

Toward an Empirical Characterization of Bridging and Bonding Social Capital

Hilde Coffé

Utrecht University

Benny Geys

Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung

Though a vast amount of empirical work stresses the beneficial effects of social capital, the recent literature has explicitly recognized the importance of distinguishing different types of social capital. Particularly, a distinction has been made between homogeneous (or bonding) and heterogeneous (or bridging) networks under the argument that the latter are more likely to generate positive externalities than the former. The empirical operationalization of this theoretical distinction has thus far, however, remained underdeveloped. The authors take a step to resolve this issue by assessing the diversity of (voluntary) association membership on a number of socioeconomic traits. The proposed methodology is applied to Flemish survey data on voluntary association membership. This analysis indicates that hobby clubs and humanitarian associations such as the Red Cross are among the most bridging associations, whereas women's groups and associations for retired people are among the most bonding groups.

Keywords: *social capital; bridging and bonding; voluntary associations; membership heterogeneity; Flemish municipalities*

Much of the empirical work on social capital stresses the positive externalities generated by high levels of interpersonal trust and social networks (Halpern, 2005). This abundance of affirmative outcomes has incited a belief that social capital is a normatively positive thing. Still, theoretical contributions have long since acknowledged that social capital is not guaranteed to produce positive externalities on society (see, e.g., Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988; DeFilippis,

Note: We are grateful to three anonymous referees for useful comments and suggestions. The first author gratefully acknowledges the hospitality of the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB; Market Processes and Governance research unit), where she stayed as a research guest during part of this research.

Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, vol. 36, no. 1, March 2007 121-139

DOI: 10.1177/0899764006293181

© 2007 Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action

2001; Foley & Edwards, 1998; Olson, 1982). For example, while strongly knit groups provide various benefits to members, they may restrict entry to others and thus deny such benefits to nonmembers (Portes, 1998). This explicit recognition that social capital is not necessarily beneficial has led several scholars to distinguish between different types of social capital. Particularly, a distinction has been made between *bonding* and *bridging* social capital (Paxton, 2002; Putnam, 2000). The former is associated with closed networks (e.g., organizations that mainly encompass people with the same background), whereas the latter entails crosscutting or overlapping networks (e.g., associations that bring citizens into contact with people from a cross-section of society). As "positive experiences with dissimilar individuals will have greater effects on the development of generalized trust than will the relations with individuals who are similar to oneself in terms of their characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors" (Marshall & Stolle, 2004, p. 129), the argument has been made that bridging associations are more likely to generate positive externalities than bonding associations.

Despite this distinction in theoretical work, the empirical operationalization of bridging versus bonding social capital is at best underdeveloped. Previous work mostly relies on proxies to measure the levels of bridging versus bonding social capital in a community (e.g., Beyerlein & Hipp, 2005) or uses rather ad hoc distinctions between the various networks to which people belong (e.g., Beugelsdijk & Smulders, 2003; Sabatini, 2005). Three notable exceptions exist (Paxton, 2002; Stolle, 2001; Stolle & Rochon, 1998). These authors explicitly recognize that there is significant diversity among various associations and employ the interconnections between voluntary associations (Paxton, 2002) or the diversity of their membership (Stolle, 2001; Stolle & Rochon, 1998) to distinguish those with more bridging potential from those with less such potential. Each of these approaches, however, has important limitations. This article therefore extends this methodological work by presenting an empirical methodology to distinguish bonding from bridging associations, which we define as homogeneous and diverse networks, respectively (Putnam, 2000). We thereby build on the argument that heterogeneous associational membership is likely to be associated with more bridging potential, whereas homogeneous associational membership is associated with more bonding potential. That is, when an association brings members into contact with a broad sampling of the various groups in society (thereby implying heterogeneous membership), the association can be defined as a bridging association. When the association is, on the other hand, narrowly constituted (and its membership homogeneous), it is likely to be a predominantly bonding association. The added value of our work thus lies in the presentation of an empirical method that should allow future research on social capital to designate specific types of associations as being predominantly bridging or bonding. As such, future work can tackle the possibly differing effects of bridging and bonding associations without needing to resort to untested (or inappropriately tested) hypotheses about this distinction.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The second section discusses the necessity of distinguishing between various types of voluntary

associations depending on their relative ability to generate bridging and bonding social capital. The third section presents the empirical methodology that allows researchers to distinguish between bridging and bonding associations by relying on observable socioeconomic characteristics of association members. In the fourth section, we employ data on voluntary association membership in Flanders to illustrate the method proposed. This analysis indicates that hobby clubs and humanitarian associations such as the Red Cross are among the most bridging association types in Flanders, whereas women's groups and associations for retired people are among the most bonding groups. The fifth section concludes.

BRIDGING AND BONDING ASSOCIATIONS

Ever since de Tocqueville's (1835/1962) pathbreaking work, it has often been assumed that "participation in voluntary associations is of vital interest for the functioning of a democratic political system" (Hooghe, 2003, p. 49). They not only instill democratic and cooperative values and norms into individuals, but the trust and norms of reciprocity that people generate in associations also spread over the whole community, encompassing citizens that are not equally active in associational life (Stolle, 2000). In more economic terms, social interactions in voluntary associations are argued to have positive externalities on the entire community. This idea has become one of the foundations of the recent literature on the civil society and social capital (e.g., Anheier & Kendall, 2002; Putnam, 1993), and empirical research appears broadly supportive. Indeed, regions high in social capital (in terms of extensive social networks and interpersonal trust) tend to perform better on a range of socioeconomic performance indicators (for a review, see Halpern, 2005).

