



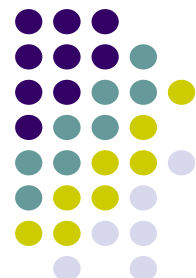
Exploring Social Capital in an Urban Context

Kirsten Harrison

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Abstract

Urban conditions in the cities of the developing world are deteriorating and the gaze of international development has increasingly fallen upon the local context. In the context of decentralisation policies and weak local states, urban policy makers and academics have begun searching for remedies at the local level, including new frameworks for understanding the social resources available to assist in local level development. Social capital has become one of the conceptual frameworks and explanatory tools taken up to factor in the role of social and institutional relationships at the urban scale. While general development debates are fairly advanced in terms of the role of social relationships in governance, the literature falls short at the urban scale. This paper reviews some of the challenges of investigating social capital in the context of a complex urban environment, where the relationships and patterns of state-society engagement, increasingly described in development discourse as social capital, are often disparate and difficult to pin down.

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INTRODUCTION

Interest in the state of urban centres has risen in the past decade upon the realisation that nearly half of the world's population is living in cities (UNCHS 2001). *The World of Cities* document compiled by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements declared:

For better or for worse, the development of contemporary societies will depend largely on understanding and managing the growth of cities. The city will increasingly become the test bed for the adequacy of political institutions, for the performance of government agencies, and for the effectiveness of programmes to combat social exclusion, to protect and repair the environment and to promote human development (UNCHS 2001:1).

There is a plethora of literature on the city in the developing world. Pivotal works have theorised about the impact of urbanisation on the state of service delivery and the urban poverty condition (Gilbert and Gugler 1992; Rakodi 1997; Beall, Crankshaw and Parnell 2000, 2001, 2002; Evans, 2002). However, within the broader development literature concern with rural poverty and national level development still predominates.

Rao and Woolcock (2001) claim that within this climate of accelerated interest in urban areas, there is an absence of procurable development data at the urban scale (see also Devas 2001). This stands in contrast to the healthy pool of literature available on social relationships in cities at the community or neighbourhood level (Beall 2001:360). Moreover, there is a notable paucity of thorough understanding of how these local level social relationships relate to citywide dynamics and trends in urban centres. This reality

sits uncomfortably with the increasing reliance by local government on the involvement of city dwellers in urban development and the escalating obligations of local government *vis-à-vis* residents.

The urban reality is no different in large South African cities. The social capital debate in South Africa has not been robust thus far. However, there has been interest expressed in using the ‘resource’ to assist in development in urban areas. The objective of this article is to demonstrate the complexities inherent within a concept such as social capital and its application in an urban context. The first part of the paper will describe the genealogy of the concept, the second part will explore the myriad of relationships between social capital and urban localities, the third part of the paper will disaggregate further relationships in an urban context and social capital and the fourth part of the paper will discuss the role social capital plays in bolstering informal institutions. It is the intent of this paper that these four parts will begin to illustrate the complexity of the concept in urban areas in South Africa.

Social capital has become one of the key explanatory tools that have been taken up to understand social relationships at the urban scale. While this analytical framework has helped provide the mechanisms through which to shift the emphasis to the role of social relationships in the social organisation of governance, the literature falls short in the urban sense.¹ Despite Putnam’s early concern with urban Italy and subsequent preoccupation with social capital in rural and urban North America, much of the international literature has located discussions of social capital in a rural context where deliberations regarding trust, associational life and identity seem easier to investigate and capture. However, as Evans argues:

The romantic vision that ‘community’ automatically entails homogeneity and unity of purpose is misleading even in traditional rural settings; urban communities contain an even more daunting spectrum of interests, identities, and political positions (Evans 2002:15).

¹ Sue Phillips does however speak to the issue of social capital in urban areas in her chapter in Rakodi and Lloyd-Jones’s *Urban Livelihood. A People-centred Approach to Reducing Poverty* (Phillips 2002: 133-150) and there is some overlap between the livelihoods analysis and that of social capital as is evident in the analysis of urban livelihoods (Rakodi 2002; Meikle 2002).

