Chapter 15: Community Vitality

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Domain description: community vitality

A definition of community forwarded by McMillian (1976, as cited in McMillian and George, 1986) suggests that a 'sense of community is 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' (p.10). Definitions of community are varied, but show three general characteristics: it is a social group, people in it have common activities and experiences, and it occupies a definite territorial area (Hoffer, 1931). This paper is mainly concerned with geographic communities of people living in villages and towns.

The concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) incorporates the social capital of the country, that is, the quality of relationships among and between people of a country. This is sustained through social networks and co-operative relationships within the community. A community where groups of people support and interact positively with other individuals, and provide social support to one another based on a sense of cohesion among community members, is said to express community vitality. Therefore from a GNH standpoint, a community must possess a number of traits: strong relationships amongst the community members (including within families), the possession of socially constructive values, prosocial behaviours such as volunteering and donating time and/or money, and a safe environment from violence and crime (Ura et al., 2012).

Empirical studies identify the community to be one of the most significant determinants of wellbeing for individuals as well as families (Putnam, 1993; 2000; Field, 2003). Social capital also affects people's learning and health (Fujiwara and Kawachi, 2008). People who feel a sense of belonging tend to lead happier and healthier lives, and create more stable communities and a more supportive society. Social capital also has an instrumental value, as increasing evidence illustrates that social cohesion is imperative for societies to prosper economically and sustainably (The World Bank, 1999).

Therefore, it is only natural that a GNH society includes community vitality as one of the nine equally weighted domains. The indicators currently cover seven major aspects of community: 1) family vitality 2) perceived safety, 3) reciprocity, 4) trust, 5) social support, 6) socialization, and 7) kinship density.

Existing sub-domains

Family vitality

Central to the concept of GNH, and the sustainment of social capital, are the co-operative relationships and social networks within the family. A vital community can be described as a group of people who support and interact positively with one another, based on providing social support to one another. In turn, applied to the family context, family vitality may be based on the same pillars of support and positive interaction, sense of cohesion and inclusion.

The family context consists of a number of influences - family type (e.g., number of adults living in household), family processes (e.g., communication, inter-generational relationships, attitudes to family roles), individual characteristics (e.g., emotional reactivity), and family circumstances (e.g., life events, social class, hours worked etc). Family vitality encompasses all of these influences, and may be framed as the outcome of the dynamic interactions between these influences that provide support, positive interactions, and a sense of cohesion and inclusion.

A GNH society would consider family as one of the important determinants of an individual's wellbeing. According to Chophel (2010), when asked to indicate the importance of life priorities, "family life" was rated as the most important. Family life can also bestow health and behavioural benefits, as good family relationships are vital for the health of family members as well as community members (Chophel, 2010). In addition, relationships formed within the family act as a positive force, particularly in a young person's life. Family vitality is also likely to influence, and be influenced by, individual vitality, as vital persons "often infectiously energise those with whom they come into contact" (Peterson and Seligman, 2004, p.273).

Family vitality is an important component of social capital, and therefore community vitality, as it encourages growth and development amongst family members through avenues of healthy family communication, family bonding, and goal commitment. Therefore, a GNH society would strive to develop a society where families are a source of encouragement for growth and development, support, cohesion and inclusion.

Safety

Feeling safe and secure at home, work and in the community is an essential prerequisite for sustaining a good quality of life. From an attachment perspective, perceived safety in child and adult relationships allows a foundation for exploration and learning (Bowlby, 1969; Green and Campbell, 2000). In terms of social space, the neighbourhood is a critical environment for

youth development (Parke and O'Neil, 1999). The perceived safety of a community has a number of effects on wellbeing at both an individual and social level. For example, perceived lack of safety is associated with negative individual outcomes of anxiety and poor health outcomes and is listed by Statistics Canada as an actual "determinant of health" (Middleton, 1998; Macintyre and Ellaway, 2000). At a social level, individuals' sense of neighbourhood safety is related to the extent to which they participate in and interact with their community (e.g., Sampson, 2003; Baum et al., 2009). Higher levels of safety and supportive neighbourhoods are associated with perceptions of better health outcomes, more social cohesion, and stronger connections with family, peers and community (Wen, Kandula and Lauderdale, 2007; King, 2008; De Jesus et al., 2010). Thus, a safe community is a significant context for community vitality as it promotes individual health and wellbeing, social relations, and community participation.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity can be defined as "being the equality of perceived investments in and out from a relationship relative to the person's own internal standards" (Pritchard, 1969, p.180). People pursue a balance between what they 'invest' in a particular relationship (e.g., time, skills), and what they receive in return from it (e.g., appreciation, self-esteem). As people give help, resources and affection to others, the abiding norm in social ties is that sooner or later, the receiver will help the giver (Gouldner, 1960). This expectation of reciprocity can facilitate the maintenance of social stability and promote individual wellbeing (Verbrugge and Chan, 2008). As an important note, however, we must acknowledge that reciprocity as considered here is quite different from the Buddhist approach and the notion of Bodhisattva activity, which is based on giving without expectation of any reward or anything in return – i.e. generosity in its own right.

Research shows that being part of a reciprocal exchange of support is related to higher life satisfaction compared to predominantly received help. In contrast, failed reciprocity resulting from a violation of this norm elicits strong negative emotions and sustained stress responses because it operates against this fundamental principle. For example, lack of reciprocity in work relationships is associated with a range of negative health outcomes including work burnout, depersonalisation, lack of personal, accomplishment, depression, alcohol dependence, and risk of heart disease (Siegrist, 2005). Lack of reciprocity is also damaging to social relations, which in turn has a detrimental effect on the social cohesion and social capital of a community.

Reciprocity can occur at an interpersonal level (i.e., couple relationships), or at a social-level (e.g., between community groups). In order to maximize interpersonal and intergroup relations, and subsequent community vitality, a

GNH society would certainly strive to cultivate a social norm of reciprocity within the community to promote community wellbeing and happiness.

