

## 1. Introduction

Social capital in the form of generalized trust is the exception globally. This means that trust in their fellow citizens is not what most people experience in their daily lives. In international comparison, it is only in four of the Nordic democracies, the Netherlands, and China,<sup>1</sup> that a majority of the population think that most people can be trusted (averages over the four waves of the World Values Survey (1981-2004)) (World Values Survey, 2006). However, this does not mean that trusting people are found only in these countries. What it does mean is that the level of generalized trust shows big variations between countries and within countries.

Even in small protestant northern European nations, we today find communities in the big cities that are dominated by ethnic and racial minorities. This segregation of ethnic groups tends to drive down the level of generalized trust in society. At the same time, the level of in-group trust or particularized trust is increased. Race and ethnicity may be of significance, but the variable with the biggest negative impact on generalized trust is inequality. In this paper, I will discuss the trust building role of the public library. The role of the library in creating social capital has not been given great attention in the literature, and its role in generating trust between ethnic groups has been even less studied. Even so, examples exist. The sparse literature on ethnicity and social capital in public libraries provides a starting point for further study. Studies on the public library applying and developing theories on social trust and social capital are necessary to bring out more knowledge of what is happening in the library regarding trust. When more is known about whether and how libraries contribute in creating social trust, it is possible to flash out in greater detail how libraries really could make a difference in the generation of generalized trust and how this contribution can be increased. Studying public libraries as trust builders in ethnically diverse communities is discussed in the library and information science context, while acknowledging that findings on social trust and public libraries contribute in increasing knowledge on the creation of social capital in general.

<sup>1</sup> Uslaner (2002, p. 220, n. 1) and Bjørnskov (2007) argue that the Chinese results should be excluded because it is a clear outlier. The Chinese figures are held in doubt. On the other hand, Chen and Lu (2007) in their study of social capital in urban China finds that the level of generalized trust is high, and that generalized trust has the same meaning in both the Western and Chinese context. That is, they claim that Chinese trust figures are comparable with those in Western countries, and that they are not suspiciously high.

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# Social Capital and the Multiethnic Challenge: The Role of the Public Library\*

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*The paper talks about the social capital in the form of civic values as generalized trust and norms of reciprocity. What it does mean is that the level of social trust varies between countries and within countries. The author says that the role of the library in creating social capital has not been given great attention in the literature, and its role in generating trust between ethnic groups has been even less studied. According to author the sources of social capital are in contention between a society-centered perspective and an institution-centered perspective. The public library as a service institution in the local community focuses its activity on fulfilling the expressed needs of the end-user of public services and providing the same service. Lastly this paper says that most studies of public libraries and social capital have concluded that the core services were most important in the creation of social capital.*

\* This is a revised version of the paper prepared for presentation at the 4th annual meeting of the Document Academy at the School of Information, University of California, Berkeley, 13-15 October, 2006.

## 2. *The Making of Social Capital and the Public Library Institution*

The public library is but one institution related to the formation of social capital (Cox, Swinbourte, Pip, & Laing, 2000; Hillenbrand, 2005a, 2005b; Putnam, Feldstein, & Cohen, 2003; Vårheim, forthcoming). Social capital means "social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1995:67). Social capital is positively correlated with various variables describing individual well-being and health, economic growth, democracy and government efficiency, as well as with lowered crime levels, less drug abuse and fewer teenage pregnancies (Fukuyama, 1995; Granovetter, 1985; Hutchinson & Vidal, 2004; Putnam, 1993, 2000, 2004; Wakefield & Poland, 2005).

The sources of social capital are in contention between a society-centered perspective and an institution-centered perspective. According to the societal account of social capital generation, social capital is created in voluntary associations and in face-to-face interaction between individuals in small groups (e.g. Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 2000). In the institutional approach, social capital is created by government institutions and in particular by universalistic welfare state policies (Hooghe & Stolle, 2003; Kumlin & Rothstein, 2005; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). Lack of empirical evidence has put the society-centered point of view in serious doubt (Delhey & Newton, 2005:313).

Therefore, the study of how universalistic public service institutions as the public library create social capital becomes theoretically relevant not only within the field of library studies, but also within the cross-disciplinary field of social capital studies. Policies towards increasing trust face big challenges. As a universalistic institution, serving a diverse public, the public library is facing these challenges in its daily operations. The library's appeal to all strands of the population could make it particularly suited for creating trust between diverse groups.

