Social Capital and Sport Governance in Europe

Edited by Margaret Groeneveld,
Barrie Houlihan and Fabien Ohl

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Barrie Houlihan and Margaret Groeneveld

In recent years there has been increasing interest in the relationship between, on the one hand, sport as a range of activities and associated institutional arrangements (particularly clubs and national federations) and, on the other, individual and community social capital. The interest in the relationship between sport and social capital can, in part, be explained by the realisation that, in any examination of the significance of associational activity, association through sport is, in many countries, by far the most common form. However, the interest in sport is also the product of the mythology that surrounds sport and which is evident in the policy outputs of many transnational organisations such as UNESCO and the European Union and also of domestic governments, which assumes that participation in sport can generate positive outcomes in relation to educational, community integration and personal behavioural objectives. As Perks observes, 'Research exposing the paradoxical nature of sport and how it can simultaneously break down, as well as reinforce, social divisions has not stopped policy-oriented groups, both locally and internationally, from enthusiastically supporting the notion that sport participation positively contributes to community life' (2007, p. 381).

The increased governmental interest in the perceived potential of sport to generate positive social capital has been paralleled by an increased interest in the governance of sports organisations. Whereas some governments, France for example, have a long tradition of intervening in the governance of sport organisations through regulatory procedures such as licensing of clubs and coaches, an interventionist attitude to sports clubs and national governing bodies has become more common in some neo-liberal countries such as England, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. Admittedly, the primary motive for intervening in these autonomous civil society institutions has been related to a concern for protecting the state's investment in elite sport success, but an important secondary motive in many countries is to refashion voluntary sports clubs (VSCs) and national governing bodies (NGBs) such that they are fit partners for government, in the pursuit of a range of pro-social policy objectives such as social inclusion, health improvement and community integration and safety. Consequently, it is arguable that the recognition of the potential value of VSCs in generating social capital is complemented by a concern within some governments as to the capacity of VSCs and other sports organisations to deliver social capital development, and a general decline in trust by government in its putative civil society partners (cf. Edwards & Foley, 2001, p. 2).

It is the relationship between the recognition of the potential of VSCs to produce social capital and the governance of VSCs and NGBs that is at the heart of this volume. Not only do the various conceptualisations of social capital focus attention on the significance of social networks, the development of shared norms, values and trust, but they also, as Sullivan notes, 'valorise the contribution of relationships in analyses of governance . . . ' (2009, p. 221). However, giving this relationship a central position is not intended to privilege the Putnamian conceptualisation of social capital (Putnam 1993, 1995, 2000), but is a recognition of the widespread adoption by governments and transnational institutions such as the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), of Putnam's analysis of the modern social malaise and its implicit policy implications for sport and VSCs. Coleman (1988, 1994) and Bourdieu (1986, 1990) offer conceptualisations of social capital which not only differ considerably from that espoused by Putnam, but also lead, particularly in the case of Bourdieu, to very different conclusions regarding the role and significance of VSCs.

In contrast to Putnam's conceptualisation of social capital as the 'social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (2000, p. 19) Bourdieu's class-based perspective conceptualises social capital as a resource to be utilised in the pursuit of economic advantage. Putnam (1993) argues that if a neighbourhood or indeed a nation exhibits a high level of political integration and possesses an efficient and stable economic system these characteristics are the result of the successful accumulation of social capital. Seligman shares a similar view and argues that the tendency towards consensus politics in many modern industrialised societies is due to the 'interconnected networks of trust—among citizens, families, voluntary organisations, religious denominations, civic associations and the like' which provide, inter alia, the legitimation of governmental authority (1997, p. 14). In contrast to both Putnam and Seligman, for Bourdieu (1986) the universalised value of 'trust', insofar as Bourdieu refers to the concept, is a euphemism which belies the pursuit of self-interest by the powerful. At an even more fundamental level whereas Putnam conceptualises society as pliable in the sense that the accumulation of social capital can transform social relations in a community and build trust, Bourdieu argues that social capital production is essentially a conservative undertaking which aids the preservation of the prevailing power distribution in society. What both Putnam and Bourdieu do agree on is that 'social capital increases with use, instead of decreasing as other forms of capital tend to, and it diminishes with disuse' (Grix, 2001, pp. 189–190).