Trust

Trust has been espoused as the 'glue' that holds society together (Luhmann, 1988) as it is important for wellbeing at both an individual and societal level. Trust encompasses an individual's belief that, at worst, others (individual or institutional) will not knowingly do them harm, and at best, that they will act in their interests (Newton, 2001). The notion of trust is inseparable from social capital, as to trust others, is to accept the risks associated with the type and depth of the interdependence inherent in a given relationship (Shepard and Sherman, 1998). These relationships include relationships between individuals and social systems.

The fundamental role of trust in a GNH society is to promote effective interpersonal relationships and community living. According to research, trust is imperative for the smooth functioning of society, and in turn, important for the development, maintenance, and sustainability of wellbeing (Meyer et al., 2008; Ward and Meyer, 2009). Trust not only makes it possible to maintain stable social relations, it forms the basis of collective behaviour and productive cooperation. For example, higher levels of political trust have been associated with increased likelihood of paying taxes (Scholtz and Lubell, 1998). Trust can also indirectly influence individuals' wellbeing, as trust can impact individuals' access to, and utilization of, services (e.g., health services; Ward and Meyer, 2009). Access to such services can in turn promote increases in wellbeing.

The link between trust and wellbeing is particularly strong for workplace trust (Meier and Stutzer, 2008; Powdthavee, 2008). For example, Helliwell and Huang (2011) explored two Canadian surveys and one US survey, finding that an increase of trust in management that is about one tenth of the scale is equivalent to more than 30% increase in monetary income. In addition, Helliwell and Wang (2010) found that among all the trust measures, having a high trust in co-workers has the greatest effect on subjective wellbeing, being associated with a 7.6% higher life satisfaction. These results show the importance of workers and managers paying more attention to workplace trust. By doing so, they may help to increase not only company profits, but also the quality of social relationships in the workplace and, therefore, in their communities. These actions may lead to higher levels of community vitality, and therefore, on a wider basis, to increased happiness and wellbeing among countries. Thus, the private sector may play a key role in improving community vitality through developing the right policies aiming increasing trust in their organisations.

Similar to values of reciprocity, trust is essential for the functioning of a happy society at an interpersonal level and at an institutional level. A trusting community, where principles of cooperation exist, is likely to develop aspects of social capital and social cohesion that are the foundations of community vitality.

Social support

Social support has been broadly defined as resources (e.g., emotional, instrumental, and financial support) provided in the context of a relationship, like having someone to turn to in time of crisis, or just having someone's in your life who makes you feel loved (Cohen and Syme, 1985). In terms of community social support, it may be reflected by the provision of support by volunteering or donating to an individual or a community. It is relevant to all spheres of life and without a doubt has a positive impact on a wide range of social, economic, cultural and environmental issues, including physical and mental wellbeing. It is understood that connectedness in a community is depicted in the strength of social networks within communities (Ura and Zangmo, 2008), and it is prosocial behaviour such as volunteering and donating that encourages interactions between people and strengthens community connections. Involvement in volunteering and donation activities generates social capital, which creates a healthier and more vibrant community. Besides these numerous benefits, it is also crucial for creating true partnerships between the different members of the community, business, NGOs and the government.

The giving of time and money - volunteering and donating – is a traditional practice in Bhutanese and other societies. These practices may have been more wide spread in previous eras, because remote communities depended on each other for survival. At the same time, commercialisation, as well as working longer hours (as further highlighted in the chapter on time use), may devalue such traditional values which may lead to their decline. So it is vital to include these indicators, to assess the level of social support in a community and its trends across time.

Socialization

The importance of socialization, that is, the possession of skills and habits necessary for participation within society, cannot be overstated. Socialization refers to the "means by which social and cultural continuity are attained" (Macionis, 2010, p.104). Through this continuity, norms, customs, and ideologies are maintained over time. This creates a social stability which is necessary for wellbeing to develop. While cultural variability is expressed in the behaviours and customs of entire social groups (societies), it is at an interpersonal level that the most fundamental expression of culture is found. This is through interpersonal interactions that are fundamental for people to develop, grow and flourish. One feature of how the continuity of values is

attained is through a sense of belonging. Establishing and maintaining relatedness to others is a pervasive concern for humans (Kohut, 1977). Maslow (1962) proposed that the need to belong must be satisfied before other needs can be fulfilled. Thus, a sense of belonging is vital to participation in society and developing wellbeing. Research on emigrants shows that they report less life satisfaction than natives, even when several demographic factors are controlled for, because they have had to leave their networks of friends and family. Furthermore, the absence of a sense of belonging may lead to loneliness, alienation, hopelessness, and poorer psychological functioning in general (Hagerty et al., 1992; Hagerty et al.,1996).

Thus, socialisation and its influence on human relatedness and cultural continuity are paramount in order to create a GNH society with a vibrant community.

Kinship density

Kinship density refers to the number of social relationships that an individual possesses. In particular, it considers social relationships between those who share a genetic relatedness (descent) or kinship through marriage (affinity).

The role of kinship in building social structures can be seen throughout history. Much research on the role of kinship has used animal studies, where patterns of social organisation have been studied in relation to cooperation (e.g., altruism) and conflict (e.g., selfishness). Familial networks engage in complex collaborations, involving mixed groups of close and distant relations, where benefits are preferentially channelled to kin (Griffin and West, 2003). Saying that, kinship functions at many levels and in complex concentric circles of connectedness, so in some cases kin relations may not have instrinsic value per se, but instead may be temporary, fluctuating, and instrumental depending on where perceived threats reside.

Research has also illustrated that the magnitude of group cooperation will vary with the degree of relatedness within the group (Krupp, DeBruine and Barclay, 2008). Cooperation between individuals is an important requisite for the maintenance of social relationships. Thus the formation of cooperation within familial networks may lay the foundation for further cooperation within social relationships outside of the family network, thereby increasing community vitality. Indeed, familial networks may be related to the urban – rural divide in community vitality. This is because social networks in rural areas are denser, more kin-based, and may provide more non-material support than urban areas (Fischer, 1982). This may also be linked to social stability. In a study comparing city dwellers with those who lived in suburbs, no difference was found in wellbeing levels due to area of residence, while length of residence has the

strongest effect on neighbourhood social ties and participation in local activities (Adams, 1992).

