Social capital and "the media":
Dimensions of the debate

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To sustain Putnam's argument, social capital must be simultaneously the ties that bind and an all-purpose social lubricant, the national duct tape and WD-40, capable of fixing any social problem.

Edwards & Foley (2001:229)
reviewing Bowling Alone.

Studies reporting declining levels of social capital, and of trust, the lubricant of social capital, have also reflected diminishing levels of public confidence in government, and in other institutions, such as the mass media. This paper begins with an exploration of the nature of social capital, its definition and measurement, and then moves to examine some of the literature on the relationship between social capital and traditional forms of mass media as well as new media. Rejecting a monolithic view of "the media", particular attention is paid to commercial, public and community broadcasting; to the "civic journalism" phenomenon and the role of local newspapers; and to new media, in their respective contributions to the creation and maintenance of social capital, or its demise.

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed a widespread fascination with the concept of social capital. This is not only reflected in a burgeoning academic literature on the subject but its popularity in public discourse and communication, especially amongst politicians seeking a penetrating sound bite (Costello 2003). While initially introduced as a sociological tool, social capital and the explosion of interest in social norms, networks and relationships, is now a frequent topic in many disciplines, including political science, economics, education, psychology, management, communication and anthropology.

The exact date at which the term appears in the literature is unclear. The earliest author accredited with its introduction is an educational administrator Lyda Hanifan, who in 1916 used the term in explaining school performance (cited in Woolcock and Narayan 2000).

A number of other authors have also been identified as early proponents, particularly Jane Jacobs (1961) and Glen Loury (1977)[1]. However, the increased attention during the last decade is largely attributed to the work of James Coleman (1988, 1990) and Robert Putnam (Putnam, Leonardi et al. 1993, Putnam 1995, 2000). Pierre Bourdieu (1986) is also seen by some to have had a seminal influence with his early work on social capital. Subsequent work inspired by these theorists has drawn upon and redefined these original conceptualisations, transforming social capital into a highly contested concept. As a result, social capital has been used to refer to such a range of phenomenon that its analytical utility has been increasingly questioned (Labonte 1999; Scanlon 2004) and calls for a sharper definition have been made (Ecclestone & Field 2003). Some have noted the use of the concept almost interchangeably with other sociological concepts such as social cohesion and social integration (for example Lowndes & Wilson 2003) thus laying social capital open to claims that it simply repackages old concepts in new language. Others, however, advocate that social capital is something new and distinct.

Despite the confusion and disagreement that abound regarding the concept, the consensus appears to be in favour of retaining the term "social capital", pending further empirical research and theoretical development.

Definitions of social capital

A clear definition is key to the measurement of social capital, for as Krishna and Shrader (2000) state, the things that are measured "must be related conceptually to what is understood to comprise social capital". The centrality of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam's definitions to research on social capital is such that these are outlined below.

Bourdieu on social capital

Bourdieu used the concept of social capital in the context of the field of education (Bourdieu 1986). Arguing against a purely economic interpretation of capital, he asserted that capital can take three separate but related forms; economic, cultural and social. Of interest to Bourdieu is the convertibility of one form of capital into another where, for example, he argues that social capital can under certain conditions be converted into economic capital. For

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[1] For the most succinct history of the concept, see Farr (2004).

Bourdieu (1986), "social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group - which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital". Bourdieu believes that social capital can be institutionalised in the form of a title of nobility, which is the "form *par excellence* of the institutionalised social capital which guarantees a particular form of social relationship in a lasting way" (Bourdieu 1986). This conceptualisation of social capital has been criticised as being "necessarily vague and unmeasurable because the only way to know social capital exists, or was instrumental in increasing economic capital, is after the fact" (Smart, quoted in Wall, Ferrazzi et al. 1998). Bourdieu's work has been drawn upon in a number of studies, although it lacks the same recognition as Coleman and Putnam.