Nonetheless, group memberships do not necessarily engender positive externalities (see, e.g., Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988; DeFilippis, 2001; Foley & Edwards, 1998). The impact of participation in voluntary associations on the wider community is likely to vary with "the group's goals and activities, and with the diversity and inclusiveness of their memberships" (Knack, 2003, p. 344). The mafia and militia groups are clearly associations with strong internal connections but generally do not lead to beneficial externalities for the wider community. Also, the Weimar Republic in Germany had a very vibrant civic life, but its organization of associations along existing social cleavages has been argued to reinforce rather than defeat narrow, group-specific interests. A final instructive example relates to northern Ireland where there is a high level of trust and associational activity within the Protestant and Roman Catholic subcultures, which has generated high levels of intercommunity distrust and intolerance (Maloney, Smith, & Stoker, 2000). To capture these differing outcomes of different kinds of associations, scholars have recently made a distinction between bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000).¹ The crucial aspect in the distinction between bridging and bonding social capital is

that they point to different types of socializing. Whereas the former relates to organizations and social interactions that are concentrated on people with the same background, the latter refers to associations that bring citizens into contact with people from a cross-section of society.

Bridging associations are often argued to be more likely to generate positive externalities than bonding associations. In this respect, Putnam (2000) makes a relevant distinction between "getting by" and "getting ahead." Bonding social capital involves trust and reciprocity in closed networks and helps the process of getting by in life on a daily basis. Getting ahead, in contrast, is facilitated through crosscutting ties that take the form of bridging social capital. Theoretically, the argument builds on the idea that "positive experiences with dissimilar individuals will have greater effects on the development of generalized trust than will the relations with individuals who are similar to oneself in terms of their characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors" (Marshall & Stolle, 2004, p. 129). That is, the experiences of successful cooperation in a diverse group can more easily be transferred to the heterogeneous outside world than in-group interaction and trust among homogeneous individuals. Obviously, this does not imply that bonding groups (such as one's family) are necessarily bad. Indeed, "evidence suggests that most individuals receive social support mostly from bonding rather than bridging social ties" (Putnam & Gross, 2002, p. 11; see, e.g., Hurlbert, Haines, & Beggs, 2000).

This proposition is supported by research in social psychology on intergroup relations or interracial attitudes (see, e.g., Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2005). "This work suggests that individuals who share racial, ethnic, or other salient characteristics create an in-group bias through which cooperation, trust, and affection are most easily developed for other members of this in-group" (Marshall & Stolle, 2004, p. 130). Yet, emphasis on this shared identity also fosters out-group hostility. Strong inward-looking social relations may, in other words, generate an us-versus-them way of thinking in which a group develops strong social connections and levels of generalized trust among its members but generally tends to distinguish itself from other groups or even avoid or distrust members from these other groups (Abrams et al., 2005; Münster, in press; Portes, 1998). Bobo (1988), for example, demonstrates that "the absence of direct contact with or sustained knowledge about individuals of different racial, ethnic, or class backgrounds serves to reinforce prejudices" (Marshall & Stolle, 2004, p. 130). However, "social interaction among individuals from dissimilar groups and the forging of common cooperative experiences, fosters an identity that helps to both diminish in-group bias and to develop inclusion of former out-group members" (Marshall & Stolle, 2004, p. 130; see e.g., Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, & Anastasio, 1996).

Given these different effects bridging and bonding social capital are likely to have on economic and social phenomena, it is important to separate their effects in empirical work. Yet, only a few scholars have thus far attempted to do so. Putnam (2000), for example, points out the importance of the distinction between both types of social capital but then drops the issue and refrains from performing separate analyses (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002, p. 189, footnote).

One reason for this lack of empirical efforts to distinguish bridging from bonding social capital is that an adequate operationalization of bridging versus bonding social capital is not straightforward. Beyerlein and Hipp (2005), for example, rely on the prevalence of different religious traditions as a proxy for bridging and bonding social capital. The argument is that religious traditions differ in their participation outside their own congregations and their engagement in (or toward) the broader community. The relative presence of religious traditions can therefore be used to “approximate the entire network structure of communities” (p. 998). Other analyses by, for example, Beugelsdijk and Smulders (2003) and Sabatini (2005) have argued that bonding social capital consists of closed networks of family and friends, whereas bridging social capital is associated with membership in religious, cultural, sports, women’s, or youth groups. Besides being rather ad hoc, this distinction also presupposes that all (types of) associations will be equally bridging (or bonding). Yet, most groups are likely to be both bridging and bonding to some extent.

One attempt to provide an empirical basis for the distinction between bridging and bonding associations is presented in Paxton (2002). She defines bridging associations as those that have more extensive links with a larger set of other associations and regards the external interconnections of an association as a prerequisite for this association’s bridging potential. Though this is an interesting approach to distinguish isolated associations from crosscutting or bridging associations, Paxton fails to recognize that the extent to which association members can generate links between different groups is affected by the relative size of these groups (Blau, 1977; McPherson, 1983). Although larger groups tend to have more interconnections, “this disparity is in part generated by the definitional relationship of size to number of connections” (McPherson, 1983, p. 1058). Failing to account for this may lead to biased results (see Coffé & Geys, 2006). Another attempt to empirically distinguish bridging from bonding networks is brought forward by Stolle and Rochon (1998) and Stolle (2001). In line with our approach (see below), they define the extent to which an association is bridging or bonding as a function of the socioeconomic heterogeneity of its membership. Their specific approach, however, has some important shortcomings (further discussed below). Moreover, they fail to report the ranking of the associations in their study such that it is not clear which associations tend to be more bridging or bonding. Overall, previous research on social capital thus seems to lack a sound methodological approach to distinguish bridging from bonding associations. This article seeks to develop such an empirical approach.²

DISTINGUISHING BRIDGING FROM BONDING ASSOCIATIONS: METHOD

As mentioned, bridging associations are those that generate links between major social categories, whereas bonding associations generally fail to do so.

