

Broken Windows and Neighborhood Gardens: Searching for Signs of Visual Social Capital in American Communities

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Brief Literature Review

Introduction

- A variety of sociologists, psychologists, urban planners, and civic activists have argued that the presence of active social networks and a strong 'sense of community' between neighborhood residents inhibits such undesirable social behaviors as crime and violence, while enhancing community health conditions and general community development.
- The concept of social capital has recently emerged as a way to understand both the negative and positive forces which diminish or enhance community social networks.

Social Capital & 'Sense of Community'

- **Social Capital**
 - A set of horizontal associations between people, consisting of social networks and associated norms that have an effect on community productivity and well-being. Social capital facilitates coordination and cooperation.
 - World Bank, 2003
- **Sense of Community**
 - A feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together.
 - McMillan & Chavis, 1986

Purpose

- The purpose of this study is to discuss the possible link between the presence of observable social capital and various community outcomes.
- This is illustrated by photographs on the presence of both positive and negative observable social capital indicators in a national sample of 220 communities surrounding Monitoring the Future school sites across the United States.

Social Capital

- Norms of reciprocity (mutual aid) are dependent on social networks.
 - *Bonding* networks that connect folks who are similar help to sustain particularized (in-group) reciprocity.
 - *Bridging* networks that connect individuals who are diverse help to sustain generalized reciprocity.
- Collective action depends upon social networks (e.g., the role that the black church played in the civic rights movement) although collective action also can foster new networks.
- Broader identities and solidarity are encouraged by social networks that help translate an "I" mentality into a "we" mentality.

Bowling Alone

- Robert Putnam's article and book tapped into a deep longing in the U.S. for a sense of community that seemed to be on the decline in an era of long commutes, urban sprawl, Wal-Mart superstores, privacy fences, and housing transience.
- Putnam argues that social disconnection and community disengagement threaten our personal, community and national health.
- Close-knit communities tend to have better schools, higher educational achievement, more effective democratic institutions, faster economic growth and less crime and violence.

Is Social Capital on the Decline?

■ Declining trends over the last 25 years

– Attending club meetings



– Family dinners



– Having friends over



Putnam, 2000

Social Capital & Social Problems

- **Poverty**
 - A community's social assets can "improve the health, safety, education, economic well-being, political participation and quality of life of residents in poor communities". (Warren, et al., 2001, p. 1).
- **Health and Mortality**
 - Social capital associated with self-rated health (Kawachi, Kennedy, et al., 1999)
 - Social trust and group membership associated with total mortality as well as death from coronary heart disease, malignant neoplasms, and infant mortality (Kawachi, Kennedy, et al., 1997)

Community Attempts to Increase Social Capital

Physical Disorder & Social Problems

- **Depression**
 - Perceptions of neighborhood disorder associated with depressive symptoms (Latkin & Curry, 2003)
- **Crime and Fear of Crime**
 - Social Disorganization Theory
 - Physical incivilities and community disorder associated with crime and fear of crime (Perkins & Taylor, 1996)

American Utopian Communities

Utopia, where every man has a right to everything, they all know that if care is taken to keep the public stores full, no private man can want anything; for among them there is no unequal distribution, so that no man is poor, none in necessity; and though no man has anything, yet they are all rich; for what can make a man so rich as to lead a serene and cheerful life, free from anxieties?
(Thomas More, *Utopia*, 1515)

Historical Link to Utopian Communities

- Before the nineteenth century, various groups flocked to the New World to claim land and establish a new way of life in communal living experiments, mostly based on shared values and behaviors.
- Such communities were first distinguished by religion:
 - Virginia was established as an Anglican state.
 - Massachusetts was Puritan (persecuted Quakers and other dissident Protestant sects).
 - William Penn, a Quaker, founded the colony of Pennsylvania in 1682. Quakers and other groups had a haven with complete religious liberty. Penn actively recruited Protestant religious groups in Europe, which resulted in the largest wave of immigration to North America to that time. Besides English and German Quakers, Mennonites, Moravian Brethren and German Anabaptists responded to Penn's pleas. *Herndon, 1989*

What Might Social Capital Look Like?

