

Community Social Quality and Social Capital

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Abstract

Social quality is a recently-developed standard for assessing social and economic progress and its aim is to measure the extent to which communities can participate in social, political and economic life under conditions which enhance both individual and community well-being. It also has a potentially radical policy dimension in that it is concerned with social justice and it has been formulated as a corrective to the over-reliance on economic measures of well-being. This paper explores ways in which communities can enhance their social quality in their dealings with national institutions in relation to the following social quality elements: socio-economic security; social inclusion; social cohesion; and empowerment. The social cohesion aspect of social quality incorporates attributes of social capital, and the relationship between social capital and social cohesion will be addressed in the paper.

Introduction

This paper deals with ways in which communities can enhance their collective well-being. Its main focus is on their external relationships, particularly with national agencies and institutions. Two central themes are addressed: the strength and bargaining position of the community itself; and the attitude and approach of government and government agencies to the community. The impetus for this study came from the authors' interest in what Delanty (1998) calls *ethnos* communities: minority communities with a high proportion of immigrants or their descendants, and other communities which identify themselves on the basis of ethnicity, religion or language. The analysis presented is also relevant to other sorts of communities, particularly those based on locality and association.

The analytical framework used here is that of *social quality*, a recently developed standard for assessing the economic and social progress of groups, communities and societies. It is different from traditional quality-of-life constructs in that as well as being a measurement tool, it also has a potentially radical policy dimension. It came into being in 1997 as a result of the frustration of a group of social scientists and policy analysts with the prevailing domination of *economic* measures of quality of life within societies. Instruments such as national income and gross domestic product lead to the downgrading of social and cultural elements which are of central importance to individual and collective well-being. *Social quality*, on the other hand places a high value on social justice, human dignity and participation and it requires attention to social policies as well as economic policies (Beck, van der Maesen et al., 1997).

Social quality can be defined as 'the extent to which citizens are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well-being and individual potential' (Beck et al. 2001:7). The level of social quality experienced by communities depends on the following elements: the degree of their socio-economic security; the level of their social inclusion; the extent of their social cohesion (and the nature of national social cohesion); and the extent of their empowerment. These elements are not mutually exclusive – they often interact with and complement each other – but taken together as the components of social quality they are intended to provide a comprehensive model of the social and economic determinants of people's well-being. Social quality is bottom-up as well as top-down in its orientation and it encompasses both objective and subjective interpretations.

There are three facets to the social quality of community members. The first is their social quality as *citizens* in relation to their dealings with the nation and society (or *demos*) in which they live. The second is their social quality as *community members* and derives from the support provided by community institutions and from the strength of community identity. These two facets are discussed in detail in Berman and Phillips (2000) and Phillips and Berman (2000). The third – and this is the major focus of this paper – relates to the social quality of the community itself. A *community's* social quality depends on

both its strength as a collective entity in its own right and on its relationship to the nation state, which in turn is influenced and constrained by national legal and policy frameworks (which are usually beyond the community's control).

As an example of the impact of national policy frameworks, in some countries the state encourages communities themselves to provide services that are normally provided by government agencies. In relation to ethnos communities this ranges from, for example, the provision of religious denominational schools in the United Kingdom through to virtual self-government of the Walloon and Fleming communities in Belgium. For locality-based communities the obvious example is devolved local government. Such policies ensure that a major aspect of the social quality of community members accrues to them by virtue of their status as community members (mediated via the community's role in the polity and society) as well as from their national citizenship status.

The three facets of the social quality of community members are not independent of each other: indeed they are necessarily closely interrelated. However, they operate differently in relation to each of the social quality elements. Therborn's (2001) classification of the social quality elements into two dimensions is helpful here. The 'resource' dimension is attributable specifically to individuals and their communities and it maps to the social quality elements of socio-economic security and empowerment. The 'environmental' dimension is attributable to the social worlds inhabited by individuals and communities and it relates to social cohesion and social inclusion. Both of these dimensions influence the strength of a community but it is the environmental dimension that is most relevant to the relationship between the community and the nation state.

The next section deals briefly with internal community social quality: the strength of the community itself in relation to both the resource and environmental dimensions. This is followed by a more detailed discussion of external community social quality: the interface between community and society in relation to the environmental dimension.

Internal aspects of community social quality

Socio-economic security refers to the way the essential needs of citizens with respect to their daily existence are addressed by the different systems and structures responsible for welfare provisions. This is the most straightforward of the elements in that it refers to tangibles: protection against poverty, unemployment, homelessness, ill-health and other forms of material deprivation. The socio-economic security of a community is, in effect, its material quality of life compared both with other communities and with the nation as a whole. A community with strong socio-economic security is doubly advantaged. First, it has the resources to deal with crises within the community caused by, for example, a sudden influx of refugees, as occurred in the Jewish communities in the USA and Britain at the turn of the twentieth century (Black 1988; Sowell 1981). Secondly, of course a socio-economically strong

community is well placed in its negotiations with national and other external institutions.

