

Social Capital:  
More Than "Cool Cities"

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# Social Capital: More than “Cool” Cities

## Introduction

Several years ago while attending a seminar titled Strategic Planning for Social Enterprise at Harvard University I was introduced to the concept of “Social Capital”. This concept while heavily debated in sociological and political academic circles has come to play a significant role in the applied areas of community assessment and development. A leading scholar from the Kennedy School of Government stated the concept or “theory of social capital, gives us a whole new way to look at the problems and attending solutions to building communities “where positive change is prevalent and people care about the outcomes”.

I was immediately intrigued by this concept that helps us talk about community in a way that is not just financial, material infrastructure, or physical space, but gives us language to talk about a key dynamic that takes place when volunteers, non profits, neighborhoods, and informal or formal groups of citizens use civic virtue and common goals to succeed in making a better place to live. My career in non profit organizations has forced me to look at how individuals and groups can solve complex community problems when they have the passion and resolve to do so. On the other hand, I have also been forced to look at the limits of the public will and the failure of governmental policies that cut out key constituents and promote changes that are not just or economically sound.

When I was invited to join this club, I knew I had my chance to investigate the concept of social capital. First, I assume I am preaching to the choir. Members of this club will tend to be individuals who contribute to social capital, understand the values of networks, trust and reciprocity. Most members in The Holland Professional Group are members of other groups or initiatives that focus on civic responsibility. Presenting this topic to this group also allows us to reflect on the purpose of this group. What role does this club play today as opposed to when it was founded? Is the social capital of this organization of value to those not in the club. How many clubs like this one have become defunct over the last 10 years in our community? How can the human capital and social capital of this group contribute to building social capital in other more disenfranchised groups in our community?

As I got into this topic of social capital, I was not prepared for the complexity and multifaceted body of academic analysis, research, and applied theories. I also learned along the way that both Don Luidens and David Myers have published monographs about certain facets of social capital. The innocent first read of Bowling Alone, the now infamous book by Robert Putnam, rapidly took me to critical dialogue and arguments that run from social political theory (De Tocqueville to Marx) through the storms of neo liberal and neo conservative social policy. Yes the topic grew more interesting as I delved deeper. From the very value of “civic virtue” in democracy, to the arguments about how to scale back poverty in developing countries by the World Bank, this term, “Social Capital” has found its way firmly into the theory and practice of community development.

In this paper I hope to give you a brief overview of the nature and uses of social capital. This includes a discussion about some of the assumptions about civic society and Putnam’s theory about the waning of civic involvement in America today. I want to explore with you how this

concept helps look at social issues in a different way. I then want to talk about our own community and in our discussion, see if using social capital as a policy making paradigm could change the way we look at issues in our community.

### **Local Application**

The City of Holland is rapidly changing in almost every way. As a life long resident I see these changes occurring differently in scope and rate compared to the changes in the last two decades. Of course these changes are complex. Economics, crime rates, housing sales, ethnicity, job loss, family transience and many other dynamics play a role in our evolving community.

My wife and I enjoy walking from our house near the hospital to downtown. Even in the last five years we have noticed rapid and overt changes in the neighborhoods as we walk. Our observations are not scientific, but they are very real and observed by a large segment of our community. Changes include more children and families of color; the Seven Eleven store closing on a key intersection, houses in need of repair and investment, and a plethora of for sale signs.

Local news and hot discussion topics include school policy and strategy, (especially with the public schools), the fate of the "core city", and the challenges of ethnic and cultural diversity. In talking with people interested in justice and poverty we hear about the issues of fair and affordable housing, homelessness, and issues of childhood poverty. The issues of city and township, city schools and charter schools, healthcare and police protection are just a few examples of issues in our community and, of course in every city in our country.

Holland is a strong and vibrant community- I do not want to lose the proper perspective. Holland has a high level of social capital---today. But is it changing? Do we have a baseline for the future and a way to measure needs, possible interventions, and outcomes to interventions? What groups are shut out? What groups are shutting them out? What as a professional group can we do to foster a larger capacity of social capital into the future? What obligation do we have as individuals to become involved in our community policy making and community development. These are the types of questions that social capital can help us address

### **Social Capital**

As I was researching this paper, I encountered a rather recent article that gave a concrete example of the importance of social capital.

THOMAS H. SANDER

## **A friend in need- The Boston Globe**

November 14, 2005

...Relatively recently our hearts were pained by a sea of black and poor victims, trapped on the Gulf Coast pre-Hurricane without an exit. We notice that they were car less and lacked money for bus fare, meals, and hotels. But far fewer notice that the poor were equally trapped by a dearth of these social connections, especially crossing economic lines. Specifically, they lacked affluent friends to give them a ride, lacked contacts to negotiate heavily discounted hotel rates, and lacked out-of-town relatives with extra bedrooms.

Alas, America's rich and well-educated have always had more social capital than the poor, and those divides persist. For example, compared against Americans with incomes over \$100,000, the poor (incomes under \$20,000) were about half as likely to have befriended a business owner or someone they considered a community leader, and belonged to half as many nonchurch groups.

How can we close the social capital gap between rich youth and poor youth? It's too early to fathom the precise policy solutions. While people have to make friends voluntarily, one can certainly publicize the benefits of such friendships and dramatically increase the opportunity. For example, having youth at age 18 perform a year of mandatory national or community service in diverse groups would likely increase cross-race and cross-class social ties. The military does this well, as do some private youth service groups like City Year.

Moreover, we ought to ensure that in our rush to teach the 3 R's in inner city schools we don't forget to teach the 2 C's (connections and community). Youth, especially poor youth, ought to learn about social capital and understand the social cost they'll pay for not building these ties. Skills are also important: Institutions like churches and unions were cornerstones in teaching poor Americans how to run meetings, petition others, mobilize comrades, and build lasting friendships. Given the declines in union membership and church-going among poor youth, we must find other settings to cultivate such skills. And we ought to offer fun at-school and after-school programs that build stronger social ties among poor youth and between poor youth and better-off youth. These ties may one day, in the face of tragedy, be the difference between life and death.

