about 'social capital' as a generic concept. Rather, we need to identify what type of 'social capital' we are referring to, and for what purpose.

The concept of 'social capital' has been employed at times to justify the withdrawal of government services (Alston, 2002). It has also been used to focus responsibility for social and economic circumstances on individuals' actions at the local level of community (Costello, 2003). Alternatively, it has also been employed in the context of justifying broader government services (Latham, 1997, 1998, 2001; Tanner, 2004). The use of social capital in the general discussion of policy deployment by such divergent political discussants underlines its appeal to a range of perspectives. 'Social capital' can, however, be categorised into at least two broad approaches according to fundamental political belief structures, as illustrated in Figure 2. This effectively explicates the political nature of the concept into two of the most dominant political belief structures in Australia. It also underlines the importance of identifying the practical, as well as political, objective for which the interpretation of the concept is being employed.

The interpretation of 'social capital' that is used relates to its perceived ability to illuminate the benefits or weaknesses of specific social interactions. These can be ascribed to the neoliberal (or society centred) or deliberative democratic (or synergistic) perspectives as set out in Table 1.

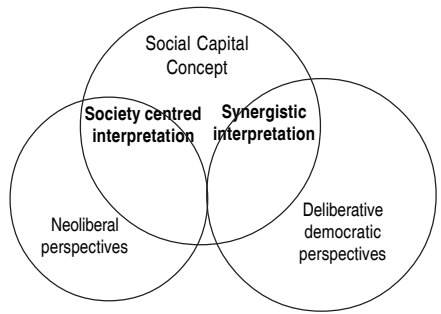


Figure 2: Perspectives of 'social capital'

It is important to note that the categorisation here has only been undertaken at a high level. It would be possible to further differentiate common categorical elements under both the neoliberal and deliberative democratic uses of the concept, such as culture or sub categories of politics. Such a sub categorisation of the concept would provide even greater clarity in the use of the term, and the potential benefits that are expected to be derived from it.

### Implications for policy of the political reinterpretation of 'social capital'

A political interpretation of 'social capital', and the empirical evidence outlined here, indicates the necessity to redefine our use of the term. This analysis suggests that 'social capital' is often (perhaps inadvertently) used as a political concept and, therefore, must be placed in the context of the political paradigm of its use, prior to its employment in discussions of community capacity and renewal policies. In addition to this, types of social capital exist which serve the purposes of different community outcomes, which vary dependent upon political objectives.

The possibility of different types of social capital existing, which are appropriate to creating alternative outcomes, is also entwined with the recognition that power (to employ



Table 1: Categories of 'social capital' interpretation

Neoliberal (Society centred)	Deliberative Democratic (Synergistic)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social capital is developed and employed by the individual will alone.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability to develop and employ social capital is dependent on the ability of a number of individuals to interact.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This interpretation applies the concept to geographically bounded communities of civic networks only, employing bonding and limited bridging networks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In addition to bonding networks, it also incorporates the internal and external bridging and linking networks of a community, and also those between a community and government structures.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It focuses only on the 'bottom up' development of 'social capital', without reference to the effect of power structures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It interprets 'social capital' as being developed through the simultaneous interaction of 'top down' and 'bottom up' social networks.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Social capital' is regarded as an entity or 'bank account' of resources belonging exclusively to individuals in the community, and for which they themselves are wholly responsible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Social capital' is regarded as a resource available to the community, giving rise to both its development and facilitating access to resources.</li> </ul>

relationships to generate social capital) plays a role in 'social capital'. In order to effectively identify the factors that assist in building relationships, it is essential to uncover which person(s) have the human<sup>12</sup> and financial<sup>13</sup> capital to participate in networks. In addition to human and financial capital, power also exists in the form of social status and class, which may preclude individuals from essential capacity building activities and networks, despite their other resources. The effect is that 'power' in these forms may prevent individuals' access to social capital generating networks, despite their best endeavours. A society centred and quantitative assessment of social capital does not recognise the effect of power to potentially prevent access to relationship networks. By contrast, the inclusion of bridging and linking networks in 'social capital' assessment, such as with a synergistic interpretation, recognises these factors. This allows them to be taken into account when assessing not only the level of social capital,

but what may be done to improve it and the benefits that it may provide a community. It is this element of power that underlines where there is a potential role for government. This is in the policies that may be focused on interventions to ameliorate the effect of power relationships, which block the development of community networks that could benefit a community's capacity.

In the context of a neoliberal (society centred) interpretation of social capital, individual empowerment is not recognised as being a dependent factor in regard to outcomes. The empowerment of individuals is, however, often subject to the influences of the social matrix in which government intervention, or the withdrawal of services, is delivered. Despite this, policy developed under a neoliberal paradigm is likely to be developed without reference to local context, or regard for any potential effects of policy on community interaction. Such an interpretation is employed in the belief that communities will be able to

use their 'social capital' to adapt to the changing social, environmental and economic circumstances caused by policy, and that a 'one size' policy can fit all circumstances.

By contrast, a synergistic interpretation of social capital acknowledges the internal and external, government and civic influences on community relationships. This requires the assessment of 'social capital' to engage with both endogenous and exogenous factors, when considering the elements that contribute to increasing community capacity. The development of policy, which utilises a synergistic interpretation of social capital, is likely to be an iterative and flexible process. Accordingly, it also acknowledges the need for communities to be actively involved in policy development which affects them, in order to achieve community empowerment and long term 'buy ins' to policy initiatives (see Stoker, 2005 for example).

To employ a synergistic interpretation of 'social capital', however, requires a large shift in the responsibilities acknowledged by government departments. It entails not only a change in culture and structure of how different levels of government do business, but also a shift in the community culture. Communities are required to be more willing to engage with government departments, and open to the possibility of governments doing business differently. As pointed out by Szreter and Woolcock (2004), greater emphasis needs to be placed on the quantity and quality of relationships, and the foundation of them in mutual respect, in order for a synergistic approach to be successful. This would be embodied in, amongst other examples, a preparedness to devolve a degree of power for decision making to communities to allow a sense of control over their futures.

The analysis here points to several implications for the use of social capital in

the policy context. 'Social capital' is a political concept, the interpretation of which is contextual to the political paradigm in which it is used. It is also imperative to clarify which interpretation is being used, prior to its employment in any discussion of community capacity and renewal policies. A clarification of which interpretation of 'social capital' is being used will elucidate the parameters of the relationships being considered and, consequently, how it will be assessed. Such clarity ensures that the social interactions being assessed are appropriate to the political and policy objectives of adopting the concept. Under a neoliberal interpretation, government is not perceived to play a role in the process of generating 'social capital', therefore policy can not logically be targeted at developing or enhancing social capital. A neoliberal (society centred) interpretation of social capital cannot, as a result, have a place in government policy.

## Conclusion

By acknowledging the political nature of 'social capital', the criticisms of it as a meaningless concept are countered. This is achieved through recognising that different interpretations of the concept have different objectives and focus. The objectives and methods of investigation result in identifying different types of 'social capital'. Further, a neoliberal (society centred) interpretation of social capital is only meaningless when used in the context of developing policy to intervene in community outcomes. This is supported by one key point: a society centred interpretation does not recognise a government, or any external actor's, role in developing community networks. Further, it does not recognise that outside actions can affect the health or breadth of relationship networks. This interpretation has the effect of creating a circular and imprisoning

theory of community capacity for struggling communities: if you don't have it to start with, nothing and no one can introduce it to you, or assist you to develop it.

The objective of employing 'social capital' positively from a government perspective in relation to community growth and prosperity requires recognition of the active partnership role that government must adopt in the process. The synergistic interpretation of social capital takes this as a fundamental premise. Further, as demonstrated by the empirical research, to achieve empowerment and increased long term capacity in communities, maximum opportunities must be created for interactive partnerships between community and government. It is this state of interaction that communities require to create and sustain their futures, working in synergy with broader government policy and global approaches. Regardless of the interpretation adopted, it has been demonstrated here that recognising the political perspectives of 'social capital' is paramount to understanding the value of social capital in the context of government policy use. To achieve an objective assessment of 'social capital', its measurement, and how it should be nurtured, it is imperative to define the political context in which the concept of 'social capital' is employed, prior to its indiscriminate use. Social capital is not a meaningless concept. We must, however, be clear about our objectives in utilising it, to ensure that the most appropriate *type* of 'social capital' is employed in seeking to understand community dynamics and the ability to prosper.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Where 'social capital' is used in inverted commas, it is to denote the continued contested nature of its interpretation.
- 2 Throughout this paper, the use of neoliberal or neoliberalism refers to those political perspectives and policies which promote free enterprise and trade deregulation, privatisation, fiscal rectitude and the minimisation of government intervention in economic development (Portes, 1997).
- 3 Deliberative democracy is used here in the manner proposed by Rawls (cited in Uhr, 1998), referring to a state whereby law and policy are formed through principles of agreement, on the basis of values that all citizens can be reasonably expected to endorse.
- 4 This paper employs the OECD definition of social capital, which is also employed by the ABS and a majority of other Australian government departments. This defines social capital as the 'Networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups' (OECD, 2001).
- 5 Bonding networks refer to those networks of relationship which connect homogenous groups of people.
- 6 Rothstein and Stolle (2002) coined the term 'society centred' social capital to refer to an interpretation of it which examines the civic domain alone, without reference to the effect of political or economic structures on relationship networks.
- 7 Bridging networks, labelled 'weak ties' by Granovetter (1972), refer to those social relationship networks between heterogeneous groups of individuals or organisations that allow the introduction of new ideas.
- 8 Linking social capital has been referred to as those relationships between people who interact across explicit power borders, formal and institutionalised. It adds the vertical power relationship component to the definition of bridging relationship networks (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004).

- 9 The term 'Synergy View' or synergistic social capital was proposed by Woolcock and Narayan (2000) to refer to those social networks between government and citizens, which promote actions based on complementarity and embeddedness. These are indicated by mutually supportive relations between public and private actors, which are embedded into community exchanges.
- 10 Indicators of prosperity and community growth included median age, income, population growth, education, and employment.
- 11 The questionnaires consisted of sixty five questions which were divided into six sections: 'Your community' – which focussed on society centred civic interactions; 'Inter community' – which assessed inter community civic networks; 'Your local government' – assessing society centred civic and local government interaction; 'Inter government' – which assessed perceptions of synergistic inter government relations between local and other levels of government, 'Paid Employment' and 'Yourself'.
- 12 Human capital may include education and knowledge about how to access networks.
- 13 Financial capital may include the money to participate in certain social circles, attend events, or purchase technology to access information and networks.

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## BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL IN GROUPS: FACILITATING SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Sue Kilpatrick

### Abstract ]

*Analysis of the experiences of four farmer groups set up to learn how to jointly manage local natural resource issues shows that the groups are going through two simultaneous processes. One builds technical competency in natural resource management and the other is the underpinning social process that allows the groups to make decisions and work collectively, which builds social capital. Natural resource management practitioners and farmers are practical people. They are likely to be more comfortable with a process that develops monitoring tools and benchmarks for natural resource management than a process of group development and social capital formation. Yet the two are intrinsically linked. This paper reflects on and analyses the experience of establishing and working with farmer groups as they go through a process of identifying environmental issues, setting and monitoring environmental benchmarks and identifying and implementing sustainable farming practices to meet the benchmarks.*

*Two questions emerged from the analysis. First, how do the four groups compare to other measures of effective natural resource management groups? Second, what are the characteristics of the groups that make them more or less effective and what has occurred in the groups (either before or during this project) to make them more or less effective? Social capital emerges as a key determinant of group effectiveness. Social capital is most effective when it comprises a balance of bonding and bridging networks, and includes shared values in relation to the purpose of the group.*

*Policy makers and extension workers need to understand the link between the two simultaneous processes occurring as people come together in groups to define and implement best practice at a local level, and how to use knowledge of social processes when designing the more concrete process of developing and implementing best practice monitoring and benchmarking with groups. An understanding of how people build social capital as they work in groups will assist with designing and facilitating group projects in a range of contexts, not only natural resource management.*

### Keywords ]

Social capital, natural resource management, farmer learning, farmer groups

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### Introduction

Social capital oils the process of working together to achieve a mutual objective (Kilpatrick, Bell & Falk, 1999), where social capital is networks and values or norms

that enable people to work together (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Natural resource management (NRM) is a complex area, with actions in one place affecting people in other places. Effective NRM requires a cooperative approach by land managers and others whose actions affect the quality of natural resources (Williams & Walcott, 1998). While non

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adoption of production related good practice affects only the non adopting farmer, failure to adopt beneficial environmental practices often affects other rural and urban land holders and threatens the livelihoods of future generations of Australians (Vanclay & Lawrence, 1995). Thus there is an obligation for the state to intervene to ensure that natural resources are managed in a sustainable manner. In recognition of this, in Australia, there is a continued trend of increasing numbers of extension (facilitator) positions in NRM areas at the expense of positions in production areas (Coutts, 2002). This paper considers effective practices in facilitating groups to develop social capital and so enhance natural resource management.

This paper first briefly reviews factors affecting the adoption of new practices and farmer groups as facilitators of change, then considers best practice processes for learning in groups to facilitate change, including in NRM. It goes on to describe learnings from a project that established and worked with farmer groups as they went through a process of identifying environmental issues, setting and monitoring environmental benchmarks and identifying and implementing sustainable farming practices to meet the benchmarks. The project was entitled 'Implementing Best Practice in Sustainable Agriculture', funded by the Natural Heritage Trust.

### **Adoption of new practices for managing natural resources**

Awareness of new practices is not sufficient to ensure their adoption. Reasons for reluctance to adopt sustainable farming practices include a wide variation in appropriateness of practices among farms (Gray, Phillips & Dunn, 1998). The characteristics of the new practice (Rogers 1995) and farmer beliefs, values and social systems affect the adoption of new practices (Barr & Cary, 2000). Practices required for sustainable NRM have technical and financial characteristics that are the opposite of those

associated with ease of adoption (Barr & Cary 2000). Farmers tend to underestimate the environmental problems they face individually, and as part of a catchment. Further, the processes generating the problems are often invisible and insidious so that farmers are not always aware of them (Vanclay & Lawrence, 1995). This suggests farmers are unlikely to be equipped to identify problems and locate and implement appropriate management systems without tapping in to external expertise and assistance.

Values and attitudes must change before behaviour changes: it has to seem 'right' to act in a new way (Kilpatrick et al., 1999). Farmers who are active in networks are more likely to make changes to practice. After examining studies in agricultural and non agricultural settings in developed and developing countries, Rogers (1995) concluded that early adopters have greater social participation. Korsching, Stofferahn, Nowak and Wagener (1983) found that Iowa farmers who are involved in farmer and community organisations were more likely to adopt conservation practices. Of particular relevance to this paper, Marsh, Burton and Pannell (2006) noted that key reasons for high level of participation in a water quality monitoring program in Western Australia included the high degree of community involvement with the project. Thus, farmers who participate in agricultural and community groups are more likely to adopt innovations because, not only do they become aware of a wider variety of new practices, they also have opportunity to test and change their values and attitudes.

### **Learning in groups**

Action research groups of farmers and 'experts' assists in identification and adoption of sustainable NRM practices (e.g. Paine, Burke, Werkert & Jolly, 2001). When farmers

are surveyed about the extension services that they have used they report that a lack of practicality of the advice is one of their main concerns (Vanclay & Lawrence, 1995), suggesting a need for real dialogue between farmers and extension workers. Participation in learning activities is linked to capacity to change (Kilpatrick, 1996; Lockie, Dale, Taylor & Lawrence, 2000; National Land and Water Resources Audit, 2000). Learning in groups fosters change in three broad ways (Kilpatrick, 1996) by:

- delivering new knowledge and skills,
- providing interaction with ‘experts’ (that is, facilitators, trainers or teachers), and
- providing opportunities for interaction with peers (that is, fellow training participants).

### Development of effective groups

Kilpatrick and Bell, (2001) studied some farmer groups widely regarded as highly effective in supporting fundamental changes to farm management practices. They identified a number of stages through which groups progress as they learn together. The groups build social capital as they learn together and develop as a group. Social capital is related to high levels of trust. The sequential stages of the process that must occur before group members can support each other as they make changes to practices (Kilpatrick & Bell, 2001) are:

1. acquisition of a high level of personal self confidence by individual members and a high level of interpersonal skills, including leadership skills;
2. getting to ‘know’ each other as individuals (history and future aspirations), developing shared values and trust;
3. coming to regard each other as credible sources of support and advice; and
4. commitment to fellow members, or being prepared to help each other out.

The social capital identified in Kilpatrick and Bell’s research comprised both bonding and bridging networks. Bonding networks occur among friends, neighbours and relations who have a close relationship, people with close ties to each other. Bridging networks are among acquaintances and those with loose ties to each other; they reach outside the group (Woolcock, 1998). Bridging ties can be with those who are socially differentiated, or with others who are similar, but external to the group.

### Evolution of effective and sustainable NRM groups

Pretty and Frank (2000) reviewed international research into agricultural groups established to manage resources sustainably. They suggest that groups evolve through four stages of maturity in the progressive accumulation of social, human and natural capital:

- Stage 0: individualistic, use technology derived solutions (*modernist system*).
- Stage 1: early group formation, either in response to a perceived crisis or prompted by an external agency. Outcomes tend to be adoption of practices similar to modern ones, but with less negative environmental impacts. Examples are low dose pesticides and zero tillage (*reactive eco efficient dependent system*).
- Stage 2: trust grows within the group, and rules, norms, and links with other groups develop. Group members see they have the capacity to develop their own solutions and experiment. New practices tend to conserve and improve soils and water (*realisation regenerative independent system*).
- Stage 3: group members have acquired new ‘world views’ and ways of thinking, groups maintain external networks, have a vision and are dynamic and productive. Groups are capable of influencing other groups. Agricultural systems are likely to be redesigned according to ecological principles

and there are substantial improvements in performance or outputs (*active redesign interdependent system*). This stage involves a ratchet shift for groups they are very unlikely to unravel or, if they do, individuals have acquired new worldviews and ways of thinking that will not revert.

Pretty and Ward (2001) list 15 variables that are indicators of where a group is situated in the stages of its evolution. The variables are grouped into world views and sense making, internal norms and trust, external links and networks, technologies and improvements, and group life span. The typology represented by these stages suggests important relationships between group maturity and social capital. Pretty and Ward ask: are groups endowed with social capital more likely to proceed to maturity, or, if social capital is a form of embeddedness that prevents change, will they stop at an earlier stage of the sustainable NRM group development typology? Schuller (2001) refers to the dark side of social capital, where bonding ties that are not balanced with bridging networks discourage looking outside the group for innovation and change. It is likely that groups endowed with social capital comprising a balance of bonding and bridging networks will be more likely to move to the later stages of sustainable group development.

Pretty and Ward (2001) go on to ask: does feedback occur between group maturity and social capital? If so, is it positive (e.g., success with a new sustainable practice spills over into success for others, or create new opportunities for cooperation), or negative (e.g., changes in worldview and technology could unsettle traditional practices, erode trust, and make existing networks redundant)? In other words, are some former group members left behind as others acquire new worldviews and new networks (changed social capital) in their progression through the typology stages of group evolution?

The issues raised by Pretty and Ward (2001) suggest that the quality of group facilitation and paying attention to the social processes of group development, discussed earlier, as well as development of technical competence in NRM, are crucial for a mature approach to NRM. Further, a learning culture that extends beyond the group should be developed by paying attention to external networks and reinforcing appropriate values and norms (Synapse Research and Consulting and CapitalAg Consulting, 2001).

Leadership and a coordinator or project officer with time to handle the business of groups or 'partnership work' (Billett, Clemans & Sesson, 2005) assists in translating learnings into new practices. The nature of group leadership has an impact on the development of groups that are effective in working together for a shared objective, such as managing natural resources. One role of leaders is negotiating shared values and developing trust (Greenleaf, 1996). Leadership roles can and should be shared in effective collaborative activity, with different members taking various leadership roles depending on their skills, time availability and the needs of the groups at any point (Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Falk & Prescott, 2002). Leaders should pay attention to building individuals' self confidence, group communication processes, group visions, and internal and external networks (Kilpatrick et al., 1999). A coordinator or facilitator, from inside or outside the group, with time to devote to the group and its tasks is key for achieving group objectives, for example Marsh, Burton and Pannell (2006) found the coordinating and motivating role played by the coordinator was key to the success of the Western Australian water monitoring project.

The process of group evolution of the four groups in the project reported in this paper, Implementing Best Practice in

Sustainable Agriculture, was analysed, drawing on evolution of NRM groups' framework and research on the development of effective groups, discussed above.

## Implementing Best Practice in Sustainable Agriculture project

The Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment project, funded by the Natural Heritage Trust Fund, worked with four groups of farmers in Northern Tasmania, named Groups A to D in this paper, over a period of between one and two years per group. Two project officers acted as facilitators, providing general agricultural knowledge input and identifying relevant specialists, experts and alternative management practices. The project funded the services of experts, when required. The project officers coordinated the activities of the group, initially intensively to assist group development, but with the aim of becoming less involved as the groups matured. The groups were to decide on an NRM issue or problem to monitor and benchmark; set and monitor environmental benchmarks; and identify and implement sustainable farming practices to meet the benchmarks. The process for developing and implementing best practice management in each group followed a similar direction but with different time scales for each step. The project officers guided the groups, drawing on a formal process for achieving continuous improvement and innovation that they developed, a similar process to that formalised in the resource book, *The Better Practice Process* (Clark & Timms, 2001).

The groups were observed during meetings and field trips, and interviews conducted with group members, the project officers and other stakeholders. Members were surveyed about attitudes and practices relevant to NRM at the start of the project, then again near the end.

The groups' characteristics, activities and the outcomes they achieved were mapped.

## Outcomes: natural, social and human capital

The mapping of outcomes suggests there is a continuum of group effectiveness, from Group A who have developed benchmarks and taken action, to Group D, which was arguably not performing as a group. In between, Group B have developed some benchmarks but not yet acted to achieve them, and Group C have commenced monitoring and considered possible benchmarks. It was apparent that the groups not only worked toward improving natural capital, they also developed human capital (that is, skills and knowledge) and social capital, with the possible exception of Group D.

Group A is the only group to have influenced others and developed external networks, and the only group to have made or considered systemic environmental impacts, which extended to influencing their contacting company's practices after the conclusion of this study.