This proposition is at the basis of our empirical methodology. Indeed, we distinguish between bridging and bonding associations through the extent to which the composition of their membership deviates from the population (see Stolle & Rochon, 1998).³ The further an association's membership deviates from the population on a given socioeconomic trait, the more certain socioeconomic groups are overrepresented or underrepresented in the association. This makes it harder to generate meaningful links between various socioeconomic groups *within* the association, which can be interpreted as a lack of bridging potential in the organization. It is important at this point to adequately define the comparison population. One possibility is to compare an association's composition to that of the entire population. However, in large countries where regional variations in population composition are significant, it may be more fruitful to compare a group's demographic profile with that of a more local population.

Consider, for example, a situation where there are three associations (A, B, and C) and two socioeconomic traits along which members can form cross-cutting ties (gender and age; see Table 1). The entire population is equally divided across both dimensions (represented in column 2), but this is not the case for membership within the associations. Organization A, for example, has 10% more male members than there are men in the population, whereas Organization C's membership consists of 80% of individuals older than age 60 (such that these are overrepresented by 55% compared to the population). We then define a diversity score as the average of the absolute values of the differences between the population distribution and an association's membership distribution on a given socioeconomic trait. For example, the diversity score for Association C on the age criterion equals $(20 + 15 + 20 + 55) / 4$, or 27.5. This indicates that the membership distribution of this association on average differs 27.5% from the population distribution. Clearly, the higher this diversity score the less bridging the organization is with respect to that particular socioeconomic characteristic.

After calculating such diversity scores for each association with respect to all socioeconomic characteristics in the analysis, one might employ two (slightly) different approaches to build a composite indicator of any given association's membership diversity (and thereby its bridging potential). The first approach rescales the diversity scores across associations between 0 and 1 for each socioeconomic dimension. That is, the largest diversity score across all voluntary associations on a given socioeconomic trait is set to 1, the smallest to 0, and the intermediate values are rescaled to lie within this range. This normalization is necessary to treat all dimensions on a common scale (Bowen & Moesen, in press) and allows us to simply add the normalized diversity scores across the various socioeconomic dimensions for each voluntary association. The resulting heterogeneity index has a minimum value of 0 and a maximum value equal to the number of socioeconomic dimensions retained in the analysis. Smaller numbers on the composite indicator reveal that the association's membership is more in line with that of the

Table 1. An Example

	% of Population	A	B	C
Gender				
Male	50	+10%	+5%	-20%
Female	50	-10%	-5%	+20%
Diversity score		10	5	20
Normalized diversity score		.333	0	1
Ranking		2	1	3
Age				
<19	25	-5%	-10%	-20%
20-40	25	-5%	-15%	-15%
40-60	25	+5%	+20%	-20%
>60	25	+5%	+5%	+55%
Diversity score		5	12.5	27.5
Normalized diversity score		0	.273	1
Ranking		1	2	3
Total				
Sum of normalized diversity scores		.333	.273	2
Sum of rankings		3	3	6

population and therefore is likely to be more accessible to bridging across various socioeconomic groups within the association. For the example in Table 1, this approach indicates that Organization B is most bridging (i.e., sum of normalized diversity scores = 0.273), whereas Organization C is most bonding (i.e., sum of normalized diversity scores = 2).

The second approach generates a ranking for each of the socioeconomic traits from 1 (i.e., association membership closest to population distribution) to *N* (i.e., association membership most divergent from population distribution)—with *N* equal to the number of voluntary associations in the analysis. These rankings are then added across the various socioeconomic traits for each voluntary association. As before, smaller numbers on this composite measure indicate that the association’s membership is more in line with that of the population—and thus that the association has larger bridging potential. For the example in Table 1, we once again find that Organization C, with a sum of rankings equal to 6, is more bonding than the other two organizations. No clear difference can now be made between organizations A and B.

Two key remarks need be made at this point. First, simply adding the normalized diversity scores (or rankings) implicitly gives equal weight to all socioeconomic characteristics in the analysis. Still, some dimensions may be deemed more important than others. Nevertheless, even though one could convincingly argue that, say, race will be more important than age or sex divisions in most societies, this provides only a partial answer to the problem. That is, it indicates only which elements are more important, but it does *not* solve the problem of how much more heavily to weigh these issues. In the absence of clear theoretical arguments for such weighing decisions, equal

treatment is a valid point of departure. Second, it should be observed that unlike the first approach to obtain an association's total score, the second approach does not take the variation in diversity scores across voluntary associations into (full) account. That is, the rank order of associations on a given socioeconomic trait does not indicate whether the diversity scores of any two voluntary associations are marginally different or very different. However, as it is not a priori clear that this information should be included in the composite measure, it might be deemed prudent to provide the results of both approaches in empirical applications. If both approaches yield similar results, this strengthens the conclusion as to the predominantly bridging or bonding nature of the various associations in the analysis.

