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Social capital in contemporary society : decline or change

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Originated in sociology and political science, social capital is the term describing a variety of structures that help individuals to achieve well-being using assets available to people according to their membership in their communities (MacArthur & MacArthur, n. d.). However, talking about social capital is problematic because both language and concepts are a derivation from economic science (Blunden, n. d.). While economic capital has to do with possession of valuable items (e.g., stocks and money), social capital is a structure based on relationships that, unlike properties, are difficult to frame and quantify. Another problem in the discussion of social capital is that terms such as “community” and “social capital” are used interchangeably. However, community and social capital are not to be seen as one and the same (Cloclough & Sitarman, 2005). For the purpose of this paper, the term “community” is going to be used to describe individuals living within the same district and under the same government, while the term “social capital” is going to be used to describe the advantage created by those individuals.

According to most scholars, the basic feature of social capital is interaction (Beem, 1999). Characteristics such as trust and engagement in social settings are regarded as great assets to the development of social capital in communities (Veenstra, 2002). Conversely, lack of interaction among individuals appears to be linked to decline of trust, which might eventually result in critical social problems. Study of social capital is usually focused on the density of the social networks and the extent of people’s

engagement in social activities in formal and informal networks. Thus, social capital is a way to translate the individual's engagement in a way that increases the gain of communal well-being. In the last few decades, the interest in social capital has rapidly increased. High social capital has been regarded as a solution for a variety of problems in society. In one of the largest surveys in the United States, Robert Putnam demonstrated that in areas with high social capital there is less incidence of crime, and people reach better academic achievements, health outcomes, and economic developments compared to areas with low social capital (*Benchmark Survey*, 2000). However, there are controversies regarding the theoretical and methodological applications of social capital in this study.

From a theoretical point of view the concept of social capital has been stretched to fit various applications to the point of losing its original meaning. Some scholars have lost sight of the consequences of extending the model of social capital from a feature of the individual to a feature of community (Portes, 1988). There is also a loose application of the theoretical concepts of trust and civic engagement in the empirical research. For instance, there are different types of trust, and it is open to debate whether or not the development and manifestation of trust are affected by characteristics of individuals and/or by the nature of their associations (Veestra, 2002). Consequently, the role of civic engagement and trust, and their links to social capital, are puzzling because they may be interpreted and structured in a variety of ways. Some of the problems are related to the historical context of the development of social capital, and others are related to definitions of the variables involved. The ambiguity of the conceptualization of social

capital is a source of concern to policy makers who feel the duty of finding solutions to social problems and, at the same time, investing as few economic resources as possible.

Origin of Social Capital

Tracking the theoretical origins of social capital, Emil Durkheim (1984) was one of the first scholars to emphasize the importance of group life as a remedy to the destructiveness of anomie. In this sense, the meanings of social capital today are extensions of the original concept. Durkheim also identified another source of social capital based on the theory of integration and sanctioning of exchanges. This view implied that there are two products in society, one in which a donor is granted a payback in the form of status in the community, and the other in which the community as a whole functions as guarantee for the payback (e.g., obligations are enforceable by virtue of affiliation to a community/group). In this way, integration and sanction would facilitate transactions for both donors and recipients because they would eliminate official contracts and guarantee status facilitating at the same time the ways to gain resources.

Karl Marx (1967) emphasized the importance of solidarity, intended as a form of cohesion and camaraderie stemming from living in the same condition and in a common situation. According to Marx, solidarity was not motivated by norms assimilated by individuals while growing up and cannot be taught. Rather, solidarity is a movement originating in an emergency situation involving people sharing the same fate, identifying with each other, and supporting each other's initiatives. Those individuals who by nature have altruistic dispositions contribute their efforts within the boundary of their community, developing benefits for every person belonging to the same community. Similarly to Marx, Lyda Judson Hanifan (1920) introduced the notion of social capital in

his review of rural school community centers, describing it as “those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people (p. 130).” According to him, tangible substance composed of elements such as good will, interactions among individuals and families, and fellowships, and their accumulation within social units, form the core of social capital.

Pierre Bourdieu (1983) reevaluated social capital deriving the language from economic theories. He described social capital 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 and recognition" (p. 249). The essence of Bourdieu's definition is instrumental. He focuses on how individual participation creates sociability and increases the functionality of the group. The idea is that since social networks are not natural assets, individuals have to draw upon both economic and cultural resources to construct them.

To illustrate his concept, Bourdieu (1983) divided social capital into (a) social relationships, and (b) amount and/or quality of the resources involved. However, since the discourse of social capital involves cultural transactions that, unlike economic transactions, are difficult to quantify, it is difficult to fully explain the results of social investments using economic exchanges as the primary mode of analysis proposed by Bourdieu.

Sociologist James Coleman (1990) analyzed the functions of social capital based on the development of human capital. Coleman defines human capital as the collective power of human assets, usually acquired through formal education, and available to the community. He proposed that social capital pertains to norms and values available as

resources to those accessing a particular social context, rather than norms and values available to single individuals. According to Coleman, a particular kind of social capital may be valuable within a certain context and ineffective or even damaging in another context. If resources are equally distributed within the “appropriate” context, successful outcomes relate to the individual’s personal abilities to acquire them. Conversely, unequally distributed resources result in individuals being deprived of the opportunities/resources to succeed in applying their personal assets within a given environment. In any given society resources are never equally distributed. Thus, the argument that social capital relates to personal assets, as proposed by a number of scholars, is only a partial explanation because, as defined by Coleman, it does not take into account the unequal distribution of resources necessary to develop human assets.

In 1990, W. E. Baker wrote that the definition of social capital could be simplified to mean the changes developing among the relationships of actors who use resources from a social structure to pursue their interest. When the density of relationships is high there are more chances to develop social capital. In 1992, Ronald Burt was in disagreement with this concept based on density of relationships, and he stated a completely different view. He said that it is the absence of ties binding individuals within networks that facilitate the emergence of social capital. In fact, according to Burt, this absence of ties leaves individuals free to look for other sources, acquire new information, and discover new resources.

In 1999, the World Bank released a statement claiming that social capital should be defined as the connection among institutions, relationships, and norms shaping society (The World Bank). The following year Putnam (2000) narrowed the concept even further

and, based on the results of his large empirical research, he reenergized the interest in social capital. Putnam focused on associational membership, specifically on norms of reciprocity and trust. In his opinion, civic engagement is positively correlated to social capital, and it is supported by the individual's participation. Thus, in his view, the core of social capital is the interaction among individuals promoting assets such as networks, norms, reciprocity, and trust.

Robert Putnam's View of Social Capital

In *Making Democracy Work* (Putnam, 1993), Putnam wrote that he noticed a strong link between the performance of political institutions and the mature of civic life among citizens in Italy. Putnam's claim was that when individuals connect and collaborate with each other they are able to build communities based on social networks that in turn are based on trust and tolerance. According to him, the key of well-being is the network of reciprocal relations in civic involvement and, as Putnam stated few years later, "a society of many virtuosos but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19).

Following his work on civic involvement in Italy, Putnam explored society in the United States, claiming that there is a range of indicators in this contemporary society such as political participation, voting, reading newspapers, and affiliations in local associations, that have been in decline in the last few decades. As stated by Putnam in his article "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" (1995), "In the established democracies, ironically, growing numbers of citizens are questioning the effectiveness of their public institutions at the very moment when liberal democracy has swept the battlefield, both ideologically and geopolitically" (p. 66).

In his book *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam further examined his theory using a substantial collection of data focusing on political and civic engagement, informal ties, tolerance, and trust. Putnam's proposition is that high social capital is an advantage because it keeps citizens setting and achieving goals, as well as finding solutions to community problems. In addition, social capital facilitates transactions within communities, increasing individuals' empathy towards others in the same community/group. One of the worries, Putnam argued, is that in the last few decades there has been a decline in social activities and an increase in individual leisure activities. As illustrated in his book *Bowling Alone* (2000), this switch from social to individual activities since the 1950s has weakened social capital and the well-being of communities in the U.S.

Putnam's construction of social problems has called for universalized cultural solutions, a general "fix it all" resolution requiring a return to traditions. His analysis has been accepted at face value by many scholars and criticized by others who have interpreted his work as claiming that only those individuals with inborn abilities to create and support relationships and to inspire trust are able to overcome the challenges of increasing social capital in their communities. Universalized solutions ("one size fits all") have been under scrutiny for a variety of other reasons. For instance, universalized solutions involve the possibility of turning into social control and/or exclusion favoring one group at the expense of another. From a political point of view, it could be argued that in society there are arrangements created with the purpose of keeping some groups in poverty and isolation in order to support the economic well-being of others (Blunden, 2004).