How mature are the groups when mapped against Pretty and Wards's (2001) 15 variables from the NRM group evolution framework<sup>1</sup>? There was a clear parallel between effectiveness in terms of outcomes and maturity. Group A displays many characteristics of stage 3, the most mature stage, especially in relation to world views and sense making, internal norms and trust and group lifespan, but still some characteristics of stage 2, e.g. in relation to technologies and improvements. Group B made considerable progress in 18 months and has many characteristics of stage 2, but still some of stage<sup>1</sup>, especially in relation to external links and networks. Group C has just started toward maturity, displaying many characteristics of stage 1, and some of stage 2, for example, a realisation of new capacities. Group D was the most recently established. It has a few stage

1 characteristics, but mostly displays characteristics of stage 0, individualistic.

Group size and how well members knew each other before the project may go some way to explaining these differences in group maturity and group outcomes. Group A was the smallest, with 6 members while Group C had 15 and Group D over 20 members. Members of Group A had worked together as a group on other non NRM projects and been involved in community groups together. They socialised together and shared a range of values, not restricted to those related to sustainable agriculture. Further, they already had a shared vision for NRM and sustainable agriculture in their district. Group B knew each other socially before the start of this project, but had not worked together before. This group spent some time coming to realise that the members had shared values about sustainable agriculture. Members of Group C knew each other before the project, but did not interact socially or in industry activities to the same extent as Group B. Not all Group D members had met before the project. Group A could be said to have the strongest bonding networks, one of the components of social capital. The project officers were conduits to expert advice; they provided bridging networks for all four groups.

The realisation that members had shared values about sustainable agriculture, already present in Group A and developed by Group B over the course of the project, appeared to be crucial for moving the group from a number of individuals perhaps interested in NRM to a group that was prepared to act together on an issue that extended beyond the boundaries of a single property. Group A developed monitoring for their NRM issue of nutrient run off, and went on to develop and implement improved practices. While Group C's issue of salinity similarly crossed

property boundaries, the members spent a lot of time attempting to find out each others' attitudes to the problem, and whether or not others would be prepared to act; they only started to find out that they shared values on the issue, and were a long way from developing a vision for managing resources in their district. Shared values and vision, relevant to the purpose of the cooperative action, are a part of social capital, along with networks.

To summarise the social capital of the groups, Group A started from a base of strong bonding networks and shared values and vision. It is possible that Group A's strong bonding networks could exclude new members from joining the group, for example if a farm changed hands. Group B were linked to each other by social networks, but could be regarded as having weaker bonding ties than Group A. Group B also developed shared values. Group C had few bonding ties and only started to develop shared values. Group D had neither bonding ties nor shared values. The project officers brought bridging networks, but analysis of the project processes showed that the building and strengthening of social capital in Groups A and B in particular was also facilitated by the timing and nature of the technical skill development activities selected by the project officers, in consultation with the groups.

### **Simultaneous technical and social capital building processes**

The project officers and the groups are going through two simultaneous processes. One builds technical competency in NRM. The other is the underpinning social process which builds the social capital that allows the groups to make decisions and work collectively. While not all groups will have bonding ties at the start of an

NRM project such as this, the experiences of this project suggest that it is possible to seed the development of bonding ties, at least to an extent sufficient to start an NRM group on the path to effectiveness. A preliminary stage should be added to Kilpatrick and Bell's (2001) sequential stages of group development, *foundation for building group relationships*, which is a set of actions that can establish a good foundation on which to build the technical and social processes. Table 1 illustrates the simultaneous processes and notes how the social processes contribute to the various components of social capital.

The stages of the simultaneous technical and social processes do not completely overlap, as can be seen in Table 1. The table

necessarily simplifies the timing of the processes. Although both are largely sequential there are many times when 'earlier' stages are revisited. For example, getting to know each other and developing shared values and trust continues right through the process, and is still happening at the action and continuous review stages. The development of shared values was crucial to an agreement on action for the benefit of the group, and is an indication of the ongoing development of social capital. The shared values developed by Groups A and B evolved as members came to understand each others' values through discussion on concrete NRM issues such as current practices and monitoring, and as they listened to alternative values implicitly

Table 1: Simultaneous technical and social capital building processes

Project stage	Social capital building process
Initiation/ group formation	Foundation for building group relationships ( <i>bonding</i> ties)
Selection of focus issue	Building self confidence and interpersonal skills (prerequisite for developing <i>bonding</i> networks and being able to use <i>bridging</i> networks effectively)
Identify impacts of current practice	Getting to know each other and developing <i>shared values</i> and trust
Selection of monitoring tools	
Monitoring	
Development of benchmarks and agreed best practice	Seeing each other as credible sources of support and advice (self directed group: <i>bonding</i> ties)
Action to achieve best practice	
Evaluation and review	Commitment to group (strong and effective social capital: motivated to use <i>all components of social capital</i> for benefit of the group)



embedded in the talk of outside experts and the project facilitators.

Examples of activities matched to social capital building stages are:

- Individual visits early on in the project help the project officer get to know members' values, experiences and history; this helps in design of activities to develop self confidence and getting to know each other.
- When identifying the impacts of current practices, a good technique is to list practices on a seasonal chronological basis as a group, and decide where the risk is for the NRM issue. This helps bring theory into a practical context, encourages group members to learn from each other and be confident that their input is worthwhile and valued by group.

### Leadership roles in the groups

The groups' activities were determined by project officers, except in the most mature group where decisions were made jointly with group members. Leadership transfers from project officer to group members as the group matures. In the early stages the project officer acts as group leader; this was still so for Group C at end of project. Two years beyond the end of the project Group A is self directed, coming together and making decisions on a range of issues not directed by the project officer. However, there is still a role for a project officer under direction of group; a role of coordination, liaison with external agencies and technical expertise. Group A saw this as so valuable that they accessed other funding and employed a project officer themselves. In terms of social capital, they used bridging networks to facilitate action for mutual benefit.

The analysis of the four groups shows that actions of the project officer in enabling and empowering group members to be leaders are

crucial to achieving group maturity and so reaching Pretty and Ward's (2001) stage 3 (Active Redesign Interdependent). Effective groups share the leadership tasks. Group A had three 'leaders', each with a specific, well understood, role: one person was an 'initiator', another a 'driver', and a third kept everyone on task.

### Conclusion

The most significant lesson is NRM groups are going through two simultaneous processes. One builds technical competency in NRM, and the other is the underpinning process that builds the social capital which allows the groups to make decisions and work collectively. Group activities which are designed to take both processes into account are likely to result in better NRM outcomes. By matching technical and social processes, project officers can facilitate the building of group social capital that includes a balance of bonding and bridging networks, and shared values, all appropriate for the purpose at hand (managing natural resources collaboratively).

To answer Pretty and Ward's question, feedback can occur between group maturity and social capital. The design of the group activities can and should enhance the process. Having members take on responsibilities within the group is important to group development and effectiveness. The findings imply that a project officer needs generalist agriculture and NRM knowledge plus good group facilitation skills.

Given that the development of human and social capital is a pre requisite for improving natural capital, the group processes that have developed human and social capital are key to our understanding of how government agencies, communities and industry can act to facilitate the implementation of sustainable NRM practices. This understanding should be applicable to designing and facilitating group projects in a range of other technical contexts.

## Endnotes

1 Mapping table available from the author

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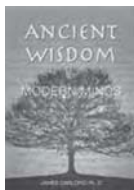
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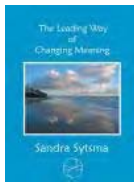
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## SITES OF INTEGRATION IN A CONTESTED LANDSCAPE

Lucia Boxelaar, Mark Paine and Ruth Beilin

### Abstract ]

*In recent decades we have witnessed a diversification of rural communities, where the agricultural sector has had to increasingly compete with other interests and demands on rural land. Land management agencies have recognised that in order to resolve sustainability dilemmas, it is important to bring the diverse stakeholders together to negotiate the sustainable use of land and natural resources. Such collaborative approaches can only be effective if there is some sense of integration between various stakeholders. This paper explores how integration among diverse stakeholders can be facilitated in a way that accommodates and embraces diversity. It does this through an investigation of a project implemented by the Victorian state government that aimed to involve a diversity of stakeholders in the land management process.*

### Keywords ]

Community, integration, stakeholders, diversity, land management, social capital

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## Introduction

Rural communities have undergone unprecedented change in recent decades. As Lane, McDonald and Morrison (2004, p. 110) argue:

*'Rurality' in Australia is now a space inhabited by diverse communities pursuing diverse practices; the rural landscape is a mosaic not a monoculture.*

Various rural geographers have described the changes in agriculture and rural communities in terms of a shift from productivism to post productivism (Halfacree, 1997; Ilbery & Bowler, 1998; Murdoch, Lowe, Ward & Marsden, 2003). The term post productivism is used to describe the way in which agriculture in rural society has lost its

hegemonic position; it reflects the diversification of the agricultural policy community. Activities associated with productivism that aim for productivity and optimization within rural industries now compete with other imperatives, which has led to differentiation of rural communities:

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... the hierarchy of activities that has long dominated rural space has been challenged by alternative demands on rural land and other resources. What counts as legitimate use of land-based resources can no longer be automatically assumed by reference to past practice and consequently activities in a range of sectors have been politicized (Murdoch et al., 2003, p. 8).

As a result of the politicisation of these activities, land management agencies recognise that in order to resolve sustainability dilemmas, it is important to bring the diverse stakeholders together to negotiate the sustainable use of natural resources (Röling, 2002). This policy orientation towards collaborative approaches has recently been discussed with reference to the literature on social capital. Social capital is defined in many different ways, but the most common aspects associated with it include the networks, norms and trust that exist within a community as a resource for development (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Field, 2003; Putnam, 1995; Putnam, 2000; Whittaker & Banwell, 2002; Woolcock, 1998). It is argued that by enhancing the networks and trust within a community, people are better able to mobilise existing skills and work collaboratively to resolve social, economic and environmental issues (Whittaker & Banwell, 2002, p. 22). Overall, the term social capital has become prominent as an organising principle in the Australian policy context (eg Hess & Adams, 2002; Productivity Commission, 2003; Stone, 2001; Stone & Hughes, 2002). Hess and Adams (2002) have argued that the advent of the discourse of social capital has taken policy development down a path that allows a diversity of participants to contribute to the policy development process.

In this paper we aim to contribute to an understanding of how to build the relationships or arrangements (social capital) that allow diverse

stakeholders to co operate across social, political and economic domains in order to address land management issues. Our discussion draws on a case study of a project implemented by the Victorian state government Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) and later the Department of Primary Industries (DPI). The Developing Social Capability (DSC) project was designed to involve a diversity of stakeholders in the land management process.

## Platforms for change

Researchers from a variety of disciplines have contributed to our understanding of participatory rural development processes. The literature emphasises social learning, networking, interplay between stakeholders, alignment of norms and values, and integration between actors and practices as important factors in effectively facilitating change (Bawden, Packham, Macadam & McKenzie, 2000; Bawden, 1990; Cerf et al. 2000; Engel & Salomon, 1997; Leeuwis & Pyburn, 2002; Paine, 1997; Röling & Wagemakers, 1998). However, at times it is assumed that participation *per se* leads to positive and inclusive change outcome. Yet Lane et al. (2004, p.106) point out that participative approaches can be dominated by powerful local elites, or can become hostage to local conservatism that allows for only incremental changes to the status quo, and at times can even increase intolerance toward minority groups. While participation undoubtedly has the potential to facilitate positive change, there is nothing inherently positive about it. In fact, engaging participants in a project is hard work, resource intensive and very time consuming. Serving the interests of all those involved is a challenge for any participatory project.

Liepins (2000) is concerned that while the term 'community' is central to the collaborative approaches that have emerged to deal with land

management issues, only limited attention is paid to the complexity of the term. While arguably the rural community may once have been relatively stable and coherent, post-productivism subverts continued claims of coherence and integration. Murdoch et al. (2003, p. 70) sum up the argument very well:

*... any integration of communities into economic and political structures must be predicated on the realisation that rural communities are no longer only 'rural'; they are made up of many differing forms of social life ... Moreover, fluid social relations are replacing the stable structures that had seemed coterminous with life in rural areas.*

The implications of this for the current emphasis on co-operative approaches and social capital are yet to be fully worked out. Liepins (2000, p. 28) argues that:

*... a debate is needed between the conservative image of 'community' in rural settings, which has so often been associated with dominant power relations and hegemonic discourses about rurality and acceptability, and a more challenging image of 'community' as a social and cultural space which might nurture alternative political possibilities.*

The question is how to build the relationships or arrangements that can facilitate convergence of such diverse stakeholders across levels of social, political and economic integration? Various authors have pointed out the mismatch between the scale of environmental issues on the one hand and administrative and economic institutions on the other (Campbell, 1998; Murdoch & Pratt, 1997; Röling & Jiggins, 1998). Many of our agricultural and natural resource management agencies continue to serve primarily productivist goals (Röling & Jiggins, 1998). Various authors have argued that the institutions that we have inherited promote linear

and one dimensional, rational ways of thinking that do not create a space for the multiple rationalities that feature within the current complex context of change (Boxelaar, Paine & Beilin, 2006; Woodhill & Röling, 1998). These authors question the ability of the prevailing configuration of networks and management structures to deal with the challenges of sustainable development. The increasing interdependence of a diversity of stakeholders requires a major restructuring of networks and a re negotiation of alliances (Groot, van Dijk, Jiggins & Maarleveld, 2002; Proost & Röling, 2000, p. 344).

Given the above, we posit that social capital in the post-productivist setting is about creating platforms for collective action that are able to bring together a range of stakeholders (cf. Röling, 2002). The term 'platform' is used here to refer to the coherence and integration that is necessary in implementing collaborative approaches, while acknowledging the inherent contingent and contested nature of such coherence. A platform is the site at which social capital is temporarily 'materialised' through discourse, structure and practice (cf. Liepins, 2000) in order to deal with a particular issue; it provides an interface between different stakeholders where their different practices, cultures and languages interact (Groot, van Dijk, Jiggins & Maarleveld, 2002). It provides a structure or social configuration that deals explicitly with the implications of post-productivism. Unlike many accounts of social capital, this conceptualisation of platforms reflects the fluidity and contingency of the post-modern world and the way in which:

*[t]he interaction between differing groups in rural communities undermines any notion that the community [or platform] has a structural coherence over and above the various relationships that run through and around it. (Murdoch et al., 2003, p. 56)*



The notion of platform provides a conceptual basis to operationalise the idea of social capital, recognising the contingencies and ambiguities of the post modern world. However, despite the emphasis on difference and diversity, platforms for change can nevertheless only be effective if there is some sense of integration and recognition of mutual dependency between parties. Without this collaboration it is simply impossible (Aarts & van Woerkum, 2002). Yet, while arguably bonding social capital, which binds a homogenous group of people (Field, 2003, p. 32), may have provided the basis for integration within the productivist post war era, such forms of social capital no longer provide an inclusive foundation for collaboration. The remainder of this paper explores the way in which integration amongst the diversity of stakeholders in a post productivist platform for change can be facilitated in a way that accommodates and embraces difference and diversity. Below we discuss our research design and outline the case study for this research the Developing Social Capability project.

### **Our research approach: a case study of the Developing Social Capability project**

The Developing Social Capability (DSC) project was implemented by the Victorian government department of (NRE) and later the (DPI). It was selected as the case study for our research because it intended to employ an innovative approach to change management aiming to involve a diversity of stakeholders in dealing with land and natural resource management issues to an extent not seen before within NRE at the time. In the words of DSC team members, the purpose of the DSC project was to:

*... be a catalyst for a whole-of-community approach to innovation and learning within the agricultural sector (team meeting notes, 2001).*

And to:

*... help the 'NRE community' to learn that meaningful natural resource management is possible if we include the wider community as part of the team (team meeting notes, 2001).*

The DSC project team implemented three pilot projects, and within these pilots, the DSC project team acted as internal consultants to existing agricultural extension programs and projects to improve the way in which these engaged stakeholders and the broader community in specific issues. The three pilots included:

#### **1. The Topcrop pilot**

The first pilot project involved the department's Topcrop program that works with the grains industry to increase farm sustainability. Staff of the Topcrop program believed that a joint pilot project with the DSC team could assist in addressing the issue of stubble management. Stubble burning is considered by some as an effective way of dealing with stubble, yet it raises environmental concerns about the loss of remnant vegetation, air pollution and soil erosion. Stubble management practices by grains farmers concern a broad range of stakeholders, including farmers, the broader community affected by pollution from burning stubble, agronomists, flora and fauna staff of DPI, the Environment Protection Authority, the Country Fire Authority and Catchment Management Authorities. Not surprisingly there are divergent views amongst stakeholders on what constitutes acceptable stubble management practice and as a result Topcrop facilitators find it difficult to provide consistent advice on stubble management to their farmer groups (Department of Primary Industries, 2004). The stubble management issue is one that has plagued the grains industry for quite some time and attempts to address this issue



have been numerous. The joint pilot with the DSC project offered an opportunity to implement a participatory approach to identify how the broad range of stakeholders around stubble management could ‘... work together to reduce the environmental impact associated with managing stubble, while improving the effectiveness for production.’ (Department of Primary Industries, 2004). A project team comprising both DSC team members and two Topcrop staff members was responsible for implementing the joint project.

## 2. *The EBMP pilot*

A second pilot that was established involved the Department’s Environmental Best Management Practices (EBMP) project. This project aimed to improve environmental management practices on farms. The EBMP project was based on a benchmarking process that encouraged farmers to assess their environmental management practices against those of other farmers. Participating farmers were supported in the development of action plans to improve environmental practices. The purpose of this pilot project was to broaden the scope of the EBMP project and explore ways to engage the broader community in collective action within a catchment.

## 3 *The FarmBis pilot*

The third pilot negotiated by the DSC project team involved a partnership with the fisheries group of the FarmBis program to enhance participation of Indigenous people in aquaculture education activities. The FarmBis program is an initiative funded jointly by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and provides financial assistance to primary producers to participate in business and natural resource management training programs. One of the goals of the FarmBis program is to increase participation of

Indigenous people in training and education activities (Department of Primary Industries, 2004). The FarmBis fishing industry coordinator saw a joint project with the DSC team as an opportunity to facilitate engagement of Koori people in discussions about their learning needs in aquaculture.

Our research into the DSC project and its pilots was designed according to the principles of action research in order to bridge the gap between our research practice and the work of the DSC project team (cf. Foote Whyte, 1991; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Accordingly, we participated actively (to varying degrees) in the DSC project team throughout the implementation of the project. One of us (the first author of this paper) attended most meetings and a large number of events organised by the DSC project. As action researchers we contributed to the development of the project on the basis of research findings. It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe and analyse this action research process in depth (for a description of the action research approach, see Boxelaar Paine & Beilin, 2007). However, what is important here is that as part of our participation in the project we collected extensive data. This included formal project documentation such as funding submissions, the project brief, tender documentation, interim and final reports of the DSC project and its pilots, position descriptions, as well as extensive notes of 28 meetings organised by the project team. The data further included transcripts of two rounds of in depth semi structured interviews with all DSC team members (16) and pilot project team members (11). To add to this, we also analysed data collected by the project team itself, including notes of workshops (14), transcripts of focus group discussions with project stakeholders (10), and transcripts of notes of interviews (28) conducted by the pilot projects.

In the following sections we discuss the design and implementation of aspects of the DSC project to explore processes of convergence between stakeholders in the project.

### Sites of integration

Analysis of the DSC project revealed that different components of the project were designed (unintentionally) around what we have referred to as different sites of integration. By site of integration, we mean that aspect, point, place or unit that facilitates a sense of 'wholeness' or cohesion within a platform. A site of integration is the aspect of a collaborative project around which people come together. In our experience, practitioners involved in the design and implementation of collaborative approaches generally pay little attention to the way in which integration amongst stakeholders is facilitated. Projects are variously organised around an issue, a community, or an object (for example, a water resource), often without any explanation or exploration of why the project is constructed in this way. In the case of the DSC project, its overall strategy was designed around a community of interest as the site of integration, the EMBP and FarmBis pilots around an issue, while the Topcrop pilot was designed around an object (stubble). Below we discuss the overall strategy and the Topcrop pilot in more detail to explore how different sites of integration affect the way stakeholders are included in the participatory process.

### Community as a site of integration

In designing community based approaches, government agencies often focus on community building *per se*. This also characterised the initial approach taken by the DSC project. The strategy for the project was

developed on the basis of an extensive literature review, which was conducted by Cocklin, et al. (2001). The strategy outlined in their report comprises the following steps that are to be implemented in a case study that is based on a particular locality:

- the development of a systematic profile of the community of interest. This is to include socio demographic profiles, environmental considerations, institutional features, as well as an analysis of existing social capability
- the identification and engagement of stakeholders in an inclusive and participatory fashion
- the identification of priorities for the locality, which is to include setting goals for social, ecological and economic sustainability and the development of initiatives to achieve these goals
- the development and implementation of interventions to support social capability
- assessment of social capability outcomes in terms of an indicator framework.

The project brief that was subsequently developed by the DSC project team on the basis of the report by Cocklin et al. similarly conceived of the change process as starting with the identification of a system or community of interest, that is 'people with an interest in natural resource management as it relates to agriculture'. One of the first activities by the project team was to conduct a brainstorming exercise of the stakeholders in the food and agricultural sectors, who have an interest in natural resource management. These stakeholders were subsequently interviewed to ascertain their perspectives on the issues and opportunities for change in the agriculture and natural resource management sectors.

The assumption that underpins the approach undertaken in this initial phase of the project is that a community is a reality that exists as a building block for capacity building

that merely needs to be identified and invited to participate. The development of a systematic profile of targeted communities prior to the engagement process is about mapping out a community in a rational and scientific way (cf. Love, Boxelaar, O'Donnell & Francis, 2007). The development of an indicator framework that allows for assessment of outcomes similarly reflects the rational basis for decision making in relation to community development. It implicitly assumes that the context of change is fully knowable, can be mapped out and managed, reflecting a positivist epistemology that translates into a linear change management program that attempts to more fully understand the community in order to plan appropriate strategies to build social capability.

The rationality of government that underpins such community appraisals and assessments of social capital is likely to construct community in a way that privileges particular aspects, assets and capacities of communities over others (Herbert Cheshire, 2000; Higgins & Lockie, 2002). There is a risk that community is constructed in a way that privileges the perspective of agency staff and social scientists. Such appraisals and assessments shape the way in which people in the community view themselves. They are not merely descriptive of an existing reality, but actively construct it (Higgins & Lockie, 2002).

Critics suggest that such a community appraisal, based on scientific and rational knowledge becomes a 'technology of government' that 'yokes' (Dean, 1996, p. 61) the behaviour of people in such communities to conform with the environmentally rational and socially responsible behaviour that is implicitly advocated and validated in the particular representation constructed about a rural community (Dean, 1996; Higgins & Lockie, 2002). It is argued that such a mapping out of a rural community actually constructs

community in a way that renders it amenable to government intervention in order to serve the ambitions of prevailing 'advanced liberal governments' (Herbert Cheshire, 2000; Rose, 1996). This becomes a process where a platform for collaboration is constructed in such a way that the community is assimilated into processes of government. Such 'government through community' (Rose, 1996) builds social capital by deconstructing the dichotomy between government and community through a process of assimilation where communities are 'governmentalised' (Rose, 1996, p. 353), as they are made visible and calculable by reports, investigations and statistical enquiries conducted from a government vantage point. Social capital that is constructed in this way assimilates diversity and this erases difference.

