Are All Associations Alike?

Member Diversity, Associational Type, and the Creation of Social Capital

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Associational memberships have become the indicator of choice for examining the formation and destruction of social capital. Memberships in associations are believed to create generalized interpersonal trust, which can be used as a lubricant that makes possible a variety of forms of social interaction and cooperation. Clearly, not all types of associations will be equally effective in their relative capacity to create generalized, or public, social capital. Each indicator of social capital that we examine is positively related to associational membership. However, some association memberships, particularly in cultural groups, are correlated with a wide range of forms of social capital. The diversity of an association also has an effect on the connection between social capital and association memberships. Homogeneous associations are less likely to inculcate high levels of generalized trust and community reciprocity among their members. These results indicate the need for further specification of the social capital theory.

Across a wide spectrum of political ideologies and academic interests, the concept of social capital is receiving intense scrutiny for its effects on societal outcomes. Social capital refers to the networks and norms that link citizens to each other and that enable them to pursue their common objectives more effectively. The existence and maintenance of social capital in certain communities or regions is believed able to lower the amount of drug use and criminal activity, to increase the success of schools and their pupils, to enhance economic development, and to make government more effective. The significance of social

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capital is that it enables collective goods to be provided extensively and cheaply by public and private means alike.

Although social capital may be fostered by a variety of formal and informal interactions between members of society, the full range of these interactions is not observable. What we can observe is the prevalence of memberships in voluntary organizations in a given society. As a result, associational memberships have become the indicator of choice for examining the rate of formation or destruction of social capital.

We can distinguish between two different types of social capital. On one hand, memberships in voluntary associations create interactions between members and increase the chance that trust between members will be developed. In associations, people interact as trustors and as trustees, building on mutual experience and knowledge (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). The result is increased capacity for collective action, cooperation, and trust within the group, enabling the collective purposes of the group to be achieved more easily.

However, the social capital thesis says more than this about the internal effects of associations, for cooperation and trust within groups describe only one side of the social capital coin. That groups can achieve group purposes better than individuals is a self-evident proposition. The more significant issue posed by the social capital perspective is whether the operation of such groups and associations also contributes to the building of a society in which cooperation for all sorts of purposes—not just within the groups themselves—is facilitated.¹ The idea of social capital encompasses the claim that the circle of trust is extended beyond the boundaries of face-to-face interaction to incorporate people not personally known (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). This is generalized interpersonal trust, a trust that goes beyond the boundaries of kinship and friendship and even beyond the boundaries of acquaintance. It can be used as a lubricant that makes possible a variety of forms of social interaction and cooperation in a community or region. We extend the notion of generalized interpersonal trust to include values such as tolerance and cooperation toward citizens in general. These orientations toward fellow citizens are values that we call public civics. Public civics is a collective form of social capital that may be contrasted to cooperation with one’s immediate circle, such as family or fellow members of a voluntary association. The more immediate form of social capital may be called private or personalized civics.

It seems plausible that some voluntary associations produce strong member-oriented bonds and therefore high levels of personalized civics. Robert D. Putnam (1995b), in an influential formulation of the connection between voluntary associations and social capital, notes that “groups like the Michigan militia or youth gangs also embody a kind of social capital, for these networks and norms, too, enable members to cooperate more effectively, albeit to the detriment of the wider society” (p. 665).² We can point, for example, to the Mafia as an association that develops cooperation within the group, even though the Mafia does not increase generalized trust in others. Religious fundamentalists may develop private ties of solidarity at the cost of public civics. Militia groups,
right-wing extremists, and terrorists from the left or right all meet regularly and interact with each other, but to our knowledge they do not foster a generalized trust—to say nothing of general tolerance—beyond their immediate group and specific projects. One need only recall the vibrant civic life of Weimar Germany, whose class, religious, ideological, and urban-rural antagonisms were reflected in its associational structure and contributed to the rise of fascism. All these examples constitute cases in which groups and associations may produce high levels of personalized social capital but fail to produce public social capital. We do not automatically see virtue in an association that establishes trust, cooperation, and norms of reciprocity among its members if it does not also do so in a more generalized sense. Therefore, personalized forms of social capital will not concern us further in this article. We will instead identify associations that foster a cooperative spirit, norms of reciprocity, and collective thinking beyond the boundaries of the group itself. In our view, public social capital is the essence of the social capital thesis.