Poor youth may never develop social ties as strong as the affluent, but we should ensure that we don't send poor adolescents to life's starting line with weights around their ankles.

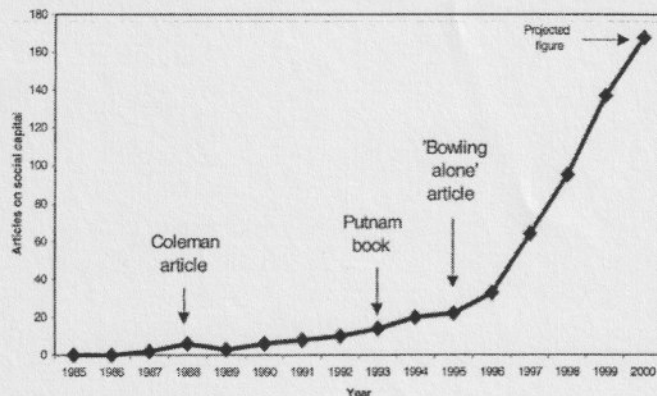
I am not intending to defend the logic and often questionable conclusions Putnam or any other scholars put forth regarding this concept of social capital. There are many research and conceptual problems with this notion of "social capital" that we can discuss later. Like so many concepts or theories in the social sciences, social capital has all the challenges of

consistent definition, measurement, and attributes. Regardless of definitional challenges, the concept allows us to use other social science ideas such as norms, values, group dynamics, and social structure theory, and apply these concepts to provide utility and function for social change and community development.

Slide 1

The increase in academic interest has skyrocketed since Putnam wrote his book in 1999, and further supports a detailed look at the importance of this concept.

**Table 1 : The Exponential Growth in References to Social Capital in the Academic Literature, 1985-2000**



Source : Halpern (2001)

<http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/2001/futures/attachments/socialcapital.pdf>

Slide 2

Social Capital is composed of the networks of social relations that may provide individuals and groups with access to resources and supports. Robert Putnam views social capital as “comprised of features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.” These networks and trust are considered “capital” because they have a utility and can be stored for future use. Like coal that fires a blast furnace, they are not durable, but it can be moved about and used when it is expedient or when it produces the most value. A theory of social capital like those theories of any other capital must be able to demonstrate some utility or gain for the people using the resource. The key difference between social capital and other capitals is that other capitals increase with disuse and social capital decreases with disuse and builds with use.

The notion of Social capital contains three key ingredients:

1. Social Capital captures elements or resources embedded in social structures. These resources are information, influence, social credentials, reinforcements (peer pressure).
2. Social Capital has an element of accessibility to the individual or group
3. Social Capital must be able to be mobilized by individuals engaged in purposeful action.

Social capital is the contextual complement to human capital. The social capital metaphor is that people who do better are somehow connected. Certain people or groups are connected to certain other groups, trusting other groups, obligated to support others, dependent on

exchange with others. Holding a certain position in the structure can be an asset in its own right. That asset is social capital.

The argument goes something like this: A screwdriver is a valuable thing. It can help me build a house, or fix a car, and so it increases both my individual productivity and the collective productivity of my community. Similarly, any social connections that I have, whether with members of my bowling team, friends from the bar, co-members of the local Rotary club, or congregants from my synagogue increase my personal productivity and the productivity of my group. Just as the screwdriver is a piece of physical capital, the social contacts that I maintain constitute "social capital" and are beneficial to both myself and bystanders in the community.

### ***Bonding and Bridging Social Capital***

Side 3  
There are two important types of social capital: Bonding and bridging. The bonding structures are organizations that keep distinct groups together and hold the norms and values constant. The radius of trust in closely bonded groups can enable high social capital and efficiency in the group, but can prevent civic growth. Highly bonded groups are seen in the cohesion of tribes, ethnocentric groups and communities that have norms of exclusivity, and sometimes, hostility to outsiders. Putnam and other political scientists claim that this small radius of trust is not ultimately positive for democratic growth, personal freedom, or for the growth and development of prospering communities. In times and places of social change, this bonding can prevent outsiders from breaking in and as more and more norms change, the bonding is stressed and breaks apart. The center cannot hold. Of course the power wielding of Social Capital is often intentional in developing countries or totalitarian régimes,. (Of course the logical example of the bonded groups could be the tribes, clans, and religious groups in the Middle East).

Looking at Holland, one can see that historically the bonding social capital created a homogenous culture with common values and goals. Holland culture worked well for a defined group of people, but has been forced to change of the last few decades. Today we should ask if the socio economic and demographic changes of our community are integrated into the civic clubs and culture. Should they be integrated? Looking around this club and many other organizations that I know of, the absence of people of color or with radically different social perspectives is apparent. My own Resthaven Board has no people of color and only in the last decade added individuals with non protestant backgrounds. As civic groups, we should ask ourselves how we can take this bonded social capital and move some of it to other groups or constituents in the community. The lessons of social capital are that we are all in this together – like it or not. Social capital that cannot be bridged breeds the KKK, terrorist groups and bigotry. Bonding capital directed to beneficial purposes empowers a food kitchen; Kids hope Programs, and social change.

The bridging aspect of social capital is more intriguing for social change and progress. In a Latino neighborhood the social capital of the all white literary club will have little value to that community. Unless that literary club decides to bridge the social capital, there is little change possible. As Putnam wrote: "Classic liberal social policy is designated to enhance the opportunities of individuals, but if social capital is important, this emphasis is partially misplaced. Instead we must focus o community development, allowing space for religious organizations and choral groups and little leagues that may seem to have little to do with

politics or economics.” Putnam, “Social Capital Measurement and Consequences”, Isuma, Volume 2, Spring 2001. While social capital is a vital source of spontaneously organized groups that foster the civic virtues and power for community prosperity, social capital is also a vital ingredient to the proper functioning of formal public institutions. Without a broad radius of trust and appropriate bonding and bridging community schools, planning commission, council, and non profit endeavors cannot succeed and do their work.

