RURAL FAMILIES, INDUSTRY CHANGE AND SOCIAL CAPITAL: SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICY

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Abstract

Rural communities are an important part of New Zealand society, and the New Zealand economy is highly dependent on rural-based activities. Substantial changes occurring in the rural economy have the potential to significantly affect local communities. This study has taken a social capital perspective to examine how 12 rural families have attempted to resolve dilemmas that have arisen as a consequence of local industry change. This change included the loss of the forestry industry, and growth in the tourism and dairy sectors. The social responses observed highlight the strong presence and substantial buffering role of social capital in assisting rural people to balance family, work and community life. We suggest that the level of self-determination afforded to the community and control over the processes required to amass social capital are fundamental to successfully fostering it. Agencies taking approaches that embrace the norms inherent in social capital itself, such as trust, reciprocity and mutuality, will be advantaged in their capacity to "bring along" families and community. These insights will be discussed in terms of their social policy implications.

INTRODUCTION

In New Zealand's Westland District the closure of the local indigenous timber industry alongside rapid growth of the dairy and tourism sectors has produced dilemmas for families and communities as they attempt to adjust to the social consequences of rapid industry change. Drawing on a social capital perspective and a case study of 12 Westland families, this project examines how rural families bring balance to aspects of the three actions defined by Arendt as being essential to "the human condition": family, work and community life. The findings reveal significant insights into how social capital is effectively reproduced in times of change. These insights are discussed in terms of their social policy implications.

Fifty years ago Hannah Arendt (1958) published *The Human Condition*. In this work she contended that there are three types of action required to be "fully human". The first two of these actions, *engagement in family life* and *paid work*, are necessary for human existence in contemporary society. The third action she called *vita activa*, or public life: a life that is actioned within jointly built civil spaces. Within these spaces we are capable of debate, we share actions and we resolve collective dilemmas (Arendt 1958). Arendt reminds us that the absence of, or over-attention to, any one aspect of the human condition is likely to be problematic.

A half a century on from Arendt's original thesis, public policy continues to debate aspects of *vita activa* and democratic governments still seek to engage *vita activa* in economically and socially productive ways. Working out the shifting balance between family life, paid work and *vita activa* is a crucial aspect of responding effectively to significant social change, be it local issues (such as natural disaster relief) or meeting the challenges that arise as a consequence of external or global forces (such as the loss of a core industry). The concept of social capital has been used as a way to recognise and gauge *vita activa* (Cox 1995).

The term "social capital" originated, in part, in an attempt to understand how "those features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam 1993). Voluntary or joint social actions provide the opportunity to resolve collective dilemmas. Individuals achieve this through the development and use of social bonds and networks as resources to facilitate productive activity (Coleman 1988). By maintaining the social relationships and structures necessary for collective activity, individuals, families *and* communities are able to realise some of these benefits, and in doing so can resolve some of the issues they face in common.

Collective social activity relies upon networks made up of social ties. Close friends (strong ties) have frequent and overlapping contact within the social cluster or group, forming a "densely knit clump of social structure" (Granovetter 1983:202). On the other hand, acquaintances (weak ties) are often diverse and heterogeneous in experiences and social location. They are not known by all within one's social circle, and the level of engagement with them is often much less (Granovetter 1983). Both types of ties are important for co-operative social action. Weak ties allow access to a different set of resources, ideas or people that may be necessary to address issues or resolve problems. Strong ties provide networks imbued with social memories of successful past collaboration, which function as a kind of "cultural template" for future collective action (Putnam 1995). Strong bonding ties allow individuals to "get by", while weak bridging ties enable them to "get ahead" (Woodhouse 2006:86).

The networks that are drawn on to enable response to shared dilemmas are generally qualified in terms of the extent to which trust and reciprocity characterise them and guide the actions of individuals. The social norm of trust describes the willingness on the part of the individual to "take risks in a social context based on a sense of confidence that others will respond as expected and will act in mutually supportive ways" (Onyx and Bullen 2000:24). High levels of trust enable co-operative action, and this in turn facilitates the expectation of mutuality. Thus, in this model, high levels of those constituent parts of social capital generate increasing "amounts" of social capital. In short, social capital feeds on its own success.

As a conceptual tool, social capital focuses explicitly on the interstices of family, work and community in ways that can reveal policy-relevant insights about how communities, both rural and urban, effectively cope with New Zealand's rapidly shifting socio-economic environment.