Alternative sub-domains for consideration

Meaning in life

Professional philosophers often draw a distinction between meaning in life and the meaning of life (Seachris, 2012). The former concerns a desirable, higher property that an individual person's life can exhibit to a certain degree, whereas the latter is a feature of the human species as such or of the universe, for example, a source of these wholes (say, having sprung from God) or a pattern they could exhibit (developing toward a telos). In proposing that recent philosophical reflection should have an important bearing on public policy, this sub-domain addresses solely in meaning in life.

When speaking of 'meaning in life', many are referring in large part to self-transcendence, that is, the eudaemonist or active understanding of wellbeing that is distinct from the hedonic or affective interpretation. Much of what people have in mind when thinking about a life's being meaningful is an individual 'realising their true self' by actualizing their capacities in the service of something 'greater' than themselves.

However, what can make one's life meaningful is not exhausted by self-realisation. Meaning in life could come from conforming to God's will or being a part of a religious community (rather than seeking out trivial satisfactions from the marketplace), or experiencing natural beauty and wilderness (rather than just concrete, Styrofoam and pollution), or residing among old, hand-worked crafts and once-off architectural constructions (as opposed to new, mass-produced works), or understanding oneself and learning to take responsibility and to delay gratification (as opposed to 'running on auto-pilot' and being 'flighty'). Such cases suggest that talk of 'meaning in life' signifies not merely self-realisation, but also pursuing highly worthwhile goals besides one's own pleasure, positively connecting with final goods beyond one's animal self, and living in ways that merit substantial esteem or admiration, thereby contributing to one's community in its larger sense (Seachris, 2012).

Community change

Many perspectives on community have moved beyond the notion of 'stability' as anything more than historical artefact (Grigsby, 2001). Change is becoming a feature of many communities, particularly as community connections with the broader, 'outside' world expand (whether through technological advancements etc.) and intensify. Vitality in this sense may refer to the collective capacity of communities to respond to change, especially economic change (Grigsby, 2001).

Other terms that may be synonyms for community change are 'sustainability,' 'community resilience' and 'adaptability'.

Authors have addressed the sorts of resources and capacities hypothesized to enhance a community's ability to respond to changing conditions. These include development of human capital (workforce skill development, leadership, decision making capacity, entrepreneurship), physical capital (health care, education and information technology infrastructure, affordable housing), social capital (capacity to 'network,' establish partnerships both within and outside of the community), and natural capital (sustainable, diverse and economically viable use and development of agricultural and natural resources). Emphasis on change also suggests community vitality as a concept that implies both structure and process (Grigsby, 2001). Measuring the ability of a community to change may be useful in order to assess the sustainability of community vitality in an area.

Equality

A high level of community vitality requires mutual respect between society members. However, it is difficult to achieve when there are massive income inequalities (Layard, Clark and Senik, 2012). Research shows that higher inequalities are associated with lower life satisfaction, even after controlling for income, personality traits and several other important characteristics (Alesina, Di Tella and MacCulloch, 2004). A plausible explanation for this relationship is the fact that the scale of income differences has a powerful and direct impact on how we relate to each other, leading to increased social tensions and, therefore, to lower wellbeing for both rich and poor citizens (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Therefore, equality (other things being equal) is desirable for two reasons (Layard, Clark and Senik, 2012). First, the value of additional income is higher for the poor than the rich. Second, greater income inequalities may increase social tensions, thereby reducing social capital, and therefore also community vitality and subjective wellbeing.

Thus, government may play a key role in promoting income equality. For instance, research results strongly support redistribution income policies through several mechanisms such as increasing tax rates, subsidies to poor people and so on.

Unemployment and job stability

The issue of unemployment is of relevance for more than one domain of the GNH, including the living standards, time use and psychological wellbeing. The main impact of unemployment on happiness goes well beyond the loss of income (Stiglitz , Sen and Fitousi, 2010). It produces a loss of social status, self-esteem, workplace social life, confidence, and diminishes other factors that

matter for a good quality of life (Layard, Clark and Senik, 2012). Unemployment also produces detrimental effects for family members, but also for communities in which people reside (Diener et al., 2009). For instance, Catalano et al. (1993) found that unemployment contributes to the increase of violence in communities. These results highlight the importance of having public policies in place that focus on increasing job stability as well as promoting meaningful dignified occupations for unemployed community members.

Intrinsic value of community vitality

Living in, participating in, and contributing to a community that is full of vitality, that is, is supportive and engaging, is often argued to be an 'end-in-itself'. Feeling part of a vibrant community with supportive relationships, friendships, peace, creativity, and safe spaces for discussions, is good in itself. Having a sense of place, knowing that you may explore the world with a continual sense of appreciation, wonder and awe, are sufficient outcomes in and of themselves to aspire to in a GNH society that encourages community vitality.

However, it is only when people have their basic needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence met can the value of community vitality be developed. Community relations can also restrict all of these needs through being oppressive, unfair, and forcing people to flee to more anonymous environments. This is especially true in societies where women are oppressed (and even physically abused or worse - unfortunately honour killings are usually family affairs). Therefore not all community belonging is "good in itself" and can only be considered as such if a community fosters freedom and realisation of human potential, etc. rather than the reverse.

Extrinsic value of community vitality

A number of benefits have been associated with social capital, a hallmark of community vitality. This includes enhanced health, better educational outcomes, improved child welfare, lower crime rates, reduced tax evasion, and improved governmental responsiveness and efficiency (Productivity Commission, 2003). In addition, having an active, supportive community is instrumental to many types of support. For example, in terms of social support, if someone falls ill, others will take care of them. Likewise, if individuals lose their jobs, others will support them through it. In terms of the most vulnerable, a vibrant community will be creative, vocal advocates of social equality, ensuring that the most vulnerable (e.g., intellectually disabled) will be afforded every opportunity and resource to maximize active participation in society. Such fairness and equality throughout a community would encourage trust at both individual and institutional level, facilitating good governance. At an individual level, a vibrant supportive community would encourage the spiritual growth and development of individuals, and allow the process of self-

actualisation, where one can fulfil their potential and experience flow. Research has shown that personal growth is linked to openness to experience, a component of self-actualisation (Schmutte and Ryff, 1997). Components of community vitality, such as community trust, have been found to be more important to happiness than household income (World Happiness Report, 2012). In terms of social capital, well-connected people are less likely to experience illness, depression or unemployment, and are more resilient, therefore being less likely to draw on the publicly funded health and welfare systems. The act of developing or joining a social network or group also provides benefits to other members of the group. Furthermore, people who are satisfied with their community, also report higher levels of happiness.