Bourdieu conceptualised social capital as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition' (1986, p. 248). For Bourdieu social capital was a personal asset which could be accumulated by participation in and development of social networks which provided access to economic resources or to other types of capital that facilitated access to economic capital. Entry to social networks was facilitated by the subtle mix of personal attributes of style, taste, disposition and other 'taken for granted' aspects of culture that Bourdieu refers to as habitus (1990, p. 53). Habitus provides the deeply ingrained systems of signals and responses that not only enables access to networks, but also the successful navigation through and reinforcement of networks. In this connection Bourdieu argues that the concepts of social capital and habitus can only be understood through the operationalisation of the additional concept of 'fields' which are specific networked arenas (sport, workplace and civic associations, for example) in which individuals and institutions struggle over scarce capital resources. Fields are where social capital transmission takes place and where group identity is refined and reinforced. Networked fields provided access to influential individuals or institutions and were the product of investment of time and energy on the part of the individual. Whereas the investment might be made in the reasonably confident expectation of an economic return the latter was not guaranteed, but was, as with the Putnamian version of social capital, reliant on a degree of trust among network members that there would be mutual reciprocation. For Bourdieu social capital has two characteristics the first of which is that it is network-dependent—'The volume of social capital possessed by a given agent . . . depends on the size of the network of connections that he can effectively mobilize' (1986, p. 249). More importantly, the accumulation of social capital not only enables a differential access to other types of capital especially economic, but also may have a 'multiplication effect' whereby the same amount of economic or cultural capital may yield different amounts of profit due to the possession of different amounts of social capital (Siisiäinen, 2000, p. 11). Establishing formal associations is one of the most effective ways of transforming a given quantity of social capital (indicated by the number of network participants) into a qualitatively more valuable resource. Formal associations can institutionalise the accumulated capital of individuals and thus enhance the individual's deployment of their personal social capital. The second characteristic is that social capital is based on mutual recognition which has a symbolic character insofar as it is a product of intersubjective communication. Symbolic capital fulfils a deeply ideological function and consequently influences the perceptions of the legitimacy of the uses of other forms of capital by individuals (Joppke, 1987).

Clearly, Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital has much in common with elitist and class-based analyses of society where social capital is cumulative and where the investment in social capital by socially dominant groups creates 'defensive communities' (Forrest & Kearns, 1999, p. 1) which are concerned with the maintenance of that dominance as a 'class for itself' (Field, 2003). At the other end of the power distribution in a capitalist economy, Szreter (2000) argues that the poor are unlikely to be able to access bridging capital and may only be able to access bonding capital which will have the consequence of reinforcing their low status and marginal relationship to political power.

By contrast Coleman conceptualises social capital in a much more positive light defining it as, 'a variety of different entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors whether persons or corporate actors' (1988, p. 98). Coleman's theorising of social capital was prompted by his interest in the creation of human capital through the education system and among the young and his dissatisfaction with economic and sociological theories which he considered over-emphasised agency and structure respectively. Basing his analysis on rational choice theory, according to which all social interaction is perceived as a form of exchange, he sought to synthesise the economic and sociological approaches. For Coleman (1994) social capital was created by individuals who pursue their rational self-interest within networks of social relations such as the family or community organisations. In this pursuit of network-based self interest a variety of forms of social capital are created. For example, social capital may take the form of obligations and expectations where action on one person's part to the benefit of another is undertaken in the expectation that an obligation will be created and repaid in the future. Coleman refers to these reciprocal obligations as being heavily dependent on trust and as analogous to financial 'credit slips'. A second closely related form of social capital relates to the norms and effective sanctions which maintain the social structure within which trust can develop. The development of these norms and sanctions requires a degree of moderation of the pursuit of self-interest in order to invest resources in developing and maintaining the social structure (e.g., clubs and associations) that facilitate norm reinforcement and the application of sanctions. Norm development according to Coleman depends on effective network closure, which is the capacity of a social structure to apply sanctions to errant members. Coleman argues that social closure generates a set of effective sanctions that can monitor and guide behaviour and thus enable the proliferation of the obligations and expectations which comprise social capital because they serve as a 'favour bank' (Coleman, 1988, p. 107). As will be argued in the discussion of Putnam's conceptualisation of social capital, while Coleman addresses directly the issue of access to networks and thus to social capital, the issue of access is under-explored by Putnam.