It is important to note that both approaches recognize that "bonding and bridging are not either-or categories into which social networks can be neatly divided, but more or less dimensions along which we can compare different forms of social capital" (Putnam, 2000, p. 23). Although this is theoretically appealing, it necessarily implies that there remains some liberty on the side of the researcher applying this methodological framework to determine the cutoff point between bridging and bonding social capital. Although one can clearly argue that some organizations are more or less bonding than others, defining an organization as either bridging or bonding per se remains at the discretion of the researcher.

Finally, it should be mentioned that our approach addresses three shortcomings in the previous work by Stolle and Rochon (1998) and Stolle (2001). First, they only employ the first approach presented here to create a composite indicator of association membership heterogeneity. The results of the analysis, however, may vary depending on the exact procedure employed to generate the heterogeneity index. For example, as can be seen in Table 1, the first approach is able to distinguish between groups A and B, whereas the second cannot. Comparing the results across various summation procedures may thus provide an important means of ascertaining the robustness of the analysis to such methodological choices. Second, they fail to normalize their diversity scores prior to adding them across socioeconomic dimensions. This may lead to biased results because the various socioeconomic dimensions are then not treated on a common scale (thus implicitly giving different weights to the various dimensions included in the analysis). In our example, failing to normalize the diversity scores leads to total diversity scores of 15, 17.5, and 47.5 for A, B, and C, respectively. This implies that A is now more bridging than B, whereas the reverse is true when a normalization of the scores is applied. Hence, the implicit weighting of the various socioeconomic dimensions by not normalizing the diversity scores might affect the conclusion regarding the relative bridging potential of voluntary associations. Third, Stolle and Rochon (1998) and Stolle (2001) remove the dimension in which a voluntary association is furthest from the population distribution "in order not to penalize associations of youth, older people women and so forth—associations whose defining trait happens to coincide with one of the dimensions of representativeness we measure" (Stolle &

Rochon, 1998, p. 64, footnote). However, given that these associations specifically aim at certain groups in the population, one might argue that they by definition want to generate strong bonds between individuals characterized by this socioeconomic trait. Hence, it would be inappropriate to exempt their defining trait from the analysis. Indeed, by removing this dimension, these associations will appear more bridging than they actually are.

DISTINGUISHING BRIDGING FROM BONDING ASSOCIATIONS: A CASE STUDY

To illustrate our methodology and to assess the bridging or bonding potential of a set of voluntary association types in Flanders, we employ data from five surveys conducted by the Administration Planning and Statistics (APS) of the Flemish government. The APS surveys were originally designed in 1996 and ask, among other things, whether respondents participate in certain types of voluntary associations (e.g., hobby clubs, sports clubs, women's associations, and so on). Although the survey has been executed on an annual basis since 1996, we only use data from the waves of 1999 and the period between 2001 and 2004. The reason is that the question on voluntary association membership was considerably revised in 1999 (though the 2000 wave temporarily relapsed into the old question). Prior to 1999, people were asked whether they had during the previous year been active members of roughly 10 types of voluntary associations. The revised question asked whether people were—or had been—active or passive members in 22 different types of voluntary associations. As this permits us to assess the relative performance of a much broader range of voluntary associations, we rely on this extended version of the membership question for our analysis and pool the results from the five survey waves using this extended question (i.e., 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004). Pooling the various samples (each consisting of a random sample of approximately 1,500 individuals representative of the Flemish population) maximizes the number of association members in the analysis and generates sufficient members for most association types to allow for a more meaningful analysis (also see below).

However, before we proceed to the analysis it is important to point out that these survey data are not ideal to separate bridging from bonding associations. The reason is that they do not allow a test of the membership diversity of voluntary associations as such but are necessarily restrained to an analysis of the associational types brought forward in the survey. Hence, the data entail the risk that the demographic profile of membership in association types may be quite different from that in the associations within each type. This aggregation problem arises when one or more of the demographic variables used are correlated with membership in a particular association (e.g., women may be more likely to join knitting clubs), but *not* with the general propensity to join associations of that type (e.g., women may be no more likely to join hobby clubs in

general). Hence, when a given association type harbors a very diverse set of homogeneous associations—an alternative example could be religious groups of various faiths—this may lead to the finding that this association type is more bridging than is justified based on the underlying associations (see also Stolle & Rochon, 1998). A more direct analysis of association membership based on data from the voluntary associations themselves would not suffer from this problem. Unfortunately, we lack such data on associations' memberships, and obtaining them for all associations in Flanders would undoubtedly be a task too cumbersome and costly to be used in actual research. An important task for future research might therefore be to "generate a representative sample of organizations from which a sample of members may be contacted" in order to be able to make "strong statements about the composition of types of organizations" (McPherson, 1983, p. 1061).