## Bowling Alone

The key proponent for Social Capital in this decade is Harvard Professor and Founder of the Saguaro Institute, Robert Putnam. Putnam wrote several monographs and books on social capital and the decline of civic virtue in the U.S.

In 1993 his book, Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy brought Social Capital as a term back into the sociological mainstream. In this book Putnam researched the effectiveness of the governments of the north and south of Italy. Through extensive research he found that “civic virtue, and the more traditional trust and reciprocity of the North allowed them to become more prosperous and functional as a community. The community’s that had networks and trusting relationships were better positioned to make economic and necessary infrastructure changes than the more educated and wealthy area that could only tap into government support and policy creation.

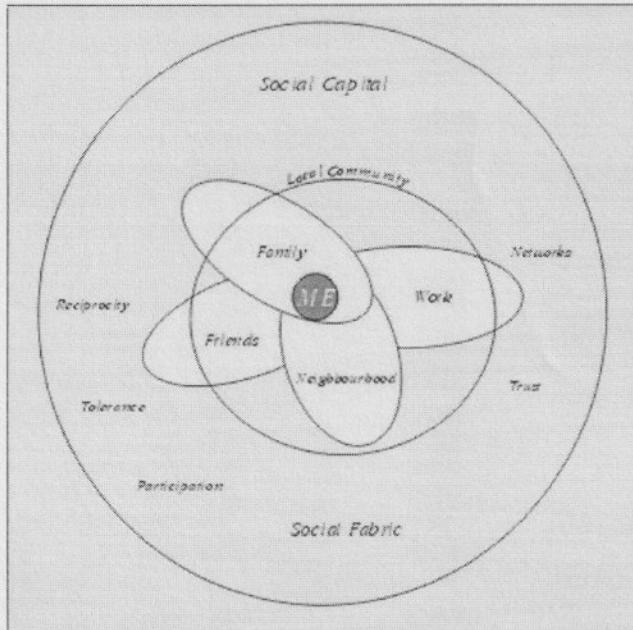
Then in 1993 he published Bowling Alone. In this book, Putnam claims that after World War II, and as the parents of baby boomers took over the reigns of government, civic life, and business, something vital to the American experience began to change. The observations of De Tocqueville of a country that was civically engaged and equal, began to move toward a country where the once prevalent group bowling leagues and bridge clubs gave way to communities where neighbors did not spend time with other neighbors, and the daily routine of life had little time for social guilds, PTAs, and the interest and participation in community elections. The sub heading of Putnam’s book after all was: The collapse and revival of the American Community. While more people than ever are bowling today, the numbers of people bowling in organized groups and community leagues has been on a rapid decline. In what some scholars think is a giant leap, Putnam postulates that involvement in civic life, voting rates and volunteering, is central to what makes democracy work and what defined the communities of our grandparents.

There are several key ingredients that help discuss the social capital of a group or community.

1. Civil Society –Contributing to change in the community through activities that are not part of the formal political system, commerce, or government.
2. Community – social capital varies between and within communities and the physical social and economic characteristics affects the levels of social capital within it.
3. Civic leadership
4. Social networks- The structural element of social capital
5. Electoral political participation
6. Volunteering
7. Trust

8. Reciprocity- good turns will be repaid
9. Inter racial trust
10. Informal social ties
11. Faith based engagement
12. Social Exclusion/Inclusion

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*Building blocks of Social Capital*

The outcome of his research was the creation of several measures that could be used to determine the social capital and civic health of a community. With the establishment of the Saguaro Institute this Social Capital Benchmark survey was conducted by dozens of US cities. Many of the concepts listed above are also basic elements of this Social Capital Benchmark survey. I was surprised to find that the Grand Rapids Foundation funded a comprehensive grant to measure the social life of Grand Rapids in 2000. Below is just a sample of the Grand Rapids scores:

- Racial trust **108**
- Conventional politics participation **96**
- Activist politics participation **102**
- Civic leadership **99**
- Associational involvement **116**
- Informal socializing **99**
- Diversity of friendships **100**
- Giving and volunteering **123**
- Faith-based engagement **119**

A society that is characterized by generalized reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society states Putnam. "The vibrancy of American civil society, the magic American variable has noticeably declined over the past few decades." (Bowling Alone) The quantity quality and

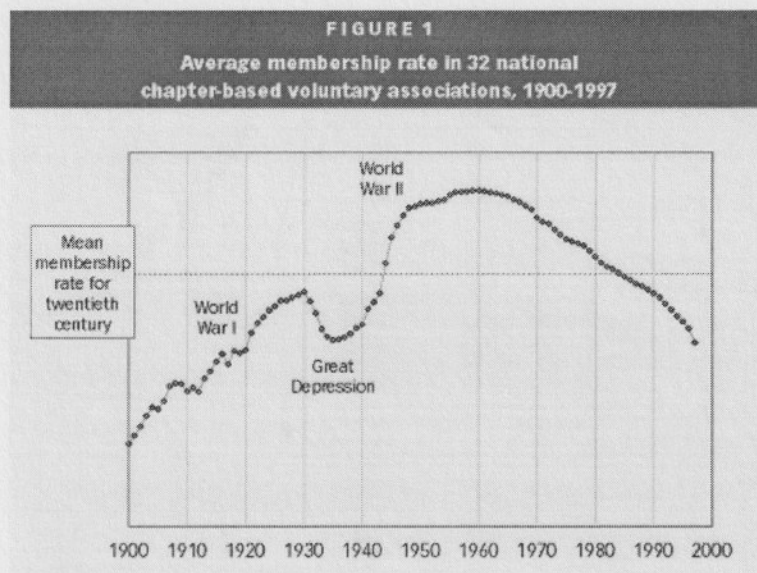


persistence of social interactions among neighbors, friends and members of groups and associations generate social capital and work together for a common good. The common good is what makes democracy work.

