

Wallman, Sandra

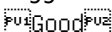
**Working Paper**

## Network Capital and Social Trust: Pre-Conditions for Diversity?

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**Network Capital and Social Trust:  
Pre-Conditions for ‘Good’  
Diversity?**

Sandra Wallman

NOTA DI LAVORO 67.2005

**MAY 2005**

KTHC - Knowledge, Technology, Human Capital

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# Network Capital and Social Trust: Pre-Conditions for ‘Good’ Diversity?

## Summary

This paper unpicks the assumption that because social networks underpin social capital, they directly create it – more of one inevitably making more of the other. If it were that simple, the sheer quantity of networks criss-crossing a defined urban space would be a proxy measure for the local stock of social capital.

Of course the interrelationships are more complex. Two kinds of complication stand out. The first is specific: networks have both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, but the two elements have no necessary bearing on each other. The shape and extent of a network says nothing about the content of the links between its nodes. Certainly the line we draw between any two of them indicates contact and potential connection, but what kind of contact, how often, how trusting, in what circumstances, to what end...? Reliable answers to these questions need more than surface maps or bird’s eye accounts of who goes where, who speaks to whom.

The second complication is a general, not to say universal, difficulty. We are stuck with the fact that sociological concepts - networks, social capital and trust included - are ‘only’ abstractions. They are ways of thinking about the apparent chaos of people behaving all over the place – here, to make it worse, in multi-cultural urban environments - but none of them is visible to be measured, weighed or quantified.

This does not make the concepts ‘untrue’, and it should not stop them being useful. My hope is that we can find a nuanced perspective which will at least make the complications intelligible. At best, a multi-layered model will account for diversity in the nature of trust; and for variations in the way social capital is hoarded or distributed within and across ethnic boundaries. It would be contribution enough if we were able to specify the conditions which cause social capital, as Puttnam formulates it, to be exclusionary or inclusionary in its effect..

**Keywords:** Network capital, Social trust, ‘Good’ diversity

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## 1.

### Introduction

The paper begins by summarising the development of the network idea as social anthropologists pioneered it in Africa in the 1950s. They, like us now, were trying to make sense of multi-cultural [in their time “inter-tribal”] urban encounters brought about by labour migration; to know why ‘diversity’ was sometimes good, sometimes not; and to put themselves in a position to make recommendations that could bring local economic benefit. Although they did not look for social capital as such [it did not exist in the lexicon of the time] they knew the importance of “voluntary associations” which could be said to have similar functions. Like us too, they were committed to multi-layered analysis, as much concerned to interpret the strategies of individuals as they were to compare and explain the migrant styles of different tribes or categories of people. And they designed network models to suit.

Their work is brought forward with reference to my own effort to create a typology of urban systems, focusing on Europe, which would reflect and account for different styles of diversity in different cities or part of cities. A report of work-in-progress was given at ENGIME Workshop 2, [the Hague, November 2002] and is available on the FEEM website [*Nota di Lavoro* 76. 2003]. This next step version raises questions about the interpenetration of network, trust and social capital as conditions of [good] diversity, and suggests ways that they and it could be monitored in the field.

## 2.

### Methodology

The hard part of scientific research is that the ‘facts’ of it are never given to us fully formed. The raw data of field research in anthropology are people behaving all over the place. Even to begin to take charge of the chaos, it is necessary to impose some kind of framework for understanding. The themes used to construct such frameworks change with time and circumstance, but the how-do-I-deal-with-this, which-method-is-best-when questions are chronic.

Ultimately the decision about research method is guided by what one wants to know and limited by the possibilities of knowing it. Methods make sense only with reference to the research problem, the field setting, and the resources available; the four elements form an interdependent set. More vital is the decision about limitation: How best can I focus the field of study to get at what I want to know and to avoid being swamped by those chaotic raw data ?