Even though this aggregation problem should lead us to be very cautious in interpreting the results of our particular case study, we see two reasons—besides the empirical approach offered—why our analysis provides a valuable step in empirically separating bridging from bonding associations (or, more accurately, association types) in Flanders. First, when all association types in our sample are approximately equally affected by this internal diversity problem, the relative position of all association types on a scale from most bonding to most bridging is likely to be only weakly affected. Although the level of the composite index then has little substantive meaning, the order of the association types might still give an adequate indication of the *relative* bonding or bridging potential of the various association types. Second, we exclude three association types from the analysis where the internal diversity of the constituting associations is likely to be extremely problematic. This is the case for political parties, religious groups, and labor unions.⁴ Indeed, though one might convincingly argue that a person in one sports club feels some degree of kinship not only to other members of the same sports club but also to those in other sports clubs (Stolle & Rochon, 1998, p. 59), this argument is much harder to make for members of, say, various political parties. Hence, we exclude these three association types from the analysis.^{5,6} As we also exclude health care associations (because membership in one of these is obligatory in Belgium), self-help groups, and the White protest movement (which both lack sufficient members in our sample to allow reliable analysis), this leaves us with 16 association types. A list of these 16 association types is given in Table A1 in the appendix, along with the number of individuals claiming to be active or passive members of an association of a given type (both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the total sample size, viz., 7,276 individuals).⁷

The data allow us to compare membership composition with the population's composition on eight major dimensions of social cleavage.⁸ These are age, gender, education level, religion, nationality, professional category (i.e., blue-collar, white-collar, unemployed, and so on), marital status, and whether one has children.⁹ As the methodology was explained in the previous section, we only show the results from the analysis in Table 2 (more detailed results are

Table 2. Bridging Versus Bonding Association Types in Flanders

Association Type	<i>Sum of Normalized Diversity Scores</i>		<i>Sum of Rankings</i>	
Hobby club	0.883	(1)	26	(1)
Humanitarian organizations	1.215	(2)	34	(3)
Arts activities (literature, dance, theatre, music)	1.371	(3)	30	(2)
Sports associations	1.878	(4)	51	(4)
Neighborhood committees	1.897	(5)	53	(5)
Organizations aiding elderly, handicapped, or deprived people	2.007	(6)	61	(6)
Local community advisory and school council	2.350	(7)	70	(9)
Associations linked to local pub	2.417	(8)	66	(7)
Third World development and international peace	2.787	(9)	67	(8)
Environmental and nature associations	2.969	(10)	80	(10)
Fan clubs	3.133	(11)	88	(14)
Sociocultural associations	3.208	(12)	82	(11)
Family organizations	3.366	(13)	85	(12)
Youth associations	3.948	(14)	91	(15)
Women’s groups	4.009	(15)	86	(13)
Associations for retired people	6.018	(16)	112	(16)

Note: The position of the association on a scale from most bridging (1) to most bonding (16) is given in parentheses.

provided in Table A2 in appendix). Column 2 presents the sum of normalized diversity scores and column 3 shows the sum of the rankings obtained by the various associations. In both cases, higher scores imply that the socioeconomic composition of the association differs more strongly from the composition of the total population and thus indicates that the association is more bonding. Lower scores, on the other hand, suggest that associations represent more closely the composition of the total population, which implies higher bridging potential. The position of the associations on a scale from most bridging to most bonding is given in parentheses.

It is clear from Table 2 that the general conclusions from our analysis are robust with respect to the exact method used to generate the overall heterogeneity score.¹⁰ Specifically, though one should keep in mind the possible effects from aggregating associations into particular types (see above), we see that hobby clubs are the most successful in generating a membership that represents the average population in Flanders. This is also the case for associations organizing artistic activities and humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross. These kinds of associations obviously exist apart from any religious pillar (*zuil*). Such pillarization (or *verzuiling*) is an important issue in Belgium and the Netherlands (see, e.g., Billiet, 1993; Coffé, 2002), with these organizations tending to particularly attract people with certain religious and political characteristics. This is, for example, the case for women’s associations

and associations for retired people, which generally belong to the Catholic pillar. These associations are—obviously—also composed disproportionately of women and retired people, respectively. As a result, both these association types are found to be among the most bonding groups in our analysis. Youth associations also have quite homogeneous memberships. Young and unmarried people are clearly overrepresented in these organizations.

Before concluding, it may be of interest to compare the ranking of association types produced by our method to that obtained by two other approaches. First, Zmerli (2002) distinguishes between association types based on the associations' goals and activities rather than the diversity and inclusiveness of their membership (see also Knack, 2003; Wollebaek & Selle, 2002). In line with our results, she argues that pensioners' and women's associations are predominantly bonding groups, whereas sports clubs, cultural associations, and humanitarian associations are bridging. At odds with our results is her designation of organizations for helping the elderly and disabled as bonding (these are located toward the bridging side of the bridging-bonding continuity in our analysis) and youth clubs as bridging (these are among the most bonding groups in our study). This indicates that although bridging and bonding social capital are related to the inward- or outward-oriented aims of organizations (Putnam & Goss, 2002), the relationship is not always straightforward. Bridging associations do not always exclusively serve the common good, and bonding groups do not always limit themselves to the promotion of the material, social, or political interests of their own members. Hence, it may prove useful in further research to develop indicators of bridging and bonding social capital that take into account both the socioeconomic makeup of associations *and* their goals and activities. Second, Paxton (2002) defines associations as being more bridging (bonding) when they have more (less) extensive links with other associations. Her analysis indicates a very high level of external connections for human rights, peace, and environmental associations and a very low level for unions, religious, and sports organizations. This appears at odds with our findings that sports organizations are found to be predominantly bridging in our setting, whereas human rights, peace, and environmental associations are all located around the middle of the bridging-bonding spectrum. One possible explanation for this contradicting result is that associations allowing for building bridges across socioeconomic dimensions *within* the organization reduces the need to build bridges *across* associations. This explanation is, however, highly tentative and deserves further attention in future research.