Social cohesion concerns the processes and infrastructures that create and underpin social networks, including social norms of solidarity and generosity among community members. It is related to both social capital (World Bank 1998) and social integration (Klitgaard and Fedderke 1995). A high level of social cohesion maximises solidarity and shared identity and enables people 'to exist as real human subjects, as social beings' (Beck, van der Maesen et al. 1997:284). Social cohesion is an important attribute among first generation immigrant communities, particularly those which have migrated from traditional rural societies into cosmopolitan urban settings (Zokaei and Phillips 2000).

Social inclusion: if social cohesion is to do with infrastructures on an institutional level, then social inclusion relates to belonging and membership at an interpersonal and collective level. Thus the strength of community membership and identity is central to community inclusion: a community with only weak community inclusion will not have the resources to be meaningfully included in society in its own right (Delanty 1998; Peled 1992).

Empowerment is here defined as the realisation of human competencies and capabilities, in order to fully participate in social, economic, political and cultural processes. This reflects Mayo and Craig's (1995) notion of empowerment as a tool for democratic transformation (Forest, 1999). Community empowerment – enabling communities to develop their own potential – has both internal and external connotations (the latter are discussed below). Internally, communities need a strong sense of identity to be empowered and they must have a strong common volition for empowerment. There are two facets of empowerment necessary to maximise internal community social quality: passive and active empowerment. Its passive connotation relates to a community being enabled or facilitated in its empowerment, often through the extent of its social integration through normative structures and associational networks (Woolcock 1998:172). Its active connotation is strongly associated with 'team membership', leadership and positive community identity as exemplified in the British women's Black Pride movement (King 1995).

Internal community social quality depends on the interaction of these four elements, but they operate in different ways. Socio-economic security is to some extent independent of the other three and can be seen as a threshold. It is difficult to imagine a high level of community social quality without a socio-economic security level that meets the basic minimum requirements for social citizenship (Marshall 1950). Beyond that it makes intuitive sense to assume a correlation between socio-economic security and social quality – but this is by no means always the case, for example, Jews in Nazi Germany, South Asians in Uganda and Kenya in the 1960s, and Chinese in contemporary Indonesia and Malaysia.

There is a strong interaction between the other three elements of internal community social quality. Under most circumstances the association between them is positive – an increase in any one will lead to an overall increase in

internal community social quality. But this is not always the case. For example an immigrant community with shared ethnicity, religion and language may have more than enough social cohesion to optimise its community social quality but might need to enhance opportunities for positive empowerment and leadership among its members. For example, as reported in Granovetter's (1973) classic study of community ties, Boston's West End Italian community was highly socially cohesive in that it had extremely strong family and neighbourhood ties but was unempowered because it had no effective community leadership structure.

Digression: community social capital, community social cohesion and community social quality

There is a complication here because much of the literature blandly assumes that high levels of social capital, particularly bonding social capital, is always good for communities. Local communities have strong networks with high levels of face-to-face interpersonal trust and reciprocal obligations. But this is not the case. Very often it is the high level of social capital itself that holds back the community. The classic example here is the Mafia, very high on associational networks and with an absolute emphasis on trust – with ultimate sanctions against breach of trust. Here, to use Svendsen and Svendsen's (2004) metaphor, that bonding social capital has become more like 'superglue', stiffening and constraining communities rather than cohering them. Less dramatically, but more importantly in the sociological study of multicultural societies, is the extent of social capital that inheres in minority groups, often of migrant origin with different language and culture from the majority group and often instantly distinguishable because of skin colour and / or distinctive clothing. Often high levels of social capital within disadvantaged minority communities, while supporting cultural identity and group cohesion and providing vital socio-economic support systems, also have detrimental effects of isolating the community from wider social resources. Narayan gives a telling example here:

Powerful networks can restrict access to opportunities, for example the caste system in India with its rigid boundaries. social capital restricts individual freedom (women in purdah in Northern India), and can lead to excessive claims on successful group members – so excessive that successful individuals are sometimes driven to break off ties with the larger ethnic group.And sometimes the negative impacts of social capital are manifested in powerful, tightly knit social groups that are not accountable to citizens at large, and practice corruption and cronyism. ... Thus societies can be rich in social capital within social groups, and yet experience debilitating poverty, corruption and conflict.
(Narayan, 1999:8)

Therefore it is vitally important that communities, groups and networks that have strong internal, bonding social capital also have access to external, bridging social capital too. In a famous paper called 'The strength of weak ties', written before the notion of social capital came into common currency, Mark Granovetter (1973:1376) claimed that 'the more local bridges in a community and the greater their degree, the more cohesive the community and the more

capable of acting in concert'. This important issue of the relationship between bonding and bridging social capital is central to the notion of community social cohesion (Phillips, 2006).

