Too Much Bonding, Too Little Bridging and Linking. Social Capital in International Sports Associations

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Assumption: actor behaviour in international sports associations

- in international sports associations, clientilism, secrecy, unaccountability, ‘old boys networks’, corruption and criminal activity occur more frequently than in most other associations

- intermediate position in-between the normal corporate organization and gated communities/predatory governments/mafia groups

- cases and anecdotes as evidence (investigative journalism): IOC/Salt Lake City, FIFA, International Volleyball Federation, International Boxing Association
An explanation: the dark side of social capital

- individual traits versus organizational features?
- too much ‘bonding’ in small closed groups; the cohesion of groups is secured through dense in-group networking, sharing of spoils and enforced group trust, and hostility towards other groups,
- too little ‘bridging’ in-between groups, i.e. too little generalized trust, voluntary networking and common norms and values
- a modified version of the explanation of behaviour and interaction in predatory governments, mafia groups, criminal gangs and terrorist groups (and to some ethnic groups)
Other explanations

- very thin form of democracy
- very limited accountability
- very little openness
- footloose multinationals
- very weak countervailing forces against the free display of power games
- all factors are important but they are mobilized and mediated through the role of social capital
What is social capital?

- Social capital is an asset that emanates from participation in social relations.
- Networks, trust, civic norms (reciprocity, mutuality, honesty), voluntary associations.
- Definition 1: Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of relationships.
- Definition 2: Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships and norms that shape the quality and quantity of society’s social interactions.
Bonding, bridging and linking

- bonding social capital: ties (normally strong ties) between people in similar situations, such as immediate family, close friends and neighbours
- bridging social capital: more distant ties (normally weak ties) of like persons, such as loose friendships and workmates
- linking capital: relations to unlike people in dissimilar situations, such as those who are entirely outside of the community
The benefits and the warm glow of social capital

- the beneficial effect of social capital has been documented in a multitude of studies and in different fields: education, health, neighbourhood quality, regional development, organizational citizenship behaviour, innovation processes, economic growth and development, and democracy (voluntary sports associations)

- conclusion: more social capital is good?
The dark side of social capital

unfortunately, some forms of bonding social capital are associated with negative outcomes for the wider society and sometimes even for the group itself: downward-leveling social norms, antisocial behaviour, lock-in and weak adaptability, exclusion, racism, religious bigotry, increased inequality and preservation of power structures
The ambiguities of bonding

- a minimum level of bonding is crucial for socialization and identity
- beyond that level increased social capital can have positive or negative effects on the groups and positive and negative effects on the wider society dependent on the context
The effects of bonding in international sports associations

- bonding capital is highly beneficial to the privileged members of the individuals and the group in power
- however, the impacts to the wider society are often highly negative: inefficiency, clientilism, exclusion, perversion of democracy
- fertile environment for corruption ("misuse of public office for private ends")
Exploiting the opportunities, sharing the spoils and preserving the power

- good opportunities (as well as high individual rewards) for bonding
- while bridging is very difficult (cultural differences) and gives few and uncertain individual rewards
- good opportunities for exclusion and power preservation (strong mutual interests of insiders, fractured opponents with weak interests in changing the situation)
- good opportunities for clientilism and corruption (sharing spoils, corruption indexes, secrecy, weak formal accountability, weak public sphere)
What can be done?

- objectively implausible
- but room for institutional entrepreneurs and *agents provocateur*
- more openness and accountability
- governments, UN
- WACA