CONCLUSION

Although social capital has—both inside and outside the scientific world—been presented as a good thing, it is important to acknowledge that it does not always have merely positive externalities. The recognition of this “dark side” of social capital has led recent scholarship to a distinction between

bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital refers to social networks that mainly comprise people that are similar in terms of their socioeconomic characteristics (age, gender, social class, and so on), whereas bridging social capital refers to crosscutting social networks. It is thereby often argued that the external effects of bridging networks are likely to be positive, whereas bonding networks might lack such positive externalities—or may even produce negative externalities (Putnam & Goss, 2002). Despite these theoretical arguments, the distinction between bridging and bonding social capital has as yet remained underdeveloped in empirical research.

In this article, we have introduced a methodology to measure bridging and bonding social capital. Our approach assesses how heterogeneous the composition of the various associations is. The idea is that it becomes harder to generate links between various socioeconomic groups *within* an association when certain socioeconomic groups are overrepresented or underrepresented among its members. By measuring the extent to which an association's membership deviates from the population on a number of socioeconomic traits, and summarizing these diversity scores across various socioeconomic dimensions for each organization, we introduce an index quantifying the relative presence (or absence) of bridging or bonding potential in the organization. The ensuing empirical designation of specific types of associations as being predominantly bridging or bonding provides a tool for future research on social capital to analyse the possibly differing effects of bridging and bonding associations and whether diversity works differently across various cultures.

Appendix

Table A1. Association Types and Memberships

<i>Association Type</i>	<i>No. of Members</i>	<i>% of Total Sample</i>
Youth associations	332	4.6
Environmental and nature associations	396	5.4
Organizations providing aid to elderly, handicapped, or deprived people	466	6.4
Arts activities (literature, dance, theatre, music)	488	6.7
Women's groups	573	7.9
Sociocultural associations	560	7.7
Sports associations	1,766	24.3
Neighborhood committees	323	4.4
Third World development and international peace	282	3.9
Local community advisory and school council	335	4.6
Family organizations	898	12.3
Associations linked to local pub	453	6.2
Humanitarian organizations	585	8.0
Associations for retired people	510	7.0
Fan clubs	112	1.5
Hobby clubs	492	6.8

Table A2. Detailed Results on Bridging Versus Bonding Association Types in Flanders

	Youth Associations	Environmental and Nature Associations	Organizations Aiding Elderly, Handicapped, or Deprived People	Arts Activities	Women's Groups Associations	Sociocultural Associations	Sports Committees	Neighborhood
Nationality (2)								
Normalized diversity score	0	.611	.444	.500	.333	.833	.389	.500
Ranking	1	13	7	8	5	15	6	8
Gender (2)								
Normalized diversity score	.247	.494	.138	.010	1	.218	.264	.195
Ranking	11	13	7	2	16	10	12	9
Age (6)								
Normalized diversity score	.523	.164	.247	0	.251	.163	.167	.178
Ranking	15	7	12	1	13	6	8	9
Marital status (4)								
Normalized diversity score	1	.049	.121	0	.602	.391	.067	.247
Ranking	16	3	5	1	14	11	4	9
Religious involvement (5)								
Normalized diversity score	.325	.467	.325	.022	.776	.430	.243	.034
Ranking	10	14	10	2	15	13	6	3
Education (4)								
Normalized diversity score	.560	.856	.191	.522	.155	.561	.372	.375
Ranking	10	14	3	9	2	11	6	7
Kids (2)								
Normalized diversity score	1	.025	.269	.172	.663	.419	.190	.226
Ranking	16	2	8	3	14	10	4	5
Profession (6)								
Normalized diversity score	.294	.304	.271	.145	.228	.193	.187	.141
Ranking	12	14	9	4	7	6	5	3

Note: The number of categories for each variable is indicated in parentheses.

	Third World			Local Community			Associations			Humanitarian		
	Development and International Peace	Advisory and School Council	Family Organizations	Linked to Local Pub	Organizations	Retired People	Fan Clubs	Hobby Clubs				
Nationality (2)	1	.556	.556	.278	.667	.500	.167					
Ranking	16	11	11	3	14	8	2					
Gender (2)												
Normalized diversity score	.042	.036	.082	.527	.161	.513	0					
Ranking	5	4	6	15	8	14	1					
Age (6)												
Normalized diversity score	.084	.207	.229	.101	.040	.270	.046					
Ranking	4	10	11	5	2	14	3					
Marital status (4)												
Normalized diversity score	.003	.133	.555	.160	.732	.468	.159					
Ranking	2	6	13	8	10	12	7					
Religious involvement (5)												
Normalized diversity score	.368	.054	.249	.252	.217	.284	0					
Ranking	12	4	7	8	5	9	1					
Education (4)												
Normalized diversity score	1	.764	.670	.426	.903	.226	.220					
Ranking	16	13	12	8	1	5	4					
Kids (2)												
Normalized diversity score	0	.258	.753	.434	.556	.577	.244					
Ranking	1	7	15	11	9	13	6					
Profession (6)												
Normalized diversity score	.291	.343	.273	.239	.1	.295	.048					
Ranking	11	15	10	8	1	13	2					

Note: The number of categories for each variable is indicated in parentheses.

Notes

1. Besides bridging and bonding social capital, Woolcock (1998) recognizes *linking* forms of social capital. These involve social relations with those in authority.

2. In line with, for example, Stolle and Rochon (1998), Stolle (2001), and Paxton (2002), we concentrate on voluntary associations. It is, however, important to keep in mind that there are various other situations in which individuals can have contacts that crosscut socioeconomic divides: for example, in schools or at the workplace. Hence, our approach focuses on one potential source of bridging social capital.

