

Defining Social Capital



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Internationally ...

This is a national issue, but with an international audience with a goal of understanding the health of our communities and how this reflects experiences in other countries.

International harmonisation in measurement could prevent the necessary flexibility for each country and within each country to recognise the context specific-nature of social capital

Definitions (1)

The aggregation of actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group

~ Bourdieu, 1983/1986

Why define social capital?

Three Reasons

- To recognise and accept assumptions to ensure construction and evaluation are on the same basis
- To increase the likelihood that the information collected is interpreted and applied correctly
- To enable consistency over time

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Three key elements:

- **Obligations and expectations**
- **Effective channels of information exchange**
- **Disciplined relationships**

Top-down or Bottom-up?

“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country!”

Definitions (2)

Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society - it is the glue that holds them together.

~ World Bank

Social Capital v. Social Support

The degree to which a person's basic needs are met through interaction with other people

Three additional dimensions:

- Feeling esteemed and cared for
- Having a sense of belonging
- Having access to information and material resources

The Emperor's New Clothes?

Social capital relies on interaction between individuals or groups and without this interaction it loses its value.

- * The value of social capital increases as it is spent
- * It is not independent
- * Must be spent to have value

So What?!!

- It may provide avenues to engage with the disenfranchised groups
- It may be used to justify cuts to welfare funding
- May assume the quality of governance can be extrapolated from the level of social capital: High social capital = Good Governance.

Issues for further consideration

- When developing a measure we need to ensure that we evaluate the entire process, not just counting the measure.
 - Possibility of overlooking reality when the measure 'looks' correct.
- Incorporating the top-down perspective in measuring social capital

Final Thoughts

Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle:

The electron is a particle but a particle that can be described in terms of waves. The uncertainty around which the theory is built is that we can know the path the electron takes as it moves through space or we can know where it is at any given instant, but we cannot know both. Any attempts to measure one will unavoidably destroy the other. This isn't a matter of needing more precise instruments; it is an immutable property of the universe.

~Bryson, 2004



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