

# SINGING ALONE? THE CONTRIBUTION OF CULTURAL CAPITAL TO SOCIAL COHESION AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

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*Abstract:* Social capital has been defined by Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* as “features of social organizations, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate action and co-operation for mutual benefit.” Cultural capital, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, has most often been associated with personal interest in and experience with prestigious cultural resources. According to this definition of cultural capital, familiarity with traditional high-culture forms is a defining characteristic of individuals occupying high status positions within a society.

In recent years, cultural policy makers have begun to express a stronger interest in the linkages between these forms of capital. This paper focuses on linkages between personal investments in culture and the propensity to volunteer, using data from the Canadian General Social Survey. It concludes that there are collective benefits from investments in cultural capital and that these benefits make a significant contribution to social cohesion.

*Keywords:* Cultural capital; Social capital; Social cohesion; Sustainable communities

“Singing together (like bowling together) does not require shared ideology or shared social or ethnic provenance. . . . Moreover, social capital is often a valuable by-product of cultural activities whose main purpose is merely aesthetic”. Robert Putnam (2000: 411)

## INTRODUCTION

IN HIS 1993 book *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Robert Putnam observed a positive relationship between membership in sports clubs, cultural and recreational groups and social organizations and the performance of Italian regional governments. Since then, governments throughout the world have become more interested in the linkages between civic participation and sustainable communities. The research spawned by this

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interest has most often concentrated on the concept of social capital, with occasional forays into the realms of human capital, natural capital and cultural capital. However, while a considerable body of evidence exists as to the value to society of investments in human and social capital, the same cannot be said about natural capital or cultural capital. Part of the reason may lie in the fact that academic attention to sustainable environments, whether natural or social, dates back only about thirty years, roughly to 1972 when the *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment* urged a new synthesis between development and the environment (United Nations Development Programme, 1982). Another part of the reason may be due to the lack of an adequate conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between the various types of “capital” and the role that each plays in contributing to societal well-being and to social cohesion.

This paper will attempt to make a modest contribution to current debates about the role of culture in fostering cohesive and sustainable communities. It will begin by reviewing why culture is increasingly entering into the discourse on sustainability. It will then define and discuss various types of capital, and their contributions to personal and community well-being. The third section of the paper will briefly examine preliminary evidence in support of the collective benefits of investment in cultural capital. The final section will propose a possible model to explain the linkages between cultural and social capital, social cohesion and sustainable communities.

## COMMUNITY HARMONIES

In its report *Our Creative Diversity* (Perez de Cuéllar *et al.*, 1996), the World Commission on Culture and Development observed that “. . .cultural patterns play an irreplaceable role in defining individual and group identity and provide a shared ‘language’ through which the members of a society can communicate on existential issues which are beyond the reach of everyday speech.” This “communication on existential issues” commonly occurs through the mysterious mechanism of “creativity”, a trait that during the twentieth century was increasingly defined as falling within the province of the individual artist and the cultural industries producing aesthetic content. Throughout the last century, as cultural production became an industrial issue, creativity began, more and more, to be subordinated to economic and trade concerns. At the dawn of the 21st century, however, it has become apparent that creativity plays a critical role in spheres other than the economy or the purely aesthetic. In other words, “communication on existential issues” has become central to promoting harmony between the various “ways of living together” that formed the basis of the World Commission on Culture and Development’s definition of culture.

In part, this increased attention to creativity and culture in the social sphere has been in reaction to the prevailing economic discourse about culture. As UNESCO recently asserted (1998), cultural products are not like other trade goods. Therefore, considering them solely within an economic framework relegates culture and creativity to subsidiary and instrumental roles as mere promoters of economic growth.

Several streams of contemporary thought are beginning to converge on a new and broader approach to the role of culture in society and the economy. They include development studies, urban studies, media studies, cultural sociology, cultural anthropology and some branches of

TABLE I Social ecological theory

<i>Structural elements</i>	<i>Procedural elements</i>
Ideologies and values	Social bonding (ties between intimates)
Social differentiation (patterns of social difference based on distribution of goods and services)	Social integration (linkages between functional elements)
Community (patterns of social and spatial interaction distinguishing a collective)	Social solidarity (commitment to a larger whole)

Source: Burch (1991).

art history, musicology and philosophical aesthetics. Development, urban and media studies, in particular, share a concern with the role of culture in promoting creativity and innovation (Hall, 1998; Collaborative Economics, 2001), social and economic inclusion (Coleman, 1999) and participatory democracy (McChesney, 2000). Underlying this new approach is a growing discomfort with the ability of classic theories of social order, class struggle, and supply and demand to explain social cohesion—essentially why social systems hold together as opposed to falling apart. While there is no consensus about a new theoretical approach, social ecological theory, which concerns itself with understanding the origins, persistence or decline of various patterns of social relations, appears to be emerging as a promising analytical tool for this purpose. Social ecological theory has three major structural and three major procedural elements, as illustrated in Table I.

