



Social capital in sport clubs

Introduction

The concept of social capital is described and used by various researchers. What interested me the most is the fact that this concept is about networks. People and organizations are part of and participate in temporary and durable networks in everyday life and these networks are becoming more and more important. I want to gain more insight in the concept to see how it works.

In this essay I will describe the concept of social capital and its features based on a literature review. Bonding, bridging and linking forms of social capital are distinguish. Then I will take a look at social capital in sport clubs. Finally, implications for building social capital in 'Open Clubs' are discussed.

Civil society and social capital

Civil society and social capital are two related concepts. Civil society refers to groups of people who contribute to change in the community through activities that are not part of the formal political system, commerce, or government (Baum and Ziersch, 2003). It comprises those organizations that complement (and contextualize) states and markets, while at a lower unit of analysis social capital refers to the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). Civil society may be the more comprehensive concept, but its operationalization in research and policy debates has often been made manifest through the concept of social capital (Woolcock, 2011). Putnam articulates an understanding of participation (in civil society) in terms of the social capital which is produced as a result of different forms of civic activity (Portes, 1998).

To understand how social capital is defined, I will dive deeper into Bourdieu's work. One of Bourdieu's main contributions to social science has been introducing the three concepts of habitus, field, and capital (Bourdieu, 1977; 1986; 1990). A habitus is a structuring mechanism that generates strategies for actors in the social world and through which actors relate to the social world. It is a system of durable dispositions, an internalized mental or cognitive structure that functions both consciously and unconsciously, and is constraining in its suggestion of what people should and should not do (Ihlen, 2007). At the basis of a habitus are all of the situations through which dispositions are created and that an individual experiences throughout his or her life (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu (1977) viewed society as a social space made up of a network of conceptual fields (Browne-Yung et al., 2013). A field has a dialectical relationship with habitus and is understood as a social space or network of relationships between positions occupied by actors (Ihlen, 2007). Actors use various forms of capital to pursue their interests knowingly or unknowingly and to position themselves within this field. Looking at sport clubs the club itself can be seen as the habitus, the field is the social space of members and non-members (like parents, sponsors, visitors) in the club and the actors are the individual members (or non-members) themselves.

In his article on forms of capital, Bourdieu (1986) defines three fundamental types of capital: economic capital (money, property), cultural capital (knowledge, skills, educational qualifications), and social capital (connections, membership of a group). He also argued that all of these forms of capital might also be apprehended as symbolic capital (prestige, honor, reputation). All these forms of capital are important to a sport club, but in this essay I will focus on social capital.

The concept of social capital

Concepts influencing the development of social capital theory have a long history dating back to the work of Durkheim, Marx and Weber (Portes, 1993). Nowadays there are two main schools of thought regarding the definition of social capital.

The first school is based on the work of Putnam. Putnam (1995) conceived of social capital as a community level resource and defined it as "features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit". Social capital can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating certain coordinated actions (Putnam, 1994). He sees social capital as "a distinctively social feature that is reflected in the structure of social relationships and so is both a public good and an ecological characteristic". Putnam, in a communitarian vision sees social capital as resulting from a strong civil society in which the state plays little part (Baum and Ziersch, 2003). Putnam (1993) includes sports clubs as an organizational type, representing a kind of horizontal interaction important for the functioning of social capital (Seippel, 2008).

At the heart of the concept of the second school is the notion that the relational resources within a community can be harnessed by certain actors to achieve desired outcomes (Bourdieu, 1980). Bourdieu (1986) gives a detailed definition of social capital: 'Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.' This definition focuses on the resources that are available to individuals as a result of their membership of social networks. Opposed to Putnam, Bourdieu sees the state as central to the way in which civil society mediates access to social capital (Baum and Ziersch, 2003).

