

Clubbing Together:

The Hidden Wealth of Communities

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Authors' Note

Attempting to describe the 'hidden wealth' of community activity has proved an exciting journey over the past nine months. The disparate and granular nature of social activities meant we found ourselves tackling a very broad topic, many facets of which were challenging to identify. Clubs and social groups represent a part of communities which people often take for granted, and which some may argue is outside the realms of policy-making. Clubs represent social interaction and relationships, something priceless to society – and any attempt to quantify or measure their worth in numerical terms would face challenges. Instead, this report aims to paint a picture of the best cases already happening in the UK today, across geographical, online, and interest-based groups, with the modest ambition that highlighting good practice will encourage others to recognise their value, and work towards replicating these benefits further.

For all their help and support in the writing and researching of this report, we would like to thank Paul Talboys, the Bingo Association; Matthew Taylor, the RSA; Brian Leonard, Sporta; Rosie Luff, the Southbank Centre; Simon Bottery, Independent Age; Mervyn Kohler, Age UK; Majeed Neky, Living Streets; Andrew Sharp, National Childbirth Trust; Rob Gerrard, Beach Bingo in North Shields; Tim Deeming, Grand Bingo in Nuneaton; The staff of Mecca bingo club in Dagenham, Essex; Guy Daines, CLIP; Ruth Cherrington; Leonie Brown, British Lung Foundation; Dr Adrian Pabst; Llew Monger, Community Impact Bucks; Will Perrin, NESTA; Lewis Kirnon, Dartford Borough Council; John Knight, Join In Local Sport; Rachel Barber, National Federation of Women's Institutes; Oli Winton and Charlie Napier. We are also grateful to colleagues from ResPublica: Caroline Julian, Phillip Blond, Emma Baron, Peter Shand and Beatrice Ferguson, for their support during the editorial process.

Keith Cooper and Caroline Macfarland

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Foreword

The Bingo Association is delighted to be partnering with ResPublica on this extremely important and thought provoking report into the hidden wealth of communities and the value of community clubs and associations. With close to 500 clubs in the UK, bingo plays a hugely important role in communities up and down the country, and we have long seen the value of the bingo club beyond simple entertainment for our members.

Bingo has not had an easy time of it in recent years with regulatory and fiscal barriers stifling growth. However, bingo clubs have been working hard to adapt to changing times but without ever forgetting the important role that we play in society. We are glad that this report highlights this vital role of social group activity. Recognition of this social value through promoting multi-purpose town centres and a more sympathetic tax regime will ensure that our clubs can continue to operate as pillars of local communities.

As the report authors note, often it is difficult to identify or quantify the social and public good of clubs. For our own bingo club managers, the benefit is evident on a daily basis for the members we support across diverse communities. We hope that this report will ensure that politicians, policy makers and the wider public understand this value and do everything they can to support bingo clubs and other diverse club activities that all contribute to community well-being.

Paul Talboys
Chief Executive
Bingo Association

Executive Summary

The Government's 'Big Society' and localism agendas have strongly emphasised the concept of 'community', and resulting policy initiatives have been designed to articulate a social and political culture change. Yet, whilst radical in many ways, policy implementation has lacked a comprehensive picture of the steps needed to generate the enthusiasm and civic spirit necessary for a truly healthy and participative society.

This report is based on the premise that social good best flourishes within existing forms of community. Even within geographical boundaries, people can't be forced to group; instead they are motivated via their existing interests, networks and social journeys. Many groups and associations already exist that strengthen relationships, encourage feelings of belonging and create 'social capital'. We refer to these groups as 'the hidden wealth of communities': groups that generate for both members and non-members a wealth of social and public good that is often intangible and unquantified. This paper surveys the group leisure and social pursuits that commonly encourage us to join or create our own associations or clubs, and analyses the potential for a greater 'club-culture' in the UK.

We argue that provoking group instead of individual behaviours, and using groups and clubs to draw in further participation, should be central to initiatives across a range of policy areas.

Not all club activity needs to lead towards 'civic action in order to be of value. But the potential for social and membership activities to 'spin-out' and become catalysts for civic activity and public good is evident. Often, clubs provide a notable framework for public policy objectives. Clubs and membership activities generate sentiments of trust, reciprocity and purpose, which pass more easily from member to member than if all were acting alone. Such 'norms' can and do spur members into social action, such as voluntary work or charitable giving.

Chapter One: The hidden wealth of casual connections describes the nature of 'club-type' activities in further detail. Social activities for which citizens agree to regularly congregate play a wider but less visible role in society than volunteering and democratic engagement. Memberships help us to form and foster trusting relationships, build social networks, and create contagious attitudes of engagement that enable civil society to thrive. Clubs, associations and the activities that emulate them are also tried and trusted for combating loneliness, improving wellbeing and building resilience against civil disorder.

We argue that proper regard for the current and untapped value of club-type activities can bring great benefits to society – but with it comes a set of responsibilities. Those who expect citizens to engage in extra voluntary and charitable activity must help create suitable conditions for them to do so. Only then can such an expectation be considered reasonable. Policy changes at a national and local level are, however, too often introduced with little or no regard for how they damage or improve sources of social value.

Our case studies demonstrate that the contagious attitudes of engagement found in clubs can not only generate hidden wealth, but also create 'spin-offs' of social value: benefits which spill over into the wider community, i.e. when social goods become springboards for public good.

Chapter Two: The role of membership and leisure activities in community cohesion, tackling loneliness and improving wellbeing, recognises that regular mixing and meeting with others builds resilience against civil disorder and improves well-being. It draws on the 'purposive' and 'pooling' aspects of club activities, whether sport, bingo or arts activities, and the enthusiasm which propels this social mixing also has potential to fuel social action. Club activities also play an important role in combating loneliness, particularly among older people; informal social interaction has also been found to act as a 'buffer' against fear and mistrust in neighbourhoods.

The connections that people make during certain activities are by definition more casual than those made in more formal situations, such as at work. Many leisure and social clubs are often also more inclusive and commonly accessible than the more exclusive, single-interest pursuits such as interaction with close friends and family. In this sense they generate 'casual bonds', which are important to building informal social networks.

Chapter Three: The changing face of social clubs points to interesting recent developments which show that the engaged consumer and the active citizen are not necessarily mutually exclusive: both are often situated within membership frameworks. 'Commercial' activity can often be used to cultivate social value seen in more group structures.

The rise of the internet also marks important developments in the way that groups form, aggregate and sustain themselves. However, to avoid the danger of face-to-face clubs being replaced by online networks, digital inclusion policies should aim to 'nudge' new users towards face-to-face interactions with other people they meet online. Co-ordinated, aggregated online platforms which use innovative technology such as mobile apps should be used to interface voluntary, community and leisure activities with commercial and public service information, to provide a holistic picture of local communities and encourage 'cross pollination' of interests.

Chapter Four: Hot-housing a culture of clubs, explores the factors that make some membership environments more successful than others. Accessible space is highlighted as a crucial resource for clubs to become sustainable. The government have widely endorsed multi-purpose town centres that move beyond their retail function, as led by Mary Portas' independent review of the high street. In an age where the church and village halls are often no longer used as the central hub for local communities, other spaces have taken on the function of community space. Bingo halls, laundrettes and commercial premises, such as cafes and leisure centres, are all used for social activity alongside as their primary function. This chapter addresses the ways in which we can democratise and innovate the use of shared space for social purpose, providing a number of insights for public policy initiatives, as well as providing an ideal for private companies to contribute to the social networks and

local communities within which they operate. If a town centre is to be truly multi-functional, initiatives such as the 'Town Teams' pilots should not be solely based on retail or public service interests, but also include representatives of community groups, clubs and societies.

Finally, although many of the benefits of club cultures are anecdotal, there are definable traits that pinpoint their transformation from social into public good. Shared interests are as important as residential location in grouping for a social purpose. With this in mind, adult social care personal budgets could potentially be channelled toward club-type activities. Increasingly, budget holders are pursuing club-type behaviour, and future initiatives should actively encourage both new membership structures and existing clubs to 'incubate' personal budget pools such as shared transport services. The Government's Giving agenda too, can learn valuable lessons from club models and the enthusiasm generated from shared interests. To access and encourage civic activities, we need to draw on what is important and relevant to people in promoting further engagement.

The conclusions of this paper draw together our proposition that healthy, active communities cannot be defined by volunteering statistics, public service delivery or economic activity alone. National and local policy makers, community leaders and business representatives must acknowledge the inter-related nature of local social activity - which is often a hybrid of group affiliations and club memberships, consumer preferences, and informal bonds.

To these ends, localism should not be limited to a residential basis, but also concentrate on where people spend their time. Policy should look beyond traditional infrastructure and institutions given that objectives can often be met by other, self-selected activities. Partnerships between existing groups that already represent users and members are key to this, and the multi-purpose spaces and activities should be overseen by local associations representing a number of interests which cut across a range of sectors and interest groups, including the more informal social and leisure pursuits. Communication is also vital, and the development of new types of local media outlets will be fundamental to increasing local participation in engagement opportunities across the board.

Because of the self-selected nature of these activities and groups, they often can't be created by governments. However, where they do exist, they need more recognition, support networks and encouragement to flourish on a national basis. To this end, by aligning policy priorities with the recognition of the club-culture which already exists and how it can be nurtured, demonstrable results for social and public good will follow.

Introduction

The concept of 'community' has become increasingly pertinent to public policy in recent years. The Coalition Government's 'Big Society' narrative, as well as the localism agenda, puts a huge emphasis on community and instances where people group together around a common cause. But what does this actually mean? From the various groups making up a geographical social fabric, to civic participation, to service delivery, the term has a number of different meanings and contexts. At what point does 'association' become a 'community'?

'Communities' are broadly defined by psychologists as a set of people with 'some kind of shared element'.¹ Such elements could include almost anything from the place members live to their interests, beliefs or values. Seen in this way, we typically belong to multiple communities, including neighbourhoods as well as any number of social, leisure or interest groups. Our 'sense of community', however, varies significantly according to how much choice we had in joining that community, according to research by community psychologists. Compared with communities whose identity is tied to neighbourhood or place, interest groups such as religious associations and sports clubs foster a relatively greater sense of community with corresponding stronger emotional connections and feelings of both fulfilment and influence. This report argues that the stronger community feeling associated with groups which citizens attend out of self-interest – e.g. 'club-type' activities – helps motivate the kind of social action that the Government wants to encourage.

Therefore the scope of this project is to:

- i) Analyse the social value of 'club-type activity';
- ii) Identify where and how this can be activated, nurtured and converted into civic engagement and public good.

This project examines 'community' in what may be considered broad terms, that is, the social capital engendered by group association. Yet it simultaneously has a narrow focus by surveying more specifically the concept of membership and belonging in modern society in the context of a parallel decline in traditional models of association and levels of trust in society.

Recent research points to plunging levels of public trust in both businesses and government.² Just 38% of 200 'informed'³ members of the public told researchers of the Edelman Trust Barometer (2012) that they trusted the UK government compared with 43% the previous year. Trust in business fell even further, from 44% in 2011 to 38% this year. More than 70% of respondents said that companies should be involved in solving social and environmental problems. The public expects businesses to act ethically and 'help local communities' according to Ed Williams, Edelman's UK chief executive: "This is the difference between trusted and distrusted companies".⁴

1 Obst, P. and White, K. (2007) 'Choosing to belong: The influence of choice on social identification and psychological sense of community' in *Journal of Community Psychology* 35(1), pp. 77-90.

2 The Edelman Trust (2012) The Edelman Trust Barometer 2012 [Online] Available at: www.slideshare.net/fullscreen/EdelmanInsights/2012-edelman-trust-barometer-global-deck/5 [Accessed 31 January 2012].

3 The Edelman Trust defines 'informed members of the public' as college-educated, in the top quartile for household income, people who follow news and public policy affairs several times a week.

4 The Edelman Trust (2012) *Levels of trust hit new lows among UK public, survey finds* [Online] (Updated 24 January 2012) Available at: www.edelman.co.uk/2012/01/levels-of-trust-hit-new-lows-among-uk-public-survey-finds/ [Accessed 31 January 2012]

Religious participation has also nosedived in the UK. In 2010, half of respondents to the British Attitude Survey said they followed no religion compared with 31% in 1983.⁵ 56% said they never attend a religious meeting in 2010 – a drop of seven percentage points from 1990. The overall decline in participation was concluded to be largely due to the increasing rejection of religion by younger generations. In 2010, 65% of 18 to 24 year olds said they did not belong to a religion, compared with 31% of respondents aged between 65 and 74.

Traditional forms of secular association have also declined. The number of traditional working men's clubs plunged from 4,000 in 1974 to half that amount in 2012.⁶ A further five clubs close each week. Membership of the Federation of Women's Institutes has more than halved from 442,000 in 1972⁷ to 210,000 today.⁸

Against this backdrop, we are looking at contemporary group association and the circumstances in which association within communities thrive. How can the lessons learned from successful examples of 'club-culture' be used to make suggestions and recommendations for national policy priorities and civic ideals?

There is a clear 'civic deficit' in the UK, exemplified by poor levels of participation at the voting booth as well as areas of public life. Only 4% of people are involved in running a service in their community, according to figures cited in one study. Nearly half the voluntary hours within the UK are provided by a civic core, which represents only 8% of the adult population.⁹ However, as our Civic Limits report pointed out, engagement must continually compete with other types of activity. Consequently, by examining the incentives and motivation behind club participation and social activity we can gain valuable policy lessons.

There is much other work (such as ResPublica's Civic Limits: How much more involved can people get?¹⁰) on public engagement in 'civic' activity, such as volunteering and participation in local government, but this project takes a deliberate focus on the more informal aspects of association. In surveying what we call 'club-culture' in the UK, we explore how group leisure and social pursuits that commonly encourage us to join or create our own associations or clubs, i.e. 'civil' society rather than 'civic' society.



