Social Capital and Civic Engagement in Central Florida

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The concept of social capital has a long intellectual history in the field of social sciences. In recent years, interest of scholars from sociology, political science, economics and public administration is rapidly increasing. The reason for this increasing interest is that it has been aware of the importance of social capital in communities’ administrative, social, economic and political development. In this sense, the concept of social capital is an issue to be discussed with solution of current problems of public administration, subjects of governance, civil society, and participation.

Social capital has a lot of definitions which are completely different from each other. Common point of these different definitions is that social capital is a resource at both individual and community level. We will use Robert Putnam’s definition about social capital in this paper. Putnam (1993) defines social capital as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action”. In his book; *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community*, Putnam describes declining social capital in America. He analyzes relationship between social capital and civic engagement and assumes that there is a positive relationship between social capital and civic engagement.

The paper aims to reveal how there is a relationship between social capital and civic engagement in Central Florida. We will use “The Central Florida Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey that is made by The Survey Research Laboratory in the Institute for Social and Behavior Sciences at the University of Central Florida among central Florida residents. The survey questions were prepared by “The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey Saguaro Seminar Civic Engagement in America” created by The Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. The survey consisted of sixty-seven questions providing quantitative data and answered by 1,606 citizens. Responses to questions were received through telephone surveys. At random, a computer-assisted method was used to call citizens living within Central Florida. We use notion of civic engagement not only as voting but also as creating a community, concern of politics, volunteering, attending a political meeting, participating in any demonstrations, protests or boycotts, cooperating to solve problems and involvement local action. The paper explains which social capital’s elements affect civic engagement and examines that there are barriers to involve. We study whether the same race, the same gender and education level are important for a person involved with group or not. In addition, we analyze relationship between civic engagement and trust level that citizens have about government and people because of the fact that trust is social capital’s important element.

References