Coleman on social capital

Coleman introduced the concept of social capital as a tool in his attempt to "import the economists' principle of rational action for use in the analysis of social systems proper" (Coleman 1988). Concerned with assessing the role of social capital in the formation of human capital, Coleman sets out his definition of the concept, the various forms that exist, and the structural conditions under which it arises (Coleman 1988). According to Coleman, social capital consists of a variety of different components, which have two things in common; "they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors...within the structure" (Coleman 1988: S98). Social capital is described as capital because it is productive, facilitating certain things that would not be achieved in its absence. Different to other forms of capital, which tend to be private goods, social capital is a public good, which "inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors" (Coleman 1988: S98). It is the public good aspect of social capital that differentiates it from other forms of capital, and is also the factor that leads to under investment in social capital. As actors receive only a share of the benefits they are less inclined to spend time on investment.

According to Coleman, social capital occurs in different forms. The first, obligations and expectations, is dependent on two elements; trust, which ensures repayment of obligations, and the actual extent of obligations. The issue of trust and trustworthiness is an important one, recurring in many subsequent explorations of social capital. The second form of social capital

is the potential information that can be gained from social relations, which forms an important basis for action (Coleman 1988: S104). The existence of effective norms and sanctions constitutes a third powerful form of social capital, which like other forms of social capital, act to facilitate some actions while constraining others. Coleman also distinguishes between family social capital, the relations between children and parents (and other members, if they are part of the family) (Coleman 1988: S110) and social capital in the community, relations with those actors outside the family.

Putnam on social capital

Putnam's extensive empirical work in Italy and the United States represent arguably the most influential studies of social capital, both in terms of his definition of social capital and the indicators used to measure it. Focusing initially upon good governance in Italy, Putnam found the correlation between civic engagement and effective government to be virtually perfect (Putnam 1994). Putnam, redefining social capital as a community level feature, regards social capital as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam, Leonardi et al. 1993). This precise definition is frequently quoted in the social capital literature. Putnam notes, as Coleman does, that the special feature of social capital is that it is a public good that accumulates through use (Putnam 1993:170). Trust is an essential component of social capital, lubricating cooperation. Social trust, as opposed to personal trust, arises from two related sources - norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement.

Norms of reciprocity can be of two sorts. Balanced reciprocity involves simultaneous exchanges and leaves no outstanding debt. Generalised reciprocity refers to a continuing exchange relationship that at any point in time will be unbalanced, and consequently the relationship involves mutual expectations for future repayment. Putnam argues that it is the norm of generalised reciprocity that is the highly productive component of social capital, and that it is most likely to be associated with dense networks of social exchange.

Networks of civic engagement are an essential form of social capital, and the denser the networks, the greater the likelihood of cooperation for mutual benefit. Putnam notes the importance of kinship bonds but believes networks of civic engagement to be more so, as they instigate wider coopera-

tion. Perhaps the most contested and contentious aspect of Putnam's thesis is that networks built around horizontal links form the key to social capital formation, and that "a vertical network, no matter how dense and no matter how important to its participants, cannot sustain social trust and cooperation" (Putnam 1993:174). This narrow definition of social capital has been contested by many subsequent theorists, who argue that vertical ties also form an important source of social capital (Woolcock 2000) and that such a restrained conceptualisation undervalues the critical role of the state in mediating social capital (Szreter 2002).

The final criticism of Putnam is of his methodology. Edwards and Foley (2001) for example take Putnam to task for disaggregating data.

Towards a Contemporary Definition

The above definitions of social capital converge in several ways, and common components can be identified. Winter has argued that there are many overlaps between the definitions of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam and that all "effectively refer to the same processes" (Winter 2000a). Despite this, subsequent debate has resulted in the development of countless alternative definitions, among which confusion is rife. There is a danger that some authors have failed to distinguish between what social capital is and what it does, the sources from the consequences (Woolcock 1998), and as a result discussions of social capital often fail to refer to the same thing.

Among these definitions however it has been argued that consensus is emerging, summarised as follows: "social capital refers to the norms and networks that facilitate collective action" (Woolcock 2001). Other points of general agreement can be found. Social capital is widely regarded as a resource that is productive (hence the applicability of "capital"). In addition to its role in facilitating cooperation and action, social capital can act as a form of social control, for example in the form of sanctions (Wall, Ferrazzi et al. 1998). The public good aspect of social capital is also widely acknowledged, recognising that social capital belongs to no one individual but is an inherent feature of the social structure.