3. One might also measure membership diversity by calculating the degree in which members distinguish themselves from each other—rather than from the overall population—on certain dimensions of social cleavage (e.g., by calculating the standard deviation or coefficient of variation on given socioeconomic traits; see Stolle, 2001). The approach presented in the main text builds on the notion that social capital is likely to be fostered most by “memberships in associations that are representative of the larger society” (Stolle & Rochon, 1998, p. 64, footnote). It is preferred by the authors from the view that overrepresentation or underrepresentation of given groups in an association may yield a biased view of their degree of integration and of the aggregate importance (i.e., beyond the association) of the bridging that occurs within the association.

4. Labor unions are presented by Stolle and Rochon (1998) as an example of an internally homogeneous group of associations. Nonetheless, in the Administration Planning and Statistics surveys, labor unions are grouped into one category with employers’ organizations and retailers’ associations. These three groups are obviously addressing a very different public, whereas each constituent group is likely to be highly homogeneous.

5. An additional reason to exclude political parties and unions (see comment on unions in previous note) is that these association types are clearly politically inspired and endeavour to achieve certain policy aims (Knack, 2003; Wollebaek & Selle, 2002; Zmerli, 2002, 2003). As social capital theory focuses on apolitical associations as the typical sources of social capital generation, we decided to remove them from the analysis (Stolle, 2001). Still, the quantitative findings are similar if they are retained in the analysis in the sense that the ranking of the remaining association types from most to least bridging is only marginally affected by these types’ inclusion (results available upon request).

6. Rather than excluding such association types from the analysis, one might also consider assigning them a normalized diversity score of 1 on those dimensions in which the aggregation problem is most forceful (e.g., religion for the group of religious associations). Technically, this lowers the inflated bridging nature of these association types without altering the relative position of the other associations in the analysis. As this, however, does not resolve the problems with these three association types in the present setting mentioned in the previous two notes, we refrain from executing this approach in this study.

7. We include both active and passive members, as previous research indicates that the intensity of involvement has little effect on social capital formation, such that “research on voluntary associations should not limit itself to active participation” (Hooghe, 2003, p. 56; see also Stolle, 2001; Stutzer & Frey, 2006; Wollebaek & Selle, 2002). Moreover, it has been argued that associations that do not involve face-to-face interactions might nonetheless involve “symbolic” communities that provide a resource for those involved (e.g., Keane, 1998; Minkoff, 1997). Still, one might question whether the choice to include passive members affects our findings. Re-analyzing the data using only active members indicates that this is not the case. Indeed, the Pearson rank order correlations between the rankings obtained from the analyses with and without passive members are above .90 (full results available upon request).

8. We thereby compare the composition of voluntary associations with the demographic profile of Flanders as a whole for two reasons. First, the demographic profile does not differ dramatically across Flanders on the socioeconomic traits we regard. Second, as mentioned before, our data concern association types in Flanders and do not identify particular associations in given areas, making it impossible to compare their composition to a more local population.

9. Clearly, other socioeconomic categories can be considered. Given data availability, it was, for example, not possible to include income or partisanship in the present analysis. Moreover, different socioeconomic characteristics may be more important in other settings: namely, language (e.g., in Canada, Switzerland, or Belgium), race and/or ethnicity (e.g., in the United States), and so on. In any case, it is important to consider a significant number of sociodemographic characteristics to avoid spurious inferences. The reason is that some associations tend to form around one common characteristic (e.g., Skocpol, 1997). Each will thus be bonding on this particular dimension but might be bridging along other dimensions. A limited scope of the analysis may then incorrectly categorize associations that are homogeneous on one dimension but heterogeneous on various others as bonding association. This is avoided by including more socioeconomic traits. Indeed, associations that are able to overcome this one bonding dimension best by being bridging on all other dimensions will still turn out to have an overall high bridging potential.

10. They are also robust when we measure membership diversity by calculating the degree in which members distinguish themselves from each other rather than from the overall population (see also Note 3). In fact, four of the five most bonding and four of the five most bridging associations are designated as such by both approaches, and the Pearson rank order correlation between the rankings obtained from the alternative approaches is .79 (full results available upon request).

References

- Abrams, D., Hogg, M. A., & Marques, J. M. (2005). *The social psychology of inclusion and exclusion*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Anheier, H., & Kendall, J. (2002). Interpersonal trust and voluntary associations: Examining three approaches. *British Journal of Sociology*, 53, 343-362.
- Beugelsdijk, S., & Smulders, S. (2003, August). *Bridging and bonding social capital: Which type is good for economic growth?* Paper presented at European Regional Science Association, Jyväskylä, Finland.
- Beyerlein, K., & Hipp, J. R. (2005). Social capital, too much of a good thing? American religious traditions and community crime. *Social Forces*, 84(2), 995-1013.
- Billiet, J. (1993). De katholieke zuil en de integratie van migranten [The Catholic pillar and the integration of immigrants]. In F. Demeyere (Ed.), *Over pluralisme en democratie. Verzuiling en integratie in een multiculturele samenleving* (pp. 85-104). Brussels, Belgium: VUB Press.
- Blau, P. M. (1977). *Inequality and heterogeneity: A primitive theory of social structure*. New York: Free Press.
- Bobo, L. (1988). Group conflict, prejudice, and the paradox of contemporary racial attitudes. In P. A. Katz & D. A. Taylor (Eds.), *Eliminating racism: Profiles in controversy* (pp. 85-114). New York: Plenum.
- Bourdieu, P. (1985). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.
- Bowen, H., & Moesen, W. (in press). Benchmarking the competitiveness of nations: Non-uniform weighting and non-economic dimensions. *Corporate Governance*.
- Coffé, H. (2002). De sociaal-culturele breuklijn en maatschappelijke betrokkenheid [The social-cultural cleavage and social involvement]. *Mens & Maatschappij*, 77(4), 319-337.
- Coffé, H., & Geys, B. (2006). *Measuring the interconnections of voluntary organizations: A note on the importance of association size*. Unpublished paper.
- Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital and the creation of human capital. *Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95-S120.
- DeFilippis, J. (2001). The myth of social capital in community development. *Housing Policy Debate*, 21(4), 781-806.
- de Tocqueville, A. (1962). *De la démocratie en Amérique* [Democracy in America]. Paris: Galimard. (Original work published 1835)
- Foley, M. W., & Edwards, B. (1998). Beyond Toqueville: Civil society and social capital in comparative perspective. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 42(1), 5-20.

