

ETHNIC IDENTITY, DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL COHESION THROUGH VOLUNTEERING: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THEORETICAL CONCEPTS APPLIED TO CULTURAL NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS IN SOCIETY

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Introduction

A body of literature is developing on the role that voluntary associations play in the development of: identity and self-expression (Stebbins, 1992; Arai, 1996; 1999; 2000); social capital and social cohesion (Arai, 2000; Hemingway, 1999; 2000; Newton, 1997; Putnam, 1993a; 1993b; 1995); and citizenship and civil society (Arai, 1999; 2000; Friedmann, 1992; Hemingway, 1999; 2000; Torjman, 1997). With a focus on white, middle-class Americans, Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton (1985) built upon Tocqueville's notion of the mores or "habits of the heart" and the extent to which participation in local politics, family life and religious traditions help to create individuals who can sustain a connection to a wider political community and support the maintenance of free institutions. However, in this work and others little attention has been paid to participation in a specific subset of voluntary associations—namely, non-profit cultural organisations—and the role that serious leisure forms of volunteering play in the expression of diversity or homogeneity in what Allison (1988) refers to as poly-ethnic or pluralistic communities such as Canada, the United States or England.

Concepts such as ethnic identity and acculturation are embedded within a broader theoretical discussion of diversity, homogeneity and community. This paper presents a conceptual model that points to the potential incoherence among these concepts and discusses the extent to which participation in the public sphere through non-profit cultural institutions supports assimilation and acculturation or the maintenance of ethnic identity (diversity). In doing so, this paper connects the tensions between ethnic identity and acculturation to a critical discussion of volunteering, social capital and social cohesion. In addition, under the current political and economic challenges facing our communities, these theoretical discussions are applied to the practical volunteer management issues related to the sustainability or stagnation of cultural organisations in civil society.

Connecting Ethnic Identity and Acculturation to the Organization and Community

The ability of diverse individuals and groups to coexist and flourish is important to the stability of a country. In Canada, many issues erupt in social spaces where this has not been accomplished. Thus, our interest naturally turns to the role of leisure in creating social cohesion, and the outcomes of social capital in society. Existing literature focuses on differences in participation patterns and leisure constraints and the extent to which individuals belonging to ethnic groups have been assimilated and/or acculturated (Allison, 1988; Allison & Geiger, 1993; Carr & Williams, 1993; Floyd & Shinew, 1994; James, 1995; Philipp, 1995; Rublee & Shaw, 1991), or have maintained their ethnic identity (Allison & Geiger, 1993; Tirone & Pedlar, 2000). Recent work by Tirone (1999-2000) also points to the experiences of racism or indifference. This connects to our broader concern with the expression of diversity versus homogeneity in Western society. However, a concern with the vitality of the public sphere and civil society also leads to questions about how these concepts pertaining to individual identity connect to the health of our cultural non-profit organizations, and to the nature of the broader community.

This paper discusses the relationships between ethnic identity, diversity, organisational sustainability and community cohesion. Woven into this discussion is the extent to which individuals are tied into social networks and the relative permeability or tightness of those social networks. Of importance to this conceptual framework is the work by Karlis (1998) in which he explores social cohesion and social closure in ethnic cultural recreation. The expanding literature on social capital also provides a useful conceptual framework for examining social networks in relation to other elements such as norms and values, and trust in society (Fukuyama, 1995; Newton, 1997; Putnam, 1993b; 1995). The social capital literature sheds light on social cohesion in two main ways. First, intraorganisational social capital exists within organisations as connections (social networks, social integration) are built between individuals (Arai, 2000). Hemingway (2000) refers to this as bonding social capital. Second, social capital exists where connections are made between individuals in the organization and individuals and institutions outside of the organization (extraorganizational). This is also referred to as bridging or connecting social capital (Hemingway, 2000).

This latter application focuses on a frequently forgotten notion within discussions of social capital, mainly diversity. An emphasis on diversity in the broader community can create a system of insular organisations. Consequently, an overemphasis on intraorganizational (bonding) social capital may lead to a lack of sustainability for cultural organizations in Canadian society. For example, as many cultural non-profit organizations reach third and fourth generations of development they have a difficulty sustaining the organisation as younger generations of people lose interest or follow different goals. Furthermore, an overemphasis on extraorganizational (bridging) social capital may promote the sustainability of organizations as the nature of the constituent members is broadened beyond the ethnic group. However, this may also have an effect on the maintenance of ethnic identity and diversity

in society. While authors such as Earth suggest that "interaction in such a social system does not lead to its liquidation through change and acculturation; cultural differences can persist despite interethnic contact and interdependence" (as cited in Allison, 1988, p. 251), how and whether this occurs remains to be seen.

Conclusions

This conceptual model has broader implications for the maintenance of ethnic identities and distinct cultures in society. A critical theory perspective notes that each system bears the seeds of its own destruction. Further, critical theory asks us to look at the ways in which the actors within a system are unaware of those seeds of destruction, or the extent to which they unknowingly circumvent their own goals. At the heart of this discussion lies the tensions created around the notion of diversity in relation to social capital. Where diversity does exist, does an emphasis on intraorganisational social capital lead to the marginalisation of the entire organization and alienation of its members from the rest of society? Does extraorganizational social capital subsume cultural identity under that of the dominant culture (i.e., acculturation) and lead to homogeneity in society? This conceptual model reveals the problem with viewing single issues or dichotomies outside of their broader context. For example, a sole emphasis on maintaining ethnic identity through leisure practices (and an emphasis on bonding social capital) may lead to stagnation within the organization and the eventual death of them. Finally, an emphasis on social cohesion through leisure begs the question, to what end?"

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