Away from these few points of agreement there are, however, major points of contention, reflected in the differing definitions and applications of the concept. These include:

1. The appropriate level or unit of analysis.

    This particular issue is cause for division among current research on social capital. While Bourdieu and Coleman include analysis at the level of the individual, Putnam broadens this to a regional level, a schism reflected in subsequent thinking. Some talk of individual social capital while others strongly argue that social capital is a feature of the collective, which should therefore be measured at the community level (eg Kawachi 1999, Stone & Hughes 2002).

2. Various forms of social capital

    Numerous different forms of social capital have been identified, several of which recur throughout the literature. These different forms can be thought of as being either cognitive or structural (Krishna and Shrader 2000). Cognitive forms include norms, values, attitudes and beliefs, while structural forms relate to networks, roles, rules and precedents. Both of these dimensions are important, and need to be taken into account in any assessment of social capital in a community. There is variation in terms of what are regarded to be forms of social capital. There is also confusion as what may be called forms by one may be referred to as components by another, despite the difference between them.

3. The differing dimensions of social capital

    While widely accepted that networks are an integral form of social capital, debate exists over which type to include. Putnam strongly asserts that only horizontal networks should be considered, yet subsequent theorising includes both horizontal and vertical, leading to the identification of different dimensions of social capital:

    *   Bridging social capital - consisting of strong ties within a horizontal network, including family, close friends, neighbours, colleagues and others.

    *   Bonding social capital - weaker ties also, with individuals sharing similar economic and political position, but who differ in terms of location, occupation, or ethnic group.

    *   Linking social capital - vertical ties with formal institutions and organizations (Woolcock 2000).

4. The role of trust

Trust is regarded as central in most explanations of social capital, but opinion on its precise role differs. Some see trust as a form of social capital; others regard it as the currency of social capital while yet others see it as a component of social capital (Glaeser, Laibson et al. 2000).

Measuring social capital

As social capital cannot be assessed directly, it has to be operationalised into indicators. Indicators used to measure social capital depend on two things; the definition of social capital and the context within which measurement occurs. Once indicators have been identified they can be measured either by utilising existing, usually statistical data or by tools designed to generate primary data. The lack of a single clear definition has resulted in the development of a number of indicators which "tap slightly different - but also substantially overlapping - characteristics of social relations at the community level" (Lochner, Kawachi et al. 1999).

Generally speaking, the literature on measuring social capital falls into three categories:

a. Theoretical discussions concerning measurement, including attempts to devise measurement tools;

b. Empirical testing of measurement tools;

c. Research into associations between social capital and other variables, in which measurement occurs as an integral part of the research but is not the primary objective.

Indicators of social capital

Indicators identified by Coleman and Putnam have been widely drawn upon in subsequent social capital measurement work. Coleman's initial interest was the role of social capital in the formation of human capital, and his research focused upon the effect of lack of social capital on children dropping out of school. Social capital in this context was operationalised using the following indicators:

- the parents' presence in the home (two parents or a single parent)

- the number of additional children present
- the different combinations of parents and siblings
- the mother's expectation for a child's education
- the mobility of the family
- church attendance

Coleman's use of the above indicators reflects his specific interest in the role of family social capital. These micro-level indicators would need to be combined with other indicators, or the results aggregated to be of benefit at the community level. This is perhaps one of the reasons that it is Putnam's macro-level measures that have been adopted in many cases. Putnam indicators included:

- participation in voluntary associations (including amateur soccer clubs, choral societies, hiking clubs, bird-watching groups and literary circles)
- newspaper readership
- voting patterns - electoral turnout and preference voting (Putnam, Leonardi et al. 1993)

Putnam's measure of voluntary association has been used many times subsequently, although criticisms have been levelled at it, as discussed below.

Problems with measuring indicators of social capital

Much social capital research has relied upon existing statistical data sets, which can lead to a number of problems:

- Data may not exist for certain indicators, leading to their omission or only partial measurement. One example of this is trust, widely regarded to be a central component of social capital. Trust, for example, has been measured using just one or two items from the General Social Survey, conducted in the US.