'Civil' society and 'Civic' Society

The phrases 'civic society' and 'civil society' are often used interchangeably to refer to spheres of activity and association outside of government and primarily economic activities. In this paper we draw a distinction between the two terms, taking 'civil' society as a reference to 'community life' in a broad sense, outside of processes relating to those under the responsibility of government, and including social interaction in the private realm. On the other hand, 'civic' society describes the engagement of organisations and the public in local government, activism, and volunteering, and includes formally constituted groups, NGOs, and some businesses such as non-profits and social enterprises.

The 'Big Society' articulates an important culture change, but in its implementation the Government has risked conflating the diverse meanings of 'community' into one, silver-bulleted solution to social ills. Criticisms of the agenda have arisen in part because policy makers have not effectively mapped out the steps needed to generate and replicate the enthusiasm and civic spirit needed. Government should not seek to create a 'Big Society' from scratch, but should look instead to prevailing and successful models, including those below the radar, or seen to be 'outside the realms' of normal policy-making. Social good best flourishes within already-existing forms of communities. Even within geographical boundaries, people can't be forced to group; there has to be some motivation behind their existing interests and social journeys.

The demise of traditional models of association has in no way dampened our appetite for clubs. People have found new ways of regularly congregating as we reinvigorate old ones. Small group activity has, in fact, enjoyed something of a revival, increasingly gathering individuals through common causes, hobbies, desires, actions and beliefs more than we admit to know.¹¹ Some traditional games such as bingo have adapted successfully to attract new faces from broader cross sections of society. Informal associations have started out by gathering in traditional and newly created public spaces, such as libraries and art centres that have adopted 'open lobby' policies.

5 Lucy L. (2011) *Losing Faith*, NatCen Social Research: British Attitudes Survey [Online] Available at: http://ir2.flife.de/data/natcen-social-research/igb_html/pdf/chapters/BSA28_12Religion.pdf [Accessed 31 January 2012].

6 Cherrington, R. (forthcoming) *Not Just Beer and Bingo: the story of working men's clubs*.

7 Paul H. The Office for National Statistics (2003) 'The role of social capital' in *Social Trends* No. 33: 2003, London: The Stationary Office.

8 The Womens Institute (2012) *About the WI* [Online] Available at: <http://www.thewi.org.uk/about-the-wi> [Accessed 31 January 2012].

9 Sam M. & Benedict D. (2011) *The Civic Pulse: measuring active citizenship in a cold climate*, London: RSA

10 Wilson, R. Leach, M. et al. (2011) *Civic Limits: How much more involved can people get?* London: ResPublica

11 Hemming, H. (2011) *Together: how small groups achieve big things*, London: John Murray.

Leisure, sports and other group social pursuits commonly encourage us to join or create our own associations or clubs. Such pastimes have obvious attractions and benefits for individual members: they can be challenging, rewarding, and are almost certainly fun. Activities for which citizens agree to regularly congregate, however, play a wider but less visible role in society. They help us to form and foster trusting relationships and create contagious attitudes of engagement which help our civic society to thrive. Clubs, associations and activities which emulate them are also tried and trusted forum for combating loneliness, improving wellbeing and building resilience against civil disorder.

Informal social and membership behaviours can lead to further purposive interaction based on common interest in various ways, such as participation in local campaigns, responses to Government consultations, health and social care drives, volunteering and philanthropic giving, and even mutual ownership of community ventures such as fan-owned football clubs.

It will be seen that the impetus and enthusiasm for social and membership activities can 'spin-out', catalysing civic activity and public good. This is not to say that all social activity should purposefully aim to convert into civic action, but rather that some types of social activity can become a good practice example for policy objectives.

This paper pinpoints five aspects of club-type activities that we believe make them exemplary models for civil society. Associative activities that bear these hallmarks also have an important influence on our behaviour. They generate sentiments of trust, reciprocity and purpose, which pass more easily from member to member than if all were acting alone. Such 'norms' can and do spur members into social action, such as voluntary work or charitable giving. These ideal aspects of club-type activities are:

- Pooling;
- Purposive;
- Self-perpetuating;
- Inclusive; and
- Casual-bond building.

The significance of these will become clear in this and subsequent chapters. In essence, the ideal club-type activities draw people together for a specified purpose, encourage regular attendance through its 'membership effect', are open to all and facilitate the kind of casual bonds that allow us to build large informal social networks.

In surveying a number of examples, the paper highlights ideal features of places that encourage citizens to club together; situations that facilitate the kind of DIY attitude towards engagement which can help our civil – and civic – society thrive.

1 The hidden wealth of casual connections

Social activities, where people agree to regularly congregate, play a wider but less visible role in society than volunteering and democratic engagement. As will be outlined, engagement in the former may result in greater participation in the latter. Social memberships help us to form and foster trusting relationships, build social networks, and create contagious attitudes of engagement which help our civil society thrive. Clubs, associations and activities that emulate them are also tried and trusted for combating loneliness, improving wellbeing and building resilience against civil disorder.

“The personal relationships which are accumulated when people interact with each other in families, workplaces, neighbourhoods, local associations and a range of informal and formal meeting places “

Office for National Statistics’ definition of social networks

According to David Morris and Alison Gilchrist at the RSA, social networks develop within ‘communities of place’ and link people with shared interest. They identify several key locations where leisure activities take place as particularly significant crucibles of social networks, whereby “[l]ocal pubs, sports clubs and other community bases are important in establishing and maintaining connections”.¹²

Social network research has developed practical methods in order to map, measure and identify the different kinds of connections which citizens make with each other. This approach offers policy makers the tools to keep tabs on the size, shape and health of civil society and so of the size, shape and health of the ‘Big Society’ itself. If social capital is the currency of the Big Society and social networks its reserves, then network analysis seems a good way to identify where our ‘hidden wealth’ resides. Social capital, social networks and the Big Society already exist. They just need to be replenished, protected and expanded.

1.1 Valuing club-type activities

The ‘hidden wealth’ of club-type activities is by nature less obvious than market-based exchanges. Accounting for their social value is therefore more challenging than commercial and public service-related issues. This report makes the case for a greater recognition and understanding of the visible and ‘hidden wealth’ of club-type activities and the crucibles of casual connections where such value accrues.

There is nevertheless identifiable evidence underpinning our support of the club model. Membership of sports’ clubs in particular is strongly correlated with levels of social trust in the UK, according to Liam Delaney and Emily Keaney.¹³ Sports attract more volunteers than any activity other than religion. Individuals involved in sports organisations – both as members and as participants – are also more likely to participate in the political process.

Clubs provide safe meeting places for members to associate in a safe environment. Many also attract individuals from a broader demographic than those who gravitate towards more official community-based activities. They are the social mixing melting pots for people who would not otherwise meet: what we are calling ‘crucibles of casual connections’. Club and club-type activities are also beneficial for the way they attract regular rather than one-off attendance.

¹² Morris and Gilchrist (2011) *Communities Connected: inclusion, participation and common purpose*, RSA: London

¹³ Delaney, L. & Keaney, E. (2005) *Sport and Social Capital in the United Kingdom: statistical evidence from national and international survey data*, London: IPPR.

In his book *Unanticipated Gains*, Mario Small argues that the way people make social connections relates primarily to their participation in routine rather than one-off activities. His research focuses on the context of human interaction rather than the nature of the connection itself. A common focus or topic of shared attention is more likely to build relationships and trust, he concludes. Small suggests that it is the cumulative effects of these micro processes which have the potential to improve both individual life chances and social inequality.¹⁴

These traits appear typical of clubs which by their nature aim to encourage the regular attendance of members who share a common focus or interest. Dr Ruth Cherrington, a sociologist who has studied working men’s clubs extensively, believes that traditional clubs are an ideal model for strengthening our civil society in the age of austerity.

“Clubs are an excellent model for volunteering and the Big Society. Although they are in decline they are still doing a lot and are fighting back. Many were set up when there was no welfare state so if people fell on hard times they looked after each other: it was self-help. Communities were doing it all in their own time for nothing. If anyone wanted to raise some money, they raised it themselves for trips and activities, annual outings, parties, trips away for people who were sick. Despite this, clubs have been largely overlooked. People think that it is all beer and bingo and nothing else.”

Dr Ruth Cherrington author of the forthcoming book, *Not Just Beer and Bingo: the story of working men’s clubs*.

We argue that proper regard for the current and untapped value of club-type activities can bring great benefits to society – but that it also brings responsibilities. Those who expect citizens to engage in extra voluntary and charitable activity must help create suitable conditions for them to do so. Only then can such an expectation be considered reasonable. Policy changes at a national and local level are, however, too often introduced with little or no regard for how they damage or improve sources of social value.

This lack of recognition has at times choked the capacity of club-type activities to create hidden wealth. A stronger political will to address these problems will safeguard membership organisations for the future, ensuring that social value gains in this field are preserved and even increased.

Our test cases show that the contagious attitudes of engagement found in clubs can not only generate hidden wealth, it can also create ‘spin-offs’ of social value: benefits that spill over into the wider community, *i.e. when social goods become springboards for public good*.

¹⁴ Small, M. (2009) *Unanticipated Gains: origins of network inequality*, New York: Oxford University Press.

1.2 Springboards for social value and public good

An instance of 'public good' occurs when association becomes worthwhile not just for those involved, but for the wider community. A challenge for local government is to ensure that places where citizens congregate can function as a public rather than just a social good.¹⁵

The valuable nature of social activity in civil society has long been acknowledged by policy makers. The worth of relationships and the societal 'norms' that they sustain - such as trustworthiness or 'attitude of engagement' - have become known as 'social capital'. Such norms reflect our shared attitudes toward acceptable behaviour;¹⁶ they help explain why such behaviour becomes contagious.¹⁷ Although the term 'social capital' has circulated for decades, it was most recently revived by Professor Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*, a book charting the demise of civil society in the US.¹⁸

“Social capital refers to connections among individuals, social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness than arise from them. Trustworthiness lubricates social life.”

Professor Putnam on social capital in *Bowling Alone*

Our understanding of how and why social capital is generated, measured and mapped has grown in sophistication since the publication of Putnam's book. The value of social capital within communities is now also known as 'hidden wealth'; its national net worth estimated to exceed the UK's GDP. This wealth encompasses the 'world of relationships and habits' we share with family, friends and strangers, according to David Halpern.¹⁹ Our investment in friendships, casual acquaintances and gift-based exchanges contribute towards an 'economy of regard', the poorly recognised cousin of its financial counterpart.

This deeper understanding of social value is driven by at least three good reasons. The first is the pressing need to reconnect communities blighted by declining levels of trust and social fragmentation – as highlighted by the 'Broken Britain' rhetoric. The age of austerity has also created the need for a more active civil society; for citizens to become more 'pro-social', as Matthew Taylor has described.²⁰

“In order to close the “social aspiration gap” – the gap separating the society we say we want and need, from the one we have based on our current behaviour – citizens will need to be more engaged, more resourceful and more pro-social.”

The Civic Pulse: Measuring Active Citizenship in a Cold Climate

15 Rowson et al. (2010) *Connected Communities: how social networks power and sustain the Big Society*, London: RSA.
 16 Office for National Statistics (2012) *Guide to Social Capital* [Online] Available at: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/user-guidance/social-capital-guide/the-social-capital-project/guide-to-social-capital.html> [Accessed 31 January 2012].
 17 Cabinet Office (2010) *Mindspace: influencing behaviour through public policy*, London: Cabinet Office.
 18 Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone*, New York: Simon & Schuster.
 19 Halpern, D. (2010) *The Hidden Wealth of Nations*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
 20 Sam M. and Benedict D. (2011) *The Civic Pulse: measuring active citizenship in a cold climate*, London: RSA.

The difficult fiscal environment will continue to curb considerably the state's ability to act itself. These factors alone have prompted policy makers to examine how civil society can be strengthened and harnessed for social good. The final reason to develop social capital theory derives from the difficulties presented by the very notion itself. As an analytical device, it has been rightly criticised for failing to adequately account for the sheer complexities of human relationships: how they may harm as well as help, what shape they take and where they are played out.

Economist Ben Fine, one of the theory's fiercest critics, describes the concept as a "totally chaotic, ambiguous and general category that can be used as a notional umbrella term for almost any purpose."²¹ Extra layers of sophistication have therefore been built into social capital theory to deal with such concerns. Our excavation of these layers will help us to identify the five key characteristics of ideal informal activities.

The importance of hidden wealth to communities is not just championed by academics operating in a vacuum. Chapter Two describes how scientific research has found that meeting and mixing friends and families is essential for our mental wellbeing. The Office for National Statistics is taking steps to gauge its level in society. Social capital has also more recently been described as a keystone of commercial success. In her recent report into the future of high streets, consultant Mary Portas describes investment in social capital as a prerequisite to the restoration of the country's troubled commercial sector.²²

“Once we invest in and create social capital in the heart of our communities, the economic capital will follow.”

The Portas Review: an independent review into the future of our high streets

The Coalition Government's Big Society project and its Broken Britain rhetoric have also prompted a policy emphasis on social capital. The Prime Minister has recognised how the expansion of civil society he wants to preside over requires citizens to become better connected. He defined the Big Society as primarily about "bringing people together to improve their lives and the lives of others."²³

Creating more cohesive communities is a key policy agenda for the whole of Britain. The reasons behind the declining levels of trust and increased social fragmentation that characterises some of our communities are complex; they will be examined in more detail in Chapter Two. The August 2011 riots have however demonstrated that, regardless of party politics, rebuilding our civil society is vital to the future of the country.

21 Cited in Halpern, D. (2005) *Social Capital*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
 22 Portas, M. (2011) *The Portas Review: An independent review into the future of our high streets*, London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.
 23 Cameron, D. (2011) *Have no doubt, the Big Society is on its way* [Online] (Updated 12 February 2011) Available at: www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/12/david-cameron-big-society-good [Accessed 30 May 2012].