THE CONTEXT OF INDUSTRY CHANGE

The communities of interest to this study are Whataroa (pop. 405 in 2006) and Hari Hari (pop. 351 in 2006). They are situated on the South Island's West Coast, just north of the tourist destination of Franz Josef Glacier (see Figure 1). The area has a history built largely upon timber and dairy farming. Both communities remained small (around 400 people) until

the 1950s, when the sawmilling industry expanded and the New Zealand Forest Service (NZFS) extended its presence in the area, providing increased employment opportunities and encouraging steady population growth. The post-World War II housing boom meant that Whataroa and Hari Hari were well positioned to receive a good share of forestry prosperity.

Figure 1 The West Coast Region
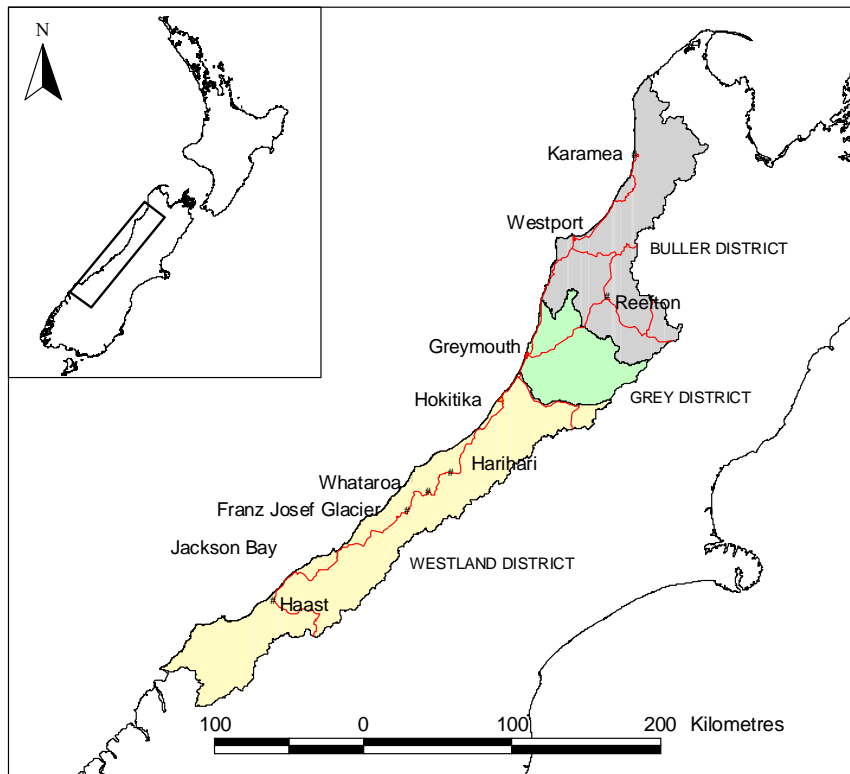
However, from the 1970s through the 1980s, rationalisation of timber processing and state sector restructuring resulted in the loss of the NZFS and considerable forestry jobs from the area (Pawson and Scott 1992). By the mid-1990s both townships had lost their timber-processing mills, workers were laid off, and local communities were forced to find ways of absorbing the ongoing effects of timber industry decline. A proportion of workers moved on, but many stayed, mainly taking up lower-paid jobs in the growing tourism and farming sectors (Sampson et al. 2007). Finally, in 2002, came the complete cessation of logging from nearby Crown-owned land, as its status was shifted from production to conservation management. By the time the decision was implemented fewer than 20 people were directly employed in a timber felling, hauling or processing capacity (Sampson 2003), a far cry from the vibrant timber industry operating in Westland in the 1970s and 1980s.

As forestry has declined, dairy farming and tourism have become pivotal to the local economy. The growing economic significance of dairying and tourism for this rural West Coast area directly reflects the importance of these industries to the national economy: tourism and dairying compete with each other as the country's leading export earners (Statistics New Zealand 2009). Alongside forestry decline, the farming sector underwent considerable change and growth. Drystock farming has almost entirely ceased, with many farms converted to more lucrative dairy units. The number of dairy units in the area has increased markedly. There are currently 33 dairy farms in Hari Hari and 30 in Whataroa, an

increase of around 20 farms since 1970.[2] While this number has increased steadily, in the last five years the rate of increase has slowed, with the addition of only three new units. Despite this, milk production figures indicate more intensive farming practice. Since 2002 production has increased by about 25% per dairy unit per day. This growth has been marked by farm conversions to dairy, farm amalgamations, increased herd size and intensification of production. These changes have generated the need for more labour units, both seasonal and year round. The farming community reports that these changes have necessitated working longer hours.