Research by Leonard and Onyx (2003) and Onyx and Bullen (2000) takes a combined view of Putnam's and Bourdieu's approaches and suggest both are significant for the development and functioning of social capital within communities. Both approaches emphasize the central role of relationships within networks and notice that social capital is unevenly distributed in society according to class, age, gender, ethnicity, and race (Harvey, Lévesque and Donnelly, 2007).

Lin (2002) suggests that social capital should be defined operationally as "the resources embedded in social networks accessed and used by actors for actions". According to him the roots of social capital lie in individual interaction and networks. Coleman (1988) adds that social capital is embodied in relations among persons. Burt (1997) argues that social capital is a quality created between people.

Smart (2000) argues that social capital should be referred to as advantages gained through social connectivity. This connectivity may translate into different acts such as reciprocity, building of relationships, development of social and emotional skills and social participation (Coleman, 1994; Verweel, 2005).

Social capital resides in social connections, group membership and interaction with others, for instance through participation in community associations and informal networking (Spaaij, 2012). Active involvement in voluntary organizations is positively associated with access to social capital and network resources (Behtoui, 2007; Van Tubergen and Volker, 2015).

Relationships and interaction in networks

Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes two key dimensions in social capital: 1. the size of the network that a person possesses and 2. the volume of the capital that the other components of the network have, and to which a person obtains access through the network. Flap and Volker (2013) add a third component: the willingness and opportunity of members to share the resources with other members in the network.

Social networks refer to the ties between individuals or groups and could be considered the 'structural' element of social capital (Baum and Ziersch, 2003). We can distinguish formal and informal networks. Formal networks include those developed through formal organizations such as voluntary organizations and associations. Formal networks have been particularly central to Putnam's conception of social capital. Informal networks include friendship, family and work, and provide resources like social support.

Within these networks development of social capital is seen as a result of a conscious or unconscious investment strategy involving exchanges of, for example, gifts, services, words, time, information, attention, care, or concern. Social capital is produced and reproduced through these constant opportunities for 'legitimate exchanges' or opportunities for contact between the members of a network (Ihlen, 2005; Norrish et al. 2013).

These exchanges also imply "obligations" or "credit". For Bourdieu (1986), in essence, group membership and the credentials and credit that followed from this, is the kind of social capital an organization like a sports club has. According to Lin (2002) social capital may function as certification of social credentials, and may also reinforce identity and recognition.

Features of social capital

Norrish et al. (2013) suggest five features of an organization with high social capital: trust, reciprocity, shared values, shared norms and openness.

Trust

At the core of social capital is trust. Newton (2001) argues that trust is probably *the* main component of social capital. Trust is defined as the extent to which individuals believe that others mean what they say and will follow through on their commitments (Sander and Lowney, 2006).

Trust and social capital are closely related because, as social capital is a relational construct, it depends heavily on trust (Lewicki and Brinsfield, 2009). Trust and social capital operate in a reciprocal relationship, trust is helping to create social capital and the use of social capital is increasing trust (Nooteboom, 2007).

Research links voluntary association membership to increased trust (Paxton, 2007; Stolle, 1998). Voluntary associations like sport clubs promote trust among their members through the norms and social sanctions passed through the in-group network (Friedkin, 1993; Marsden and Friedkin, 1993; Moody & White, 2003).

Putnam (2000) distinguishes thick trust and thin trust. Thick trust is trust embedded in personal relationships that are strong, frequent, and nested in wider networks. This honesty is based on personal experience. Thin trust extends trust beyond an individual's actual network, into a more implicit sense of common networks and assumptions of eventual reciprocity. Thin trust is based more on community norms than personal experience.

Putnam's assumption is that the personalized trust developed within voluntary associations spills over into generalized trust within communities and society more broadly (Putman, 2000).

Reciprocity

With these generalized norms of trust, people engage in reciprocity. They do things for others without any immediate expectation of repayment, trusting that the favors will be passed on to others in the community, and either directly or indirectly benefit the person doing this initial favor (Sander and Lowney, 2006). These reciprocal acts mainly facilitate access to resources at an individual and collective level (Burnett, 2006). Reciprocity also depends on the willingness and opportunity of members to share the resources with other members in the network (Flap and Volker, 2013). The reciprocity is also linked with feelings of belonging and the generation of bonding social capital (Burt, 2001; Verweel, 2005).