External aspects of community social quality

Internal social quality, however, is only part of the story of community social quality. Community empowerment, and indeed overall community social quality, are also mediated and constrained by the community's relationship with powers beyond its boundaries (Phillips and Berman 2001). It is to these issues that we now turn.

No matter how strong the internal social quality of a community is, its potential overall social quality is highly dependent on the extent to which it is *allowed* to be in control of its destiny by national and other institutions. This environmental dimension is most strongly associated with the nature of societal social cohesion and extent to which the community itself is socially included in society; in other words, the extent to which the community is *societally* included.

Societal social cohesion

Societal social cohesion is a double-edged sword. High levels lead to homogeneity and provide a strong sense of belonging, mutual support and solidarity. Nevertheless, strongly homogeneous societies do not encourage diversity or dissent and the most highly cohesive societies tend toward totalitarianism as in Nazi Germany (Kershaw 2000) and now in Afghanistan (Shah 2001). Low levels of societal social cohesion, on the other hand, while encouraging pluralism and diversity, can lead to fragmentation and disintegration of nations, as has happened in Yugoslavia. There is no 'best model' for societal cohesion: for some countries, relatively high levels of homogeneity consistent with tolerance and liberal democracy may be the most appropriate formula; whereas for others, wide-ranging pluralism coupled with enough cohesion to avoid social disintegration may be best.

In this context the notion of demos covers both nation-state, or polity, and society – and it is valuable to distinguish between these in discussing societal cohesion. Some countries have homogeneous polities and heterogeneous societies. A classic example is the USA where American *political* citizenship is largely undifferentiated, excepting native Americans (Kymlicka 1995), and the school system and the flag are central to American political identity. American *social* citizenship, though, is so differentiated that it is 'hyphenated', for example: African-Americans; Italian-Americans; Korean-Americans. The USA is socially diverse but the high level of polity-based social cohesion deprives communities defined in ethnos terms from autonomy or self-governance. The US communitarian movement is trying to change this phenomenon on the grounds that 'no social task should be assigned to an institution that is larger than necessary to do the job' (Etzioni 1995:260).

The ultimate examples of countries with both strongly homogeneous societal and polity cohesion are probably Iceland and North Korea – but ironically these are nations where ethnos coincides with demos so there is no real distinction between community and society. France is a more realistic example of a society with ethnos communities but strong homogeneity in societal and polity cohesion and very strong central government. French national and societal homogeneity is strengthened by language requirements and a rigorously enforced national secular educational system with detailed state curriculum control (Limage 2000).

The archetypal example of a state with pluralistic cohesion, both political and societal, while (arguably) avoiding the dangers of social disintegration is Belgium, which is socially, politically and linguistically bifurcated between the French-speaking (Walloons) and the Flemish-speaking communities each of which has its own, largely self-governing region. In addition there is a third semi-autonomous region, around Brussels with permeable and interlocking Fleming and Walloon communities (Belgian Federal Government 2001).

The United Kingdom, on the other hand, is a mixture: some elements of both polity cohesion and societal cohesion are homogeneous while others are pluralistic. Politically its constitution is complex, with different degrees of devolution in its four constituent countries, including a highly convoluted constitutional structure in Northern Ireland keeping, at the time of writing, a delicate balance between two deeply divided ethnos communities, each with para-military organisations holding uneasy truces. In this context it is salutary to refer to social capital as operationalised by Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993). Associational networks are a central aspect of social capital and political parties are the primary associational networks of any polity. The three major British political parties, Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrats, all have Parliamentary representation in England, Wales and Scotland, but not in Northern Ireland. In addition, nationalist parties in both Scotland and Wales are represented in the British Parliament. None of these parties have religious affiliations, and ethnos communities comprising first and second generation immigrants in Great Britain have a tradition of joining the mainstream parties rather than setting up their own political parties. (Eade 1989; Lewis 1994).

The situation in Northern Ireland is entirely different. Here all four parties represented in Parliament have very strong ethnos affiliations. The Ulster Unionists and the Democratic Unionists are affiliated with the Ulster Protestant community that looks towards continued union with Great Britain. The Social Democratic and Labour Party and Sinn Fein represent the nationalist and republican wings respectively of the Northern Ireland Catholic community that looks towards eventual independence from Great Britain and union with the Republic of Ireland (McCall 1999).

Moving away from political to societal cohesion, much of British government social policy is based on homogeneity, for example a nationally organised social security system and health service. But there are also pluralistic elements, for example in the educational system, where the state provides funding for community-managed denominational schools. Most of these are run

by the Church of England (nearly 5,000), and the Roman Catholic Church (over 2,000), along with a few Methodist (around 30) and Jewish (22) schools (Judd 1992). Recently, and after a long struggle three state-funded Muslim schools have been approved (Adil 2000). This pluralistic approach is widening as the Government is planning a major increase in state-funded 'faith-based' schools (Department for Education and Employment 2001).