The challenge of urbanists is therefore to investigate the usefulness of social capital in the context of a precarious urban environment, where the relationships and patterns of state-society engagement described as social capital are much more disparate and difficult to pin down than in less institutionally complicated settings. A further challenge is to understand whether the norms, networks and levels of trust, increasingly understood as social capital, are useful as one set of development resources for developmental urban local governments.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Several comprehensive literature reviews on social capital have been undertaken since Robert Putnam’s book (1993) *Making Democracy Work* received mainstream academic acclaim. The majority of reviews trace the history of the concept, analyse how and where it has been applied, and present critiques of a social capital framework drawn from different disciplinary perspectives. The widespread popularity of the concept in a development context is largely a reflection of the recent international focus on social infrastructure² as a resource at the disposal of governments and development agencies to potentially improve the performance of governments and as a means of including local residents in policy decisions. Within this domain, it is considered that the value associated with the concept of social capital is its explanatory power in understanding more clearly the nature of social relationships amongst individuals and to understand the factors that are important for developing and sustaining co-operative social interactions in social groups. Social capital, in its most simple form, has been defined as “the ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organisations” (Coleman 1988: 95).

Social capital has been discussed in a variety of ways by different authors since it became popularised in the aftermath of James Coleman’s (1990a) *Foundations of Social Theory* and Robert Putnam’s (1993) *Making Democracy Work*. Although the two authors used the concept social capital differently, their texts heightened consciousness around the possibilities that social relationships hold for economic growth and development (Harriss, 2002). Since then, numerous texts referring to trust (Fukuyama 1995), reciprocity

² By social infrastructure I refer to social relations and social structures (Oakerson 1988).

(Oakerson 1988), connexity (Mulgan 1997) and societal relationships have been written and applied to social and economic development discourse.

Social capital as a resource embedded in social relations – Coleman and others

The principal original proponents of the concept of social capital include Coleman, Bourdieu and Putnam. Coleman's work is important for an introductory discussion of social capital, because it directly challenges the contention of neo-classical economics that society is solely comprised of atomistic, rational individuals (Coleman 1990a). Coleman contends that social relationships make a contribution to the fulfilment of the societal objectives that extend beyond the narrowness and individualism of human capital. For Coleman, social capital is a resource located in social structures that facilitates the realisation of interests by groups rather than individual actors.

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structure and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure (Coleman 1990a:302).

Since Coleman, a variety of other texts emerged that sustained and diversified interest in social capital. Francis Fukuyama's text (1995) *Trust, Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* applies the concept of social capital to economic development and highlights the importance of culture in corporate development. Fukuyama reiterates, like Coleman and Putnam, that social capital is not a resource locked into the individual, but instead is located within a social structure. What is common to all these studies, and to the theorists that are located in the social capital genre, is the command they give to society as a realm of influence beyond that of the market or state.

Social capital as a resource in the relationship between civil society and state – Putnam

However, it was Putnam's social capital arguments that did not use social capital solely to explore norms and values within societal relationships (Putnam 1993). Instead he took it a step further and posited social capital as a resource in the relationship between an active and engaged civil society and a responsive state. Putnam defines social capital as

“features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” (Putnam 1993:167). Putnam extended Fukuyama and Coleman’s arguments by presenting social capital as a resource for optimising government performance. It is this conception of social capital that determines whether or not social capital can in fact be used as a resource in the development process. It is also the understanding most commonly used in the development literature.