The mechanisms through which these processes act to reinforce or weaken social structures are not yet fully understood, but much attention is now being focused on the role that investments in various forms of capital—especially human, social and cultural capital—play in maintaining cohesion within the system. It is to this issue that the paper will now turn.

### THREE-PART HARMONIES—HUMAN, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL IN A SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Many millions of words have been written over the past few decades on all three forms of capital—human, social and cultural. As a starting point for understanding the relationship among the three “capitals”, as well as their relationship to sustainable communities, it may be useful to begin with a review of the most commonly accepted definitions of each.

The OECD (2001: 4) defines human capital as “the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals which facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being.” The research of Theodore Schulz and Gary Becker in the 1960s confirmed that investments in human capital lead to economic returns in the form of increased employment and higher salaries. However, human capital also has non-economic benefits which, according to the OECD, include improvements in health, happiness, the educational prospects of the next generation and higher civic participation, volunteering and charitable giving.

The definition of social capital most often used is the one made popular by Robert Putnam—“social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000: 19). Putnam has made a further distinction between “bonding” and

“bridging” social capital. The former refers to social networks that reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups, the latter to networks that are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages (Putnam, 2000: 22). Both kinds of social capital have been shown to be linked to improved health, greater personal well-being, better care for children, lower crime and improved government (OECD, 2001). As well, there is growing evidence that greater cooperation and trust (an outcome or possible correlate of social capital) are associated with both stronger economic performance (Fukuyama, 1995; Knack and Keefer, 1997) and more effective democratic political participation (Hall, 1999; Rodrik, 2000).

The extensive work of Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, has shaped contemporary thinking on the subject of cultural capital. He has defined cultural capital as “the disposal of taste” or “consumption of specific cultural forms that mark people as members of specific classes” (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu’s conceptualization of cultural capital is complex, but in its simplest terms consists of three elements: (1) embodied capital (or *habitus*), the system of lasting dispositions that form an individual’s character and guide his or her actions and tastes; (2) objectified capital, the means of cultural expression, such as painting, writing, and dance, that are symbolically transmissible to others; and (3) institutionalized capital, the academic qualifications that establish the value of the holder of a given qualification (Bourdieu, 1986). The field of educational sociology, in particular, has extensively documented the personal benefits derived from investments in cultural capital, demonstrating that it improves academic performance (DiMaggio, 1982; Zweigenhaft, 1992; 1993; Catterall, 1999), family-school relationships (Lareau, 1987), marital prospects (DiMaggio, 1985), physical fitness (Shilling, 1992) and children’s psychosocial development (Offord *et al.*, 1998). In addition, there is a growing scientific literature on the benefits of arts involvement for youth-at-risk (see, for example, Weitz, 1996 and Catterall, 1999).

As is evident from these definitions, there is considerable overlap among the three types of capital, inasmuch as they all appear to be instrumental in promoting the well-being of the individuals who invest in them. Human capital resides in individuals and social capital resides in relationships, but the complementarity of human and social capital has been generally recognized in that “literate and informed citizens are better able to organize and evaluate conflicting information and express their views in constructive ways” (Woolcock, 2001). However, while research has demonstrated that there are collective benefits from investments in human capital, can the same also be said of cultural capital?

The answer to this question probably begins with an understanding of the relationship between cultural and social capital. As Bourdieu has noted, the volume of social capital possessed by an individual depends on the size of his or her network connections and on the volume of economic and cultural capital possessed by those to whom he or she is connected. This network “exerts a multiplier effect on the capital he possesses in his own right”, but it is not a natural given and requires “investment strategies” to establish or reproduce social relationships that are useful in the short or long-term (Bourdieu, 1986: 249).