When it comes to meaning as one of the potential sub-domains of community vitality, recent work in psychology suggests that believing that one's life has meaning is associated with: greater levels of a variety of positive feelings such as hope and satisfaction; better physical health and general wellbeing; lower levels of stress; lower levels of drug addiction and dependence; and reduced incidence of depression (for summaries of this research, see Baumeister, 1991; Crescioni and Baumeister, 2013). Of course, there is some variation among different societies and communities about what counts as meaningful, the good, the true and the beautiful. However, there appears to be an 'overlapping consensus' among large and long-standing traditions (Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Chinese, African, secular). Given that intelligence directed toward improving others' lives, thinking about the world and one's place in it and making one's environment attractive to the senses is indeed valued by (nearly) all cultures, and given that people can reliably tell when they have exhibited such behaviour, people's reports of meaning in their lives are probably fairly accurate. Furthermore, it appears plausible that human beings are fundamentally motivated by an interest in meaning, e.g., in judging their lives to be worthy of esteem (Becker, 1971) and in helping others, particularly the next generation (Aubin, 2013). If we are not merely egoistic pleasure seekers, in the way that animals characteristically are, but pride and prestige seekers as well, then it is likely that those who achieve the goal of an estimable life will tend to be better off in additional ways than those who fail to do so.

To conclude domains of GNH in increasing the happiness and wellbeing of individuals and societies.

Traditional public policy

The traditional public policy approach to promoting wellbeing of neoliberal Governments is that, "wellbeing" is ultimately the responsibility of the individual (Ward and Meyer, 2009). In terms of promoting wellbeing within and across society, many people have argued for some level of State

intervention (e.g., Navarro, 2002). The central problem lies in the tension between the pursuit of health and the pursuit of wealth. According to political economists, because the capitalist system is based on the production and consumption of material wealth, it cannot also promote the 'production of health' in an equitable manner (Ward and Meyer, 2009). An example is the increase of risks in contemporary society as a bi-product of industrialisation, such as increased stress due to the increased pressures on workers. In response, others have maintained that the capitalist system needs workers and therefore needs to maintain and sustain the health of workers (Ward and Meyer, 2009). However, even in this perspective, the role of the individual in creating economic capital is prioritised over the interpersonal connections that facilitate the health and wellbeing of a community.

Notwithstanding this, due to the perceived increase in social problems, there have been increasing calls to co-ordinate a policy response to arrest the deterioration of society. At the heart of community vitality is social capital, as it is associated with social and civic participation, networks of cooperation, social cohesion, trust, reciprocity, and institutional effectiveness.Basic needs-enhancing social capital is proclaimed as an unqualified "good". Social capital can be distinguished into three approaches; the micro-level approach which emphasises the nature and forms of cooperative behaviour; the macro-level approach which highlights the conditions for cooperation; and the meso-level approach which focuses on structures that allow cooperation to take place (Franke, 2005).

Major approaches to social capital have taken a variety of positions. For example, the World Bank's approach to social capital was based on the importance of contextual factors as determining collective action (Grootaert and van Bastelaer, 2001). This perspective combined micro (e.g., individual predispositions that perpetuate poverty), macro (e.g., the structure and activities of local groups) and meso (e.g., elements of the local context that facilitate or impede collective action) components of social capital. In contrast, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) adopted a macro-level approach to social capital, viewing it as an end result rather than a resource input. Four major indicators of social capital were used; social participation, social support, social networks, and civic participation. This is similar to the approaches taken by the United Kingdom and Canada (Franke, 2005). In Australia, a global approach to social capital is used, based on four major types of assets: natural, economic, human, and social (ABS, 2004).

In reality, governments already carry out a number of actions that may support or enhance forms of social capital. For example, the provision of basic systems of property rights and civic order are often preconditions for the emergence of

generalised trust. In addition, many government programmes in areas of welfare, education, family support, community services, sport and arts, and the delivery of essential services, are often implicitly aimed at developing social capital (Franke, 2005). Government has also played a major role in the growth and expansion of the volunteering sector (Salamon, Sokolowski and Haddock, 2011).

While such assistance has been successful in terms of economic development, infrastructure and quality of life in communities, this technical assistance may also limit community capacity (Cavaye, 2000). This occurs as some government approaches to "develop" communities using technical assistance can disempower local people, create dependency, and suppress local organisation and leadership (Cavaye, 2000). By focusing on "needs" rather than the assets of a community, public agencies can limit community mobilisation and social networks (McKnight, 1995). For example, previous research has illustrated how government programmes such as urban renewal and public housing projects have destroyed existing social networks within a community (Putnam, 1993). While Government assistance can create financial and physical benefits, other unintentional outcomes can occur. For example, government incentives and rezoning to create a meat packaging plant in a small rural US community created jobs for local people. However, high employee turnover diminished social capital, while crime and insecurity increased (Flora and Flora, 1995). In summary, government intervention can 'crowd-out' or inadvertently damage civil society and reduce personal and community reliance (Franke, 2005).

A number of barriers still remain in the traditional policy approaches to building social capital. For example, some authors emphasise that some sources of social capital are long-standing and, thus, may be slow or difficult to change (Fukuyama, 1999). While there may be greater scope for the short-term development (or loss) of trust and networks at the individual level, these individual opportunities are still constrained by prevailing community norms and attitudes, factors which are still generally slow or difficult to change.

Of particular relevance for policy makers, is that there is some disagreement about the role of government in social capital formation, whether it is damaging or enhancing. While social capital within a group will generally provide benefits to the members of that group, at a community-level, its translation into benefits for the broader community depends in part on the group's goals. In some cases, the achievement of group objectives may come at the expense of community wellbeing (Ostrom, 2000). Group behaviour can also have the effect of excluding 'outsiders' from roles and opportunities. At the individual-level, community or group participation can create demands for conformity, consequently restricting individual choices. For example, sanctions against the

education of girls in some developing countries, and the severe ostracism of members who disobey the norms of the Amish communities in the United States, illustrate the negative impact of social restrictions due to high social cohesion.