## 3. *Social Capital and Diversity*

Within the literature on social capital and ethnic diversity, the dominant finding has been that racial and ethnic heterogeneity lowers social capital (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2000, 2002; Coffe & Geys, 2006; Costa & Kahn, 2003; Delhey &

Newton, 2005). The levels of trust and civic engagement are lower in minority communities. On the other hand, there is research finding that ethnic diversity does not necessarily drive down social trust and actually can increase levels of trust depending on context (Marschall & Stolle, 2004; Uslaner, 2006). Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the most important factor decreasing trust is inequality. Unequal societies are low on generalized trust. The impact of ethnicity is far lower. The effect of context in the form of neighborhood characteristics is greater than for ethnicity. Trust is low when neighborhoods are segregated (often the result of inequality), not when they are diverse. It is the segregated distribution of the population that affects generalized trust most, not diversity in itself. Segregation means small opportunities for contact between groups. Majority groups feel threatened by unknown ethnic minorities. Thus, in-group trust or particularized trust is strengthened. Too much social capital of this bonding kind can be disastrous, confer the break-up of Yugoslavia: "Isolation of a group within a diverse society, not diversity *per se*, seems to be the biggest threat to trust" (Uslaner, 2006:3). Bridging social capital or generalized trust is important because it brings people that are different together.

Inequality means segregation both in space as well as in mind. In unequal societies, unequal people rarely meet on equal terms, i.e. in non-hierarchical situations. Their children do not go to the same schools, they have different doctors and hospitals, and they meet in different clubs. As opposed to segregated neighborhoods, diverse neighborhoods enjoying frequent contact between groups mixed with relative equality can enhance trust. However, we know that racial prejudices are among the more deeply rooted beliefs people have and are not easily changed. This is illustrated in the following argument: If we happen to know a nice person from another group, this is mostly attributed to the individual properties of this person and not of the group. The attributes of the individual are not transferred to the group. On the contrary, the fact that Ms. X is such a nice person just underlines how unlucky she is being part of that particular group.

**Does this mean that the trust gap between ethnic groups cannot be narrowed** considering that inequality and racial prejudices are entrenched in institutions that are difficult to move? Despite the huge obstacles standing in the way of trust, there is variation in the depths of ethnic divides and between communities.

*Although not very well investigated, but aside from anecdotal evidence, research indicates that some types of neighborhoods are more trust creating than others and that generalized trust in fact develops through social interaction in mixed neighborhoods (Marschall & Stolle, 2004).<sup>2</sup>*

#### 4. How to Create Trust Between Groups?

Given that racial and ethnic minorities are segregated into more or less homogenous local communities and the bad climate for grand political designs, solutions that can create contact between people without uprooting neighborhoods, would be very much appreciated, especially since the lowest levels of trust are found in homogenous minority neighborhoods. Contact between people across ethnic divides is one way of creating social capital, but not any form of contact in any other context. Context and the nature of contact is important (Marschall & Stolle, 2004). Obviously, for an increase in generalized trust and not only particularized trust, contact must occur in a diverse setting. Contact must also be accompanied by: "equal group status within the situation, common goals; inter-group cooperation; and the support of authorities, law, or custom." (Pettigrew, 1998:65). This set of conditions is not easy to fulfill.

One way trust can increase in spite of racial and ethnic segregation is by directing strong public policies towards making groups meet. Urban planning initiatives relocating parts of the population could reduce existing polarization of the population. Perhaps a little bit more realistic, policies designed towards avoiding *new* demographic concentrations of ethnic groups could be implemented. An even bigger question is how far one in the medium long run can hope to go along the relocation route. Additionally, to be effective, these policies are futile without relative equality between groups. This means that the most effective policy for increasing trust means reducing inequality.

Research by Rothstein and colleagues indicates that institutions and public policies treating everyone as equals, i.e. universalistic policies and benefits, as

**opposed to means tested benefits, create generalized trust (Kumlin & Rothstein,**

2005; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). Feedback effects from increased trust increase voter support for universalistic policies again increasing trust. In particular, universal policy instruments in the form of services aimed directly at the individual are effective. Examples of universal services are universal old age pensions, universal child benefits, and library services. As opposed to universalistic benefits, the negative effects for generalized trust created by means-tested benefits include the strong feelings on the part of the recipients of welfare of being humiliated in the meeting with their benefactors, the street level bureaucrats; an encounter confirming and strengthening the feeling of having inferior status felt by people on welfare, removing any potential for inter-group relations and creating hostility. The fact that the middle classes (and also the rich) through universal public services receive universal benefits makes it easier for the poor to accept welfare benefits with their dignity still in place. The other side of the coin is that the middle classes feel that they get something back from the state for the taxes they pay. These are the social mechanisms that maintain a universal welfare system. Institutions, policies, and services must be considered effective and fair across the spectrum of social groups to be able to generate rather than destroy social capital.

#### 5. The Library as a Bridge Between Community Groups

The public library, as a service institution in the local community, focuses its activity on fulfilling the expressed needs of the end-user of public services and providing the same service for all. Putnam, Feldstein and Cohen's work on one Chicago branch library, tells the story of a public library that explicitly was built to function as a trust building institution between communities (Putnam *et al.*, 2003). The concept of the library as a low-intensive meeting place is developed in Audunson (2005). It is a place where people with different interests and backgrounds meet informally; a public space where different kinds of groups, the young and the old, the Pakistani and the Hindu, the Dane and the Muslim, the rich and the poor, are more likely to meet compared with almost any other context. It is not so much a question whether the library has a universalistic service role, **but how the library fulfills this role, and whether the right questions have been asked to tap this role.** In a meeting of cultures, one would expect the library to meet the various groups with respect and understanding, as well as with documents, treating everyone on an equal basis. However, when people have different

<sup>2</sup> Marschall and Stolle (Marschall & Stolle, 2004) find in their study of Detroit neighborhoods that this is more prevalent among blacks than whites, but modify the significance of this observation by referring to the fact that whites to a much lesser degree live in mixed neighborhoods making interaction across ethnic and racial divides less feasible.