- Existing data sets that have not been specifically designed to measure social capital indicators, and may not capture particular aspects. Coleman noted in his research that his results would have been more satisfactory "if the research had been explicitly designed to examine effects of social capital within the family" (Coleman

1988), rather than relying on the 'High School and Beyond' dataset. However he believed the results were still sufficient to indicate the importance of social capital, a belief that appears to have been adopted by subsequent theorists who have also used existing datasets.

Aside from measurement difficulties, the use of indicators has been criticised in other ways;

- Indicators focus upon quantitative measurement which means that the quality of relationships, key to building trust and obligations, tends to be overlooked (Wall, Ferrazzi et al. 1998). This has led to the development of a number of alternative measurement tools, which combine quantitative and qualitative methods to capture all dimensions.

- The final confusion that arises in connection with measuring social capital relates to the level at which it is measured. A widely regarded distinctive feature of social capital is that it should be measured at the level of the community, the ecologic level.

Additionally, a number of criticisms have been levelled at Putnam's use of membership in voluntary associations; a measure has been frequently used in the assessment of social capital. Fukuyama (1997) argues that this indicator, measured by membership data, is flawed in that it only picks up membership in organisations formal enough to maintain membership data. Many social groups and networks are informal and consequently their existence, and individuals' participation in them would not be acknowledged using Putnam's method. Fukuyama (1997) also highlights other measurement problems associated with this indicator, notably the positive and negative externalities of group membership. The former refers to the fact that some groups build social capital with members outside their group, while others share this with only group members, and sometimes not even with them. Members of large organisations are no more likely to cooperate with each other simply because they pay membership fees to the same body. Negative externalities refer to those groups that actively promote hatred and intolerance, and therefore share norms at odds with the rest of society.

Social capital also has an important qualitative dimension that cannot be reflected in membership data, and it is necessary to know just how cohesive the group is, not just that it exists. Furthermore, as Johnston & Percy-Smith (2003) wisely recommend, "what is required... is a series of intensive, com-

munity-based studies which (as far as is possible) start with a very limited number of hypotheses about the nature, characteristics and consequences of social capital which can then be tested through in-depth, predominantly qualitative, community-based research".

Mass media and social capital

While conceptualisations of social capital may have been subject to increasingly vigorous scrutiny, this has not translated into an equivalent research interest examining the role of "the media" in both the creation and diminution of social capital. Putnam (2000:228) concludes that "more television watching means less of virtually every form of civic participation and social involvement" and that the decline in social capital in the United States corresponds with the advent of television and what he terms "the cocooning of America" (2000:228, 239). While this correlation has attracted the headlines, the whole picture is not quite as simple. Putnam also reports that in the United States:

- People who read newspapers have higher levels of civic engagement than those who do not (2000: 218),

- Readers of newspapers are more likely to be viewers of television news than not (2000:219),

- News readership and news viewership are in decline (2000:220),

- Those who access news from the Internet are also likely to be high consumers of news from traditional sources (2000: 221),

- Those whose principal source of news is the Internet are less likely to be civically engaged (2000:221).

Putnam's focus on mass media is largely confined to comparisons between newspapers and television. Indeed, his most civic-minded generation, those who grew up in the Great Depression, and served in World War II, also came to maturity at the same time as radio. Discussion of radio, a medium which in its earliest decades before the advent of the transistor served to promote shared experience, is largely missing, not only from Putnam's account, but also from much of the subsequent literature about the impact of mass media on social capital. Moreover, in one of its more recent forms, talkback radio, the medium provides an excellent case study for illustrating the 'dark side' of social capital.

Putnam's conclusions about the relationship between television and social capital have been contested on the grounds of both the conclusions reached, and the methodology used to reach them (Shah, McLeod & Yoon 2001, Scheufele and Shah 2000, McLeod 2000, Moy, Scheufele & Holbert 1999, McLeod, Scheufele & Moy 1999, Uslaner 1998, Shah 1998, McLeod et al 1996, Norris 1996). Uslaner, for example, found "no support for the argument that television makes us less trusting because of the content of the shows we watch, or for the argument that television makes us withdraw from civic engagement because of the amount of time consumed by viewing," (Uslaner 1998: 441). More recently, however, Hooghe (2003:84) found,

> robust relations ... between television and attitudinal components of social capital. While news programs are positively related with some of these attitudes, consistent negative relations are found with the time spent on television and a preference for entertainment programs and commercial stations.

