

# [Advantages and disadvantages of social capital](https://assignbuster.com/advantages-and-disadvantages-of-social-capital/)

In this essay I explore advantages and disadvantages social capital, which relates to social networks, the people we trust and mutual exchange of favours, the main feature here being social networks as they can be valuable to both the individual and the community, allowing information to be shared as well as promoting individuals and communities to be more trusting and equal.

Social capital has been defined in different ways over the years; James Coleman developed the concept as:

“ The types of relations that exist between individuals as located within both families and communities, and that are said to exert a strong influence on levels of educational achievement.” Scott, J. and G. Marshall, (2005: 606).

This view linking relationships within families and communities as a determinant of individuals’ social capital, identifying certain achievements as strong if these relationships are strong too:

“ Deficiencies in social capital – such as would follow from single-parenthood, decreased parental involvement with the child or with family activities, and low levels of interaction between adults and especially parents in local communities – were detrimental to development in adolescence.” Scott, J. and G. Marshall, (2005: 606).

Other influences on social capital include the social structures and the environment, which surround individuals, as well as their culture, norms and sanctions. This demonstrated in the three different types of networks within social capital, which include bonding, bridging and linking.

‘ Bonding’ can be described as the social support we may receive from the people we are close to as part of our backgrounds, it “ Relates to common identity, for example ties among people who are similar to each other…within communities.” ‘ I&DeA’, (21/10/08), which include family members, individuals sharing the same ethnic groups or clubs.

While ‘ Bridging’ can be described as the social cohesion between individuals and groups, bringing people together who would not normally relate to each other, it “ Relates to diversity, for example ties among people who are different from one an other…across communities.” ‘ I&DeA’, (21/10/08), which includes the conversations of varied views and interests between associations.

Lastly, ‘ Linking’, where the associations between those gaining independence and democratic lifestyles due to status are links with those in authority, it “ Relates to power, for example ties with those in authority or between different social classes between communities and organisations and with structures outside communities.” ‘ I&DeA’, (21/10/08), which includes powerful institutions and the decision-making process for example, local authorities.

It is important to suggest that for social capital to be strong, ‘ Bridging’ is the most important concept as it allows for more information to be passed between individuals and greater confidence for individuals and groups to become more involved with each other creating associations to benefit both the individual and the community:

“ The Community Development Foundation describes social capital as increasing the confidence and capacity of individuals and small groups to get involved in activities and build mutually supportive networks that hold communities together.” ‘ I&DeA’, (21/10/08).

Also, Robert Putnam who agrees with the concept that “ trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” Putnam, R. (1993: 167) cited by Harris, J. (2002: 2), widens the concept, emphasising the importance of people’s involvement within informal activities and voluntarily participating or being part of voluntary associations, this also showing the importance of ‘ Bridging’ capital.

However, as important social capital is claimed to be, Putnam has claimed a decrease in public participation in these informal activities and voluntary associations in particular societies therefore having a negative impact on social cohesion:

“ Over the past thirty years we have become ever more alienated from one another and from our social and political institutions, and that this disengagement poses a critical threat to our personal health, local communities and national well-being.” This taken from ‘ The Saguaro Seminar’, ‘ Bowling Alone’, (2007).

Ii is important to evaluate some of the positive and negative affects of social capital, and here it is clear that some of the positive affects could include impact on individuals’ happiness as they form relationships and associations to benefit income as well as on personal health, while on the community, a positive impact could be shown on crime rates and educational attainment and more effective government, however, as Putnam claims above that there is a decline in social capital and therefore this having a negative influence to individuals and communities, (for example, increasing crime rates, decreasing educational achievement, teenage pregnancy, child suicide, etc).

The negative affects of social capital could include social exclusion as “ many groups achieve internal cohesion at the expense of outsiders, who can be treated with suspicion, hostility or outright hatred” Walker, A. (2004).

Also, social capital can be used for ‘ bad’ purposes, perhaps for profit rather than support of individuals and communities as they network.

The idea that there are less people participating in voting and showing political interest than those who take part in volunteering organisations perhaps shows one of the ways in which the voluntary and community sector are increasingly becoming an important feature within societies.

It is first important to understand the meaning of volunteer and community and then how they are important as a whole, a third sector.

‘ Volunteering’ is “ any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to, close relatives, or to benefit the environment” ‘ National Survey of Volunteering, (1997).

