

## LOCATING SOCIAL CAPITAL IN SPORT POLICY

**Matthew Nicholson**, La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia, m.nicholson@latrobe.edu.au

**Russell Hoye**, La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia

The social capital concept has become an increasingly important way of conceptualising the way in which social relations generate positive outcomes for individuals, organisations, groups, communities and nations (cf. Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Coleman; 1988; Portes, 1998; Lin, 2001; Woolcock, 1998). The underlying premise of social capital is that relations between people have the capacity to facilitate action and outcomes, through the generation of goodwill, trust and reciprocity. According to Putnam (1995a), 'life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital', because social networks foster reciprocity and trust, facilitate communication, amplify reputations and 'allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved' (p.67). Compared to physical and human capital, social capital is the least tangible (Coleman, 1988). A key point of agreement within the social capital literature is that 'the people who do better are somehow better connected' (Burt, 2000: 3) or even more colloquially that 'it's not what you know, it's who you know' (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000: 225). In other words, there is an inherent logic in the idea that the more connections individuals make within their communities the better off they will be emotionally, socially, physically and economically. Unlike other products, particularly related to physical capital but also human capital, social capital cannot be bought and sold. Rather, social capital makes possible that which would be impossible without it (Coleman, 1988). The strength of the social capital concept, particularly for policy makers, is that it invariably focuses on the positive outcomes of increased social interaction, rather than its potential negatives, while it also provides a useful way of understanding the way in which non-monetary transactions shape and sustain communities (Portes, 1998).

The work of Putnam and other high profile academics (Bourdieu, Coleman and Fukuyama for example) has meant that the concept of social capital has enjoyed significant political currency. Portes (1998) describes the term as one of the 'most popular exports from sociological theory into everyday language' (p.2) and according to Adler and Kwon (2002) the concept of social capital has informed the study of a diverse range of issues such as 'families, youth behaviour problems, schooling and education, public health, community life, democracy and governance, economic development and general problems of collective action' (p.17). Social capital has become part of the language of public policy and concern, if not public debate and discourse (Policy Research Initiative, 2005).

This paper examines the way in which the social capital concept has infiltrated one aspect of public policy, by locating social capital within a range of international sport policies. The study examines the place of the social capital concept within sport policies of the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand in particular, with comparative European commentary where appropriate. Importantly, this paper investigates the ways in which the social capital concept is conceptualised within sport policy, which population groups and segments of the sport community social capital related sport policies seek to target and what measurement instruments are proposed. The results of this study reveal that sport policies that refer to the social capital concept adopt a necessarily vague definition, which suits a broadly defined proposition about the social benefit of sport. Furthermore, the study also reveals that community or club based sport organisation are often the target or vehicle for social capital related sport policies, but are invariably the least well resourced to implement such policies. Finally, the study reveals the measurement instruments are very rarely conceptualised, yet alone operationalised.

## REFERENCES

- Adler, P. S. & Kwon, S. (2002). Review of the literature on social capital. *Academy of Management Review*, 27, 17–41.
- Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L.J.D. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.
- Burt, R. (2000). The network structure of social capital. In R. Sutton & B. Staw (Eds.), *Research in organizational behaviour* (vol. 22). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, 95-120.
- Lin, N. (2001). *Social capital: A theory of social structure and action*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Policy Research Initiative (2005). *Social Capital as a Public Policy Tool*. Canada: Government of Canada Policy Research Initiative.
- Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1-24.
- Putnam, R.D (1993). *Making Democracy Work*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, R.D. (1995a). Tuning in, tuning out: The strange disappearance of social capital in America. *Political Science and Politics*, 28, 664-683.
- Putnam, R D. (1995b). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6, 65-78
- Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Woolcock, M. (1998). Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. *Theory and Society*, 27, 151-208.
- Woolcock, M. & Narayan, D. (2000). Social capital: Implications for development of theory, research and policy. *World Bank Research Observer*, 15, 225-250.