Furthermore, collaborative approaches built around the notion of a community as a pre-existing and objective entity tend to emphasise shared values, norms and unity as necessary requirements for collaboration. This concept of community is imbued with relatively unproblematic and essentialist notions of convergence and integration. Yet, as Somers and Gibson (1994, p.79) argue:

*... there is no reason to assume a priori that people with similar attributes will share common experiences of social life, let alone be moved to common forms and meanings of social action.*

Moreover, when such convergence does occur, it must be questioned. A critique of the concept of community that conceives of it as a naturally existing and objective entity is well developed within the discipline of anthropology (Somers & Gibson, 1994; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). It is argued that:

*Studies of ethnographic writing have revealed the apparent boundedness and coherence of 'a culture' as something made rather than found,*

*the 'wholeness' of the holistically understood object appears more as a narrative device than as an objectively present empirical truth* (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 2).

These authors also highlight that the point of this argument is not merely to deny the possibility of cultures or communities as existing as essentialist and fixed entities within a locality, but rather to emphasise that all forms of convergence and bonding are social and historical creations that need to be questioned and explained, not given the status of natural fact. As Gupta and Ferguson do of academic texts, one could criticize the strategy outlined above for taking the community or system as a given '... without asking how perceptions of locality and community are discursively and historically constructed' (1997, p. 6).

The implication of this is that there is no such thing as a community that represents an 'objective' reality that exists prior to the relationships that shape it; therefore it cannot provide the basis for a platform for collaboration in the post-productivist context. Community is contested and contingent. The emphasis on what is shared between people obscures the processes of exclusion and assimilation that achieve the social continuity that underpins any community.

## **Object as a site of integration**

While the strategy of the DSC project was designed around community as a site of integration, the pilot projects were implemented quite differently. As mentioned above, for the EBMP and FarmBis pilots, integration was facilitated around a problematic situation or issue ('how to involve more people in catchment management' for the EBMP pilot and 'how to involve Indigenous people in developing education activities for aquaculture'

for the FarmBis pilot). In this section we discuss the TopCrop pilot, which was designed around an object - stubble.

As a first step in implementing the the Topcrop pilot, the project team conducted a brainstorming exercise to identify a broad range of people with a stake in stubble management. This list was expanded during interviews with these stakeholders. The final list included people well beyond the conventional scientist - adviser - farmer relationship that characterises much of the previous work done to address the issue of stubble management. It included farmers, service providers, agronomists, representatives from the Country Fire Authority, the Environment Protection Authority and Catchment Management Authorities, but also end users of straw, and conservationists from within and outside government.

Through a total of 52 in depth interviews with stakeholders, the pilot project team explored how people perceived issues around stubble and stubble management, how people dealt with stubble, what opportunities people saw to improve stubble management practices and how they might work together to deal with stubble more effectively. Findings were disseminated in a discussion paper that was distributed to the stakeholders, and this document provided the basis for a workshop that aimed to develop action plans. At this workshop participants committed to a total of sixteen actions that included the coordination and development of a clear policy on stubble burning across the Environment Protection Authority, the Country Fire Authority, the Department of Primary Industries and the Department of Sustainability and Environment. While there was no support in the organisation for continued collaboration in a stubble management working group, the Topcrop pilot was able to construct a platform

for change, however shortlived, that included not just the farming and scientific community, but the broader community of stakeholders in agricultural issues. As one staff member argued, the DSC pilot project allowed it to move away from advocacy on behalf of farmers towards an inclusive approach that takes account of the broader range of perspectives that prevail in the community.

In her thesis on co operation for sustainability Jacobs (2001) explores what gives rise to continuity and coherence between practices. She argues that what is common does not inhere in people and knowledge. Knowledge is specific to a practice and a person may participate in several practices, but does so with differing capacities. What is common, according to Jacobs, is material, a thing or an object, which she refers to as a material substrate. She argues that people involved in different practices interpret this substrate differently and in the natural resource management context this results in sustainability dilemmas. These dilemmas then are located within the object and can be resolved through co operation of the diverse practices that are associated with the material substrate.

In Jacobs' work the material substrate forms the site of integration around which co operation for sustainability is facilitated. Jacobs (2001) illustrates her argument with an example of the way in which an American power company built a dam in the Columbia River to generate clean power. This dam prevented salmon from returning to the place where they spawned. Fishermen who caught salmon only after these had spawned and therefore contributed to sustainability, protested against this dam. The situation was resolved when people realised that the maintenance gate of the dam could be opened in order to allow the salmon to pass through. Initially the dam was

understood as something that closed off the river; however, as a result of co operation between practices it was interpreted to mean something different something that is able to let the salmon through. The material substrate provides the go between for the interface between practices.

Aspects of the DSC Topcrop pilot can be described with reference to this concept of material substrate. One could argue that 'stubble' provided the material substrate around which the various practices co operated. These included extension practice, fire management, environmental protection and production of building materials. All these practices involved different sets of values, different kinds of knowledge and capacities. What they shared was their association with stubble. Through their involvement with the Topcrop pilot, some participants reported they had changed their understanding of stubble from considering it as a waste product at the end of the production cycle, to conceiving of it as a resource for the production of building materials, or a source of nutrients for future production cycles.

As discussed above many collaborative approaches facilitate convergence by building relationships between people, emphasising what they share between them, such as values, knowledge and capacities. Relationships for collaboration are built through identification with one another. However, while it is important to build relationships, it is also important to realise that such an emphasis on similarity can lead to exclusion, marginalisation and assimilation of differences. An object, on the other hand, facilitates identification with the object, not with people in the network directly. Relationships between people then are mediated through the object, allowing for differences to be maintained as there is no forced synthesis or assimilation through a process of identification between people. This

facilitates the development of bridging capital in a way that truly 'bridges' differences, instead of assimilating them. In fact, the emphasis on the object as the site of integration is premised on the differences between people and practices. An object then provides a site of integration that does not require integration of value systems or unity in the way it is often assumed to do in rural development approaches; it is a site of integration that mediates differences between people. Despite some of the shortcomings of the Topcrop pilot, it nevertheless succeeded in engaging a broad range of practitioners in the change process in a way that allowed for expression of their differences.

### **Operationalising the object-oriented approach**

The above highlights the importance of thinking about the site of integration around which collaborative approaches are established and how this affects participation by diverse stakeholders. Findings from this research suggest an object oriented approach may be suitable in creating a space for a diversity of stakeholders to participate. The question is how we can operationalise such an object oriented approach. To answer that question we turn in this final section to the literature on approaches that have been object focused.

One example of an object oriented approach is Engeström's model of expansive learning, which has been successful in developing collaborative solutions in complex situations where antagonism was present. Engeström's approach involves a cycle of expansive learning that aims to focus participants on the contradictions about an 'object' that exists within what he refers to as a human activity system. A collaborative analysis of such contradictions creates a shared vision that involves an expansive

solution of the contradictions. For instance, in one example provided by Engeström a hospital setting the object toward which the system was initially oriented was the patient who was conceived of as someone with a singular illness episode or care visit. Through questioning and analysis this changed to an orientation towards patients as having long term trajectories and multiple illnesses and care visits. This then led to an expansion of the way in which the system was oriented to the object, which changed the activity for all parties in the human activity system (Engeström, 2000).

In the natural resource management context an example of an object oriented approach is one that is designed around an aspect of the landscape for example, a water resource. Paine & Beilin (2002) propose that landscape is a 'uniting element in resource management', as landscape allows for a bridging of the social and technical or biophysical aspects of sustainable agriculture.

However, within the land management context 'landscape' is generally conceived and operationalised in two different ways. In recent years there has been a surge of interest in geographic information systems, which has provided sophisticated high technology tools to map the landscape in terms of biodiversity, catchment and watershed areas and many other features including social aspects. Planning and policy development is increasingly underpinned by information provided through such tools. This conceives of landscape as an entity that exists outside and prior to the social relationships that construct it. As Beilin (2005) argues, '[l]andscape is commonly understood as a backdrop, as in a theatre. In this context, the viewer stands outside the frame looking at the scene'. This approach reflects a positivist epistemology that translates into a linear



change management program that is based on an ostensibly fully understood and mapped out landscape that provides the basis for future planning. Such a positivist concept of landscape as a 'container' of biophysical and social elements refers to landscape as a natural, bounded, essentialist and fixed entity, in a way that is problematic for the same reasons as those identified for 'community' above.

This positivist notion of landscape has been challenged. Halfacree (2006) argues that rural space:

*... does not somehow 'just exist', waiting passively to be discovered and mapped, but is something created in a whole series of forms and at a whole series of scales by social individuals.*

In other words, '... we do not live, act and work 'in' space so much as by living, acting and working we produce space' (Smith (1984) cited in Halfacree, 2006). Murdoch and Pratt (1997, p. 56) critique the positivist approach to landscape that characterises government's orientation to it, by arguing that:

*... while the rural is clearly 'performed' by mapping exercises these should be seen as only particular, partial and incomplete versions of what rural might be(come) ... There is no essential rural condition, no point of reference against which rurality can be measured.*

In contrast to the positivist notion of landscape, Paine and Beilin (2002) define landscape in a constructivist fashion that is reminiscent of Engeström's notion of 'object' that is central to his model of expansive learning. In fact, it could be argued that in Paine and Beilin's (2002) account, landscape provides an 'object' for collective discursive construction that facilitates learning and practice change. This is evident in the way in which they discuss one of their case studies, which focuses on two Landcare groups in

Gippsland that operated on opposing sides of a creek. This creek represented a dividing line that separated one set of hillsides and township from another. The creek zone was infested with weeds and as a result of the lack of fencing, stock watered in the creek, which affected the soil profile and marine life. A Landcare and Greening Australia initiative saw the two groups come together to clean up both sides of the creek, to fence it out and to improve the landscape. Prior to this collaboration, people managed the sides of the creek independently, which severely limited the scope for long term rehabilitation of stream life. By working together the groups changed the creek landscape in a way that also connected the two communities. Paine and Beilin (2002, p. 266) describe this process as one where 'people came together to imagine a different way of managing the creek'. Furthermore, 'the opportunity to imagine the creek not as a demarcation between two cultures (and two communities) but as a connector in a linked landscape facilitated an everyday change in practice'. The creek (or landscape) in this example can be understood as an 'object' that is reconstructed through collaboration between people.

A platform designed around landscape as object then may create a collaborative space for the disconnected and fragmented diversity of stakeholders, without necessarily assuming they share something. Hence, the platform for collaboration is not built through a process of exclusion, but on an embrace of diversity, contributing to the development of positive bridging social capital.

Overall, what the above has highlighted is that an object oriented approach will only be effective in embracing diversity if the object is approached reflexively, that is, in a way that makes explicit the contingent and contested nature of the object, rather than as an *a priori*,



objective and bounded entity. In contrast to Jacobs, whose material substrate was an object in the sense of a material or artefact, we propose that the object that provides a site of integration in a post-productivist platform for change is defined in constructivist terms as that to which our activity is directed, rather than an object in the sense of material or artefact.

## Conclusion

In order to allow genuine participation of diverse stakeholders in the land management process, it is important that we recognise how our own representations of the world are contested by others. We need to embrace difference and diversity and to achieve this we need to explicitly focus on the ambiguities of a given situation. If differences and ambiguities are not explored or 'put to use' (Salomon & Engel, 1997), marginalisation, exclusion and assimilation of diverse stakeholders inevitably occur, which compromises the mutuality of stakeholders and can lead to further intractability of issues at stake, or simply to a lack of effective action by an important group of stakeholders.

Consequently, to address the challenges and contradictions inherent in sustainable development we must not design change processes that seek to transcend diversity and difference, whereby these are considered as threats, errors or anomalies. Rather, the pathway for change should emerge from a focus on ambiguity and difference.

In this paper we have highlighted the problematic notion of community as an objective, bounded entity that provides the basis or social capital for a platform for collaboration, as this obscures the processes of marginalisation, exclusion and assimilation through which it is constructed. We have further argued that it is important that in the design of collaborative approaches, careful

consideration is given to the site of integration around which these approaches are designed and how this affects inclusion and participation by diverse stakeholders. In order to build positive, bridging social capital in the fluid and fragmented post modern world it is important that platforms for collaboration are not premised on unproblematic notions of social continuity and coherence, but on an emphasis on diversity and difference. Further research into ways in which the object oriented approach could achieve this in the land management context is required.

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## SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE RURAL CHURCH

Rol Mitchell

### Abstract ]

*This paper investigates the relationship between social capital and the church, in the rural Australian context. It is based on some of the findings from a twenty month long community study carried out by the author in 2001 2 in a country town in rural NSW.*

*Social capital has been referred to as 'a slippery but nonetheless important concept'. Many have found that this is indeed the case when attempting to clearly define, to measure, or to identify the correlates of this concept. A difficulty that arises when attempting any sort of quantitative analysis involving social capital is the problem of a reliable measure, for in the absence of a measure, meaningful comparisons with other parameters, such as religiosity, are not possible.*

*Surveys carried out during this particular study, however, provided assessable data on two factors sometimes used as surrogate measures of social capital, volunteering and community attachment. Information was also gathered in these surveys on many aspects of religiosity, such as church involvement, attitudes and opinions. Equipped with this quantitative data, relationships between these parameters could be examined and analysed. This paper reports the findings from that study.*

### Keywords ]

Rural, sociology, religion, volunteering, socio religion, church social capital, community attachment, rural social issues

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## Introduction

A study of the social capital literature reveals that there is little unanimity on just how social capital should be defined. This is understandable, for although the concept may have been around for some time the popular usage of the term is a relatively recent phenomenon (Woolcock 2000, p. xviii). Hughes, Bellamy and Black (1999, p. 2) refer to it as an 'ubiquitous neologism', that is, a fairly new term found almost everywhere. Ubiquitous it may be, but there is a wide diversity of opinion as to just what social capital actually is, prompting the Australian Bureau

of Statistics (ABS) to state that 'social capital is not, however, a precise term' (ABS 2000a, p. 3). As this is the case and although definitions of social capital abound, it is appropriate that I state my own simple working definition used in the design of the *Countrytown* research project<sup>1</sup>, being that:

*Social capital is that reservoir of goodwill and willingness-to-cooperate that facilitates community functioning.*

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The actual measurement of social capital poses another challenge. Grootaert (2002, p. 43) comments ‘...social capital really refers to an underlying social force that eludes measurement and that proposed indicators are at best imperfect proxies’ [emphasis added] whilst Fukuyama (1999, p. 2) states ‘...trust, networks, civil society, and the like which have been associated with social capital are all epiphenomena, arising as a result of social capital but *not constituting social capital itself*’ [emphasis added]. In relatively recent times many people have addressed this problem. The very detailed World Bank’s *Understanding and Measuring Social Capital* document (2002) describes their SOCAT or Social Capital Assessment Tool which uses teams of interviewers and researchers and attempts quite complex measurement along several dimensions. Putnam (2001) documents declining levels of community involvement and supports his argument with numerous very detailed charts and graphs. On the other extreme there are much simpler measures such as Macgregor and Cary’s (2002) Social Capital Rapid Appraisal Model (SCRAM), designed to remotely and quickly obtain a ‘snapshot’ of social capital levels in a given community using readily available secondary data. In between these extremes there are many very learned writings from the pens of such people as Onyx and Bullen (1997), Stone (2001), Stone and Hughes (2002), Black and Hughes (2001) and the ABS (2000a) to mention just a representative few. A study of these writings makes it clear that there is little consensus at this stage on just how to assess the actual magnitude of social capital in any locality, or indeed of the units in which it should be measured. It would appear therefore that until some form of direct measurement is perfected, the quantification of social capital must rely on indirect measures, or indicators.

Volunteering has been widely identified in the literature as a useful surrogate measure or indicator of social capital. Onyx and Leonard (2000, p. 113) make the comment that ‘Volunteering is at the core of social capital. The development of social capital is not the same thing as volunteering, but the two concepts are closely related’. And in ABS (2000a, p. 19) we read ‘...voluntary work is another frequently used measure [of social capital]. It is an indicator of participation in community and active citizenship’. Black and Hughes (2001, p. 75) state ‘in much of the literature on social capital, involvement in voluntary associations has been taken as one of the major indicators of the level of social capital’. In the *Countrytown* research project, investigation into volunteering formed a large part of the study, with data coming from two quite distinct sources (See Researching social capital and the church Section, below).

Another surrogate measure of social capital identified in the literature is community attachment. Liu, Ryan, Aurbach & Besser (1998, p. 447), for example, state that. ‘more recently social capital has been used to account for differing levels of local solidarity and attachment. Low levels of social capital are expected to accompany low levels of community attachment’. Although an examination of the writings of, for example, Toennies (1887) (also see Liu et al. 1998 p.433) and comparatively recent contributors such as Kasarda and Janowitz (1974), Beggs, Hurlbert, & Haines (1996) and Gaudy (1990) show they contain little or no specific mention of social capital, these writing make it obvious that social capital and community attachment are closely related concepts. This, I believe, legitimates the use of community attachment as a surrogate measure of social capital in the present context.

Whilst the research on which this paper is based did not develop any direct measure of local social capital per se, survey material did



produce some evidence on the two significant components of social capital mentioned above, volunteering and community attachment. In addition, the same surveys yielded information relating to respondent's religious attitudes, beliefs and/or behaviours, that is to say their degree of religiosity. It was therefore possible to make meaningful observations and calculations on the relationships of these three variables volunteering, community attachment and religiosity. In this way it was possible to throw some light on the significance of the local church as a possible contributor to the creation and/or enhancement of social capital in an Australian rural community.

## Researching social capital and the church

In the year 2000 my wife Dorothy and I carried out a pilot study of twenty country towns right across NSW searching for the most suitable location to carry out an in depth community research project. *Countrytown* (a pseudonym used for reasons of anonymity) was finally chosen for a variety of reasons. Firstly it was judged to be a fairly typical rural community, suffering from all the challenges that most rural communities and towns have faced over recent times drought, population decline, youth exodus and the withdrawal of many services. And with a district population of just under 5000 it was judged to be small enough for one researcher to be able to engage with community in some depth yet large enough to contain social networks of sufficient complexity. In addition, when key local people were approached they quickly warmed to the idea and offered encouragement. Funding for the project came from Charles Sturt University in the form of a PhD research scholarship.

The *Countrytown* research project got under way in early 2001 when my wife and I moved into the town, initially as total strangers (and

therefore carrying very few preconceptions) to spend 20 months in 'participant observation'. Though this was a whole community based social research project, the particular aim was to ascertain the significance, if any, of the Christian church to its host community. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data gathering were used, but the data on which this particular report is based were derived from two surveys carried out during the research project.

It needs to be noted that the first of these surveys, the Volunteers Survey, targeted only active local volunteers and produced data relating to volunteering in general and, amongst other things, the church attendance patterns of volunteers.

The second survey carried out in the following year and referred to in this paper as the *General Survey*, targeted a random sample drawn from the total local community and covered a much broader spectrum of topics. Whilst it did gather some data on volunteering which augmented that from the previous study, information relating to a wide range of attitudes and opinions was generated. This made possible a more exhaustive analysis of several variables as will become apparent in the later discussion of the findings. We now turn our attention to these two surveys in greater detail.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Volunteers Survey (1st survey)*

By a fortunate coincidence, the first year of the *Countrytown* project, 2001, had been nominated by United Nations as the Year of the Volunteer. This opportunity was therefore seized upon to carry out a detailed study of local volunteering. A committee made up of local community members, including myself, decided to 'showcase' volunteering in *Countrytown* with a Volunteers Expo. This was a one day event where local volunteer



organisations mounted a display in the town hall telling the story of their particular volunteering activity. It was colourful, well publicised and well attended. The same committee gave permission for me to take advantage of this period of heightened local awareness to conduct a survey of local volunteers and a particular effort was made to place a questionnaire form into the hands of every local volunteer. The survey form invited respondents to anonymously supply information such as how many hours they contributed, how many different volunteer tasks they performed, reasons for their involvement and the type of work performed, in addition to the usual demographic information.

It became clear from general community observations that many individuals performed not just one, but sometimes several, different volunteer tasks. That is to say, one individual may carry out a number of unrelated volunteer activities or 'person/tasks'. By way of example, one individual taking part on the meals on wheels roster counted as one 'person/task'. If the same individual also took a turn at the local school canteen, that was counted as another 'person/task'. And whilst it was almost impossible to ascertain the actual total number of individuals involved in volunteer work in the local community, it was possible to arrive at a reasonable approximation of the total number of volunteer person/tasks carried out. This was done by simply identifying and then contacting each and every volunteer organisation, asking for information about the numbers involved in their operation. Full and willing cooperation was offered by all parties, not only to provide the numbers but in many cases, to also deliver the survey forms.

In this way a reasonably accurate figure of 850 specific person/tasks were identified, and therefore 850 forms were printed and distributed. It was realised of course that any

given individual might perhaps receive more than one form, possibly several, one from each organisation with which they were involved. However since each form had provision for recording the details of several different tasks, only one form per person need to be returned and this fact was made quite clear in the instructions. Since, as mentioned above, the actual number of volunteers in the district could not be ascertained with any accuracy, the figure could not be used as the basis for calculating a response rate. Rather, the response rate had to be approximated by comparing the number of person/tasks in the community (approximately 850) with the number identified in the returned forms (approximately 475) and it was on this basis that an approximate response rate of 55% was claimed.

As would be expected, the returned forms were not identified in any way. Whilst the information collected from this particular survey did not lend itself to accurate correlational analysis, it did yield some interesting and useful information which will be reported later in this paper under *Results and Discussion*. The age, marital status, educational achievement, sex and stated motivation of respondents were identified and recorded.

One question, amongst several on the survey form, asked if respondents ever attended church, and if so, how often. The vast majority of respondents completed this section. Therefore it was possible and convenient to divide responses into two groups to produce a simple dichotomous variable, regular attenders and infrequent attenders. Regular attenders were defined, in agreement with such authors as Hughes and Blombery (1990), Bentley and Hughes (1998) or Kaldor et al. (1999) as those attending, or claiming to attend once a month or more. Infrequent attenders were defined as those attending less

frequently than once a month and included those who stated that they never attended church at all.