The relationship between trust and successful civic engagement appears to be an important element in the research of social capital according to some scholars. However, this relationship is unclear, and it often appears to be a circular argument. Putnam (2000) claimed that trust and civic engagement are reciprocal, and he wrote that establishing which one causes the other is not important. Stolle (1998) found that trust is key in order to encourage civic engagement, while Brehm and Rahn (1997) found that civic engagement encourages trust, and the former is necessary in order to develop reliance on others. Issues of diversity seem to be largely ignored or misinterpreted in social capital theoretical construction and research. According to Putnam, interactions among diverse groups are essential to build trust and engagement in society, and Americans today appear to be more supportive of diversity than they have been in the past. However, data from the *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey* (2000), designed by the Saguro Seminar and conducted by Putnam, show that areas characterized by a diverse population have low social capital. The data showed the same result even when socioeconomic status was taken into account.

One of the critiques of the *Benchmark Survey* is that it appears to provide measures of opinions and personal choices, rather than social explanations, and leads to the implication that change means decline. For example, some of the causes of “decline” of social capital, according to Putnam (2000), are features associated with reducing social inequality including growth of the welfare state, the civil rights movement, and women’s access to paid labor.

There are obviously a variety of important implications involved in the study of social capital and its features. It is extraordinarily difficult to assess the meaning and

consequences of lack of trust and engagement in society, but there is consensus among scholars of various social disciplines that these two elements are essential to social capital. However, the theoretical stances and research methods offered until now may be questionable both ethically and structurally. In accordance with NASW and the mission traditionally held by social workers, I believe that we should stress the need for theoretical and empirical inquiry in order to reexamine and demystify rigid notions of social capital.

The central premise of social capital is that it improves the livelihood of communities because it creates and preserves benefits shared by people as public good. It is difficult to quantify social capital per se, and it may be impossible to quantify informal engagement and activities compared to formal ones, even if informal activities may be more influential in the development of social capital. Thus, one of the challenges of studying social capital is finding which means can be deliberately used to create, maintain, and increase it. An alternative in the study of social capital might involve examining who benefits from it and who does not, in order to understand who is included or excluded and why. This alternative may also be helpful in understanding how studies of social capital may have been used in order to promote a particular social aim. Another alternative in the study of social capital might involve looking at evolutionary changes such as historical, environmental, and technological progresses that have reshaped the structure of society in order to find out if social capital, and the ways to achieve it, has transformed rather than declined.

In Chapter II, I am going to explore aspects of trust, civic engagement and leisure, in relation to social capital to better understand the complexity of social capital. I am

going to examine some of the major scholarship investigating theoretical definitions and implications of trust and civic engagement in order to find how they relate to social capital. I am also going to propose that there are reasonable doubts regarding allegations of decline of social capital in the U.S. The intent is to show that there are alternative explanations for changes in society that do not necessarily pertain or predict such decline. This approach is going to encourage different theoretical perspectives in order to develop research methodologies promoting objectivity in the study of social capital.

In chapter III, I am going to discuss various changes in social capital, arguing that those “changes” that have occurred during the last few decades do not necessarily mean decline, and they may be the outcome of individuals adapting to changing environment. In this chapter, I am also going to review social capital in order to determine whether current studies of social capital are useful to the development of well-being of citizens, or whether they may be mistakenly used to increase a “culture of fear” in contemporary society.

In chapter IV, I am going to discuss the political and social ramifications of social capital, reviewing how “special” interests might have been used to promote particular causes, and how this might be affecting intervention and division of resources. I am also going to examine subsequent policy and research implications of these political and social ramifications, and I am going to conclude with some of the implications for future research and policy.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I am going to explore two variables that are fundamental for the development of social capital: trust and civic engagement. In regard to trust, I am going to focus on aspects such as personal trust and trust in institutions. In regard to civic engagement, I am going to explore leisure and activities. These concepts often appear in the social capital literature, and they are considered necessary for the development of social capital. Robert Putnam posits particular relationships between various aspects of trust and activities. However, in my opinion, there are miscalculations regarding certain structures of trust and activities that underestimate certain meanings of their relationships, and could be interpreted in ways that were not originally intended.

Trust

Putnam (2000) identifies generalized reciprocity and trust as the hallmark of social capital, and he makes clear distinctions between kinds of trust. He states:

There is an important difference between honesty based on personal experience and honesty based on general community norms -- between trusting Max at the corner store because you've known him for years and trusting someone to whom you nodded for the first time at the coffee shop last week. Trust embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent, and nested in wider networks is sometimes called "thick trust." On the other hand, a thinner trust in "the generalized other," like your new acquaintance from the coffee shop, also rests

implicitly on some background of shared social networks and expectation of reciprocity. Thin trust is even more useful than thick trust, because it extend the radius of trust beyond the roster of people whom we can know personally. As the social fabric of a community becomes more threadbare, however, its effectiveness in transmitting and sustaining reputations declines, and its power to undergird norms of honesty, generalized reciprocity, and thin trust is enfeebled. (p. 134)

“Trust” among individuals seems to be of great importance to a wide range of phenomena such as economic growth, democracy, social integration, and general well-being. Trust is also a fundamental component of social capital, and is frequently used as a key indicator of it. According to Welch, Rivera, Conway, Yonkosky, Lupton, and Giancola (2005), there are no studies providing an inclusive inventory or findings showing the different characteristics of trust within diverse contexts. Thus, if trust is such an important element, it is essential to examine its origins and definitions before analyzing its applications.

In general, risk and trust have been always closely related. Some individuals have the inclination to dare more than others. Hence, when individuals are faced with a situation that is perceived as ambiguous and they choose to take risks, they are considered trusting. Perception of risk is also a personal feature that differs from person to person, reflecting a person’s opinion of the world. Depending on the perception of risk, trusting decisions are made using rational evaluation comparing the cost and the gain.

There are two broad schools of thought regarding trust. The first stemmed from individual personality theories in the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s (Cattell, 1965; Erikson, 1950). “Trust” is viewed as a feature of the individual, and is acquired when individuals

develop appropriately. These features require an understanding of individuals within their life context. The second school stemmed from social theories (Putnam, 2000) in which trust is conceptualized in terms of the relationships between individuals and their social environments. This property focuses on the relationship between central institutions and individuals' personal experiences and their social status within a social system. It is not a "societal property," but a function of the relationship between institutions and individuals.

If one regards trust as a characterological trait of the individual, nouns like awareness, faith, confidence, and belief usually describe this asset. In general, personal trust is defined as the belief that others will act in our interest without causing harm (Gambetta, 1988). According to Giddens (1990), trust includes confidence and faith, and is defined as that assurance in the reliability of another individual or system in relation to desirable outcomes. In this sense, confidence is a belief based on abstract principles and on the reliability and accuracy of personal assets.

Tonkiss and Passey (1999) propose that trust is a conventional way of associating honesty with fairness. According to Simmel (1950), trust means relying on another's consistency, and it is "one of the most important synthetic forces within society" (p. 326). Erikson (1950) argues that trust is a fundamental trait of personality that is learned early in childhood. Govier (1997) claims that, for the most part, individuals maintain a constant amount of trust through time.

Misztal (1996) also describes trust as a psychological feature within the human mind. However, in his opinion, trust is also a fundamental asset of social and institutional relationships and thus, outside the human mind. According to Misztal, there are

individuals who naturally bring more trust into every kind of relationship, and there are interactions that are trustful whether or not individuals participating in those interactions own personal trust.

Individuals trust other individuals they know, and at times they trust other people they do not know if their sense of confidence is supported by a known social structure. Both forms of trust facilitate collaboration and increase community resources (Fukuyama, 1995). However, Brehm and Rahn (1997) have conducted a study using a different perspective that postulates a causal relationship among the features composing social capital. In their study, the researchers examined the development of social capital in a poor neighborhood in South Africa, which had just had its first election after 46 years of apartheid rule.

The African National Congress in collaboration with the National Education Crisis Committee had decided to let young people participate into a school program. This program should have included 3,000 to 4,000 students but, due to lack of teachers, material, and space, they were able to accommodate only 500 of them. As a result, the remaining students did not have anything to do and, according to the residents of the area, the students were left wandering in the street every day until the end of the school day. Residents complained that these young people were harassing the citizens in the street, stealing, and threatening the security of the area.

Since the protests from the community's leaders were ignored, the citizens organized their own protest. They took collective action against what was perceived as a threat to the community, and they demanded the intervention of the state. This protest generated trust and solidarity among citizens who had never known and/or trusted each

other until then. Three weeks later, the problem with the students was resolved and, while the majority of citizens disengaged from the rest of the community, a small number of people remained active in the neighborhood (Brehm & Rahn, 1997).

Brehm and Rahn's study showed how people took collective action in a community where people did not know nor trust each other, where they never had any reason to interact with each other, and where they did not share any obvious commonalities. The threat of their peace being disrupted was the spark that caused people's reaction and pushed them to engage in civic action. Brehm and Rahn offered a different view of the cycle of trust and engagement in relation to the development of social capital, showing that participation may be produced by external factors unrelated to trust. In this study, the combination of perceived threat generated trust among people who had never trusted or known each other.

The notion that when faced by need people come together and cooperate for the community's well-being may also explain what happens when there is a natural disaster such as the hurricane Katrina or tragedies such as the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. In those two instances, trust was not a must in order to develop cooperation among some people. External pressures such as threat and danger may become motivations for some groups to participate in collective action. However, it does not explain the behavior of those who do not choose to cooperate within the same situation.