There is a dearth of literature and research challenging the logic of the connection between Putnam's bowling league analogy and the true dynamics of our communities. (Social Capital is Not Waning, Burt) There is criticism about using civic associations both as a symptom and cause. However, Putnam does an excellent job of detailing the changing involvement in organized social groups in the U.S. through voting records, enrollment figures in Rotary clubs, bridge clubs and hundreds of other organizations

Putnam provides the data supporting the decline in social capital and civic engagement from several sources. Using detailed time study surveys from 1965, 75, and 85. Records of membership in diverse organizations such as PTAs, Red Cross, labor unions, and yes even bowling leagues Putnam shows that participation in many voluntary associations declined roughly 25% to 50% over the two or three decades.

Let's look at just a few of Putnam's statistics



[www.isuma.net/v02n01/putnam/putnam\\_e.shtml](http://www.isuma.net/v02n01/putnam/putnam_e.shtml)

Several other examples are shown in Appendix A.

### Applying Social Capital

To think of our relationships as "capital" suggests a different way of thinking about other people and about our community. To create capital we must invest labor (service learning). We must expend energy in creating tools, or learning skills, or saving money. Or building relationships in order to put the capital to use later. Capital also requires maintenance and renewal. Knowledge and skills must be updated and refined. Partners in a community must

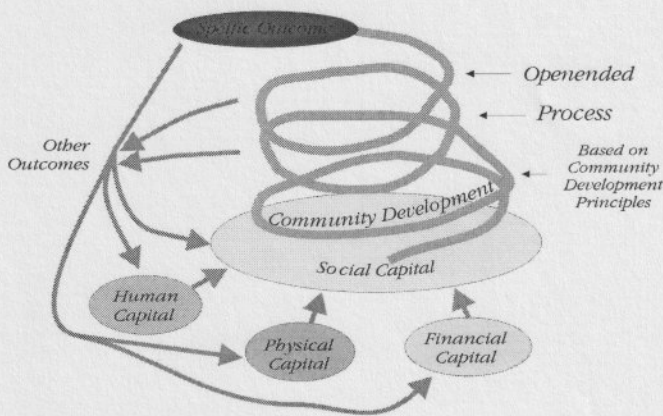
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constantly seek ways to renew the circle of trust. Schools for instance need what James Coleman calls constant attention from responsible adults to work and survive in the context of families, churches, neighborhoods and communities.

Why do social scientists care about SC, and why are Governments and groups like the World Bank focusing on community development with Social capital as a key component? Social Capital when applied in the context of financial, human, and physical capital can and is effective in fostering positive community change.

*Social Capital and Community Development*



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There are three reasons social capital is beneficial to a community:

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First, communities that have high social capital at work resolve collective problems more easily. Second, social capital greases the wheels that allow communities to advance smoothly. Where people are trusting and trustworthy, and where they are subject to repeated interactions with fellow citizens, everyday business and social transactions are less costly....A third way in which social capital improves our lot is by widening our awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked. People who have active and trusting connections to others – whether family members, friends, or fellow bowlers – develop or maintain character traits that are good for the rest of society. Joiners become more tolerant, less cynical, and more empathetic to the misfortunes of others. When people lack connection to others, they are unable to test the veracity of their own views, whether in the give or take of casual conversation or in more formal deliberation. Without such an opportunity, people are more likely to be swayed by their worse impulses.

So let us assume that the civic life of associations and volunteers and the qualities of trust are correlated to the changes in our cities and give working concepts to begin to improve life in our communities. What does this decline mean? What measures are important and which are

valid. And finally, how can we assess how to use social capital to reinvest in our cities and communities.

Many qualities help us assess the value of social capital in a community: Network size, resources available, similarity, resource delivery, network structure, information flow etc. Key to the analysis to communities however is the structural holes in social capital. Is there a neighborhood sense? Is there a connection between the city council or government and a group of local people with their own social capital? Is there social capital that can influence the schools, the location of parks, the direction of traffic, city lighting, and police protection? Does the community have a self proclaimed identity? Are there structural holes created by another group's powerful hold on their own social capital that prevent necessary social change? Are there leaders who understand social capital and are willing to support civic life with economic resources, capacity building, and investment of time and energy?

As opposed to simply hoping for "cool cities" or the rise of the "Creative Class", a policy focused on social capital looks at building the infrastructure that promises a multivariate, and "living" community base by investing in the groups and networks that are most affected by their environment. A true understanding of social capital also necessitates understanding how social capital works both in local groups, but also in the global economy.

### **The Holland Community**

Using a social capital approach to looking at Holland today and in the past could explain the many strengths and reasons why Holland is a very livable city - for many groups. I think it is a safe assumption that the Social Capital inventory of Holland would be at least as high as Grand Rapids if not higher. Civic leaders have invested considerable financial, human, and social capital to the city and surrounding areas. Effective social service agencies are able to recruit Board members, leaders, and volunteers. The organization I work for, Resthaven joins with other agencies like Boys and Girls Club, WIT, Hospice, Community Action House, and Good Samaritan Ministries to provide many social services. Virgil Gulker and the Kids Hope Programs are national models. The churches have always been a high producer of social capital, and we know we have many active congregations in town. The city has worked on community based charettes to develop parks and public spaces. The colleges and seminary in Holland supplies a high quantity of human and intellectual capital to promote the generation of social capital. From neighborhood block parties to a cup of coffee at JPs, people are getting together in Holland

On the other hand the core city is suffering, the Health Center struggles for support and health care delivery reflects policy issues on the state and national level. Holland Public Schools are dealing with trust and reciprocity issues in light of policies that are not at all informed or enlightened to promote social capital. The governing bodies of the school board and city council have made decisions that rather than build social capital have seeming begun to deplete the reserve from the past. The conflict between township and city meant a loss of an opportunity to build an area performing arts center.