Here enters the notion of context. Essentially context is completely elastic; decisions about where to draw the line around it are taxing because quite arbitrary. How far out can it/ does it need to extend? [I am reminded always of the small girl who said she knows how to spell banana but doesn’t know when to stop...<sup>1</sup> ] Yet more drastic

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<sup>1</sup> A proper exploration of this problem is given by Ernest Gellner in ‘Concepts and Society’ ( 1973).

is the fact that context is about meaning as well as practice. Social actors invariably affect practical events by the meanings they put on them [Figures 1, 2].

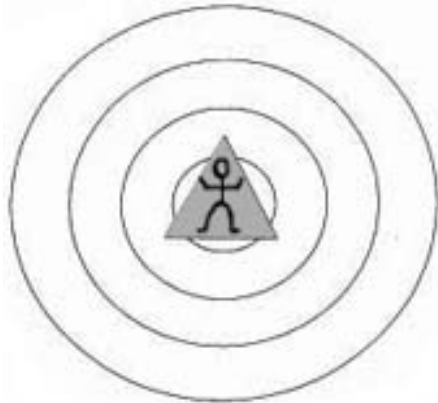


Figure 1. Levels of Practical Context



Figure 2. Practical context with levels of meaning superimposed

Each shape/scope of context implies its own kinds of research strategy. The antecedent to thinking about networks is the distinction between survey and case study. Surveys look at people as units of population; anthropological case studies see them embedded in systems of relationships<sup>2</sup> - i.e. in context[s]. Roughly speaking, the survey studies a few things about many people; its scope is broad but shallow. The case study method, by contrast, studies everything about very few; its scope is narrow but deep. It brings all the characteristics of the person/ group/ place together to make a multi-dimensional and holistic picture [Figures 3, 4].

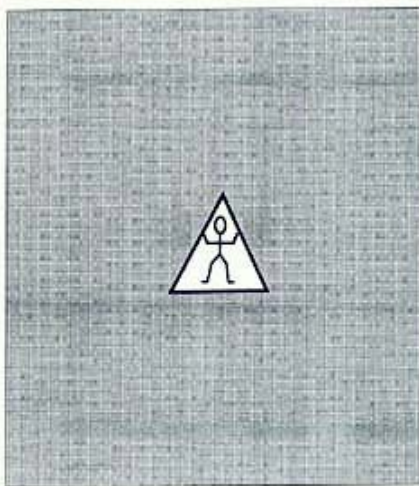


Figure 3. Block to focus on person / problem-of-person

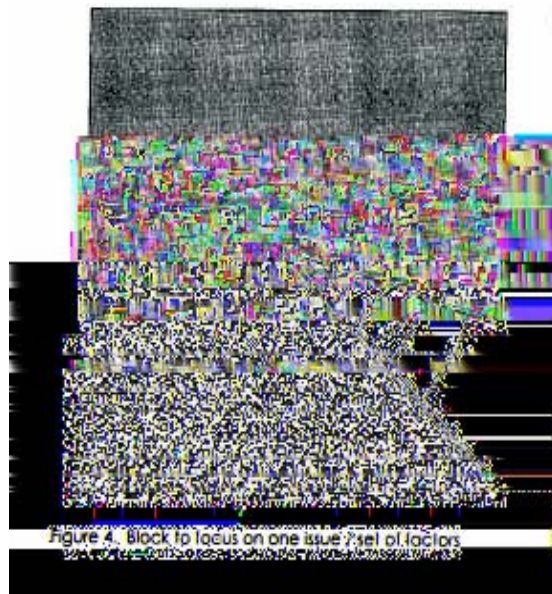
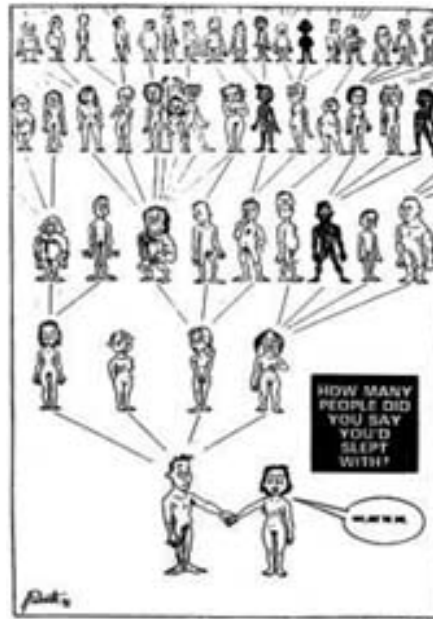


