

SOCIAL CAPITAL AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

AN APPLIED INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE



EDITED BY
JOHN M. HALSTEAD
AND STEVEN C. DELLER



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In *Social Capital at the Community Level*, John Halstead and Steven Deller examine social capital formation beyond the individual level through a variety of disciplines: planning, economics, regional development, sociology, as well as non-traditional approaches like engineering and built environmental features. The notion of social capital in community and economic development has become a focus of intense interest for policy makers, practitioners, and academics. The notion is that communities with higher levels of social capital (networks, trust, and norms) will prosper both economically and socially. In a practical sense, how do communities use the notion of social capital to build policies and strategies to move their community forward? Are all forms of social capital the same and do they all have a positive influence on the community? To help gain insights into these fundamental questions *Social Capital at the Community Level* takes a holistic, interdisciplinary or systems approach to thinking about the community.

While those who study social capital will acknowledge the need for an interdisciplinary approach, most stay within their disciplinary silos. One could say there is strong bonding social capital within disciplines but little bridging social capital across disciplines. The contributors to *Social Capital at the Community Level* have made an attempt to build that bridging social capital. While disciplinary biases and research approaches are evident there is significant overlap about how people with different disciplinary perspectives think about social capital and how it can be applied at the community level. This can be from neighborhoods addressing a localized issue to a global response to a natural disaster. This book is an invaluable resource for scholars, researchers and policy makers of community and economic development, as well as rural sociologists and planners looking to understand the opaque process of social capital formation in communities.

John M. Halstead is Professor of Environmental Economics at the University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire, USA. He received his PhD in Agricultural and Applied Economics from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, MS in Resource Economics from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and BA from the University of Notre Dame.

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“This is an important and timely book. By focusing on community social capital, the contextual nature of the variable and its implications for social justice are illuminated. The authors confront potential of social capital for increasing as well as decreasing inequality and poverty theoretically, empirically, and with concrete cases.”

– **Cornelia Butler Flora, Charles F. Curtiss**

Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Sociology,
Agriculture and Life Sciences, Kansas State University

“The field of community development witnessed something of a ‘paradigm shift’ with the emergence of local asset-based strategies. None of these has proven to be as significant as that of social capital formation. This book is the very first comprehensive assessment and discussion of social capital in the context of community development practice and thus constitutes a major contribution.”

– **Mark Lapping**, Distinguished Professor, Edmund S. Muskie
School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine

“*Social Capital at the Community Level* is a unique contribution to social capital and community development literature. Bringing together scholars from four disciplines, the book provides new insight into how social capital works at the local level and how it affects important economic and social outcomes (small business development, poverty reduction, trust). It is a must-read for those involved in local community development and rural wealth creation efforts.”

– **Bruce Weber**, Professor of Applied Economics,
Oregon State University

The community development research and practice series

Volume 7

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The evolution of the field of community development continues. As reflected in both theory and practice, community development is at the forefront of change, which comes as no surprise to our communities and regions that constantly face challenges and opportunities. As a practice focused discipline, change often seems to be the only constant in the community development realm. The need to integrate theory, practice, research, teaching, and training is even more pressing now than ever, given rapidly transforming economic, social, environmental, political and cultural climates locally and globally. Current and applicable information and insights about effective research and practice are needed.

The Community Development Society, a nonprofit association of those interested in pushing the discipline forward, is delighted to offer this book series in partnership with Routledge. The series is designed to integrate innovative thinking on tools, strategies, and experiences as a resource especially well-suited for bridging the gaps between theory, research, and practice. The Community Development Society actively promotes continued advancement of the discipline and practice. Fundamental to this mission is adherence to the following core Principles of Good Practice. This book series is a reflection of many of these principles:

- Promote active and representative participation towards enabling all community members to meaningfully influence the decisions that affect their lives.
- Engage community members in learning about and understanding community issues, and the economic, social, environmental, political, psychological, and other impacts associated with alternative courses of action.
- Incorporate the diverse interests and cultures of the community in the community development process; and disengage from support of any effort that is likely to adversely affect the disadvantaged members of a community.
- Work actively to enhance the leadership capacity of community members, leaders, and groups within the community.
- Be open to using the full range of action strategies to work towards the long-term sustainability and well-being of the community.

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Social Capital at the Community Level

An Applied Interdisciplinary Perspective

John M. Halstead and Steven C. Deller

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*Edited by John M. Halstead
and Steven C. Deller*

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xvi
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xvii
 Foreword	 xxi
<i>Mark R. Warren</i>	
 1 Social Capital and Community Development: An Introduction	 1
<i>John M. Halstead and Steven C. Deller</i>	
 2 A Brief History of Social Capital Research	 14
<i>Shannon H. Rogers and Patricia M. Jarema</i>	
 3 The Built Environment of Communities and Social Capital	 31
<i>Kevin M. Leyden and Abraham Goldberg</i>	
 4 Social Capital, Communities, and the Firm	 44
<i>Bjorn Markeson and Steven C. Deller</i>	
 5 Social Capital, County Information Networks and Poverty Reduction	 81
<i>Stephan J. Goetz and Yicheol Han</i>	
 6 Measuring Social Capital at the Neighborhood Scale through a Community Based Framework	 103
<i>Shannon H. Rogers and Kevin H. Gardner</i>	