Putnam first presented this argument in the 1993 text *Making Democracy Work*. It was as a result of the impact of this text that the social capital debate expanded and was taken up by international organisations dealing with government performance. Putnam’s application of the concept of social capital was to explain associational life and democratic performance and this was the key focus of Putnam’s study of Northern and Southern Italy. Putnam’s study ascertained that the levels of “civic engagement, political equality, solidarity, trust and tolerance and voluntary association” were critical in determining government performance (Putnam 1993). Putnam argues that citizen involvement in associational life creates social capital and is beneficial to civic engagement in two ways: first, it inculcates a culture of co-operation, and second, successful associational life relies on shared norms, values and trust all of which are cultivated through involvement in associations. On the basis of these learned norms and values of civic co-operation, social collaboration is much more likely to occur and hence society’s demands on government are more likely to be coherent and collaboratively articulated. Putnam explains the relationship as follows:

societal demands → political interactions → government → policy choice → implementation. Government institutions receive inputs from their social environment and produce outputs to respond to that environment (Putnam, 1993:9).

It was this causal relationship that made Putnam’s adaptation of social capital so compelling. Putnam purported to provide an alternative answer to the question of what makes for a successful relationship between active civil society and the state and he began to key out the requirements for optimum government performance.

Despite his extensive empirical research, critics of Putnam's conclusions in Italy have emerged in many disciplines. There has been some dispute around Putnam's proposed hypothesis that dense associational life leads to optimum government performance. To explain further, Grootaert (1999) critiques Putnam's work by arguing that Putnam assumes that because there are co-operative relationships in a locality, as reflected through dense associational life (understood to be the micro-sphere), this co-operation will be transferred to a societal scale (meso-scale) and will ultimately translate into societal demands on government for optimal performance (1999). It is Putnam's purported uncomplicated, causal linking between micro³ and macro⁴ level factors that has raised substantial concerns around the validity of the link created between social capital and government performance, particularly in the urban context where dynamics are complicated and often times unpredictable.

LOCALITY

Given that the work of local government hinges upon governing the jurisdiction within which it is located, an important variable in the discussion of social capital and its relationship to governance performance in the urban context is the notion of location. This is because localities in the urban context hold different meanings and values for its residents than rural areas. Putnam proposes that social capital is an accumulated good and a historical resource that grows incrementally. In truth, in order for this incremental growth to occur and social capital to accumulate, it would need to flourish in a locality unmarked by trauma and conflict, or any other factors that are divisive to a geographical locality. This is an unlikely reality in complex urban settings where political and social realities have a large role to play in framing social relationships. Putnam's implicit path dependency stems from the contention that stocks of social capital are built incrementally in an area over time. However, Diani (2001) makes the point that albeit that social capital can persist over long periods of time, political changes constantly reconstitute those social bonds. In urban settings the reconstituting of social bonds can be particularly significant given the complex nature of interactions.

³ Woolcock originally developed the notion of micro and macro levels of engagement and how this relates to social capital. Micro factors, in this context, apply to norms and values and relationships between individual citizens (Woolcock 1998).

⁴ Macro factors apply to the overall understanding of political culture and relationships between state and civil society. It is the meso space between micro and macro relationships that remain absent in Putnam's study. It is this caveat that has been the cause of much criticism directed towards Putnam.

One way in which social capital in urban areas can be affected is through the interaction between disparate groups of residents. Debertin (2002) makes the important point that the difference between urban and rural communities is that in rural communities there is greater likelihood that locality and social capital will overlap. It is taken for granted in Putnam's study (and much subsequent research on social capital) that associational life is linked to locality (Narayan-Parker and Pritchett 1997; Grootaert 1999). In their discussion of 'Social Capital and Participation in Urban Neighbourhoods', Portney and Berry (2001:71) contend that neighbourhoods are "where bonds of community are built". Lowndes (1995:163) argues that the realities of urban life have resulted in "choice, diversity, pluralism and competition" emerging as the organising principles for politics. A particular locality is not immediately the domain of identification. Harvey contends that the poor are dependent upon their locality, as mobility is limited. As such, they are in fact "trapped in space" and more likely to engage in some form of urban politics and citizenship (cited in Lowndes 1995:164).

In urban areas, there are better odds that residents will have networks that extend more broadly. An assumption informing this paper is that even within cities, across different areas locality and social capital will overlap in different ways (Phillips 2002). Phillips however, suggests, as does this paper, that people do have relationships that extend beyond the physical space of their home and do not necessarily exist as a "bounded unit" (Phillips, 2002:142), nor are the actions of these individuals purely structurally determined.