Hooghe also concluded "that television effects are dependent not only on the time people spend but also on the kind of programs they watch and (at least in countries with a public broadcasting system) on the station they tune in to" (Hooghe 2003:84).

This supported the earlier research by Shah (1998: 469) which found that "television viewing plays a conditional role in the production of social capital that is dependent on the use of particular genres", but Scheufele and Shah (2000) subsequently questioned the entire argument about the impact of media use on social capital, finding that individual personality type was a much more likely indicator of civic engagement than media consumption patterns. In all of this debate, from the earliest stages, there have been important caveats about methodology, in particular, about disentangling cause and effect (Norris 1996:475-476).

Social capital and the media in Australia

The literature on social capital in Australia is small but growing and there is not a consensus about the state of social capital in Australia, despite some substantial research on the measurement of social capital by the Institute of Family Studies (Stone & Hughes 2002) and the Productivity Commission (Productivity Commission 2003). Cox (2002:356) concludes, "the Australian data show some contradictory indicators of whether social capital is declin-

ing, stable or growing". Much of the Australian research relates to social policy with respect to families, schooling and health (Winter 2000b).

Australian research on the relationship between social capital and the media is scanty. In a somewhat disappointing, even confusing, account of the state of social capital in Australia, Cox (2002:352-353) touches only lightly on "the media" as a factor influencing civic engagement, citing the Morgan research on public perceptions of honesty and ethics among journalists, and declining public confidence in the mass media, and suggesting that both television audiences and tabloid newspaper readership are in decline. Cox does make the useful point that in Australia the state has historically played a greater role in the provision (if only funding) of community services, than in the United States. The Productivity Commission Research Paper (2003) explores this point in much greater depth. Australia also has, unlike the US, compulsory voting at national, state and local government elections.

Certainly, the data from the Morgan survey of occupations indicates a low level of trust in the honesty and ethics of the various media professions (Morgan 2004). Each year Morgan Research asks respondents to rate various professions for honesty and ethics. Nurses consistently rate most highly with 94% of respondents regarding them as honest and ethical in the 2003 survey. In 2003, talkback radio announcers rated 21% from a low point of 14% in 2000; television reporters rated 17% from a low of 11% in 1997; newspaper journalists rated 11%, up from a low of 7% in 2000. Federal MPs rated 17% in 2003, up from 7% in 2000. Newspaper journalists have consistently rated the lowest of all the media professions.

The situation with respect to television audiences and newspaper readership is much more complex than suggested by Cox (2002:352-353). Free to air television viewing is certainly in decline, under the dual threats of subscription television and the Internet. Australian newspaper readership and circulation trends need to be read in the light of a well developed magazine sector in the Australian media marketplace, a strong daily press in regional Australia, and the strong growth of suburban throwaway papers over the past two decades. Moreover, the distinction between tabloid and broadsheet is not necessarily significant, especially in one newspaper metropolitan markets like Adelaide (tabloid) and Brisbane (broadsheet). Kirkpatrick (2000) provides a detailed insight into the declining circulation patterns of the regional daily

newspapers in Australia since the 1990s. Metropolitan newspaper circulation went into decline a quarter of a century before the 1990s.

Local newspapers, 'civic journalism' and social capital

The phenomenon of "public journalism" or "civic journalism" has civic engagement as one of its objectives, and through this objective, a commitment to increasing social capital. The prime objective of "public" or "civic" journalism" is; of course, revive declining newspaper circulations (Lloyd and Hippocrates 1997:9) through re-engagement with the readership, which if achieved, would reflect in increased social capital, if we accept newspaper readership as a positive indicator of social capital. The legendary Buzz Merritt of the *Wichita Eagle* in Kansas - one of the founders of the public journalism movement - sees newspapers as a repository for civic capital (Merritt in Black 1997:183):

> ...a community bent on building civic capital needs a public repository for that capital, a place where the knowledge, the people, and the encouragement that success breeds - the accumulated experience of a community learning to make itself better - can be drawn on.

However the promoters and purveyors of public journalism in the United States such as Rosen and Merritt fail to make the explicit connection to the notion social capital; they stop one step before, at civic engagement, which is only one dimension of social capital.