7	Social Capital and Community Planning <i>Mary A. Friedman and Andria V. Fraser</i>	114
8	The Relationship between Social Capital and Ecosystem Services: A Regional Analysis <i>Patricia M. Jarema and John M. Halstead</i>	134
9	The Role of Natural Disasters and Technology in the Formation of Social Capital <i>Mark Skidmore and Hideki Toya</i>	155
10	Latino/a Immigration, Social Capital, and Business Civic Engagement in Rural Prairie Towns <i>Terry L. Besser and Nancy J. Miller</i>	174
11	Social Capital: What Do We Know? And Where Do We Go From Here? <i>John M. Halstead and Steven C. Deller</i>	190
	<i>Index</i>	203

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

1.1	Co-authorship network: bridges among disciplines	6
2.1	General representation of bonding vs. bridging social capital	21
4.1	Regional social capital archetypes	55
4.2	Small business concentration index	69
4.3	Spatial clustering of small business concentration index	69
5.1	The concept of a polycentric spatial structure	87
5.2	In-entropy by type of connection	89
5.3	Poverty rates for the United States (1959–2012)	90
5.4	Change in poverty rate, the United States (2001–2011)	91
5.5	Map of percent (a) out-migrants and (b) out-commuters	92
5.6	Movement of people in Alabama and Georgia; (a) migration and (b) commuting	93
5.7	Migration and commuting entropy measures	95
6.1	Research methods used	106
8.1	Framework of a social-ecological system	137
8.2	Geographic distribution of the number of membership organizations and associations, per 10,000 persons (1990)	140
8.3	Geographic distribution of third place establishments, per 10,000 persons (1990)	141
8.4	The net loss of forested land cover in the period of 1990–2000 (an index)	145
8.5	Geographic distribution of housing growth in wildland areas in the period of 1990–2000	149

10.1	Socioeconomic and diversity predictors of social capital and business civic engagement with 2005–09 population controlled	184
10.2	Socioeconomic and diversity predictors of social capital and business civic engagement with 2005–09 poverty rate controlled	185

Tables

2.1	Various definitions of the term “Social Capital”	17
4.1	Business implications of regional social capital and implicit institutions	57
4.2	Entrepreneurship metric relationships	65
4.3	Small business concentration index	66
4.4	Correlations across entrepreneurship priorities and social capital	68
4.5	Modeling of small business concentration	72
5.1	Definitions of variables and descriptive statistics	94
5.2	Regression parameter estimates	96
6.1	Principles of community based participatory research	106
6.2	Focus group guiding questions	109
7.1	“What makes you feel like you are part of a community?”	121
7.2	Percentages: “How much do you trust different groups of people that may be involved in your community?”	122
7.3	Mean Scores: “How much do you trust these groups to make decisions in your community?”	123
7.4	Percentages: “How much do you trust government to make good decisions?”	124
7.5	Mean Scores: “How much do you trust government to make good decisions?”	124
7.6	Involvement in local action in past 12 months	125
7.7	Percentage of people participating in social activities	127
7.8	Obstacles to becoming involved in community	128
8.1	Ecosystem services as defined by the millennium assessment	136
8.2	Description of variables used in two vectors of social capital measurement	140
8.3	The net loss of forested land cover as a function of social ecological system	147
8.4	Wald F test results examining the combined effect of social capital measures on the net loss of forested land cover	148
8.5	Regression results scenario 2	151
8.6	Wald F test results examining the combined effect of social capital measures on housing growth in the WUI in the period of 1990–2000	152
9.1	Natural disasters, information and communication technology, and trust. dependent variable: change in trust	165
9.2	Climatic and geologic disasters, information and communication technology, and trust. Dependent variable: change in trust	166
9.A	Summary of statistics of all variables	171

9.B	Definitions and sources of variables	172
9.C	List of Countries	173
10.1	Indices for business civic engagement and social capital variables (N=1303)	182
10.2	New destination and matched towns compared—means (standard deviation)	183
11.1	Brief summary of chapters in this volume	192

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FOREWORD

Beyond Place: Social Capital Theory and Practice Twenty Years Out

This volume on social capital and community development comes at an important time. It provides an opportunity to reflect on the contributions of social capital theory about twenty years out. Robert Putnam began publishing his work on social capital in the early to mid 1990s. As the authors of this volume note, the content of these ideas was not entirely new to scholars and practitioners in community development. But Putnam's work, perhaps because of its scale and comprehensive nature, and perhaps also because of its timing, had an impact that cannot be overstated. Place-based strategies for community advancement were on the rise, as were asset-based strategies. Putnam offered a grand theory into which community development could find an important place. For many it represented the reassertion of the value of civil society—and of the worth of relationships and of community—in the face of the power of the state and the market. Suddenly policy-makers had to consider the effects of public policy on a community's social fabric, not just on the economic or social prospects of individuals. Notions of community building, so close to the concerns of community development scholars, were now reaching a broad audience.