The central role played by *civic* association in cultivating engaged and connected societies is recognised by official research. For example, a Communities and Local Government study points to social capital's role in addressing a raft of social problems: "Community ties, social reciprocity and civic engagement are particularly important to address contemporary health, skills and environmental challenges."²⁴

However, a policy divide has developed between this rhetoric of support for civic association and the initiatives and concrete policies needed to catalyse, sustain and expand activities that bring citizens together. The Government's ambition for an expansion of civil society and its efforts to fix 'Broken Britain' should be matched by a recognition of activities that generate social value in all sectors, not just the public sector, and commitment to supporting and enabling these.

1.3 Learning from popular pursuits

This report argues that one practical way of increasing participation is by learning from examples of citizen participation in clubs. A greater understanding of activities with thriving levels of participation can inform efforts to revitalise those that have withered. We also highlight the potential for these success stories to platform public goods. The state's role in all this then becomes one of recognition and support for these activities.

In addition to the significant leverage given to voluntary organisations in the context of the 'Big Society' agenda, the Government's Giving strategy has paid increasing attention to the varied ways individuals can contribute to society, beyond the charitable giving model alone. This Cabinet Office Green Paper and the subsequent White Paper on Giving recognised the giving of time, beyond formal volunteering situations to informal donations of time such as helping neighbours or strangers. Yet according to international comparisons, the UK is ranked only 29th internationally for 'giving time' and ties in 26th place for 'helping strangers'.²⁵

The average UK citizen spends nearly 17 hours a week watching TV, but only one hour engaged in formal voluntary work.²⁶ The Cabinet Office have focused on laudable initiatives to 'get people involved' and donate their time to society; but it has largely done so in a way that focuses on individual contributions and not on the 'group-on' effect harnessed by an associational approach to giving.

²⁴ Cited in Rowson et al. (2010) *Connected Communities: how social networks power and sustain the Big Society*, London: RSA.

²⁵ Charities Aid Foundations (2010) *World Giving Index*, London: Charities Aid Foundation.

²⁶ Office for National Statistics (2005) *Time Use Survey* [Online] (Updated 19 July 2006) Available at: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=7> [Accessed 3rd March 2012].

We have identified five ideal aspects of club-type activities which provide a model framework for group association, and which should be borne in mind when evaluating their hidden wealth. Club-type activities are:

Pooling

The popularity of club-type activities makes them ideal fora for connecting people. They gather large numbers of members in one place: they are pooling. Such group pursuits are also enjoyable: people flock regularly to sports clubs, leisure centres, bingo clubs, hobby groups and other such public spaces out of want rather than obligation.

Purposive

Communities that coalesce around common interests therefore have an increasingly important role in creating networks that were traditionally fostered by belonging to a neighbourhood, Obst and White conclude. These findings have important implications for governments keen to encourage social action.

In many if not most cases, social and leisure activities do not imply aimless enjoyment or lack of purpose; rather, membership is often aligned with self-improvement and a sense of achievement. Often there is also an element of 'healthy competition' between either between members, or between the club and other competing clubs, or both.

Self perpetuating

The rewarding nature of club-type activities and the 'membership effect' makes them self-perpetuating; they drive regular, enthusiastic attendance. Club membership also generates a sense of ownership and belonging, which means that attendance at paid activities is much more than a basic commercial transaction. Rather, membership is based on a common purpose and trust.

Inclusive

Club culture is associated with a heightened sense of community, according to psychologists. Such a sense of community not only helps motivate social action but is also likely to catch on among communities' members like any other socially acceptable norm. Community psychologists Patricia Obst and Katherine White found that 'self-selecting' interest groups, such as sports clubs and religious associations, enjoy a greater sense of community compared with communities in which members' common element is their neighbourhood: "Although there can be a degree of choice in where we live, a number of factors such as financial, practicality, work and family related factors impinge on our decision."²⁷

During the course of this project it has been drawn to our attention a number of times that cultivating a sense of membership usually requires a sense of 'us' and 'other', therefore excluding non-members. We argue however, that this is the case with all groups and affiliations, and by contrast social clubs imply inclusion based on shared interest rather than

²⁷ Obst, P. and White, K. (2007) 'Choosing to belong: the influence of choice on social identification and psychological sense of community' in *Journal of Community Psychology*, 35(1), pp 77-90.

other, more arbitrary factors. In Chapter Four we address the expectations of inclusion and reciprocity that should be taken into account when clubs are perceived as contributed to social and public good.

Casual bond-building

Clubs are arguably better at bringing divided communities together than the 'strong ties' between close friends and family.²⁸ In this sense they are 'casual bond' building, generating associative behaviour between the lesser acquainted and those who may not mix further outside the boundaries of the club itself. In this sense also, clubs are inclusive by not requiring more formal bonds or mutual interaction.

We are purposefully departing from the common blame-game approach of putting poor levels of participation down to apathy or disillusionment with the political process. Without disregarding these explanations, our more positive stance aims to address the problem of poor public participation rather than explore its history. There are good reasons to think that the 'formal' state can learn much from the way citizens choose to participate in 'informal' activities. From this stems insights into the way social value is articulated and understood, how wider public policy can learn from 'club culture', and the role for commercial enterprises in converting social and commercial to public good.

The self-perpetuating and pooling aspects of associative activities are what help make them ideal environments from which social action of a more altruistic nature can flow. Individuals can achieve more when acting as part of a group instead of alone; regular attendance ensures a steady accumulation of social capital and an attitude of engagement and inclusiveness which can catch on amongst other members.



Recommendation:

Social and public policy initiatives should recognise the wealth of participation in 'club-type' social and leisure activities, and take into account these frameworks when administering policies at a local level. When implementing policies aimed at individuals, policy-makers should take into account their relevance to group association.

The next chapter will examine the latter two characteristics of club-type activities as fundamental to community cohesion, resilience and wellbeing.

2 The role of membership and leisure activities in community cohesion, tackling loneliness and improving wellbeing.

The UK has seen a steady erosion of the formal and informal social networks which help create a sense of trustworthiness and salve loneliness. The picture across the country is, of course, complex: some communities are more cohesive than others; the worst show worrying signs of fragmentation. The causes of this erosion are equally elaborate. Significant social and demographic shifts and recent events like the August 2011 riots, however, give vital clues as to why our collective capacity to generate social capital has diminished.

Family networks are increasingly dispersed as children move ever greater distances from their parents. Older people in rural areas are left isolated through lack of transport; those in deprived urban areas live in fear of leaving their homes. Greater longevity leaves people living alone for longer, a widening equality divide has fostered resentment and the internet revolution has left many behind.²⁹ The value of human relationships has also become increasingly displaced by individualistic consumerism, as the 2011 riots arguably revealed.³⁰

We believe that the club-model of association and the connections it fosters are undervalued sources of much-needed social capital. Clubs can also be excellent repositories for what researchers have pinpointed as a particularly beneficial kind of human relationship for healing our fractured communities. What we are calling ‘casual bonds’: those forged between the lesser acquainted. These are arguably better at bringing divided communities together than the ‘strong ties’ between close friends and family.³¹ Club-type activities will be shown to be excellent but often unrecognised builders of casual bonds.

Membership pursuits can succeed in improving community cohesion in ways that official efforts are unlikely to envisage. This chapter links two characteristics of club-type activity to their capacity to act as springboards for altruistic behaviour: their ‘purposive’ and ‘pooling’ aspects. People mix and meet together for a particular purpose when they play sport, bingo or attend art events; the enthusiasm that propagates this congregation has the potential to fuel social action.

We therefore propose a distinction within social capital thinking to distinguish the kinds of connections we form when engaged in purposive activity and those we make by chance, such as when bumping into friends, family or strangers in the shop. Purposive activities have greater potential than the ‘non-purposive’ type to drive social action and to rebuild social connections that have been allowed to wither.

2.1 Community cohesion and pro-social behaviour

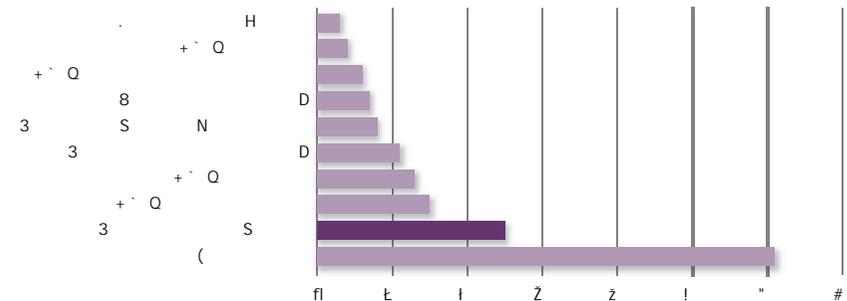
The fraying of traditional social networks, which has resulted from three decades of socio-demographic attrition, is studied extensively in Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*.³² In the UK, similar social tears are described by David Halpern as ‘striking pattern of concerns’ in public opinion. By the mid-2000s, public concern in Britain had become dominated by fear of other people. Fuelled by worries about crime, immigration and terrorism, such fears zoned in on people living in our own communities: ‘those in their midst’, as Halpern puts it. Such a trend has a corrosive effect, creating cracks in our hidden wealth.³³

29 Campaign to End Loneliness (2011) *Safeguarding the Convoy: A call to action from the Campaign to End Loneliness*, Abingdon: Age UK Oxfordshire.
 30 Portas, M. (2011) *The Portas Review: An independent review into the future of our high streets*, London: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.
 31 Rowson et al. (2010) *Connected Communities: How social networks power and sustain the Big Society*, London: RSA.
 32 Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone*, New York: Simon & Schuster.
 33 Halpern, D. (2010) *The Hidden Wealth of Nations*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

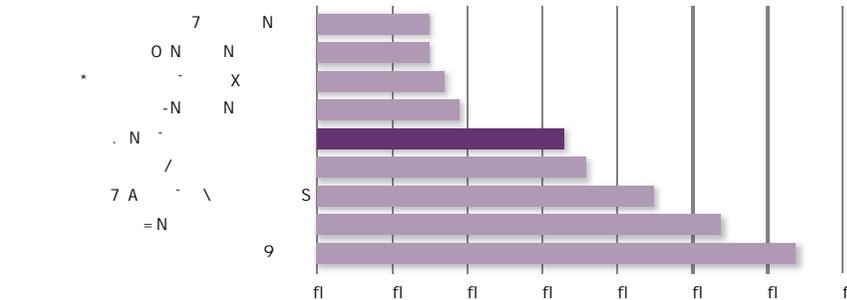
These traces of diminishing trust levels and subsequent social fragmentation were underlying themes of the ‘Broken Britain’ rhetoric. This agenda established a link between the failure of civic institutions and social relationships on the one hand and the relatively poor social outcomes for the worse off on the other,³⁴ filtering into the narratives of politicians, civic leaders and policy makers before the 2010 General Election. Against this contextual agenda, empowering individuals and communities to restore trust and create better connected communities have become public policy priorities.

Lack of social contact was named as the most common barrier to community cohesion by respondents to the government’s citizenship survey 2008/09. A later citizenship survey in 2010/11 found that people who mixed socially with neighbours from different ethnic or religious backgrounds were most likely to do so in groups, clubs or other organisations than in any other purposeful activity. A third of respondents had such contact in this category – twice as many as at places of worship. The ability of casual connections to improve social cohesion is clearly apparent to the public.

Factors perceived to prevent cohesion, 2008/09:



Proportion of people who have mixed socially with people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds in the last month, 2010/11:



34 Blond, P. (2010) *Red Tory: How the left and right have broken Britain and how we can fix it*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

Regular mixing and meeting with others has also emerged as a way of building resilience against significant civil disorder and in improving our well-being. Research into the causes of English riots in 2001 and 2011 point to the devastating consequences of poorly connected neighbourhoods. Analysts commissioned by the official inquiry into the August 2011 riots found that 71% of the disturbances were in areas ranked the worst 10% for social cohesion. Those communities which suffered little or no rioting attributed their resilience to the social capital they had invested in their areas, the report concludes.³⁵

“We heard a number of possible reasons why some communities experienced little or no rioting. These included the level of deprivation, the amount of social capital people had invested in their local communities, the physical environment, transport links and the preventative actions of local services and people. Many people told us in different words that strong community cohesion, shared identity, community pride or having a stake in their local area stopped or reduced rioting in their area: ‘We don’t smash up our own town.’

5 Days in August: an interim report on the 2011 English riots

The interim report also identified concerns about the rise of ‘consumerism’ as a value in society. Such a worry was addressed by Mary Portas in her inquiry into the demise of high streets in the UK. She links the August riots to the ‘radical and profound shift’ in our nation’s value set. “We no longer value the place we live in or the people we live alongside. We no longer value human interaction, socialising or being part of something bigger than ourselves.”³⁶

The link between civil unrest and poorly connected communities was established a decade beforehand in the Cantle report into the riots in Oldham, Bradford and Burnley. The social, cultural and other networks of the diverse community groups living in those areas failed to connect, it found. “These lives often do not seem to touch at any point,” the report concluded; many citizens in those northern towns and cities did not enjoy “meaningful exchanges.”³⁷ The Cantle report also credited social capital as a source of resilience and wellbeing in communities.

“Where social capital exists, it is said that such communities are likely to benefit from lower crime rates, better health, higher educational achievement and improved economic development.”

Community cohesion: a report of the independent review team

The combination of the riots and the loneliness agenda demonstrate the need to recognise and understand the way informal networks form in society, according to David Morris’s and Alison Gilchrist’s recent report for the RSA.³⁸

35 Riots Communities and Victims Panel (2011) *5 Days in August: An interim report on the 2011 English riots*, London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

36 Portas, M. (2011) *The Portas Review: An independent review into the future of our high streets*, London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

37 Cantle, T. (2001) *Community cohesion: A report of the independent review team*, London: Home Office.

38 David, M. and Alison, G. (2011) *Communities connected: Inclusion, participation, and common purpose*, London: RSA.

“Community connections, reaching across place, interests and identity, are largely untapped assets that can promote wellbeing and address social exclusions. The recent incidents of civil disorder that affected a large number of British cities and the stubbornly high number of lonely people serve to highlight the need to address alienation and isolation within communities.”