Major research findings of potential relevance to new public policy

A number of research projects have illustrated methods of increasing social capital and building the capacity of communities. These approaches take the OECD definition of social capital, and focus on networks of people, and their shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within and among groups. One such approach is to increase the interpersonal relationships within and between groups by using information and communications technology (ICT). In a report from the Commonwealth of Australlia (2005), ICT was found to supplement social capital as individuals and organisations used ICT to extend their services and reach, thereby reinforcing existing relationships and creating and extending new relationships. Hoowever, this very much depends on how ICT is used, as it can also increase social isolation (more screen-time, less interpersonal time) and increase inequities (disadvantaging poorer groups without access to the technology).

Another policy approach geared towards enhancing the interpersonal networks of communities may include planning provisions. For example, in order to create a space for meeting, playing, and communal activities, provisions must be implemented in planning applications for open spaces, such as parks and reserves. For example, the OECD (2001) notes that, in Pistoia, Italy, the municipal council provides spaces for children's meetings, family activities, and community meeting points. This provides support for families not in need of full-time childcare. In addition, parents and other family members (e.g., grandparents, siblings), can attend enrichment activities at these locations, which serve to support both adults and children, and strengthen community ties. The same meeting places also provide after-school spaces for school-age children, and "educational resource centres" (OECD, 2001, p.68) for teachers of infants.

Another example of beneficial planning is illustrated in the UK, where anti-traffic measures promote safety in the residential street. For example, lowering speed limits and restricting vehicle access by non-residents provides spaces for children to play and encourages community connection (UKPIU, 2002). Such measures would be aimed at increasing perceived safety, and encouraging interpersonal connections in a community. However, this is likely to work better in a community with high social capital, as the maintenance and upkeep of public spaces would be a local responsibility.

Another approach to increasing social capital focuses on education. Participation in education is linked to economic development and is the basis for building positive values that characterise social capital such as reciprocity, trust, acceptance and cooperation. Social capital is also related to favourable educational outcomes such as higher retention rates and higher student achievement (ABS, 2002; Putnam, 2000). For example, a number of studies link the involvement of families, the community and the state to improved education outcomes. This is thought to work through the involvement of all of these levels encouraging a sense of community ownership, mobilising additional resources, and strengthening institutional capacity, which subsequently improves the relevance and quality of education. Lifelong learning is also an important aspect of education (Falk, Golding and Balatti, 2000). This taps into existing networks of people, and facilitates opportunities to develop new social networks and discuss important issues in the community. Adult and Community Education can promote lifelong learning, which has been identified as key in the development of flexible and sustainable communities (Falk, Golding and Balatti, 2000). In line with this, policy should be further developed to encourage education. This should incorporate values education that encompasses developing skills in interpersonal communication, culture, and diversity, in order to develop curiosity and appreciation of diversity, and trust (Hughes, Bellamy and Black, 2000). Others suggest incorporating volunteering into the school curriculum, as early experiences in volunteering appears to be highly predictive of community engagement in later life (UKPIU, 2002). In-school education could also be used to deliver aspects of the psychology of parenting, relationships and child development to enhance students' parenting skills for later life. This is based on evidence suggesting the important role of parenting practices and the social capital of parents for the development of children's capacity to form trusting relationships (UKPIU, 2002).

The Government and its structures also have a vital role to play in increasing social capital. As espoused by the OECD (2001), a commitment to public welfare, accountability and transparency provides citizens with a basis for trust and social inclusion, which subsequently increases social capital. Government and its agencies are ideally positioned to support the vitality of communities. A number of principles to achieve this are outlined by Cavaye (2000). These principles form the basis of a number of approaches to recasting the role of government interactions with communities; redefining the "real work" of public servants to a dual role of "delegation and community", where delegated work is achieved in a way that supports community networks, partnership and capacity; fostering relationships between community members and government workers by increasing the "networking" role of public servants in communities, initiating contact with diverse groups of people; introducing accountability for

the process with which government interacts with communities, and accountability for community capacity outcomes; and coordination between agencies based on valuing existing cooperation, common goals and values, and joint projects. This policy of a dual role of government agents is transferable across contexts. For example, in an Australian project aimed at building networks among rural women through access to communication technologies, a nominated person in each government department was available for contact by women in the network, providing these women with valuable linking social capital (Productivity Commission, 2003). In addition, granting citizen's participatory rights, including the use of 'citizen juries', in policy formulation may encourage community participation and trust in government (UKPIU, 2002). Thus, promoting a sense of equality, transparency, and accountability in themselves may increase the quality of political institutions, promote trust, and subsequently build social capital. A consequence of this approach is that government departments would have to go through a process of capacity-building in order to re-evaluate their role. In addition, a possible risk also includes the government being selective in dealing with certain community members over others. Costs regarding education and changing work-based practices are also likely to be incurred.

Recommendations

What not to do – Which actions/policies need to be stopped or modified so as to 'do no harm'

- An important facet to the efforts to develop and promote social capital within a community, is that government and public policy *cannot* build community vitality – this requires the engagement and by-in of individuals within and between communities. Any approach that may be viewed as heavy handed, manipulative, or imposing unwanted restraints on individuals are likely to be rebuffed.

- In addition, existing patterns of interaction between community participation and government organisations are likely to connect relatively small number of people. For example, relatively few people from a community are involved in government, or government agencies, and the few people involved in one setting are likely to be the same people involved in another (Skidmore, Bound and Lownsbrough, 2006). Therefore, encouraging the existing forms of community participation is likely to only ever engage a relatively small group of people. Other solutions must be put in place.

- Finally, now that social capital is being highlighted as important to individual and community wellbeing, it is important that a long-term

vision and commitment to developing community vitality is created. Policies and projects lead by short-term political agendas are likely to undermine and erode community trust in the long–term. A focus on, and commitment to, long-term community sustainability is paramount to building community vitality.