I had the opportunity to be a part of Putnam's team of graduate students at Harvard University who helped work on the *Bowling Alone* project. This was an exciting time for me as a member of this team and also in my own research. I used social capital theory in my dissertation and first book, *Dry Bones Rattling* (Warren 2001) where I showed how the social capital gathered around religious congregations provided a critical resource for community organizing efforts that sought to build power for low-income communities. Effective organizing by the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation network, the subject of my study, built and used social

capital to win campaigns to construct more affordable housing, create job opportunities, increase equity and quality in public education, and improve neighborhood safety. The network's local organizations built broader forms of power in support of community development and equity goals by linking congregations across metropolitan areas, creating bridging forms of social capital across race and class lines.

I also had the opportunity to be co-organizer of a Ford Foundation sponsored conference held in 1999 on the role of social capital in combatting poverty. This was an early effort to consider the value of social capital to community development with a particular focus on low-income communities and communities of color. Like the editors of this volume, we saw the need to bring scholars together across disciplinary boundaries and to struggle with the definition and measurement of social capital. We published the conference papers in an edited volume (Saegert, Thompson, and Warren 2001) where my co-editors and I argued for considering social capital building at three levels: bonding, bridging and institutional. We showed the need to create and connect bonding and bridging forms of social capital with social connections to public institutions in a larger project of social transformation. We warned that social capital could not address poverty or foster community development on its own, but did provide a critical resource for community organizers and antipoverty activists.

The editors of this volume have asked me to reflect on the contributions of social capital theory to community development in the years since that early work. I remain as excited about the generativity of social capital theory as I did before, but perhaps I am more sober about its ultimate power if social capital remains organized and studied primarily at the local level. On the one hand, research has demonstrated the vital role that social capital plays in local community well-being, as the findings of this volume continue to show. We now understand better what factors promote or inhibit the development of social capital and its impact on a range of important outcomes for families and communities. One could produce similar volumes on social capital and education or on social capital and public health as well; and we would see evidence for its impact in these and other areas vital to well-being for families.

Indeed, this volume marks a further advance in this endeavor. Chapters in this volume show the contribution of social capital to community planning and to land use policy, for example. Many of the chapters advance understanding of the contexts and processes that enhance social capital. For example, we learn from chapters three and six how the built environment shapes social capital. In chapter three, Kevin Leyden and Abraham Goldberg demonstrate the impact of the way a community organizes itself spatially on the opportunities and incentives for collectiveness in a neighborhood or community. In chapter six, Shannon Rogers and Kevin Gardner show the effects of walkability on trust. Chapter nine by Mark Skidmore and Hideki Toya even shows that disasters can be events that provoke an increase in social trust at the national level, especially when people are connected through information technology.

In chapter four Bjorn Markeson and Steven Deller engage an important and longstanding debate concerning social capital and its “dark side.” Social capital can be used for purposes that support broad collective values and community enhancement. However, like any resource, groups can use social capital to advance their own interests in competition with or in suppression of other groups. Markeson and Deller, however, want us to further appreciate that there can be unintended negative consequences of social capital even when the stated aim is positive. In this case social capital is shown to promote and support small business development but sometimes to impede it as well.

Despite the continued demonstration in this volume and elsewhere of the importance of social capital to community development, my assessment today is more cautious. We have seen the development of broader social, economic and political trends that have profoundly impacted the state of our communities on the ground in local areas. Communities have been wracked by the megatrends of growing economic inequality, of mass incarceration, of large-scale immigration to old and new destinations, of gentrification in so many big cities, and of the kind of political gridlock that has prevented significant new public investments in low-income families and communities. Families struggle to advance when the only available work does not pay a living wage and when their children have no choice but to attend failing schools. When families are driven out of their neighborhoods by gentrification or by Hope XI redevelopment of their homes in public housing, we have little evidence that they are doing better; they may well be doing worse.

In my view, young people of color in low-income communities are at the epicenter of these megatrends. Nearly half of all black and Latino children grow up in or near poverty, often in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty with high rates of violence and inadequate services. They attend under-resourced schools, which fail them at high rates. As a result, in many cities half of all black and Latino boys fail to graduate from high school. Most will be condemned to lives of poverty and the males likely to imprisonment. Fully two-thirds of black men without a high school degree will serve time in prison at some point in their lives (Western and Pettit 2010).

We know, of course, that social capital can play an important role in supporting young people. Individual youths do better in school when surrounded by supportive adults in the form of bonding social capital in their families and in their churches, and sometimes in the form of bridging social capital by mentors from more affluent communities. Moreover, youth outcomes are better in communities with higher levels of social capital, including low-income communities (Sampson 2012). These are important findings and suggest the need to redouble efforts to build and use social capital at the local level.

However, twenty years out, we also need to ask the bigger question about the strength of social capital in the face of the larger forces mentioned above. How much of a difference is social capital making? Is it fulfilling the promise of social transformation? Nearly twenty years ago, Xavier de Souza Briggs (1998) highlighted the difference between social capital that helps people get by and social