Figure 4. Block to focus on one issue / set of factors

The network idea falls somewhere between the two extremes. Indeed, it was developed in part to bridge the quantitative-qualitative gap in a user-friendly way.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Leach 'An anthropologist looks at social survey'

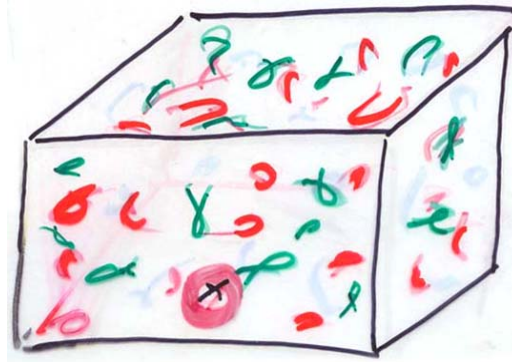
The urgent disaster of the AIDS epidemic has underlined its value as a popular tool for thinking with. This rather charming HIV-prevention poster is specifically ‘about’ sexual networks [Figure 5], but it illustrates the general network logic: Who knows X? How many other people know X? How many know someone who knows someone who knows X? Which of these people know each other? Who is outside the net? [Although the point of this particular poster is that only those who ‘know’ no one at all can be sure of escaping it.]



**Figure 5. Network Logic**

Similar nitty-gritty questions are asked by anthropologists, but we also use network notions *a priori*, to define the context of research and/or to structure a case study. Specifically we are likely to do so when working in urban places. Given the interdependency of method and setting, it is no surprise that strategies for defining context in traditional anthropological arenas – normally ‘tribal’, rural, small scale, homogeneous – turn out to be inappropriate in polyglot towns. The real value of network thinking emerges where there are no natural boundaries of beach or border or settlement pattern from which to infer that one set of relationships, one context, has ended and the other has begun. No surprise again to see that social network studies, with notable exceptions,<sup>3</sup> have developed most importantly in cities.

<sup>3</sup> The line of descent begins with John Barnes (1954) who used ‘network’ to apply to relationships not defined by territory or by work among Norwegian fishermen. Elizabeth Bott (1957) applied it to showed husband/wife role segregation in Britain to be a function of network connectedness. See: “Thinking with Networks” in Ulf Hannerz (1980),



**Figure 6 The City as “Fishtank”**

The main varieties of the anthropological version of network thinking can be demonstrated by the image of a fish tank full of fish [Figure 6].

The tank represents – say – the city, the fish the people who live and work in it. One strategy would be to make a map of the movements and interactions of categories of fish/people in the tank/city, and from that to infer what kind of place, what kind of social or fishy network system that city/tank *is*. If, instead, we wanted to know about one individual among the many, our strategy would be to tag one fish/person and follow it/them around to trace the pattern of their connections – an ego-centred network. Which option we take depends of course on what it is we want to know...

It is important to keep the tank/fish distinction in mind,<sup>4</sup> even in cases – like our present project – where it is appropriate that they be combined. Key to the manipulation of social capital in multi-cultural urban systems is the relation between people[s] and place. What *could* this person/ethnic group do to get by in this particular city setting? What are his/their capabilities? Do they ‘fit’ the capabilities of the place?<sup>5</sup> The two kinds of capability are discussed here in turn.