Tourism in the region has also steadily grown. Tourist figures show that visitor numbers have risen steadily since the 1960s (Narayan 1995), with significant increases in tourists since the 1990s (Simmons and Fairweather 2001). Total visits by travellers to West Coast Regional Tourism Organisations are forecast to rise from 2.32 million in 2008 to 2.53 million in 2015 – an increase of 9.1% (212,100) or 1.3% p.a. (Ministry of Tourism 2009). Figures supplied by the Department of Conservation of the numbers who walk the Franz Josef Glacier[3] access track show an increase of 26% between 2001 and 2007, with almost 460,500 walkers recorded in 2007.[4] Although it is not known what proportion of tourists visiting the region walk the track, the Department of Conservation considers that these numbers reflect an overall increase in visitor numbers in the area.

This increase in visitors has created both seasonal opportunities and costs. Opportunities include drawing tourist dollars into accommodation and passing trade and provision, and associated employment. However, the costs include increased seasonal pressure on infrastructure, and an increase in younger transient workers required to service this growth. In the context of wider industry change, this industry has also contributed to the shifting demographic profile of the area, not only in population size but also in composition.

The loss of key industries and the rise in new industries have placed shifting sets of demands on local family and community resources. This is a common scenario in many rural areas in New Zealand and presents the intractable policy problem of how to improve communities' capacities to cope effectively with economic transition. There have been a range of government initiatives to support rural communities undergoing significant change. These include an increasing concern in government with "joined up government and joint working between agencies and across sectors in order to address 'wicked' social problems and improve policy outcomes" (Walker 2004:1). Nationwide policy initiatives include Heartland Services and the Working for Families package. Infrastructure support includes e-government initiatives to raise the profile and accessibility of existing social services through Ministry websites.[5] More targeted support includes the West Coast Economic Development Fund. However, as existing policy strategies, these have tended to focus on the provision of *formal* social services and economic support as a means to support the reproduction of social capital. An appreciation of the ways in which social capital is *informally* reproduced at the nexus of family, paid work and community participation in a context of shifting economic contexts is sadly missing.

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[2] All details regarding the dairy industry were provided by Westland Milk Products Manager, personal communication, 2 May 2007.

[3] It is assumed that virtually all of the tourists who visit Franz Josef pass through Hari Hari and Whataroa.

[4] Ian Singleton, Department of Conservation, Franz Josef, personal communication, 17 November 2007.

[5] The impact of e-technologies on rural social networks was not mentioned by respondents and so cannot be regarded as a significant component of their social networking. Nevertheless, as an emerging issue it would benefit from more specific exploration.

In terms of the New Zealand-focused social capital literature, an enduring "wicked problem" has been the lack of fit between values and legislation (see, for instance, Robinson and Williams 2001). Robinson and Williams's discussion of the different ways in which voluntary activity, giving and sharing are understood in Māori and non-Māori society highlights the fact that there are culturally distinct differences in how community participation is practised and understood. This can cause difficulties when initiatives and legislation are developed out of one cultural perspective, which is then laid over all cultures within the land. This is relevant to the current discussion because it makes the point that it is crucial to know how people understand and practise social capital.

In response, relatively recent research suggests that policy initiatives that seek to bridge the gap between policy and community value-based practices through collaborative and devolved decision-making do have a positive impact on social capital (see, for instance, Casswell 2001, Taylor 2004, Walker 2004). Yet no New Zealand research has (until now) attempted to decipher how rural communities effectively reproduce social capital through times of economic upheaval. This study focuses directly on how 12 rural families living in adjacent rural communities have attempted to resolve this dilemma, and so it directly engages with this "wicked" policy problem.