Beyond the purely quantitative effects of network “investments” on personal capital, there lies a qualitative and collective element that has barely begun to be explored. It becomes very difficult, in fact, to separate collective benefits from personal dispositions (or cultural capital) when one begins to discuss the parameters of a sustainable, cohesive society. This was pointed out at a workshop on “Social Capital Formation and Institutions for Sustainability” that was

held in 1998 at the University of British Columbia in Canada. Participants observed that it was important to understand the distinctions between social and cultural capital. “This distinction is important”, they stated, “because one can have a society rich in social capital; however, due to the nature of its cultural capital (as represented, for example, by a ‘frontier economic’ mentality) such a society may be unsustainable. Cultural capital may determine the *quality* of social capital” (Mendis, 1998, italics added).

Bourdieu’s theories have sometimes been criticized as being overly deterministic, relegating individuals to positions within social spaces (which he refers to as fields) on the basis of their economic, social and cultural characteristics and allowing little leeway for change. However, a few researchers are beginning to view fields as dynamic systems—as a “network, or a configuration, of objective relations among positions” (Anheier *et al.*, 1995) within which individuals are constantly subjected to experiences and undertake actions that either reinforce or modify the field itself (Laberge, 1995). Viewed from this perspective, it is also possible to consider cultural capital in a collective as well as an individual light.

This is certainly the case in recent work in the area of culture and development, which characterizes culture as “. . . a complex web of relationships and beliefs, values and motivations. It is a social operating system that influences attitudes, behavior and responses to change. This system operates on personal and communal levels and may be a barrier to, or a catalyst for, the development of social capital” (Gould, 2001). The literature on development, in fact, is beginning to make a connection backward from dynamic systems theory to cultural capital as an asset that “provides human societies the means and adaptations to deal with the natural environment and to actively modify it” (Berkes, “Cultural and Natural Capital: A Systems Approach Revisited” in Mendis, 1998). According to this notion of sustainable development, how people view the world and the universe, their environmental philosophy and ethics, their traditional knowledge and their social and political institutions will dictate how they function within their environment. Embodied cultural capital, or habitus, therefore lies at the base of this concept.

Returning to the structural and procedural elements of social ecological theory outlined in Table I, it is possible to suggest, on the basis of the preceding discussion, the areas where the various types of capital may act to reinforce or erode social systems (Table II).

Again, it is worth mentioning that the precise mechanisms by which the various forms of capital interact among themselves or on the social environment are not well-understood. To assert that they contribute to the social ecology is perhaps intuitive, but to understand *how* they contribute will require a much greater understanding of the dynamics of Bourdieu’s fields, a subject to which this paper will later return. Cultural capital clearly has a role in the collective

TABLE II Capital components of the social ecology

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Primary capital components</i>
Ideologies and values	Cultural capital
Social differentiation (patterns of social difference)	Financial capital, human capital, cultural capital
Community (patterns of social and spatial interaction distinguishing a collective)	Social capital, human capital, cultural capital
Social bonding (ties between intimates)	Cultural capital, social capital
Social integration (linkages between functional elements)	Social capital, cultural capital
Social solidarity (commitment to a larger whole)	Cultural capital, social capital

well-being of society, but approaches to evaluating its impact are in their infancy. Helen Gould, in a recent publication, has suggested that, at a minimum, better information will be required on: (1) the cultural resources and assets of the community; (2) the cultural values that underpin the community's way of life; (3) the relationship between these values and the community's social capital; and (4) the impact of this cultural capital on the formation of social capital (Gould, 2001).

While the conceptual framework in this area is still underdeveloped, a certain amount of empirical evidence does exist as to the positive impacts of cultural capital and cultural capital investments on collective well-being. It is to this evidence that we will now turn.

### **HEARING THE VOICES: EVIDENCE OF HARMONY**

Does individual cultural capital combine to have an impact at the collective level? If so, how? This section will look first at the effect of collective cultural capital (in the form of cultural organizations) on communities. It will then examine the participative behavior of those who engage in cultural activities to determine if Putnam's thesis that such participation increases social capital is borne out by existing evidence. In both cases, the reader should bear in mind that current indicators provide only a limited picture of these behavior patterns, so what follows is a series of "snapshots" drawn from a variety of studies, focusing on a variety of cultural practices. Most of this material concentrates fairly narrowly on the cultural capital that is created by arts participation. Broader measures of cultural practice are infrequently utilized, which perhaps reinforces the critique of elitism sometimes leveled at practitioners and researchers in this field. However, while these studies are not entirely comparable, they do provide, in total, an indication that cultural capital (at least that form embodied by arts participants and those engaged in the types of cultural and heritage activities generally recognized, supported and measured by governments) is functioning at the collective as well as the personal levels.