This article is a plausibility probe into social capital theory, based on extant data. We examine the effects of different types of associations on a range of indicators related to public social capital. The purpose is to identify which traits or dimensions of associations are connected to those public forms of social capital. Specifically, we examine two hypotheses with regard to the connection of associations to public forms of social capital. First, we explore the impact of the type of associational activity, the purposes to which the organization is dedicated. Our most fundamental expectation is that associations directed to different purposes will have different effects on the development of public social capital. An association whose raison d'être it is to extract rents from the government is less likely to promote a community-based sense of reciprocity than is an association dedicated to improving area schools, even though both associations may generate social capital-promoting interactions between their members. Similarly, political skills and participation are more likely to be fostered in an association concerned with political ideas than in a bowling league. In other words, we expect that although all associations may contribute to public social capital in one or another of the extended meanings of the term, not all associations contribute to social capital in the same ways or to the same degree. Because no one has made the claim that associations are perfect substitutes for each other, we see this hypothesis less as a refutation of the theory of social capital than as an attempt to specify the theory more fully.

Our second hypothesis is that the effect of associations on public social capital will vary depending on the inclusiveness of the particular association. Many claims made about the effect of associational memberships on social capital rely on the formative experience of interactions with other members. If those interactions bring one into contact with a broad sampling of members of society then the formative experience is likely to be much more pronounced than if the association is itself a narrowly constituted segment of society. In the extreme case, the association may not only be narrowly constituted but may also have as its purpose the denial of equal rights or opportunities to others. In such
instances, it is reasonable to doubt the effectiveness of associational membership in promoting generalized trust or reciprocity.

Although the surveys we use encompass a wide range of associations and indicators of social capital, our reliance on survey data also imposes significant limitations on the analysis. One major problem is that social capital, particularly as described by Putnam (1993), is a collective resource rather than an individual one. This means that social capital should ideally be measured on a collective scale, with the community, region, or country as the unit of analysis. It is a category mistake to refer to an individual’s social capital. Ideally, one tests the effects of associations on the macrolevel, relating the civic characteristics of a community to its associational density (Putnam, 1993). We focus here on the microaspects of the concept by examining the extent to which aggregated memberships of different associations in the United States, Germany, and Sweden differ from nonmembers in their level of civicism. Our unit of analysis is thus not the individual but rather the association, and our conclusions will permit inferences about the effects of various associations on public social capital.

A second limitation of the data is the problem of causality. It is not clear theoretically how associational memberships lead to generalized forms of public civicism. Generalized trust involves a leap of faith that the trustworthiness of those you know can be broadened to include others whom you do not know. The mechanism of this leap from experience to faith is not known. To study it, we would need to track association members over time to determine whether and how membership increases generalized trust (and other aspects of social capital) or whether, instead, those higher in social capital traits are drawn disproportionately to associational membership. Surely, both processes are typically operative, although we will not be able to examine this issue with our cross-sectional data. Consequently, this article does not represent a test of the social capital thesis; we instead take the causal reasoning of the theory as a given. Our purpose in this article is rather to uncover and explain variations in the extent to which different associations conform to the patterns predicted by the social capital theory.

MEASURING SOCIAL CAPITAL

In this section of the article, we provide a brief overview of our indicators of social capital, their theoretical and logical foundations, as well as their relationship to associational membership. All the indicators were created on the basis of survey questions described in the appendix.

The first set of indicators covers the theme of participation and engagement, both in politics generally and in the community specifically. Studies have long demonstrated that participation in nonpolitical organizations stimulates political involvement and interest (Erickson & Nosanchuck, 1990; Olsen, 1972; Rogers, Barb, & Bultena, 1975; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).
Both the formal and the informal activities of the association impart an understanding of political and economic issues. Associations also open up possibilities for political participation by cultivating among their members the "organizational and communications skills that are relevant for politics and thus can facilitate direct political activity" (Verba et al., 1995). Organizing personnel meetings at work, setting up a food pantry at church, or chairing community charity drives are all activities that develop social skills that increase one's sense of political efficacy and competence. We will examine the effect of associational membership on political action, engagement in community affairs, interest in politics, and political efficacy.