One other consideration needs to be mentioned, and that is just how 'volunteer work' was defined. In its document entitled *Voluntary Work* (2000b) the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) states that:

*In the Survey of Voluntary Work a volunteer was defined as someone who, in the past 12 months, willingly gave unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group.* (p. 3)

Whilst this quote contains a concise definition of volunteering, it has been suggested that limiting the definition to activities carried out through a formally organised group excludes a vast area of volunteer activity that occurs informally and spontaneously, for example preparing a meal for a sick neighbour. In this particular study, however, the contact was actually made through a formal volunteer organisation, bringing it into line with the ABS definition as stated above. However we will return to this issue later in a discussion of the General Survey in which a slightly broader definition was included in the actual questionnaire.

Whilst on the matter of definitions, it was observed that some of the volunteer tasks nominated by the respondents themselves took place within a church organisation for example 'mowing church lawns' or 'arranging the flowers in the church'. A question that arises is whether tasks carried out as part of the internal activities of a particular group, and this a minority group, should be considered to be a volunteer activity. This leads any social researcher into a very grey area of making value judgements on what type of volunteer work should be included. However in this particular part of the study, no such conflict arose since by the ABS definition stated

above, no differentiation could be made since all tasks were 'willingly [given] unpaid help'. This matter, however, took on an added significance in the General Survey to be discussed later in this paper.

### **The General Survey (2nd survey)**

As mentioned earlier, the General Survey was carried out in 2002, almost a year after the Volunteers Survey discussed above, and had a much wider scope. Questionnaires were posted to a randomly selected sample of one in five of all people of voting age in the local shire, irrespective of whether they were urban or rural dwellers. Almost 700 forms were posted or delivered and as accurately as can be determined, 612 actually reached the intended recipient. A wide variety of topics ranging from personal beliefs to matters affecting the local community were covered in the survey instrument. A response rate of 60% was achieved. A simple test was designed into the questionnaire to indicate any pro church or anti church response bias<sup>3</sup>. This indicated a very small anti church response bias, of negligible magnitude. Analysis of the returned questionnaires using the SPSS statistics package yielded a large amount of useful data. However in the present context the areas of interest were volunteering, community attachment and religiosity.

Data on volunteering were generated by just one question with a multiple choice response, providing information on the number of hours of volunteer work contributed by the respondent. The definition of volunteer work was varied slightly from the earlier *Volunteers Survey* in order to include both formal and informal volunteering (see earlier discussion). The definition stated in the questionnaire was 'work that is unpaid but has a benefit for others or for the community (eg fire brigade, meals on wheels, hospital visitation, school canteen, working bees, mowing church lawns etc)'. Note

also that the decision as to what actually constituted volunteer work and therefore was to be included in their estimation of time spent in volunteering was left up to the respondent. The logic to this was that the 'jury' for deciding what constituted volunteer work was in fact made up of the respondents themselves.

Data on community attachment were generated by responses to five separate questions combined into a single scale. Statistical reliability tests of this scale showed a Cronbach's alpha figure of 0.685, a satisfactory figure for a small number of components, and a mean inter item correlation figure of 0.3073 which falls within the recommended range of 0.2 to 0.4 (see Pallant, 2001, p. 86). Each respondent registered a single score on this scale, facilitating statistical comparisons with other variables of interest, in particular, religiosity.

A measure of religiosity was generated by responses to no less than nineteen questionnaire items, each revealing some aspect of *religiosity* and combined into a single, composite scale. Statistical reliability tests of this scale showed a Cronbach's alpha figure of 0.8762 which is well above the critical 0.7 figure, indicating that it the scale has high internal consistency (see Pallant, 2001, p. 86). Each respondent registered a single score on this religiosity scale, facilitating statistical comparisons with other variables of interest.

## **What the study revealed about church and social capital**

It will be recalled that the primary aim of this paper is to report if, in the *Countrytown* study, any connection had been found between social capital and the local church. It will also be recalled that while the level of social capital in *Countrytown* could not be measured directly, two proxy measures or indicators were available, namely volunteering and community

attachment. Both these indicators could be statistically compared with the measure of religiosity. This latter measure was quantified by the 19 item religiosity scale as mentioned previously. We will turn our attention firstly to the volunteering phenomenon.

## ***Volunteering and the church***

It is clear from our earlier discussion that social capital and volunteering are closely related, but in the context of this particular discussion another relationship is of interest, that between volunteering and religious faith. Fortunately for our purposes, there is a significant literature dedicated to this topic. The positive correlation between church involvement and volunteering has been widely acknowledged. Commenting on Australian volunteering, Bentley and Hughes (1998, p. 66) report that 'the people who contribute most to voluntary work are church goers, with 45% of those who attend weekly involved, compared to 18% who never attend'. Pusey (2000, p. 22), also looking at Australian volunteering, says 'however, volunteering, or 'charity work', is positively related to some social attitudes and dispositions. ... People who say they are believers are about twice as likely as agnostics to give their time to voluntary work'. Similar findings from many parts of the world are reported by Wuthnow (1993), Greeley (1997), Asconi and Cnaan (1997), Park and Smith (2000), Lukka and Locke (2000) and Becker and Dhingra (2001).

## ***What the Volunteers Survey revealed about volunteering***

In the *Researching Social Capital and the Church* section the Volunteers Survey was discussed at length and attention is now turned to the findings. The findings of the survey were presented to the community and to the surprise of many local people, the survey

revealed that around 83,000 person hours of volunteer work were contributed in this one small community each year. It also revealed the mean number of hours per year per volunteer in the *Countrytown* sample was 234, compared to the Australia wide figure as reported by Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2000b, p. 12) of just 117, coincidentally exactly half.

As an interesting aside, if one divides the *Countrytown* total number of volunteer person hours per year of 83,000 as stated above, by the population of the district (4712 people, ABS 2001) one arrives at a value, in round figures, of 18 volunteer hours/year/head of population. It would appear that if one needed a crude or first approximation measure of social capital for a specific geographical area, this could be such a measure.

Analysis of the forms showed that there was in fact little difference between regular and infrequent attenders in the number of hours per individual contributed. Infrequent attenders came out marginally in front with a mean figure of 213.5 hours per year, frequent attenders registered slightly less at 204.7 hours per year. However there was a significantly greater number of individuals in the latter group. A simple calculation (number of regular attenders multiplied by average number of hours for that group) revealed the total annual contribution from each group.

When this calculation was carried out it was revealed that 57.5% of the volunteer hours in *Countrytown* were carried out by regular church attenders, and 42.5% by irregular or non attenders. To put this finding into perspective, it was discovered in another part of the community study that only around 15% of the local population were regular church attenders. Statistically, therefore, all other things being equal it would be expected that 15% of the total volunteer hours would

have been contributed by the regular church attenders. Yet the survey results showed 57.5%, almost four times the expected figure. Expressed differently, the data suggests that 57.5% of the local volunteer hours were contributed by a small minority group, regular church attenders who constituted just 15% of the local population.

It could be claimed, however, that with a 55% response rate that nothing is known about the 45% who did not respond. There could in fact exist a significant 'non return bias'. The assumption taken in the earlier calculations was that the non return group were the same as those who did respond, but it is just possible that the one question on church attendance may have acted as a disincentive for non religious people to respond to the survey. If this was in fact the case a different (some may say quite implausible) assumption is called for. This alternative assumption is that *all* non responders were in fact non churchgoers. If the calculations are done on this basis a different picture emerges, showing that only 31.5% of volunteer hours were contributed by regular church attenders. But this is still more than double the figure to be expected if regular churchgoers were no more likely to volunteer than others (remembering that only approximately 15% of the population were regular churchgoers as mentioned earlier).

These findings would be surprising indeed if other researchers over a long period of time and in many different countries had not discovered the same general trend, that churchgoers are much more likely to be involved in volunteer work than non churchgoers. It needs to be stated however that these findings do not prove that church affiliation is the actual *cause* of increased volunteering, a matter that will be taken up again a little later in this paper.

### What the General Community Survey revealed about volunteering

We turn now to the second and quite independent strand of information on volunteering derived this time from the General Survey (see earlier notes). It will be remembered that the sample for this particular survey was drawn from all people of voting age within the *Countrytown* shire. The survey instrument invited a response to a wide variety of topics ranging from matters affecting the local community to personal beliefs and attitudes. However one of the 45 questions in the instrument did ask about the number of volunteer hours the respondent contributed in a typical week, and offered five fixed response categories. Other questions scattered throughout the document were designed to tap into religious attitude or behaviour and responses to these were combined into a nineteen component composite religiosity scale. It was therefore possible to examine the relationship between these two variables, volunteering and religiosity.

The first statistical extraction was a straight correlation between the two variables, and this yielded a modest Pearson correlation figure of  $r = +0.253$ , significant at the .01 level and  $n = 367$ .

Some commentators, Becker and Dhingra (2001) for example, have suggested that it is actual church attendance and the associated social interaction with like minded people, rather than the general religious orientation that facilitates volunteering. A correlation between volunteer hours and church attendance rather than religiosity (which is composed of many different factors as mentioned above) therefore seemed appropriate. However this revealed only slightly higher correlation, at  $+0.267$  ( $n = 356$ ), significant at .01.<sup>4</sup>

Though in purely statistical terms this result is quite modest, when viewed graphically the significance is more apparent. The chart shown in Figure 1 is obtained by stripping off both the upper and lower thirds of the respondent sample in terms of religiosity score, then displaying their volunteer contribution in age groups.

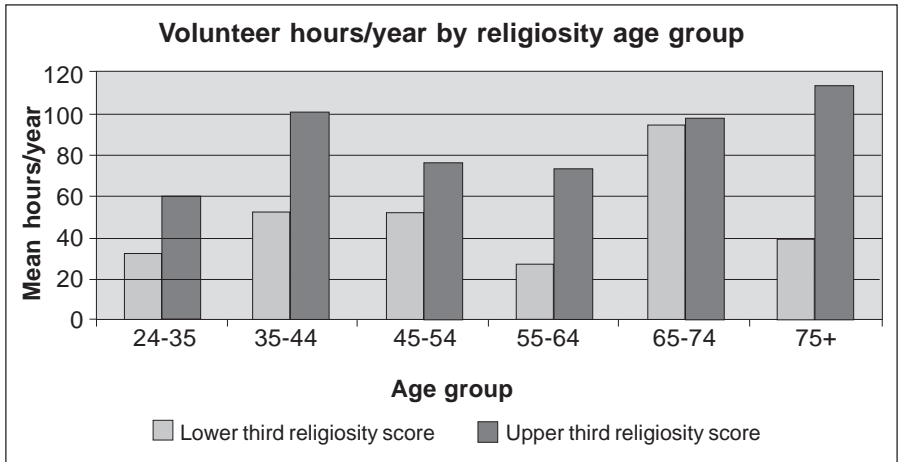


Figure 1: *Countrytown* volunteers hours-per-year by religiosity by age

Note 1. Any cell containing a statistic in which  $n < 2$ , was deleted, as occurred in the 15-24 group. For entire sample  $n = 367$ .

Note 2. In arriving at the mean hours per year, all responses were included as well as those who carried out no volunteer work at all.

As mentioned earlier, many researchers (Bentley & Hughes 1998, Pusey 2000, or Wuthnow 1993 for example) have discovered a positive relationship between religiosity and volunteering rates, and it can be seen that this was also the finding in the *Countrytown* study. The result is unambiguous, but the usual caveat is in order. Church involvement does appear to promote volunteering, but there are other plausible explanations. For example, there could be a third unidentified variable in operation, or in fact causality could run in the opposite direction. That is, it could be argued that volunteering causes church involvement. However, given that church attenders are exhorted to be helpful to their 'neighbours', but that volunteers are not encouraged to be church attenders, the direction of causation is obvious, if not strictly provable.

### **Community attachment**

Community attachment, that feeling of being part of, being integrated with, and having a commitment to one's local community does bear a strong relationship to social capital. However, whereas social capital is generally viewed as something that resides in the community (even if dependent on the attitudes and behaviour of individuals in that community), community attachment is usually thought of as something uniquely possessed, to greater or lesser degree, by each individual. Liu et al. (1998, p. 447) make mention of the relationship between community attachment and social capital when they write 'more recently social capital has been used to account for differing levels of local solidarity and attachment. Low levels of social capital are expected to accompany low levels of community attachment...'

There is a significant body of literature on community attachment dating back to Toennies (1887) and more recent

contributions such as Kasarda and Janowitz (1974), Gaudy (1990), Beggs, Hurlbert and Haines (1996) and Liu et al. (1998). A review of the literature suggests that there are two competing models of the concept, the linear model and the systemic model. The linear model, in general agreement with Toennies's (1887) *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* concept, is of particular interest to rural sociologists since it suggests that the size and the population density of any given community are the most significant independent variables affecting community attachment. However the more generally accepted systemic model, usually attributed to the work of Park and Burgess (1921, 1925), insists that other factors such as age, class, length of residence and formal and informal associations, are the more significant factors (see Kasarda and Janowitz 1974 p. 329, Gaudy 1990 p. 179, Liu et al. 1998 p. 433). This makes this latter perspective very relevant to the present research since church affiliation clearly falls into the category of 'formal and informal associations'.

It is obvious that in the terms of the *Countrytown* research question which was: What is the significance of the church in a rural community? there was something to be gained in attempting to discover if any measurable relationship existed between religiosity and community attachment in this particular community.

The methodology of the General Survey carried out in *Countrytown* in 2002 has been mentioned earlier in this paper. In analysing the results of this survey the level of community attachment of each respondent was measured by an index consisting of the responses to five separate questions. Similarly, the level of religiosity was measured by a nineteen component composite religiosity scale. Having done this it was a relatively simple

procedure to arrive at a correlation figure between these two variables, and the bivariate correlation produced by the SPSS statistics program between religiosity and the community attachment measure was a modest  $r = +0.259$ , significant at .01 level, with  $n = 367$ . This points to a small but clearly positive relationship between the measures of religiosity and community attachment in this particular sample.

attachment that appears to accompany higher levels of religiosity is a direct result of the attitudes and the world view promoted by the churches, or whether church involvement was an intervening variable. Liu et al (1998, pp. 444-5) found evidence in their study that ‘specifically, local church involvement influences other forms of local involvement, which in turn affects friendship patterns and, subsequently, community attachment’ (pp.

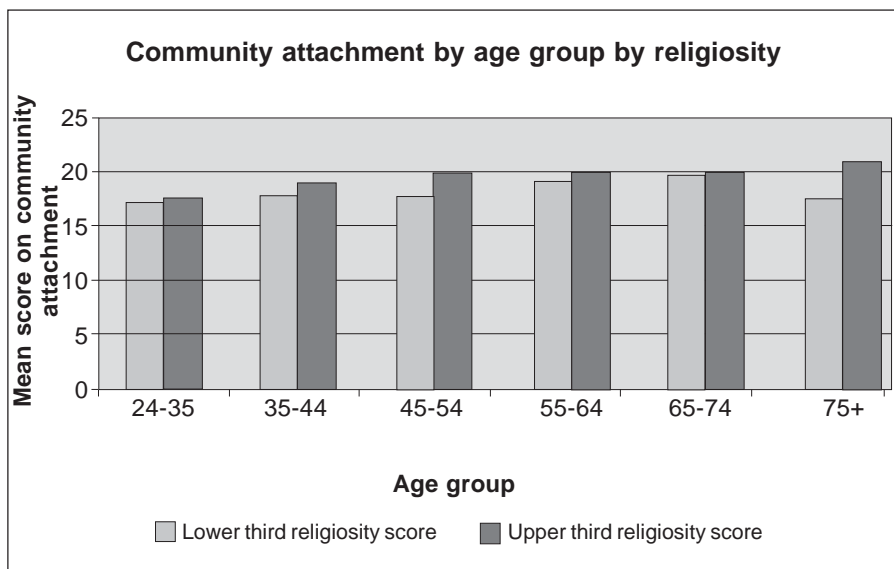


Figure 2: Community attachment in Countrytown by age group by religiosity. Whole sample  $n=367$ . The 15-24 age group was too small for meaningful analysis ( $n=7$ ).

As we saw earlier, an alternative and more intuitive way of looking at the relationship is to divide the sample into three groups on the basis of the religiosity score, and then compare just the upper and lower thirds, as shown below in Figure 2. It can be seen that in every age group, the upper third religiosity group scored higher on community attachment and in some age groupings significantly so.

It was not clear from the *Countrytown* research if the increased community

444 5). However irrespective of whether the increased level of community attachment is a direct or indirect result of church involvement, the evidence suggests that the latter does indeed enhance community attachment in a small but significant way. The previously quoted authors summarised their findings by stating that ‘local churches should be recognised for their critical role in creating and maintaining social capital and community attachment’ (p. 447).



This comment may well be applied to the *Countrytown* study as well.

## Summary and conclusion

It needs to be acknowledged that the research on which this paper is based was done in just one country community and because of this, constituted a sample of one. This is obviously a limitation and no general applicability can be claimed. Though the location was chosen with great care after investigating nineteen other potential sites, no one town could ever be claimed to be absolutely typical. However there is a long tradition of sociological studies that have examined just one situation in depth and Dempsey's work (1979, 1983, 1990, 1996) provides one very relevant example. No doubt these works are valued because of what they contribute to the understanding of wider social phenomena. My personal hope is that other researchers may come to realise that rural Australia and the people who populate it constitute a fertile field for social research at the present time.

Rural Australia is going through difficult times. The social fabric of country communities is in some cases being strained to the limit. One of the institutions still surviving in rural areas, albeit with some difficulty, is the church. The question at the heart of the research reported in this paper is what does the church contribute to rural community resilience? What does the church contribute to the stock of social capital in smaller country communities?

It is widely acknowledged that social capital has many indicators. Two of these indicators, volunteering and community attachment, have been studied in a contemporary, country community and the results reported in this paper. As we have seen, the evidence strongly suggests a modest but consistently positive relationship between each of these indicators and religiosity.

There is, however, evidence to show that contemporary sociologists display considerable indifference when it comes to matters of religion. By way of example, in a very time consuming search of past copies of the influential journal *Sociologia Ruralis* covering a period of 42 years and 664 articles, I could only find four that touched on religious influence. A similar search of *Rural Society* was similarly unfruitful, with just one article out of 194 over a 12 year period. It would appear that in the contemporary sociologist's understandable eagerness to stay on the cutting edge of the science, that an area of social life that appears to be rather anachronistic holds little interest. Yet few would challenge the influence that religion has had on Australian culture, particularly rural culture. And although the value structures of past years may dissipate over time, they for the most part reside in the deeper recesses of the collective psyche of the people. As such they may exhibit a resilience and longevity quite out of phase with the more superficial aspects of contemporary culture.

For these reasons, it may be that religion has been greatly undervalued as a contributing factor in the formation and maintenance of social capital, particularly in rural communities.

## Endnotes

- 1 A more exhaustive and generalised treatment of the *Countrytown* research project is contained in the author's book, *Country Life and The Church*, ISBN 0 646 452177.
- 2 In both cases the survey instrument was of considerable size, making it impractical to include a copy in this paper. I would be happy to supply a copy of either or both documents to anyone having a genuine interest in examining them. My contact information is [rol.mitchell@bigpond.com](mailto:rol.mitchell@bigpond.com)

- 3 The test consisted of a comparison of the percentage of the population of that geographical area expressing 'no religion' in the official census figures (ABS 2001) with the percentage displaying the same response in the *Countrytown* survey. The figures were 6.4% and 9.5% respectively indicating, if anything, a small 'anti church' bias in my sample.
- 4 Correlation between church attendance and religiosity was  $r = 0.860$ ,  $n = 352$ ). A correlation figure of .267 equates to a coefficient of determination of .07. That is to say, around 7% of the variability in the sample is accounted for by the level of church involvement.

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## NEGATIVE SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CONFLICTS: ASIAN ENTREPRENEURS IN NEW ZEALAND AGRICULTURE (1870s – 1920s)

Branka Krivokapic-Skoko

### Abstract ]

*This paper focuses on negative consequences of social capital formation within ethnic business groups using historical evidence on three distinct farming protests involving ethnic groups in rural New Zealand. The paper begins by analysing some of the key debates relating to the role of ethnic business networks, ethnic social capital and its potential negative consequences. In particular, the paper discusses the recursive effects that the strong ethnic community solidarity can have in causing negative reaction and overt conflict between ethnic and local business groups.*

*Highly organised Asian communities in New Zealand agriculture showed a strong intra group orientation within their businesses, and formed social structures for the intra group mobilisation and distribution of resources. Such ethnic solidarity in business was stereotyped negatively by the host business groups, and in conjunction with some other factors has led towards anti Asian protests in rural New Zealand, such as in Otago during the late 1870s and the early 1890s, and particularly in Pukekohe in the mid 1920s.*

### Keywords ]

Ethnic social capital, conflicts, Asian entrepreneurs, New Zealand, social capital

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## Introduction

The ethnically exclusive business networks developed among ethnic business groups could be considered as a source of economically productive social capital. However, while the ethnic business networks provide immigrants with privileged access to some resources, they also implicitly exclude outsiders and restricted individuals in taking up business decisions (Sotiropoulos, 2005; Waldinger, 1995; Wintrobe, 1995). Moreover, once ethnic business networks have emerged their further existence may promote an opposing effect and eventually place ethnic entrepreneurs in conflict with certain segments of the host business population. As Woolcock

(1998) and Cleaver (2003) noted, the studies on social embeddedness and economic life of immigrants seemed to be the first one to move away from the pervasive focus on the beneficial effects of social capital.

This paper focuses on the recursive effects of ethnic networks and ethnic solidarity in business, which could be associated with conflicts between ethnic entrepreneurs and competing groups from the host population. The paper first outlines key features of negative social capital as developed within the ethnic entrepreneurship literature. It is followed by a discussion of empirical accounts from the historical comparative research on Asian entrepreneurs and anti Asian farming protests

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which occurred in rural New Zealand. The comparative research design allowed for a systematic, holistic comparison of the ethnic groups included in the empirical analysis. Data were gathered on the key comparative variables, relying on the examination of available empirical sources, mainly involving extensive bibliographic research. The empirical research was carried out using Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), a method designed to draw causal inferences from comparing configurations of the selected causal variables across cases included in an analysis (Ragin, 1987). As a result, QCA offers deterministic causal explanations, which embrace a combination of causal or independent variables considered to be important for the emergence of an outcome.

### **Ethnic social capital: negative consequences**

Ethnic social capital a set of resources available to an ethnic group through member's social relationships within the social structure has attracted considerable attention within the ethnic entrepreneurship literature (Giorgas, 2000; Light, Bhachu & Karageorgis, 1993; Putzel, 1997; Waldinger, Aldrich & Ward, 1990; Ward & Jenkins, 1984). The literature offers many examples of how immigrants within network based mechanisms gained certain economic advantages, such as privileged access to some resources, preference for co ethnics in economic transactions, reduction of formal contract and, accordingly, lower transaction costs.