#### **Cultural Capital and the Community**

Stolle and Rochon (1998) used survey data to answer the question, "are all associations alike?" They hypothesized that not all associations contribute to social capital to the same degree and that the effect will vary depending on the inclusiveness of the association. Using four sets of measures—(1) participation and engagement; (2) generalized trust of others; (3) trust of public officials and institutions; and (4) tolerance and optimism—they examined the behavior and attitudes of those who belonged to various types of associations and those who did not. Not surprisingly, they found that associational membership was highly correlated with many of the traditional indicators of social capital, particularly political contacting, political engagement, community and social participation, and generalized trust. Controlling for age, education, sex, size of community and race, they also examined the behavior and attitudes of members of various types of associations—political, economic, group rights, community, cultural, personal interest and social. They found that members of cultural groups (defined as those engaged in "preservation of traditional regional, national or ethnic culture, church groups, literary, music and arts activities") scored highest on generalized trust and political trust/efficacy, and second-highest on optimism and tolerance (after social groups). Stolle and Rochon concluded

that "... some association memberships, particularly those of cultural associations, appear to exhibit a wide range of forms of public social capital" (Stolle and Rochon, 1998: 61).

The *Comedia* organization in the United Kingdom recently examined case study research and found considerable evidence of the positive social impact of the arts. First, arts participation was found to have a positive effect on social cohesion by bringing people together (particularly young and old), encouraging partnerships, promoting intercultural understanding, reducing fear of crime and promoting neighborhood security. Second, it helped to empower communities by building organizational skills and capacities, by helping people to gain control over their lives and to become more active citizens and by regenerating neighborhoods. Third, active participation in the arts had positive impacts on local image and identity by celebrating local culture and traditions, affirming the pride of marginal groups, encouraging involvement in environmental improvements and transforming negative perceptions of local authorities and agencies. The study concluded that participatory arts projects are essential components of successful social policy because they are flexible, responsive and cost-effective ways of addressing community development problems (Matarasso, 2000).

In the United States, according to one analyst, "... the arts community has long labored under a stubbornly persistent class system of its own, one that continues to haunt the field: the recognition ... that the audience for the non-profit arts remains highly skewed, betraying a demographic profile that tends to be older, wealthier, better-educated, and whiter than a typical cross-section of the American public" (Larson, 1997: 75). In an attempt to build a broader audience base, many local arts organizations in the U.S. are increasingly engaging in community development activities to the point where "arts in community development" initiatives were found in 1996 to be the fastest growing program and service area of local arts agencies (Larson, 1997: 84). A survey by the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies found that, in 1996, about 93% of these agencies were involved in racial awareness initiatives, 88% in youth-at-risk programming, 76% in economic development initiatives and 63% in crime prevention. Moreover, local arts agencies were becoming increasingly engaged in the community itself, with 81% partnering with neighbourhood and community organizations in this programming. Other significant partnerships were with local school districts (76%) parks and recreation departments (73%) and convention or visitor's bureaux (56%) (Larson, 1997: 84-85).

Some of the most interesting and extensive research on the community impact of the arts has been undertaken by the Social Impact of the Arts project in Philadelphia (Stern and Seifert, 1994). In 1994, the project team set out to determine if cultural capital was important, not only as an instrument of class dominance by elites, but also as a means of strengthening social ties and community spirit. To examine these relationships, the team performed statistical analysis on two databases. The first measured the arts participation behavior of 600 adults, while the second contained information on almost 600 arts groups in the metropolitan area. The databases were linked via postal (zip) codes, and the primary measure was total number of arts events attended. While the study found the usual correlations between arts attendance and higher incomes and education, it also found that the number of arts and cultural groups in the respondent's zip code was the best single predictor of participation in arts events. After examining a number of possible explanations, the researchers concluded that the ecological context in which individuals live is a powerful contributor to involvement, although the causation was not clear. While it was possible that

the number of groups in a neighborhood might encourage individuals to become more involved in the arts, the researchers suggested that "... there might be another feature of these areas—for example, the social commitment of community residents or 'social capital'—that leads to *both* the creation of more groups and greater attendance" (Stern and Seifert, 1994: 7).