What if we leave the gentrified downtown and go into the core city? What if we talk to the school counselors about the problems they see with kids? If we go to the core neighborhoods and measure the social capital in these areas what would we find? Could the social capital measures help us diagnose a current or potential problem in the downtown? And also, are we

just behind the prevailing national trends in Holland? Are my walks downtown telling us to be careful of the cool city covering up the real story in our community today and in the future? Are our decisions in school policy, urban planning, economic development, and cultural design really looking at the power and value of social capital to build a strong city where everyone has a role in the civic structure and civic life? Have our civic organizations just hung on and are they in jeopardy?

We know the historic guilds (Rena Boven Guild, Resthaven Guild, and Church Guilds) are waning; some of the social clubs don't have the energy they used to have. While some of the churches are growing bigger and stronger, many parish churches see demographic change and some are closing. I know Bethany CRC is wondering how long they will be here. Fourth and Sixth Church are gone. Groups such as Ambucs and the Lions club fight for survival. Most of the bridge clubs and even many clubs such as this professional club face extinction or a need to retool.

So how can we work to build our stock of social capital in order to create democratic health and community development?

The keys to building social capital depend on helping build transitions in people's lives. These transitions include:

1. Helping populations at risk of exclusion
  - Minorities, special needs, youth, Elderly
2. Supporting life course transitions
  - Health transitions, divorce, school dropouts, substance abuse
3. Promoting community development efforts.
  - Public spaces, events, the arts, planning, housing, poverty prevention

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In each of these areas there are four steps to assess, support, and encourage social capital.

1. Increase program sensitivity to existing Social Capital
2. Establish favorable conditions for desired network formation and maintenance
3. Tap into existing networks to deliver services
4. Build and support new networks

Examples: Holland Public Schools  
Latin Americans United for Progress  
Church programs  
Existing Service Clubs  
Padnos International Exchange  
Sister City Programs  
Cottage Grove

There are many core activities that could assist individuals and groups empower a community by applying social capital concepts.

*New Study*

### Act Locally

First – We need to recognize that while the Federal Government and the states do not have many obvious levers for creating social capital, they can be instrumental in creating and supporting policies that give the local community resources that is needed. Policy makers and governments need to be aware of the current capital and how to build capital for the future. We need to assess if local government and non profit agencies have the knowledge base and resources to access currently available opportunities. The Holland/Zeeland Foundation or other granting agencies could educate leaders on finding and procuring other grants and innovative programs. Educating local neighborhood groups on the assessment of social capital and the techniques to build relationships could help empower the core city, advocates of disenfranchised groups, and community members affected by trends and decisions.

### Support community values and religious groups

Social Capital is frequently a by product of churches, synagogues, tradition, and shared experiences. Angel capital for non profits such as churches can encourage opportunities to bridge networks. An assessment of current social capital help by churches could reveal interesting and unknown currency in Holland. I am on the Board of the just created Lakeshore Non-Profit Alliance. After being in the non profit sector for many years I could not believe how many organizations and programs I did not understand or knew existed.

### Education

Education is an area where government and public policy has the greatest direct ability to generate social capital. For instance doctors not only learn medicine, but also the Hippocratic Oath. School children learn subject matter but also norms and values of society. Our current Holland Public Schools governance and the City Council currently operate in separate spheres. We might find, for instance, that an understanding of social capital, could alter the way we make decisions about focus schools, selling neighborhood schools, the tension between charter and city schools. There might be a fundamental change in the way the school board and the city government work together. The traditional lines of financing, leveraging community political pressure, involving all public members in civic discourse, could and probably would be altered if we looked at the problems with a keen eye to what does it mean to social capital.

An understanding of the need to build social capital would see schools not just as a place for course work and academics, but also a source of social capital, net work building and the enhancement of trust. Closing neighborhood schools could eliminate the opportunity for smaller neighborhoods to bond, organize, and solve some of their own problems. The “Do Something” program in many schools in the Midwest, for instance, encourage and train middle school children to identify community concerns and then to begin to find ways to talk about these issues and make a plan to move forward. Children involved in civic life at an early age are more likely to stay involved later.

### Build Leadership Skills

We need to train and foster leadership, build capacity, and share skills and talents. The Chamber of Commerce leadership programs, the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC), and Rotary programs all are directed toward these goals. But civic leadership and encouraging civic involvement can also occur at the worksite level. Encouraging and allowing civic participation, conducting mentoring and training programs, and sponsoring capacity building all are helpful

approaches to encourage community. Business that have resources in strategic planning, financial planning, and marketing, could offer some of these services and knowledge “in kind” to smaller non profit organizations that cannot afford this talent or training.

Building social capital can be adversarial and controversial. As James DeFilippis wrote in his article “The Myth of Social Capital and Community Development”, “Inner city neighborhoods have social networks and trust between those networks, and they possess many non-governmental, community based organizations. What they lack is power and the capital that partially constitutes that power.” Individuals, professional groups, and advocates for change need to be prepared to work toward what is just, not just what is accepted as the status quo.

#### *Property rights, Urban planning, and Public Safety*

Property rights and public safety can help foster social capital. City Zoning, Planning and home financing play important role in setting environment for building social capital. Assuring community input, involvement and feedback could help tackle problems before they occur. Community policing can take the place of criminal policing.

### Summary

Social Capital is a concept that has been used to help evaluate community dynamics and mobilize communities to develop and change. Many non-governmental organizations such as The World Bank, The U.N., and many major granting organizations have been committed to building social capital around the world. The Governments of countries from Canada to Croatia have commissioned programs to build social capital.