### **3.**

#### Ego-centred Networks

On the ego-centred side, recent studies tend to focus on the way networks are deliberately ‘worked’. Emphasis is on their use value, on conscious planning and purposes. Networks feature prominently in studies of businessmen, politicians, brokers, manipulators and anyone wanting to get or manage information. Anyone seeking protection, favours, services or illicit substances will – must – use any connection available. In arenas like these, good personal networks are like capital in the bank.

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<sup>4</sup> A common metaphor making the same point distinguishes the forest from the trees.

<sup>5</sup> I take this notion from the 18th Century gardener “Capability” Brown, who is said to have begun each project with the question “What is the capability of this landscape”. See: Wallman 1997.



Two examples of the way ego-centred networks work and are worked are useful here. One offers a typology based on the *shape* of the connected group<sup>6</sup> which handily underlines the significance of interconnectedness – i.e. of who among the people ‘Ego’ knows also know each other [Figure 7].

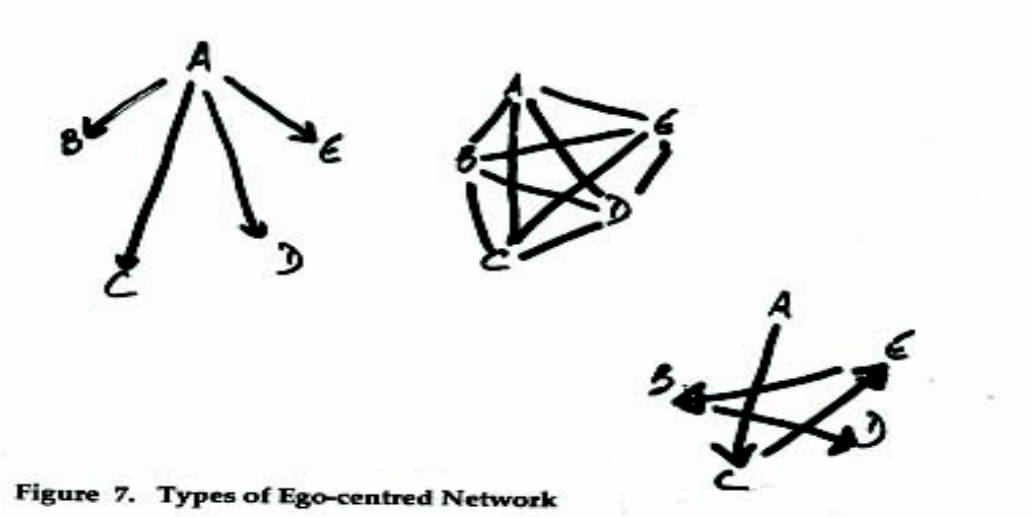


Figure 7. Types of Ego-centred Network

<sup>6</sup> J.Clyde Mitchell (1983) page 16.

The other foregrounds the *content* of network links to analyse a gossip network in an African factory <sup>7</sup> [Figure 8]. Because gossip is about norms and the definition of “us”, gossip networks always follow the boundaries of the moral community.