In relation to social status, trust seems to be more common among individuals who have a higher education, a higher income, and a higher status in society. In *Bowling Alone* (2000) Robert Putnam writes "In virtually all societies 'have-nots' are less trusting than 'haves', probably because haves are treated by others with more honesty and respect"

(p. 138). According to this view, trust generates throughout personal life experiences, and those who have “comfortable” lives are more likely to trust compared to those who live in disadvantaged situations characterized by poverty and discrimination, situations which promote exploitation and social exclusion. Patterson (1999) also analyzed the relationship between trust, class, and race in the U.S. His findings show that poor people generally have less trust towards each other and towards many institutions than rich people and, when holding income as a variable, African Americans are the least trusting ethnic group in the U.S.

There are many ways to foster trust in individuals. Mizruchi (1996) proposes that there is a positive correlation between individual trust and trust in institutions, and the assumption is that individual characteristics and social relations influence each other and describe the social system itself. However, Putnam (2000) argues that while individual trust may create solid social structures, the same thing does not happen when trust is redirected and limited towards larger institutions. In fact, he argues that there is a distinction between trust in others and trust in institutions, claiming that, while empirically social trust and trust in institutions may be related, it is important to make a distinction between the two types of trust at a theoretical level.

Putnam (2000) uses the examples of organizations with large number of subscribers to illustrate the distinction between trust in an empirical sense and in theoretical trust, claiming that in “mass-membership organizations . . . for the vast majority of their members, the only act of membership consists in writing a check for dues or perhaps occasionally reading a newsletter” (p. 52). Thus, while these organizations may be very significant at a larger social level (i.e., political), and they may

be important in empirical research, they do not foster social connectedness and do not contribute to civic organization in a traditional way. In his words, “social and political trust may or may not be correlated, but theoretically, they must be kept distinct” (p. 137).

Personal trust may be expressed in different ways according to the type and size of communities and institutions. Through time, this expression of trust may create positive or negative cycles characterizing the community that, as a consequence, may negatively or positively influence relationships in other communities. For example, Coleman (1990) describes norms of reciprocity and trust characterizing members in the community of diamond merchants in New York. Those merchants shared norms of reciprocity and trust facilitating their transactions within their specific community. However, those same norms would not apply outside their community, limiting the activities of the merchants and deterring them from reaching for resources outside their community.

According to Giddens (1990), the most obvious way to understand trust is starting from the family nucleus, moving towards the outside in small social settings, and then widening into larger systems such as cities and nations. Interactions shared within the family and extended into larger systems (i.e., schools, local public institutions, and government) create two types of trust: trust towards people we have contact with and trust towards people who are not spatially there. Giddens suggested that while in the past primary trust was mostly based on direct interaction (i.e., personal trust), in contemporary society direct interaction has been gradually replaced by conceptual trust and trust in a more global, expert-oriented system (i.e., within the context of a well-known institution).

For example, we can trust a politician, who is a complete stranger, in virtue of his area of expertise and/or his party affiliation.

Following this rationale, trust in political entities and government is a manifestation of conceptual and expert-oriented types of trust. Kasperson, Golding, and Tuler (1992) said that it is the performance of social institutions that determine political trust, and this is an extension of individual trust and trust in social relationships rather than the product of deliberate calculations. According to Hardin (2002), legitimacy of an institution and our experience with it supports trust in that institution. He argues that individuals place trust in institutions when they have strong reasons to believe that these institutions are going to act in their best interests.

If trust is a property of society rather than a personality trait of the individual, the participation and contribution of individuals stemming from cultural, social, and/or political institutions might encourage the development of trusting attitudes and behaviors. In this sense, trustfulness might not be a personal characteristic but an individual's estimate of the environment, and might constantly adjust in response to changing circumstances within a specific environment.

According to Inglehart (1999), richer and/or more democratic nations show higher rates of societal trust compared to poorer and less democratic ones. Inglehart's conclusion is that societal trust is linked to happiness and well-being. Putnam (2000) and Patterson (1999) reach the same kind of interpretation in their study on the richest and the poorest in the U.S., claiming that those who are socially successful and have a high income, social status, and education are more satisfied with their life and activities, have less anxiety, and are more trusting compared to those people who have low socio-

economic status and low education. Patterson's conclusion is that "anxiety and insecurity are clearly the most powerful forces driving distrust" (1999, p. 190).

The nature of relationships among individuals manifests in various ways. When a society is high on social capital it implies that individuals participate actively in the community and that there are connections among various groups and organizations (Cernea, 1993). Trust increases with interaction because it helps develop a long-term reciprocity among individuals (Platteau, 1997). Thus, cooperative action increases the well-being of communities. However, not everybody chooses to cooperate. Some individuals may take advantage of the situation, enjoying the common benefits gained from other people's actions. Still, many people cooperate for the common good. Thus, social scientists explain collaboration through trust. People trust their perception of others in a positive way, and this conviction helps them in taking the rational decision to collaborate.

From an economic point of view, when groups centralize their practices, they may be increasing the levels of collaboration within their group and, at the same time, they may increase the level of exclusion with people outside their group. Groups usually engage in these kinds of practices because the participants would rather interact with people who are similar to them, and by the same token, they may avoid those who are different from them. These commonalities are often based on ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, gender, religious affiliation, and so on.

The advantage of centralized practices, or parochialism, is facilitation of transactions. Three factors facilitating the transactions are (a) the willingness of individuals to collaborate with somebody who is similar to them, (b) cultural affinities

that endorse informal norms, and (c) support for the individuals' preferences that are shared within the group (Bowels, & Ginti, 2004).

Potentially, any trait shared by the group reinforces the membership to a group. However, tangible characteristics such as race, for instance, are more influential because they cannot be acquired. Such characteristics make the legitimacy of an individual incontestable. On the negative side, parochialism creates social exclusion that violates universal and legal norms, along with public policy. It also generates intolerance towards diversity and social interaction outside the network. Thus, activities promoting interactions among individuals should be considered an important link between trust and social capital.

Civic and Leisure Engagement

Putnam (2000) argues that political knowledge, trust, and activism have been dropping in the last three decades of the twentieth century as evidenced, for instance, in voting patterns. The percentage of voter participation decreased from 62.8 % in 1960 to 48.9 % in 1996 (pp. 31, 32). Regarding informal social ties, Putnam says that although most Americans are not isolating themselves, leisure group activities with friends are in decline too. Those connections Americans make with friends at a one-to-one level, according to the DDB Needham Life Style archive as illustrated in *Bowling Alone*, show that entertaining friends dropped from 14 to 15 times per year in the 1970s to an average of 8 times per year in the late 1990s (p. 98).

My message is that we desperately need an era of civic inventiveness to create a renewed set of institutions and channels for a reinvigorated civic life that will fit the way we have come to live. Our challenge now is to reinvent the twenty-first-

century equivalent of the Boy Scouts or the settlement house or the playground or Hadassah or the United Mine Workers or the NAACP. What we create may well look nothing like the institutions Progressives invented a century ago, just as their inventions were not carbon copies of the earlier small-town folkways whose passing they mourned. We need to be as ready to experiment as the Progressives were. Willingness to err and then correct our aim is the price of success in social reforms. (p. 401)

According to Etzioni (1995), the moral standards of responsive communities represent the basic human needs of individuals. These communities encourage both individual rights and duties/responsibilities towards the community in general. Engagements intended as activities that stimulate individuals to work, both physically and mentally, toward the same goal are essential for the development of relationships and shared meanings in a community.

Community structures play a role in the development of trust, cohesion, and collaboration. There have been many debates among leisure scholars regarding the rise of individualism, privatization, and consumption. According to Arai and Pedlar (2003) there are at least two meanings of leisure. First, leisure is seen as a product of consumption, and in the second, it is seen as a shared activity with shared meanings.

Some consider leisure activities built within community structures the antagonists of privatized leisure activities. For example, Meyersohn (1972) and Atherton (1954) claimed that in the last century organized pastimes and commercial entertainment have replaced informal and spontaneous recreation, and privatized diversions have replaced collective recreation in order to support a capitalistic system promoting material goods.

As Barber (2006) writes, “The young are big spenders way before they are even modest earners: in 2000, there were 31 million American kids between twelve and thirteen already controlling 155 billion consumer dollars” (p. 6). According to him, the core of capitalistic systems is pressuring individuals to consume in order to survive. To achieve this goal, capitalists do not only manufacture goods, but they also manufacture “needs.” However, it could be argued that in the last century there has been a process of modernization, and that “traditional” activities have been replaced by “modern” ones.