The Social Impact of the Arts project carried out similar analyses in other cities—Chicago, Atlanta and San Francisco—which confirmed and expanded upon the Philadelphia findings. These analyses found strong correlations between neighbourhoods that were *both* economically and ethnically diverse and the number of arts groups in those neighbourhoods. This study also found that those areas of Philadelphia most likely to have experienced economic revitalization between 1980 and 1990 were *both* economically and ethnically diverse and had a large number of arts and culture organizations (Stern, 1999: 8). The researcher concluded that "Arts and cultural organizations have a unique place in the ecology of social institutions. Neighborhoods with many arts organizations are likely to have many non-arts institutions as well. Indeed, in these strong institutional neighborhoods, arts and cultural institutions are likely to be over-represented" (Stern, 1999: 4–5).

To better understand just how embedded arts and cultural groups were within their neighbourhoods, the Philadelphia researchers also analyzed the frequency with which these organizations interacted with other groups both in their areas and outside them. Interestingly, they found that neighborhood networks were "strategically constructed" in that the contacts did not match the institutional profile of the neighborhood, but were instead focused on "organizational maintenance" rather than "community engagement". For example, the arts and cultural groups surveyed were more than four times as likely to contact commercial organizations outside of their neighborhood than in it. Put another way, only 4% of the houses of worship and special interest groups within the organizations' neighborhoods had been contacted during the survey period by the arts and cultural groups. The researchers concluded that "... often the history of cultural funding, the current priorities of funders, and the organizational cultures of the major players in the cultural sector work against these tasks [of understanding and working within community networks]" (Stern and Seifert, 1999: 2).

A final piece of evidence about the community contributions of cultural capital is drawn from Canadian experience. The *Our Millennium* project initiated by the Community Foundations of Canada to mark the new century was an invitation to Canadians to make lasting "gifts" to their communities in one of 11 theme areas: youth and children, arts and culture, environment, heritage, connections, recreation, learning, safety and crime prevention, care and support, global citizenship and "other". More than 6500 group projects or activities, involving 4.6 million participants, were registered. Over 27% of the projects registered were in the domains of heritage and arts and culture. Some of these projects were traditional, such as restoration of heritage buildings in the community or the publication of local histories. Others, however, utilized various means of cultural expression as a platform for activism. For example, several groups organized concerts or film festivals to raise awareness of problems such as racism or global warming. In other cases, performance art was used as a vehicle for promoting intercultural contact and understanding, for articulating the special needs of groups such as the disabled, or for preserving and celebrating the traditions of particular ethnocultural groups. A significant number of the millennium projects actively involved youth in media, visual arts or music projects. Libraries, in particular, organized many youth projects intended to foster



a love of reading or literature or to commemorate historic events of significance to the community.

The Caledon Institute, which analyzed the social capital that was created by the *Our Millennium* project, concluded that:

If there is a single theme that stands out as noteworthy, it is the fact that a disproportionately large number of projects employed various forms of arts and culture—not just those listed in the arts and culture formal category.

This is an important finding in that it speaks to the methods that Canadians feel are effective ways to reach people. Arts and culture are viewed as the purview of the elite or of privileged citizens who can afford to engage in these activities. However, the *Our Millennium* projects showed just how very important were the arts and cultural activities in working with youth, seniors, members of visible minority groups—with virtually all Canadians (Torjman and Leviten, 2001: 28).

It is to this aspect of cultural capital—its impact on the everyday activity of individuals—that we will now turn.

### **Cultural Capital and Individual Behavior**

The everyday cultural activity most often practiced by individuals is television viewing. In the 1998 Canadian General Social Survey, 96% of respondents indicated that they had watched television during the past 12 months. (This compares to the 8% who said that they had attended a classical music performance and the 3% who said that they had attended an opera.)

A debate currently rages in the academy as to whether the cultural activity of television viewing has had a positive or negative effect on social cohesion and the sustainability of communities. As Robert Putnam has famously observed, “Americans at the end of the twentieth century were watching more TV, watching it more habitually, more pervasively, and more often alone, and watching more programs that were associated specifically with civic disengagement (entertainment, as distinct from news)... Moreover, it is precisely those Americans most marked by this dependence on televised entertainment who were most likely to have dropped out of civic and social life—who spent less time with friends, were less involved in community organizations, and were less likely to participate in public affairs” (Putnam, 2000: 246). He has, in fact, concluded that at least 25% of the decline in civic participation in the U.S. over the past 25 years can be attributed to television viewing habits.