A second cluster of indicators includes measures of generalized trust and reciprocity within the community. Networks of civic engagement are said to foster norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust (Putnam, 1995b). These norms of reciprocity are generalized when they go beyond specific personal settings, in which the partner to be cooperated with is already known. Generalized norms of reciprocity are indicated by an abstract preparedness to trust others (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994).

Slightly closer to home is the matter of reciprocity in the community in which one resides. Coleman (1990) referred to the formation of so-called credit slips that can be created by doing something for others, trusting that the person will reciprocate. This process establishes expectations (on the side of the one who gave) and obligations (on the side of the one who took). One could assume that experience of the actual extent to which obligations are repaid will ultimately determine the level of trust. Coleman mentions the case of rotating credit associations, which can only exist when there is a high level of trust between people. An individual's preparedness to create open credit slips requires a generalized trust closely related to the trust we have already discussed. We expect, then, association members to score high on our measure of "community credit slips," just as they do on generalized trust. We will measure generalized trust with survey questions on whether people are trustworthy and helpful. We have also developed an indicator of community credit slips, which measures interaction and borrowing between neighbors.

The third block of indicators includes trust toward public officials and institutions. Much of the scholarly and popular attention given to social capital in recent years has centered on its potential to redefine the partnership between public and private organizations in the provision of collective goods. For this reconstituted relationship to work, there must be a high degree of trust not only between citizens but also between citizens and government. Hence, trust in public officials and institutions is part of the complex of attitudes and behavior that makes up social capital.

In the United States, declining trust in government since the early 1970s involves not only institution-specific factors (scandal in the White House, partisan wrangling in Congress, controversial rulings by the Supreme Court) but also a more general loss of faith in government (Brehm & Rahn, 1996). The same point can be made in international comparisons of trust in public officials.
Specific events may affect levels of trust throughout a society, but to the extent that associations add to social capital, their members will be relatively trusting of public officials and institutions. We measure this type of trust with survey questions on the respondent's trust in public institutions and confidence in the people who run them.

The fourth set of social capital indicators represents a collection of attitudinal variables important to social capital: tolerance, approval of free riding, and optimism. Tolerance is similar to generalized trust in that it reflects an attitude toward others that goes beyond the immediate circle of known people. Like trust, tolerance is a basis for cooperative endeavors; it facilitates acts of reciprocity. Voluntary associations may contribute to specific tolerance among members by bringing people into contact with each other. Generalized tolerance, like generalized trust, implies acceptance of those with whom one has had little or no contact, in addition to acceptance of those with whom one interacts. We will include two different tolerance scales based on responses to questions on whether the respondent would avoid having as neighbors marginalized people and specific groups of outsiders.

Social capital also implies a willingness to do one's share in collective endeavors. In a setting rich in social capital, one is less likely to expect others to be free riders and, partly in consequence, one is also less likely to be a free rider. Associations are often depicted as productive of viewpoints broader than self-interest, even when the associations themselves pursue a more privately oriented interest. They broaden the member's sense of self, developing the "I" into the "We" (Putnam, 1995a; Rochon, 1998). We hypothesize that members of associations will learn an ethic that considers it wrong to free ride on governmental policies or public goods. Our measures include questions on approval of free riding in the use of public services.

Finally, social capital requires confidence in the continuation of social and political relationships. Social reciprocity is rational only if one has a positive outlook for the future and a faith that others are also prepared to engage in reciprocal exchange (Uslaner, in press). Our optimism scale includes questions about the respondent's outlook on the future.

DO ASSOCIATIONS MATTER FOR PUBLIC SOCIAL CAPITAL?