Leisure as a product of consumerism is often related to theories of individualism. Leisure is a broad term comprising a range of activities engaged in freely by individuals (Definition of leisure, n. d.). Consumerism is defined as the association of personal well-being with material possessions and consumption (Veblen, 1994). Broadly, theories of individualism hold that individualists promote the unrestricted exercise of individual goals and desires, based on individual need rather than collective need. As illustrated by Nathaniel Branden (1994), individualism may be viewed in two ways. First, in an ethical-psychological sense, it is posited that individuals should think and judge independently and, second, in an ethical-political sense, it is conceived that individuals have the right to pursue their goals of self-realization.

In this context, leisure is usually privatized and is characterized by the growth of the leisure industry, which requires individuals to invest money on recreation; the public realm is considered only as a mean to achieve personal goals. Some individuals take care of their personal needs and interests and may not be concerned with their immediate environment and social surrounding. Some people exercise their right to choose how they spend their time and resources without considering the effects of their choices on society.

Cooperation, in this context, implies an evaluation of gain and cost. Individuals act together only when seeking mutual advantage.

On the other hand, when leisure is seen as a shared activity and shared meanings, it does not necessarily imply a commercial activity, and there is not evaluation of personal gain. Individuals act in the interest of the community, and everybody shares the gains. Participation in communities, according to Arai and Pedlar (2003), leads to people participating and volunteering in a variety of leisure activities such as sports and hobbies, and promoting common and public goods. The authors call it a “communitarian conceptualization of leisure” (p. 186) that is in contrast to that privatization of leisure which, according to them, has become usual in the last few decades.

At the beginning of the 1900s, North American reformers argued that leisure had the potential of improving the quality of life of individuals. However, while societies were shifting towards democratic capitalism, both the individual and public spheres in general shifted too towards individualistic values. In this regard, according to some scholars, recreation intended as social activity for the personal and common good has been increasingly shifting into a selling good aimed to create profit. Some scholars have argued that "commodification" of leisure activities is evident in the increase of commercial recreation and decrease of free pastimes as, for instance, shopping in department stores versus participating in a bake sale organized by the local community, and other types of fee-for service recreations.

“Commodification” and “privatization” were a concern of critics such as Eric Fromm (1955) who claimed that individuals were spending more time within close circles rather than socializing with a broader range of individuals in public places. The

implications of this concern, as previously noted by Haifan in 1920, were the demise of neighborliness and civic engagement and the increase of family isolation and community stagnation. Civic engagement could be compared to social networks that bring together people who are unlike one another (bridging), while family isolation could be compared to people who get together to promote the material, social or political interests of its members (bonding).

Wearing & Wearing (1991) argue that leisure contributes to individual identity, but in contemporary society this identity has been increasingly concealed by a market economy that is turning leisure into a large-scale treat devaluing the experience of leisure. According to some scholars, the meaning of recreation/leisure has become synonymous with individual gain (e.g., individual health and well-being). Since the end of the 1900s, practices of leisure and recreation have become more individualistic. The concept of recreation as the product of consumption has trumped the concept of recreation as a practice for the common good. Consequently, some believe that this shift has contributed to the rise of various kinds of social problems and social crises (Arai & Pedlar, 2003).

Some scholars believe that the primary social problems in the twenty-first century include social crises leading to alienation (e.g., lack of integration into social structures due to physical barriers and/or discrimination), loss of intimacy and trust (e.g., creation of impersonal mass marketing), as well as political crises (e.g., the Watergate scandal), which are compromising individuals' civic engagement. The causal link between civic engagement and trust may be structured in a variety of ways. As observed by French journalist Alexis Tocqueville, after a visit to the United States in the mid-19th century, civic engagement is necessary to develop trust. In *Making Democracy Work* (Putnam,

1993), Putnam found that there is a relationship of reciprocity between civic engagement and trust. He said that without reciprocity neither civic engagement nor trust would be possible and, as he stated in *Bowling Alone* (2000), “The causal arrows among civic engagement, reciprocity, honesty, and social trust are as entangled as well-tossed spaghetti” (p.137).

In the *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey* (2000), Putnam wrote that social connectedness is a strong predictor of individuals’ well-being, even when holding predictors such as income and educational level constant. According to Putnam, there are three key measures determining how individuals are involved in their communities. They are: 1) political participation, 2) civic leadership/associational involvement, and 3) social trust.

Political participation, as measured in the *Benchmark Survey*, is divided into two categories. The first is “conventional” political participation, which includes factors concerning how many people are registered to vote, and how many are interested in politics (e.g., reading current events in the newspaper). The second is “protest” political participation, which includes participation in marches and boycotts.

Civic leadership/associational involvement includes frequency of engagements in groups and clubs, number of people who took an active role as leaders, and other levels of participation in such groups as Internet communities, neighborhood associations, religious organizations, and business associations (*Social Capital Benchmark Community Survey*, 2000).

Social trust, the third concept describing how individuals are involved in community is, according to Putnam (*Social Capital Benchmark Community Survey*,

2000), at the core of social capital, because it determines whether or not individuals engage in common participation in communities, groups, associations, and activities. Since Putnam's survey shows social connectedness as a strong predictor of individuals' well-being, and connectedness depends on the levels of social trust, it seems logical to conclude that social trust is actually "the" predictor for social capital and well-being.

Dietlind Stolle (1998) has conducted a study of a group of people, some of whom were involved in civic engagement, which investigated the impact of group membership in a given society. She found that personal choices affect voluntary civic engagement. Accordingly, people do not acquire more trust towards others because they join associations; rather, they already trust others, and this trust is the reason why they join associations in the first place. However, as shown by Brehm and Rahn (1997) in their study in South Africa, trust did not have any significant effect on civic engagement. Rather, people identified with a cause developed in a situation of crisis. Perhaps both conclusions are accurate within their own context.

Regardless of the causal relationships among variables, Putnam (1995; 2000) has focused on associational relationships, norm reciprocity, and trust. In his opinion, civil engagement is positively correlated to social capital, and it is supported by individuals' participation and trust. Putnam's (2000) proposition is that high social capital is an advantage because it helps citizens achieve goals and find solutions to communities' problems. Putnam's empirical evidence shows that people who live in areas with higher amounts of social capital are able to cope better with stress, illness, and trauma compared to people living in areas with low social capital. Thus, changes negatively affecting social capital should be considered deleterious for society. In addition, according to Putnam,

social capital facilitates the transactions in a community, and it increases individual empathy towards others in the same community/group. As stated by Putnam, “Social capital can [thus] be simultaneously a “private good” and a “public good”” (p. 20).

Social capital may be considered as a societal “side effect” deriving from the collective choices of individuals, political situations, and socio-economic status (including race, gender, and education) within the context of need for the community and the gain of single individuals. The study of social capital needs to include reevaluation of the terms and assessment of variables and their individual relationship within the social context of the situation. In the next chapter, I am going to discuss various changes in social capital, arguing that those “changes” that have occurred during the last few decades do not necessarily mean decline. Rather, it can reflect individuals’ adaptation to changing environmental factors. I am also going to review social capital from the perspective of who is gaining from it and who is not in relation to environmental factors in order to determine whether current studies of social capital are useful to the development of well-being of citizens, or whether they may be mistakenly used to increase a “culture of fear” in contemporary society. The studies themselves may not be problematic, but, as I am going to show, they contain certain shades of ambiguity that allow some to endorse a specific agenda promoting definite social aims.

CHAPTER III

TRANSFORMATION

The *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*, designed by the Saguaro Seminar and conducted by Putnam, comprises a sample of 29,200 respondents nationwide. The survey's questions include topics such as social trust, political participation, civic leadership and associational involvement, giving and volunteering, faith-based engagement, informal social ties, diversity of friendship, and equality of civic engagement. According to the results, Putnam points out that there are a variety of problems regarding the ways individuals engage with each other in their communities that have weakened social capital in the U.S. (The Saguaro Seminar, n. d.). However, despite the size of the survey, there are fallacies in the interpretation of the data that Putnam points out in his book *Bowling Alone* (2000).

Putnam's (2000) strategy in his study was the accumulation of as many independent sources as possible in order to explore social change. As stated by him in the book's appendix, "No single source of data is flawless, but the more numerous and diverse the sources, the less likely that they could all be influenced by the same flaw" (p. 415). There are other observations regarding the study's shortcomings in the appendix of *Bowling Alone*. Putnam wrote that some sources of data used to measure social changes, such as membership records, for example, have a number of deficiencies because they do not account for factors like organizational lifecycles, that can be distinguished from the well-being of the communities in which they exist, and lack of record-keeping in

organizations without a formal structure (addresses, archives, etc.). Another shortcoming according to Putnam (2000) is related to the limitations associated with the use of surveys, which include 1) comparability, 2) continuity, 3) comprehensiveness, and 4) timeliness.

The pitfall with comparability, defined as the extent to which variables measure the same thing across time and space, is the fact that data often cannot be controlled in such a way as to guarantee that social time-lapses such as “order effect” (in which order the questions are asked), and “house effect” (different survey organizations showing various results even when the same questions are asked) are accurately taken into account in the study.