Shared values

One of the most powerful motivators for people to get together is the belief in a shared set of values and a common purpose. Voluntary associations like sport clubs can be understood as expressions of shared values – 'organizing around enthusiasms' (Hoggett and Bishop, 1985). A shared value needs to speak to the heart as well as the brain (Hammer et al., 2012). These shared values, norms and understandings facilitate co-operation within or among groups (OECD, 2001).

Shared norms

Norms are cultural products (including values, customs, and traditions) which represent individuals' basic knowledge of what others do and think that they should do (Sherif, 1936; Cialdini, 2003). Sociologists describe norms as informal understandings that govern individuals' behavior in society (Scott and Marshall, 2009). Norms are regarded to exist as collective representations of acceptable group conduct as well as individual perceptions of particular group conduct (Lapinski and Rimal, 2005). When norms exist and are effective, it constitutes a powerful form of social capital (Coleman, 1988).

Applying the last two features to volunteers in a sports club, strong shared norms, values and understandings would be associated with high levels of trust within the group (Nichols, Tacon and Muir, 2012).

Openness

Openness can be regarded as important in two ways: an honest way of talking or behaving in which one does not try to hide anything and a tendency to accept new ideas, methods, or changes. Both are indications for how 'open' a sport club's culture is. Are members talking *with* each other or *about* each other and is the club open to changes or not.

We see these features also in Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) work on organizational social capital. They argue that organizational social capital comprises three key dimensions: structural (connections

among actors); relational (trust among actors); and cognitive (shared goals and values among actors). These dimensions are distinct but interrelated. Structural social capital indicates the presence of a network of access to people and resources, while relational and cognitive social capital reflect the capability for resource exchange (Andrews, 2010).

Features like trust and shared values facilitate networks of bonding, bridging and linking as different forms of social capital (Fukuyama, 1995; Woolcock, 2001). I will address these forms of social capital in the next paragraph.

Bonding versus bridging versus linking social capital

Social networks have been distinguished as bonding, bridging and linking, reflecting the different types of social capital that they promote (Ager and Strang, 2004).

Putnam (2000) describes bonding social capital as 'sociological superglue', reinforcing exclusive identities within homogenous groups, and bridging social capital as 'sociological WD-40', enabling social contact between people across diverse social backgrounds (Nichols, Tacon and Muir, 2012). Bridging and linking social capital refer to ties that cut across different communities/individuals (Narayan, 1999). Linking social capital in particular refers to vertical connections which exist between different levels of social status (Woolcock, 2001; Skinner, Zakus and Cowell, 2008). For social groups to influence their surroundings 'weak ties' or 'bridges' are just as important as 'strong ties' or 'bonds' (Seippel, 2008).

Bonding social capital

Bonding social capital is usually characterised as having dense, multi-functional ties and strong but localized trust (Darcy et al, 2014). It refers to horizontal tight knit ties between individuals or groups sharing similar characteristics such as those among relatives, close friends or members of sport teams or clubs (Baum and Ziersch, 2003; Nichols, Tacon and Muir, 2012). It is viewed to promote homogeneity, particularized trust and high personal connections, while also being more likely to be inward-looking and less tolerant of diversity (Briggs, 1998; Spaaij, 2012). Bonding is important for a sense of personal identity, support, cohesion, feelings of togetherness and belonging (Seippel, 2008).

Putnam (2000) notes that 'bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity'. Although bonding social capital may create strong in-group loyalty, it may also create out-group opposition and depress social aspirations. In the context of discussing social capital and tolerance, Putnam notes that bonding social capital can reinforce social stratification (Baum and Ziersch, 2003).