According to Coleman social capital is productive insofar as it facilitates the achievement of goals that could not otherwise have been attained. Its productive function leads Edwards and Foley to observe that it is consequently 'impossible to separate what it is from what it does' (1988, p. 126). At the heart of Coleman's formulation is the assertion that, whereas the pursuit of social capital is motivated by self-interest, benefits are generated not only for the individual but also for society. More explicitly than was the case with Bourdieu, Coleman considers trust to be an important aspect of social capital generation. Social capital was generated most effectively within the family, but could also be produced in other social organisations, for example churches. Trust is perhaps most clearly defined by Fukuyama as the 'expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest and cooperative behaviour, based on shared norms, on the part of other members of that community' (1995, p. 26). In part trust is generated through childhood relationships with parents and while often considered to decline as children move in to adulthood it is potentially reconfigured as people participate in the associational life of civil society and the imagined communities to which they give rise (Anderson, 1991). However, Coleman accepted that social capital resources 'differ for different persons and can constitute an important advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital' (1994, p. 300). In acknowledging the interplay between structure and agency Coleman was explicitly accepting the uneven distribution of social capital. Developing the interrelationship between structural factors and agency, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) usefully distinguish between the structural, relational and cognitive dimensions of social capital. The structural dimension is the pattern (number and nature) of social connections which facilitate the flow of information and the establishment and nurturing of relationships; the relational dimension refers more to the quality of the personal relationships that have been developed over time; and the cognitive dimension is the shared understandings that emerge within networks and between network members.

What Coleman and Bourdieu have in common is the assumption that social capital is a quality and a resource that inheres in small scale social networks and in the relationships between the individuals that constitute those networks. In contrast, Putnam (1993) argues, based on his studies of trust in Italian regional government, that social capital might also be an attribute of large scale communities such as cities, regions and even nations. It is this assertion that social capital is a property of collectivities rather than individuals, as in Coleman and Bourdieu's conceptualisations, which made his research of such interest to governments. As Grix notes, 'Broadly speaking the concept [of social capital] has come to refer to the by-product of trust between people, especially within secondary organisations and associations, in which compromise, debate, and face-to-face relations inculcate members with principles of democracy' (2001, p. 189).

Subsequent to his study of Italy, Putnam (2000) applied the same analysis to civic life in the U.S. The conclusion to his analysis was that social capital was a social good which was in decline in the U.S. and that its decline was having adverse consequences for social welfare. Putnam defined social capital as, 'connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trust-worthiness that arise from them' (2000, p. 19). In essence, social capital is conceived of as a neutral resource which helps to establish communities that have strong social norms which permeate and maintain strong social networks that lead to the generation and maintenance of mutual trust and reciprocity. As Grix notes, 'For Putnam, the key source of social trust is to be found in norms of reciprocity and networks of civil engagement, measureable by citizens' membership and participation in associations, ranging from choral societies to rotary clubs' (2001, p. 193). Communities that have a higher density of civic associations possess strong networks and a greater depth of mutual trust and will consequently have lower transaction costs, i.e., there is less need for systems of audit, inspection, monitoring and supervision. According to Woolcock and Narayan, 'social capital includes norms and values that facilitate exchanges, lower transaction costs, reduce the cost of information, permit trade in the absence of contracts and encourage responsible citizenship and the collective management of resources' (2000, p. 240). For Putnam, 'A society characterised by general reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful one—for the same reason that money is more efficient than barter' (2000, p. 21). More generally, Putnam argued that, 'life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital' (1995, p. 67).

Putnam identified two types of social capital—bonding and bridging—to which Woolcock added a third—linking social capital. Woolcock (2001) provides perhaps the most succinct definitions of the three forms of social capital.

> Bonding social capital, which denotes ties between like people in similar situations, such as immediate family, close friends and neighbours
> Bridging social capital, which encompasses more distant ties of like persons, such as loose friendships and workmates and
> Linking social capital, which reaches out to unlike people in dissimilar situations, such as those who are entirely outside the community, thus enabling members to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available within the community. (2001, pp. 13–14)

Bonding capital is, in essence, exclusive as it reinforces already established ties whereas bridging capital is more inclusive. According to Putnam, bridging networks although characterised by weak interpersonal ties may be more valuable to the individual as they may allow access to resources, such as jobs, political contacts and specialist skills, which are not present in bonding networks. Thus the weak ties 'that link me to distant acquaintances who move in different circles from mine are actually more valuable than the 'strong' ties that link me to relatives and intimate friends whose sociological niche is very like my own' (Putnam, 2000, pp. 22–23).

A central contrast between the theorising of Bourdieu and Coleman on the one hand and Putnam on the other was that Putnam extended the scope of social capital from it being an asset which essentially was produced and utilised by individuals to being a property of local communities and nations which underpinned positive civic virtues and 'good governance'. Whereas Bourdieu's theorisation is located within a sociological traditions associated with conflict theory and structuralism Putnam's antecedents lie within functionalism and its concern with collective values and social integration and stability.

It is not hard to see the attraction of the Putnamian version of social capital to governments. Of particular importance is that Putnam's