Regarding continuity, Putnam claims that data from one survey is not enough to establish a trend, and is not to be intended to show a cause for change or decline. He warns that assumptions of social changes deriving from a single observation are comparable to making “claims about global warming from a single glance at the thermometer” (Putnam, 2000, p. 417). However, at times Putnam refers to social change variables as causes having effects in society, and, throughout the book, his tone regarding social capital and social well-being is ominous:

The dominant theme is simple: For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their communities, but a few decades ago – silently, without warning – that tide reversed and we were overtaken by treacherous rip current we have been pulled apart from one another and from our communities over the last third of the century. The impact of these tides on all aspects of American society, their causes

and consequences and what we might do to reverse them, is the subject of the rest of this book. (p. 27)

Regarding comprehensiveness, Putnam (2000) writes that a survey must cover a wide net of activities in order to avoid the risk of overlooking other factors that might have contributed to the decline of a given activity. For instance, he says that if people's "favorite" activity in the past few decades was bowling, and bowling was replaced by another sport or leisure activity, the number of participants in bowling alleys would be in decline due to an offset of activities rather than a decline of people's interest in bowling.

Finally, in regard to timeliness, Putnam (2000) claimed that since time proceeds unevenly, the ways of measuring a given period of time "must be matched to hypotheses about the scale and timing of change" (p. 217). Thus, if there are changes in society affecting social capital, Putnam argues that we should be mindful of other inferences that over time might have changed the parameters of society and, consequently, the ways people interact.

In general, the drawback in measuring social changes, according to Putnam (2000), is that there are very few instances of survey archives providing data that is comparable, continuous, comprehensive, and timeless. In fact, he wrote that the oldest collections of data on social trends "did not begin before the mid-1970s" (p. 417). He continued saying that although there are reasons to assume there were changes throughout the 1960s, measuring data did not start until the following decade. However, on page 205 Putnam contradicts himself when, talking about mobility and sprawl, he writes "in 1968 (when civic engagement was near its peak)." The assumption here is that

if there were not data until the mid-1970s, claiming that the actual levels of civic engagement in 1968 would be unknown.

Examining cumulative measures of social capital in order to investigate its sources and availability to society's members seems problematic (Edwards & Foley, 1988), and it could be interpreted as ethically questionable. Putnam's work has offered an extensive body of research creating the illusion that such cumulative measure is possible.

How Has Society Changed and What Are the Implications?

Putnam (2000) argues that:

Sometimes "social capital," like its conceptual cousin "community," sounds warm and cuddly. Urban sociologist Xavier de Souza Briggs, however, properly warns us to beware of treacly sweet, "kumbaya" interpretations of social capital.

Networks and the associated norms of reciprocity are generally good for those inside the network, but the external effects of social capital are by no means always positive Urban gangs, NIMBY ("not in my backyard") movements, and power elites often exploit social capital to achieve ends that, from a wider perspective, are antisocial. Indeed, it is rhetorically useful for such groups to obscure the difference between the pro-social and antisocial consequences of community organizations. When Floridians objected to plans by the Ku Klux Klan to "adopt a highway," Jeff Coleman, grand wizard of the Royal Knights of the KKK, protested, "Really, we're just like the Lions or the Elks. We want to be involved in the community." (pp. 21-22)

The publication of *Bowling Alone* (Putnam, 2000) stimulated increased concerns about the decline of social capital in the United States. Putnam's research on social

capital was recently awarded the Johan Skytte Prize in Political Science (*Robert Putnam Awarded*, 2006), and has attracted the attention of a large sphere of people. According to Putnam, there have been changes in both trust and engagement in the United States that have precipitated the decline of social capital during the last decades. With the data from the largest survey on social capital in the U.S., Putnam gives a construction of social problems that demands the attention of scholars, politicians, and policy makers, urging them to intervene applying a universalized cultural view in order to reverse the “decline” of social capital.

In the executive summary of the *Benchmark Survey*, it is argued that America is becoming more diverse, and that generally Americans appear to be more open to this new diversity. The data show that in diverse communities such as Los Angeles and the Bay Area, residents report friendship with individuals of different ethnic/racial groups, and they also show more tolerance regarding civil liberties. At the same time, the survey shows that ethnically diverse communities have low levels of trust, connectedness to people of a different race and socio-economic status, and political participation.

Regarding tolerance and trust, Putnam (2000) elucidated another point claiming that although Americans are now more tolerant towards each other compared to the past few decades, they trust each other less as evidenced by the boom in occupations such as the law that have increased from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Putnam has taken into account trust and engagement as major elements necessary to the development of social capital, but he did not analyze the relationship between various aspects of trust operating in diverse contexts or situations that might undermine elements of engagement. In addition, Putnam has correlated a number of individuals’

changes in activities and engagements (e.g., club participation, voting, etc.) with the decline of social capital, but it could be argued that individuals are simply making different choices in order to adapt to a changing environment, and that the meanings of social capital itself are being transformed. Some changes may be considered adaptation rather than documenting a crisis. For instance, the reason why sales of newspapers are in decline might be related to the fact that people get information from different media (e.g., news online) and not because people read less.

Mobility and Sprawl

With regard to mobility, Putnam (2000) states:

Compared with the citizens of most other countries, Americans have always lived a nomadic existence From our frontier and immigrant past we have learned to plunge into new community institutions when we move. Nevertheless, for people as for plants, frequent repotting disrupts roots systems. It takes time for a mobile individual to put down new roots. As a result, residential stability is strongly associated with civic engagement. Recent arrivals in any community are less likely to vote, less likely to have supportive networks of friends and neighbors, less likely to belong to a civic organization. (p. 204)

Individual relocations and their engagement in society may be due to reasons influenced by external factors unrelated to personal characteristics (i.e., immigrants need five years to become citizens and, thus, are not able to vote for that period). However, relocation is an ambiguous concept in Putnam's study. According to Putnam (2000), urban sprawl and mobility have not damaged connectedness among individuals nor have they been responsible for lower social capital. For instance, according to Putnam, 20% of

Americans have changed habitations, and 7% have relocated to different states or outside the country, compared to 16% and 6% who have changed habitation and relocated in 1990s.

Putnam's (2000) conclusion is that the decline in social connectedness and social capital might be related to the nature of the places Americans have moved to in the last few decades. Putnam's proposition is that when people move to the suburbs, for instance, they sort themselves into homogeneous environments. Furthermore, by the end of the century, neighborhoods in the suburbs were built taking into account socioeconomic-status, race, marital status, and so on. Putnam claimed, "One might expect the numbing homogeneity of these new suburban enclaves to encourage a certain connectedness" (p. 210), even if this connectedness included only those individuals living within the limits of that specific community. At first, Putnam said that those who live in small towns, rural areas, and small suburbs are more altruistic and trusting when compared to individuals who live in large metropolitan areas. He supported this claim reporting that people living outside urban areas have 10 to 15% more group memberships, 10 to 20% more church attendance, and 30 to 40% more engagements such as committees and public meetings. However, later on in the book he pointed out that most evidence shows that those living in such exclusive areas had a low rate of civic engagement, including political involvement.

Dagger (2003) has a different perspective than Putnam. He finds that, in urban sprawl, large amounts of land are wasted in building houses, roads, stores, and vast parking lots, which dramatically affect the lives of citizens. According to him, those living in the suburbs are more likely to separate themselves physically and emotionally

from the core of the city. Consequently, he finds that individuals are losing their civic identity with dangerous outcomes to civic engagement. In Dagger's opinion, the free market system is responsible for this environmental damage. Although Dagger's explanation may seem logical, he seems to underestimate the capacity people have to adapt to new situations, and new communities in the suburbs may have taken the place of the "old" communities in cities.

Propaganda

Putnam (2000) continues:

The touchstone of social capital is the principle of generalized reciprocity – I'll do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return and perhaps without even knowing you, confident that down the road you or someone else will return the favor The norm of generalized reciprocity is so fundamental to civilized life that all prominent moral codes contain some equivalent of the Golden Rule. (pp. 134-135)

There are a variety of alternatives that might better explain why trust and engagement, and subsequent social capital, are changing in the U.S. There have been a number of conflictual messages in society simultaneously promoting and discouraging trust. For instance, while numerous social scientists claim they are concentrating their efforts to promote generalized trust in communities, in the last two decades parents have focused their efforts on discouraging their children from trusting strangers due to the high number (or what is perceived to be a high number) of children abductions. Although this approach from parents may be well justified in order to prevent child abduction or other harm, too much emphasis on distrusting others may turn out to be counterproductive

(Welch, Rivera, Conway, Yonkowski, Lupton, & Giancola, 2005). The excessive endorsement of personal achievement may also foster distrust towards others, who are seen merely as competition. Furthermore, public trust of religious figures has been decreasing in the last few years, following a number of sex scandals.

Using the same logic, low political participation and decreasing numbers of voters in political elections may be explained by other factors beside lack of participation in PTO meetings, social clubs, and bowling alleys, as claimed by Putnam. A number of events have been wearing down people's trust in institutions such as huge corporations like Enron (exemplifying the greed and misconduct of corporate America), major league baseball (players using steroids and other behaviors that have tainted the image of good sportsmanship), and voting itself (e.g., the "hanging chads" and other glitches in Florida during the 2000 elections) (Welch et al., 2005).