Bridging social capital

Bridging is the expression of heterophilic ties between people who are different, such as those across teams within a league (Nichols, Tacon and Muir, 2012). Bridging is about reaching beyond networks of family and friends. Bridging is important for personal and community development (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Bridging can be used in at least three different ways: to cross demographic divides, notably ethnic divides, to bridge structural gaps between networks, and to access information and resources outside the community (Darcy et al., 2014). Social networks representing bridging-social

capital provide the opportunity structure that is a prerequisite for influence in and through civil society (Seippel, 2008).

For organizations as sport clubs to be influential in civil society, it is required that both kinds of social capital (bonding and bridging) are developed and that they work productively in a balanced way (Burt, 2005).

Linking social capital

Linking social capital is concerned with relations between individuals and groups in different social strata (Healy and Coté, 2001). It refers to ties between different social groups of society; for example, citizens from all social groups who are fans of their local professional football club (Harvey, Lévesque and Donnelly, 2007). Woolcock (2001) includes the capacity of individuals and communities to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond the immediate community in linking social capital. Szreter (2002) relates linking social capital to relationships between people across formal or institutionalized power in society. He argues that this form of social capital is particularly relevant in terms of reducing inequities because it encourages people to feel a sense of responsibility for people beyond their bonded group. Burnett (2006) suggests that sport can generate linking capital by facilitating access to resources and assets that are highly valued in the community.

Social capital in sports clubs

A growing body of sport management literature has recognized how social capital develops in the networks of volunteers and stakeholders connected through voluntary sport clubs (a.o. Seippel, 2006; Harvey, Lévesque and Donnelly, 2007; Spaaij and Westerbeek, 2010; Spaaij, 2012; Heidary, Amiri, Eisani and Kenari, 2012).

The associational nature of sport clubs is often seen as a forum for the creation of social capital (Spaaij and Westerbeek, 2010). Tonts (2005) suggests that sport clubs can be seen as sites of social networking and therefore form the basis for both the creation and expression of social capital.

To describe social capital and its relevance and importance for a sport club, I will take Putnam's short definition of social capital. Putnam (2004) defines social capital as 'social networks and norms of reciprocity': in an organization, this translates into the ways in which people relate to each other and work together. In a sport club social capital can refer to networks within the club, between different teams or committees in the club, between committee members and the board members, and between the sport club and other sport clubs in the wider field.

Social capital is a collective resource available to all the group members and embedded in either formal structures or informal relationships (Nichols, Tacon and Muir, 2012). In applying this to a sport club run by volunteers, social capital may be embedded in the formal structures of the club, such as defined roles of chairperson, secretary, trainer/coaches etc. On the other hand, the informality characterizing many voluntary organizations like sport clubs means it will also be embedded in relationships. These can be more important than formal structures. Shared norms and values bind the members to the sport club. This may include 'the desire to promote a sport so they or others can

play it, the identity with a social institution, and the social rewards of membership' (Nichols, Tacon and Muir, 2012).

Building social capital is important for organizations like a sport club, its members and the community. Hazelton and Kennan (2000) identify how social capital can contribute to the organizational bottom line by leading to increased, or more complex, forms of social capital, reduced transaction costs, and organizational advantage (for example: improved productivity and efficiency). The degree of connectedness and engagement in voluntary organizations like sport clubs is reflected in the availability of social capital in a community (Lin, 2001).

Bonding social capital

In my opinion bonding social capital is the foundation of a sport club. Sport clubs arise because a bunch of people have the same interest and the same passion for a particular sport. Sport clubs are relatively strong contributors to concrete social networks among active members in sports organization (Seippel, 2005). Social encounters in the sport club are important to members and can be more important than the sports activity itself (Spaaij, 2012). It creates a sense of identity and strong attachment to the locality (Hague and Mercer, 1998).