Communities connected: inclusion, participation, and common purpose

Recreational leisure facilities are already recognised by the government as playing a vital role in teenagers’ lives. The coordination of provision for 13 to 19 year olds is in fact a legal duty for local authorities – and one with which schools, charities and business are expected to assist.³⁹ The government sees such activities as essential for teenagers’ physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. However, club membership rates of young people from households in the lowest income brackets are half that of those from the highest,⁴⁰ which indicates that traditional group association does not stretch sufficiently to the young people most vulnerable to isolation and anti-social behaviour. StreetGames’ projects are an example of sporting activities for young people who feel alienated by the ‘rigid structure’ of traditional sports clubs.

CASE STUDY



StreetGames

Streetgames is a national charity dedicated to developing sport participation within disadvantaged communities, with the aim to provide alternative pathways for young people at risk of offending, increase volunteering and social action and improve well-being. Many programmes across the Streetgames network are designed to tackle anti-social behaviour.

In Wigan over 20 sessions are held per week, providing young people to take part in activities including football, dance and handball. Analysis of data provided by Greater Manchester Police across four areas between 2007-2009 shows a reduction in youth related anti-social behaviour on days when the sessions are delivered. In Goldborne/Lowton, for example, the number of criminal damage offences halved between 5pm and 8pm on Friday evenings, coinciding with the times the sessions are delivered.

Streetgames encourages participants to become involved in sports volunteering. Over 4,000 volunteers have been recruited via general StreetGames sessions.⁴¹

39 Department for Education (2011) *Positive for Youth - executive summary*.

40 Sport England: Active People Survey 4 (2009/10) *Active People Survey 4* [Online] (Updated 16 December 2010) Available at: http://www.sportengland.org/research/active_people_survey/active_people_survey_4.aspx [Accessed 31 January 2012].

41 Streetgames (2011) *Changing sport, changing lives, changing communities: Using sport as a mechanism for tackling anti-social behaviour* [Online] (Updated 22 February 2011) Available at: http://www.streetgames.org/www/sites/default/files/file_attach/streetgames%20briefing%20paper%20-%20changing%20lives.pdf [Accessed 31 May 2012].

2.2 Loneliness and wellbeing

There are further pressing reasons for a stronger emphasis on efforts to encourage social interaction. The first is its role in combating loneliness. The need to help our older population to stay in social contact with their friends and family demands particular attention. Loneliness among older people has become an issue of increasing concern in policy circles. One in 10 older people are in contact with family, friends or neighbours fewer times than once a month.⁴²

Club-type activities can therefore play a significant role in keeping older people connected. This focus on older people is particularly warranted because they make a disproportionately large contribution to the Big Society, as the ResPublica report *Age of Opportunity* discovered.⁴³ Despite this, our older generation remains a massively underutilised population; their huge untapped potential best released through social interactions.⁴⁴

Encouraging citizens to meet and mix is not just seen as a fix for fractured communities. It is also regarded as essential for our health and wellbeing. The idea that creating and fostering connections with family, friends and fellow citizens is good for us is also backed by a wealth of scientific research. A wide-ranging review of mental health and wellbeing by the Government Office for Science - involving 400 leading experts in diverse disciplines from psychiatry and genetics to social sciences - has arrived at a similar conclusion. The *Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing* project, led by the government's chief scientific officer Professor John Beddington, champions efforts to encourage social mixing as demographic and other social factors conspire to pull people further apart.

“The relentless demands for increased competitiveness will combine with changing family commitments, such as the two-earner family and the increasing need to care for older adults. These demands will have major implications for work-life balance and the wellbeing of workers, and have knock-on effects for their families and communities... The evolving mix of cultures, changing family structures and changing patterns of migration, will drive the need to connect better across cultural groups and across generations.”

Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing project, 2008

This authoritative study ranks ‘connecting with others’ as the top of five well-being equivalents of the five fruit and vegetables we need to eat to stay physically well. “Scientific and other evidence shows the importance of social networking in promoting mental capacity and wellbeing in older adults,” it adds. This same evidence indicates that activities that foster social networking through social activities, volunteering and pursuits that allow us to meet frequently with friends and family are all good for the wellbeing of older people.

42 Campaign to End Loneliness (2011) *Safeguarding the Convoy: A call to action from the Campaign to End Loneliness*, Abingdon: Age UK Oxfordshire.

43 Cox, A. (2011) *Age of Opportunity: Older people, volunteering and the Big Society*, London: ResPublica.

44 Foresight Project (2008) *Mental Capital and Wellbeing: Making the most of ourselves in the 21st century*, London: Government Office for Science.

CASE STUDY



Community Impact Bucks

The Pub Lunch Club project aims to tackle social exclusion amongst older people in rural areas with poor public transport links and few public services across Buckinghamshire and rural Milton Keynes. Monthly inexpensive lunches (priced at £6 for three courses) are run in local village pubs, attended by between 20 and 50 attendees on each occasion.

The project is run by Community Impact Bucks, an umbrella body for voluntary and community sector and rural communities, with one part-time project co-ordinator who locates outlets and negotiates lunch deals. On establishing a new club, the project co-ordinator then usually gets in touch with local parish councils, Women's Institutes and other local groups to recruit local volunteers who will help organise the lunches.

Although the clubs are run in small villages, 75% of people attending have met someone in their own village who they have never spoken to before. Just over 30% of people attending have become involved in some other activity or club as a direct result of attending the lunch club.⁴⁵ The project is now seeking to move into more urban areas such as Aylesbury and Wycombe, and organisers are also in discussion with Muslim groups in setting up similar clubs in venues which are suitable for Muslim attendees.

The need to nurture casual connections is also important in urban areas where individuals – particularly older people – often feel most isolated. The interactions we have with our family and friends and during our work and pastimes help make up ‘personal convoys’ that carry us through life; they enable us to live life to the full.⁴⁶ As one in ten older people are in contact with their families less than once a month, regular engagement in informal activities can form a significant part of older people's interactions with their neighbours. Associative pursuits can also help establish support patterns for future generations. Grandparents often take their grandchildren along to bingo, for example.

The ‘Campaign to End Loneliness’ considers that the safeguarding of older people's convoys should be a priority for public authorities seeking to combat loneliness and isolation. The Government's effort to expand the Big Society must reach out to those who are lonely, it adds. This involves safeguarding the kinds of social activities which contribute towards our personal convoys.

45 Community Impact Bucks (2012) *The Pub Lunch Club Project Annual Report January 2012* [Online] Available at: <http://www.communityimpactbucks.org.uk/pages/pub-lunch-club.html> [Accessed 22 February 2012].

46 Campaign to End Loneliness (2011) *Safeguarding the Convoy: A call to action from the Campaign to End Loneliness*, Abingdon: Age UK Oxfordshire.

“Government cannot banish loneliness. But any government intent on making society bigger must help bring out of the shadows those who feel cut off. Central government’s role lies in enabling “life as usual” with all its everyday social connections, and in breaking down the barriers: overcoming poverty, fear of crime, lack of transport, poor health, age discrimination.”

Safeguarding the convoy: A call to action from the Campaign to End Loneliness

Although loneliness can affect anyone in society, older people are arguably more vulnerable as they lose friends and family and their mobility and income declines. Research has also linked lack of social interaction to the onset of degenerative diseases such as dementia - an illness which costs the UK an estimated £23 billion each year.⁴⁷

Prevailing loneliness and isolation demonstrates why the restoration of our social capital stocks is so pressing. Informal social interaction has also been found to act as a ‘buffer’ against fear and mistrust in neighbourhoods.⁴⁸ Research has revealed that some ways of bringing people together may be more effective than others. A greater understanding of the categories of social capital which researchers have identified can help policy makers determine which social activities merit protection and support. This report suggests that club-type activities bear the hallmarks of a particularly beneficial kind of social capital: that of a more inclusive ‘bridging’ type.

Recent government policy has recognised that community association and integration should be part of a pro-active strategy, exemplified by the Department for Communities and Local Government’s report, *Creating the conditions for integration*. The report highlights the role of local communities in encouraging people to find ‘common ground’ between each other.⁴⁹

“...building a more integrated society is not just a job for government. It requires collective action across a wide range of issues, at national and local levels, by public bodies, private companies, and above all, civic society at large.”

Creating the conditions for integration

Announcing this policy in February 2012, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, supported plans to encourage neighbourhood face-to-face interaction via an annual ‘Big Lunch’, drawing local residents together for a street party-type picnic. This is a welcome initiative aimed at encouraging casual bonds within communities, but focuses on group activity as the end result, rather than utilising the potential for coalitions of existing groups to offer a means to achieve greater integration

47 The Alzheimer’s Society (2012) *Facts on Dementia* [Online] Available at: http://alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=535&pageNumber=2 [Accessed 31 January 2012].

48 Cavill, N. Williams, D. et al. (2011) *Making the case for investment in the walking environment: A review of the evidence*, London: Living Streets.

49 Department for Communities & Local Government (2012) *Creating the conditions for integration*.

– such as the community arts group who organised a street party in Toxteth, an inner-city area of Liverpool⁵⁰. Often, strong public policy emphasis on neighbourhood presents the potential danger of ‘crowding out’ the wealth of other community groups that exist beyond neighbourhood divides. Government interventions in encouraging ‘Big Lunch’ style gatherings and others such as street parties and festivals should fully recognise groups like this and the Community Impact Bucks’ Pub Lunch Club as integral to orchestrating events and championing participation and inclusion.

Existing clubs and groups are already pivotal in organising neighbourhood social activities and taking initiatives to fruition. Cases such as these should be actively taken into account when implementing policies – in other words, social groups should be used as springboards for other activities.



Recommendation:

In promoting local activity, the Department for Communities and Local Government should take into account the wealth of clubs and associations that cut across immediate geographical areas, and allow for involvement and engagement from these groups in local initiatives. For example, the ‘Big Lunch’ should specifically aim to involve groups and clubs who meet in the local area as well as local residents.

2.3 Building social bridges

‘Bridging’ social capital is one of two categories identified by Professor Putnam. It exists in contrast with ‘bonding’ social capital, which creates in communities a sense of sticking together rather than generalised reciprocity. Activities generating bonding social capital are inward looking and serve to reinforce exclusive identities rather than the feeling that we are part of a broader community. By contrast, ‘bridging’ social capital is more beneficial in that it brings together a broad range of citizens, creating a general sense of reciprocity and the feeling that we are part of a broader community. Activities that foster such social capital are outward looking and inclusive – open to people across a diverse demographic. Efforts to build this kind of social capital should therefore focus on activities that draw citizens together who would not otherwise meet. Putnam argues that “[t]o build bridging social capital requires that we transcend our social and political professional identities to connect with people unlike ourselves.”⁵¹

50 The Big Lunch (2012) *Previous Big Lunches* [Online] Available at: <http://www.thebiglunch.com/about/previous-big-lunches.php> [Accessed 31 January 2012].

51 Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

The relative merits to society of 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital is contested. While Putnam appears to favour the latter, Halpern suggests that community health requires helpings of both. Rowson et al point to evidence that highly bonded immigrant communities are better at integrating and forming bridging connections with other communities.⁵² Nevertheless, the benefits of the more outward facing 'bridging' social capital remain, whether or not its 'bonding' counterpart plays a more benign role than Putnam originally envisaged.

The most important and interesting ties for policy makers seeking to strengthen fragmented communities are casual ones. This is in part because the poor depend more on strong ties than wealthy cohorts of the population. "The heavy concentration of social energy in strong ties has the impact of fragmenting communities of the poor into encapsulated networks with poor connections", argue Rowson et al, concluding that the lack of casual ties among the poor is one reason why poverty is self-perpetuating.⁵³

Informal situations are excellent generators of bridging social capital and more likely to forge casual social bonds than strong ones. The connections that citizens make at play are by definition more casual than those made in more formal situations, such as at work. Many leisure and social clubs are often also more inclusive and commonly accessible than the kinds of exclusive single-interest pursuits which Putnam claims generate bonding social capital. Arts centres, sports facilities and bingo clubs often draw large groups of people together. Such situations have the capacity to facilitate the creation of large numbers of casual bonds rather than few strong ones.

Sports centres put on a range of activities that encourage social mixing among participants with diverse interests. The range of services available at facilities achieves a 'cross-fertilisation' of communities,⁵⁴ and is widely accessible from most towns and villages in the UK. Most councils operate their own leisure centres; hundreds of other sports facilities are run independently by social enterprises.

Bingo clubs also typify what we are calling 'crucibles of casual connections' - places that regularly bring together large numbers and a diverse demographic of people who would not otherwise meet. Whilst the majority of members are of pensioner age, there is a growing phenomenon in the leisure and entertainment market for younger people too. The game has also been innovated to attract a more diverse demographic, particularly younger people. For "rock'n'roll bingo", song titles rather than numbers are dabbed as members recognise excerpts played by the callers. 'Binglo' nights are carried out in the dark with luminous dabbers to add an extra element of fun. The game has seen a rising proportion of players from more affluent socio-economic backgrounds.⁵⁵ Retail consultant Mary Portas described bingo as a 'brilliant way to bring people together' in her report into how the

52 Rowson et al. (2010) *Connected Communities: How social networks power and sustain the Big Society*, London: RSA.

53 Ibid.

54 Brian Leonard, chief executive of Sporta, at a ResPublica steering group round table.

55 Ernst & Young (2011) *Impact assessment of bingo duty change*.

country's high streets could be rejuvenated.⁵⁶ The game also enjoys widespread support across the political spectrum. MPs from all three main parties last year signed an early day motion to recognise the important social and community role that bingo clubs play in the UK. Signatories include Clive Betts MP, the current chair of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee.⁵⁷

Two further qualities of informal activities make them potentially excellent springboards for more altruistic activity in that they are 'purposive' and 'pooling'. People mix and meet together for a particular purpose when they play sport, bingo or attend art events. The enthusiasm that propagates participants to congregate for leisure activities has the potential to be converted into social action.