It could be argued that there are other factors shaping individuals' increasing distrust toward others, increased perception of danger, and suspiciousness towards political authorities. Some of these factors might be connected to mass media and the ways it divulges information, and there are discordant view regarding this subject. Putnam's stance on the media, particularly television, is strictly based on quantitative data (i.e., numbers of hours spent watching television) linked to decrease of civic engagement and trust.

Mass media

Putnam (2000) explains:

The first quarter of the century had nearly passed before the term mass media was invented. At the end of the century, by contrast, the gradual merger of the massive

telecommunications and entertainment industries had become the very foundation for a new economic era Among the effects of this century-long transformation, two are especially relevant here First, news and entertainment have become increasingly individualized Second, electronic technology allows us to consume this hand-tailored entertainment in private, even utterly alone. (pp. 216-217)

Putnam (2000) claimed that the increase of time spent watching television is linked to less social trust and less group membership compared to time spent reading a newspaper. According to him, television viewing might directly account for as much as half of the drop in social capital in the U.S. Putnam's claim is that, "The evidence makes quite clear that newspaper reading and good citizenship go together" (p. 218), and that "Dependence on television for entertainment is not merely a significant predictor of civic disengagement. It is the single most consistent predictor that I have discovered" (p. 231). The reason for this phenomenon, still according to Putnam, is the fact that television "steals time," encouraging passivity and lethargy, and negatively affects individuals' psychic well-being.

Dhavan V. Shah (1998) explored how social capital evolves, and whether or not television viewing influences civic engagement and interpersonal trust, specifically focusing on time and preferences for particular television genres. According to the results, participation and trust are directly linked to civic engagement and interpersonal trust, while television watching acts only as a provisional function in the development of social capital. This researcher did not find any significant link between television genre and civic engagement and trust.

In another study, Pasek, Kenski, Romer, and Hall (2001) examine the role of mass media in relation to 14-to 22-year-old disengagement from politics. The survey targeted 12 types of mass media (including television), awareness of political events, and time spent in civic activities. Following Putnam's hypothesis, the researchers tested the positive links between civic activity and political awareness, but their findings contradict Putnam's proposition. The results of this study showed how information and entertainment media both facilitate civic engagement. In particular, news media was positively correlated to political awareness and civic engagement. The results of this survey also showed that despite media influences on civic and political engagement, the outcome, overall, was favorable. In fact, one of the researchers' suggestions was to develop ways to utilize the media in order to build community engagement for youth.

Another theory of the effects of mass media is based on people's perception of risk. Some argue that mass media is responsible for shaping individuals' ways of thinking/perceiving risk (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), while others argue that humans, by nature, perceive risk due to irrational ways of thinking (i.e., feeling safe vs. being safe) (Slovic, 2000).

Many scholars criticize mass media claiming that it is controlled by the corporate world, whose sole purpose is supporting and increasing their sales (Herman & McChesney, 1997; Keane, 1991; Kellner, 2004). Critics argue that the news is mined for entertainment value, often featuring gossip, scandals, and violence in order to attract people's attention, thus increasing the ratings and in turn increasing sponsors and revenues.

Even political news is often far from being informational. Mass media often report politicians' personalities rather than ideologies, and their family scandals rather than their plans. For example, political propaganda, as shown by mass media, focuses on catchy slogans that provide minimal information, creating distrust and lack of interest in many people (Capella & Jamieson, 1997).

For instance, Don Imus, a television and radio celebrity who made a racist and sexist comment on his radio show when talking about a women's basketball college team, has recently dominated the news. His comment was re-played and commented on for weeks on radio and television even after the show host had apologized to the basketball team, the team had accepted his apology, and he had been fired from the broadcasting station CBS. Although Don Imus's comment was not a frivolous matter because it raised serious issues regarding freedom of speech and the perpetuation of racial stereotypes, this event has dominated the media for weeks monopolizing the public attention. In the meantime, news such as the status of the war in Iraq and the political scandal regarding Alberto Gonzales, the attorney general accused of firing eight U.S. attorneys for political reasons, assumed secondary importance on the news.

Often the perception of increased danger is used by the media as a mean for catching people's attention, provoking unnecessary fear as a response. Television is likely to show crimes that are not statistically significant and undermine those that are statistically noteworthy if the "product sells" and the rating responses are high, thus, according to some scholars, manipulating people's perceptions of danger.

Slovic (2000) argues that humans, by nature, have common fears, and that perception of danger is not always the result of rational analysis. In his opinion,

individuals' responses to risk may be dictated by emotions rather than rational thoughts leading to unsafe behavioral choices. One example supporting this view is the sense of safety people had driving, rather than flying, after the events of September 11, 2001. According to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA, 2003), tourists' air arrivals dropped 6.5% during that period, while vehicle arrivals increased by 7.3%.

This argument implies that, statistically speaking, the risks of being injured or dying in a terrorist attack in the U.S. is much smaller than that of being injured or dying in a car crash. Another example of misperceived risk is reported by the National Center for Statistics & Analysis (2003), which reported that approximately 20% of Americans drive without a seat belt. The assumption is that driving a car is a "familiar" activity that does not elevate concern for some individuals. However, this is a false sense of control or misperceived risk. The US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has estimated that in 2002, 85% of people who died in car crashes could have been saved if they had been wearing seat belts.

Sensational or bad news attracts attention in ways good news does not. Accordingly, reports may be skewed or selected in order to inflate information aimed to attract as many viewers as possible to increase sponsors and, thus, revenues.

Diversity

Putnam (2000) writes:

Of all dimensions along which forms of social capital vary, perhaps the most important is the distinction between bridging (or inclusive) and bonding (or exclusive). Some forms of social capital are, by choice or necessity, inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups. [...]

Bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity. . . . Bridging networks, by contrast, are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion. . . . Bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40. (pp. 22-23)

Fukuyama (1999) has proposed that shared moral values in a community promote higher levels of social trust. There seems to be a rising level of cynicism and a decrease of trust in the U.S. over the last five decades. Very few people seem to extend their trust beyond close networks. According to Rice and Steel (2001) and Putnam (2000), communities characterized by ethnic and racial diversity have low levels of social trust. The logical deduction is that engagement and trust promote social capital only within homogeneous groups. However, when groups centralize their practices, they increase levels of collaboration within their group at the expense of those outside the group who are going to be excluded (Bowels & Gintis, 2004).

Potentially, any trait shared by a group reinforces the membership of an individual to that group. However, tangible characteristics such as race, for instance, are more influential because they cannot be acquired. Such characteristics make the legitimacy or lack of legitimacy of an individual incontestable. Thus, parochialism, defined as a narrow range of interests, has the potential to create social exclusion that violates universal and legal norms, as well as public policies. Along the way, it also generates intolerance towards diversity and social interactions (Bowels & Ginty, 2004).

Bobo's (1988) research shows that when people miss interacting with others who are different from them on a racial, ethnic, and SES scale, they develop and/or reinforce

prejudice against the “others” based on inaccurate information. Conversely, expanding ties is beneficial to the promotion of trust. Putnam has been advocating a return to traditions, but given the complexity of diversity in the U.S., proposing solutions based on one perspective may come at the expense of those who do not subscribe to that perspective or who value different traditions.

Van Deth (Devine & Roberts, 2003) has made a distinction between the social aspects of social capital, such as social networks, and the cultural aspects, such as norms and values. The concept is interesting because it changes the discourse of social capital. Instead of considering social capital as being more or less in decline, it stimulates a discourse on whether or not social capital works and how.

Proposed Solutions

According to Putnam (2000):

Some solutions to today’s civic deficit may seem initially preposterous, but we should be wary of straining our civic intensiveness through conventional filters.

The specific reforms of the Progressive Era are no longer appropriate for our time, but the practical, enthusiastic idealism of that era – and its achievements – should inspire us. (p. 401)

Putnam’s view that civic engagement and trust foster social capital has transformed social capital into a communal resource, adding moral and ethical values to the concept. In these terms, the concept of social capital is narrow, and it obscures the effect of social capital at the individual level. Social capital, as for other forms of capital, is not equally available to all. In addition, not all types of social capital are created in the

same way or serve the same purpose for everybody. Thus, the proposition that social capital is the “panacea” curing all evil in society should be taken with a grain of salt.

After the publication of Putnam’s book, there has been renewed awareness in social capital as a remedy for the cause of today’s social problems implying the assumption that these problems lie in the weakening of civility rather than a changing civility. Social capital might be valuable in certain circumstances and within certain communities, but the same social capital could be deleterious in a different context and situation. An abundance of social capital is seen as being almost necessary for the well-being of individuals in society, and a society rich in social capital is better than one that has none. However, this argument might lead to an excessively rigid and unresponsive political system, in which a number of politicians have already adopted a “distorted” view of social capital and ways to use it to pursue their own political interests. Putnam’s hypothesis has stimulated a lot of attention on change as a negative, sidetracking scholars and diverting attention from other issues. Some politicians might have adopted Putnam hypothesis in order to shed responsibilities from government agencies, and to promote little intervention.