Other recent developments in British government policy have also strengthened the national infrastructure for facilitating community empowerment by providing resources aimed at strengthening communities. The Working Group on the Active Community (1999:5) comments that 'The Government's own infrastructure for supporting community involvement should be reviewed and strengthened ... with a coherent approach across *all government departments* to deliver the active community agenda'. These developments can also operate at an international level, for example with the European Union promoting policies and providing finance for enhancing community use of information and communication technologies in its member states (Cordis 1996).

The enhancement of pluralistic societal cohesion leads directly to opportunities for enhanced community empowerment, and thus community social quality – but these community enhancements do not *necessarily* follow. The onus is upon the community to respond and it is here that strong community cohesion has an empowering effect. In this context there are close links between social cohesion and social inclusion.

Community inclusion in society

The overall social inclusion of community members will be enhanced if the community itself is strongly included in society in its own right. Conversely, even a strong community with high levels of internal social inclusion will have a low overall social inclusion and social quality level if the community is not fully included in society. In addition, its members will have low levels of societal social inclusion. For example, in most European countries Gypsy communities find themselves in this position; they have high levels of community inclusion and cohesion but are prey to discrimination and social exclusion. Here, until the community's inclusion in society is enhanced, there is often a trade off between societal and community inclusion: for an individual to be included in wider society it may be necessary to hide or deny membership of the ethnos Gypsy community (Hawes 1996).

The British Jewish and Muslim communities provide interesting case studies of the ups and downs of community social inclusion. For over 150 years the Jewish community has had a special status in British society, initially through government recognition of the role of the Chief Rabbi and the Jewish Board of Deputies in community governance (including civil and marital law) and subsequently in relation to education (Phillips 2002). This was partly due to the strong cohesion and inclusion *within* the community and partly to the level of inclusion of the Jewish community leaders themselves within the higher

echelons of British society including links with Royalty and the government (Gartner 1960). The level of its inclusion in society can be gauged by the fact that the community is universally referred to as *Anglo-Jewry*.

Anglo-Jewry went through a difficult time at the turn of the twentieth century when Britain had to cope with 150,000 east European Jewish refugees. But, the community itself policed the immigrants, repatriated those who were not able to become financially self-sufficient, and provided financial support for those who needed it – all without recourse to government finance. Its success in coping with this crisis further strengthened the community's inclusion in British society (Feldman 1994).

The British Muslim community on the other hand has never achieved such a high level of inclusion in society. The primary reason for this is that the community itself has not achieved similar levels of either internal cohesion or inclusion to that of the Anglo-Jewish community; and this in turn has led to the community having a relatively weak collective identity. In particular, it does not have an individual or collective leadership that is unambiguously recognised either at national level or by the community itself. Compared to Anglo-Jewry, the British Muslim community has been severely disadvantaged (Dwyer 1993). First, it is not so well-established: large scale Muslim immigration, initially from Pakistan, only started in the 1960s and there was no well-established Anglo-Muslim community to welcome them. Secondly most Muslim immigrants from the Indian sub-continent came from rural backgrounds and did not have the high levels of human capital of the earlier urban east European Jewish immigrants (Shaw 1988). This meant, among other things, that the level of community socio-economic-security has always been much lower among British Muslims than in the Anglo-Jewish community (Werbner 1990).

Conclusions

Bringing these elements together, it can be seen that there are both internal and external aspects to a community's social quality. Internally, community social quality depends upon community cohesion, inclusion, socio-economic security and empowerment. Externally the situation is rather more complex. It is essential for a community to achieve a high level of inclusion in society in order to have influence at the national level. Most importantly, though, the nature of societal social cohesion constrains the extent to which any community can reach out and be responsible for aspects of its members' social quality that would otherwise be under the control of national or societal institutions. Within these parameters, some aspects of societal social cohesion affect the extent to which the community can optimise its external social quality.

Therefore, the extent to which a community can empower itself is tightly constrained by the nature of societal cohesion. At national level, increasing pluralism, coupled with a multicultural ethos, can facilitate further community empowerment. There is scope here for ethnos and other communities to act collectively to put pressure on governments to move towards more pluralistic approaches to societal cohesion. In Europe the EU can be enlisted too, as it

develops its subsidiarity policies based on the Maastricht Treaty. In a Public Hearing at the European Commission in March 2001 the Scottish Minister for Europe called for better ways of involving sub-national communities in the EU decision-making process and made a plea that decisions should be made as locally as possible (European Commission 2001:14). This reminds us that ethnos and other communities with links across Europe can use the EU as a vehicle for moving towards higher levels of community social quality

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