*backgrounds, unequal treatment might be in the interest of equality. There are two major ways of building trust through the public library. One is society-oriented model making the library a community institution rather than a traditional library by, for example, moving towards a community social welfare institution, a community/recreation center with librarians working primarily as community social workers cooperating closely with the social services and voluntary associations. The other model is institution-oriented focusing on the library as a document provider. Perhaps only the second model is in line with the ideal of the public library as a universal service provider, and able to build trust. The few studies that had been conducted on social capital and libraries clearly point in this direction. People go to the library to find information. By maintaining this core, the library can fulfill its universal role and be perceived as a legitimate meeting place for all (Cox *et al.*, 2000; Hillenbrand, 2005a, 2005b; Vårheim, forthcoming).*

## 6. The Public Library as Generator of Social Capital Among Immigrants

Little research has been done on the public libraries and social capital. Vårheim (forthcoming) found only eleven articles in peer-reviewed journals in the combined databases of LISA and ISI Web of Science. Of these, only two also dealt with race/ethnicity. Both articles focus on how to cater for the information needs of immigrants, and are firmly grounded in the tradition of the library as primarily an information provider. One article concentrates on researching the information needs of immigrants (Canadian data), and finds that first of all, information literacy is the first step towards their integration in Canadian society (Caidi & Allard, 2005). In addition, the authors point to the discovery of the library and its safe environment, telling friends about the benefits of the library, and the experience of trust in the library personnel as important for inclusion. Next, a call is made for tailoring library services according to the specific needs of immigrants and different immigrant groups. For example, it is recommended that libraries include local community records into their collections including immigrant material.

The second paper, covering Danish data, more directly studies how public libraries meet immigrants, how integration of immigrants in society can be less

painful with public libraries as active players (Elbeshausen & Skov, 2004). The importance of the library is underlined in that it is one of the very few public cultural institutions visited regularly among immigrants. Integration is seen not as a convergence of value systems, but as building multiple points of contact with the majority for minority groups. The article concludes that libraries succeed more in integration if immigrant culture is not made the focal point of library's work with minority groups. The library is most successful even in integration when its primary focus is upon providing universal services. At least when it comes to integration, it is not obvious that focusing on the immigrants' cultures of origin is in the interest of the immigrants themselves, that is, if integration is the main goal. This finding is reinforced by a study of voluntary immigrant associations in Denmark (Togeby, 2004). These associations are regarded as important by the government and receive substantial funding. However, generalized trust is not higher among association members compared to other immigrants. The danger seems to be to make the immigrant into a client with specific needs. This does not mean that the specific information needs of immigrants should not be catered for, but that the library first and foremost must be a point of contact between minority groups and the majority, not a place for the creation of in-group social capital by focusing on the needs of the immigrant groups as such, but rather focusing on their need for contact with majority groups and other minorities, generating generalized trust or bridging social capital.

## 7. Conclusion

Most studies of public libraries and social capital have concluded that the core services were most important in the creation of social capital (Vårheim, forthcoming). The trust in the library is grounded in the traditional library services related to documents. General community work is not what people expect or want from the library. This finding does not mean that the public library is not a place for contact between people within and across race, ethnicity and communities. On the contrary, the library in being a library, i.e., a public information space for all, is one of, perhaps the most open meeting place for people of all categories except perhaps public parks.

*Further, in-depth studies of the public library as creator of generalized trust* in diverse communities are needed for learning more about the mechanisms in the generation of trust among minority communities as well as in other community contexts. Regarding the creation of generalized trust, the public library institution, which has the same universalistic foundation for its services all over the world, seems to be an extraordinary well-suited object for comparative studies of many aspects of the creation of generalized trust.

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# 7

## Social Capital and Public Policy – Summary

Carolin Gomulica

*This paper provides a concept and short overview of how and why social capital could be linked with public policy and what are the most important and critical issues. The paper also raises some questions – why should social capital be considered at all for public policies? And is it important to understand the possible negative outcomes of the society are with social capital and public policies. It can be said that social capital is a concept with a lot of potential especially for developing countries. Policies affect directly the life of people in areas as health, education, employment, housing, living conditions, access to basic services etc.*

This paper provides a short overview how and why social capital could be linked with public policy and what are the most important and critical issues.

### The Effects of Social Capital for Public Policy

Social capital is a concept that could form part of public policies but it is important to notice that it is not a 'cure-all'. It is a concept which can be transformed into