The breadth of these indicators of social capital suggests the extent of the creative enthusiasm deployed in this literature. Table 1 provides a sweeping verification of this enthusiasm for associational membership, based on six surveys from three countries: Sweden, Germany, and the United States. These surveys yield a total of 102 associations whose members we examine on 12 indicators of social capital. We calculated the relationship between associational memberships and political participation, political engagement, and the other dimensions of public social capital arrayed across the top of the table. Analysis of covariance produces adjusted means on each dependent variable for
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political Contacting</th>
<th>Political Engagement</th>
<th>Community and Social Participation</th>
<th>Non-campaign Political Participation</th>
<th>Community Credit Slips</th>
<th>Generalized Trust</th>
<th>Political Efficacy</th>
<th>Trust in Public Officials and Institutions</th>
<th>Generalized Optimism</th>
<th>Tolerance of Marginalized People</th>
<th>Tolerance of Outsiders</th>
<th>Disapproval of Free Riding</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of significant</td>
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<td>differences/number of</td>
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<tr>
<td>associations observed</td>
<td>23/28</td>
<td>35/45</td>
<td>20/28</td>
<td>60/87</td>
<td>19/43</td>
<td>31/74</td>
<td>15/43</td>
<td>18/57</td>
<td>3/14</td>
<td>8/45</td>
<td>7/45</td>
<td>7/45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>82.1^a</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>71.4^a</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>21.4^a</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: See Note 6.

NOTE: Entries are percentages of associations in all surveys whose members are high in social capital (significant at alpha = .05 level). Controls for age, education, gender, and size of community are applied.

a. Total percentage based on results from one survey only.
members and nonmembers in each association. We are controlling for age, education, size of community, and gender, because these are commonly identified as the primary determinants of social participation (Almond & Verba, 1963; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978). Without these control variables, any differences between members and nonmembers in the various dimensions of public social capital might be purely a consequence of these other traits of associational members.

The total percentage row of Table 1 tells us the proportion of associations whose members were significantly higher than nonmembers in the particular domain of social capital. Reading the first column, for example, shows that in 82.1% of all associations in our three countries, members scored significantly higher than nonmembers in political contacting. Members of associations were frequently found to be significantly higher than nonmembers on all indicators of social capital. At the same time, members are substantially more distinctive on some dimensions of social capital than others.

Relative to nonmembers, associational members are highest on political participation, participation in community activities, and political engagement (interest and frequency of engaging in political discussion). The smallest differences between members and nonmembers are found on generalized optimism, tolerance, and disapproval of free riding. Political efficacy and trust are also found in heightened degree among members compared to nonmembers.

The heart of social capital theory, the claims made most consistently and most strongly, center on the two measures in the center columns of Table 1: community credit slips and generalized trust. And here, the theory of social capital does well. The proportion of significant relationships between associational membership and community reciprocity/generaized trust is lower than the proportion of significant relationships with political and community participation. This is to be expected. People who are prone to political activity are drawn to associational life, and many types of associations urge their members to participate in politics. None, however, is likely to make overt requests of members that they exchange favors with their neighbors or that they trust others in the society. Seen in that light, the fact that members are significantly higher than nonmembers on these traits in more than 40% of our cases is an impressive confirmation of the link between social capital and group memberships.

VARIATION BETWEEN ASSOCIATIONS

In the enthusiasm for the effect of associations on social capital, distinctions between the different types, purposes, and forms of associations have tended to be lost. In his book on the importance of civicism in several regions in Italy, Putnam (1993) has shown convincingly that the prevalence of horizontal associations creates the basis for effective governance, presumably because of the social capital built by associational membership. Putnam refers back to the work of Tocqueville, who praises various kinds of associations, "religious, moral,
serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute,” as virtuous organizations, all of which “instill in their members habits of cooperation, solidarity, and public-spiritedness” (Tocqueville, as cited in Putnam. 1993, p. 90). Even if all organizations are virtuous, though, they need not be equally virtuous. We can take advantage of the presence of 43 different types of associations in our data sets to examine the relative concentration of social capital in different associational sectors.

The range of membership profiles can be illustrated by looking at the relationship between community credit slips and membership in 20 Swedish organizations (see Figure 1). The horizontal line shows the total sample mean on community credit slips, adjusted for age, gender, education, race, and size of community. Even with this range of controls, members of most associations score substantially above the total sample mean; in 10 of them, the difference is significant. Our practice of counting only relationships significant at the .05 level or below is a conservative one, given the small sample sizes of members in many of the associations. Even so, Figure 1 shows a pervasive connection between associational membership and community reciprocity.