But strong bonds within a sport club can make it so homogeneous in their membership, that the club becomes exclusionary toward certain citizens along race, gender, and social class lines, the so called 'dark side' of bonding social capital (Tonts, 2005; Lake, 2011). Spaaij (2012) describes bonding social capital as not merely a potential outcome of sports activities; it is also put to work to negotiate access to sports clubs.

Bridging social capital

Participation in a sport club is also regarded as stimulating bridges or links between different groups and social networks. Harris (1998) suggests that sport can be used to foster new friendships and social connectivity across class, religious and ethnic boundaries. Tonts (2005) argues that this can include players, coaches, volunteers and spectators, and can ultimately lead to increases in norms of trust and reciprocity. Whittaker and Holland-Smith's (2014) research demonstrates that the bridging of social capital leads to a widening of volunteers' social networks.

Spaaij (2012) argues that a focus on perceived similarities can be an important aspect of bridging, just as it is of bonding. His research on Somalian (Muslim) football clubs in Melbourne shows that bridging networks were also created with Muslim players on opposing teams. Here bonding – being Muslim – and bridging – engage in social contact with Muslim players of other teams – social capital intertwine.

Bridging social capital also has a 'dark side' where sporting encounters between groups can magnify inter-group differences and tensions. Miscommunication, distrust, verbal abuse, and discrimination can even lead to physical violence in a context of direct sporting confrontation (Spaaij, 2012).

Linking social capital

Sport clubs are typically introverted organizations concerned with their own activities (sport), and aren't particularly oriented towards other (voluntary) organizations (Seippel, 2008). Other studies also suggest that sport clubs are among the least linked parts of civil society (Paxton, 2002; Perrin, 2005).

The quality of linking social capital can be also assessed in terms of the type of connections that sport clubs have with competitors, politicians, journalists, bureaucrats, and other relevant groups or organizations (Ihlen, 2007). Sport clubs have to invest in social capital to strengthen connections with these stake holders.

Spaaij (2012) suggests that skills and education of volunteers in a sport club enables them to access and utilize linking opportunities that present themselves in sport. Increased level of education has resulted in the higher level of expertise in Finnish sports clubs (Koski, 2012). Volunteers can transmit part of the social and cultural resources accessed through bridging and linking networks to other club volunteers thus developing increased levels of linking social capital.

During my research I noticed that little research has been conducted on linking social capital in sport clubs. On one hand this is logical, because sport clubs tend to be inward looking and don't use resources in available networks where the sport club is part of. On the other hand, society requires sport clubs to be more outward looking to adapt to changes in society. Traditional sport clubs should become (more) open sport clubs. In the following paragraph I will describe what open sport clubs are.

Sport clubs as Open Clubs

Sport clubs represent the largest category of voluntary organizations in the Netherlands and throughout Europe and are therefore an important asset in civil society.

Sport clubs increasingly have to deal with changes in their surroundings. The modern sports consumer is very demanding, legal and regulatory pressure is increasing, the financial capacity is under pressure and voluntary work admittedly remains the same in terms of hours, but changes substantively (Buijserd, 2013; Zeegers 2014).

Socio-cultural trends also affect sport clubs. Think of the gradual aging of people in society, ongoing individualization, reduced importance of competitive sport, increased participation in events where the key performance is finishing regardless of the performance itself, more emphasis on the immaterial than the material, new technologies enabling new social connections, increasing need for flexibility, changing demands for new sports (fast, fierce, tough) and more attention to health and vitality (Schulze, 2009; Stammes, 2013; Brouwer, 2014).

These trends could be a threat, but there are also opportunities for sports clubs. The opportunities are often not seen because committee members of sport clubs frequently think in a traditional way and are too internally focused. Responding to current themes such as vitality and health, creating innovative sports for seniors and seeking cooperation with potential partners and other sport clubs, health care and businesses, is done by only a small number of sport clubs. This traditional view of the sport clubs can be a threat to the well-developed association culture in the Dutch sports landscape (Sillen, 2014a).