What to do

A lack of meaning stems from a number of large-scale institutional practices. Those who are unemployed feel that they are failing to contribute to society and to support their families, while those who are employed often sense that they are working too much and doing so at activities they do not find important. Those who are poor find themselves lacking resources to purchase goods they could deploy for meaningful projects (e.g., they cannot acquire books, or instruction, or artistic supplies), while those who are rich are surrounded by material objects but often lacking in human relationships. Those who are victims of sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination miss out on (often, substantial) opportunities, with the injustice reducing the meaningfulness of their lives, whereas those who benefit from such practices feel superior for misguided reasons, and the undeservedness of the privilege reduces the meaning it might otherwise confer. In general, less and less of life in modern societies is determined by communicative action among people, and is instead steered by the exigencies of bureaucracies, markets, technology and the flow of mass numbers of people (Fromm, 1955; Gorz, 1980; Habermas, 1984; 1987).

Major socio-economic changes that would address the above are not immediately forthcoming, and the right ones to make are often unclear. However, in their absence, the state could still adopt certain enabling strategies that promise to make a real difference. Here are some possibilities, many of which draw on the idea that people have a need to give and to contribute, particularly from their midlife years onward (Aubin, 2013). In so far as these are general prescriptions – advantages and benefits of the proposed policies need to be addressed (examples of existing case studies, evaluated projects and novel initiatives).

Take social capital into account in the development and evaluation of projects, programmes, and subsequent policies.

  a. This means recognizing the importance of networks and social connections, and their particular dynamics as resources for individuals and/or communities.

  b. This also means assessing direct and indirect influences that community projects, programmes, and interventions may have on community networks and resources. For example, anti-traffic measures implemented

to promote safety in a residential area, such as lowering speed limits and restricting vehicle access by non-residents, also provided spaces for children to play and encourage community connection (UKPIU, 2002).

c. The aim of a social capital assessment is to make networks and resources accessible for achieving significant socio-economic or health-related results. This approach must also consider the influence of various institutional arrangements that may promote or hinder the production of social capital. For example, in areas of high social capital (e.g., communities that provide 'meals on wheels'), policymakers must take into account the existing trust of community-lead services, and harness and support these resources rather than undermine or compete with them. It is in this sense that the social capital approach can be used to develop and evaluate projects and programmes.

Embed participation within the wider community:

d. Although community participation in government roles and agencies are lead by a relatively small group of people (Skidmore, Bound and Lownsbrough, 2006), it is imperative that the value of this existing small group is maximised.

e. One suggestion to do this is to select participants for governance roles by lottery, with financial support to encourage selected individuals to engage with their position. This would allow a diversity of people of different social connections from the usual "social leaders" to engage and develop social capital.

f. This could be supplemented by government sponsorship of ongoing, innovative and action-learning processes that would create a broader long-term foundation of community support for governance activity.

g. Citizens could also be empowered to invigorate local communities by using information and communication technology (ICT). This technology offers governments opportunities to consult with a broader array of citizens and seek feedback on government actions in the locality.

h. Disadvantaged groups, and particularly those most in danger of social exclusion, must have greater access to new media, in order to promote opportunities using ICTs, and also to insure that inequalities are not increased by those who have access to technology and those who do not.

i. The establishment of community groups must be facilitated. This could be helped by; the provision of finances and resources to launch and

launch organisations; public campaigns to encourage participation in community activities, and measures to encourage bridging social capital between existing community groups (Saguaro Group, 2000).

j. In line with establishing community groups, reforms to public liability laws and insurance arrangements, in addition to regulatory requirements, may be reviewed from a social capital perspective in order to ensure that events that have a high community value are facilitated and encouraged to progress (Saguaro Group, 2000).

Focus on education:

k. In particular, involving the various levels of families, communities, and the state in education, would encourage a sense of community ownership, mobilise additional resources (e.g., using school buildings in out-of-school-time for community activities), and strengthen institutional capacity, which subsequently improves the relevance and quality of education.

l. Lifelong learning is also an important aspect of education (Falk, Golding and Balatti, 2000). This taps into existing networks of people, and facilitates opportunities to develop new social networks and discuss important issues in the community. Lifelong learning can also play a key role in the development of flexible and sustainable communities (Falk, Golding and Balatti, 2000).

m. In line with recommendations from the OECD (2001), incentives for continual learning could be developed. By re-structuring the organisation of learning opportunities throughout the lifecycle, in addition to offering financial and tax incentives for learning, individual learners may be encouraged. Other incentives that could be offered include on-the-job training, part-time further education, alteration of work and study, and increasing the utility of distant and IT-based learning for adults (OECD, 2001).

n. Incorporating volunteering into the school curriculum may also play an important part in highlighting the importance of community participation.

o. Parenting education can promote positive parenting practices and social support. For example, as illustrated by the Productivity Commission (2003) in Australia, universal group parenting education provided for first-time parents can promote social support and create social networks among new parents. These relationships and networks can provide

ongoing social support and contact for these parents and children after the duration of the group meetings.

p. Providing psychological skills education for the unemployed around their strengths assessment and utilisation, optimism and resilience development may enable them to find employment easier and contribute to the community during the time of unemployment.

q. New local libraries can be created and maintained by joined community effort. Construction companies can be requested as part of a building permission to put up some rooms that would serve as a school library (or a chemistry centre, or a chess club, etc.). Wealthier individuals with extra books can be informed how to donate some to the libraries. Retired persons from the local community can be trained to volunteer their time to run the library, whilst requesting large corporations for a portion of their social responsibility funds to assist. A list of who has contributed and how would widely publicized on the internet, radio and television.