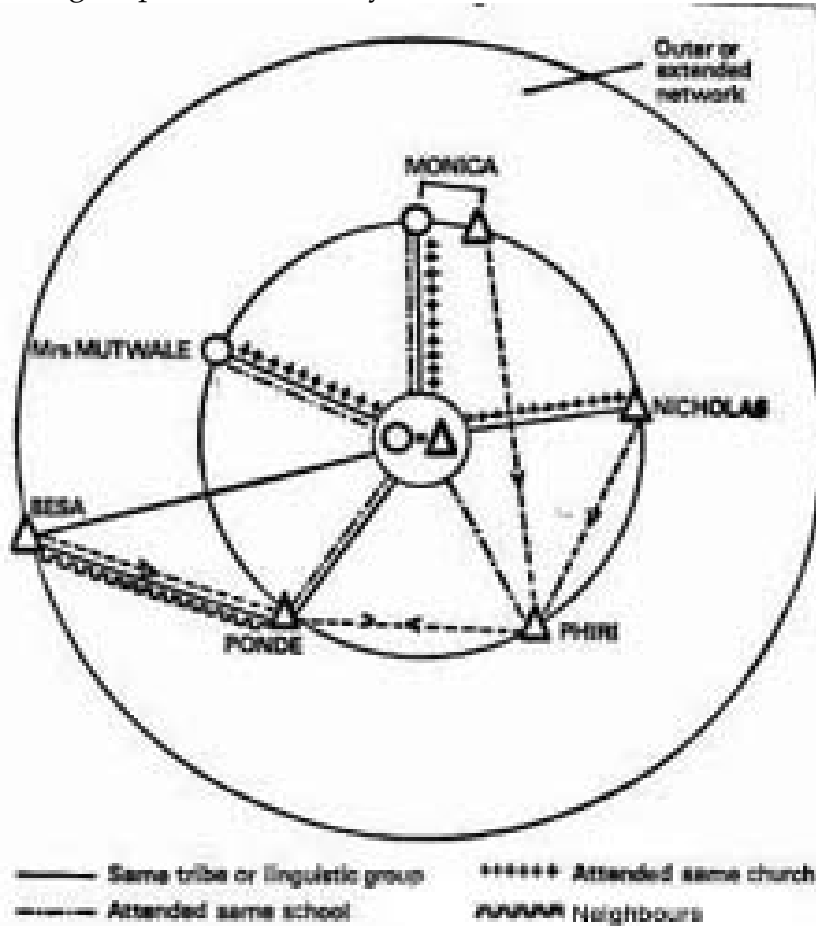


Figure 8. A Gossip Network

Potentially therefore, they are handy evidence of the distribution of social capital. On that point, we should note in this example that “belonging to the same tribe or linguistic group” is only one of four bases of connection among network members.

With the advent of computers, network analysis risks too much complication. My own view is that it should stay simple enough to think with, and/ but that the thinking needs to be ‘orderly’. The classic statement<sup>8</sup> distinguishes *morphological* and *interactional* network criteria – the first describing structure [as shown in Figure 7]; the second, process. Each implies questions to be asked of the field data [see Box].

<sup>7</sup> A.L. Epstein (1983) in Mitchell [cited], page 127.

<sup>8</sup> Mitchell *op. cit.*

Morphological criteria:

*Anchorage* - Where's the centre? Who is *Ego*? What's the reference point?

*Reach* - How many steps to get somewhere? How far can *Ego* get with it?

*Density* - Do the people *Ego* knows know each other?

*Range* - How many does he/she have direct contact with?

Interactional criteria:

*Content* - What's the meaning of the links between people in the network?

*Directedness* - Is the link oriented one way? Initiated from one side or both?

*Durability* - Are these long or short-term links? Do they change often?

*Intensity* - How strong is the tie? Does *Ego* let it override other obligations?

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*Durability* - Are these long or short-term links? Do they change often?

*Intensity* - How strong is the tie? Does *Ego* let it override other obligations?

*Frequency* - How often, how regularly is this link activated ?

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*Anchorage* - Where's the centre? Who is *Ego*? What's the reference point?

*Reach* - How many steps to get somewhere? How far can *Ego* get with it?

*Density* - Do the people *Ego* knows know each other?

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Interactional criteria:

*Content* - What's the meaning of the links between people in the network?

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*Durability* - Are these long or short-term links? Do they change often?

*Intensity* - How strong is the tie? Does *Ego* let it override other obligations?

These questions help, but they do not solve the problems signalled in the discussion of context [Figs. 1 & 2 *above*]. One was the matter of limitation: How and where is the network to be bounded? How many steps out from *Ego* are *necessary* to throw light on the problem being studied ?<sup>9</sup> The other was the knotty question of meaning: Not only are we concerned to know the nature of the connections [some clues to this are given by the categorical basis of each relationship – the reason we know each other – as in Figure 8]; we also must accept that not all of them are in play all the time. They lie latent unless and until context makes them a useful basis for social action.