RURAL SOCIAL CAPITAL – BETWEEN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

In general, a rural setting tends to intensify the need for and prevalence of social capital. Strong differences have been found in the patterns of responses between rural and urban centres and the nature of social capital generated (Onyx and Bullen 2000). Rural communities generally have higher levels of participation in the voluntary sector than urban communities (Taylor et al. 2007, Ryan et al. 2005), and social capital is also generally stronger in rural settings than in an urban context (Hofferth and Iceland 1988). Relationships in rural places are also embedded in dense networks of close ties, which have been shown to foster greater levels of social capital, linked with successful rural community development (Woodhouse 2006). As already noted, these Westland rural communities are excellent places in which to examine social capital because they face the consequences of social change more intensely and, arguably, with less effective government support than their urban compatriots. At the same time, the literature suggests that rural people are more likely to successfully manage significant socio-economic change precisely because of their levels and forms of social capital. If that is the case for these Westland families, it will provide valuable insight into what makes rural social capital so effective and, by extension, what may help other struggling rural and urban communities around New Zealand.

Families have a significant, though often overlooked, place in any analysis of social capital. Studies have tended to focus on how social capital is generated and then deployed *within* the family unit for family wellbeing. For example, Offer and Schneider (2007) examined the role of children in the generation of social capital for the family, concluding that children can act as potential conduits in the wider community in the building of networks upon which parents may eventually draw. Furstenburg and Kaplan (2004) and Furstenburg (2005) explore how social capital is generated and accumulated *within* families. They identify the improved long-term social welfare of children as a consequence of growing up in "social capital rich" families.

Our interest, however, is in the factors alluded to by Stewart-Weeks and Richardson (1998); namely, how families amass shared "social goods" in the spaces *between* families and communities. We agree with Cox (1995), who argues that families are the building blocks of communities. Akin to the way that mortar holds together bricks in a wall, our focus is on the way in which social capital becomes the "social glue" that holds communities together, so that families, as the building blocks of community, can function in optimum social health. Rural families are of particular value here because, as Hofferth and Iceland (1998) indicate, rural families in many instances benefit from strong kinship ties but may suffer from a deficit of weaker (wider) ties that provide wider social network opportunities afforded to urban family units.

Stewart-Weeks and Richardson (1998) undertook a qualitative examination of the role of social capital to the wellbeing of 12 Australian families living in a variety of social and physical locations. They draw an important distinction regarding the purpose of participating in the accrual of social capital. On the one hand, they suggest social capital-generating behaviours are engaged in directly to improve the prospects of the family unit. On the other hand, individuals may concentrate their civic activities with the intention of amassing shared public "social goods" for the good of all, from which families (and individuals) will invariably derive benefits (Stewart-Weeks and Richardson 1998).

METHODS

Data used in this study were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews over two field work periods during 2007. We used a combination of snowball and purposive sampling to recruit families.[6] From these we chose 12 "typical" families for their capacity to reflect the breadth of community composition and to encapsulate the aspects of social capital explored in this study. This is in line with standard qualitative practice of the "deliberate selection of theoretically important units" (Tolich and Davidson 1999:35).

The first field visit involved systematic semi-structured interviews. "Gap searching" and preliminary analysis occurred prior to the second field visit at the "mid-point" of data collection. The second field visit allowed us to systematically follow up on any issues that arose during the first round of interviews and to fill gaps identified in the data. The analytical framework used was based on grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 1990), where concept indicators are compared across cases in order to establish core concepts. We acknowledge the potential for homogeneity in the local narrative in small, relatively isolated rural communities, so we probed respondents to get behind the "standard" rhetoric. Constant comparison and repetition of response helps to confirm and validate concepts. The two-part process of data gathering particularly enhanced this analytic framework. The themes discussed in this paper have emerged from the narratives of the 12 families interviewed.

THE 12 PARTICIPATING FAMILIES

The following table provides summary details about the 12 families included in this study. It covers household size, the presence of extended kin living locally, the nature of employment, and our assessment of their level of civic participation or engagement based on interview data.

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[6] We generally interviewed husband and wife together.