That said, there is a great deal of variation between associations in the involvement of members in community exchange. The association scoring highest on this measure is 33% above the lowest. This leads us to ask which associations are most effective in developing these traits. Although we know of no one (other than perhaps Tocqueville himself) who has explicitly said that all associations are equally effective in creating social capital, nowhere have we seen the assembly and testing of hypotheses about which associations are most effective in this regard. The variation in Figure 1 motivates our further exploration of the hypothesis that some associations are more effective than others in creating social capital. We will examine the link between social capital creation and two associational traits: the purposes of the association and the diversity of its membership.

THE IMPACT OF ASSOCIATIONAL SECTORS

The surveys available to us asked about membership in 43 different types of organizations. We have grouped these into seven categories that we will call associational sectors. Our first hypothesis is that political, economic, group rights, cultural, community, private interest, and social-leisure organizations will vary in the extent to which their memberships are high in social capital. For example, we expect that members of political, economic, and group rights associations will be more active in their rates of political and community participation because such groups make demands on their members for political activities. We also expect higher levels of political trust and efficacy among members of political and economic associations. With regard to interactions with neighbors or general social outlooks on trust, we hypothesize that associational sectors that create more contact between members, such as community
organizations, cultural organizations, and personal interest organizations, are more successful in influencing their memberships.

Table 2 displays the rates at which group members proved to be significantly different from nonmembers, in the expected direction and with controls applied, on our dimensions of social capital. The entries in each cell indicate the extent to which members of each associational sector are significantly above the societal norm on our four dimensions of social capital. For example, in all 40 (100%) political associations from the six surveys, members scored significantly higher on political action than nonmembers. The same was true of 72.2% of the 36 economic associations in our samples.

Comparisons among the four dimensions of social capital are best seen by reference to the bottom row of Table 2, which shows the overall rate at which associational memberships score higher than nonmembers. As expected, we find that membership in all kinds of associational sectors is most connected to political action and matters least with respect to optimism, tolerance, and free ridership.

The "All" column at the right side of Table 2 tells us that cultural organizations were particularly likely to have members rich in traits associated with social capital. Group rights and social or leisure organizations, on the other hand, were least likely to stand out with regard to our various indicators of public social capital. These overall rates of social capital concentration within memberships, however, mask a significant degree of specialization between associational sectors in the kinds of social capital found within them.

Members of political, economic, and community groups, for example, are heavily involved in political and community participation. Cultural, personal interest, and community organizations are particularly likely to have members scoring high in generalized trust and in reciprocity with neighbors. Members of cultural, personal interest, and economic groups (but not political groups!) are especially high in political trust and efficacy. These results suggest that although members of all types of associations contribute to all forms of public social capital, memberships of a particular associational sector are more likely to score highly on some dimensions of social capital than on others. This is a reminder that a generalized enthusiasm for the effects of associational membership on social capital must be tempered by a specification of what types of groups we are talking about and what aspects of social capital are being considered.

Associational sectors are defined by group purposes, and group purposes are only one way of categorizing our 102 associations. Let us now consider the relationship between associational member diversity and social capital.

THE IMPACT OF ASSOCIATIONAL DIVERSITY

Our second hypothesis states that associations whose members bridge major social categories will be more effective in fostering generalized social trust and other components of social capital than will associations whose membership is socially constricted (Putnam, 1995b, p. 665). To test this hypothesis, we mea-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Association Sector</th>
<th>Political Action</th>
<th>Generalized Trust/Community Credit Slips</th>
<th>Political Trust and Efficacy</th>
<th>Optimism, Tolerance, Free Ridership</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
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<td>Economic</td>
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<td>Group rights</td>
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<td>27.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>58.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal interest</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Entries are the percentages of associations of each sector whose members are significantly different from nonmembers, controlling for age, education, sex, size of community, and (in the United States) race. The N in each cell is the number of tests for significance, with each test based on an association-indicator dyad. See Note 6 for a list of associations in each associational sector.
sured the extent to which association memberships deviate from the population as a whole on six or seven major dimensions of social cleavage. In all three of our countries, we measured the degree of representativeness of association members with respect to education, occupation or occupational prestige, religion and church attendance, partisanship or left-right ideology, age, and gender. In addition to those six dimensions, we also measured racial representativeness in the case of the United States and representativeness in the proportion of immigrants in the cases of Germany and Sweden. The final diversity score is the sum of the membership deviations from population norms minus the single dimension on which the association is least representative.