- Gaertner, S., Rust, M., Dovidio, J., Bachman, B., & Anastasio, P. (1996). The contact hypothesis: The role of common ingroup identity on reducing intergroup bias among majority and minority members. In J. L. Nye & A. M. Browser (Eds.), *What's social about social cognition?* (pp. 230-260). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Halpern, D. (2005). *Social capital*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Hibbing, J. R., & Theiss-Morse, E. A. (2002). *Stealth democracy: Americans' beliefs about how government should work*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hooghe, M. (2003). Participation in voluntary associations and value indicators: The effect of current and previous participation experiences. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 32, 47-69.
- Hurlbert, J. S., Haines, V. A., & Beggs, J. J. (2000). Core networks and tie activation: What kinds of routine networks allocate resources in nonroutine situations. *American Sociological Review*, 65, 598-618.
- Keane, J. (1998). *Civil society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Knack, S. (2003). Groups, growth and trust: Cross-country evidence on the Olson and Putnam hypotheses. *Public Choice*, 117, 341-355.
- Maloney, W. A., Smith, G., & Stoker, G. (2000). Social capital and associational life. In S. Baron, J. Field, & T. Schuller (Eds.), *Social capital. Critical perspectives* (pp. 212-225). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Marshall, M. J., & Stolle, D. (2004). Race and the city: Neighborhood context and the development of generalized trust. *Political Behavior*, 26, 125-153.
- McPherson, M. (1983). The size of voluntary associations. *Social Forces*, 61(4), 1044-1064.
- Minkoff, D. (1997). Producing social capital: National social movements and civil society. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 40(5), 606-619.
- Münster, J. (in press). Simultaneous inter- and intra-group conflicts. *Economic Theory*.
- Olson, M. (1982). *The rise and decline of nations: Economic growth, stagflation, and social rigidities*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Paxton, P. (2002). Social capital and democracy: An interdependent relationship. *American Sociological Review*, 67, 254-277.
- Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22, 1-24.
- Putnam, R. (1993). *Making democracy work. Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: Collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Putnam, R., & Goss, K. A. (2002). Introduction. In R. Putnam (Ed.), *Democracies in flux. The evolution of social capital in contemporary society* (pp. 1-19). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Sabatini, F. (2005). *Social capital, public spending and the quality of economic development*. Unpublished paper.
- Skocpol, T. (1997). The Tocqueville problem. Civic engagement in American democracy. *Social Science History*, 21(4), 455-479.
- Stolle, D. (2000). Onderzoek naar sociaal kapitaal. Naar een attitudele benadering [Inquiries into social capital. Toward an attitudinal approach]. In M. Hooghe (Ed.), *Sociaal kapitaal en democratie. Verenigingsleven, sociaal kapitaal en politieke cultuur* (pp. 25-59). Leuven, Netherlands: Acco.
- Stolle, D. (2001). 'Getting to trust'. An analysis of the importance of institutions, families, personal experiences and group membership. In P. Dekker & E. M. Uslander (Eds.), *Social capital and participation in everyday life* (pp. 118-133). London: Routledge.
- Stolle, D., & Rochon, T. R. (1998). Are all associations alike? Member diversity, associational type, and the creation of social capital. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 42(1), 47-65.
- Stutzer, A., & Frey, B. S. (2006). Political participation and procedural utility: An empirical study. *European Journal of Political Research*, 45, 391-418.
- Wollebæk, D., & Selle, P. (2002). Does participation in voluntary associations contribute to social capital? The impact of intensity, scope, and type. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 31, 32-61.
- Woolcock, M. (1998). Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. *Theory and Society*, 27(2), 151-208.

- Zmerli, S. (2002, August/September). *The empirical relevance of bonding and bridging social capital: An East-West German comparison*. Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Boston.
- Zmerli, S. (2003). Applying the concept of bonding and bridging social capital to empirical political research. *European Political Science*, 2(3), 68-75.

Hilde Coffé is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at Utrecht University. She conducts research on extreme right parties, political sociology, political parties, and Belgian politics. She has published a book on the extreme right parties in Belgium, and some of her work has been published in Journal of Urban Affairs, West European Politics, Electoral Studies, Social Science Quarterly, Regional and Federal Studies, and Acta Politica.

Benny Geys is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Market Processes and Governance Research Unit, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung. His research focuses mainly on (local) government performance. Some of his work was published in Journal of Urban Economics, European Journal of Political Economy, European Journal of Political Research, Journal of Urban Affairs, and Social Science Quarterly.