The public journalism phenomenon in Australia has been discussed in a handful of articles, most in the period 1996-2001 (Romano and Hippocrates 2001, Richards 2000, Hippocrates 1999, Lloyd and Hippocrates 1997, and McKnight 1997). Hippocrates (1999) details a project in civic journalism at the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* on race relations - which he acknowledges was partly in response to the rise of Hansonism (1999:69) - in partnership with the QUT Journalism School, the Ethnic Communities Council and Australians for Reconciliation. Proof of the efficacy of public journalism lies in its success in engaging its readers. Half a decade after the initiative was reported there is little in the content of the *Courier-Mail* to suggest the notion has endured. Since that time, the paper has expanded its coverage of lifestyle, entertainment and popular culture. The current debate in the US among editors and journalism scholars is about whether public journalism is dead (Witt 2003:70).

However, the discovery and naming of this phenomenon in the 1980s does not mean it started then. Even though Hippocrates, as the major

booster of civic journalism in Australia, suggests it arises in the late 1980s, a reading of Kirkpatrick's work on the history of regional dailies in Queensland (1995:112) persuades one that "civic journalism" was one reason for the commercial success of the Manning, Dunn and Irwin families in Queensland provincial newspapers from the 1930s onwards. Of the Toowoomba *Chronicle*, Maryborough *Chronicle* and Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin*, Kirkpatrick writes:

> the principal emphasis in the editorial content was localism with a special effort being made to target all members of the community's families. (1995:108) Each of the three newspapers relied on district correspondents to provide "local news" for its more scattered readers...(1995:109).

William Manning (1864-1943) as editor of the Mackay Mercury actively fostered the development of social capital in the district (Kirkpatrick 1994: 117-8). Harvey (2000) implies that editor-proprietors such as Manning were not uncommon in Australian country newspapers from the 1850s onwards.

Since the late 1930s, social researchers in the United States have been clear about the role of local media in "fostering integration of citizens into their communities" (Friedland & McLeod 1999: 197). McLeod et al found strong links between local media use and community integration in the United States, although they warn that the relationship is a complex one (1996: 189), with neighbourhood involvement related to the reading of a community weekly newspaper, but unrelated to cable television subscription and a metropolitan newspaper subscription.

Putnam's conclusions about the relationship between community involvement, newspaper readership and television news viewing have been confirmed in the only Australian study found to explore these relationships (Killiby 1994a). In research conducted in 1992, Killiby found that those with high levels of civic engagement in the Bathurst district of NSW were also more regular readers of the local daily newspaper the *Western Advocate* and viewers of the local TV news on Prime (Killiby 1994a: 283). Low levels of civic engagement were correlated with low levels of *Advocate* readership and local TV news viewing. Killiby (1994b) also reported a weak link between citizens' conception of their duty to be informed and their level of media consumption. The difference, however, is between, citizens' perceptions of their responsibility to be informed and their media use on one hand, and citizens' actual civic engagement and their media consumption habits, on the other.

Broadcast media and social capital

Commercial broadcasting

In relation to television, comparisons between the United States and countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand are complicated by the fact that the US has no tradition of public broadcasting established by statute and publicly funded, despite the heroic output of PBS. In the US, television equals commercial television. There is certainly evidence from a Belgian study that, "commercial stations, especially, cultivate a less civic-minded value pattern among their viewers" (Hooghe 2002: 84).

Public broadcasting

Anne Dunn (1997) has argued that the ABC has a Charter responsibility to promote civic engagement (although she does not use that term), and demonstrates how ABC Radio, in particular, fulfils that obligation. Brookes (2004:8) has recently argued that public broadcasters should explicitly report their contribution to the building and maintenance of social capital. While Brookes may be overly optimistic in his expectation that public broadcasting can overcome the audience fragmentation implicit in an environment predicated on narrowcasting, he nonetheless raises an argument which has been largely unheard in the debate in Australia about both the ABC and SBS. The significance of Brookes' report is that it was co-published by the BBC, and at the risk of overstating the argument; it offers a compelling rationale for the revitalisation of public broadcasting.