It is necessary to distinguish between the kinds of connections we form when engaged in purposive activity from non-purposive types of chance activity, such as bumping into friends or family at the shops or striking up conversations with strangers at bus stops.

These non-purposive casual connections are unlikely to lead to social actions. Their chance nature makes reoccurrence less probable compared with purposive activities that often encourage and drive regular attendance. Non-purposive casual connections are also unlikely to be pooling: they are not characterised by the gathering together of a large number of people.

Purposive casual connections are forged and fostered in situations where people indulge in activities for a particular purpose and social outcome, when engaging in sport or team activities, other competitive games such as bingo, or educational leisure such as arts classes. Our social interactions and expectation of outcome in such situations are in an important sense related to our reasons for being there.

Such social interactions are likely to be repeated when they are an instance of a regular event; they are also pooling by nature as they involve diverse numbers of people gathering together. These two factors combined give them potentially effective platforms for social action such as volunteering and charitable giving. The purpose with which we pursue asocial pursuits can act as reason to collaborate with our counterparts in other types of social action.

These distinctions are not only valuable for policy makers seeking to platform public goods into informal activities. They also strengthen the case for a greater regard for the particular social value of leisure pursuits, which involve us mixing with our fellow citizens. A better recognition of the hidden wealth of informal activities requires this more sophisticated understanding of how casual connections contribute to our national social capital stocks. In December 2011, the Public Administration Select Committee made the recommendation in their 'Big Society' report for "[a]n impact assessment, applied to every Government policy, statutory instrument, and new Bill, which asks the simple question: "what substantively will

56 Portas, M. (2011) *The Portas Review: An independent review into the future of our high streets*, London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

57 Backbingo.com (2011) *Early Day Motion 1919: TAXATION OF BINGO* [Online] (Updated 6 July 2011) Available at: <http://www.backbingo.com/press/early-day-motion-1919-taxation-of-bingo> [Accessed 31 January 2012].

this do to build social capital, people power, and social entrepreneurs?⁵⁸ Leisure pursuits, as ‘crucibles of casual connections’ that are purposive, pooling, and encourage inclusive social mixing, should be recognised and promoted in policy implementation as vehicles for cultivating social value.



Recommendation

National and local governments should extend their considerations of social value from the public sector to other areas, notably shared space and private vehicles that contribute in a significant way to building communities. The Government should enforce the recommendation of the Public Administration Select Committee, for ‘[a]n impact assessment, applied to every Government policy, statutory instrument, and new Bill, which asks the simple question: “what substantively will this do to build social capital, people power, and social entrepreneurs?”’ This should be extended to include a social value impact statement which details how national policy changes can harm or help the hidden wealth in communities.

3 The changing face of social clubs

Traditional and modern clubs commonly combine charitable and social action activities with a commercial function. There is no lack of literature investigating how consumerism has become a strong force in society alongside an increasing public attitude against the power of commercial enterprise. This chapter points to interesting recent developments which show that the engaged consumer and the active citizen are not always mutually exclusive. Ethical spending choices have, of course, been an important factor in the habits of many for decades. We are, however, increasingly seeing ‘commercial’ activity taking an active, purposeful role in cultivating the more traditional aspects of group association.

Meanwhile, the rise of internet has provided a key aggregative function that has changed forever the ways in which groups are formed and maintained. Whilst this has largely been beneficial development for catalysing clubs and associations, there are a few detrimental effects of the internet as a medium that could be seen as crowding out personal engagement, and should be tempered by ongoing emphasis on its potential as a tool for and means to face-to-face interaction.

3.1 From consumers to members

An important premise of this paper is based on a feature of clubs and membership organisations whereby the recognition of mutual benefit leads to peer-to-peer action. Successful commercial campaigns and grouping strategies draw heavily on these effects, and the rise of the modern marketing industry in the 20th century was largely a product of peer-to-peer evaluation based on consumer choices. These factors can be applied to informal clubs and social activities, and developed a step further with what we call the 'subscription effect'.

Membership of a club and/or participation in a purposive activity often requires a formal or informal transaction, whether administrative or financial – and this transaction is converted into a short or long-term agreement. This could be seen as a sophisticated form of consumerism given its potential longevity, which is often the reason for forms of commercial membership. Often these commercial participative structures, as well as being purposive and inclusive in their transactional sense, are pooling, offering a platform for engagement; self-perpetuating, generating a community of enthusiastic participants; and casual-bond building, given that there is a specific impetus for congregation which need not extend into intimacy.

In other words, savvy commercial activities are drawing on the grouping effects and membership ethos through the recognition that these constitute increased value for consumers. Often, these benefits are transposed into wider community gain beyond the membership community.

Gyms, leisure centres and health clubs are excellent examples of subscription or transaction-based membership structures that draw on a 'community function' for a commercial enterprise. Members join on a personal and social basis, usually on the basis of a subscription agreement. Whilst a frequent criticism of gyms is that they are overpriced and provide a value accessible elsewhere (such as outdoor fitness), 12% of the UK's population are registered as a member of a private or public fitness facility.⁵⁹ Gyms and fitness facilities also use sophisticated communications and referral tools, offering members incentives to recommend peers and grow the organisational network through private networks and relationships.

59 The Leisure Database (2011) *The 2011 State of the UK Fitness Industry Report*.

Co-operative business models are a form of commercial enterprise whereby members are afforded a share of profits and a voice in the management or governance of the organisation. The United Nations has designated 2012 the International Year of Co-operatives to highlight the fact that one billion people across the world are members of co-operatives. One such mutual enterprise is The People's Supermarket.

CASE STUDY



The People's Supermarket

The People's Supermarket, based in London's Lambs Conduit Street, is primarily a grocery retail business with 1,000 members. Each member pays a £25 annual membership fee and is obligated to donate four hours of time per month to help run the enterprise, in return for 'members' discounts' on the supermarket's produce. But supplementary to this, members run events around shared interests, such as a pet weekend and beer tasting. These activities broaden the conventional role of shoppers and consumers to interactive, club-type activities. The People's Supermarket also extends its community focus to supporting the long-term unemployed with volunteering opportunities and by working with local young offenders and people with specific social needs.

However, it is not only enterprises that have formalised their membership structures via a business model who draw on a membership ethos amongst customers. Bingo clubs, for example, can take various forms from community groups to a private limited company. Yet across the board they are widely regarded by users and managers as membership organisations. The clubs surveyed as part of this project reported conscious efforts to make members feel safe and welcome, and also encouraged interaction between members and with staff, leading to extended social activity outside of bingo halls. Whilst the vast majority of participants take part for recreational and social purposes, more so than for winning money,⁶⁰ on the rare occasions when gambling does become out of control, members are encouraged by staff and their peers to sign 'Ulysses agreements', banning themselves from taking part in bingo games. Almost 300 members of bingo clubs nationally sign self-exclusion forms.⁶¹ A number of clubs also run extra services for members, such as coach services and subsidised taxis.

These cases represent the potential of commercial functions of various types to spin-out for social good, often recognisable via a membership structure. Beyond their primary purpose and rationale for joining, members receive other tangible and intangible benefits, whilst spin-out goods often reach beyond the member constituency and into the wider local community.

60 NatCen (forthcoming) *Secondary Analysis of the British Gambling, Prevalence Survey: Bingo*.

61 Gambling Commission (2011) *Industry statistics April 2008 to March 2011*.

3.2 From online to face-to-face interaction

The internet has undeniably transformed the nature of club-type activity on a global scale. As an organisational tool, it provides an instantaneous medium for communication, aggregation and recruitment of members. Club websites act not only as sources of information, but as repositories for the group's identity and past interactions, for example via photo galleries.⁶² Sites like meetup.com act as global banks for clubs and associations to help members find and join local or virtual groups at the click of a button; many other such websites succeed in grouping their users to become active participants within a membership framework and ethos. Clearly, the internet has presented simple and low-cost ways for clubs to extend their outreach.

However, there is an identifiable discord between online and face-to-face interactions, whereby online aggregation is not converted into association. This section aims to ascertain why this is, and how the conversion of online groups could be translated into social good in a more tangible sense based on using internet as a tool for knowledge-share and catalyst for face-to-face activity.

The digital revolution has prompted a seismic shift in the way we congregate for club-type activity. Large chunks of leisure time for some demographic groups, particularly the young, wealthy and well-educated, is now spent online; social networking websites accessed from monitors and smartphones have replaced the physical world as participants' principal meeting places.

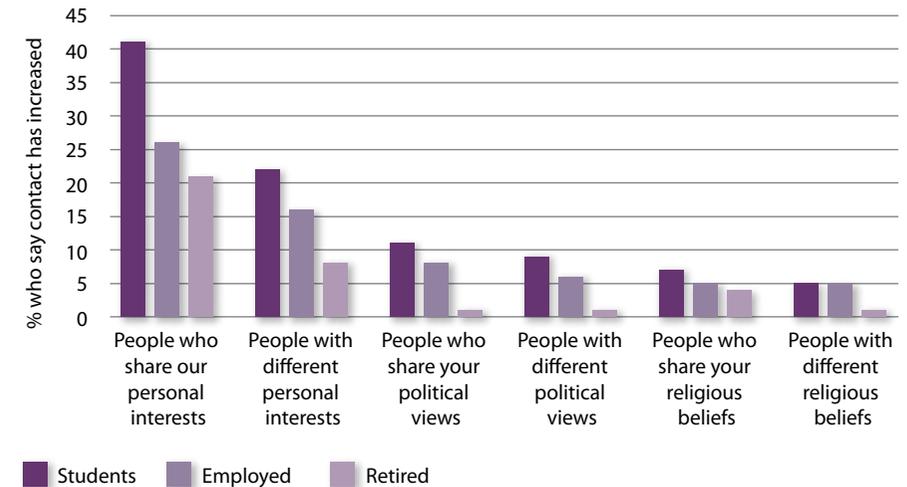
Despite the evident benefits to their survival, the incredible expansion of online social networking groups since the 2000s has also posed certain threats to traditional forms of casual connections. Online social clubs also have the potential to crowd out face-to-face interactions in the physical world. Whilst so-called 'new generation users' who own mobile devices appear 'more sociable' than citizens with no internet access at all,⁶³ there remains a digitally excluded demographic in society. Research into the use of social networking websites by all internet users reveals that although their use shot up from 17% of the population in 2007 to 60% last year, there are some sections of society that are being left behind. While almost 90% of students log on to social networking sites only 15% of the retired population do. The figure for the employed is 62%.

Additionally, the ease with which the internet helps us to join groups sympathetic to our established political or religious views has the potential to limit rather than increase our exposure to diversity. This inward-looking aspect of online interactions makes them big generators of 'bonding' rather than 'bridging' social capital – a process Putnam termed as 'cyber balkanisation' – because social networks allows us to pick and choose friends whose interests match our own. Online applications like Facebook even now allow us to shut out those who we find irritating by simply clicking 'defriend'. Results of the OIS 2011 survey seem to indicate this inward looking 'bonding' rather than the more casual 'bridging' social capital.

62 Hemming, H. (2011) *Together: How small groups achieve big things*, London: John Murray.

63 Dutton, W. and Blank, G. (2011) *Next Generation Users: The internet in Britain*, Oxford: Oxford Internet Institute.

Influence of Internet on Offline Social Networks by Life stage:



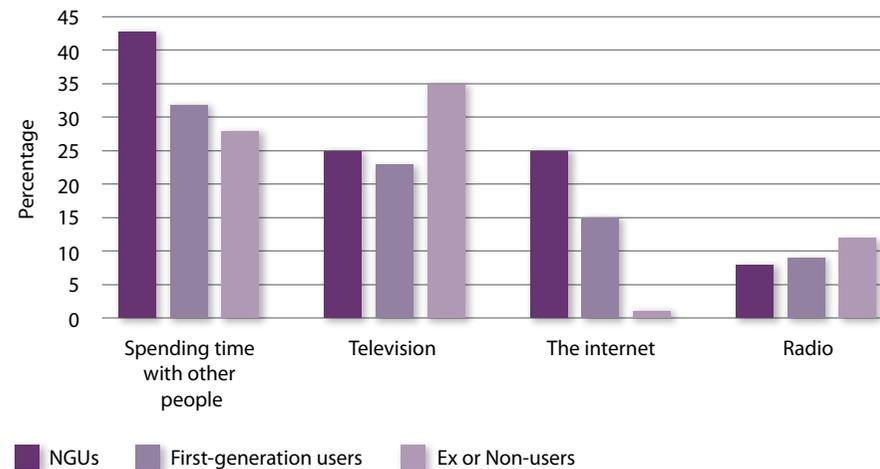
Source: Oxford Internet Survey 2011

Therefore, do steps need to be taken to ensure that internet interaction enhances rather than infringes social and face-to-face activity?

Whilst mainly anecdotal, evidence suggests that retro-leisure club-type activities are more likely to avoid the inward-facing nature of some online social networking websites. Members of 'real-world' clubs are positively choosing to socialise in the real world clubs instead of their online counterparts. For example, only 10% of bingo club members play the game online. Most club members have tried and rejected similar games on the internet, due to the added social value of face-to-face interaction.⁶⁴ The Oxford Internet Survey 2011 suggests that individuals who visit social networking websites – so-called next-generation users, or NGUs – not only significantly expand their circle of friends; they are also more likely to favour face-to-face than online interactions and place a greater premium on socialising than those who had no online access at all. Figures showed that more than half of all internet users who made a connection with someone online met them later in a face-to-face interaction.