Note that we cannot literally determine the composition of the membership of the group to which the respondent actually belongs. What we can do is test for diversity within associational type. When an individual joins a labor union, for example, we believe that person may feel a kinship not only to other members of the same union local but also to all other union members. To the extent this is true, the relevant unit of analysis is the associational-type “labor unions” rather than the specific local affiliate of, say, the Metalworkers’ Union in a particular city. However, our assumption about uniformity and solidarity within an associational type is likely to be more valid in some cases than in others. Hobby clubs are almost certainly a less coherent associational type than labor unions. Particular hobby clubs are formed by aficionados of specific hobbies, and these will often be relatively homogeneous. Hobby clubs, in the aggregate, score as very diverse on our measures, but that is not likely to be the case in the specific club to which an individual belongs. Nor do we believe that there is a “hobbyist solidarity” comparable to the solidarity of organized labor. Members of a rare book collector’s hobby club, for example, are not likely to feel associational brother-or-sisterhood with heavy-metal fan clubs.

The problems of making inferences about the diversity of a local organization from data on diversity in the associational type led us to the following expectations. If an associational type scores as homogeneous on our measure, the individual organizations will not be substantially more diverse than what we observe. If, on the other hand, an associational type scores as highly diverse on our measure, that does not necessarily indicate diversity within the individual organization to which a member belongs. We therefore expect our measure of diversity within associations to take, in effect, two values: “homogeneous” and “indeterminate.” This quirk of the measurement must be borne in mind as we examine our results.

Despite these shortcomings, our measure of diversity within associational types does pick up some relatively nuanced differences between different types of groups. Most associational types are composed disproportionately of people from higher education and occupational backgrounds, although this is particularly true of Swedish shareholder associations, American fraternities and sororities, American arts and educational associations, and peace and professional associations in each country. Most sociable organizations, such as Ordensställskap in Sweden, Heimat groups in Germany, or fraternal associations in the
United States represent somewhat homogeneous memberships. Similarly, we find that members of pensioners' associations and agricultural associations underrepresent higher levels of education and social class. Political clubs in the United States are representative on many of our dimensions, but their diversity is reduced by an overrepresentation of both liberal and conservative extremes, whereas the middle is underrepresented.

Our diversity measure also reveals some interesting differences between similar associational types in different countries. Unions are generally highly diverse in their memberships, but this is especially true in Sweden because such a large portion of the labor force is organized. For much the same reason, church groups in the United States are particularly diverse, but they are not in Germany or Sweden.

Because diversity of membership may be expected to have a particularly strong impact on generalized trust and community credit slips, we have singled out these scales for analysis in Figure 2. It groups the 57 associations in our three national surveys into four diversity quartiles, ranging from least diverse to most diverse. Within each quartile, we counted the proportion of associations whose memberships have significantly higher levels of generalized trust and community credit slips, controlling for education, age, gender, and community size. Figure 2 shows that there is a relationship between associational diversity and
the extent to which members report generalized trust and involvement in community reciprocity. This relationship is particularly pronounced for groups at the lowest level of diversity (that is, the associations whose diversity we are best able to measure). It is possible that the relatively weak relationship in the top three quartiles of associational diversity is due to our inability to measure diversity in the upper ranges. It is also possible that there is a threshold level above which further diversity does not make additional contributions to membership’s trust. Either way, we have shown that the degree of associational diversity is associated with levels of generalized trust and community reciprocity among members, at least among the most homogeneous associations. A more nuanced analysis of the effects of group diversity must await a study designed to measure diversity within local associations (see Stolle, 1998).

CONCLUSIONS

Our inquiry into the connection between associational membership and the attitudes and behaviors supportive of social capital has found that association members are significantly different from nonmembers across the broad range of indicators of social capital that we examined. This relationship between associational membership and indicators of social capital holds up across all types of associations, from literary societies to political clubs, with a range of statistical controls applied. Although there are differences between types of associations and between countries, these should not obscure the broader pattern in which we were unable to find a single indicator of social capital that is not positively related to associational membership.