Table 1 Family Types Included in This Study

Family type	Children in h'hold	Total in h'hold	Extended kin local	Employment – main breadwinner	Level of civic participation
Middle aged	3	5	No	Timber	Medium
Young township	2	5	Yes	Construction	Medium
Rural empty nesters	0	2	Yes	Service	Medium
Ex-forestry	3	5	Yes	Unskilled labour	Low
Middle-aged township	2	4	Yes	Trades/service	High
Single mother	1	2	Yes	Unskilled	Low
Township empty nesters	0	2	No	Timber	Medium
Newcomer young	3	5	No	Farming	Medium
Older farming	0	2	No	Farming	High
Younger farming	2	4	Yes	Farming	High
Retired	0	2	No	Retired	Low
Mid-life entrepreneurs	0	2	Yes	Retail/service	Low

CENTRAL THEMES EMERGING FROM THE STORIES

Families' Use of Networks and Ties

Our respondents commonly expressed the extent to which their families are able to access and utilise networks with varying degrees of success. The *older farming family* originally came from outside the region and demonstrates the usefulness of wider, weaker ties. This family is currently involved in around 16 or so formal associations and organisations, ranging from high-level engagement at the wider regional (and in one instance, national) level to involvement and participation at the local level. The kinds of projects this couple become involved in have clearly benefited from the extensive networks the family has actively developed over 30 years. This level of civic participation means they easily identify the need to draw on a wide array of social connections to address community issues. As a consequence they are seen as people who can be relied on to get things done:

> "We are accepted because people know we don't sit on the fence. People who are not close to us will ring up and ask us for help with problems, and they thank us."

During the mid-1980s the main breadwinner of the *middle-aged township family* was made redundant from an occupation that had afforded him the opportunity to build extensive bonding and bridging ties. He shifted into forestry, working in a small timber-processing operation until he was made redundant again. However, the local knowledge regarding his skills coupled with the extensive wider networks throughout the district have ensured employment offers have continued to come his way. He remarks that as tourism has continued to grow, so too have the demands for services in the area, giving him some continued job security. He tells us that resolving issues of employment was made considerably easier as a consequence of drawing on his wider bridging social networks.

In relation to resolving the effects of industry and occupation loss, access to networks was shown to be a critical factor in the capacity of families to effectively respond to change. With sufficient ties to resolve their own issues the *mid-life entrepreneurs* used wider social networks to secure employment immediately after the husband lost his job in the forestry industry. Later, as they began to build their own business, they drew heavily on both their local social connections and wider bridging ties (outside the region) to generate sufficient custom necessary for the success of the business. On the other hand, the *retired family* also

had redundancy thrust upon them following the loss of forestry. Their excess of strong bonding ties, in this case mostly kin ties, have provided this family with a block of land and stock that have effectively allowed them to remain in the area. However, they have done little else. Their options have been confined to those available within their rather homogeneous and immediate social world. She told us:

> "If you need something done, and you wanted voluntary help, you would have to probably ask a lot of people. You'd usually have to pay now to get things done."

Consistent with Woodhouse's argument, in the presence of sufficient bridging ties the *midlife entrepreneurs* have been able to "get ahead" while the *retired family's* excess of bonding ties has allowed them to simply "get by" (Woodhouse 2006).

Newcomers' responses highlight the importance of networks to community. Newcomers typically arrive in the community with very few or no bonding ties. Establishing networks early becomes critical in a family's ability to gain acceptance and move into the community. When the *township empty nesters* arrived over 40 years ago, she recalled how important it was to build social connections:

> "I just had to work hard at doing things in the local community in order to try to deal with the costs of loneliness and isolation."

The *newcomer young family* demonstrates the utility of ties; firstly to move into a community and later to bring about co-operative social action. Immediately after arriving two years ago, the wife joined the local play group, where she quickly developed some strong friendships with other mothers. Later these ties became critical to the success of establishing a new sporting club, something she wanted to do, both for her children and for her community. These ties allowed her to rapidly link into other networks as a source of willing participation and support for the club. This enabled a co-ordinated and collective community action that benefits local families and children.

Trust and Families in Community

All families in this study generally indicated having high levels of trust in their communities. We were constantly reminded that "most people can be trusted". Almost every household indicated that they could trust the community with their assets and leave the house unlocked. Most people also suggested having high levels of trust regarding the safety and wellbeing of their children. The *middle-aged township family* pointed out:

> "I can always trust that someone is watching out for my kids. One of the advantages of living here, if your kids get up to no good, someone, somewhere, will be looking out. It's like a big neighbourhood watch."

High levels of trust serve a useful purpose for families in the social monitoring of children, and illustrate a supplementing role of community for family wellbeing. Interestingly, this social monitoring was seen to serve a wider parental function that both kept their children safe while noting any of the children's transgressions. According to the *ex-forestry family*:

> "Everyone looks out for everyone else's kids. If someone does something [if a child misbehaves] parents will actually contact each other. And as parents we thank each other for keeping that going."