Community broadcasting

Carpentier, Lie & Servaes (2003:52) have pointed to the definitional issues in relation to the terms "community" and "alternative" media. For the purposes of this discussion, the term "community media" is used to describe the community broadcasting sector, which is the third sector of the Australian broadcasting landscape along with commercial and public broadcasting.

Community broadcasting services are defined in section 15 of the Broadcasting Services Act as being broadcasting services that:

- are provided for community purposes; and
- are not operated for profit or as part of a profit-making enterprise; and
- provide programs that:

(a)   are able to be received by commonly available equipment; and

(b)   are made available free to the general public.

There have been two models for licensing community services in Australia: special interest and geographic or broad-based community licences. Although these two classes of licence are no longer in the legislation, they continue to frame the approach to defining community for the purposes of community broadcasting (ABA 2004).

In Australia, there are 218 community radio stations with permanent licenses, and some 45 temporary licensees. The broadcasting regulator is bringing in new arrangements for permanent community television licenses and there are some nine organisations currently involved in providing community television services. Both the existing community radio services and the new arrangements for community television have the potential to contribute to social capital.

The literature on community media, and alternative media, in Australia is wide ranging (Cock 1977, Perry 1977, Moran 1995, Barlow 1997, Forde 1997, van Vuuren 2002, Forde, Foxwell & Meadows 2002, Lawe Davies 2002, Forde, Meadows and Foxwell 2003a, Forde, Meadows and Foxwell 2003b). Yet, one of the features of the Australian literature is the failure of media researchers in Australia to articulate more clearly the links between citizenship and social capital. With one significant exception (van Vuuren 2002), it is almost as if media researchers and social capital researchers are tuned to different frequencies. The May 2002 issue of *Media International Australia incorporating Culture & Policy* was devoted to the theme of Citizens' Media. Most of the articles are about the community radio sector, and while there are occasional references to civil society, there is, with the exception noted above, little mention of social capital. Elinor Rennie writes that:

> Central to the possible uses and approaches to community media is the capacity of citizens' media to play a part in the improvement of social capital within certain areas that have become marginalised politically and economically (Rennie 2002:11, our emphasis).

There is much more concern with the community media offering alternatives to the representations of mainstream media than with the broader function of community media in relation to social capital. Perhaps the focus on representation is a tacit recognition that the community media sector simply does not have the audience reach to play an effective role in relation to social capital, and that its role properly is about broadcasting the voices of minorities whose voices are otherwise unheard or distorted. The same appears to be true of publications which might be termed "the independent,

alternative press" in Australia (Forde 1997). It could well be that the "special interest" community broadcasting license category, originally in the Broadcasting Act has encouraged the notion of "alternative" or "representational" media, which in turn is reflected in commentary and literature on community media. Certainly, the removal of the category from the legislation indicates a policy change which sees such media forms more as "community" than "alternative".

This notion of "alternative" as distinct from "community" has influenced the UK where the community broadcasting sector has been much slower to develop than in Australia. Buckley and Suckling (2003:36) describe the UK sector as:

> empowering communities by giving everyone the access to communication, and by giving voice to the voiceless...whose reality is not described on the airwaves by the mainstream media.

The importance of providing such an empowering platform for those on the periphery should not be underestimated, an oversight often cited by Putnam's critics in terms of his circumspection about the extent to which advocacy, and advocacy organisations, are regarded as contributing to civic engagement (see Edwards and Foley (2001:227).

The broadcast production organisations in both community radio and television do, as voluntary organisations, contribute to the creation of social capital. Kathy van Vuuren's (2002) study of the contribution to social capital of three rural community radio stations is some of the most promising research published on the media and social capital in Australia to date. While van Vuuren's review of the literature is extremely limited, in that the article draws mainly on Australian sources - a number of them unpublished - for an understanding of social capital, and ignores the work of Coleman, and Putnam after 1993, her study nonetheless usefully measures participation in networks and reciprocity in community radio stations at Roma and Tenterfield and a station which wished to remain anonymous but styled in the report as 9CRX, a station also located in a rural community 75 km from a major city. The adoption of the case study approach means it is not possible to generalise across the sector from three rural radio stations, which are in all likelihood unrepresentative of the sector, but the conclusions are encouraging:

> The study...confirms the importance of participation in volunteer networks that go beyond the radio station and into the community - an important element of social capital (106).

