Social capital and democratic practices
Social Capital Conference
October 20, 2018
Antioch College, McGregor Hall
One Morgan Place
Yellow Springs, OH 45387
10:00AM-3:00PM

Greetings. Thanks to Michele Sutton and Gery Deer for inviting me to this occasion. Thanks to Chris Daniels for envisioning this conference. Thanks to Dr. Thomas Manley for serving as host. Thanks to you, the audience, for attending.

It's a pleasure to talk with you today about "social capital and democratic practices". I will speak about the nature of, challenges of and operation of social capital. But first let me make one disclaimer: some of what I say will be representative of the Kettering Foundation and other remarks will be my own. In any event, I am solely responsible for anything I say. I will make some remarks and leave time for Q & A. Before moving directly to the subject, allow me an opportunity to say something about the Foundation and how it operates.

The Kettering Foundation

The Kettering Foundation is a research organization. The Foundation does not make grants. The Kettering Foundation explores a meta question and three sub questions. The big question is what does it take to make democracy work. The presumption is that democracy should be driven by the people and benefit all citizens. The sub questions are: How do people become engaged as citizens? How can citizens work together to solve common problems? How can citizens engage governmental agencies and nongovernmental organizations?

Kettering uses two sets of lenses in exploring and analyzing democratic citizenship in a polity. The first set contains coarse lens and falls under what I call

democratic arrangements: institutions, communities and citizens. The other set includes fine lens that we call *democratic practices*: naming problems, framing issues, deliberating, resourcing, organizing and learning. Kettering hypothesizes that if citizens are exercising these basic democratic practices then they will have better chances of controlling their common future.

Nature of social capital

What James Coleman means by social capital…is the norms, the social networks, and relationships between adults and children that are value for the child growing up. Social capital exists within the family, but also outside the family (Coleman, 1987, p.36). Just as physical capital is created by working with materials ot create tools which facilitate production, human capital is created by working with persons to produce in them skills and capabilities which make them productive…If physical capital is wholly tangible, being embodied in observable material products, and human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual, social capital is still less tangible, for it exists in the relations between persons (Coleman, 1988, pp. 382-83).

The core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value…social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups…social capital refers to connections among individuals-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam, 2000, pp.18-19). There are two important dimensions of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital is inward looking and includes ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based women's reading groups, and fashionable country clubs (Putnam, p.22). Bridging social capital is outward looking and comprises the civil rights movement, youth services groups and ecumenical

religious organizations (Putnam, p. 22). Bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40 (Putnam, p. 23).

Challenges of social capital

Norms and values held by individuals become social capital only insofar as they facilitate action by others…they are context specific; outside that situation they may be of little to no value (Edwards & Foley, 1998, p.129). No form of capital is distributed evenly in American society nor do all individuals have equal opportunity to access the various forms of capital. Not all forms of social, cultural or human capital are equally valuable as resources to facilitate individual or collective actions (Edwards & Foley, 1998, p.129).

Socioeconomic and political context plays a prominent role in determining the value of a specific form of capital…(Edwards & Foley, 1998, p.130). Social capital, in Coleman's conception, is a morally and ethically neutral resource that facilitates all manner of individual and collective endeavors. It can just as easily enhance the operations of a community improvement organization or human rights advocacy efforts as it can a drug gang or death squad (Edwards & Foley, 1998, p.131).

Operation of social capital

Since Kettering is more interested in bridging social capital and if time permits I'll briefly discuss five such examples from our research.

Case #1: Tia Gaynor (2015) conducted a study with the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) to ascertain whether a particular program of their administrative routines was co-productive. The LAFD found it necessary and beneficial to work with members of the community, Professional Community Intervention Training Institute

(PCITI), (original gangsters, OGs, now former gang members), in its south precinct to deliver fire and rescue services.

The LAFD partnered with PCITI to co-jointly train one another to educate and prepare for fire and rescue activities in the community. The Fire Department had an incentive to engage with citizens that grew out fear of safety for their own lives when arriving on the scene of an emergency in low income and crime ridden neighborhoods. The command given to fire and rescue workers was to stage two blocks away until cleared to approach the scene.