Although the effects of associational membership in producing social capital can only be determined by longitudinal study, our findings help specify the theory in three ways. First, different facets of public social capital are connected to associational membership in varying degrees. Political activities, for example, are strongly related to memberships in voluntary associations of all kinds. Although high levels of generalized trust and community reciprocity are correlated with the memberships of most associations, tolerance is not.

Second, different types of social capital are found in different sectors of associations. For example, some association memberships, particularly those of cultural associations, appear to exhibit a wide range of forms of public social capital. Members of community organizations and personal interest groups join cultural association members in high levels of generalized trust and community reciprocity. In addition to cultural association memberships, personal interest and economic association memberships are particularly high in political trust and efficacy. Political associations have the most politically active memberships but are less likely to be positively associated with generalized trust, political trust and efficacy, tolerance, optimism, and free ridership.
Third, the level of diversity of an association has an effect on the connection between social capital and association memberships. Based on the three national surveys available to us, we determined that the least diverse associations are less likely to have memberships with high levels of generalized trust and community reciprocity.

Although we have not explored the subject in this article, it is worth noting that there are also intriguing variations between countries in the types of associations most productive of social capital. Church associations in the United States and Germany, welfare and social work associations in the United States, sports clubs in Germany, and unions and third world associations in Sweden are the greatest associational stars in the social capital firmament. These differences deserve further exploration; all we can say at this point is that they are not simply a function of associational sector or diversity.¹⁴

It is worth emphasizing the severity of our tests for links between associations and social capital—a severity that results partly from data constraints and partly from our decisions in the process of doing this research. Although every indicator of social capital examined here has its champions, we know of no one who has suggested that all of them are actually part of social capital. And yet, we have found all of these indicators to be significantly related to associational membership. Those relationships have appeared despite the small samples of members in most associations, making it necessary in some cases for truly heroic differences to appear in the adjusted means before our .05 threshold was crossed. We also found some support for our hypothesis about the effects of diversity within the associational type, despite the necessity of making inferences about local groups based on diversity among the national body of members. Although we are able to do little more than to certify some associational sectors as “not diverse,” our results were supportive of the hypothesis that associational diversity fosters social capital.

That the social capital theory has withstood these preliminary efforts at subjecting it to cross-national testing suggests that this is certainly an area that will repay further examination. Future studies can overcome issues of measurement with an association-based design that takes specific organizations as the unit of analysis. Such studies should merge contextual variables with individual data, for example, on the extent of diversity and degree of member activity within the local organization, whether it has a hierarchical or horizontal authority structure and so forth.¹⁵ We have demonstrated that the connection between associational membership and social capital is robust across countries and across indicators of social capital. At the same time, we find clear indications of differences across types of associations. These results indicate the need for further specification of the theory of social capital.
### APPENDIX

#### Indicators of Social Capital

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political action</td>
<td>Participation in political activities ranging from contacting public officials to taking part in boycotts, demonstrations, and election campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement in community</td>
<td>Taking on community responsibilities, writing a letter or article for a newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in politics</td>
<td>Strength of political interest, propensity to discuss political matters with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalized trust</td>
<td>Questions on trust in others and about whether people would try to take advantage of someone if they got a chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit slips</td>
<td>Extent of interaction and borrowing from neighbors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political trust</td>
<td>Confidence in the people running the executive branch, Congress, and the Supreme Court (United States); trust in the parliament and parliamentarians, in communal officials, in the judicial system, and in the education system (Sweden and Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political efficacy</td>
<td>Belief that governmental officials care about public interests, ability to influence politics or to make claims on officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance</td>
<td>Tolerance I—tolerance toward outsiders; Tolerance II—tolerance toward marginalized people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free riding</td>
<td>Combines responses to questions about cheating on taxes when you have the chance, avoiding a fare on public transport, claiming governmental benefits to which you are not entitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>A positive outlook on the future and a belief that politicians are interested in the welfare of other people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### NOTES

1. Putnam (1995a), although aware of this distinction, concentrates on those forms of social capital that serve "civic ends" (p. 665). He does not integrate different forms of civicsness into the concept of social capital.

2. Putnam has elsewhere (1993, p. 221, note 30) pointed out that not all organizations are committed to democratic goals.