Open Clubs

Pro-active participation in a changing environment is needed to make sport clubs vital and ensure the long-term continuity of sport clubs (Broeke, 2014; Hoevenagel, 2004). In the Dutch sports landscape NOC*NSF – the National Olympic Committee and Sports Federation - introduced the term

'open club'. There are more names given to open clubs which mean about the same, such as socially active or vital sport clubs. An open or vital sport club can be defined as a financially and organizationally healthy sport club with strong governance and good policies that develops realistic and future-oriented activities from its own responsibility, for both its members and its surroundings and thus is capable to fulfill its role in both sports and society (Blom, 2013).

The basic of an open club consists of the 'golden triangle': (voluntary) staff, accommodation and sports offerings (NOC*NSF, 2014). When a sport club can make sure the elements of the golden triangle are intertwined, all the basic preconditions for a vital sport club are there.

An open club usually has more than one of these characteristics (Van Eekeren and Dijk, 2013; NISB, 2014):

- is demand-driven: not only to its members but also to non-members as local residents;
- is neighborhood-based: the sport club know what's going on in its neighborhood and can contribute to the neighborhood;
- is inviting and welcoming;
- consciously sees and seizes opportunities that match the ambitions of the club;
- collaborates with other organizations;
- conducts active and continuous policy on the development, quality and training of trainers, coaches, referees and administrative staff;
- has structural attention for conducting social activities and secures this within the sport club.

All this can lead to membership retention and/or growth, more things going on at the club and continuity of its existence (NOC*NSF, 2014). Focus points for sport clubs to become an open club are (1) a change in thinking: from internal to external focus, (2) continuous monitoring of needs of members and non-members, (3) making the club's members fans and even ambassadors and (4) collaborating with other organizations (Sillen, 2014b).

Every sport club is an asset to civil society, simply by being there for its members. But open clubs in addition connect with people and organizations outside the club. It mainly concerns the openness to the outside world and the activities arising therefrom (Sillen, 2014c). This has implications for the development of social capital in the club. I will address this issue in the next paragraph.

Building social capital in Open Clubs

In one of the previous paragraphs I described the three forms of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking. For every sport club, also open clubs, all three forms are important. But what are the consequences for building social capital in an open club compared to a traditional sport club?

Bonding social capital

As mentioned before, to me it is the most important form of social capital for every sport club. Shared norms, values and interests connect people within a sport club. Bonding social capital remains important for an open club, but it is to be expected that the 'dark side' of bonding social capital, the exclusionary part, is not or less existent in an open sport club compared to a traditional sport club. Current members of the club must be willing to share their values and norms with new

members to include them in the sport club and should be inviting and welcoming to newcomers. A sense of openness is crucial.

Bridging social capital

One of the characteristics of an open club is its contribution to the neighborhood. When a sport club knows what's going on in their neighborhood, the sport club can organize activities, share resources and connect to neighborhood networks to bind people and other organizations to the club. Some even refer to the term 'the sport club as community center of the future'. Projects are funded to initiate partnerships, for example in The Hague where football club SVH and hockey club HCWV share a sports accommodation and organize activities for both its members and the neighborhood (ZonMw, 2015). Development of bridging social capital is thus important for open clubs or traditional clubs that want to become more open.

Linking social capital

Linking social capital involves initiating partnerships with various people and organization outside the direct community of the sport club. In Tilburg for example, in the BORIS-project – a program to promote sports among inactive inhabitants aged 45+ in the neighborhoods Tilburg-West and Tilburg Reeshof – three sport clubs work together with general practitioners, physiotherapists, a commercial fitness school and the municipality. This project is funded by Sportimpuls, a Dutch funding program for sports (participation) programs. A project like this would never have been possible to develop and effectuate without these sport clubs having linking social capital. In an open club linking social capital is better developed than in a traditional sport club. Or, if a traditional sport club wants to become a (more) open club, it should have more attention to building linking social capital.

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