64 Paul Talboys, Chief Executive, Bingo Association, speaking at ResPublica steering group roundtable.

Average Importance of Media for Entertainment by Users and Non-Users



Source: Oxford Internet Survey 2011

The results of the OIS 2011 indicate that social activities in virtual and physical worlds are not as mutually exclusive as first feared. Mobile access to the internet in particular appears to encourage rather than crowd out face-to-face encounters. The OIS researchers however warn that the rise of the NGUs threatens to open a 'new digital divide' which again leaves the poorest on the wrong side.⁶⁵

"A major factor related to next generation users is household income. There are next generation users at every income level, but there is clearly a greater proportion of next generation users among the higher income groups in Britain. There is a new digital divide developing in Britain, and other nations, between the first generation users and the next generation users."

Next generation users: the internet in Britain

A better understanding of where the added value of the internet lies will ensure that government and private industry initiatives to close the digital divide and provide the opportunity to increase our national capacity to generate social capital. The Government has established a digital inclusion taskforce to help 17 million UK non-users join the internet revolution - mainly made up of the oldest and poorest section of society. Official efforts to help the 'digitally excluded' must, however, go further than merely hooking them up to the internet. They should also 'nudge' new users towards face-to-face interactions with other people they meet online.

65 Dutton, W. & Blank, G. (2011) *Next generation users: The internet in Britain*, Oxford: Oxford Internet Institute.

University of Michigan Professor, Paul Resnick, argues that the best way to improve social capital in the technologically advanced age is to think about physical and virtual world networks in tandem. Policy makers could talk in terms of 'socio-technical' capital when they seek ways of harnessing technology to create rather than destroy of old forms of social capital, such as associative leisure activities.⁶⁶ Efforts to support and expand activities traditional to terrestrial sources of social capital with the use of technology involve inventing 'new forms of togetherness', and should not risk ignoring the need to think of both in tandem.

"If we do not succeed in creating new forms of socio-technical capital from these new forms of online interactions, our society will decline in its ability to provide emotional support to its members. In the long run, our economy and our health and safety may all be at stake."

Resnick on the risks of ignoring the impact of technology on social capital

Efforts to replenish social capital stocks in the modern world can harness a new approach which takes account of online club-type activity. The current and tremendous potential of social networking sites to connect people is not something that should be ignored. Concerns about the kinds of casual connections that the internet generates or fails to generate, however, raise important questions for those tasked with bringing the digitally excluded online.

Digital inclusion drives provide an excellent opportunity to replenish the social capital deficit. The national 'Go On' Campaign involves pledging time to help internet beginners, whether friends, family or neighbours, to use the internet. However, despite being a high profile nationwide campaign, the website does not directly and pro-actively link those who volunteer with local people in need of assistance. It instead recommends that volunteer 'Digital Champions' search for opportunities via local connections or visit the Do-It.org website, which links to more general volunteering opportunities - requiring further research and commitment from users rather than delivering on the initial pledge of 'helping someone get online'. This seems like a missed opportunity to convert digital inclusion initiatives into real-time, physical connections via a number of channels. The 'Go On' campaign would surely benefit from providing the details of local care homes, libraries, or bingo clubs as places to meet the digitally excluded demographic.

Digital inclusion initiatives should also steer new users to websites and technological innovations that help them to find retro-leisure club-type activities where they can enjoy physical world interactions. Such an approach takes into account both the social value of physical world club-type activities and the capacity of technology to facilitate social interactions.

66 Resnick, P. (2002) *Beyond Bowling Together: SocioTechnical Capital in HCI in the New Millenium ed. by Carroll, M. J.* Boston: Addison-Wesley, pp 247-272.



Recommendation

Digital inclusion initiatives such as the 'Go On' campaign should provide a direct introduction to specific local community groups, charities, individual beneficiaries, and private organisations. The campaign and complementary programmes should emphasise the ways in which digital inclusion can be converted into face-to-face interaction.

The last few years has seen the emergence of local-based software applications (apps), designed for smartphones and other mobile devices as complementary tools to websites. Often low-cost or free for the user to download, there is a prolific market of commercial, tourism and service-based apps based on private, public and user-generated data. Already, a number of new media sites and applications are able to connect people with commercial facilities, services and activities closest to their homes. However, government departments and local authorities have not yet reached a level of technological sophistication comparable with the private sector. This risks leaving 'public' priorities isolated from, and lagging behind, commercial counterparts.

The Government's move to focus on Open Data initiatives indicates increasing recognition of the aggregative capacity of the internet. However, policy efforts are to date reflected in relation to public service personalisation and delivery, highlighting the potential of accessible public data on the NHS, transport, schools and criminal justice as a tool for measuring performance and innovating new services. There is clear scope to integrate information regarding community, voluntary and leisure activities into this framework, in a move towards a 'participative transparency'.

There are already a number of local authority and community group websites which showcase the real potential for further interactive platforms, based on user-led content.

CASE STUDY



A selection of area-based websites and apps

Calendapp Website and iPhone app that maps local and worldwide events, activities and tourist destinations, including concerts, restaurants and museums. Content is user-generated content and can synchronise with Facebook so users can also browse friends' events and invite others to events.

Play-Cricket the ECB's on-line cricket network for all Clubs, Leagues, Cup Competitions and County Boards, providing information and statistics on club cricket. The directory is searchable by type of club or by county.

Join In Local Sport Join In Local Sport is a non-profit organisation backed by the National Governing Bodies of sport and regional and local sporting bodies, aiming to extend participation in sport beyond the Olympic and Paralympic Games by encouraging sports clubs from around the UK to host events and activities on the weekend after the London Games (18th-19th August 2012). The website is searchable by postcode.

Splashpath Website and mobile app for finding local swimming pools and swimming clubs. Allows the user to generate own activity timetable. Also lists live updates from users who have uploaded information on their recent activity, such as number of lengths swum or a specific challenge.

LivingStreets Website and app encouraging walking in local neighbourhoods, allowing individuals and groups to record and compare their walking activity with other members of its online community. The interactive website introduces an element of competition by ranking members according to how far they have walked and aims to encourage further strolls by telling members about their benefits.

The Southwark Circle Membership organisation that links an online community to face-to-face association through platform encouraging Southwark residents to make contact with fellow local residents either around shared interests (such as hobbies) or in relation to certain practical needs (like child care or home care). Members can also get support from dedicated helpers who help out with practical tasks and share their knowledge. Southwark Circle is a community interest company that was set up with funding from Southwark Council. It reinvests any profit in the activities of its members and views online interface as a way of staying connecting and fostering a sense of real community through cooperation and reciprocal help.



Gumtree Extensive online network and app of classified ads, searchable by location or category which includes property, items for sale, job vacancies, services, dating, car pools, skill swaps, sports and social groups. Ads are free to post and the site covers 48 cities across the UK and Ireland, with 13.7 million visitors each month.

Staffordshire County Council Website listing local public services, information for businesses, job vacancies, tourist information and comprehensive information on leisure and culture including a searchable database containing information on over 3,000 clubs and societies in Staffordshire.

Newsome Grapevine Community website featuring information on the Newsome area, including community events, activities and services. Also publicises drop-in sessions where local people help each other with all kinds of technology.

Do-it National database for volunteering opportunities, searchable by interest and location.

North Ayrshire Council 'report and track' Via this app, residents can tell the council about issues such as broken glass and dog-fouling. Users can upload photos, pinpoint an exact location, and keep up to date on the progress of repair.

Yoursquaremile DCLG-endorsed website encouraging local civic action, which aggregates search results from Do-it, Localgiving.com, Fix My Street and Flickr, as well as nearby hyperlocal websites.

Despite the variety of digital and hyperlocal platforms, there remains a dissonance between area-based websites, and other innovations which are usually based on a limited interest-base. For example, many local council authorities provide comprehensive information on their website, but use an outdated 'directory' style for listings rather than using mobile technology or interactive maps. Whilst the Department for Communities and Local Government recently announced plans for an online 'hub' for civic activists, incubated in the YourSquareMile.com website,⁶⁷ this platform only lists local civic activism opportunities, creating a separation from more general social and leisure interests. Too often, 'public' websites require the interested user or potential member to visit a number of different sites for complementary information on their local area.

There is a need for more holistic representation of a local area which draws on technological innovation to create virtuous cycles of online and offline interaction. User-led, open source applications allow new, interactive communication channels to develop in manner similar to online social networks. Co-ordinated, aggregated platforms for a number of apps relevant to services, leisure, volunteering and commercial interests would also allow public and private sector providers of clubs the opportunity to publicise their facilities to new members.

⁶⁷ Newlove, M. H. (2012) *Building Safe, Active Communities: strong foundations by local people*, London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

Aggregated data platforms would help increase exposure and cross-pollination of 'civic' activities such as volunteering with more general social activity. In a similar way to adwords and search engine optimisation mechanisms, aggregative community websites could advertise information on local sports clubs when a user searches for commercial gyms in the area, or volunteering opportunities renovating a community park if a user was an avid gardening club member. They could even be used for connecting agencies to each other, so that clubs can engage in time banking or equipment-sharing activities with other clubs, even if their members do not share similar interests or aspirations.

We envisage that beyond information-sharing alone, this would achieve a 'participative transparency' of data. Alongside the decline of the traditional local newspaper or community circular, technology opens up opportunities to leverage these crucibles of casual connections on a hyper-local basis, leading a new wave of local media that turns information into connections. Online consumers are increasingly accustomed to being exposed to opportunities relating to their interests and preferences. Whilst it is important that the use of digital communications does not lead to the exclusion of some social groups, we should also ensure that the use of outdated information channels does not leave public information channels lagging behind and disjointed from other developments. Without assuming full responsibility for co-ordinating the consolidation of data on comprehensive local services, amenities and social groups, government can take measures to encourage third parties to do so. This could be via calls encouraging the integration of government data with user-led content.



Recommendation:

The Cabinet Office should work with DCLG and DCMS to ensure that the Open Data drive encourages the integration of public data with other private and community information to present a holistic, multi-purpose media platform by local area and achieve a 'participative' rather than passive transparency of data. This could achieve a cross-pollination of complementary social, consumer and civic interests.

4 Hot-housing a culture of clubs

Whilst traditional forms of group decreased during the later party of the 20th Century, this by no means implies that group formation and membership is in decline. Rather, individuals have adapted their group behaviours to changing socio-cultural and technological environments. In this chapter, we will explore the potential for 'hot-housing' a culture of clubs, and the factors that make some membership environments more successful than others.

The value of accessible space is highlighted as a crucial factor for clubs to become sustainable. The potential for space to be converted from commercial to social purpose provides a number of insights for public policy initiatives, as well as providing an ideal for private companies to contribute to the social networks and local communities within which they operate. Finally, although many of the benefits of club cultures are anecdotal and intangible, there are definable traits which pinpoint their transformation from social into public good.

By their very nature, leisure and social activities cannot be forced or implemented via strategic processes. Rather, club-type activities are the result of grouping around interests and social journeys on an informal basis. Whilst there is no silver bullet for making social groups happen, there are a number of identifiable catalysts and enablers. Many clubs – both new and traditional - have adapted successfully to their changing environments, gathering in different ways and locations.

4.1 The value of space

Physical space is clearly relevant in realising our recommendation to convert online and consumer communities into face-to-face purposive activity.

Places where people choose to congregate vary as much as their tastes. Arts and cultural institutions' have a role cultivating a membership culture and shared identities and belonging. The UK's extensive network of libraries are excellent facilitators of club-like associative activity. Leisure centres and bingo clubs are also good examples of commercially-run spaces that are crucibles of casual connections. The Royal Festival Hall's 'open lobby' policy shows how a large art institution and the informal groups that gather there enjoy mutually beneficial relationships.

In an age where the church and village halls are often no longer used as the central hub for local communities, other spaces have taken on the function of community space. Bingo halls, laundrettes, commercial premises such as cafes and leisure centres are all used for social activity as well as their primary function. How can we democratise and innovate the use of shared space?

CASE STUDY



The Royal Festival Hall

Following a major refurbishment in 2007 the Royal Festival Hall became a regular meeting place for a wide assortment of informal groups such as groups of carers, and mothers with their babies and children, easily accommodating wheelchairs, buggies and prams. Young groups of street dancers have started to use the space to practice whilst knitting clubs meet to swap patterns and tips.

The Southbank Centre is now taking steps to sensitively 'formalise' its relationship with these informal clubs for mutual benefits: informal groups can find out about events relevant to their interests from Southbank Centre staff; and the art centre's programmers gain access to an enthusiastic pool of interest groups. Knitting circles that meet to swap tips at the RFH were told by staff about crochet master classes that were going on elsewhere on site. Programmers have started to tailor events to cater for the new demographics that the RFH's informal meeting space attracts, such as a 'sensory' art event for babies within the annual Imagine Children's Festival, to cater for the increasing number of new mothers that gather there. The Southbank Centre also routinely hosts professional street dance companies, reflecting its use as an informal rehearsal venue for amateur dance groups.

By adopting an 'open foyer policy', the RFH became widely accessible to a demographic far more diverse than just art lovers. On a practical level, the RFH is warm and light with ample seating areas. Wifi is free throughout the centre and staff use social media to engage with new audiences – for example, a recent Facebook competition, Dance Your City, encouraged amateur dance groups to upload videos of their routines for fellow Facebook users to vote on, with the winner performing on stage in a professional show.

This approach demonstrates how an institution has adapted to deliver both social and public good. Other public spaces should also be encouraged to adapt for social and leisure use.

The Government have widely endorsed multi-purpose town centres which move beyond their retail function. Mary Portas, in her independent review of the high street, articulated a vision of 'multifunctional and social places... which offer a clear and compelling purpose and experience that's not available elsewhere, and which meets the interests and needs of the local people'.

Sports and leisure centres enjoy features which make them ideal crucibles of casual connections. They are present in most local authority areas, have long hours and are generally run by well-trained staff who are used to facilitate group-type activity. Their

ubiquity and suitability as centres of club-type activity are, however, under-acknowledged and underexploited.

Outdoor space too is a fundamental asset to the development of local groups⁶⁸. Under the 2011 Localism Bill, local councils, beginning with parish and town councils, have even greater powers to make available outdoor space for communal, social purposes – including churchyards, village greens and commons as well as community halls. Despite the centrally enforced cuts, they also continue to fund community-run shops and employ staff to support local groups and initiatives.