The thoughts and theories about social capital move back and forth across the partisan lines. While George W Bush quoted Putnam in his first inaugural address in respect to faith based initiatives, many community developers speak out against Republican threats to social and economic revitalization programs. Democrats see the decline of social capital as a battle cry for increased funding for their social agenda. Republicans see social capital as support to pull back federal support and encourage private and local initiatives to step up. Other political groups see social capital as a theory that underestimates the need for radical change based on social conflict and social advocacy rather than dialogue or bridge building.

The concept of social capital assumes that bridge building and networking can bring value to civic life. Involvement in voting, community associations and other community activities are fostered by social capital and involvement. At the same time social capital and involvement drive people to become more involved and more invested. This involvement is good for commerce as well as the arts. Research conducted by social scientists and community development groups have shown that communities and neighborhoods with high social capital, are healthier, have less violent crime, lower hunger and poverty rates, and schools with better outcomes. Groups that have financial resources, network power and social capital building skills are best positioned to help a community grow and prosper.

The recent theories of building the “creative class” and building “cool cities” do not address our need to continue to seek theories and approaches to grasp the effect of the changes in our

economic and political environment on individuals, groups, children and youth, and the elderly, people in transitional stages, and those who have disabilities, just to name a few.

While social capital is not a panacea and needs to be seen in the context of other financial, political, and social forces, the concept has value to help us look at the potential that individuals and groups with current social power have to change our community. The changes must be structural and include the values and spirit of diverse and varied people and communities. The strongest community offers civic participation, trust, reciprocity, and social connectedness to as many citizens as possible.

As members of a professional group we can make our community better with a few action steps:

1. Join groups that promote civil society and the bridge to build social capital where it is needed.
2. Organize and problem solve as individuals with the responsibility to build social capital.
3. Foster local, national and global dialogues about how groups and non governmental organizations can change the capital structure.
4. Create work place social capital enhancement.

Cool cities are a great idea. But a city where there is trust, reciprocity, civic involvement and an abundance of social capital has an infrastructure that promises much more than just being "cool".

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**FIGURE 1**  
**Average membership rate in 32 national**  
**chapter-based voluntary associations, 1900-1997**