Putnam’s remarks have generated a somewhat defensive reaction among media researchers, but no conclusive refutation of his hypotheses, despite the abundant survey data on television viewing available to cultural researchers. Using survey data on civic engagement from 1959, 1973 and 1990, Peter Hall found that the average number of association memberships among the adult population in Britain *grew* by 44% between 1959 and 1990, despite the fact that British citizens watch, on average, over two and a half hours of television a day. Hall did note that the British working classes, who are less active in community associations and have lower levels of social trust, watch approximately one-third more television than the middle classes. Rather than laying the blame at the feet of television, however, he concluded that shifts in material conditions (for example, high levels of unemployment) and changes in social values (whereby membership in associations is less conducive to building trust than in the past) were probably more responsible than television for a decline in social capital (Hall, 1999).

In a study of civic participation, interpersonal trust and television use, Dhavan Shah disaggregated television viewing into genre-specific categories, then assessed the relationship of viewing categories with civic engagement and interpersonal trust. He hypothesized that television viewing motivated by the need for information, personal identity (e.g. a search for role models) and social integration (e.g. a sense of connection) would be positive for social capital. However, television viewing motivated solely by the need for entertainment would likely be detrimental. He found, in fact, that total television viewing was not related to civic engagement, thereby weakening Putnam's argument. On the other hand, viewing social dramas (such as *LA Law*) were positively correlated with civic engagement, while viewing "friendship sitcoms" (such as *Friends*) and science fiction (such as *Star Trek*) were positively correlated with interpersonal trust. Shah found no correlation between watching news or sports and either civic engagement or interpersonal trust. He concluded that "... the relationships between the use of television, civic engagement and interpersonal trust must be viewed as more conditional—highly dependent on the type of programming one is considering and audience members use of it. How much television people watch appears to be less important than what they are watching." (Shah, 1997: 22).

Shah's findings reinforce the more general conclusions of recent mass communications research which suggests that "... there has been a turn away from the exclusive understanding of civil society as an institutional or informational space, in which mass subjects passively receive information" towards a new understanding which "... sees civil society as a cultural space in which different individuals and groups jockey to narrate the social and where citizens actively construct their own understandings of real and ideal civil society by filtering overarching discourses through multiple spheres and communities" (Alexander and Jacobs, 1998: 29).

If audiences use the narrative structures of the media to filter "cultural data" and to create cultural capital, there may indeed be a link between different television viewing practices and patterns of civic engagement and volunteering. Unfortunately, most television viewing statistics cannot be linked to statistics on volunteering and participating and, in the case of those that can be, such as the 1998 Canadian General Social Survey, viewing patterns have not been disaggregated to permit this type of analysis. The discussion below, therefore, deliberately omits the television viewing variable, not because it is irrelevant, but because the database used is unable to support the depth of analysis required to answer questions about the cultural capital generated by this form of cultural participation.

In Canada, the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS) examined how Canadians spent their time. This survey, conducted by Statistics Canada, the national statistical agency, utilized a random sample of Canadians 15 years of age and over. A total of 10,749 people were interviewed, yielding a response rate of almost 78%. Among many other activities, questions were asked about attendance at arts events, visits to heritage institutions, participation in cultural activities, media consumption and volunteering. The GSS database is therefore a potentially rich source of information on the propensity of those individuals possessing cultural capital (as manifested in cultural consumption patterns) to also engage in the civic life of their communities. A preliminary statistical analysis of GSS data tends to support the major hypothesis of this paper—that investments in cultural capital have collective benefits inasmuch as they also encourage individual altruism in the form of community volunteerism.

Table III shows cross-tabulations between volunteer rates and various types of cultural and media consumption activities.