Recommendation

Local councils should report on the contribution of publicly-owned spaces and assets in enabling civil society groups in their annual report. This could also be extended to local retailers, leisure centres and private spaces.

Often, however, promoting use of shared space should not be left to local councils alone. Libraries are another example of public meeting places that facilitate club-type activity and contribute to shared public and social good. Meeting spaces have been made available in library buildings since the early Victorian times, according to the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP).⁶⁹ Such spaces have provided a safe, comfortable location for local clubs and interest groups to meet, and play a particularly important role in rural areas where they act as a 'hub' for local life, according to the National Federation of Women's Institutes.

"Libraries provide an open access focal point for the whole community. The values of education and equality of opportunity are at the heart of both the library service and the Women's Institute, and many WIs have built close links with their local libraries. Numerous WIs have their own book groups, and rely upon the services provided by libraries, such as group borrowing in order to function."

Ruth Bond, NFWI Chair, National Federation of Women's Institutes

⁶⁸ This was argued in ResPublica's 2011 report, *Children and the Big Society*, which recommended that the process of revising the framework of statutory guidance for local authorities should ensure that local assets that keep children safe and develop social capital, such as parks, playgrounds and children's centres, are retained. For further reading, see Fisher, D. and Gruescu, S. (2011) *Children and the Big Society: Backing communities to keep the next generation safe and happy*, London: ResPublica.

⁶⁹ Source: informal conversation with Guy Daines, head of policy at CILIP.

Libraries were described as 'public anchors for neighbourhoods and for communities' in a 2003 report for the Department for Culture, Media & Sport.⁷⁰ A survey commissioned by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in 2010 described libraries as a great 'social leveller' and a means of reducing social isolation.⁷¹ Libraries also serve as cultural outlets and are important hubs for older people, families with young children, unemployed people and students. Yet, records show that between 1st April 2011 and 31st March 2012, 117 have ceased to be run by the local council, 44 of which are now closed, 21 now run by volunteers, 4 by social enterprises, and one paid for by a parish council.⁷² 13 libraries have become volunteer-run or social enterprises since 1st April of this year.

Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude recently endorsed the idea of Community Improvement Districts, which would see local residents group together to run local libraries, care services, or crime prevention facilities.⁷³ However, this focuses primarily on the interests of residents as opposed to others who benefit from shared space. Social enterprises should not only be encouraged to run community facilities, but should draw on the involvement of local clubs and associations in their formation and management. Leisure and cultural trusts, for example, are charitable social enterprises that provide 30% of public leisure centres in the UK, through partnerships with local authorities. Members of Sporta, the representative body for cultural and leisure trusts, collectively operate over 910 sites including swimming pools, theatres and leisure centres, and have a combined annual turnover of over £739 million.⁷⁴

Operational and financial alternatives to council-funded services should move away from narrow considerations of functionality. As traditional services such as libraries and post offices develop their business models in response to funding pressures, evaluating the best social value for a given space should include considerations of access by diverse community groups and clubs. A number of recent policy recommendations concerning the future of libraries have suggested their integration with other public services such as police surgeries and health centres⁷⁵, but interfacing these with informal groups is crucial. We propose that the pilots of Portas's recommendations for 'Town Teams' should account for community facilities alongside the multi-functionality of private space.

70 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2003) *Framework for the future: Libraries, learning and information in the next decade*.

71 Museums, Libraries and Archives Council/Ipsos MORI Poll (2010) *What do the public want from libraries?* London: Ipsos MORI.

72 Public Libraries News (2012) *List of "Withdrawn" Libraries* [Online] Available at: <http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/p/6-closed-since-1411.html> [accessed 30 April 2012].

73 Wiggins, K. (2012) *Maude backs concept of community improvement districts* [Online] (Updated 17 January 2012) Available at: <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/go/news/article/1112407/maude-backs-concept-community-improvement-districts/> [Accessed 27 February 2012].

74 Sporta (2011) *Time to Trust: The case for social enterprises in sport, leisure and culture*, Exeter: Big Wave Media.

75 Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2011) *Future Libraries: Change, options and how to get there* [Online] (Updated 14 March 2012) Available at: http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/media-centre/-/journal_content/56/10171/3378801/NEWS-TEMPLATE [Accessed 31 May 2012].



Recommendation

In response to pressures on spending, local authorities need to consider radical operational alternatives for cultural institutions and community hubs, such as social enterprise models, as alternative to closure. They could further incentivise existing institutions such as schools and churches to open up their space, and encourage joint ownership of commercial leisure space with community trusts, via community share offers.

4.2 Beyond CSR

It is not only local councils and public bodies who have a responsibility to facilitate the development of community groups and clubs. As we discussed in Chapter Three, private and commercial companies are also recognising the benefits of providing space and support for users and members beyond transactional activity alone.

The traditional view of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is increasingly perceived as insufficient because it fails to transform the way that companies themselves operate and pursue profit. Alternative approaches seek to reconnect financial gain with 'doing good' for partially economic reasons that are linked with greater sustainability. Certain business theorists like Michael Porter, previously an influential defender of CSR, have advocated the idea of 'shared value' because attention to the wider social and environmental impact welfare of enterprises promotes rather than hinders economic profitability.⁷⁶

The primary reason for such thinking is that the pursuit of long-term stable and steadily augmenting profit, for strictly economic reasons, requires an attention to mutual benefit. For these reasons, enterprises should internalise externalities or 'cost in' the social and environmental demands that their economic activities make. This should be viewed as part of the 'natural' structures of incentives and rewards for businesses. This suggests, in a new way, how a reciprocal economic model can account for both pro-enterprise and pro-social flourishing.

The logic of 'shared value' also applies to clubs and other community-based organisations. In exchange for proper recognition of their social role, art and leisure providers must start sharing their expertise with others. Those who already operate successful facilities can play a vital role in helping informal club-type activities in their communities to get up and running. Crucibles of casual connections are not only the bedrock of the Big Society. They are also an important source of the skillset required for its expansion.

76 Porter, M. E. and Crane, M. R. (2011) 'Creating Shared Value' in *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2011, pp. 2-17.



Mecca Bingo

In contrast to the public, charitable funded space at the Royal Festival Hall, bingo clubs are an excellent example of commercial premises that provide substantial social goods. The Mecca bingo club in Dagenham, Essex, provides a new 'social lounge' as well as the main bingo hall, where members are free to chat and make noise whilst playing. This lounge is also used for non-Bingo events such as karaoke and as a party venue, available to members free of charge.

Despite their being a commercial enterprise, many bingo halls are also used for other purposes, such as British Lung Foundation public health events. These screen people for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, a life-threatening illness which often goes undiagnosed.⁷⁷ During just one day of testing at Mecca Bingo in Hull, more than 40 attendees were referred for further tests – 20% of the 226 people who agreed to be screened.

Bingo clubs have also been closely associated with fundraising and creative charitable activity and therefore are exemplary of associative pursuits leading to wider behaviours of pooling resources and giving to a shared common cause. All ten bingo clubs, who were interviewed as part of this project, have been involved in some kind of charitable fundraising event. Much of the fund raising activity was for local charities. Beach Bingo, in the coastal town of North Shields, regularly raises money for its local lifeboat association, for example. Nine said they had hosted a non-bingo related event with another organisation. Bingo was regularly described by respondents as a popular, sociable game in which friendships between members extended beyond the confines of the halls.

"All communities need a focal point. Invariably the bingo club is that focal point. There is no doubt that the bingo club is a very important part of the social fabric of the community."

Tim Deeming, Director of the Grand Bingo Club in Nuneaton

Bingo clubs are also an example of how club-type leisure activities have suffered from unfavourable policy changes. Recent alterations to regulation and tax rules have hit bingo operators hard, forcing 20% of clubs to close since 2003. The number of clubs is shrinking by around 5% each year. In 2008 alone, 29 clubs shut their doors, and just one opened. Research commissioned by the Bingo Association, an umbrella group for bingo clubs, found that the industry is suffering because of what it describes as a discriminatory tax regime,

⁷⁷ British Lung Foundation (2001) Past Events [Online] Available at: http://www.lunguk.org/supporting-you/awareness_and_lung_testing_events/past_events.htm [Accessed 31 January 2012].

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which fails to recognise the social value that bingo clubs contribute to their communities. Bingo clubs are subject to the top rate gambling tax of 20 %, compared with 15 % for high street betting shops and online bingo games. Offshore online bingo is not taxed at all.

National and local governments should recognise where and how business and commercial space can be encouraged to provide benefits for the community over and above their primary purposes.



Recommendation

Local authorities should consider whether business rates should reflect a shared space's contribution to the community. National tax policies could take into account how private premises cultivate group association and community spin-off groups.

Private enterprises are not exempt from serving the formal institutions within which networks can become embedded and thrive. Existing commercial membership organisations, such as gyms and sports clubs, are already sophisticated in their membership structure and benefits. Therefore they often serve as excellent hubs for community capacity-building. As Small iterates,

"Rather than hoping that the 'movable middle' suddenly feels inspired to volunteer, perhaps those concerned about social capital and the Big Society should turn to these 'routine' organisations, since these have not only the means but also the incentive to alter their behaviour. Attention should be turned from the parent to the child care centre, from the ordinary person to the routine organisation. Want more bowling leagues? Stop hoping for enthusiasts. Convince the managers of bowling alleys, who have something to gain!"⁷⁸

Mario Small, *Unanticipated Gains*

Given the current focus on bringing new life to the high street as a result of the Portas review, now is a good time to evaluate the social, community-building function of spaces in town centres. The Government is implementing 'Town Team' pilots – groups made up of councils, business representatives, landlords and local MPs who would oversee the operational management and creative vision for high streets.

⁷⁸ Small, M. (2009) *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of network inequality*, New York: Oxford University Press.



Recommendation:

Town Team initiatives should not only be oriented toward retail enterprises, but cover a wide range of interactive services, including leisure and social activities via one platform. In championing local business through 'market days', they should also promote social and leisure clubs and activities.

If a town centre is to be truly multi-functional, these initiatives should not be solely based on retail and business interests. Town Teams should include representatives of community groups, clubs and societies, and take into account the activities of existing groups when recruiting representatives, and champion local social activities alongside local business.

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Dartford 'My Street' Portas Pilot

Dartford in Kent was one of the 12 successful Portas Pilots announced by the Department of Communities and Local Government in May 2012. Dartford's bid was based on the intention to establish the High Street as both a business and community venue, providing opportunities for people to interact with groups like Slimming World, Scouts, Brownies, artists and dance groups. Already Dartford's Orchards Shopping Centre hosts regular fun days for the local community on its malls, including dance workshops and arts and crafts, and an 'Over 50s Club' meets in an empty shop unit for activities such as keep fit, arts and crafts demonstrations, and guest lectures on topics such as healthy eating and personal safety.

Examples such as Dartford show that there is much outside the siloed vision of functionality and purpose for town centres. Further 'nudges' could also include the 'moonlighting' of spaces, encouraging bingo clubs to make their space available to mothers' groups during non-opening hours, or pub gardens to become regular pop-up spaces for market stalls or arts clubs during the daytime.



Recommendation:

In implementing their response to the Portas Review, the Government should wholeheartedly support the concept of multi-functional spaces in town centres and address the incentives which could further promote community use, shared use and 'moonlighting' of commercial space and empty properties, such as VAT exemption on facility hire of private space by community groups.

4.3 From the 'civil' to the 'civic'

"Successful, integrated communities are ones that make better use of informal support and care; are better equipped to resolve their own problems without state intervention; and can have higher levels of volunteering, social support networks and charity."

Department for Community and Local Government report on Creating the conditions for integration

Whilst not all social benefit does or should 'spin-out' into public benefit, there are identifiable ways in which social grouping can lead to further purposive interaction based on the common interest of members. Much of the purpose of our argument in this paper is to highlight the fact that groups and clubs do already constitute key parts of the 'big society'. Earlier in this paper we drew a distinction between 'civil' society, that is social and voluntary interaction within communities outside of economic activity and government, and 'civic' society, which describes public engagement in local government, activism and volunteering. This is not to say that the former type of association cannot lead to the latter. As the case studies in this report have demonstrated, shared interests are as important as residential location in grouping for a purpose, and can serve as the basis for charitable activity and health and social care drives. Public policy initiatives can capture this for wider public benefit in relation to specific public services.

We discussed in Chapter Two the importance of informal social activity as an important tool in preventing social ills such as loneliness, isolation and anti-social behaviour, and improve physical and mental wellbeing. Recent policy developments in adult social care emphasises personalisation and the use of localised tailored services. Evidence from pilots suggests that personal budgets have been spent on a wide range of services, including equipment for college courses or work and ways for people to take part in activities with others in their community. Some of the most exciting recent developments in personalisation have been the move from entirely individual budget control, towards helping budget holders to come

together and act as a group, becoming commissioners and shaping their own services⁷⁹. This in itself is club-type behaviour, and future initiatives should actively encourage both new membership structures and existing clubs to 'incubate' personal budget pools such as shared transport services.

“ Recommendation

There is potential for personal budgets to be channelled toward club-type activities. Encouraging pooled budgets may allow the savings on resources to be used for other shared pursuits. The new health and well-being boards could aim to integrate health and social care initiatives with existing local social and leisure activities.

Finally, the Government's Giving agenda is a high-profile policy approach to increasing philanthropic giving and charity involvement in other ways such as volunteering, time banking and shared resources. But although the Cabinet Office Green Paper recognised the potential to catalyse latent demand for volunteering - given that 26% of non-volunteers (~3.3m people) are willing to start giving time through volunteering⁸⁰ - focus is often biased toward individual giving, and does not take into account the wealth and contribution of group activities.