The ethnic entrepreneurship literature, most closely associated with the work of Waldinger (1995; 1997), Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) Portes (1995; 1998) and, Portes and Landolt (1996), also argued very strongly about the need for exploring the existence of negative social capital<sup>1</sup>. Whilst social relations enhance the ease and efficiency of economic exchange

among community members, the same connections implicitly restrict outsiders. Morrow (2001) argued that ethnic configuration and associated dynamics of belonging can also operate in a way that excludes others from assessing resources. Indeed, the more embedded are economic actors in dense, closed, homogenous networks, the stronger the mechanisms for excluding outsiders.

Through the closure mechanisms, group members connected by strong relationships ties benefit from embedded and dense networks (Coleman, 1988). Obviously, they should benefit from greater cooperation, greater conformity to the norms, and greater information sharing. However, this simple direct relation between network density and performance was challenged by some authors (Oh, Labianca, & Chung 2006), who argued that excessive group closure may negatively affect group social capital. 'Strong closure groups can constrain individual group members' contacts with diverse others outside and can restrict access to more varied resources and innovative information available beyond the closed groups' (p. 573). Or, as Putnam (1993, p. 221) also acknowledged 'Social inequalities may be embedded in social capital. Norms and networks that serve some groups may obstruct others...some forms of social capital can impair individual liberties'.

The ethnic business networks may also impose some constraints on decisions of ethnic entrepreneurs. Waldinger (1995, p. 555) referred to the dualism between community solidarity and individual freedom of the immigrants as the 'other side' of embeddedness. Similarly, Giorgas (2000) argued that the membership in an ethnic community often demands conformity to the norms and may inhibit behaviour of the individuals. Apart from restricting individuals

in taking up business decisions and implicitly exclude outsiders, the existence of ethnic networks and associated collective sanctions and community controls, create excess claims on group members and leads towards downward leveling norms (Table 1).

Ethnic networks should be open and dynamic in order to achieve more complex and efficient economic exchange. According to the recent literature on the networks (Huggins, 2001; Levine, 2004; Podolny & Page, 1998), ethnic networks face limitations in offering more dynamic, open, heterogenous and changeable networks appropriate for the knowledge economy. As Bowles (1999) noted the tendency for the ethnic communities to be relatively homogenous may make it impossible to leverage benefits from diversity coming from the competitiveness, exchange of skills, and in particular generation and exchange of business ideas. Inter network connectivity is essential for the emergence of network knowledge, since those connected across groups are more likely to initiate new ideas (Burt 2000). However, there is a possibility that networks based on static strong ties such as ethnic networks may have a propensity to establish 'lock in' (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Labianca & Brass, 2006; Lechner & Dowling, 2003) inhibiting the creation of new knowledge and innovation.

Some authors also pointed at the recursive effects of ethnic networks and ethnic solidarity in business, which could be associated with conflicts between ethnic entrepreneurs and competing groups from the host population (Baker, 1983; Wintrobe, 1995). Ethnic business networks, through cutting the costs and internal distribution of resources, would increase the groups' competitive advantages. A related perception is that such cohesive and highly organised ethnic groups represent an economic threat to the competing business groups from the host population (Table 1). The host business groups will react when they perceive that their economic power is threatened by the actions of ethnic groups, be that threat real or imagined (Baker, 1983).

Wintrobe (1995) argued that ethnic conflicts are likely to appear in the situation where there are significant differences in production factors and income. Since the ethnic networks can only provide advantages for the members and these cannot be transferred to the outsiders, it may be said that the difference in income and returns between the individuals included in the ethnic networks and those who remain outside, could be regarded a likely cause for the conflicts. For instance, Wintrobe (1995, p. 44) stated that 'the strengthening of one ethnic network

breeds fear on the part of outsiders in the same way that one nation's decision to increase its stock of weaponry breeds fear on the part of other nations'.

Wintrobe (1995) further argued that *blocked entry* and *exit* are the fundamental characteristics of the ethnic networks, explaining the

Table 1: Negative consequences of ethnic social capital  
Negative ethnic social capital

<p><u>Inside the ethnic business networks</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.Restrictions on individual freedom</li> <li>2.Exclusion of outsiders</li> <li>3.Downward leveling norms</li> <li>4.Excess claims on group members</li> </ol> <p><u>Ethnic business networks and competing business groups</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.Negative perception of ethnic solidarity in business</li> <li>2.Perception of unfair competition</li> </ol> <p>Source: Portes (1998), Waldinger (1995), Wintrobe (1995)</p>
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competition among ethnic business groups and the potential conflicts. Since ethnic social capital can not move from one group to another differences in returns and incomes between the ethnic groups will persist. According to Durlauf (1999, p. 2) the possibility that ethnic social capital can lead to undesirable behaviours and potential inter group conflicts is more than theoretical. 'Behaviours which enforce differential treatment of insiders and outsiders to a community are linked to the nature of social capital. It then becomes possible that an ethnic group with strong internal support mechanisms can exhibit discriminatory behaviour when it comes to hiring or doing business with the members of other ethnic communities' (p. 2). Therefore, by enhancing the ethnic identity, as well as *blocked entry and exit*, ethnic social capital can promote inter group hostility.

The potential of ethnic social capital to lead to inter group hostility has been well documented in the literature on ethnicity and entrepreneurship (Bonacich & Modell, 1980; O'Brien & Fugita, 1982; Tsukashima, 1998; Turner & Bonacich, 1980). Based on comparative historical research on ethnic groups involved in New Zealand agriculture (Krivokapic Skoko, 2001) the following sections of this paper outline the negative consequences of social capital formation within the context of Asian entrepreneurship.

### **Asian entrepreneurs in New Zealand agriculture (1870s – 1920s)**

The entrance of an immigrant population into New Zealand agriculture occurred mainly in the second half of the nineteenth and first few decades of the twentieth century, creating a distinct and recognisable ethnic mosaic of rural New Zealand. This mosaic was characterised by involvement of a few ethnic

groups who became associated with a particular type of agricultural production and fulfilled a vital role in the development of some rural localities.

Chronologically, Asian immigration into New Zealand agriculture began in the 1870s with the arrival of Chinese immigrants. They moved into the Otago goldfields and formed semi permanent rural settlements attached to the co ethnic mining communities. With the decline in gold mining the Chinese populations dispersed throughout the country and took up other occupations, with the majority of them moving towards self employment as market gardeners and as food retailers. At that time (1870s 1920s) the influx of the Chinese market gardeners was obvious<sup>2</sup>. The Chinese pioneered most of the market gardening areas of Otago and they were also among the early Otago developers of commercial orchards. This occupational transition marked the socio economic history of the Chinese for many decades, producing the stereotypes of New Zealand Chinese as market gardeners (Beatson & Beatson, 1990; Ng, 1993). Until 1916, there were around 1,400 market gardeners and food retailers out of around 2,000 Chinese living in New Zealand at that time (McGill, 1982).

The involvement of Indians in New Zealand agriculture has been centred on Gujarati market gardeners and Punjabis dairy farmers mainly in the North Island. As self employed farmers they entered agriculture during the 1920s, having previously been a largely mobile population involved in various rural labouring activities. Gujaratis were moving in large numbers from the labouring jobs to self employed market gardening, while some Punjabis became involved in dairying and moved from rural labouring or sharemilking towards acquisition of their own dairy farms (McLeod, 1992; Taher, 1965; Tiwari, 1980).



The Chinese and Indian farming enterprises were embedded in ethnic business networks which facilitated mobilisation and distribution of resources, and provided support for ethnic entrepreneurs in starting and carrying out the business (Krivokapic Skoko, 2001). The same empirical research also illustrated how Asian entrepreneurs tended to make extensive use of the cultural traditions of the home countries in organising these networks. For instance, the informal, ethnically exclusive networks developed within the Chinese market gardening community were rooted in the Confucian ideology which promoted collectivism, mutual trust and reciprocity.

The Chinese market gardeners worked in organisations comparable to the matrilineal Chinese clans. The Chinese market gardeners in New Zealand represent four family clans, Poon Fah, Szeyap, Tsangshing, Kong Chew (Ip, 1995, p. 61). The family clans played an important cohesive role within the Chinese market gardener community in New Zealand (Lee, 1974; Ng, 1959). The function of the familial associations was to deal with the adjustment of the Chinese to the strange environment, relying on the base of mutual aid and protection. The family clans helped Chinese immigrants to establish themselves and offered some protection and security in times of any kind of crisis. These Chinese family clans are further organised into *bongsa*, groups based on common descent from specific areas of mainland China (Ng, 1959; Sedgwick, 1982). Such groups spoke the same Chinese dialect. Basically, there were two dialect groups within the Chinese market gardeners: the Poon yu *bongsa* was dominant amongst the Chinese market gardeners in the North Island (Meyer & McLellan, 1988), and Se yips dialect group was dominant around Ashburton in the South Island (Ng, 1959).

The Chinese market gardeners across New Zealand were bound together by clan, dialect or locality ties and these connections helped them attain the resources needed to start a business. Any required hired labour for market gardeners came from new immigrants from the same village of the home land. Family clans were at the core of migration chains and provided the necessary funds, supporting and coordinating the immigration flows. As Sedgwick (1982) noted, those already involved in market gardening supported newcomers by paying the compulsory poll tax (p. 317).

The Chinese market gardeners also generated resources through *hui kan* associations. The *hui kan* enabled the Chinese to pool their savings and helped them establish and coordinate their ethnic business. *Hui kan* (rotating credit associations) were derived from Chinese traditional society and were based on Confucian ethics of reciprocity and mutual obligations. Raising the funds for such credit associations and self help funds was done by levying each Chinese family according to the number of adult males, or each Chinese family in market gardening according to the area under cultivation (Sedgwick, 1982). These ethnic associations were based on mutual obligation and the principles of reciprocity. Apparent mutual obligation within the family clans and among community members in general was sustained and regulated by effective instruments of community control. Moreover, the sanctioning capacity of the Chinese community in New Zealand enforced informal business contracts between the Chinese market gardeners. As noted in the Declaration of the 4th Congress of the Chinese Association in 1939 (80 percent of the members were market gardeners) 'A penalty on those who refuse donations was adopted' (Sedgwick, 1982, p. 394). The regulations of the New Zealand Chinese Association as they proposed in 1909

explicitly stated that 'Those who try to evade paying the Association a levy will be dealt with severely' (p. 673).

Similarly, Indian farming enterprises were organised into ethnically exclusive business networks which mimic the traditional structures of support from the home country. Thus, *jati* identity, village and provincial connections shaped economic activities of Gujarati and Punjabi immigrants in New Zealand agriculture. Moreover, Gujarati market gardeners tended to be organised in a number of extended patrilineal family networks, known as *kutumb*.

These networks maintained the mobilisation of labour and capital. If Gujarati immigrants needed to borrow money to start up the business, they would rely on the support from self help financial institutions formed by relatives or immigrants from the same village. Those loan agreements realised within kinships based networks were unwritten, based on trust as collateral, and without interest rates (Leckie, 1981). Once settled down in the business, it was a matter of trust and *dharma* (duty) to support the new immigrants and to meet those unwritten obligations. Apart from the immigrants from the same villages these kinds of agreements were extended and also included the members of one's caste (Leckie, 1981; Tiwari, 1980). Similarly, Punjabi dairy farmers frequently utilised family and kinship ties in starting and expanding their business (McLeod, 1992; Tiwari, 1980). In the case of the early Punjabis, the so called 'Hindu farm' performed as *gurdwara* (a Sikh temple) and as a place that served the useful purpose of supporting newly arrived Punjabi migrants. The history of the developing Punjabi dairy community in the Waikato showed how family dairy enterprises were held together through informal networks. Dairy farms were mainly

transferred within the community, either through arrangements relying on the joint families or by transferring to co fellows.

Ethnic business networks developed among Asian entrepreneurs in New Zealand agriculture encompassed both normative and resource components as outlined in the economic sociology literature (Davern, 1997; Portes, 1995; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). Thus, these networks, informal by character, were based on mutual obligations, trust, the principles of reciprocity and the capacity for internal sanction by the community. Within such informal ethnic associations, Asian market gardeners and dairy farmers were reciprocally obligated towards co ethnic members, and in the absence of legal enforcement, business transactions were backed by codes of conduct and the sanctioning power of the community. They succeeded in creating social structures to provide mutual ethnic support, and also in coordinating economic activities and controlling intra group competition in business.

The empirical research also highlighted the consequences of ethnic business networks in providing ethnic groups with certain advantages. It was documented that growth and competitiveness of Chinese and Indian owned agricultural enterprises in New Zealand were largely attributable to the forms of self help ethnic institutions. The ability of the Chinese market gardeners, for instance, to rely on ethnic informal networks for mobilisation of credit and information could give them a comparative advantage over the entrepreneurs who were outside the ethnic communities. Chinese and Gujarati market gardeners were also able to generate, through their informal networks, a better position in terms of selling and buying the products, obtain the capital for starting up the enterprises, and enhance their ability to cut costs. Generally, it could be that the existence of informal business networks

enabled the members to generate and distribute resources probably more quickly and efficiently than was possible for non members. This supports the work of other authors (Light et al., 1993; Ward & Jenkins, 1984; Waldinger et al., 1990) who, while studying different empirical cases, pointed to the competitiveness which comes as a result of the business network structures along ethnic lines.

## **Anti-Asian protests in rural New Zealand**

Under some conditions the existence of ethnic business networks may eventually place ethnic entrepreneurs in conflict<sup>3</sup> with certain segments of the host business population. The organizational power of ethnic networks was identified as one of the factors leading towards ethnic conflicts (Tsukashima, 1998; Turner & Bonacich, 1980).

The empirical research (Krivokapic Skoko, 2001) indicated there were three distinct farming protests involving ethnic business communities in New Zealand. All three conflicts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were related to Asian market gardeners. The opposition to Asian entrepreneurs in New Zealand agriculture was expressed in terms of a perceived economic threat and coincided with periods of economic depression. The Chinese and Gujarati market gardeners were very widely regarded as an economic threat to the competing business groups from the host population. Clearly, the local market gardeners perceived Asian entrepreneurs as representing an economic threat to their economic interests and felt threatened by the presence and expansion of cohesive ethnic communities in business. They responded by taking certain actions intended to limit the growth of the Asian farming enterprises and to prevent them from entering the same occupation.

## **Anti-Chinese protests during the late 1870s**

During the 1870s, the Chinese in New Zealand went through occupational transitions from gold mining activity towards self employment as market gardeners. During that period the Chinese also started to face public antagonism and protests as articulated among the European market gardeners in Otago. The Otago local business community became unified and demanded that restrictive measures be imposed on the Chinese in New Zealand. Moreover, by using various local government measures they tried to prevent Chinese from settling down and leasing land (Ng, 1993). Apart from these direct actions which were channelled through county councils, there was generally negative public opinion centred on the presence of Chinese market gardeners within local communities. Articles published in Otago local newspapers such as the *Mt Ida Chronicle*, *Dunstan Times*, and *Taupeka Times* reflected these anti Chinese attitudes (as cited in Ng 1993, pp. 276-280).

Public opinion opposing the Chinese presence developed to such an extent that anti Chinese legislation was discussed in Parliament during the second half of the 1870s. It resulted in the introduction of the Asiatic Restriction Bill of 1879 in Parliament, and afterwards in the enacting of the Chinese Immigrants Restriction Act of 1881 (Hall, 1929). European market gardeners clearly expressed concerns that their livelihood was threatened by the influx of Chinese market gardeners. Such perceptions of economic threat were included in a political platform of leading politicians of that time, such as G. Grey or R. Seddon (Ip, 1995).

## **Anti-Chinese protests during the early 1890s**

During the early 1890s the small business community, represented by European market gardeners and the labour movement had

united in anti Chinese opposition. In 1894, the Trades and Labour Council in Wellington petitioned that the residence taxes should be imposed on the local Chinese fruit retailers (Sedgwick, 1982). The same sources recounted that The Knights of Labour opposed the movement of Chinese into the Wairarapa in March 1892. Chinese businesses were closely observed by local business associations, and in Wellington, for instance, the local Grocers and Early Closing Association in 1891 appointed a committee to observe the business practice of Chinese fruit shops. Newspapers also provided revealing accounts of the negative societal perception towards Chinese market gardeners. Also, a large part of the debates in the House of Parliament in 1895 were based on the Chinese involvement in the growing of vegetables. For instance, opposition to the Chinese presence in that business was underlined in discussions on the Asiatic and Other Immigration Restriction Bill of 1895 and resulted in the passing of the Asiatic Restriction Bill of 1896 (p. 196).

Chinese market gardeners were perceived as an economic threat in the locations where they were competing with European commercial market gardening, such as Otago (Ng, 1993), Canterbury and Wellington (Sedgwick, 1982). These accounts agree that Chinese businesses experienced lower operating costs because of the existence of trust within the community. In addition, the existence of the rotating credit associations meant that their capital was pooled and credits were available without interest. Such competitiveness of the Chinese market gardening community was simply perceived as unfair and unscrupulous. The content of the newspaper articles of that time describes Chinese competition using terminology such as 'foul, contrary to nature and unjust'

(Sedgwick 1982, p. 260) and argued that Europeans could not compete with the Chinese in growing vegetables. Also, the anti Chinese politicians of that time, W. P. Reeves and R. Seddon, viewed the Chinese as an economic threat to the European market gardeners in New Zealand (Ip, 1995).

### ***Anti-Asian protests in Pukekohe in the mid 1920s***

The most outstanding example of anti Indian, and in general, anti Asian protests in rural New Zealand happened in Pukekohe during the mid twenties. During that time Indians (Gujaratis) began to lease or buy land for market gardening and settled down primarily in Pukekohe. Such occupational transformation and residential concentration of Indians created noticeable negative public concern. The local population, mainly potato growers were at the heart of anti Indian feelings in Pukekohe, clearly expressed through their concern about the influx of Indians to the area (Leckie, 1981).

General negative public perceptions of the presence of Indian market gardeners further developed into articulated and synchronised actions by the host business groups the local potato farmers. The most striking feature of these actions was the emergence of the White New Zealand League in 1926 which became the voice of the host business community. The League advocated exclusionist policies towards Indians and urged Government to enact legislation to prevent further settlements by Indians and, in general, Asians on the land. This was summed up in a motion adopted at the inaugural meeting of the League: 'That the businessmen and landowners in the district those interested support any action, if favourable by the Chamber of Commerce, to approach the Government to introduce

legislation making it illegal to lease or sell land to Asiatics' (cited in Leckie 1985, p. 110).

The League gained support from the local Chamber of Commerce and as the *Franklin Times* of February 3, 1926 reported, 'The Chamber of Commerce decided to join the League in its goal of securing legislation to exclude Asians from New Zealand' (Leckie 1985, p. 111). In July 1926 the same aim was adopted by the Franklin Agricultural and Pastoral Association. Federated Farmers in Franklin County called for the confiscation of Asians' land and their immediate repatriation. Potato and onion growers in Pukekohe, at a meeting on 17 April 1926, also endorsed a petition to Parliament requesting legislation to prohibit the selling or leasing of land to Indians. In 1926 some farmers' associations (Franklin Growers' Associations) and branch associations (Canterbury Fruit Growers' Association) joined in supporting calls for such a policy (Leckie, 1985).

The main points in opposition to Indian, in fact, Asian market gardeners in Pukekohe, may be summarised in the words of a local potato grower as 'fear of economic competition' (Leckie, 1985, p. 110). In a citation by the White New Zealand League (1926), Asian market gardeners were accused of taking over 'the means of production in this industry (market gardening) in a few years' (cited in Sedgwick 1982, p. 347).

The White New Zealand League further argued that the threat of unfair Asian competition was hitting particularly the self employed, small scale farmers. As a response, local farmers came together with a small group of Auckland businessmen and established the White Producers' Co operative Association with the goal of dealing 'only with white farmers and producers co operating for their benefit and excluding Asians' (Leckie

1985, p.120). The Indian market gardeners of Pukekohe were stereotyped in the local press as being a homogenous and quite unassimilable (as cited in Leckie 1981 p. 620). The pamphlets of the White New Zealand League also referred to the 'clannishness' of the Chinese and Indian growers (Sedgwick, 1982).

It may be said there was an intra class division regarding the presence of ethnic entrepreneurs in New Zealand agriculture. Basically, fear of the competitive powers of the Asian entrepreneurs was expressed amongst the self employed, small scale local farmers. In fact, it was small farmers who were the most vocal and active in attempts to limit and expel the Chinese and Indian origin farmers from the same business. Opposition to the Asian presence in agriculture also came from organised labour (the working class), while large scale landowners and employers supported the presence of a low cost, mobile, and relatively skilled Asian labour force (Sedgwick, 1982; Taher, 1965).

It was generally considered that an Asian labour force would lower wages and increase unemployment amongst the host population. Such public opinion was used extensively by some politicians in parliamentary debates. During Seddon's time as Prime Minister (1893 1906) a number of legislative restrictions were enacted selecting immigrant groups which would be allowed to come in, and also excluding immigrants groups already in the country from certain economic activities. Later on, W. Massey and the Reform administration (1914 1928) continued with the same platform, focusing on the small business community and the working class in calling for anti Asian immigration restrictions (Ip, 1995).

Thus, what emerged quite clearly from the empirical research was that the presence of

cohesive and highly organised Asian farming communities was associated with negative reactions amongst the domestic business population, small size farmers in particular. Perceptions of an economic threat within the context of economic depression were associated with the emergence of anti Asian farming protests that occurred in rural New Zealand settings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The Chinese and Gujarati market gardeners were very widely regarded as an economic threat to the competing business groups from the host population. Clearly, the local market gardeners perceived Asian entrepreneurs as representing an economic threat to their economic interests and felt threatened by the presence and expansion of cohesive ethnic communities in business. They responded by taking certain actions intended to limit the growth of the Asian farming enterprises and to prevent them from entering the same occupation.

## Conclusion

Ethnic business groups tend to form ethnically exclusive networks which facilitated mobilisation and distribution of ethnic resources, and provided immigrants with an economic support system. While the networks could be a source of the strength of ethnic business communities, under some conditions, their existence may lead towards conflicts between ethnic entrepreneurs and some segments of the host business population. As the social capital literature emphasised social closure is necessary for social capital to be facilitated (by imposing the norms, promoting expectations and reciprocity). However, it can also lead to exclusionary closure, negative perception of strong ethnic solidarity in business, and potentially to inter group hostility.