3. Personalized forms of civicsness can, of course, also serve as useful and powerful ingredients of a democratic system. This is the case, for example, with the strong in-group bonds and trust developed in organizations associated with the civil rights movement and the women’s movement. In this article, however, we concentrate exclusively on generalized forms of social capital.

4. One of the originators of the concept, Pierre Bourdieu (1992), has viewed social capital as an individual resource. See also the work by Granovetter (1985).

6. The data sources consist of three national surveys and the World Values Study for the relevant countries. They are the following: General Social Survey merged samples (1983, 1984, 1986); Svenska Medborgarundersökningen (Swedish Citizen’s Survey) 1987; German Allbus survey 1991; and the World Values Survey merged samples of the United States, Germany, and Sweden (1983, 1990). We used so many data sources to be able to examine a wide array of proposed aspects of social capital, none of which was measured in all of the surveys. To maximize the number of association members available for analysis, we pooled the American General Social Surveys of 1983, 1984, and 1986, as well as the two waves of the World Values Survey. Because these six surveys were independently designed, they are not consistent in the menu of association types offered to respondents. Comparisons between association types in different societies can only be approximate; the Swedish Ordenssällskap resembles an American Elks Club in many ways, but it is not quite the same thing. A church association in Sweden will be different depending on whether it is part of the established Lutheran Church or one of the dissenting churches. American veterans’ groups and German Vertriebene are each rooted in the particular histories of those countries. That said, our challenge was to construct a typology of associations in the three countries that would make comparisons possible without doing violence to these differences. We have opted for the following scheme, which is the basis of Table 2:

Political associations: political clubs; political parties, international affairs clubs, peace, environmental, and temperance organizations, third world and human rights groups.

Economic associations: unions, employers’ associations, professional associations, agriculture associations, consumer groups, cooperatives, shareholders’ organizations.

Group rights: pensioners, Vertriebene, veterans, immigrants, handicapped, animal rights, women’s groups.

Cultural associations: associations for preservation of traditional regional, national, or ethnic culture; church groups; literary, music, and arts societies.

Community groups: local action groups, residents’ associations, service and welfare organizations, health care groups, parents’ associations, voluntary defense associations.

Private interests: sport, outdoor, youth, hobby, auto.

Social or leisure groups: fraternities and sororities, social groups, Heimat organizations, fraternal organizations.

7. In the United States, race was also controlled. In the Swedish Citizenship Survey, size of community was not measured and so could not be controlled.

8. The categories of political action, generalized trust/community credit slips, political trust and efficacy, and optimism/tolerance/disapproval of free ridership are aggregations of the variables and scales listed in Table 1. We refer to these four clusters of indicators as the “dimensions” of social capital. The statistical procedure in Table 2, as in Table 1, is analysis of covariance.

9. The diversity score calculates the proportional differences between the sample of associational members and the entire population. These proportional deviations are then added for each trait (such as education, religion, etc.) to a total diversity score for each membership.

10. Our more highly specified hypothesis is that social capital is fostered by memberships in associations that are representative of the larger society, exclusive of traits that define membership in the association. Therefore, we deleted the dimension on which the association was least representative in order not to penalize associations of youth, older people, women and so forth—associations whose defining trait happens to coincide with one of the dimensions of representativeness that we measure.

11. See Maccoby (1958), who suggests that, in general, associations are more homogeneous than we think.

12. Our confidence in the measure is further strengthened by the Pearson correlation between diversity of particular sectors in Sweden and the United States (r = .81).

13. We exclude the World Values Survey from this analysis because its trust indicator is a single dichotomous question, and there are no indicators of community credit slips.
14. For further analysis of cross-national differences, see Stolle and Rochon (in press).

15. We also tested the hypothesis that memberships of associations with a higher percentage of active members are higher in social capital. Because so much of social capital theory rests on the effects of member interaction, we believed that associations with a high proportion of active members (hobby, church, and immigrant organizations) will have memberships higher in social capital than organizations whose members are generally passive (union, consumer, and environmental organizations). We employed measures of member activity available in the World Values Survey and in the Swedish Citizen Survey, but we found no differences between associations based on their levels of activity.

REFERENCES