Thus the *potential* network of a person has one shape/scope; it includes all the people he/she knows; the whole fish tank. The *operational* network by contrast includes only those relevant in a given situation; the “action set”. The difference between them imposes a caveat on studies of ethnicity or ethnic relations. At the collective level, the simple presence of others in *Ego*'s ethnic category is not itself evidence of an interrelating ethnic group [or of usable social capital !]. And regarding individuals, ethnicity may be little or never relevant to the friendship of co-ethnics.<sup>10</sup>

My own effort to deal with these elements may clarify by illustration. It also begins the transition from the *Ego*: fish to the collective: fish-tank perspective on networks. It was one of a number of strategies for mapping context, together aiming for a ‘full’ and holistic case study of an inner south London area. The first phase of the study encompassed the area as such [and is germane to the next section]; the second compared the livelihood of different ethnic groups by analysing the resources of

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<sup>9</sup> The same guru [on p.40] says that a maximum of two steps is usually enough; and [on p.20] that an urban *Ego* is unlikely to have direct links with more than about thirty people anyway.

<sup>10</sup> By the same reasoning, multi-cultural populations constitute ‘diversity’ only when the various categories of people interrelate as groups [Wallman/FEEM 2003]

particular households - distinguishing those from the family, the ethnic group, the larger community and the statutory services.<sup>11</sup>

In this example, the problem of limitation is arbitrarily 'solved' by a map of concentric circles, representing *geographic* distance from Ego in a way reminiscent of Practical Levels of Context in Figure 1. In the second version of the same map, the concentric circles represent *affective* distance [Figs. 9, 10]. Having filled in the first chart, respondents seem to have no difficulty understanding the sense of the second. Geographic spread is accessed with questions like: "Where do all the people who are important to you now live?" The second follows a similar procedure to get at affective meaning: "How close are you to each of them *in feeling*?" This procedure brings the problem of meaning under a kind of control by separating and then cross-referencing *geographic* and *affective* elements of Ego's network.<sup>12</sup>

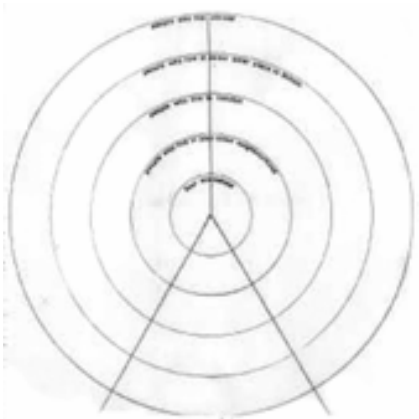


Figure 9. Geographical distance from Ego

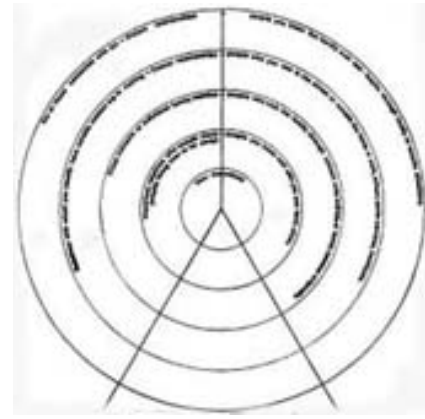


Figure 10. Affective distance from Ego

The method offers scope for defining Ego's universe of people broadly or narrowly: sometimes it is useful to ask about "everyone you know"; sometimes to focus on an 'action set' defined, say, by support in times of illness<sup>13</sup>, or trust or some kind [Who would you ask to look after your children?<sup>14</sup> Who is financially reliable? Who should know your family secrets?...] Importantly, for present purposes, it could be used to identify who, in the network, Ego considers to be "social capital" and who not - always supposing we have some operational means of distinguishing the two categories. Centrally, the "which network?" decision depends on what the researcher wants to know. The practicality of it hinges on his/her resource capabilities, and the capability of the setting. The capability of urban places is explored in the following sections.