This negative consequence of the ethnic social capital formation was illustrated using empirical evidence on the conflicts between Asian entrepreneurs and competing local business groups involved in New Zealand agriculture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What emerged quite clearly from that particular empirical setting was that the presence of cohesive and ethnically exclusive business networks within Asian farming communities. However, this was strongly associated with negative reactions amongst the host business population, small size farmers in particular. High ethnic social capital accumulated through Asian business networks conferred a competitive advantage that created a perception of an economic threat and further provoked hostility of the host business groups. They responded by taking visible actions or substantial vocal activity aimed at expulsion of the Asian farming enterprises from the country or to restrict their activity.

## Endnotes

- 1 The literature on the negative consequences of social capital used the different terminology such as: the 'dark side' of social capital (Putzel, 1997; Portes, 1998; Cleaver, 2003), zones of 'social capital deficiency' (Harris & De Renzio, 1997), 'anti social capital Beall (1997), 'downside' of social capital' (Portes & Landolt, 1996). In 1997, Roger Waldinger challenged the very positive, one side picture of social capital by posing the following question: *Social capital or social closure?* In 2001 the London School of Economics published a working paper: *An appropriate capital-isation? Questioning social capital* (Morrow, 2001). In 1997, *The Journal of International Development* had a special issue on the negative or dark side of social capital. However, it was largely unnoticed in the literature.



- 2 The noticeable advances in New Zealand agriculture made by Chinese were recognised almost from the beginning of their involvement in the agricultural industry. The following piece of evidence comes from the Chinese petition from 1888 as a response to the imposed immigration restrictions: 'Before the arrival of the Chinese, fruit and vegetables were scarce commodities to many New Zealand workers and poorer people. Sometimes they had to pay a high price for them. After the Chinese took over the trade, fruit and vegetables have never been short in supply and are selling at more competitive prices' (Sedgwick, 1982, p. 198). Also in the opposition towards the Undesirable Immigrants Bill in 1894, it was noted that the Chinese gardeners had made a considerable contribution by turning small pieces of land into productive gardens that provided vegetables at reasonable prices (*Ibidem*, p. 201). The contribution of individual Chinese entrepreneurs was also recognised, such as the involvement of Chew Chong in establishing dairy industry in Taranaki, North Island (Drabble, 1996). Chew Chong was inducted into the New Zealand Trust Business Hall of Fame.
- 3 In this paper, conflicts are defined as collective actions aimed at displacing and neutralising opponents (Williams 1994, p. 54). Accordingly, conflicts may be conceptualised as visible actions or substantial vocal activity of the host business groups aimed at expulsion of the ethnic group in business from the country or to restrict their activity. Indicators of conflicts will be articulated negative actions and attitudes of the domestic host population, which may be manifested, for instance as calls for expulsions of the ethnic business population, emerging in the media, or being the subject matter of parliamentary debates.

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## FROM ORAL HISTORY TO LEADERSHIP IN THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY: A FIVE YEAR JOURNEY WITH THE WAGGA WAGGA ABORIGINAL ELDERS GROUP INCORPORATED

Noelene Milliken, Sonia Shea and the  
Wagga Wagga Aboriginal Elders Group Incorporated

### Abstract ]

*This paper aims to identify the links that show how the establishment of an Aboriginal Elders Group in the Wagga Wagga community has contributed to the social capital of the Wagga Wagga Aboriginal Community. The paper will highlight the key educational episodes: oral history program; incorporation of the Elders group; self governance of the group, and confirmation of identities of community members that show how social capital has accrued and community capacity building has occurred. It will also highlight the leadership role and the accumulation of community civil capital that has developed for members of the Aboriginal Elders group over the time that they have been together.*

### Keywords ]

Social capital, Indigenous communities, vocational education and training, Aboriginal elders, NSW TAFE

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The formation of the Wagga Wagga Aboriginal Elders Group Incorporated occurred in 1999 when Sonia Shea, Aboriginal Programs Manager, NSW TAFE Riverina Institute provided funding for an oral history program. The program brought together older

### Introduction

**N**SW TAFE Riverina Institute Wagga Wagga Campus staff has a close working relationship with the Elders Group and provided the underpinning training and support which led to the formation of this valuable community group. The continuing educational role of the TAFE staff and the infrastructure that the Institute is able to bring to the relationship of staff and Elders is believed to enhance the effectiveness of the group in its role as community Elders. The Elders Group provides a representative focus for the consultative process when community educational and training programs are being discussed.

**Noelene Milliken** is a Foundation Studies teacher with NSW TAFE Riverina Institute Wagga Wagga Campus who works extensively in the field of Aboriginal Education. She is a language, literacy, numeracy and communication teacher. Noelene's involvement with the Wagga Wagga Aboriginal Elders Group has been one of the more rewarding areas of her teaching.

**Sonia Shea** is the Aboriginal Program Development Manager for NSW TAFE Riverina Institute. Sonia is a Ngunawal woman from the Yass district. Sonia was the instigator of the oral history program which led to the formation of the Elders Group and actively consults with the Elders to develop learning and training opportunities within the region.

members of the community and they met for one day a week for six weeks to talk together about their life experiences as Aboriginal people. They were fortunate to have in their group a younger woman who had computer skills, which she skilfully used to transcribe taped interviews and discussions. Since that initial six weeks the Elders have become a recognised group and once becoming an incorporated body have been able to put into practice their charter. The Elders charter (vision statement) states that the Elders Group has a commitment to reconciling their community and bringing about harmony within their community while at the same time promoting education and training as the way forward to self determination.

The Wagga Wagga Aboriginal Elders Group provides a focus and a connectedness to the Aboriginal Community in Wagga Wagga because of who the members are and what they believe in. Who they are refers to their name which was deliberately chosen to honour the many different nations and family groups who were resettled in the Wagga Wagga area. What they believe in underpins their commitment to reconciliation between themselves as Aboriginal people first, and a desire to move on to a *'new dreaming'* which allows all their community members to participate in society on an equitable footing. Not to forget the old but to look forward and help their younger generations to achieve their dreams. The Elders Group provides a forum for the coming together of the many disparate groups of Aboriginal people in the community who for many years have been isolated and disconnected due to resettlement.

### **The journey begins**

The learning process (in this case an oral history program) underpins the social capital provided by the Elders and provides the glue that holds

it all together is based on mutual trust and respect of each other and a shared understanding of each other's life journey. When compiling their oral history stories, which led to the writing of their book and the filming of the video *Making Waves for a New Dreaming* (2001), the people involved uncovered the many common threads of their collective identity as Aboriginal women. They are all women who have lived through significant times that had a big impact on who they are today. Even though their life journeys have been very different many of their experiences could only be directly attributable to their Aboriginality, a fact that must not be discounted in any way. Similarly, Vickers (1983, cited in Bawden 1998, p.13) states '...the conditions for survival are cultural rather than technological and human systems are different'.

By recording those experiences the women discovered a way that they could move forward based on the mutual understanding of and respect for each other's journey. By becoming an incorporated body they gave themselves a group entity which has enabled them to take a leading role in their Community. They entered into public life, began to work for their Community in both a voluntary and paid capacity and yet still managed to take the time necessary to support their extended and blended families. The 'civil society' that the social scientist Eva Cox (1995) envisages is very much a reality for these Aboriginal women. As a not for profit organisation the Elders have managed to keep a balance in their lives that is enviable but is also in keeping with their charter.

Their greatest contribution to the social capital of their Community is leadership. Aboriginal leadership is not an hereditary process. It is a process that occurs when the need arises. Elders do not have to be old. They are not elected. They simply come about in an idiosyncratic Aboriginal way. Elders are not

challenged. They may not always be listened to but they will be respected by dint of their being Elders. Their opinions will count in decision making. Their skills will be valued. Their contribution sought after. Their involvement with much of the Community decision making will be directly or indirectly canvassed. Elders will be approached individually or as a group and their acquiescence to a particular decision will often be the deciding factor in whether a direction will be taken. Part of their strength in the Community is their vast network and contact with many service providers and other community and family groups.

The Elders bring to that network a shared value(s) base that is culturally focused. A cultural norm that says simply we are all Aboriginal. We have different backgrounds, our personal cultures may vary but we have shared enough heritage and hardship to recognise each other. Their contribution and commitment to the confirmation of Aboriginal identity in their Community is testimony to this commitment. Their policy and procedures and processes developed have been carefully thought through and stand firmly on a clear understanding of what it means to be an Aboriginal person in all its many guises. To be accepted by the Elders is to have a rightful place in the Wagga Wagga Aboriginal Community. There is mutual trust of and by the Elders in the Community and there is a strong two way commitment. The Elders are committed to seeing their Community grow and advance and likewise the Community wants to see the Elders Group prosper and remain a part of the social capital that they enjoy.

Since forming their group five years ago (at the time of writing) the Elders have seen a coming together of local networks which has achieved considerable interactive productivity. Their work and involvement with NSW TAFE,

Charles Sturt University, Monash University, exchange TAFE groups from USA, visitors from Canada and local community groups could be said to be contributing to sustainable future activities. Their involvement in their Community has meant that Community activities have been linked and a chain of achievement created.

How the formation of the Elders Group and their Oral History Project learning impacted on the community and what it produced by way of social capital is shown in Figure 1.

The acquiring of new knowledge and information through the learning processes to develop the oral history project and the incorporation of the group lead very much to personal change among the Elders themselves. From being women who stayed at home and kept a very low profile they became publicly recognisable identities in the Community. The learning opportunities that the TAFE courses provided led to the interaction between the Elders themselves and many other groups in the Community. An outcome of that learning was the building of and accumulation of social capital norms, trust, shared values and commitment, which has led to social reform by way of a recognised and recognisable Aboriginal group identity within the broader community. The learning activities provided the currency to enable the relationship building to occur (Bawden, 1998, p 13).

There has been some economic benefit and currency of a different kind. The Elders Group is now sought after for paid work and significant grant monies have been attained since becoming incorporated. Both the social and economic reforms are therefore productive and their sustainability is evidenced by the five years the Elders Group has existed (at the time of writing) as well as the newer supported groups which have evolved in that

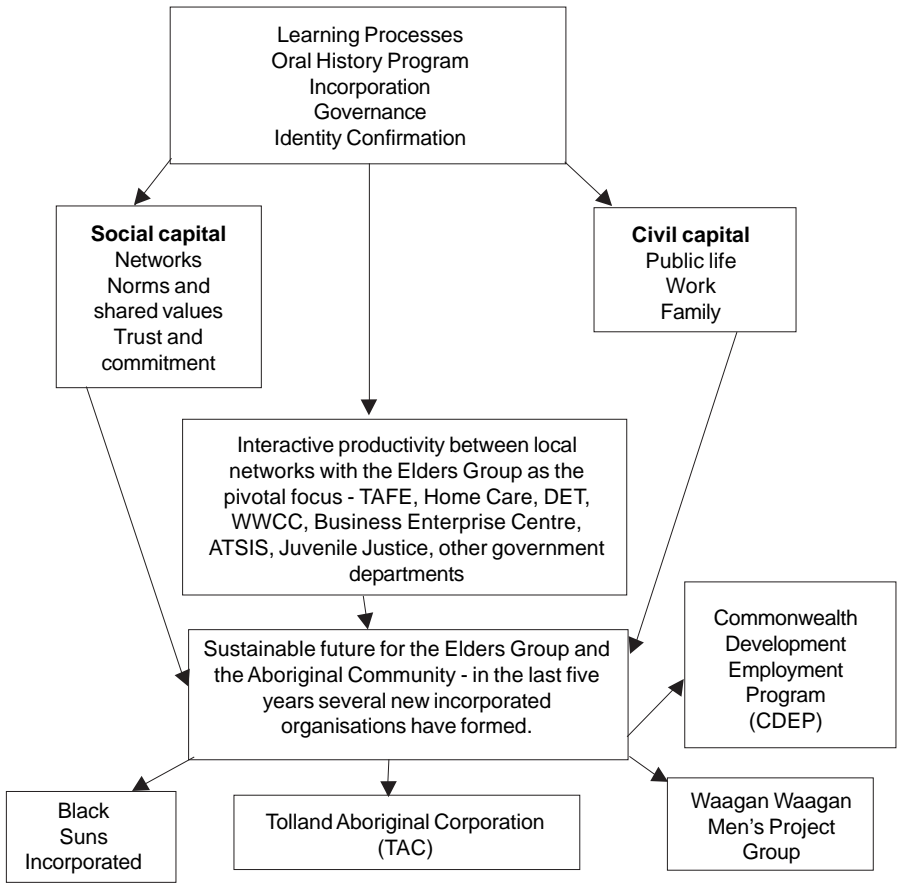


Figure 1: A flowchart of the journey of social capital development of the Wagga Wagga Aboriginal Elders Group

time the Black Suns, CDEP, Tolland Aboriginal Corporation, Waagan Waagan Men's Project Group (as shown in Figure 1). There are other groups being planned, which have the potential to provide economic and social capital benefits to the Wagga Wagga Aboriginal community. For example, a Wagga Wagga Aboriginal Dance Group is one new venture which was recently discussed with the Elders.

### How do we know the Elders Group is building social capital?

Can we say the Elders Group is amassing social capital? When we consider the three social capital indicators: knowledge resources of the community both on a personal and collective level are developed; identity of the community is established both in personal and collective arenas and a social and civic belongingness is

established; and consolidated understanding of and familiarity with community assets that can be shared for the mutual benefit of all members of the community. And if we accept the formula that community learning equals community capacity building, that is the ability to do certain things, then perhaps we are entitled to so state that the Elders Group is amassing social capital.

If we consider the learning moments and the milestones which are underpinned by that learning then perhaps we can conclude that community capacity building and thence social capital is occurring and that leadership has developed.

The Elders 'learning moment' context (Figure 2) is based on the idea put forward by Falk and Harrison (1998, p 6) that 'learning

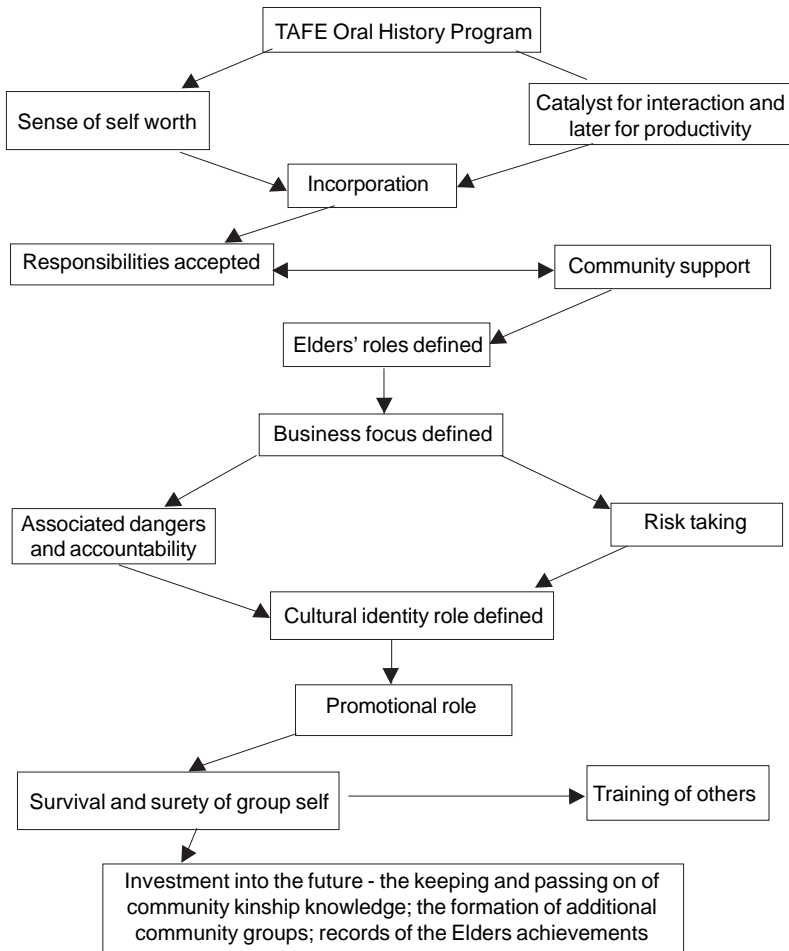


Figure 2: The Elders 'learning moment' context



only ever occurs in a particular socio cultural context'. It also demonstrates that community learning leads to the ability to do certain things, that is, community capacity building. The oral history program undertaken by the Elders became the catalyst that enabled them to take the next steps in their educational journey and at the same time build social and civil capital within their community.

When setting out to put some thoughts onto paper about the Elders' learning journey with TAFENSW it was necessary to consider what others more knowledgeable were saying about community capacity building. It seems that much of what is happening and has happened with the Elders' group is in tune with current thinking of the day. A community can be defined as a 'social system' which has common elements which are: 'human beings living in a locality and engaging in some form of interaction with one another.' (Lynn, 1994, p. 312) The Aboriginal community in Wagga Wagga is unique in its combination as it is a resettlement area for Aboriginal people and the need to establish strategies to address the issues in their community is very much at the forefront of the Aboriginal Elders charter of continuing the process of reconciliation within their community.

It is also said that community work practice is defined as a process that: brings people together and encourages the recognition and ownership of needs and problems; translates needs into strategies for action; forms coalitions with others who have common interests; challenges power relationships and structures to redress inequalities (Lynn, 1994, p.330). Re creation of community has become an aim of community work and in rural communities particularly it is not just re creation but recognition and ownership of the existing problems (Lynn, 1994, p. 330). This is

particularly so in the Wagga Wagga Aboriginal community and the Elders Group see part of their role as one of bringing their community together and that their 'community work is a process which can have valuable and empowering outcomes' (Lynn, 1994, p.330) for themselves and their community members. The Group and the work it does depends for its success on establishing a thorough understanding of the community's values and practices, networks and source of power, and developing a negotiated consensus of identified needs' (Lynn, 1994, p. 332). Dependency for the Elders on each other and their community is a reality of their struggle to survive. We are, after all, all dependent in one way or another. Our society depends upon wise governance at state, federal and community levels so that individuals and community groups can benefit from the largesse that might come their way.

It is the building of relationships within the Elders Group through the educational process of sharing their stories that has led to the growth of social capital within the community. The survival of the group depends upon the relationships they build with each other and with their community. Bawden (p13) tells us that 'relationship building ... is the essence of social capital, while learning is its currency' and that 'the conditions of survival are cultural rather than technological' and that 'human systems are different'. For the Elders Group the cultural aspects of the group's survival are significant as is survival for the individuals involved in the group. Education and the subsequent learning are seen to be the key to the survival of the very unique human system that the Elders represent.

However, Chaffe (p. 87) sees community capacity building as 'community mindedness where rural families focus on retraining and improving services' and that this focus will

'enable people to move from being a reactive follower to a person who is willing and able to choose their future.' Similarly the Elders Group has demonstrated that their 'community mindedness' to bring about reconciliation within their community will give their community a choice in what direction it will take to establish services and training opportunities. It is by building trust and striving for common goals that social capital accrues. Cox (cited in Dudfield, p. 94) tells us that 'social capital increases when we build trust and mutuality which allows us to feel valued and to value others.'

Once the Elders group was established and recognised as a community entity its value to the Aboriginal community as well as the broader community was quick to be recognised. This point is highlighted by Norton (cited in Dudfield, 1998, p. 96) who defines social capital as 'the relationships between people which are productive and create something of value'. The reconciliation approach that the group took enabled many disempowered members of the community, in consultation with the Elders, to have a voice. Non Aboriginal people also found that there was real value in consulting with the Elders in regard to community activities and developments. A real social change occurred as the Elders Group provided a focus for enhanced cultural activity and economic opportunities.

Falk, Harrison and Kilpatrick add to Norton's beliefs and extend the thinking by saying that 'social capital has a role in enhancing and producing socio economic outcomes' (1998, p.116) and that these outcomes require opportunity, conditions and process which all have to come together at the right (one might say opportune) moment. On their own these elements are not sufficient as they require a human (should one say humane?) element that might lead one to

consider Maslow's hierarchy of needs. As with any economic endeavour unless there is commitment to and for the 'good of others', community capacity building can become an exploitative situation where individual profit taking can be put before community benefit. The social capital gains are lost as individual benefit takes precedence.

Social capital facilitates action and exists in the relations among people and that trust is essential for a group to succeed along with common understanding of a shared meaning of trust (Falk et al, 1998). The authors (Falk et al, 1998 p.118) indicate that 'social capital is used up as it is produced' and this reflects the very significant aspect of social capital that is built by 'Yarn Up' meetings. For the Elders 'yarning up', i.e. meeting with other Elders and community members to discuss issues of concern, is part of their social capital construct as it is by sharing their experiences that they feed back information into the stores of community knowledge. 'Yarning up' may not always seek to find solutions but it provides the venue for discussion and allows for a variety of input from members of the community who feel safe to have their say about issues that concern them. The Elders are seen to be the leaders of the 'Yarn up' and will participate in the discussion but do not in any way try to dictate the outcomes of the discussion.

## **The Elders Group as true Community leaders**

One could then ask whether the Elders are true leaders in their community. Is their influence in their community sustainable? To consider this aspect of the Elders Group and the role it plays one needs to consider the current thinking about leadership and how it is defined. Gray and Williams (2002, p114) tell us that 'leaders derive no direct benefit

from their leadership, other than any rewards of office, including esteem' and that 'leadership [is] action which involves organisational work and hence some complex social relationships'. This is certainly true of the Elders Group. For the most part there is very little remuneration for individuals for the part they play in their community. They certainly receive many certificates of appreciation and have been recognised for their commitment to the community at local and state level but it is their organisational work within the community that makes them leaders. They are the hub around which significant community activity revolves.

The Elders Group takes a pluralistic approach to their leadership role and as a group it is representative of the many Aboriginal groups in Wagga Wagga rather than taking an elitist approach which would represent only one group. They are not appointed or elected leaders and the legitimacy of their leadership comes from their desire to see their community grow and prosper and they do everything they can to pursue the collective interest of their community thus assisting the development of social capital. Oxley, (cited in Gray & Williams, 2002, p. 119) reminds us that 'egalitarianism prevails in voluntary organisations' and that is truly the case in the Wagga Wagga Aboriginal Elders Group. However, we are reminded by Dempsey (1990, cited in Gray & Williams 2002, p. 119) that social exclusions based on race, gender and age do occur. The Elders group is an Aboriginal women's group and although younger women are encouraged to join the group they do not have voting rights until they are fifty years of age. There are no 'free riders' in the Elders group. All effort is for the collective good of the community but it does not come without effort to ensure 'that collective action results in collective gain and

is seen to do so [does] present a challenge' to the Elders and is definitely a challenge for their leadership role. (Gray & Williams, p. 119)

TAFENSW has a role to play to assist and support the Elders in their leadership role and does so at the local Wagga Wagga campus where all community interests and educational and training needs are recognised. To a certain extent TAFE can provide an arena in which issues can be resolved in a non judgemental and non sectarian manner. TAFE courses are available to all and with the Elders support and involvement TAFE is able to provide an inclusive training in an educational arena. TAFE is a 'peoples' corporation' which has a responsibility to all people in the community and responds to the needs of that community as far as practical when required. TAFE is able to promote the leadership role of the Elders Group knowing that the members of the group represent all Aboriginal family networks in the Aboriginal community.