Local communities for beauty

r. Even poverty needs not be ugly. A local government may help residents in impovershed areas to organise themselves to make their surroundings more attractive. Living in a more attractive environment would not be a panacea for the problems of the poor. However, it would be a realistic goal to strive to achieve; it would bring people in the community together; it would offer a way for many, both rich and poor, to improve others' quality of life, including the raising of self-esteem and self-reliance; and it would facilitate the experience of beauty, which is good for its own sake.

s. Local church members can be encouraged to help get people to come out in order to pick up rubbish.

t. Local artists can be asked to come in to help teach residents, particularly young people, to use paints and mosaics and to construct sculptures.

u. Local farmers may be encouraged to help residents start and maintain gardens, and florists - to donate flowers and to teach people how to tend them.

v. Construction companies may be envisaged teaching unemployed people in the community how to repair and repaint houses, or about how to construct benches from scrap material.

w. In all cases, the state should take responsibility for organising 'before and after' pictures, to continue to enable people to take pride in what they have accomplished.

Architectural change for extending families

x. Nuclear families, let alone single-parent households, are often ill-equiped to survive the modern realities of life. Setting aside concern about gender roles (i.e. that women do the bulk of cleaning and caring), rearing children is too big a job to be done by one or two adults, especially when life in a modern economy typically requires labour by both parents to be undertaken on the job market. If it takes a village to rear a child, then perhaps a village should be created.

y. The state may promote specially designed housing so that a dozen or so units formed a collective compound reserved for those with children and those interested in supporting them. For example, such units may form a circle, so that the middle is a play area for children, which all could keep an eye on. The units could be spaced far enough apart for privacy, and yet they are close enough for others to hear if there is serious fighting and abuse.

z. It might be that two or three of the residents stay home to watch over the younger children during the day, and that they are financially supported by others who work outside the compound or by the state.

aa. One could suppose that there is a collective area where all children do their homework, or that there is a compound rule that no one may play outside until her homework is done, or that television broadcasts are turned off between certain times of the day.

bb. It could be that the parents would meet together every two weeks or so to talk about parenting issues or matters of collective concern regarding the compound, or that they listen to outside experts such as social workers and child psychologists during this time.

Case Study: Unemployement training, Esher House

In 2012, employment advisors from several organisations in the UK and Australia were trained by Esher House Ltd in ten academically-based methods for enhancing strengths, resilience and character over a number of concurrent days. This training was enhanced with overseeing quality advisors subsequent performance, presentation materials and a booklet reminding the advisors of the correct intervention techniques. The focus was not on directly telling the unemployed clients how to go about entering employment, but in allowing them to build confidence and efficacy in their own capabilities and set their own goals and find their own solutions – no matter how seemingly un-related to employment these were.

Advisors were also trained in Solutions Focused conversations, enabling a salutogenesis approach – talking about positives, strengths and goals, instead of retrospectively focusing upon problems, issues and failings.

Where implemented, all projects achieved the best "Into Work" and "Sustained Employment" outcomes in each country within their sector – i.e. 12 month+ unemployed on Ingeus' UK Work Programme contact, generationally unemployed, etc.

Barriers to implementation

Recommendation 1: Take social capital into account in the development and evaluation of projects, programmes, and subsequent policies.

- It may be necessary to create a department within government, similar to the agency responsible for assessing policy and programme implication for the environment, for the assessment and evaluation of social capital.

- There is potential risk in evaluating government projects, programmes, and policies in terms of social capital, as government initiatives that have created economic growth that may be held as successful, may be found to destroy social networks and decrease community vitality.

- In order to assess social capital, and to create a government agency to carry out this service, financial investment is necessary in recruitment, training, and implementation. It would be difficult to argue for investment for a social capital assessment agency when others agencies may be looking to invest in programmes that have tangible results (e.g., infrastructure, health service, education).

- Employment and training will be required in the assessment and evaluation of social capital.

- Citizens are more likely to advocate for the alleviation of the symptoms of low social capital (e.g., crime) or more high profile social problems such as poverty, rather than the lack of social networks.

Recommendation 2: Embed participation within the wider community

- There may be political resistance to creating community partnerships, as developing community discussions and facilitating community networks is likely to significantly increase and change work practices for government officials. In addition, the resistance is even more likely if these very networks then critique and challenge government policy and action.

- The increased workload of engaging with community partnerships is likely to need the recruitment of additional government agency officials. In addition, it is necessary to invest in community partnerships. Individuals from the community selected to participate in the community partnerships may also need financial support to participate.

Recommendation 3: Focus on education

- Traditional education policymakers are likely to resist changes that may deviate from the traditional academic focus in schools, especially in light of any costs incurred that may be at expense of conventional expenditures.

- The introduction of universal group parenting programmes in communities and volunteer programmes in schools will create administrative and supervisory costs.

- Parenting programmes may be seen as authoritarian and divisive if a universal approach is not adopted and adhered to in practice. If "at-risk" groups are over-represented in such programmes, a breakdown of trust and social cohesion may occur.

Recommendation 4: Local communities for beauty

- One real concern about this proposal is sustainability. How and who would ensure that the new environment is maintained? One way to deal

with this would be for the local government to intervene in at regular intervals, but a better one would be for the community itself to take responsibility. People who are retired or influential could be in charge of sustaining the renewal, with the state providing some forms of support for them.

Recommendation 5: Architectural change for extending families

- The biggest problem with this suggestion is cost, or rather scope. It would take space to host these kinds of developments, which would not easily work in large apartment buildings. The numbers of people who could be involved, at least initially, would not be great. However, if the idea caught on, then developers would likely construct them without state involvement. Furthermore, it could be that the benefits of living in such a communal arrangement would help reduce financial burdens that the state would otherwise face; one would expect adults to be less stressed and depressed and the young to do better in school and to be better socialised.

Policy actions

What processes should be followed to build policy (local or national consultation and experimentation rather than a blueprint)?

The first essential process to follow in order to build community vitality policy is to measure social capital in all projects, programmes and policies. In a number of recommendations outlined by Sandra Franke (2005), the Canadian Policy Research Initiative outlines the approach to measuring social capital. In the first instance, it is suggested that the government adopt a social capital approach to developing research, data, policy and evaluations. As outlined above, this would include the assessment of direct and indirect influences of policy and programmes on the social networks and social resources of individuals and communities. This process involves three facets. First, it is necessary to document the existence of social networks at the individual and/or group level to identify the presence and manifestations of social capital (Franke, 2005). The second facet of this process is to examine the conditions of social network functioning and exchanges in order to understand how social capital operates. This is necessary at all levels, to assess how social capital is created, and used, by various groups within diverse communities. The third facet of measuring social capital is to establish links between social capital and specific outcomes, in order to clarify the potential of social capital in specific contexts with specific issues.