Urban theorists such as Douglass and Friedmann (1998) and Castells (1997) argue that whilst civil society can be stuck fast in neighbourhoods, cities and states, it can as easily have far-reaching networks both nationally and internationally. Amin and Thrift (2002:3) suggest that cities are "mixed spatialities" and sites of global and local processes. Tostensen, Tvedten and Vaa (2001) evince that within an African context networks can either be ascribed or acquired. Ascribed identities are kinship or ethnicity based, while acquired identities are religious. They argue: "Ascription is a particularly important aspect of civil societies in Africa. The reach of networks may be confined to local communities or span continents to include Diaspora populations" (Tostensen, Tvedten and Vaa 2001:16). The authors argue further:

despite the growing importance of urban associations, informal networks within kin-groups, neighbourhoods, or gender and age groups, and links with rural areas probably, still play a more significant role for the urban population in their struggle for survival than do associations. Such networks are important for access not only to material resources, but social security and the fulfilment of socio-cultural obligations (Tostensen, Tvedten and Vaa 2001:24).

With the acknowledgement of the possibility that social capital is not necessarily geographically contained, so the complexity in the relationship between state and society is no longer limited to intrinsic power inequities in place bound civil society organisation and the structural constraints they face. Instead, it broadens the terms of reference to those beyond locality. This raises questions of whether or not these wider connections and allegiances allow citizens to be governed according to their identity by local government.

Virtual urban communities

An urban neighbourhood with far-flung networks potentially makes more challenging the work of utilising and constructing social capital for the purposes of governance. It is often argued that a poor, heterogeneous and highly evanescent population in fact constrains urban politics. The transient nature of the population inhibits the creation of structures and associations specific to the area. Coleman argues that stability is key to the creation, maintenance or destruction of social capital. He posits that “disruptions of social organisations or social relations can be highly destructive to social capital” (Coleman 1990a:320). Byrne’s analysis (1999) of ‘communities’ and social exclusion contends that collective action is more likely to occur in areas where people have a permanent presence and hence a vested interest. But then again, even with the permanent presence of residents, exogenous factors can impact directly on the stocks of social capital both positively and negatively, throwing anticipated collective action into disorder.

The implications of this vocabulary are important in the debate around social capital in urban areas as it presents the possibility of individuals belonging to different communities, be they micro locale, virtual communities or moral communities. Associationalism reconciles the possibility of self-governing communities that have local,

national and international affiliations, thus not restricting society to an area-bias (Hirst 1994:71). Mulgan concurs, arguing that “connexity makes it possible for these memberships to be far more dispersed than in the past. There are few intrinsic reasons why any of these scales should be geographically close” (Mulgan 1997:115). This is explicitly the case in large and heterogeneous cities such as Johannesburg. This reality broadens exposure to a myriad of independent ‘norms and values’, some of which are more predisposed towards engaging with local government and other groups than others. At the same time, Mulgan argues that the economics of attachment dictate that individuals have finite connections to ‘communities’ (Mulgan 1997). In literature associated with collective action, it is argued that group size affects the likelihood of collective action (Olson 1965; Kähkönen 1999). Kähkönen’s study continues that the more heterogeneous a society is, the less likely it will organise for collective action. Fukuyama makes the following bold statement:

It would appear that in many African cities, older tribal structures and family ties have been broken down with rapid urbanisation and have not been replaced by strong voluntary associations outside of kinship. This kind of atomized society does not provide fertile ground for economic activity, supporting neither large organisations nor family businesses. One interesting thread that runs through such societies, however, is that of a delinquent community: the community structures that do exist are criminal organisations. It is as if there is a natural universal human impulse towards sociability, which if blocked from expressing itself through legitimate structures like family or voluntary organisations appears in pathological forms like criminal gangs. And indeed, mafias have appeared as one of the strongest forms of social organisation precisely in places such as Southern Italy, American inner city, Russia and many Sub-Saharan African cities (Fukuyama 1995:338).

