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The Social Science Journal

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/soscij

The mediating effect of civic community on social growth: The importance of reciprocity[☆]

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 May 2013

Received in revised form 14 August 2013

Accepted 15 August 2013

Available online 9 September 2013

Keywords:

Social capital

Social change

Community studies

Qualitative methodology

Civic engagement

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effects of economic structural change on community social capital. The content of 156 interviews in Southern communities entrenched in the offshore oil economy, were used to investigate the consequences of industrial and civic restructuring on the social structure and social ties among local residents. The central finding is that population turnover and in-migration of workers demanded by a rapidly expanding economy enhances the density of weak tie networks within the community. However, the activation of these weak ties is highly dependent upon perceptions of future reciprocity from newcomers to the community by the entrenched members. Weak ties are important because they serve as a foundation for community members engaging in collective problem solving. Civic and social institutions can mediate the negative effects of rapid community growth shown. When newcomers are not integrated into the community, it may lead to exploitation and exclusion due to stigmatic labels.

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1. Introduction

Sociology has long investigated the causes and consequences of social change (Parsons & Shils, 1951; Tonnies, 1963). Whether these consequences are positive or negative has been a debate between sociologists since the inception of the discipline itself. Much of this investigation was spurred by the industrial revolution bringing many to inquire whether or not rapid social change is indeed beneficial for the communities experiencing it. The thinking

among certain classic theorists was that rapid social change resulted in substantial disruption for community members (Freudenburg, 1984).

This debate is ongoing; contemporary research concerning industrial growth shows mixed results. Some research suggests the positive outcomes of social growth (Brabant, 1993; Brown, Bankston, & Forsyth, 2013; Forsyth, Luthra, & Bankston, 2007; Tolbert, 2006; White, 1983). These studies find that community and industrial growth often lead to increasing employment, higher wages, and other positive social outcomes. Alternatively, the social disruption thesis posits that rapid community growth will often lead to a wide array of social problems (Greider, Krannich, & Berry, 1991). Some argue that the offshore oil industry, like other extraction industries, is detrimental to regions in the long run (Seydlitz, Jenkins, & Hampton, 1995; Seydlitz, Laska, Spain, Triche, & Bishop, 1993). However, the model utilized by previous scholars to investigate growth brought upon by the Gulf oil industry has recently come under scrutiny regarding its paradigmatic focus on fluctuations of populations as negative (Brown, Bankston,

[☆] This article was part of a larger project supported by the United States Department of Interior, Mineral Management Services, through the Marine Institute, Louisiana State University, (Cooperative Agreement 32806, Task Order 39798). The views are those of the authors alone and do not reflect the policy or position of MMS.

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Forsyth, & Berthelot, 2011; Forsyth et al., 2007; Gramling & Brabant, 1986; Luton & Cluck, 2002). Other literature documenting the adoption of the energy industry in Canada and Australia also points to the plethora of positive and negative implications of the industry (Storey, 2001, 2010).

The offshore oil industry is one of the leading employers in the gulf area. Within 40 years since its inception, the industry provides direct employment to 41,798 residents of Louisiana. The reach of the oil industry extends even farther than those under direct employment. By 1981, the industry led to the creation of over 80 thousand other jobs servicing the extraction of offshore oil (Tolbert, 2006). With the majority of offshore oil leases belonging to Texas and Louisiana, the impact of this industry on these states' communities is unquestionable. The offshore oil industry has brought about a tremendous amount of change to the effected communities. The sheer size of the industry attracts large immigrations, as well as large exoduses from many communities. These communities have been impacted in a variety of ways.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Social growth's effect on community integration

Social disorganization literature comments on the role of social change on community outcomes. Shaw and McKay's (1969) theory of social disorganization states that societies rely on a normative consensus on common goals in order to regulate behavior while social growth will undermine this normative consensus and lead to negative communal outcomes. More contemporary research adds to this model, theorizing the imperative nature of residential stability which both allows time for residents of a neighborhood to initiate and strengthen ties with each other and allows communities to engage in informal social control (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Sampson, 1988).

On the other hand, social growth and societal change negatively affects pre-existing social ties between community members. Freudenburg (1984) finds that small rural communities which experience rapid growth in fact exhibit declines in the density of acquaintanceship between residents. This counterintuitive result suggests that while the number of possible ties increases, the cultivation of these friendships is not assured. In fact, rural communities experiencing rapid growth often become more homogenized due to the exclusion of newcomers from their social circles.

Community growth has a negative influence on levels of social trust perceived by residents (Brown, 2011; Hartnagel, 1979). Lowered levels of community trust further inhibit the incorporation of newcomers to these communities, and it hinders community members from forming relationships with others outside of their established social circles. Furthermore, members of the community also shy away from civic and social interaction. Finally, locals exhibit a lack of faith in future reciprocity. This lack of faith is seen between interaction with newcomers as well as with the larger community as a whole (Table 1).

The overall theme is that social growth, through population turnover and instability, has negative social outcomes due to weakened community integration and lowered civic and social interaction. These outcomes are caused by the tendency of rapid population change to lower the normative consensus, strain pre-existing and potential social ties, and lower the density of acquaintanceships. Once this happens, communities become increasingly homogenous which creates a dichotomous relationship between long standing residents and newcomers.

2.2. Social capital

Social capital is not only built upon social trust, it also builds social trust between community members and heightens the normative consensus (Healy, Hampshire, & Ayres, 2004). Social capital is often defined as the resources held in relationships between individuals or larger social entities (Paxton, 1999; Putnam, 2000). These relationships are based on trust and reciprocation (Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1988) and are available to facilitate the achievement of certain ends (Rosenfeld, Messner, & Baumer, 2001).

An underlying notion on the reciprocal potential of social capital is that it "adheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons" (Coleman, 1990, p. 302). The concept is characterized as the glue that holds groups of individuals together (Pooley, Cohen, & Pike, 2004, p. 73). It has also been found to solidify group structure by strengthening group norms and sanctions, and increasing perceptions of obligation to the group (Coleman, 1988).

Coleman (1988) focuses on three outcomes of social capital that are important to this research. The first lies in obligations and expectations. He highlights the importance of reciprocation in social action between actors. He further stresses this form of social capital is reliant on the levels of trust and trustworthiness within the social network. The second is that norms and sanctions are essential for social collectivities to insure actors are perceived to be acting in the interest of the social collectivity. The last describes information channels as being avenues where actors are able to get information from relationships that will provide a basis for later action.

Social network literature has further elaborated on the importance and variability of information channels. The composition of ties within social networks has been posited to lead to differing levels of potential action and benefit. The main argument is that heterogeneous networks are better equipped for information transference than dense homogenous networks (Granoveter, 1973). Since dense homogenous networks are comprised of individuals strongly related to one another, information within them is redundant. Heterogeneous networks are not only comprised of strong relationships between actors but also weaker ones which provide bridges between social networks where actors can gain new information not available within highly homogenous networks. Thus "networks that are large in size and contain a variety of close and weak acquaintances are hypothesized as providing access to the greatest number of resources, while networks that are limited in size and diversity can constrain resource mobilization and opportunity mobility" (Zippay, 2001, p.

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