Voluntary associations have been defined as:

“ Any public, formally constituted, and non commercial organisation of which membership is optional, within a particular society.” Scott, J. and G. Marshall, (2005: 691).

This could include churches, political parties, pressure groups, leisure activity groups as well as professional associations, to encourage public participation to maintain social order.

The key features of voluntary organisations includes that they are independent and self-governing, driven by values and are to support others not to profit themselves, while a ‘ Community’ is “ a group of people living together in one place” who share either a common religion, race or other characteristic or interest that allows the group to be considered collectively.

Communitarianism emphasises the importance of responsibility and finding solutions to social problems within the community. Mark Granovetter (1973) developed a ‘ weak ties’ theory that suggests individuals have strong ties, such as close friends and family, similarly to bonding, shows the support between individuals, while weak ties are those individuals have with acquaintances which can help to develop socio-economic status similarly to bridging in social capital. This concept demonstrates one of the ways in which social capital and the community are interconnected.

Together, the two above notions of volunteering and the community have much contribution toward improving individuals and groups lives.

The Voluntary and Community Sector, (VCS), has been outlined by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), as comprising the following characteristics:

·        “ Self-governing organisations, some registered charities, some incorporate non-profit organisations and some outside both classifications.

·        Great range of size and structure of organisations.

·        Work delivered for the public benefit, beyond the membership of individual VCO’s.

·        Independence of both formal structures of government and the profit sector.

·        Important reliance on volunteers to carry out its work.” ‘ I&DeA’ (18/09/08).

This showing the importance that social capital and the government has on the VCS as networks and policy, and are needed to allow for the sector to grow and benefit the community, allowing for social cohesion and a growth of public participation, this avoiding the affects of what Putnam describes as ‘ Bowling Alone’.

The way in which the VCS can be interconnected to social capital and government policy is shown by the cross-cutting review as the VCS’s are for “ building social capital…contributing expertise and experience to policy formulation.” ‘ I&DeA’ (18/09/08).

There are many advantages of the Voluntary and Community Sector, some of these include that there is variation in scope and it is very diverse, allowing any members of the public to participate in benefiting the community as well as themselves.

Also, the NCVO outlines that the VCS builds social capital, which helps to “ bind society together”. ‘ I&DeA’, (18/09/08). In addition the needs of others are met through “ expertise and experience” ‘ I&DeA’ (18/09/08), this allowing participants such as volunteers to gain training and skills to benefit themselves and the community. Flexibility is also an advantage, which allows for changing needs to be accounted for.

However, a disadvantage could still include the issue of social exclusion as a particular group may become less involved within the community as others form associations.

It is important to consider the way in which government policy is connected to social capital and to the voluntary and community sector, to help analyse the extent to which they are interconnected.

“ In recent years Government interest in, and support for the Third sector organisations has been unprecedented. This can be seen for example in proposals for:

·        Modernising the legal and regulatory framework for ‘ charities’ and the wider ‘ not-for-profit’ sector

·        Facilitating third sector involvement in public service delivery, and

·        Local regeneration and civil renewal schemes” NCVO, (2005-2007)

This shows how the government have helped to support the third sector by allowing implementing policies, which allow the sector to benefit.

More recently, the sectors have become ever more associated with each other as they begin to work together due to the government being less able to deal with certain social problems alone:

“ There is now greater understanding that effective policy responses to many social problems such as inequality, unemployment and social exclusion require a cross-sectoral approach, with the government working with the third sector and the community.” Walker, A. (2004).

This ‘ cross-sectoral’ approach takes into account that partnerships are the key to adjust areas of concern within society, allowing expertise and more funding toward services for greater gain and stronger social capital:

“ There are now an increasing number of departmental strategy documents making reference to the advantages of addressing issues of social capital in policy as a means of improving social outcomes and promoting community cohesiveness and development.” Walker, A. (2004).

The implications partnerships will have includes that the community will benefit as more people will want to participate in the structures, as more plans are made. This also having a positive affect on community safety; such as ‘ neighbourhood watch’ schemes, involving local people in criminal justice.

Overall, analysing the way in which social capital works as well as the development of the voluntary and community sector over recent years and the changing strategies of working together with other sectors such as the government, in order to maintain social order and benefit communities as a whole, it is evident that the three sectors are interconnected on many levels, whether it is to build bridges and create networks to benefit the community or to provide some sort of service to help in providing benefits as a whole.

## Reference

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