While Fukuyama’s analysis of the emergence of delinquency in cities can be interpreted as offensive, the presentation of a dislocated population is pertinent. The importance of this discourse is the opportunity it presents for analysis around whether or not governments may well create communities in areas characterised by atomistic residents, whether social capital exists or develops in these settings and whether or not these communities unite to influence government. Policy initiatives, such as area-based

targeting, are based on the notion of community, an example of government attempting to create a community through the identification of a geographical area as a 'deprived area' (Glennerster, Lupton, Noden and Power 1999). Nikolas Rose presents a fascinating analysis of what he terms 'the death of the social'. Rose argues that government responds to civil society through a 'community' nomenclature whereby government articulates the identities of its citizens through location within a particular community. The 'social' is therefore no longer the focus. Rose argues thus:

The subject is addressed as a moral individual with bonds of obligation and responsibilities for conduct that are assembled in a new way – the individual in his or her community is both self responsible and subject to certain emotional bonds of affinity to a circumscribed network of other individuals – unified by family ties, by locality, by moral commitment to environmental protection or animal welfare (Rose 1996:334).

In this quotation too, Rose suggests the possible difficulties of governing a diverse citizen whose loyalties are located in a range of different arenas which might or might not overlap.

ONE LOCALITY, ONE SOCIAL CAPITAL

This paper specifically argues that the form of social capital present in any urban community is conditional on the locality. Edwards and Foley made this point in 1998 when arguing that "the value of a particular form of social capital for facilitating group or individual social action varies according to social, spatial, historical and geographical location" (Edwards and Foley 1998:127).

Whilst classical social capital arguments rest on the assumption that social capital is linked to locality, the above sections have argued instead that social capital is not necessarily purely locality bound. Instead, given the nature of social relationships and power, social capital can come in different guises in a social structure. Coleman contends that:

social capital has certain properties that distinguish it from the private, divisible, alienable goods treated by neo-classical economic theory. One of these, discussed

by Loury is practical inalienability. Although it is a resource that has value in use, it cannot be easily exchanged. As an attribute of the social structure in which a person is embedded, social capital is not the private property of any of the persons who benefit from it (Coleman 1990a:315).

However, this paper suggests instead that social capital, if it exists in a locality, is not a packaged resource that can be automatically enlisted by all members of society to achieve certain objectives. Instead, the inherent inequities in civil society and the possibility that different types of social capital can coexist within one locality are critical considerations. Foley and Edwards in fact argue that it is not a given that social capital is a public good, and as such question whether it is capable of in fact producing the effects attributed to it (Foley and Edwards 1998).

Beall (2001) in her work comparing urban governance across selected cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America, argues that social capital can be regarded a semi-public good as it has both public and private attributes. Bourdieu's work acknowledges differences in power through the inequitable distributions of social, cultural and symbolic capital. Castell's work on hegemony in civil society suggests that dominant organisations in civil society are reflected in the state and are indicative of existing structural inequities. But as has been pointed out, the social capital literature taken up by development theorists and practitioners⁵ has not undertaken detailed analysis of power (Beall 1997; Harriss 2002). Power as a factor in determining, analysing and understanding the relationship between an active and engaged civil society and municipalities is essential.

Accepting that social capital does not take one but many forms is important as it convolutes further the relationship between associational life, social capital, collective action and local government performance. Adding complexity to the consideration of social capital as a public good are academic-practitioner discourses stating that the types of social capital can be differently categorised. These distinctions are not new to the literature. In Mitchell's (1969) study of networks he analyses the contrasts between 'open' and 'closed' social relationships in Central Africa. Narayan makes the distinction between bridging and bonding social capital and the different forms social capital can

⁵ This refers to the original texts of Coleman and Putnam.