## Conclusion

The external promotion of a group or individual that is not 'right' can have the effect of destroying long standing social capital within that community but this is not the case with the Elders Group. It is important that in community groups such as the Elders Group that leadership does not depend on just one person and the Elders are very mindful that they all must be equal to the task of representing their group and speaking publicly on behalf of their organisation. This egalitarian approach to leadership and power puts the Elders Group in a strong position within their community. Flora, Flora and Fey (1992, p. 252) suggest that power has 'the ability to make something happen that otherwise would not happen or to prevent something from happening that others wish to make happen'. Whether the Elders are able

to wield power by this definition remains to be seen but it is by dint of their very being that we believe that they have been instrumental in acting as a catalyst for some of the changes that are occurring within their community.

What is more important for the Elders Group is how whatever power they have is used in order that a difference in the quality of life for their community members can be achieved, and that the community reconciliation process does continue. Whether the Elders continue to provide an 'order of social coherence which develops on the basis of natural interdependence inheritance' (Schmalenbach 1961, cited in Bell & Newby, 1976, p. 61) remains to be seen. However, by providing a shared way of thinking and a forum for the expression of ideas within a collective cultural heritage they have begun the process and they will continue to contribute to the growth of social capital within their community. An interesting outcome which would not have been achieved if six women had not come together for a short six week course to tell their stories and have a yarn.

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## 'REAL' SOCIAL CAPITAL IN BALI: IS IT DIFFERENT FROM 'THE LITERATURE'?

Ian Falk and Kaler Surata

### Abstract ]

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*The research reported in this paper focuses on social capital in two of six sites from a larger project concerning the role of communities in managing plant pests and diseases in Australia and Indonesia. In these two Balinese sites, the focus is on the nature and role of interactive ties in the overall strategies community members utilise in their identification and management of plant pests and diseases. The established position on bonding, bridging and linking ties is represented by Woolcock and Narayan (2000) and Stone and Hughes (2001). However, in Australian work, Leonard and Onyx (2003) test the notion that bridging and bonding are two different types of connections, and suggest that '...people prefer to bridge through their strong ties' (p. 225). A greater on the ground understanding of the 'real' nature of social capital's network tie qualities is warranted, and would inform the accuracy of the 'real' nature of interactive ties, as well as the ways social capital is measured and judged. This paper explores the 'on the ground' nature of bonding, bridging and linking ties through reporting on data from a comprehensive multi methods study of two Balinese communities. It describes the nature of the 'real' social capital in these communities and suggests how it might vary from the social capital as described in 'the literature'.*

### Keywords ]

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Social capital, Indonesia, Bali, ties, bonding, bridging, linking, interactivity, learning

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### Backdrop to the research in Bali

**I**n the six sites of the larger study<sup>1</sup>, the focus is on the role of communities in identifying and managing the pests and diseases that impact on plant crops and broader quality and quantity of the food supplies. One component of the 'role of communities' is the ways in which social capital is (or is not) harnessed to improve community approaches to these biosecurity issues. This paper examines the ways in which the two Balinese communities utilise their social capital resources to solve problems about plant pests and diseases.

The context is the small island of Bali, one of more than thirteen thousand islands in the Indonesian archipelago. Bali's population is over three million people found in an area of 5663 km<sup>2</sup> a small but densely populated island in the tropics about one twelfth of the size of Tasmania. Until the 1970s, the predominant industry in Bali was agriculture, driven by the staple food crop of rice. Then tourism took over from agriculture as the dominant economic driving force, but in the Bali of post

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2002, following the bombings, tourism was severely shaken.

Underpinning the capacity of the Balinese people to hold out against five years (at time of writing) of bad times is, we argue, the social structure of Balinese communities, based on strong connections between family and community members cemented together by reciprocity. However, the system of interlocking kinship connections goes deeper than simply the 'feel of strong community'. The ties associated with the networks also form the fabric on which the success of the management of the rice irrigation networks rests. It is the intermeshed system of community network connections which provide the grist for the social capital mill of this research. It was anticipated that a country where particular identifiable strong learning networks have already been seen to operate successfully for socio economic advantage (Lansing, 2006) would provide a strong source of data for examining the 'real' nature of ties, bonds and reciprocity.

### Resources to action

What is the nature and role of interactive ties in Balinese communities as they become aware of, and manage threats and challenges such as plant pests and diseases? What resources can a community expect to draw on in their everyday actions and interactions to meet such challenges? How do 'bonding, bridging and linking ties' fit into the pattern and roles of interactive productivity in these communities? In this section, we describe the fundamental nature of interaction as the baseline social unit of socio cultural and economic productivity. It is important to note that the notion of 'productivity' is open ended: we do not imply a value for the outcomes (productivity) of interactivity, simply that from all interactions there is likely to be productivity, good, bad or neutral, of some kind.

From an external, 'objective' observer's viewpoint, interactivity seems to just 'happen'. People interact in a seemingly spontaneous and sometimes even haphazard fashion. However, such an observation belies the purposeful and important work of each and every interaction in producing socio economic outcomes. Even 'having a little chat' (Falk & Harrison, 1998) accomplishes important work in using, building and consolidating the social ties that, it can be argued, are resourced by various forms of capital. Flora (2004) has developed a framework of forms of community capital which provides a useful heuristic for this paper.

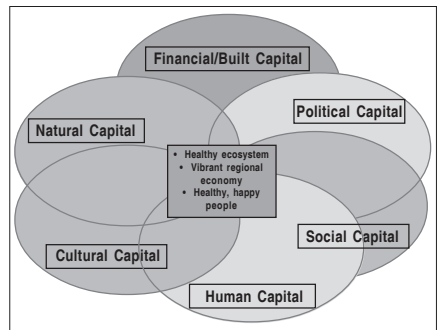


Figure 1: Intersections of forms of community capitals

(Source: Flora, 2004, p. 9)

Six forms of 'community capital' are depicted in the above figure. Social capital is noted as one of these. However, as the next section shows, social capital's role extends beyond that of simply 'another capital'.

### Interactivity, ecologies and social capital

While the previous section illustrates that there are different forms of capital available for the composite capacity of a community, what Flora (2004) describes as 'community capacity', it does not indicate *how* these resources are made available for use in achieving socio economic outcomes, and this is the notion of interactive

productivity. What we argue here is that, far from being just one of the capitals available for use in a community, the process of social capital formation is in fact the mill that grinds the social and economic order into place each and every moment of each and every day (Falk & Harrison, 1998; Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). Each time and place (site) of interactivity has its own purpose and because the achievement of different purposes requires different inputs, the features of the interactive 'ties' will differ. That is, different resources in different configurations are required at different times and different places to achieve particular purposes.

Much social science research in the last few decades focuses directly and only on people as individuals, as if their actions can be abstracted and understood in isolation from their interactions with other people, their places and objects. It is these very places and objects which, in fact, make their interactions meaningful. Studying people in isolation from their places and objects has resulted in many flawed policy and strategy implementations of research outcomes to occur. One of importance to this study that had highly deleterious impacts was the 'Green Revolution' that occurred in many parts of the world in the 60s and 70s, including Indonesia and, of relevance to this paper, Bali (Falk & Surata, forthcoming).

'Learning' is the academic discipline which is best suited to understanding the acquisition of new knowledge in the case of this paper, acquiring new knowledge about plant pests and diseases. Falk and Balatti (2004) find that learning occurs in different situations and environments that have different ecologies of which particular institutional and organisational characteristics are only one aspect. It is useful to think of these different learning sites and interactions as 'learning ecologies' which in turn draw on various resources for their successful iteration.

As earlier noted, the kinds of resources, or inputs, needed for interactivity are grist for the mill of social capital production and use (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) with essential components of knowledge and identity. The role of identity in acting as a filter, lens or screen in the learning process is not new. Wenger (1998) finds that, 'We accumulate skills and information, not in the abstract as ends in themselves, but in the service of an identity' (p. 215). Lesser and Storck's (2001) research expresses it differently but equally as strongly:

*...identity is important because it determines how an individual directs his or her attention. What one pays attention to is, in turn, a primary factor in learning. Therefore identity shapes the learning process.* (p. 832)

In all interactions, it is the engagement that brings to the fore the past experiences (identities, skills and knowledge) of the interactants (Falk, 2006). Simultaneously, these often unconscious choices from past experiences are guided by two factors: (a) facets of the interactants' identities, and (b) expectations of future scenarios that mix with identity resources to define the experiences selected. That is, the identity shaped selection of experiences forms the essence of learning that occurs in these engagements.

### **Social capital and interactive bonding, bridging and linking 'ties'**

Social capital is the network qualities that emerge from interactions between people and organisations. The interactions result in the production of positive or negative socio-economic outcomes (Coleman, 1988; Portes & Sessenbrenner, 1993; Putnam, 1995). The term 'interactive productivity' (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) used in this paper captures both the process of social capital production



(interaction) and the notion that there is an outcome, impact or product of some kind. Trust and reciprocity are qualities of these networks. Identity is a product of these networks and at the same time an input into the interactions (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) that occur in the networks. It is the work on ties, and the reciprocity bound up with them, which is therefore of particular relevance for this paper.

Stone and Hughes provide a summary of the nature of the different network ties as established in earlier work on social capital by, for example, Woolcock and Narayan (2000). Stone and Hughes (2001) describe the distinction between social capital's bonding, bridging and linking ties in these ways:

- Bonding social capital is characterised by high levels of close, closed and densely knit networks and associated high levels of familiar/personalised trust and reciprocity.
- Bridging social capital involves more sparse ties with people/organisations that are diverse, or heterogenous. These types of connections relate to generalised trust, beyond trusting relationships with people who are familiar or known.
- Linking ties are vertical, and involve ties with people/organisations in power/authority. These types of ties are associated with trust in governance and expert systems (Giddens, 1990; Black & Hughes, 2001 Stone & Hughes, 2001 p. 4).

From the above definitions, we note considerable looseness here: first we have 'bonding social capital' and the word 'ties' is not mentioned. Then we have 'bridging social capital' with 'sparse ties', then finally we have 'linking ties' which are indeed named as 'ties'. These distinctions reflect the 'established' position on these three types of ties and, with a couple of exceptions, this paper is concerned

with the nature of ties, whether bonding, bridging or linking.

However, in some Australian work, the above distinctions are questioned. For example, Leonard & Onyx (2003) test the work of Woolcock and Narayan (2000) who argue that bridging and bonding are two different types of connections, whereby bridging is associated with loose ties across communities and bonding is associated with strong ties within a limited group. Leonard & Onyx's results suggest that '...loose and strong ties are not synonymous with bridging and bonding' (p. 225). Moreover, '...people prefer to bridge through their strong ties' (p. 225). They find '...that a model for a high social capital society might be a chain of well bonded groups each with strong links to some other groups' (p. 225). Here, Leonard and Onyx refer to bonded groups that have links of various kinds, presumably as a way of clarifying the issue of ties. The latter finding is of high relevance for this chapter on Balinese social capital, since it suggests that for high social capital, strong bonding need to be firmly in place, and that it is more likely to be these 'ties' that are in fact preferred to be used for bridging and often linking purposes. Leonard and Onyx do not dispute the need for the different functions served by bonding and bridging, rather they suggest that these functions can be served by the same 'ties'. Frankly, none of this really helps understand what a 'tie' is, nor how it is the same or different from a 'link' or indeed from 'social capital' itself (see Stone and Hughes 2001 quote above which effectively equates social capital with ties through their linguistic use in the three definitions they forward).

## Social capital in Bali

Studies of social capital in Bali itself are few. Lansing (2006) finds that networks of particular characteristics can become flexible problem solvers and improve the features of

the system that enable it to learn and adapt. Marshall, Patrick, Muktasam & Ambarawati (2006) find that the greater success of community systems of micro financing in Bali compared with those of Lombok lies in the nature and extent of reciprocity in the bonded ties at village level. Patrick, Marshall, Muktasam & Ambarawati (2006) also raise some questions for Stone and Hughes' (2001) definition of linking ties.

### **Rice paddy irrigation systems and social capital**

Rice and the management of its irrigation systems still dominates the activities and thinking of the majority of Balinese people today. Those in the tourist sector, or associated arts and handcrafts industries, nevertheless retain strong ties with rice, which is also embedded in the island's daily religious activities. The Balinese *subaks* are the systems of physical and human networks linking the irrigated rice paddy networks. Balinese rice terrace irrigation systems are regarded as unique in the world for their scope and interconnectedness. It is these systems which provide a documented way of understanding the structure and scope of social capital in Bali.

A subak is the local organization which manages a collection of sawahs (rice terraces) with interlinked irrigation and drainage systems, forming ecological systems that cover the majority of the small island from high in the mountains to the coastline. All owners of rice paddies belong to the local subak. There are many perhaps between 10 and 20 subaks in even one region of Bali, and they are all interlinked organizationally, spiritually, economically and infrastructurally through irrigation and the networks that manage the irrigation. Each collection of 10 20 or more subaks has an organisational focal point of a water temple, epitomising the integration of

the spiritual basis of the village with its economic, vocational, cultural and social bases. Each subak, in itself a network of inter related sawahs, is also linked with all the other subaks in the same water catchment area. There may be around 100 300 subaks in one catchment area, and all form a complex, inter related, flexible network that in reality integrates the socio cultural, spiritual, economic, vocational, village and family life of Balinese society.

Lansing's (2006) work spans decades and focuses on networks and network characteristics from anthropological and cross disciplinary bases. Lansing (2006) describes some of the features of these networks that develop and respond to complex environmental, agricultural and social situations:

*The ability to shift the scale...is what gives...networks their ability to manage the ecology. With that ability the ... networks become flexible problem solvers....[Moreover] adaptive systems do...not focus on optimizing one solution, but rather on improving the features of the system that enable it to learn and adapt... (p. 15).*

The subak system of interlocking networks of networks requires cooperation and reciprocity for the maintenance of its ecology between the socio economic, physical, environmental, cultural, spiritual, community, village and family aspects of Balinese life, but there are other studies of social capital in Bali.

Marshall et al. (2006) report on a comparative study of social capital in Bali and its neighbouring island of Lombok concerning small agricultural business micro financing. They find that the greater success of the community systems of micro finance delivery in Bali compared with those of Lombok lies in the nature and extent of social capital as evidenced by the nature of the reciprocity in the close bonded ties at village level:

*...the fact that community delivery in Bali was through the desa adat (traditional village) institutions and [traditional rules or norms] which retain a strong influence on actual behaviour, including in encouraging and enforcing loan repayments. In contrast, this community strength was not so evident in Lombok. (Marshall et al., 2006, p. 19)*

Further Balinese research into bridging ties by Patrick et al. (2006) raises some questions for Stone and Hughes's (2001) definition of linking ties as being '...associated with trust in governance and expert systems' (p. 4). Patrick (2004) concluded that:

*...with regard to the seed rice contract, participation was influenced by irrigated land ownership and group (subak) membership.... Instead of individual smallholder characteristics influencing participation it was community characteristics and social capital. (p.ix)*

This research shows direct links between the macro structure of subak membership and community level meso characteristics.

In Bali, banks were more likely to become involved in lending activity because they perceived some groups to have the institutional or community structures/incentives to ensure repayment. That is, effective 'linking' ties were only effective when other structural elements of the community were in place at community and individual level. Patrick et al. (2006) re affirm, it is the:

*...characteristics of the community, not just individual smallholders [that] may be important in determining who participates effectively in the market for new agricultural commodities....the ability of particular groups to access contracts, manage (and hence access) community finance systems and government assistance programs may also be influenced by other factors such as the strength of the group... (p. 4)*

That is, there is empirical support from a number of research areas for shifting our gaze

from the individual entity to the nature of the ties evident when the entities *interact* with each other in search of social, economic, environmental and cultural ecological stability. The significance of these findings for the present paper lies in the nature of the bonded ties. It is not simply the mere existence of these ties as being based on relationships, but the fact that the ties are locked into the formal social structures of traditional customs and strongly held norms or laws. The 'law' follows a kind of hierarchy of relationship based obligations of reciprocity first to God, then to village members, then to family members.

## **A methodology to suit the context**

A 'mixed methods' approach was utilised in this study. Methods were combined in a variety of ways. The literature describes several ways of looking at different mixed methods approaches (e.g. Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Miller, 2003; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007), which allow researchers to, on the one hand make deductions from empirical data, while on the other hand test these deductions with the inferences that emerge to both test hypothesis and build theory (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003). This combination effectively validates the findings of both data sources, a strategy which was employed in the research reported here.

A total of 185 respondents were interviewed (Bali Site A: 85, Bali Site B: 47, Kupang West Timor Site C: 53). The two Balinese sites which this paper is concerned with were identified according to a set of criteria related to diversity of economy, location and relevance to biosecurity issues. Site A is a community in the heart of the tourist zone of Bali, partially to capture information about the passage and knowledge of tourists (2.5 hours flying time to Darwin, Australia) and partially because of the response to these issues by the local community.

Site B is a community in a remote, rural region of Bali whose core activities revolve around agriculture and the ways agricultural produce finds its way to markets locally and nationally.

Data was gathered using formal interviews, informal open ended interviews, closed questionnaires and observation. These were tailored for the different audiences of community leaders, farmers, tourists, policy personnel and women. Interview data were transcribed first in Balinese and Indonesian according to the language of the original interview. The resulting quantifiable data was analysed in a variety of different ways, including the use of standard statistical packages and techniques such as regression analysis. The qualitative components from interviews conducted face to face as well as from the open ended sections of questionnaires were analysed using thematic analyses (e.g. Boyatzis, 1998; Silverman, 2001) with guidance from Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie's (2003) idea of a 'intrarespondent thematic matrix to determine the relationship among the meta themes (p. 359)'. Frameworks such as Flora's (forthcoming) 'capitals' framework were applied to selected passages of conversation to elicit deeper levels of possible meanings, and certain linguistic techniques related to the kind of conversation analysis based on ethnomethodology (e.g., Boden, 1994) were used in the same exploratory and confirmatory fashion. Finally, it is noted that the data were analysed on a site by site basis, then the data was subjected to a cross site analysis as well (often called a cross cutting analysis). In this paper, only a portion of the qualitative data is considered and their analyses reported. A more detailed coverage is found in Falk and Surata (2007).

### **About Site A: Tourist destination**

This community is among the top 3 beach destinations for tourists in Bali. Site A has an

area of 305 hectares varying between 2 and 10 metres above sea level. The more or less permanent population is 3331 of which more than half (57.4%) work in the retail sector, selling goods such as wood carvings, clothing, artwork, place mats and decorations of various kinds to tourists (BPS, 2006a). The tourist population itself has fluctuated in the last few years since the bombings at Kuta and Jimboran. BPS (2005-6) notes that the total tourist numbers for Bali in 2005 were 1,388,984 and in 2006 1,262,537, but figures for this site are not available.

In Site A, two distinct clusters of interviewees were interviewed: the people from the community itself community leaders, women, youth and others:

#### **(a) The community**

Interviews were conducted with 2 community leaders, 2 government leaders, 2 from the youth leadership group, 2 from the women's leadership group, 33 community members and 5 outsiders.

#### **(b) The tourists**

Thirty nine (39) tourists were interviewed. As noted in the Methods section of this paper, the interview schedule for the tourists was tailored for this group and differed in several respects from the schedules for the communities. The tourists were drawn from a wide range of nationalities and age range as follows:

- a. Europe 4, Japan 1, Malaysia 3, Australia 12, Thailand 4, USA 2, Taiwan 1, Russia 2.
- b. Ages were as follows: 17-25 years 17, 26-35 years 6, 35 years and over 16.

The results of the interviews are reported in the results and findings section of this paper.

### **About Site B: Remote, rural and agricultural**

Site B is, for Bali, a remote and rural area with a strong agricultural base. It is located close to the central mountains about two hours drive from the Provincial capital of Denpasar and has an

area of 1,200 hectares. The population is 7,829 of which approximately two thirds (64.9%) who work in the agricultural sector (BPS, 2006b). Here, agriculture is a majority of wet rice grown in irrigated rice paddies, but with a good representation of other dry farming mixed crops such as coffee, cocoa, vegetables, corn and livestock such as chickens and cattle.

Interviews were conducted here with two community leaders, 1 government leaders, three from the youth leadership group, three from the women's leadership group and 38 community members.

### Results and discussion

A selection of the results of the interviews and analyses that focus on the structure and dimensions of social capital interactivity from the two Balinese sites is now reported. Through the first set of analyses, we show how social capital is central to getting a job done, solving a problem, disseminating new knowledge and so on. To accomplish this, we present the results of an analysis of resources, or capitals of various kinds that are required for effectiveness in

community problem solving or change management. We use the Flora framework of capitals for this purpose (Flora forthcoming). We follow this with an analysis of the social capital structures and processes in the two communities. What follows then is a discussion about the results in terms of the relationships and embedded interactive sets that build social capital in purpose related activities.

#### Site A. Social capital through relationship-based interactive ties

The setting is a *banjar* in Site A. A *banjar* is two things: (a) an open sided, large community building used as the focus for community activities, and (b) the name for the local government organisation where government and traditional policy is brought together and administered. The interview is with a senior *banjar* leader, a male. The following piece of data is in response to the researcher's question in italics at the top of the table. The answer is transcribed in the left column, and the notation as to the forms of capital drawn on in the interactive productivity are in the right column.

Table 1: Transcript segment 1 with capitals commentary

<i>Question: What institution/organizations (private or public) have continuously implemented a particular program here?</i>	
<b>Transcript answer</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
For the last three years, we . . . . . have carried out collaborative work . . . . . with several hotels . . . . . here to conserve the local river . . . . . and do some tree planting. . . . . Besides that, we have cleaned up our environment. The hotels . . . . . with their staff . . . . . work with the community. . . . . Sometimes the hotels . . . . . assist the village . . . . . and give money to buy. . . . . seed for the trees and for other things. . . . . needed to help clean up the environment. . . . .	ORGANISATIONAL CAPITAL SOCIAL CAPITAL BUILT & FINANCIAL CAPITAL NATURAL CAPITAL NATURAL CAPITAL NATURAL CAPITAL BUILT CAPITAL HUMAN CAPITAL SOCIAL CAPITAL BUILT CAPITAL SOCIAL CAPITAL FINANCIAL CAPITAL NATURAL CAPITAL NATURAL CAPITAL

There are 15 occurrences of capitals, spread across six types, including 'organisational capital'. The passage illustrates the role of social capital's networks which are the agents of the relationships of collaboration that are involved in the local river project. The project is a partnership (relationship) between the community on the one hand, and business and industry on the other hand. The analysis using the framework of Flora's capitals identifies conceptual categories as they are referred to in the narration of the event. The agency for interactive productivity is relationship based networks where social capital is generated and drawn upon. Social capital networking events are where the human capital of 'staff' can be utilised. The collaborative events (social capital) are where the resources of the hotels (built and financial capital) can be harnessed by the community. The common purpose is quite a complex one – the restoration and sustaining of a river's ecosystem, yet it is only through deliberately arranging opportunities (events) where social capital's networks (getting together) are activated that these other resources (financial, human, built and natural capital) can be released for the community's benefit.

