

Fab Abs

Recent Research Abstracts

Vol. 36 - November 2005

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Putnam, Robert. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

The author discusses the two main components of the concept of social capital: bonding social capital and bridging social capital. The former refers to the value assigned to social networks between homogeneous groups of people and the latter to social networks between heterogeneous groups. Underworld gangs, for instance, may create bonding social capital, while choirs and bowling clubs create bridging social capital. Bridging social capital is argued to have a host of other benefits for societies, governments, individuals and communities. The author claims that joining an organisation cuts in half an individual's chance of dying within the next year. Horizontal networks of individual citizens and groups that enhance community productivity and cohesion are said to be positive social capital assets whereas self-serving exclusive gangs and hierarchical patronage systems may produce negative social capital burdens on society.

Allik Juri; Realo, Anu. (2004). Individualism–collectivism and social capital. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*. 35 (1), 29-49.

The authors analysed available data on the relationship between individualism–collectivism and social capital within one country (the United States) and across 42 countries. In America, the states with a high level of social capital (higher degree of civic engagement in political activity, where people spend more time with their friends and believe that most people can be trusted) were paradoxically found to be more individualistic. A correspondingly strong association between individualism and social capital was observed in the comparison of different countries. These results support Durkheim's view that when individuals become more autonomous and seemingly liberated from social bonds, they actually become even more dependent on society.

Jorgensen, Bradley. (2004). Social Capital in a Tolerant Society? A Response to Treasurer Costello's presentation to the Sydney Institute. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*. 24 (1/2), 1-20.

In his address to the Sydney Institute in July 2003, Australian Treasurer Peter Costello argued that tolerance would flow from an active voluntary sector. The author argues, however, that the Treasurer failed to acknowledge that all behaviour is strategic and that engagement in community or social activism is usually motivated by some form of self-interest. Ultimately, Treasurer Costello's notion of an active voluntary sector may not lead to greater tolerance or inclusiveness, but rather to the exclusion of those citizens with low social capital. Ageing workers, slow or ineffective learners and women may be especially at risk. The author, therefore, argues the need to develop policies that strengthen the capacity of individuals through both formal and informal means rather than holding out on the hope of an active voluntary community to achieve inclusiveness and tolerance.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2004). *Measuring social capital. An Australian framework and indicators. Information Paper*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS catalogue no.1378.0)

This report contains the conceptual framework for gathering statistics on social capital as developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. After defining various elements of social capital, the report outlines the definition and parameters of each topic, possible sources of data and indicators for measuring social capital. Examples of areas included in the framework are social participation, bonding, norms, and trust. Also included in appendices are existing sources of data on social capital, example questions from existing surveys and a suggested group and organisation typology.