Despite demonstrably high levels of trust and feelings of safety regarding family wellbeing, the recent influx of newcomers and seasonal workers that has accompanied industry change has challenged this trust. The *rural empty nesters* echo commonly held sentiments: they point out that the constantly changing population base has made them reconsider their own behaviour around trust and the way in which they approach newcomers.

Caution towards strangers reinforces notions of community maintenance. Cohen (1985) argues that community is a relational idea, whereby outside differences, or "oppositional otherness", reinforce the social norms and bonding ties of those within the community. Put simply, this is a "them and us" scenario, where the attitudes and actions held and performed by "them" are constantly visited to illustrate the worth of the things that "we" (us) hold dear. Hence there exists a paradox. While the community rhetoric is one of "treating people you don't know with suspicion", there is little value in terms of community cohesion in maintaining mistrust of "outsiders" when they are living among you.

These communities recognise they are small and express a dependence upon the entry of "new blood". The wife of the *young township family* described the way in which new workers, or the "drifters", fit in. Like many, she reminded us that in a small and tightly bonded community, where "there is not a big pool of people", the notion of acceptance is important. The *middle-aged family* detailed their own efforts to support newcomers by hosting a lunch for "those people in the community who don't have family nearby". Maintaining mistrust would perpetuate social faction and divide, something that almost all our families told us was ill affordable in small rural communities. According to the wife in the *newcomer young family*, fitting in requires tolerance and acceptance of people for how they are: "there is a need to fit in". There is limited adaptive value in closing community boundaries and excluding newcomers.

Reciprocity and the Family

A constant theme in the families' stories is the expression of the need to give something back to other families and the wider community and to return favours. Irrespective of the nature of the networks to which the families were connected, participants indicated a strong commitment to reciprocation. However, many respondents indicated that industry change has reduced the amount of time available for people to "give" back to, and/or be involved with, the community. There is little doubt that many are working harder and longer, but it is manifest that some very busy people are still making time for mutual assistance. Almost without exception, all families indicated a strong commitment to reciprocity. As the *younger farming family* reminded us:

> "If things are really big around here, you don't even need to ask. They just step in and help … Even though one might not get on with everyone, there is recognition that in times of need, they'll all help and if things are done you just pay it back."

This respondent was very clear that the capacity of the community to assist "makes here a great place to live".

Competing demands on time forced the *middle-aged family* to prioritise their contributions by distinguishing between local-level contributions and the kind of actions that might not directly benefit locals. He suggested that a call-out to assist the ambulance to cut a tourist out of a car wreck might not feel urgent, yet:

> "when I am called on by a neighbour or a friend to contribute in any capacity toward
> something going on around town, I really am almost always happy to contribute."

Central to this is the strong notion of mutual support. Ideas like "people look after one another and they know I'm here and vice-versa" and "it's the right thing to do and you hope others would reciprocate if it were you" (in need) run through many of the stories. Nonetheless, there were expressions of concern about the impact of increased time pressures being detrimental to building the kind of communities seen as favourable places in which to bring up families.

ALIGNING THE NEEDS OF WORK, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Recent industry changes have challenged the capacity of families to engage in some aspects of the formation of social capital. Such things as sporadic employment, the need to seize casual opportunities when they arise, and shifting or uncertain working hours hinder the ability of many families to engage in formal voluntary participation, despite indicating a willingness to do so. The *rural empty nesters* stated:

> "We can ask people for things if we need to, but everyone is actually really busy …
> mainly cos of dairying and tourism … everyone is just flat out working."

The *middle-aged family* father rationalised his use of time for contributing to community and the building of social capital. He highlighted the considerable drain and level of commitment involved in volunteering for such things as the ambulance. Service in this organisation may take one far from home, only to be providing assistance to strangers. Others raised the question as to whether membership of such organisations is really about putting something back into the local community or more about an unpaid service to the tourism industry. In contrast, he pointed out that contributing to local families "is almost always possible". A further example lay in the story of the *middle-aged township family.* Time pressures for the husband, coupled with odd working hours, impede his ability to get fully involved, despite having a strong conviction of the importance of staying involved. They both agreed that his wife is the "main contributor" to building social capital on the part of this family through her work in the community.