<sup>11</sup> Wallman [1982] *Living in South London*; [1984] *Eight London Households*..

<sup>12</sup> The procedure appears in detail in Wallman 1984, Ch. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Wallman [1996] *Kampala Women Getting By: wellbeing in the time of AIDS*.

<sup>14</sup> Wallman 1984, Ch..

4.

#### Local Network Styles

For the earlier workshop I drafted a model of urban systems to explain the diversity of diversity. It is based on an ideal type contrast between *closed* and *open* urban systems [Figure 11]. In the first case, the boundaries of social categories are overlaid – ‘thick’, inflexible, impermeable. Systems of this type are extremely hard for outsiders to enter. In the second case by contrast, the social categories do not match: the people I work with are not the people I live with, nor are they exclusively members of my ethnic group. Social boundaries are flexible and more diffuse. The local system is more resilient in the face of change – even adapting to the disruptions caused by in-migration. These two systems are very different kinds of fish tank.

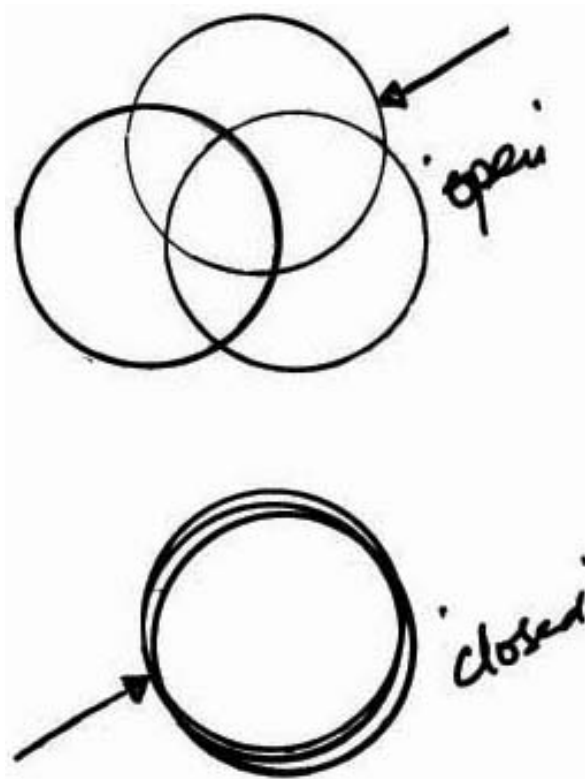


Figure 11. Boundary Effect – Open v Closed Systems

The differences affect the local network in ways which are relevant to the scope, type, and distribution of social capital [Figure 12]. In the *closed* version, the network is tight and contained, relationships are multiplex: everyone knows everything about everyone else. In the *open* version, ties are looser and more often single-stranded. Significantly too, they spread further.