- Is it possible to observe social capital in communities?
 - What would it look like?
 - How safe would it feel?
 - What sort of space would people share?
 - What kinds of social interaction would you see?
 - How clean and well-kept would it be?

Contemporary Trends in Shaping Communities: New Urbanism

- More than 200 developments in 39 states – a 37% increase in New Urbanist projects in 2001. *Sander, 2002*
- New Urbanist design principles include:
 - Diverse (mixed residential, business and retail)
 - Walkable (shops, walking and bike paths, streets in grid pattern to encourage social interaction)
 - Not automobile-centric (garage in back of house)
 - Houses near street to encourage social interaction (front porch)
 - Not gated
 - Clearly defined edges and centers
 - Shared gathering spaces (parks, town squares, community centers)

Disney's Celebration, Florida

"In the spirit of neighborliness, Celebration residents gather at front porches, park benches, recreational areas, and downtown events celebrating a place they call home".



Community parks offer playgrounds, benches, and places to gather in. Miles of walking paths and bicycle paths. A vibrant downtown area where friends and neighbors meet. A signature golf course, plus tennis courts and community swimming pools. Overall, the *look and feel* of a warm and friendly hometown'.

Link between Social/Physical Capital & New Urbanism Trends

- Architecture (front porches, sidewalks, location of shops, etc.) cultivates cohesion, social networks, trust and reciprocity among residents.
- Defined boundaries and shared gathering spaces promote a sense of community cohesion, shared identity, and safety.
- Community-based shops promote community re-investment and social solidarity.
- Mixed income housing opportunities promote improved racial integration.

Prairie Crossing, Illinois



"A sense of community. We believe that community and conservation can go hand in hand. The trails and gardens of Prairie Crossing are designed to be places where people can meet to enjoy and care for the land. Volunteer activities with neighbors will be possible through the Liberty Prairie Conservancy, which organizes stewardship programs throughout the 2,500-acre Liberty Prairie Reserve. From the outset Prairie Crossing has sought to work collaboratively with its neighbors, seeking to achieve unusual synergies with homeowner associations, highway officials, and local businesses as well."



Prairie Crossing, Illinois

- The residents of Prairie Crossing celebrate their community and its pastoral heritage through seasonal celebrations, such as the Spring Equinox Bonfire, Summer Solstice Gathering, Autumnal Equinox Gathering and Harvest Festival, Prairie Crossing Zucchini Festival, Thanksgiving Harvest, and weekly farmer's market. Other events pepper the warmer months, such as animal demonstrations, featured crop day, hay bale playground, hikes, and small concerts.



Measuring Visible Social Capital

- Most data collected to date has been survey data on concepts relating to social capital – collective efficacy, sense of community, social disorganization
- Relatively recent attempt to measure indicators of visual social capital – mostly negative items such as litter, unkempt lots, etc. to gauge absence of social controls
- Systematic Social Observation
- Very few studies look at presence of positive social capital

Orencia Station, Oregon

- The town includes a mix of housing types, a central park and several "pocket parks," pleasant sidewalks, narrow, tree-lined streets and through connections to surrounding streets and businesses, all within walking distance of light rail. Most of the homes have front porches and garages in back accessed by alleys. About a fourth of the homes have "granny flats" over garages.



Sampling Issues

- ImpacTeen and Bridging the Gap
- Monitoring the Future Study
 - Yearly sample of approximately 250 communities surrounding schools with a nationally representative sample of students
- ImpacTeen collects a variety of data in these communities, including key informant interviews, store observations, and outdoor observations of visual social capital

Measuring Visual Social Capital

Community/Recreational Space

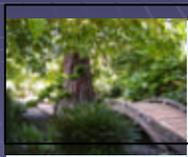
Sports Areas



Neighborhood Gardens (urban)



Parks, Green Spaces, Playgrounds



What it's not...

- No private vegetable gardens or floral shared gardens



Public Pools/Beaches



Auditoriums/Theaters



Attractive Community Spaces

(Trees, Flowers, Shrubs)



Places of Worship



Temples



Churches



Mosques

Sidewalks in Residential Neighborhoods