take. Bonding social capital refers to tight bonds between close groups. These bonds ensure hermetic ties but can also be the basis for exclusion of others. Bridging social capital are bonds between assorted groups where bonds are fungible but exclusion is also less foreseeable (Narayan 1999; Baron, Field and Schuller 2002). Putnam and Goss suggest another division within social capital, namely inward-looking versus outward-looking. Inward-looking social capital they describe as consolidating the rights of a particular group of members, whereas outward-looking refers to those groups in search of public goods such as the Red Cross (Putnam and Goss 2002). Portes makes more intricate the distinctions and imputes further two sources of social capital, namely consummatory and instrumental. Consummatory refers to networks of socialisation such as those found amongst families and networks. Instrumental are those that are purposeful and based on the potential of reciprocity (Portes 1998). This division raises questions regarding the conditions under which different forms of social capital are able to be mobilised. Krishna and Uphoff (2002) also classify social capital in two ways: namely structural and cognitive. Structural social capital refers to those relationships based on social networks along with rules and procedures. Cognitive, on the other hand, describes networks based on shared norms and values and inclines people towards engaging in collective action (Krishna and Uphoff, 2002:87).

The commonality in the divisions within social capital that are outlined in the above paragraph suggests that a distinction must be made between ties that are tightly bound and those that are amenable to broader engagement such as the work of Granovetter on strong and weak ties. Narayan (1999) maintains that cross cutting ties, or those ties that connect social groups, are required if collective action and well being are to be a byproduct of social capital. Whilst indeed bonding and bridging types of social capital (or its expression in varying discourse) are useful divisions, it still does not explain fully resident responses to varying circumstances. These responses play a significant role in determining the viability of social relationships contributing to urban governance. Evans suggests:

There is no reason to expect poor urban communities will necessarily be endowed with the kinds of norms and networks, or 'social capital' that enable collective action. For a set of households to construct a sense of shared identity and common purpose sufficient to enable them to act collectively, it takes

uncommon imagination and heroic effort. Even if the members of a community do manage to act collectively, improving their own liveability is likely to require support from political structures that surround them, and their leverage vis-à-vis the rest of the political structures is unlikely to be sufficient to allow them to change the way the city deals with problems of livelihood and sustainability (Evans 2002:16).

It should not be taken as a given that hermetic ties exclude the possibility of collective action. Significant structural constraints may force some residents to seek refuge in bonding social capital and collective action may be required to catalyse this response. Furthermore, ‘bonding’ social capital need not be apolitical. Bridging social capital can also be spontaneous and issue-driven.

Discussions of the “dark side of social capital” (Putzel 1997:941) or “anti-social capital” (Beall 1997 and 2001) explore other instances in which ‘bonding’ types of social capital relationships become the basis for exclusion. This might diminish the possibility of collective action. Putzel critiques Putnam’s optimistic understanding of civil society through his contention that social capital can be a negative resource as illustrated through associations such as the Ku Klux Klan, gangs and crime syndicates (so too does Portes 1998). He also contests Putnam’s notion that the family is the most fundamental form of social capital by drawing attention to the implicit hierarchy and gender inequities represented in family life (Putzel 1997:944-945). These unambiguous normative attachments to the descriptions of social capital constrain attempts to understand the different forms of social capital as well as the productive roles these can play in urban governance.

LOCATION, INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Locality has an important role to play in determining the nature and form that social capital takes. In as much as institutions, structure and agency have a bearing on social capital, so too does the context within which discussions of social capital are undertaken. The urban context considered in this paper is the African city and the nature of the African city is a critical component in determining how social capital manifests.

Much has been written about the nature of cities in developing countries that make discussions of governance, social capital and service delivery different from those of developed countries (Gilbert and Gugler 1992). Simone (1999) argues that African cities are largely characterised by a lack of effective governance, the implications of which include the creation of an unsafe and uncertain environment. Residents consolidate geographically in blocks or neighbourhoods to compensate for the lack of formal institutional presence and in an attempt to recreate lost social ties (Simone 1999). It is because of specific circumstances that these social structures emerge. These actualities do not confront citizens in developed countries in the same way and hence the evolution of social structures would differ, although, in many urban contexts in Africa, social identity and locality indeed overlap considerably.