In the next chapter, I am going to discuss the political and social ramifications of social capital, reviewing how “special” interests might have been used to promote particular causes, and how this might be affecting intervention and division of resources. I am also going to examine subsequent policy and research implications of these political and social ramifications, and implications for future research and policy.

CHAPTER IV

THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RAMIFICATIONS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital, intended as positive outcome from the combination of generalized trust and access to social networks, is important at various levels, especially at the level of public policy, because it correlates variables that are usually greatly advantageous.

As discussed earlier, many scholars have linked generalized trust to positive views of democratic institutions, civic engagement, and political participation. Individuals living in societies characterized by high levels of social capital report having better health, education, general well-being, and happiness, compared to societies with low social capital. Some data have shown that communities with high social capital have better economic growth, working democratic institutions, and lower crime rates.

Although there are disagreements among scholars regarding the origins of social capital, researchers such as Fukuyama (1995) and Putnam (2000) agreed that the power of developing social capital resides on individuals' trust and the amount and frequency of their interactions. However, their stance narrowed the concept of social capital to resources possessed by individuals and their engagement in activities, linking them to the outcome of the collective. Other data show controversial evidence supporting the relationship between engagement and generalized trust at individual levels in relation to increase of social capital.

There is general agreement that social interaction is the byproduct of personal traits facilitating transactions and cooperation among individuals, and most scholars

agree that not all voluntary associations exert their power to create resources that are favorable to everybody. Thus, it appears that the key to improving social capital lies in organizing communities at a local level in order to generate a “custom made” social capital according to the needs of a specific population within a given area. Following this logic, it seems difficult to identify a relationship between social capital and the role of national and state political institutions.

Berman (1997), Hall (1999), and Levi (1998) proposed that an institution-centered approach might be more effective than a society-centered one (i.e., Fukuyama and Putnam) or a historically-determined one (i.e., Putnam), which are two of the approaches discussed earlier in connection to social capital. In fact, Berman, Hall, and Levi disagree with Putnam, claiming that social capital cannot develop separately from the involvement of politics and government and within the realm of social institutions. From their perspective, institution makeup is used to influence the ways individuals develop ties and cooperate in society.

Research aimed at studying the role of government creates a new set of theoretical and empirical questions related to political and administrative institutions on one side, and social capital and generalized trust on the other. For instance, according to some scholars, generalized trust and engagement are necessary to increase economic equality among citizens with consequent increase of social capital and well-being.

Levi (1988) suggests that government monitoring is particularly important for the development of social capital. Rothstein and Stolle (2003) suggest that institutional impartiality and universal programs, as opposed to targeted programs, are the keys to stimulate social capital. However, society in the U.S. is not homogeneous, and it is

represented by a variety of people with different ethnic, cultural, social and economic status, gender and other backgrounds, needs, and interests. All these differences make the discourse of impartial and universalized intervention difficult because any intervention is likely to favor one group or a limited number of groups at the expense of others.

Social capital, as presented by Putnam and others, has been politicized, as particular sets of resources and selected groups have been favored over others. Politicization of social capital has created a series of implications and raised a number of questions that are important to consider in order to develop social policies for democracy. Two of these questions concern how to handle minorities as well as other groups. For instance, there are questions regarding the value of impartiality and universalism when dealing with diversity, the value of focusing on minority issues in order to achieve equality, the cost of this focus on society, and the effectiveness of equality itself (i.e., equal to whom?).

Questions stemming from different implications regarding social capital as presented by Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone* (2000), and socio-political implications are discussed in this chapter. These questions relate to community development with particular emphasis on community and individuals, civic engagement and economic growth, and social rights and welfare within the realm of bonding and bridging groups. I will conclude this chapter with a discussion on implications for future research and policy of social capital.

Community and Individuals

In 1977, Loury wrote:

The social context within which individual maturation occurs strongly conditions what otherwise equally competent individuals can achieve. This implies that absolute equality of opportunity, where an individual's chance to succeed depends only on his or her innate capabilities, is an ideal that cannot be achieved. . . . An individual's social origin has an obvious and important effect on the amount of resources that is ultimately invested in his or her development. It may thus be useful to employ a concept of "social capital" to represent the consequences of social position in facilitating acquisition of the standard human capital characteristics. (p. 176)

In *Making Democracy Work* (1993), Putnam argued that that social capital was a resource that individuals and groups either possessed or did not. Referring to the Italian community, he wrote, "[Italian communities] did not become civic simply because they were rich. The historical records suggest precisely the opposite: They have become rich because they were civic. . . . Development economists take note: civics matters" (p. 37). According to Putnam, social capital is a "possession" that both individuals and communities either have or do not. However, communities are a complex aggregate of a series of variables such as social, political, cultural, and economic affiliations, and per se they cannot display any form of activity as individuals and institutions do (De Filippis, 1999; Massey, 1994). Also, the outcome of a community is not simply related to attributes of the individuals residing in that community. Rather, an outcome implicates individuals' relationships within and beyond any given community. These relationships are filtered through issues of power and market, and are not necessarily related to individuals' inborn qualities.

Civic Engagement and Economic Growth

As Foley and Edwards(1997) state:

Tocqueville argues that America's associational life springs from the twin social and political conditions of the new nation. . . . The social condition, the relatively egalitarian character of American society, plays an explicit role in Tocqueville's account of the genesis of American associationism. The political freedoms Americans enjoy play a generally supporting role, but an essential one. American egalitarianism poses serious problems for public life to Tocqueville's mind. . . . a general leveling promotes mediocrity and conformism [and] associations arise to fill these deficiencies. (p. 554)

Putnam's view of civic engagement implies a vision of societies sharing common norms and reciprocity for the benefit of the large group. However, civic engagement is not necessarily a positive constituent promoting common goals on the basis of trust and shared values for two reasons. The first reason is that "individuals (and groups) do not always share mutual interests. The second reason is that all groups and associations are not equal and do not exert the same kind of power. Inevitably, certain social networks and their constituents have more authority and influence and may be the recipients of more or better benefits compared to others within the sphere of a given socio-political realm. However, since Putnam's view implies a division between "social capital" and "capital" itself, a discrepancy in theoretical and practical terms involving socio-political intervention arise from his theory of social capital and civil society.

Discussing variation between different types of capital, Bourdieu (1985) recognized that all types of capital derive in some way from economic capital.

Particularly, he points out that social capital is never disconnected from the more traditional form of capital (economic), although it could never completely be reduced to an economic form. The paradox of this connection, still according to Bourdieu, is rooted in the fact that social capital is characterized by a set of relations strongly interconnected to economy and power, but, at the same time, it conceals these relationships. Following this logic, the socio-political implications are that if the success of civic engagement relies on the amount of social capital, social capital itself, intended as the outcome of production, is also the means of economy and power. In these terms, it is important not to link individuals participating in social networks to the products (economic and power) they generate. In doing so, there is a risk of equating individuals in the networks to the outcome, either successful or not, undermining their access, or lack of it, to resources.

In order to be considered an asset, social capital has to maintain a connection to economic capital, at least in theory. Within this context, some individual in a given community might have the ability or favorable access to assets to increase their production. This advantage might come at the expense of other individuals who may not have the same advantages, or who might be “eliminated” as competitors. For instance, if there is only one position in a company, and if that position is considered “capital” to every member of a community, the type of engagement and trust described by Putnam would not exist in that community. As argued by Max Weber in 1925,

[A relationship] is especially likely to be closed, for rational reasons, in the following type of situation: a social relationship may provide the parties to it with opportunities for satisfaction of various interests, whether the satisfactions be spiritual or material If the participants expect the admission of others will

lead to an improvement of their situation, their interest will be keeping their relationship open. If, on the other hand, their expectations are of improving their positions by monopolistic tactics, their interest is in a closed relationship. (1993, p. 40)

Economists, along with political scientists and sociologists, are debating on economic growth on a variety of levels, and most of them agree that institutions, such as government, have a strong influence on determining economic performance. Economists, in particular, point out that higher levels of social capital produce good institutions. According to them, absence of social capital may explain low levels of spending on public goods such as education and welfare. However, when talking about social capital, economists actually focus on trust as a predictor of economic growth.

At the level of community, trust limits the costs of transactions within that community. Thus, it does not come as a surprise that a number of studies have shown a positive correlation between trust and economic growth. However, when considering civic engagement as a predictor of economic growth, there are inconsistencies as well as disagreements among scholars and findings of studies. Knack and Keefer (1997), for instance, found that the correlation between civic engagement and better economy is not statistically significant, and that “promoting horizontal associations through encouraging the formation of participation in groups may be counterproductive” (p. 1284).