In order to gauge the influence of new policies and programmes, an increasing proportion of countries is using pilot projects in order to facilitate 'fine-tuning' before large-scale implementation. The UK's Strategy Unit (2002) recommends the widespread use of pilot projects, as the benefits largely offset the costs (e.g., resources and time). However, a notable limitation of pilot projects is their sensitivity to context, thus producing difficulty in generalising their results. Thus, contextual factors must be well defined in the assessment of social capital within a pilot project in order to obtain valid data.

What urgent priorities need more 'research and development'?

To improve policy design and coherence, further research is needed to provide conceptual clarity surrounding social capital itself, deepen understanding of the sources of social capital and how they operate, and to improve on current measures and measurement methodologies. The current lack of conceptual clarity, together with the potential risks that some government actions could even erode social capital, suggest that there may be merit in the short term in tending towards small-scale policy experimentation. This would provide experience and data on different policies aimed at supporting or enhancing social capital. Similarly, there would be merit in regular policy evaluations to assess the effects of such policies and to suggest appropriate design adjustments.

Further, establishing the direction and extent of any causal link between social capital and the variables of interest is not straightforward because, among other things, it is plausible that high levels of social and economic wellbeing can lead to higher social capital, rather than (or as well as) the reverse. These are key questions that necessitate clarity in order to maximise the practical implications of social capital policy.

Making Participation a National Priority

Key Actions
At a macro-level, it is necessary for government to develop a long-term vision and political commitment to developing community vitality. Given that many forms of social capital may be slow to change or establish (e.g., trust), a long-term commitment and vision is vital. It is also imperative at a government level to recognise the importance of social networks and social connections as a resource within and between communities.

In order to underline the long-term commitment to promoting social capital, it may be necessary to create a government agency responsible for assessing the direct and indirect influences of government projects, programmes, and

policies on social capital and community interpersonal networks. This investment underlines the political commitment and can be used to advocate for the assessment and evaluation of programmes and policies from a social capital perspective.

This agency will fulfil a number of key roles. For example, recruits to this agency will be trained in the assessment of social capital. This agency can also be used to train government officials in engaging with local communities and when and how to create "community partnerships". This agency can also create broad procedural guidelines for the establishment of community partnerships.

For example, such guidelines would emphasise the role of public agencies in the interface between government and communities through these partnerships. Public agencies are in the best position to foster community capacity as they have "buy-in" through local services (e.g., Police Service, Education Department, and Health Department etc.). Thus, there is an existing foundation of trust and confidence between local public services and communities.

While the role of government agencies has traditionally been service delivery, given the increasing demands for greater community capacity, the ability of the public service to contribute to community capacity becomes more important.

The goal of the public service is to become not just experts in their area, but to foster the relationships and trust between public agencies and their communities.

Agencies need to meld "top down" and "bottom up" community involvement. For example, top-down changes will not succeed without an ethic of community involvement at the "grassroots" level. While everyday community-public servant relationships will largely remain at an informal intuitive level without top down structures providing the organisation to make them more deliberate.

In addition to partnerships between government agencies and communities, building social capital also requires coordination between government agencies. The complex and interrelated issues facing communities require agencies to work cooperatively.

No one department or agency can help communities build capacity. All government agencies have a role.

Data and measurement for policy

The GNH survey provides a number of questions on community vitality that incorporate amount of donations and volunteering, sense of belongingness and trust in neighbours, a measure of family relationships and a measure of safety. While these questions provide some insight into the vitality of a community, there are significant gaps. For example, there is no indication of an individual's interpersonal connections outside the family, no indication of social participation, no clear measure of social support, and no indication of civic engagement. Although various problems exist in the conceptualisation of social capital, a number of measures have been proposed. For example, the World Bank Social Capital Assessment Tool (SOCAT) is a multifaceted measure that assesses social capital at household, community and organisational levels Due to the burdensome nature of this assessment (qualitative and quantitative components), it may not be appropriate for the inclusion in the GNH. A more appropriate measure may be the social capital indicators proposed by the Siena group or Statistics Canada's General Social Survey (Zukewich and Norris, 2005). These questions were developed to be inserted into various national or international surveys. Questions assess an individuals social participation (e.g., type(s) of group in which respondent is involved), social support (provided and received), social networks (e.g., frequency of contact with friends, family, or work colleagues), and civic participation (e.g., voted in most recent election).

A different perspective may be needed to assess the social networks from a social policy perspective. Under this light, the assessment tool called the 'Social Capital Impact Assessment' developed by the Saguaro Seminar is appropriate to use to assess the impact of the implementation of a social capital project/programme. This assessment can be used to obtain information about both the correlates of social capital, and/or about the levels and types of social capital. Questions refer to bridging social capital (e.g., "will the policy create more/less occasions for people to interact with those that differ from them?"), family ties (e.g., "will the proposed initiative increase or decrease people's discretionary time?"), and trust in institutions (e.g., "Is the act institution suggesting a process for securing approval of this initiative in which all parties have confidence?").

Monitoring

Investment is needed into the domain of community vitality. While a number of government services are implicitly directed to increasing the social capital of individuals and communities, investment is needed to provide a scientific foundation for the future assessment and evidence-based implementation of programmes and policies to increase social capital. A special body charged with the assessment and evaluation of all government programmes and policies is

necessary given the large undertaking of evaluating social capital. A useful monitoring system could be the measurement of interagency work, or the number of multidisciplinary projects implemented at a community level. This may signify the process of creating community partnerships. In terms of finance, it may be difficult to assess the benefit of social policies, as converting a particular change in social capital into a benefit or cost estimate, comparable to other benefits and costs, raises problems (UKPIU, 2002). In addition, assessing the direct and indirect expenditure on social capital is difficult, as a variety of current government expenditures, for example into health, security, and infrastructure, are likely to already impact on a community's social capital. Therefore monitoring the development of interagency and community partnerships may be a valid proxy for investment in social capital.

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