That is, the local government organisation which is the organisation mentioned in line one ('we') is the hub of a number of intersecting relationship based networks, all of which are responsible for a part of the overall project. Each network contributes a different capital resource to the interactive productivity of the project in hand. For example, there is the network activity associated with the hotels which produce human ('with their staff') and financial ('give money to buy') capital which, through other local government organisation networks, gets applied to natural capital assets ('seeds for trees', 'clean up the environment'). In logical sequence, the relationship is

established through partnerships or collaborations, then networking activities can occur that generate and use social capital. These networking activities consist of sets of interactive ties between people as they go about working towards a common purpose.

However, while researchers tend to tease things apart to examine their components (for example, the various 'capitals' in the interactive event above), it is important to recognise that the interactive productivity occurs in a complex web of simultaneously occurring, relationship based 'sets of interactive ties'. The 'analytic outcome' for the researchers can help understand why something works and what its parts are, but each part will not work in isolation from the others. For example, human capital does not, nor can it, exist in a vacuum from the network activity that releases it for consumption. The real situation is inevitably dynamic, shifting, complex and interconnected. Single 'things' are inseparable in the act of people engaged in the act of social interaction. At the core of 'real' social capital, then are people. People are simultaneously members of different relationships, within these relationships they have sets of interactive ties with the people who are members of that relationship field. Micro interactions within these fields build into large scale social and community activities involving organisational and group interactions such as partnerships, meetings and other collaborations.

### **Site B. Identity, social capital and complexity in the priest**

As stated earlier, our focus is on the nature and role of interactive ties at the local level in the overall strategies community members utilise in their identification and management of plant pests and diseases. When interactive ties are in action, various resources to those



actions are mobilised. These resources can be broadly categorised into two groups: knowledge resources and identity resources (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). During interaction, the knowledge resources possessed by the participants are enacted through the conversations or activities. Equally as important as the knowledge they bring to interactions is the 'different hats' they wear at different times and at different stages of the interactions that influence the way participants think and act. These 'different hats' are what we refer to here as identity resources (e.g. Côté & Levine, 2002; Falk & Balatti, 2003; 2004; Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Lesser & Storck, 2001). This analysis shows how one person's identity resources stem first from his relationships, and in turn those resources shed light on the nature and complexity of the 'ties'.

The data reported here is from in depth interviews in Site B with a central figure who is a priest. He was identified as having remarkable networks displaying a range of functions and types of 'ties'.

The following encapsulates some elements of the priest's relationships and the resulting relationship based ties that follow. Note that identities related to 'place' (Falk & Balatti, 2003; 2004) are often not explicit in this kind of data because of their all pervasiveness. However, concepts of place are central in Balinese life, and in their religion, as is clear in the example below where offerings are made in many strategic 'places' in the family home, community and further a field locations on the island.

First, the priest's family relationship from which his primary identity resource flows is 'married with three sons', the youngest being a toddler. The first son is of working age and has a speech impediment which earlier caused the priest and his wife considerable thought as to the most appropriate career for him. The

second son is also of working age. Second, the priest has an identity as one of two middle level priests that serve this community, the higher level priest being located and operating at a more regional level. As a well respected priest in his community, he is sought after for a range of advice about a range of priestly matters including the kinds, configurations and quantities of offerings (usually made of plant material including flowers) required for different religious occasions. A little background on these offerings is important to aid the readers' understanding:

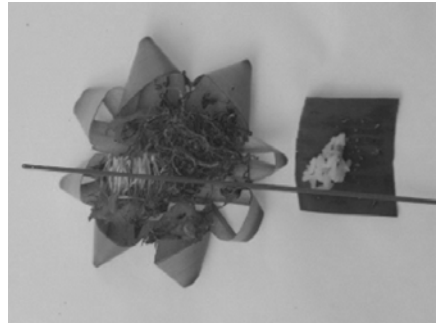


Figure 2: Typical mandalic offering associated with Balinese Hinduism

Pictured above is one morning's typical offering made at perhaps 14 – 20 locations around a typical Balinese home. The floral offering is woven of coconut leaf, fixed in the shape of a particular religious mandala and decorated with particular flowers and leaves. There must be at least three different kinds of flowers for any one offering. The fresh cooked rice on banana leaf is offered in the same twice daily ceremony, and the incense sticks lit to accompany the offerings. In a typical home, around 14 – 30 of these small offerings are laid out in different locations around the house and yard during each round of offerings, morning and late afternoon. As can be seen from the resources quantity and labour



involved (human, natural, financial and cultural capital), keeping pace with the religious requirements on a daily basis is a large and expensive task, magnified many times during one of the frequent special occasions which occur for all of life's stages and daily socio-cultural practices such as building, or blessing a new acquisition for the family (such as a work tool, stages of building or renovating a home described in Falk & Surata, (forthcoming), or buying a motor bike). In addition to the routine daily small offerings and the special occasion ones, 'middle sized' offerings are made around five times a month for the home, four times a year at the family temple (see below), six times a year for the village temple and 14 per year for both home and village.

The following picture is of a small sample of fruit and floral constructions offered at a family temple ceremony, one of only many occasions and locations where offerings are made (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Fruit and floral construction for family temple offering

As can be seen by comparing with the size of the fruit, these are large scale constructions taking days and many resources to complete.

In Bali, it is usual for priests to also have income producing activities, since the community roles of priests are unpaid. Our priest and his wife operate three additional businesses: (a) Marketing cultural resources: Offerings and cultural performances, (b) Market stall: Shirts and DVDs, and (c) Chicken farms. These enterprises are all based on close ties which are part of family (nuclear and extended) relationships

Let us now look at each of these businesses in turn to see how social capital, relationships and ties might be at work here. Brackets refer to the type of sets of interactions – bonding, bridging or linking. Occasional note is made of various 'capitals' referred to in the earlier analysis in order to remind the reader of the integration of these resources into the interactive productivity shown here.

### (a) Marketing cultural resources

The priest is, as noted above, often called on for religious advice by other community members (bridging) who need to know what type and configuration of offering is required for different purposes. Many people do not have time to make their own, so need to buy them, and they seek the priest's advice on this as well. He uses his relationship base to draw on resources: he has an aunt called here Aunt One (Aunt Two figures later). Aunt One (bonding) makes these offerings and the priest refers many people to her to purchase the requirements. The priest is given a commission by Aunt One for this referral service, providing a part income (financial capital).

The priest is an experienced shadow puppeteer in the Wayan Kulit tradition (cultural capital). He creates dances including barong dance ('topeng' using face masks depicting

figures from religious history) and music (gamelan traditional orchestra) and is in demand to perform in other places as well. He has set up his first son (bonding) in the Wayan Kulit, dance and performance business (financial capital). The voice impediment is no problem when topeng is involved since the face masks and dance do not involve voice. Same for the Barong dance where the dancer operates (with a colleague) inside a large costume similar to a dragon. The priest's wider relationship and links are with the Provincial government department of culture (linking). He is held in such respect that his dance, music and puppeteering is commissioned annually by this department for a Provincial level (equivalent in Australia to a State in Australian or US terms) arts and crafts exhibition attracting international and national interest. Of further note is that, in addition to the first son, the priest is training (human capital) his wife in the art of Wayan Kulit as well, and she has had recent exposure at the annual arts festival.

### **(b) Market stall**

Aunt Two (bonding) makes and buys shirts. The priest and his wife buy these and each morning sell them at two traditional markets nearby (bridging). They sell other items as well, including DVDs of their Wayan Kulit performances, dance and gamelan music to extended community members (bridging).

### **(c) Chicken farms**

The priest operates three chicken farms with a total of 18,000 chickens. The idea here is that you buy young stock and grow them, with a guaranteed purchaser in the central Chicken Farm Business Organisation (CFBO). It is important to note here that licences to buy young chicks for the farms are not easy to acquire and require the central CFBO to trust you and know you can deliver on your promises. The priest's relationship is with the Manager

of the CFBO and he has a long and trusting relationship with this man. As a result of this set of bridging and linking interactions, the priest has been able to act as a guarantor and establish his cousin, Cousin One, as being worthy of standing as a chicken farmer with the Manager of CFBO. Cousin One is, however, poor, and the family does not have the necessary finances to buy into a chicken farm. To help overcome this, the priest has established a relationship, therefore, between Cousin One and another cousin who is wealthy and lives in the city. Cousin Two did not know Cousin One well at all, but through the priest's auspices, Cousin Two is now financing Cousin One in the new business. He is also training Cousin One as a driver (human capital) for his business transport needs.

## **Discussion**

First we offer a caution. We do not claim to generalise from these examples of the data but to suggest a new schema or model for testing. Generalising is neither possible nor the purpose of the analyses. The analyses are illustrative, and selected to suggest that resources to action are not fixed in either their configuration or their quantities. As noted, one use of data such as these is to suggest models based on patterns found. The analyses here illuminate the ways relationships form the foundational fields in which sets of interactions occur. Each interactive set draws on certain resources, or capitals through the use of social capital interactivity. The relationship based interactive fields that occur about particular events also have diverse kinds of 'sets' of interactions – bonding, bridging and linking sets. In the first analysis (restoration and sustaining of river ecology), the combination of bonding, bridging and linking 'sets' of interactive events are used to get things done and manage change. These sets are sourced in relationships related to partnerships. In the

second analysis, the priest's different interactive fields are relationship based and contingent on aspects of his identity as a priest, father, cousin, nephew, acquaintance or friend. Within these relationship fields there are different sets of purpose related interactions which we can see named in the priest's data as bonding, bridging or linking.

These limited findings of the Bali sites support the social capital literature in respect that it finds there are differences in how sets of relationship based interactions are used. There are relationships, and people have different sets of interactions within these relationships. These sets of interactions each have different purposes, and may be for bonding, bridging or linking. The priest had, for example, a relationship and a particular identity with Aunt One, but that relationship itself could not be classified accurately as either bonding, bridging or linking. It is the sets of purpose related activities *within* that relationship field that can be named as bonding, bridging or linking. In the case of Aunt One, the priest uses this relationship for various purposes: there are sets of events that are bonding interactions, and sets of interactions that act as a bridge for resources to flow. That is, in the one interactive field, different functions/purposes may be served.

The latter articulation tends to support Leonard and Onyx's (2003) finding when they say that '...loose and strong ties are not synonymous with bridging and bonding' (p. 225). Moreover, '...people prefer to bridge through their strong ties' (p. 225). However, as is now discussed more fully, the analyses raise some question about the word 'ties' as used in the social capital literature. The literature confuses the relationship with the purpose and outcome of the interactive sets that are embedded in the interactive field. 'Ties' are often equated with the 'relationship' as opposed

to the purpose of the sub sets of interactions within the main interactive field. The classic example used is the bonding ties of the mafia. Indeed it is not the ties necessarily that are 'bonded' so much as the sub sets of interactions within that overall set of mafia relationships.

To further the discussion about an emerging articulation of the nature of relationship fields, sets of interactions and their potential for productivity, we therefore propose a schema that elaborates on the nature of network ties and relationships (based on aspects of identity) as follows: The grounded data we have from this research suggests a clarification of the terms based on their sequence of interactive production i.e.,

- (a) The first is the relationship (interactive field) between those producing the interactions.
- (b) The second is the specified set of interactions (interactive set) coming out of that relationship which have a common purpose/intent/function/intended outcome, and when we look at a particular set and its purpose, we are then in a position to identify and describe
- (c) the third group, which is the type of interactive set; these may be a bonding type, a bridging type or a linking type.
- (d) In the fourth stage we are in a position to mark out interactive productivity as it is found to occur.

On the basis of the above, we therefore suggest a qualification to the use of the term 'tie'. We simply cannot 'find' data supporting the notion of a pure 'tie' at the point of real live interactive production. The nearest a 'tie' gets in relation to the categories above is at (b), the specified set of interactions, but 'tie' is misleading in that it suggests people only have one type of tie or another and that these ties

depend on the *relationship*. The data, however, suggest otherwise: The *relationship* spawns *interactive sets* of different *types*.

In diagrammatic terms, the suggested re structure of terms can be encapsulated in figure 4.

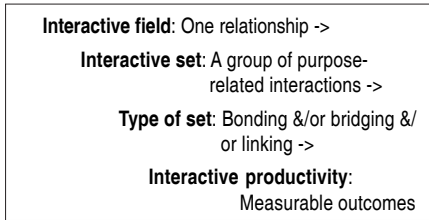


Figure 4: Articulation of network interactions

What seems to be important across all fields of interactions is that the function of the interaction depends on the specific and commonly held purpose of the communication as inflected by the aspects of identity of the interactants.

### Summary and conclusions

It is difficult to see how one could generalise about the use, worth or value of, say, bonding 'ties' without knowing the purpose or function that the tie was used for in a particular situation, nor how its use then compared in importance with another use of a different kind of 'tie'. That is, in this research, the purpose determines the function (bonding, bridging or linking) to which the tie is put, and in any one relationship, there are possibly many interactive sets embedded. The priest has a relationship of some kind (family, friend etc) and each interactant depends on the other for something

the priest has cultural resources that the government department wants, and he uses that relationship for enhancing the human capital of Son One and his wife each of which has that common purpose or interest at its heart. However, the data also show that the descriptions of bonding, bridging and linking

in the literature need some qualification if they are to be meaningful at the local level where the work of identities is done. That is, a 'tie' is one purpose related 'interactive set', and there can and often are all three types of interactive sets (bonding, bridging and linking) embedded in the one field of relationship interactivity.

Finally, of equal if not more importance to these authors is a methodological and analytic point. The pieces of data chosen and analysed above show up the inadequacy of focusing on a single analytic category (e.g., 'social capital', 'human capital', 'natural capital' or even 'identity') as a cause or solution to a problem or issue. The real situation is inevitably complex, dynamic and interconnected. Single 'things' are inseparable in the act of social interaction, as the 'capitals' and the priest analyses have demonstrated. Social capital is shown in the example of the priest to be drawn on and built during interactions. But at these points of interaction the actual data *are* the interactions, not the individual components of capital that are drawn on as resources for action. Taking social interaction at the level of data seriously (in this case the questions and answers in interviews) is vital if we are to understand the complexity of concepts such as identity and its role in communities' capacity for change. For it is these interactions that build into large scale social and community activities involving interactions such as partnerships, meetings, collaborations and relationships between people of a less formal kind. These are the issues we need to understand better if we are to break new ground in working constructively and collaboratively with communities to understand and manage biosecurity. Interaction as displayed through identities is at the core of the production and use of 'capitals' and resources of all kinds. We therefore call for more serious scholarly work on identity and interactivity as a source of data and analytic outcomes.

## Endnotes

1 The larger project is resourced by the CRC for National Plant Biosecurity, reported in detail in Falk & Surata (2007) *Community strategies for managing biosecurity*

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# BOOK REVIEWS

## WATER POLITICS IN THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN

Connell, D. (2007)

*Annandale, NSW Australia: The Federation Press. ISBN 978 1 862867 633 0 pp. xii + 241 RRP AUD 49.95 paperback.*

Kathleen Bowmer

Charles Sturt University

This book is developed from a PhD undertaken during Connells 'four good years' at the Australian National University Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, and draws on his experience during eight years with the Murray Darling Basin Commission where he went 'still largely a prisoner of my background in the humanities and learnt that science and engineering are interesting as well as important'. Connell comments that PhD support from Land & Water Australia kept him focused on the need to search for elements of water policy that will benefit both production and sustainability.

As might be expected from his background and experience, Connell is able to cross traditional discipline boundaries with ease and eloquence, approaching the challenges of natural resources policy and management with a depth of scientific understanding against a carefully researched historical and political backdrop. He details and explains the reasons behind complex decision making and state federal tensions, taking an appropriate independent and scholarly position to describe the history of water politics in the Basin. However, in later chapters which cover more recent developments, notably the National

Water Initiative and '10 billion dollar rural water plan' (now the National Plan for Water Security) he gives an incisive and critical analysis of approach and prospects for success. I agree with Connell that the sophisticated hydrological knowledge that is required to implement the National Water Initiative at a catchment level is not yet available, and that there is as yet no agreed definition of sustainability to underpin these new policies.

I recommend this book as a very comprehensive account of water politics in the Murray Darling Basin. The structure is: Chapter 1 a context for talking about water; Chapter 2 governments take control, 1880 1920's; Chapter 3 establishing a public policy framework, 1900 1980's; Chapter 4 another attempt at basin wide management in the 1980's; Chapter 5 contradictions within contemporary water management; and Chapter 6 responsibility for reform, what should be done.

I found the book well written, with copious footnotes, bibliography and handy index. Concepts in water management such as the 'cap' (pp. 158 59) and the salinity management strategy (pp. 134 44) are explained as lucidly as I have seen anywhere. The summary of significant events and developments (pp. ix x) is a useful framework for the text.

I agree with the statement in the Prologue that 'Bored alienation is the usual response from most people to the seemingly interminable discussions about water policy. Boredom restricts



participation and decision making to special interest groups and technocratic elites. We must restore colour and excitement to the great saga of water management'. The next edition might be enhanced by a little more attention to layout, illustrations and colour, and be updated on the saga of the National Plan for Water Security and the formation of the new Murray Darling Basin Authority.

My only quibbles are minor. I would have appreciated a little expansion of the options in the 'core task of institutional design' which is raised in the Epilogue. A key question 'What combination of laws, policies, organisational structure and cultural values will promote patterns of behaviours and decision making to implement sustainable management systems?' is raised but not answered. Instead it remains a challenge for the future.

\* \* \*

## ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY: AUSTRALIAN PRACTICE IN THE CONTEXT OF THEORY

Thomas, I. (2007)

*Annandale, NSW Australia: The Federation Press. ISBN 978 1 86287 603 3 pp 493  
RRP AUD 69.50 paperback.*

Ingrid van Putten

University of Tasmania

**A** stated aim of this book is to provide a starting point for gaining a background in environmental policy or for developing and/or implementing such policy (p. v). Although the book does provide a comprehensive coverage of this policy field a coverage relevant to its fulfilling this aim it does not make it easy for readers to find the information they seek. Although the index provides a broad ranging list of terms and the overall organisation is rational, in the individual chapters information is presented in a

There are a few errors: Wodonga misspelt on page 155 and a few inconsistencies in referencing.

Overall I highly recommend this book as essential reading for students and professionals with interests in natural resource policy and management as well as water issues specifically. Agency policy makers, engineers, industry leaders, consultants, lawyers, educators, environmentalists and regional decision makers will find the later chapters particularly stimulating and thought provoking. Farmers, the general public, and community representatives on regional decision making groups will find the book logical, current and un hindered by technical jargon. So Daniel Connell can be pleased that he has achieved one of his important objectives: 'to encourage people to be more involved in debate about the future'.

confusing and seemingly random manner. Examples from environmental and other fields are often mixed with case studies and theory without any apparent order.

The book has four parts and 20 chapters. Part A (two chapters) provides an introduction to the topic and covers basic issues such as the distinction between public and private policy, the role of economics and politics, and philosophy and 'green' perspectives. It made me eager to continue reading.

But Part B, which presents the range of environmental policies administered by different levels of government, did not sustain the book's flow and focus. It contains superfluous detail and a repetitive discussion of treaties,

conventions and legislation that is inessential for what follows. Moreover, it introduces some concepts, such as steps to create an environmental policy (p. 148), prematurely.

Part C, on 'the key elements of policy making' (p.155), is the guts of the book and returns to the aims set out in the preface. Through a 'Landcare' case study, Chapter 9 effectively establishes the interface between theory and practice. Chapter 10 reviews relevant policy formulation tools providing readers with constructive reference material. Chapters 11 and 12 also contain such material: they provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of all aspects of policy implementation. But weaknesses in the ordering of material are evident. For instance, the discussion of the advantages of economic instruments (12.5.3) precedes the discussion of the specific economic instruments (12.5.4). Emphasising that the basic policy cycle (p. 179) serves as the guide for the chapter headings in Part C may have created a clearer picture for the reader.

Part D, a thorough overview of the many influences that act on the practicalities of environmental policy making, was illuminating and definitely kept my interest. It clearly explains why the theory of the previous chapters sometimes comes unstuck and does not always translate into real action; it outlines the impact of the political process and other broad influences on the policy making process; and it makes many suggestions on how these influences, such as the media and stakeholder groups, may be managed.

But too often the book reads like a literature review, or a mere presentation of information, rather than a focused discussion of a theoretical topic. In many parts, the 'story' needs some focusing, particularly due to the vastness of the topic.

Distracting, albeit interesting, information is often inserted. For example, a typology of

individuals who may be involved in the policy process interrupts a discussion of the policy making process itself (p. 173). And some seemingly important information is not explored adequately. The author acknowledges that economics has become 'more prominent in all areas of policy development' (p. 10), emphasising this point again on page 64, but fails to include utility maximisation in Table 1.1 (p. 9) with profit maximisation as a rationale for policy. This oversight is compounded where the influence of attitudes on policy making are discussed and the ability of economics to incorporate attitudes in the economic framework, such as in the utility maximisation framework, is not acknowledged.

Instances of repetition include: Figure 8.3 and 8.4 are virtually identical; the text and dot points on page 248 outlining the criteria for assessment of implementation instruments are repeated in Box 11.3; the list on page 229 is the same as on page 297.

Visual presentation is sometimes poor. There is an excess of dot points in the text and also in separate boxes, and a lack of horizontal lines to separate the rows makes tables difficult to read (e.g. p. 241). Some short sections like chapter 10.4 seem hardly warranted and distract from the general flow of the text.

And there are several instances of poor editing: on page 228 is a sentence in the introduction that makes absolutely no sense, while on page 331 a very strange sentence appears. Sometimes the author unnecessarily changes from addressing 'the anonymous reader' to addressing 'you' personally (e.g. p. xix).

In conclusion, the book's weaknesses of presentation in particular the presentation of the reviewed literature and theory detracts from its great strength: the completeness of literature reviewed, and the excellent attempt at combining case studies with reviews of existing policy and theory approaches.

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