TABLE III Selected cultural participation and volunteer rates—Canada, 1998

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Volunteer rates (%)</i>	
	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Non-participants</i>
Attended children's performance	61	42
Attended choral music performance	57	43
Attended dance performance	55	43
Attended classical music performance	52	44
Attended theatre performance	51	38
Attended opera	51	45
Visited commercial art gallery	51	46
Visited science museum	51	44
Attended cultural heritage performance	48	32
Attended popular stage performance	48	32
Attended cultural or artistic festival	47	30
Visited historic site	47	27
Used library	46	29
Accessed the Internet	45	29
Visited nature park	42	26
Read book for pleasure	36	22
Went to movie theatre	38	26
Read magazine	37	24
Read newspaper	36	22

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (1998).

These cross tabulations reveal a robust association. Among those who participated in any kind of cultural activity, the volunteerism rate was 34%, while among those who did not participate it was only 20%. In some cases, the differences were striking. For example, the volunteerism rate for those who attended any type of concert performance was 46% in comparison to a rate of 27% for those who did not attend. For those who visited any type of museum in 1998, the volunteerism rate was 47%, as compared to 28% for those who did not visit a museum.

The tabulations also suggest that an "active" lifestyle, including fairly high levels of cultural *consumption*, coincides with a pattern of community involvement. But is active cultural *participation*—epitomized by Putnam's choral societies—also conducive to social capital, as measured by volunteerism rates? Table IV suggests that, to a certain extent it is, but perhaps, like television viewing, may be dependent on the type of cultural participation engaged in.

TABLE IV Cultural participation and volunteer rates—Canada, 1998

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Volunteer rates (%)</i>	
	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Non-participants</i>
Acted or did other theatre activity	64	33
Sang in a choir or solo	55	32
Wrote poetry, stories, non-fiction	48	32
Did choreography	47	33
Did artistic photography	47	33
Played a musical instrument	45	32
Did visual arts (e.g. painting)	43	33
Did crafts	41	31

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (1998).

TABLE V Volume of cultural participation and volunteer rates—Canada, 1998

<i>Cultural participation level</i>	<i>Volunteer rate (%)</i>
1–4 events	12.9
5–9 events	23.9
10–14 events	38.7
15–19 events	52.1
20 + events	65.6

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey (1998).

While one might be tempted to conclude that “acting together” is an even more powerful determinant of social capital than “singing together”, it would appear that the positive effects of cultural capital on social capital may be also be linked to *quantity* as well as *quality* of cultural involvement. Table V shows the relationship between numbers of cultural activities (regardless of type) and incidence of volunteering.

Further multivariate analysis is required to isolate the key determinants within this overall pattern of behavior, but the findings so far appear to confirm that there are collective benefits to investments in cultural capital and that some sort of “virtuous circle” is in play. As individuals invest in their own cultural and human capital and participate in various types of cultural events and activities, they also appear to increase the social capital within their communities. Researchers and policy makers are far from understanding how this occurs, but current work in Canada to understand the linkages between social cohesion and social outcomes may hold a few clues.

### SINGING FROM THE SAME HYMN BOOK—A TENTATIVE MODEL

One of the challenges in doing research in the field of social cohesion (in its simplest terms, attempting to understand what holds societies together and sustains them) is the problem of causation. What are the inputs and what are the outputs? Do the inputs feed directly into the outcome of social cohesion or do they work indirectly through other intervening processes? Are the processes recursive and, if so, how do the feedback loops work? Which feedback loops are critical determinants of social cohesion? How can public policy contribute to the “virtuous” loops and avoid the “vicious” ones?

In an attempt to begin to answer some of these questions, researchers in the Department of Canadian Heritage have developed a preliminary model of how the process of maintaining social cohesion might work (see Fig. 1). This model is far from final and, as our knowledge base slowly grows, it continues to undergo modification.

The model is intended to illustrate the reciprocal relationship between social cohesion and social outcomes by combining a number of causal connections that have been identified individually in the literature. It is an attempt to trace the dynamics of social cohesion within a social space—in essence, a macro-version of Bourdieu’s fields. The model recognizes that there are multiple inputs to social cohesion or sustainable societies and that government policies represent only one set of these inputs. Civil society and the social capital it generates have been widely acknowledged to be important components of the system, as are the institutions and values that underpin society. However, up until recently, there has been little attention paid to what engenders social capital and a healthy civil