In the last few years, a number of economic studies focused on measures of civic engagement including group participation and state spending (i.e., redistribution of income) in relation to economic growth. Regarding participation, most findings show heterogeneous communities have less civic engagement and economic growth compared

to homogeneous communities. For instance, Alesina e La Ferrara (2000) found that organizational membership in metropolitan areas characterized by greater racial diversity was lower and income inequality was higher when compared to areas with less racial diversity. Putnam (1993) showed similar findings and, when discussing those who reside in inner cities, he argued:

Although most poor Americans do not reside in the inner city, there is something qualitatively different about the social and economic isolation experienced by the chronically poor blacks and Latinos who do. Joblessness, inadequate education, and poor health clearly truncate the opportunities of ghetto residents. (p. 39)

What is not clear is if inner cities really lack social capital, as Putnam claims, and if this lack of social capital affects economic growth in any way. It seems to be a common assumption, particularly among American policy circles and popular culture among Caucasians, that inner city communities populated by non-white people are characterized by lack of trust, values, morals, and engagement, which are basic elements indispensable for development of social capital as described by Putnam and others. According to this view, lack of economic functioning is related to failure of people functioning properly within the context of social capital.

Despite the fact that the notion of inner cities and their seemingly apparent social “deficiencies” has been part of various political and public policy debates, there is little evidence supporting this view. According to Anderson (1999) and other ethnographic researchers, social capital exists in inner cities, but in different forms. For instance, in his book *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City*, Anderson argues that most poor communities in inner cities rely on barter systems,

exchanging favors with one another. For instance, one person is likely to fix a neighbor's car in exchange for his neighbor's help to paint the kitchen, and another person is likely to style someone's hair with an expectation of being paid back in the future with another favor. Thus, according to Anderson, it is the lack of a functional economic system that compels people to interact within the sphere of what he defines as an "irregular economy" (p. 318).

Regarding state spending (i.e., redistribution of wealth), states spend differing amounts per capita on social welfare, and the federal government in the U.S. has been playing an important role counterbalancing state fiscal disparities by reimbursing Medicaid and foster care, federally funding the Supplemental Security Income (SSI), helping Food Stamps and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), favoring those states with a higher low-income rate requiring no state funds (Caputo, 2006).

Social Rights and Welfare

Writing about liberalism, Patulny claims:

[Liberalism] system is predicated on the belief that the market can service most needs and will inevitably reduce poverty, and that welfare may impede the efficient functioning of the market; liberal values are therefore the most inherently anti-welfare. For liberals, only a very basic systems of means-tested public provision is necessary for those unable to participate in the market (essentially old and infirm). The 'residualist' nature of such welfare subject to the "suspicion" inherent in means testing is unlikely to encourage tolerant attitudes conducive to supporting social rights and bridging social capital. (Patulny, 2005)

Marshall (1973) argued that there are different forms of rights in society. Civic rights relate to individual freedom such as freedom of speech, faith, and the right to own property. Political rights relate to “[participating] in the exercise of political power, as a member. . . or as an elector of the members of such a body” (p. 8). Social rights, according to Marshall, are more controversial because they range from “the right to a modicum economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (p. 8).

According to some scholars, there are three major risks in capitalistic societies. The first one is related to commodification, which is promoting the well-being of individuals by depending upon a market-based society. The second one is social stratification, which is related to access to “goods,” and creating a pattern of superior and inferior ranks among individuals within a hierarchical scale in the social contest (Esping-Anderson, 1990). The third one is “familialisation,” or maintaining an inequitable gender division and poor family outcomes based on gender discrimination against women, which supports a paternalistic view (Esping-Anderson, 1999).

Social rights, unlike civil and political rights, require resources (i.e., financial) that can be at odds with a capitalistic system, which is based on the ability to pay rather than on equality of rights of individuals according to the prevailing standards (i.e., “normal way of life”) of a given society. The fact that not all individuals are capable or in a favorable social strata position of achieving these standards based on individual limitations might create social exclusion.

Some scholars argue that following the pressures of the free market to increase profit, and the competitive economy related to globalization, the concept of welfare has been equated to a threat to social integration and a danger to the national economy (Goldberg, 2002). However, other scholars have argued that welfare programs create dependence on public services (thus, the state) eroding social capital (Saunders, 2005; Wolfe, 1989). This view might be creating a stigma supporting a punitive view of vulnerability and fostering intolerance.

One of the problems of social capital is related to ownership. According to Putnam (2000), social capital is the product of interaction and is owned by the collective. Bourdieu (1986) claims social capital is an asset belonging to the individual. Other scholars argue there is a conflict between types of social capital, namely bonding and bridging, and the possibility that there are types of negative social capital toxic to society, creating a victim blaming mentality (Patulny, 2004; Portes & Landolt, 1996). The way social capital theory is conceptualized supports the view of community self-reliance without considering the structures required to build such self-reliance. This omission might explain the popular view of social capital as a substitute for welfare provision.

Interpretation of social capital as a welfare substitute promotes the concept of the localized community failing to distinguish between circumscribed communities and wider civic society. Putnam's interpretation of social capital seems limited to the community level, creating the illusory view that well-being in society might be generated by community interactions as a cure-all. The hazard of this view is policy aimed to encourage community participation with the assumption that the outcome of participation will "build" social capital for the benefit of all, stigmatizing those who gain no benefit.

This interpretation of social capital might be eroding social rights. Obviously, policy by itself cannot create social capital, but it can influence development.

Implications for Future Research and Policy

The conceptual map of future research on social capital should be redirected into the analysis of social capital at three levels. The micro level, aimed to analyze social capital at the individual level, meso, aimed to analyze social capital at the community level, and the macro level, aimed to analyze social capital at the societal level. Such analysis would be helpful to increase the understanding of how society works, as well as create a “blueprint” for policy intervention. The primary goal of government intervention should be to develop a system to cultivate social capital at all three levels with the help of a number of policies supporting individuals, community development, and promoting citizen education. Overall, future research should not accept the existing work in the area of social capital at face value and it should include a new understanding and conceptual framework to influence policy favoring the well-being of society as a whole.

It could take a long time to unravel the discourse of social capital, participation, and trust. Up to now, there is consent among scholars regarding the recurrent theme of social relations providing opportunities for the development of social capital. However, the current trend emphasizing individuals and small networks should be reviewed in the future.

The political, legal, and institutional settings of communities influence the capacity of social groups to act in the interest of the members in communities. The quality of formal institutional involvement might actively encourage communities supporting local programs. A variety of studies (Collier & Gunning, 1999; Hall & Jones,

1999) have shown how high levels of ethnic division paired with weak political rights are positively correlated to societies' slow growth. Thus, if fragmented societies and weak institutions do not favor social capital, the logical deduction is that investing in both civic and governmental social capital are complementary factors that should not be considered separately in order to be effective.

The purpose of a new conceptual framework should separate indiscriminate references to both forms of social capital, "personal" and "communal," shedding light on the confusing association of process and outcome (i.e., cause and effect) of social capital, and develop policy affecting interventions for various sectors and at different levels.

One aim of the research should be to provide a base for building a collection of data aimed to direct policy, and inform individuals, informal groups, and formal institutions regarding their accountability to promote the common good. Data should be collected using comparative research designed to evaluate micro, meso, and macro structures across and within countries in order to investigate poverty rate, government performance, conflicts (e.g., ethnic), and economic growth. Research should also incorporate multidimensional levels of analysis taking into account changes occurring throughout time, and taking into account that measures of variables such as personal and generalized trust are approximations.

The goal of gathering information about social capital should be raising the awareness among decision-makers about the potential impacts of interventions and changes in policy rather than relying on the capacity of individuals. Investing in social capital should reduce the cost of transactions between individuals and government.

Imposing costs on citizens without a guarantee of a gain in return does nothing to create an incentive for citizens to pay the initial cost.

Furthermore, if individuals in one group perceive themselves to be the only ones paying the cost (e.g., taxes) for benefits they do not really need, they will not be compliant with the cost involved. Incrementing social capital to facilitate citizen-government interaction should, consequently, shape the expectations of individuals (e.g., taxpayers) about the behaviors of those in need. For instance, giving individuals optimistic expectations about those in need, and reinforcing the importance of public services as beneficial for the entire group (either directly in need or not) should relieve the government of the burden of enforcing compliance. In order to do so, emphasis in social capital should smooth the shift between personalized interests into community interests or, using Putnam's words, "developing the "I" into the "we"" (1995, p. 67).

Policies should be designed to facilitate individuals' functioning within a social context characterized by a combination of informal networks and formal institutions. Understanding the effect of policies on social capital is important in order to individuate the power and political interests of those with a direct investment in it. At the same time, it is important to empower the organizational capacity of those who are most in need (e.g., poor) helping them connect with the rest of the communities and social groups. If those in need were encouraged to participate in the implementation of services (e.g., health care) and the evaluation of these services, there should be a return of revenues to the advantage of the entire community. The idea is providing common ground for individuals with different needs to enable them to interact with one another.

Research on social capital has been limited mostly to models concerning individuals and social cooperation, personalized and generalized trust, activities, and other variables related to the individual. Future research needs to extend to government intervention and its correlation with social capital in order to develop a series of hypotheses that further develop research favoring the collective well-being of individuals.

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