The fire department trained community members on life saving techniques and policies and community members educated the firefighters on gang culture and behaviors. What appeared to be unlikely bedfellows has proven to be a good partnership for delivery of fire and rescue services in a disparate community. Once reluctant firefighters were fearful of answering calls of emergencies in the neighborhood now bravely arrive on the scene with the assistance of OGs. This is a good example of coproduction or complementary acting as Kettering calls it.

Case #2: The City of Fairborn identified "slum landlords" as a public problem. So the city partnered with Kara Lindaman (2015), organized public forums, invited citizens and held forums. After naming the problem and framing the issue during the forums, the name of the problem was changed to Fairborn's "sense of community".

In this case City Hall named the problem "slum landlords" because of a number of complaints and citations. But when the citizens assembled and deliberated on the problem, they decided the problem was broader and different. The citizens determined the problem to be about sense of community- feeling and belonging to a community. Though this research explored evidence of coproduction what it found was City Hall

reaching out to citizens and beginning the process of trust building. So, this case turned out to be a lesson on the notion of citizens viewing and naming problems and framing issues differently than professionals or experts.

Case #3: Marijoan Bull (2017) explored efforts to initiate a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program in West Springfield, MA. She examined how deliberative forums were used to make collective decisions. This study reflected on how the integration of parent dialogues, designed with deliberative features, affected and shaped a set of recommendations. This work focused on two elementary schools within West Springfield. These schools, Coburn Elementary School and Memorial Elementary School, were in census tracts with substantially lower household income than the town overall.

Again, this study illustrated how citizens view the universe differently than professionals. Citizens have a way of honing in on things held valuable for themselves. Citizens tend to focus on the whole of a problem and not just its parts. Not unlike other case studies cited herein, it appeared that unless the six democratic practices were interjected in public forums, the professionals tended to go about business as usual. It was also apparent that when citizens engaged in controlling their future the outcomes and consequences became more acceptable and legitimate.

Case # 4: Brandi Blessett (2016) explored the impact of Faith in Florida's efforts on restoring rights to persons formerly incarcerated in the state and to ascertain whether coproduction existed between citizens and a nonprofit organization. Specifically, the researcher paid attention to how citizens were engaged in coproduction with a nonprofit organization. This NGO has developed a model for engaging the community in public problem solving. The elements of the model included personal interviews with residents,

research on issues, community organizing, and reflection and evaluation. This model parallels in part the six democratic practices especially naming and framing, organizing and learning. Initially, Faith in Florida began focusing its efforts on immigration reform, healthcare expansion and youth empowerment.

After engaging the Parramore neighborhood in Orlando Florida, rights restoration emerged during a discussion on housing and crime. At least half of the residents in the discussion had failed to secure meetings with the City Commissioner because of their criminal backgrounds. Residents were stigmatized and barred from the rights and privileges of full citizenship. This kind of stigmatization reduced formerly incarcerated persons to second-class citizens as they could not bear arms, vote, or secure gainful employment. So, Faith in Florida engaged these residents in campaigns to "ban the box" and restore voting rights. The campaigns were successful (though not entirely) in changing the policy of having job applicants to answer the question regarding being convicted of a felony; and having the governor to change the policy on restoration of voting rights.

In the end, though rights restoration was important for residents, moving forward the primary issues were housing and employment. This report is an example of how a nonprofit organization could engage ordinary citizens in complementary action. Citizens worked with the NGO to control their common destiny.

Case # 5: Ellen Knutson (2014) explored ordinary citizen involvement in Participatory Budgeting (PB) in the 49th Ward of Chicago. It is easy to critique the meaningfulness of this process. Since, only a small number of citizens have opportunity to decide a fraction of the city's budget. However, PB provided some citizens with

democratic practice on public decision-making and an opportunity to make a difference in their neighborhood.

In short, citizens in the 49th Ward availed themselves of the opportunity to exercise some of the six democratic practices on a small a scale through participatory budgeting. The study provided a microscopic view of how citizens may engage with institutions to coproduce public goods. It also demonstrated that some public servants value input from citizens and at least see citizens as meaningful contributors in the work of government.

However, in this case, it was the Alderman who possessed power and shared it with citizens in his Ward. The only levers of power that citizens had were voting and collective action. Citizens were woefully unmatched when engaging administrative agencies and major nonprofits no matter how complementary their relations. So the big question is how can the balance of power be shifted in favor of citizens?

Thank you very much. I am now available for Q & A.

References

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