The nature of many women's investment in social capital illustrates one of the stronger mechanisms whereby community can be maintained and reproduced alongside the demands of family, as children become a conduit into community (Furstenberg 2005). As demonstrated by the *newcomer young family*, establishing the local sports club met the needs of the mother's own children, in terms of after-school activity, as well as enabling her to fill a perceived need for others. As a newcomer family, the substantial contribution made by this mother has given her own family an excellent opportunity to build social ties. Similarly, the mother of the *middle-aged township family* identified that an after-school activity she was instrumental in establishing, while principally done for her own children, met a need for more activities for other non-sports-minded children in the community.

We are not trying to diminish the substantial contributions men make to the building of social capital. Rather, we are arguing that the *nature* of women's contributions, in particular, frequently aligns the needs of family *and* community − a useful strategy in the context of diminished time. Moreover, common in our discussions with women was the elevated status of the demands of both family and community, frequently over the building of careers. In

closely aligning these two objectives it was clear that for many they could do for themselves as and when they did for community.

In summary, this case study shows that these rural families worked their balancing acts between work, family and community commitments in ways that built and shared in the "accumulated wealth of public goods". They did this by drawing on different types of community networks depending on the need:

- strong bonding ties were drawn upon to "get by"
- weak bridging ties were drawn upon to "get ahead".

They did this by using trust to:

- generate reciprocity between community members (shared social monitoring)
- strengthen notions of mutual support that can be relied on
- be open to "strangers" and engage bridging social capital as a strategy to bring newcomers into the community.

They did this by being flexible as life circumstances changed, which involved:

- rationing the division of effort between family, work and community
- changing levels of commitment and involvement as circumstances dictated (e.g. children in the house, retirement, employment changes).

They did this by being strategic and selective with time.

- There was a division of labour within the family over community responsibilities – mostly along gender lines, where women would focus energy on community projects that would benefit the whole family.
- Effective and efficient use was made of time spent on community projects – people would initiate and get behind community projects that met their own pressing family or personal demands.

The findings from this study highlight the degree to which the *vita activa* is self-generating. They also highlight the character of effective and continued *vita activa*: people are better able to continually engage in community activities if that engagement can be flexible, strategic and selective. *Vita activa* is most powerful when it is self-determined.

This research has uncovered the core values and practices associated with community participation on the West Coast. Participation works when it can be self-directed and flexible, because it is precisely these characteristics that enable people to respond effectively to shifting socio-economic imperatives in ways that foster, rather than undermine, social capital.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

This paper has examined social capital and community response to industry adjustment and change within the rural sector. Rural communities and families are an important part of New Zealand society, and the New Zealand economy is highly dependent on rural-based activities. When significant changes have an impact on rural economic activities, the communities they support will inevitably be affected.

The research has raised a number of issues, both for policy makers and for the future implementation of social capital policy initiatives.

- It is worth focusing on social capital as a site of policy intervention because when effectively reproduced it helps generate a sense of belonging and wellbeing, even in contexts of economic flux.
- It is worth supporting informal community-determined initiatives. These are likely to be effective and therefore to support rural communities in times of change.
- This kind of support needs to be given in a way that best fits people's own existing and evolving community participation practices.

A sense of ownership and pride is critical in effecting meaningful action. As we have seen, developing social ties and bonds with others in the community is a critical precursor for participation in the accrual of social capital. Social networks that are open and can tolerate the ideas of others, including those new to the community, stand a greater chance of co-ordinating and facilitating reciprocity, mutuality and community mindedness at both the formal and informal levels, down to the level of the street, the neighbours, and the family household.

We strongly suggest that for social capital to work well it has to emerge from the "bottom up" and that policy initiatives must be developed with this in mind. Moreover, these need to speak to shared assumptions regarding appropriate resolutions for collective dilemmas. The jointly built civil spaces referred to by Arendt (1958), in which *vita activa* is actioned, are the property of all within the community. As a resource of the collective, social capital is expressed within the everyday lives of individuals, families and communities. Hence, effective policy directives should facilitate access to resources through the fostering of bridging opportunities and the provision of financial and technical/advisory support. Policy initiatives that embrace the norms inherent in social capital itself, such as trust, reciprocity and mutuality, will be advantaged in their capacity to "bring along community".

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