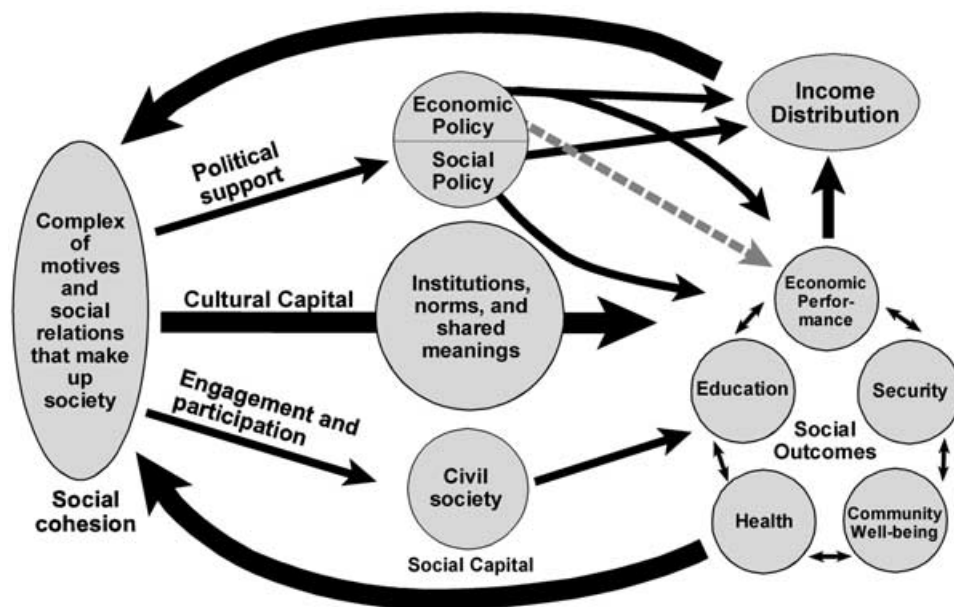


FIGURE 1 Causal links between social cohesion and social outcomes.

society. The question of the “quality” of social capital, as discussed by Mendis (see above), has led us to include cultural capital in the model—not as a subset of social capital—but as one of the inputs to the formation of institutions, norms and shared meanings (Stanley, 2002).

The evidence presented in this paper also suggests that a very important feedback loop may exist between cultural capital and civil society/social capital that has not hitherto been acknowledged. We do not yet understand why people who participate in cultural activity also seem to have higher rates of participation in their communities, but if this connection proves to have a robust link to social capital and the quality of community life, it may signal a role for cultural capital that goes far beyond “opera tickets for the elite”. The evidence so far seems to suggest that cultural participation helps to connect individuals to the social spaces occupied by others and encourages “buy in” to institutional rules and shared norms of behavior. Without this “buy in”, individuals are unlikely to enter into willing collaboration with others and without that cooperation, civic engagement and social capital—key components of social cohesion—may be weakened.

One of the reasons behind the development of this construct was specifically to suggest an alternative to the prevailing neo-classical economic model that has governed policy development over most of the last two decades. Unlike simple economic models, based on supply and demand and on utility maximization, the social cohesion model is both holistic and reciprocal in that it illustrates how everything can affect everything else and how outcomes in one round can affect the outcomes of subsequent rounds. As Stanley has observed, “A trend which affects a social outcome or its distribution will affect overall social cohesion, and so eventually influence the other social outcomes.” (Stanley, 2002: 7). It follows, therefore, that policies which reduce the amount of cultural capital in a society may have a negative impact not only on individual opportunities to participate in a specific cultural

activity, but also on civic engagement and social capital (assuming that this paper's hypothesis regarding the collective benefits of investments in cultural capital can be confirmed by further research). Examined in this light, wholesale and indiscriminate cuts to music in schools, public libraries, public broadcasting, heritage commemoration, or any other type of program intended to create cultural capital could conceivably have far-reaching negative implications for the sustainability of the communities or societies in which they occur.

Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, far from being a static and deterministic construct is, in fact, very much dependent upon the actions of agents within fields. As one commentator has recently noted, these fields consist of "a space of possibilities" where socialization of the agents is governed not by intersubjective ties but by objectively defined relations between agents (Swingewood, 1998: 94–95). The similarity of this language to that of dynamic systems theory and to the logic behind the above model is difficult to ignore.

If much of what we are and who we become is governed not only by shared meanings but also by how these shared meanings influence our relations with others, "singing together" (or even "acting together" or "visiting a museum together") may hold benefits not only for oneself, but also for the people around us. Indeed, preliminary evidence would suggest that even "singing alone" may be a transformative experience and one of the key elements of a sustainable community.

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