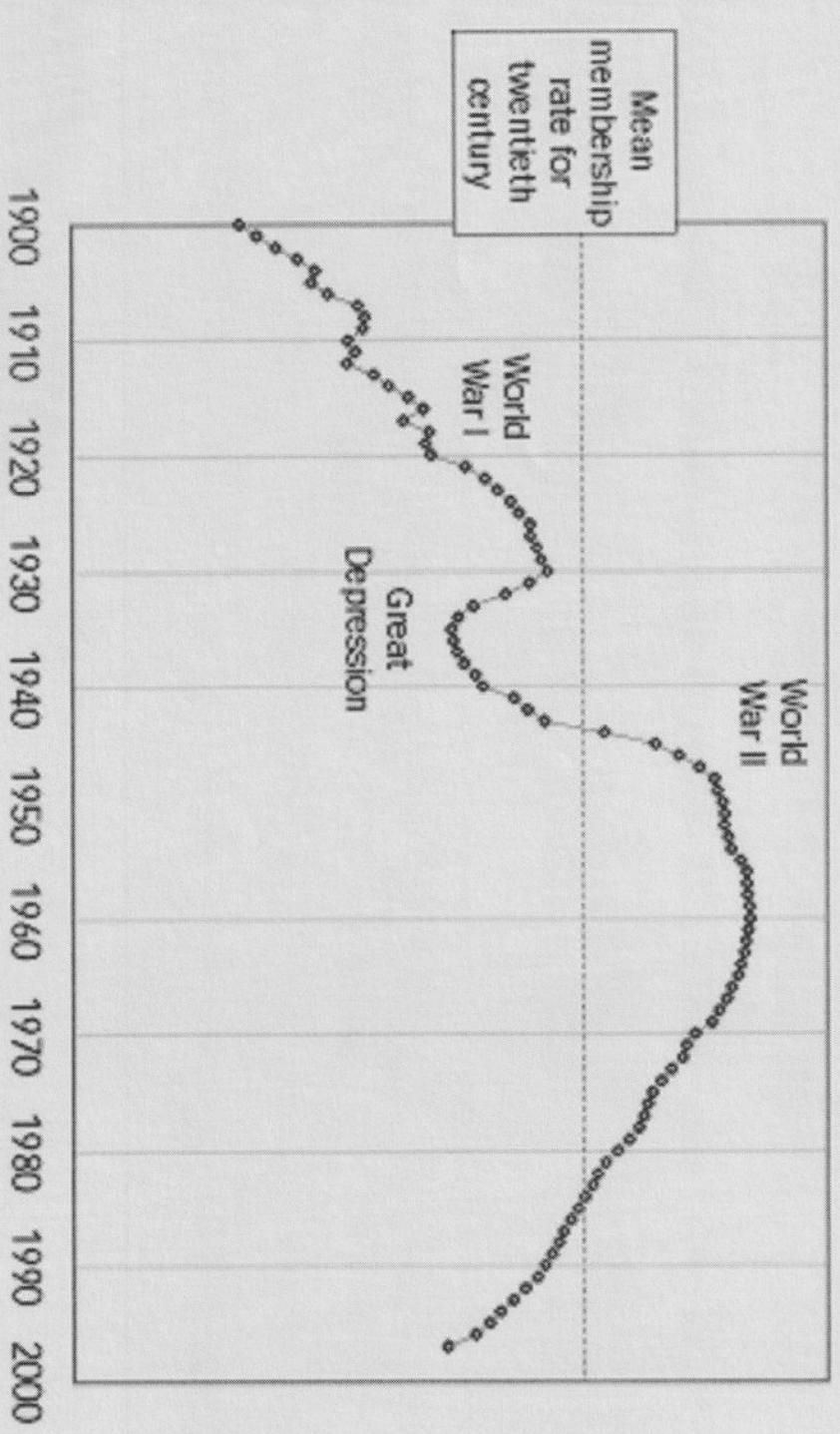


FIGURE 2

Active organizational involvement, 1973-1994

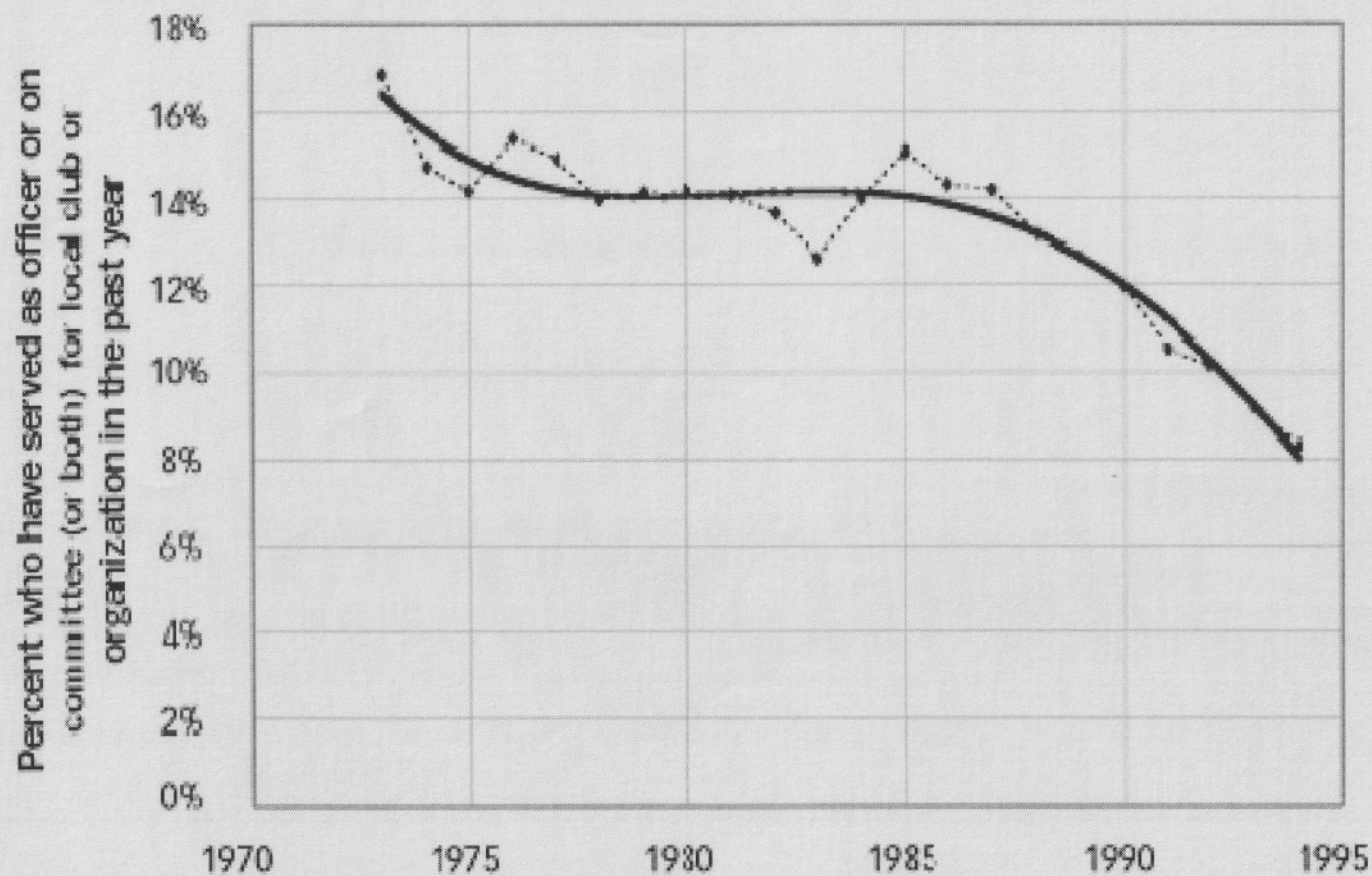
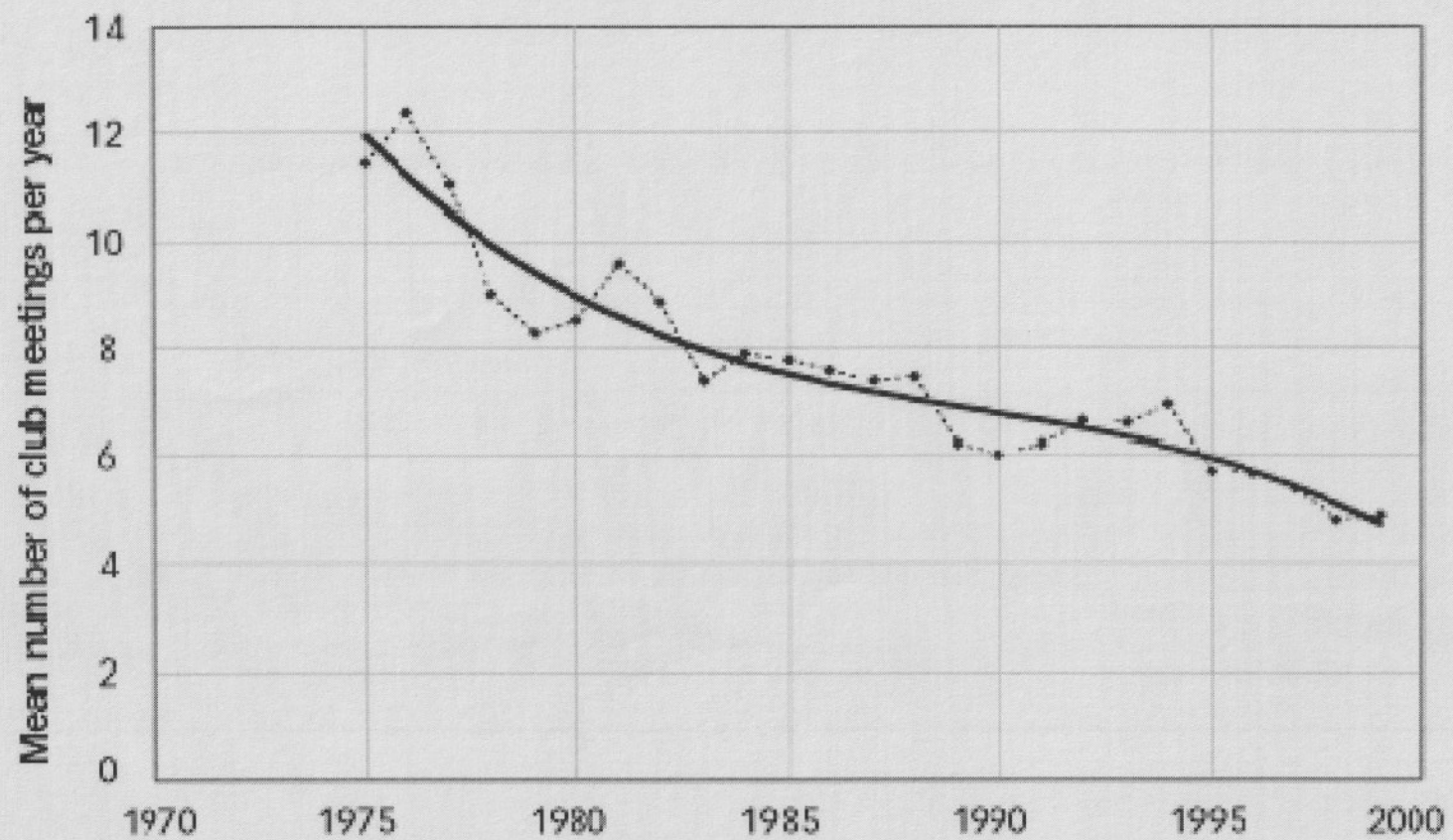