Given that the usefulness of social capital to local government depends on determining under which circumstances social capital becomes a resource for creating positive relationships between an active and energetic civil society and a responsive state, it becomes necessary to consider the historic analysis of an area and consequent relationships with local government. Historical analysis provides contextual insights into existing 'communities' and structures. In addition, the history of an area holds important information regarding the structural factors that impact upon the locality and potential for collective action. Moser (1998) concludes in her article on 'The Asset Vulnerability Framework' that:

The urban poor might be particularly vulnerable to *social fragmentation*. Community and interhousehold mechanisms of trust and collaboration can be weakened by greater social and economic heterogeneity, associated with wider distributional ranges of incomes, opportunities and access to infrastructure, services and access to urban areas (Moser 1998:4).

Further to that, understanding of locality provides some insight into social identities and historical relationships between state and society (Fincher and Jacobs 1998). Maloney, Smith and Stoker (2001:84) argue "only by being sensitive to the different locations in which social capital is created or inhibited is it possible to judge its impact on governance".

If informal institutions are the means by which business is done, this has a critical bearing on the potential of social capital as a prospective resource for local government. Much of the existing social capital literature argues that in contexts where institutions are absent, local residents bond together to formulate survival strategies (Moser 1998; Grant 2001; Rose 2001; Tostensen, Tvedten and Vaa 2001; Saegert, Thompson and Warren 2001; Phillips 2002). Richard Rose (2001) explains that in the case of Russia the suspicions that arise from the conduct of formal institutions promote the formation of informal institutions. The failure of formal institutions to deliver means that alternative means of accessing services are sought under some circumstances. The power of these informal institutions can supersede that of the local state. Since institutions can be ordered according to formal or informal rules, the state is not necessarily the ordering principle. This mostly occurs in situations whereby the state is neither trusted nor capable of delivering basic services. Walton (1998) adds that urban groups learn to cope with the realities imposed on them as a consequence of the retreat of the state into privatisation and deregulation.

Informal institutions facilitate the survival of these marginalised groups and intensify existing identities through constructing a measure of certainty in an otherwise hostile environment. Although these residents may not have a fixed history, they share a broader acknowledged identity and sufficiently powerful (but selective) relationships of trust with each other. Rao and Woolcock (2001) make reference to this dynamic amongst immigrant communities in the United States. They state that new arrivals are able to access ‘indigenous social institutions’ to assist at the outset. Whilst this practice succours, it also excludes because it is only accessible to *insiders* (Rao and Woolcock 2001:2). Fuchs, Shapiro and Minnite’s (2000) study amongst New York’s Russian Jewish networks has similar findings. Narayan contends that social capital and social exclusion can be interlinked. She suggests “those who belong to social networks which already have access to the resource allocation decisions of the state or the private sector (jobs, location of industry) are much more likely to continue to be included in societal processes than those who do not have such access” (Narayan 1999:5). Harriss proclaims similarly “‘social capital’ for one group of people may constitute ‘social exclusion’ for another” (Harriss 2002:10).

CONCLUSION

Addressing how social capital might be used as a resource in African cities is the concern of this paper. Whilst a sizeable literature on social capital exists, and the debates are prolific and fruitful, there is limited, locally-based empirical research undertaken in complex urban contexts in African countries.

The paper critiques Putnam's conception of social capital as a resource in the relationship between civil society and the state by arguing that his suggested relationship between associational life, social capital and improved government performance is simplistic and flawed when applied to an urban context characterized by complexity and flux. The paper suggests that the relationship between associational life, social capital, collective action and optimum government performance must be analysed at a local level. The mobilisation of social capital depends on a myriad of interconnecting factors that were found to be more complex than simply a dense associational life, as argued by Putnam. Considering these factors are critical when exploring social capital and the form it takes in an urban setting. The various means within which social capital can be articulated in urban areas by virtue of their characteristics, suggests that social relationships must be carefully considered and analysed prior to developing assumptions regarding their utility in urban governance projects.

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