Analysis by Volunteering England of the Second Futuretrack Survey of 2006 applicants for UK Higher Education found that student membership of extracurricular clubs and societies was associated with higher rates of volunteering. Whilst not surprisingly, students who took part in charity and community orientated organisations had the highest rate of volunteering, with over half of students who join these societies volunteering, there was no significant difference in volunteering rates for students who worked during term time. Despite having other commitments on their time, student volunteers were likely to be 'busy' students who took part in a range of activities.⁸¹

⁷⁹ In the Stamford Forum approach, piloted in Leeds, individuals are invited to pool budgets with the resources held by some of Leeds' Neighbourhood Networks (one for each ward). Each Network is led by older people and receives council support as well as drawing upon volunteering and time banking. Some have established social enterprises which deliver services to older people as alternatives to traditional care.

⁸⁰ Department for Communities and Local Government (2010) 2008-09 *Citizenship Survey Volunteering and Charitable Giving Topic Report*.

⁸¹ Holdsworth, C. (2010) *Student Volunteers: A national profile*, Keele University: Volunteering England.

	% of students who volunteer	% of students in survey
Sports club	18.1	47.3
Political society	24.2	9.0
Community organisation	51.2	15.4
Subject society	21.6	18.8
Hobbies/special interests	19.0	37.8
Religious society	28.8	13.4
Language club	21.9	9.3
Drama society	24.5	9.5
Student union society	24.2	17.9
Has a leadership role	25.3	15.6

Source: Holdsworth, C. (2010) *Student Volunteers: A National Profile*- Table A1, page 10

Therefore, it can be argued that it is the 'embeddedness' in social networks, and the shared value that passes from member to member, which generates other pro-social behaviours. Although we acknowledge that conflicting pressures on people's time is a barrier to volunteering, social activity and volunteering are not mutually exclusive activities and should not be polarised in terms of implementing incentives to give. Indeed, 60% of people receive information about volunteering opportunities through word of mouth connections, and the Cabinet Office have recognised that leveraging social networks is an important factor in encouraging civic engagement.⁸²

Recent work by Robert Putnam has found that people in religious communities benefit from increased social capital, but that this is not explained by their religiosity (i.e. how strong their religious beliefs are). Rather, it is their increased sense of community that results in increased giving and a corresponding elevated sense of well-being. Members of religious communities not only help each other, they also support other groups and activities more than their secular peers.⁸³

Here it is not religious belief, but the sense of community and the networks based around shared interests, that serve as a means to other social and public good. In an increasingly secular society it is therefore the sense of community that we should seek to replicate, if not on a religious basis, then on other social and communal interests which actively generate increased trust and reciprocity amongst members. To access the civic, we need to ascertain and draw upon what is important and relevant to people, and how these shared concerns can be developed into other forms of shared activity.

⁸² Office for the Third Sector (2007) *Helping Out: A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving*, London: Cabinet Office.

⁸³ Putnam, R. (2011) *American Grace: How religion divides and unites us*, New York: Simon & Schuster.



Recommendation

Local authorities should aim to publicise volunteering and civic engagement opportunities to existing groups, clubs and established networks, through a variety of channels. This might include the 'Town Team' or umbrella group representatives, aggregated internet platforms and physical community spaces.

Encouraging community volunteers should increasingly be based on groups as well as individuals, for example through recruitment of whole local teams and clubs for specific community projects. Time banking initiatives, whereby volunteers earn 'credits' for the time they give to community projects, which are then redeemable against time and help from others, are a growing incentive for civic and philanthropic activity.

CASE STUDY



Bettws estate, Bridgend, Wales

In the Bettws estate near Bridgend in Wales, more than 500 young people partner with staff to run the youth club and other community projects. In return for their time spent volunteering, they receive time credits which can then be used to go on trips organised by the youth club, or to use the community gym or boxing facilities. Antisocial behaviour on the estate has dropped by 17%.

Time banking projects could move far beyond an individual-to-community basis, and align groups with the community via the loan of space, resources, transport, or club members themselves (in training other club leaders, for example). In certain cases, credits could eventually be used against community budgets and pooled personal budgets for appropriate activities.



Recommendation:

Local authorities could partner with other groups to use reward mechanisms such as time banking 'credits' to further prompt group activities, in recognition of the social contribution of clubs to their local communities.

Philanthropic commitments based on group interest has been demonstrated in cases of funding community projects. In recent years a number of crowd funding platforms based on multiple pledges from individuals, groups and businesses to meet a target. One such example, Spacehive.com is a website used to publicise and attract supporters and donors for development projects for accessible community space, such as sports facilities, playgrounds and high street renovations. Potential donors can pledge cash donations or offer in-kind contributions, like materials, employee expertise, or services, and are only charged if the project meets its pledge target.

CASE STUDY



Glynoch Community Centre, South Wales

Glynoch is an ex-mining town in South Wales with an unemployment rate of around 60%. The redevelopment of Glynoch Community Centre aims to provide a multi-purpose, energy-efficient community centre to host social and leisure clubs, workshops, a conference suite for local businesses and facilities for young people's groups and activities. After achieving grants and council funding, the project was promoted on Spacehive to appeal to local groups and supporters to help meet the remaining £30,000. Complementary to the online platform, the fundraising drive included public fundraising initiatives driven by local sports teams Pontypridd RFC and Cardiff Blues.

Glynoch Community Centre is just one example of an initiative driven by the social capital and civic spirit engendered by popular pursuits, which pulled in existing groups to help fund a community asset in a time of limited public spending. It is also demonstrative of online and offline activities working in harmony to group people together based on common interest, and is an idea of how these casual connections can be used for economic benefit.



Recommendation

The Government's Giving agenda should be informed by people's behaviour in relation to popular social pursuits, and encourage use of the participation channels of existing clubs and associations. Initiatives encouraging local grass-roots civic action should not concentrate exclusively on volunteering, but should be integrated with social activities so as not to compete with, but be seen as complementary to leisure.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

“We try to keep the whole thing very simple. There is no constitution, no formal agreement, and no bank account. We encourage informal get togethers... but are careful that we pick days that fit in with the local calendar and do not coincide with other village events.”

Llew Monger, Co-ordinator, Community Impact Bucks Pub Lunch Clubs

The wealth of communities, often intangible and under-acknowledged, is embedded in multi-faceted reciprocal relationships and social networks. By their nature as informal groups or activities, this makes them hard to pinpoint and quantify. However, via a broad-brush account of social capital as a means to public good, social value within businesses, facilities and services, and a sense of community based on both local engagement and shared interest, we can identify a common theme of successful communities as those in which a sense of membership and belonging flourishes.

From this paper we can draw a number of conclusions. First, it is somewhat narrow-minded to quantify healthy, active communities by volunteering statistics, public service delivery or economic activity alone. National and local policy makers, community leaders and business representatives must acknowledge the inter-related nature of local social activity - which is often a hybrid of consumer preferences, group affiliations and club memberships, and informal bonds between residents or acquaintances, service users and active citizens or volunteers. The benefits to members of a community are based on a rich tapestry of social engagement - which includes social and leisure activity within individual social journeys.

Secondly, membership does not always prioritise the local in a geographical sense. Localism is indeed an important and comprehensive policy agenda, but the nature of the ‘local’ is changing due to the internet’s transformation of breadth and scope of aggregation beyond neighbourhoods in the geographical sense. Therefore, localism should not be limited to a residential basis, but also concentrate on where people spend their time.

Public objectives should therefore look beyond traditional infrastructure and institutions aimed directly at serving specific policy objectives. Objectives - such as community cohesion, social exclusion and loneliness - can often be met in the course of other activities, which are self-selected by communities in meeting their social and recreational needs, and are therefore appropriate channels for addressing other needs to achieve social good. Often, the social value of these activities is unanticipated and therefore underestimated.

The mechanisms and support structures of enabling bodies such as unions and universities are exemplary in their ease of set-up and spin-outs.⁸⁴ University undergraduates in the UK are exposed to a number of extra-curricular social activities and membership options, much facilitated and encouraged by the student unions. In the *Futuretrack Survey of 2006 applicants for UK Higher Education*, students were more likely to take part in university societies and clubs rather than external ones, whether these were based on sports, other creative hobbies, religious interests, charity or community purposes, languages and others. These findings suggest that when institutional arrangements are in place for engagement and participation, and relate to social groups and preferences, they are preferred over other external activity. This does not mean that people should not be encouraged to come together on the basis of their individual pursuits and interests outside of formal institutions. But if there are existing channels and mechanisms for group participation, these should be exploited as a resource for further action.

⁸⁴ Small, M. (2009) *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of network inequality*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Partnerships between existing groups that already represent users and members will be key when forming new vehicles to address public policy challenges. Considering only traditional institutions when delivering public policy objectives – such as retail business in high street policy, or public providers and charities when considering improvements to service delivery – will only serve to categorise interests in a conflicting or competing way. Instead, the multi-functionality of these institutions should be overseen by local associations representing a number of interests which cut across a range of sectors and interest groups, including the more informal social and leisure pursuits.

The internet presents an excellent opportunity for the development of aggregated local platforms covering a range of interests. Digital inclusion initiatives should emphasise the conversion of online access into face-to-face activity. In cultivating a shared sense of membership within and between communities, communication is vital, and the development of new types of local media outlets will be fundamental to increasing local participation in engagement opportunities across the board.

What is perhaps most difficult to convey is the ‘ethos’ of membership, which is based on common interests and values, shared activity and reciprocal benefit. Much of this is because of the basis in relationships and attitudes.

Because of the self-selected nature of these activities and groups, they often can’t be created by governments. However, where they do exist, they need more recognition, support networks and encouragement to flourish on a national basis. To this end, by aligning policy priorities with the recognition of the club-culture which already exists and how it can be nurtured, demonstrable results for social and public good will follow.

Summary of recommendations:

- Social and public policy initiatives should recognise the wealth of participation in ‘club-type’ social and leisure activities, and take into account these frameworks when administering policies at a local level. When implementing policies aimed at individuals, policy-makers should take into account their relevance to group association.
- In promoting local activity, the Department for Communities and Local Government should take into account the wealth of clubs and associations that cut across immediate geographical areas, and allow for involvement and engagement from these groups in local initiatives. For example, the ‘Big Lunch’ should specifically aim to involve groups and clubs who meet in the local area as well as local residents.
- National and local governments should extend their considerations of social value from the public sector to other areas, notably shared space and private vehicles that contribute in a significant way to building communities. The Government should enforce the recommendation of the Public Administration Select Committee, for ‘[a]n impact assessment, applied to every Government policy, statutory instrument, and new Bill, which asks the simple question: “what substantively will this do to build social capital, people power, and social entrepreneurs?”’ This should be extended to include a social value impact statement which details how national policy changes can harm or help the hidden wealth in communities.
- Digital inclusion initiatives such as the ‘Go On’ campaign should provide a direct introduction to specific local community groups, charities, individual beneficiaries, and private organisations. The campaign and complementary programmes should emphasise the ways in which digital inclusion can be converted into face-to-face interaction.
- The Cabinet Office should work with DCLG and DCMS to ensure that the Open Data drive encourages the integration of public data with other private and community information to present a holistic, multi-purpose media platform by local area and achieve a ‘participative’ rather than passive transparency of data. This could achieve a cross-pollination of complementary social, consumer and civic interests.
- Local councils should report on the contribution of publicly-owned spaces and assets in enabling civil society groups in their annual report. This could also be extended to local retailers, leisure centres and private spaces.
- In response to pressures on spending, local authorities need to consider radical operational alternatives for cultural institutions and community hubs, such as social enterprise models, as alternative to closure. They could further incentivise existing institutions such as schools and churches to open up their space, and encourage joint ownership of commercial leisure space with community trusts, via community share offers.

- Local authorities should consider whether business rates should reflect a shared space's contribution to the community. National tax policies could take into account how private premises cultivate group association and community spin-off groups.
- In implementing their response to the Portas Review, the Government should wholeheartedly support the concept of multi-functional spaces in town centres and address the incentives which could further promote community use, shared use and 'moonlighting' of commercial space and empty properties, such as VAT exemption on facility hire of private space by community groups.
- 'Town Team' initiatives should not only be oriented toward retail enterprises, but cover a wide range of interactive services, including leisure and social activities via one platform. In championing local business through 'market days', they should also promote social and leisure clubs and activities.
- There is potential for personal budgets to be channelled toward club-type activities. Encouraging pooled budgets may allow the savings on resources to be used for other shared pursuits. The new health and well-being boards could aim to integrate health and social care initiatives with existing local social and leisure activities.
- The Government's Giving agenda should be informed by people's behaviour in relation to popular social pursuits, and encourage use of the participation channels of existing clubs and associations. Initiatives encouraging local grass-roots civic action should not concentrate exclusively on volunteering, but should be integrated with social activities so as not to compete with, but be seen as complementary to leisure.
- Local authorities should aim to publicise volunteering and civic engagement opportunities to existing groups, clubs and established networks, through a variety of channels. This might include the 'Town Team' or umbrella group representatives, aggregated internet platforms and physical community spaces.
- Local authorities could partner with other groups to use reward mechanisms such as time banking 'credits' to further prompt group activities, in recognition of the social contribution of clubs to their local communities.

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This publication is an output of ResPublica's British Civic Life workstream, one of the three core workstreams of The ResPublica Trust.

Within this workstream we will explore the use of community assets and cultural hubs for wider social and public good, the importance of the family and other social institutions in cultivating values and citizenship, and the social action and ethically instructive role of faith and other civic groups. Alongside this publication, our work on the British constitution will examine the value of the monarchy as an institution alongside others for citizens today.

The Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the Olympics in 2012 mark a monumental year for Britain, and complement our work on the social and cultural heritage of civil society. From grassroots groups to embedded institutions, civic association maintains a central role in cultivating an engaged and connected society. These projects all examine social capital as an engine of progress as much as economic capital, outline principles to empowering individuals and communities, and emphasise quality of life and human relationships as key to the progression of a social common good.

ISBN 978-1-908027-02-3

Price £15

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