FIGURE 3

Club meeting attendance dwindles, 1975-1999



**FIGURE 4**  
**Four decades of dwindling trust Adults and teenagers, 1960-1999**

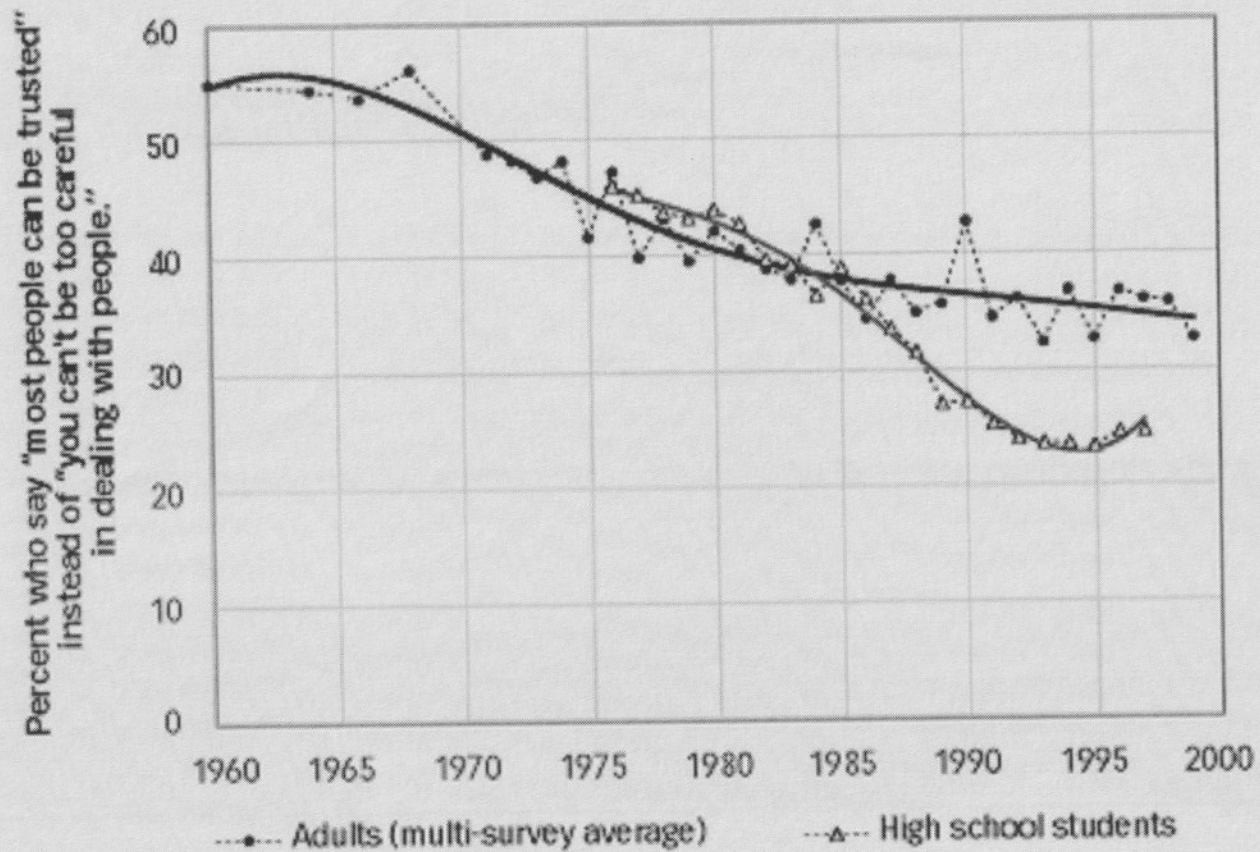


FIGURE 5

The rise and fall of philanthropic generosity, 1929-1998

