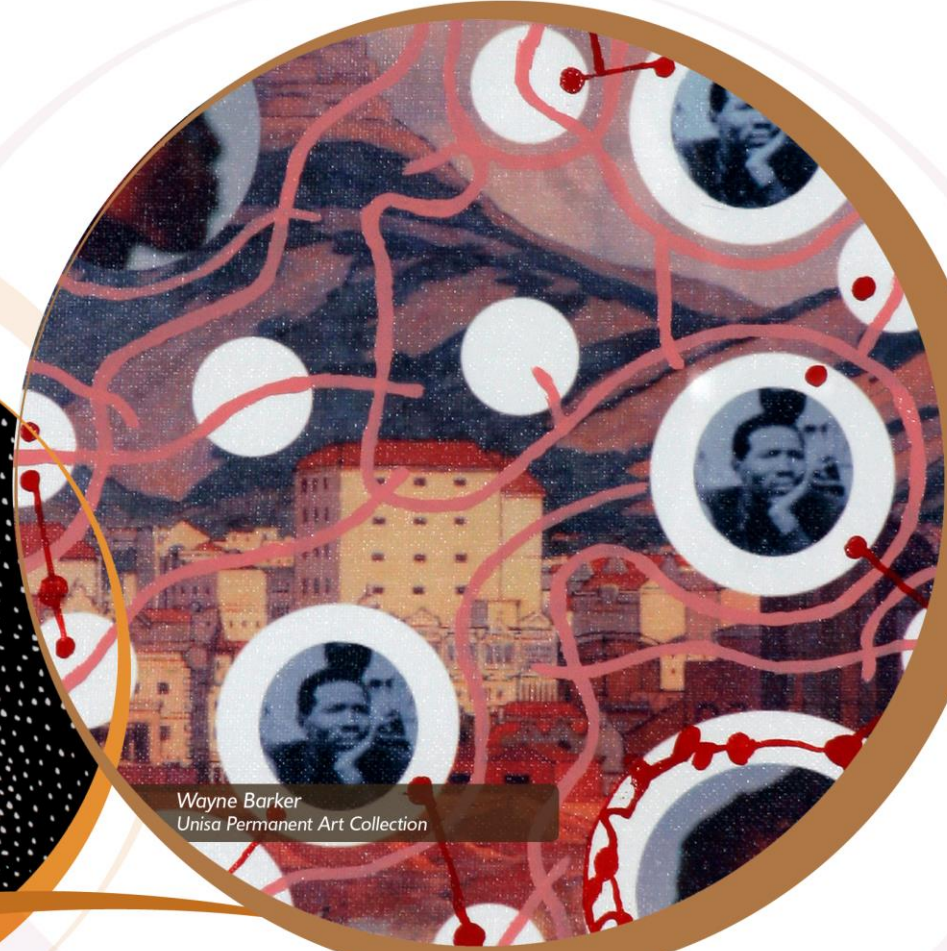


Social capital as a key concept to inform public policy



Sibusiso Maseko
Unisa Permanent Art Collection



Wayne Barker
Unisa Permanent Art Collection

Define tomorrow.

Describing Social Capital

Students must demonstrate an understanding of the concept of social capital, be able to differentiate between the three forms of social capital and how it is related to public formulation.

In this regard you have to make specific reference to the general descriptions of social capital described on page 21 to 22 of your study guide. This section highlights that social capital is broadly about:

- “networks of social relationships and the resources they embody”
- “can be invested in and drawn upon to facilitate action, and can be beneficial as a resource for individuals and communities”
- “a person’s family, friends and associates is an important asset, one that can be called upon in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and leveraged for gain”

In addition to describing social capital in these broad terms, you also have to show the three different strands of social capital. That is:

Bonding social capital:

- occurs in homogeneous groups, families and ethnic enclaves, is characterised by strong interpersonal ties and in-group loyalties, and provides socio-psychological support to its members.

Bridging social capital:

- operates horizontally across different social cleavages (ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation).
- It connects members to assets and information. This has the potential to create inclusive, democratic institutional structures.
- Civic groups open to membership of people of all age groups, races, social classes, genders, sexual orientations and so on are examples of groups that experience bridging.

- **Linking social capital:**

- operates across vertical wealth groups, and enables members of these groups to access resources, ideas and information from formal institutions outside their groups (Frank 2003).
- Linking social capital can open up economic opportunities for less powerful or marginalised groups and enable them to get ahead by improving trust and tolerance.

Follow this link for additional notes on the different forms of social capital:

<https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/explanation-types-social-capital/>

Why should social capital be considered as a key concept in policy making?

Reasons for considering social capital in policy formulation:

- In terms of justifying social capital in public policy formulation you need to consider the idea that social capital may assist gaining a more accurate understanding of the values, needs and characteristics of the target population.
- This implies that an understanding of the possibilities for social capital mobilisation is a key part of policy-making.
- However, you need to look further in to why it is important that public policies are rooted in the values, needs and aspirations of communities.

Other arguments supporting the inclusion of social capital in policy formulation:

- establishes an appropriate balance between “bottom-up” and “top-down” approaches in public policy.
- fosters respect in public policy implementation for individuals, communities and their rights.
- encourages active citizenship based on principles of mutual help and responsibility.
- promotes partnerships between citizens, communities, intermediary agencies and the government.
- nurtures voluntarism in the community.
- It places considerations for the local and locality at the centre of policy aimed at addressing complex problems.
- Promoting the formation of social capital as the “glue” of civic networks that bind people to their communities can be regarded as a possible democratisation strategy in public policy.

Critiques of social capital

Some of the key critiques levelled against social capital:

- the over-enthusiastic incorporation of social capital into policy-making ideas is that it remains something that is difficult to measure.
- Researchers cannot ascertain levels of social capital (sometimes gauged as the amount of civil participation or volunteering in a community) in a particular policy's target population or understand how to maximise its positive influence.
- Another point of critique is that strong bonding social capital can lead to social exclusion of groups of individuals.

Paul Haynes (2009) provides a comprehensive set of critiques of social capital. For additional reading, this paper is available at:

http://www.ingenio.upv.es/sites/default/files/working-paper/before_going_any_further_with_social_capital_eight_key_criticisms_to_address.pdf

Exploring the link between social cohesion and social capital

- Here you first have to define the concept social cohesion. On page 23 of your guide the concept is defined as:

“Social cohesion refers to the degree of social integration and inclusion in communities and society at large and the extent to which mutual solidarity finds expression among individuals and communities”

- Based on this definition, social cohesion is linked to social capital in the sense that a more cohesive society can assist in:
 - solidifying/improving mutual relations between members of communities/society for social capital to have maximum impact in policy processes.
- Your task is to consider ways in which social capital may foster integration and inclusion in society.
- Consider whether social cohesion and social capital are mutually dependent. Formulate your own arguments to demonstrate your understanding of and your position on the connection between the two concepts.

For additional reading on these two concepts you may download the article by Anita Cloete:

<http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/vee/v35n3/01.pdf>

Thank you

Define tomorrow.

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