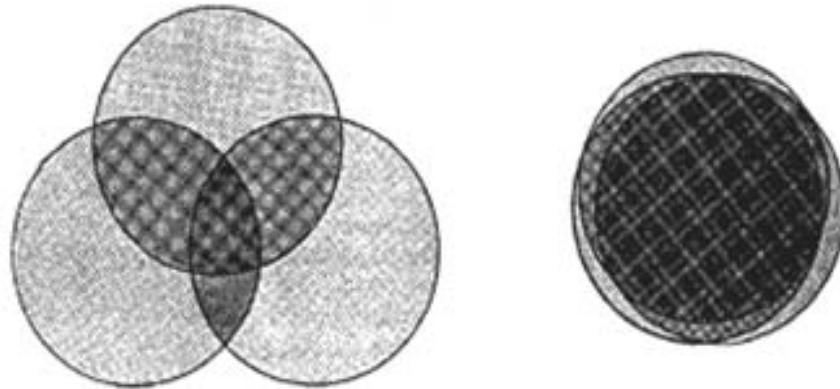


Figure 12. Network Effect – Open v Closed Systems

This contrast is exactly the one drawn in Puttnam's distinction between *exclusionary* and *inclusionary* social capital and it has the same implications: the *closed* system confines resources to members, barring access to outsiders who are by definition untrustworthy. Increments to social capital will have been internally generated and kept within the narrow network; stocks they will not be shared with outsiders, *nor will they be used to extend or cement relationships with them*. The logic of an *open* system, on the contrary, entails expansionist relationships. And since social capital shared is social capital expanded, the dynamic of 'sharing' creates more to be shared.

5.

#### Conclusion

At the end of these exercises, some things are confidently known: different kinds of urban place offer different scope for connectedness; and patterns of connectedness decide the distribution of social capital. But this is 'only' a model. It works fine as a system of logic, but has limited capacity to explain real life variations of cause and effect. We know roughly, I think, what social capital is not: it is neither a network of contacts waiting inert, like money, to be hoarded or spent or invested, nor is it the automatic outcome of people with something in common getting together. The piece missing from both definitions is the meaning which people – fish in a particular fishtank – put into the web which links them. Specifically, the missing piece is trust.

The economic metaphor holds: trust has to be invested to convert connectedness into social capital. It is the difference which makes the difference between a population category and a creative, entrepreneurial, mutually supportive group. Social capital is held within a network of people who consider each other trustworthy. The dynamic is the same whether the group is mono- or multi-ethnic, exclusionary or inclusionary. The social capital which makes for productive ethnicity and/or 'good' diversity is cemented by trust. Recognising the conditions of its presence/absence is a step towards knowing what it is.

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## Endnotes/References

<sup>1</sup> A proper exploration of this problem is given by Ernest Gellner in 'Concepts and Society' (1973).

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Leach 'An anthropologist looks at social survey'

<sup>1</sup> The line of descent begins with John Barnes (1954) who used 'network' to apply to relationships not defined by territory or by work among Norwegian fishermen. Elizabeth Bott (1957) *Family and Social Network* applied it to show husband/wife role segregation to be a function of network connectedness. See: "Thinking with Networks" in Ulf Hannerz (1980) *Exploring the City*.

<sup>1</sup> A common metaphor making the same point distinguishes the forest from the trees.

<sup>1</sup> I take this notion from the 18th Century gardener who is said to have begun each project with the question "What is the capability of this landscape". See: Wallman 1997, "Appropriate Anthropology and the Risky Inspiration of 'Capability' Brown". In *After Writing Culture*, eds James, Dawson, Hockey

<sup>1</sup> J.Clyde Mitchell (1983) *Social Networks in Urban Situations* page 16.

<sup>1</sup> A.L. Epstein (1983) in Mitchell [cited], page 127.

<sup>1</sup> Mitchell *op. cit.*

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<sup>1</sup> By this reasoning, multi-cultural populations constitute 'diversity' only when the various categories of people interrelate as groups [Wallman/FEEM 2003].

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<sup>1</sup> The procedure appears in detail in Wallman 1984, Ch. 3.

<sup>1</sup> Wallman [1996] *Kampala Women Getting By: wellbeing in the time of AIDS*

<sup>1</sup> Wallman [1984] *Eight London Households* passim.



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- (lxv) This paper was presented at the EuroConference on “Auctions and Market Design: Theory, Evidence and Applications” organised by Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei and sponsored by the EU, Milan, September 25-27, 2003
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- (lxviii) This paper was presented at the ENGIME Workshop on “Governance and Policies in Multicultural Cities”, Rome, June 5-6, 2003
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- (lxx) This paper was presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> Coalition Theory Workshop on "Collective Decisions and Institutional Design" organised by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and held in Barcelona, Spain, January 30-31, 2004
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- (lxxii) This paper was presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Coalition Theory Network Workshop held in Paris, France on 28-29 January 2005 and organised by EUREQua.
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