Forde, Foxwell and Meadows (Forde, Foxwell and Meadows 2003, Forde, Meadows and Foxwell 2003a and 2003b), have mapped the contribution of community radio organisations in Australia to education and training, but do not articulate a specific link to social capital. What is missing in both the work of van Vuuren and Forde et al is any discussion of the role programming can play in the creation and maintenance of social capital. As with public broadcasting, the argument is yet to be effectively made about the contribution to social capital made by programs community broadcasters put to air, as distinct from the contribution the community broadcasting organisations make simply because they are community organisations.

Chatting alone? The Internet and social capital

The social impact of the Internet, and relationship between elements of social capital and the Internet, have been widely canvassed over the past decade, from Rheingold's now classic work on virtual communities (1993 and 2000) subtitled *Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, to Castells' work on network society (1996), to the more recent work of Barry Wellman and his associates (Wellman 2002, Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova & Garton 1996, Wellman, Haase, Witte & Hampton 2001, Haythornthwaite & Wellman 1998, Hampton & Wellman 2001, 1999). Putnam's view in 2000 was: "[I]t is still too early the predict the long run effects of these new channels... the newer media are mainly drawing on the steadily shrinking traditional audience for news, not expanding it" (Putnam 2000: 221).

Putnam is, however, writing about the Internet as a source of news. There is also an argument that the Internet can promote, and itself be, a form of civic engagement. One of the more enduring projects has been the Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV), developed at Blacksburg, Virginia. The full story is told in Cohill and Kavanaugh (2000). However, of interest here is the recent finding by Kavanaugh and Patterson (2003:496) of "frequent and increasing use of the BEV and the Internet for local, social capital building activities". Brainard argues that Putnam ignores new forms of cyber engagement (2003:385) which contribute substantially to social capital. In this respect, Howard (2002:550) makes the useful point that, "some organisational forms can be difficult to study qualitatively because human, social, cultural, or symbolic capital is transmitted over significant distances with

technologies that do not carry the full range of human expression that an ethnographer...hopes to experience."

Wellman et al in their study of the Internet and social capital found that the Internet did contribute to social capital - "supplement" was the term they used - but that there was no correlation between heavy Internet use and civic engagement, (Wellman et al 2001: 439). They suggested the Internet is becoming "normalised" as it is incorporated into the routines of everyday day life (436).

Then there is the well-documented phenomenon of "net activism" (Taylor, Kent & White 2001, Mancusi-Materi 1999, Hill & Hughes 1998) and the associated Indymedia movement (Platon & Deuze 2003). One of the most celebrated case studies of net activism being the anti WTO protests in Seattle in DeLuca & Peeples (2002).

In the Australian context there are already several studies which make explicit the link the way ICTs have contributed to social capital in rural communities (Goggin 2003, Simpson, Daws & Wood 2003, Norris 2002). The results of these studies parallel the results of similar studies in rural Minnesota (Sullivan et al 2002, Borgida et al 2002). The effectiveness of ABC Radio in promoting social capital identified by Dunn (1997) is further enhanced by the scope of ABC Online, although there does not appear to be any research to this effect as yet.

Conclusion

So how significant are "the media" in the creation and maintenance of social capital? The conclusions to be drawn from this analysis are first, that more research is required, certainly in the Australian context, not only about the impact of traditional print and broadcast media on social capital, but also on the influence of the Internet on social capital. Secondly, the key research question is: Is it "local" media rather than "community" media that contribute to the creation and maintenance of social capital? Is community ownership of the medium necessary for it to promote civic engagement, or is the "localness" of the medium, or indeed the "locality", more important than who owns it? For if shared experiences are one of the dimensions of trust building (Brookes 2004:8) then in the Australian context, the audience reach of community broadcasting and the circulation of community publications are too small for the impact to be significant. As for any role that mass media

might play in the development and maintenance of social capital in Australia, we are reliant on "local" newspapers and public broadcasters. Finally, as we have shown above, there is an increasingly robust and very public debate about what actually constitutes social capital and who might benefit from it. Clearly this is a debate that needs all forms of media not only actively promoting diversity of opinion, but even more importantly, transparently owning its own critical role in the production and reproduction of social capital, including its dark sides.

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