



National Experiences and International Harmonization in Social Capital Measurement: A Beginning

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National Experiences and International Harmonization in Social Capital Measurement: A Beginning

1. Introduction

A discussion of national experiences measuring social capital took place at two Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) meetings, in London in September 2002 and in Budapest in May 2003. The participants at the Budapest meeting agreed, in outline form, to a set of key questions that could be used in national surveys where some level of international comparability was desired. They also agreed to refine these questions before suggesting them as standards for international comparison.

This document summarizes national experiences of the measurement of social capital and proposes a set of harmonized international questions. It begins with a review of current approaches to social capital measurement presented at the London meeting, focusing on the experiences of countries that have undertaken a systematic analysis of social capital. It then discusses the components of social capital agreed upon at the Budapest meeting. Finally, it proposes a list questions as a first step towards international harmonization of the measurement of select aspects of social capital.

2. National Approaches

Social capital has emerged as a topic of interest to researchers, governments and international organizations. This section discusses the various approaches to social capital measurement presented by countries attending the conference on Social Capital: The Challenge of International Measurement, convened by the OECD and the United Kingdom Office for National Statistics in London, September 25-27, 2002. Full details and papers from this event are available at:

http://www.oecd.org/document/24/0,2340,en_2649_34543_2380248_1_1_1_1,00.html

Importance of cultural context

Several countries noted the importance of cultural specificity in the measurement of social capital. For example, New Zealand noted that in Maori culture, family and community are not understood as distinct categories. Similarly, Japan's unique social and cultural traditions mean that the boundaries between friends and business associates or between voluntary and semi-obligatory activities are not easily defined. In Finland, interest in social capital has focused on comparisons of different regions as opposed to social capital at the national level. Germany also noted the importance of attention to internal variations within a country, such as those in the old and new federal state.

Cultural context is an explicit part of Australia's social capital framework; social capital

interacts with other resources in a context of cultural, political, institutional and legal conditions.

Systematic federal interest in the measurement of social capital

Although there is a generalized interest in the notion of social capital, relatively few participating countries have a focused interest in the topic as evidenced by a federal program of systematic research. Measures of some aspects of social capital are available from existing data sources but there is currently no major national measurement initiative in Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Japan, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey or the United States. In France and the United States national support for of social capital measurement is hampered by the still-evolving state of theoretical conceptualization and related measurement problems.

In contrast, there is focused federal government interest in social capital in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The remainder of this section will focus on the experience of measuring social capital in these countries.

General acceptance of the OECD social capital definition

The OECD definition of social capital - “networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups” (Cote and Healy

2001:41) - has been officially adopted by Australia and the United Kingdom. Although not officially endorsed, it is also generally accepted as the working definition in Canada. New Zealand has its own definition of social capital, also focusing on networks and the notion of cooperation:

“relationships among actors (individuals, groups, and/or organizations) that create a capacity to act for mutual benefit or a common purpose” (Statistics New Zealand 2002:3).

Analytical framework focused on networks

All four of these countries have developed analytical social capital frameworks. In each, the notion of networks is central to the conceptualization of social capital. Social capital is seen as a resource residing in and stemming from networks. It is also conceived of as an attribute of the group rather than of the individual, although data is generally collected at the individual level and then aggregated. The classification of three types of networks - bridging, bonding and linking – is also common to the social capital framework in all four countries.

Australia has one of the most comprehensive approaches to measurement of social capital. At the highest level of abstraction, the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ (ABS) framework conceptualizes social capital as one kind of resource, drawing on and feeding back into other types of resources (natural, produced economic, and human capital). In this way, social capital contributes to a wide range of wellbeing outcomes such as health,

education, employment, family functioning, economic growth and sustainability and social cohesion.

The ABS framework presents the various elements of social capital with possible statistical indicators and data items. The four dimensions of the framework describe attributes of networks:

1. network qualities (norms, such as trust, reciprocity and inclusiveness, and common purposes such as social, civic and economic participation);
2. network structure (size, frequency of interaction, density and openness, power relationships and transience/mobility);
3. network transactions (interactions which at the same time invest in and maintain relationships and draw resources from them, such as sharing knowledge and sharing support); and
4. network types (bridging, bonding and linking) (Edwards 2004).

The social capital framework developed by the United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics (ONS) includes the dimensions most commonly used in the United Kingdom as well as items that have proved to be important to understanding social capital. It includes five dimensions:

1. Social participation (involvement in local groups, voluntary organizations, clubs, religious activity);

2. Civic participation (confidence in institutions at different levels, how well informed about local or national affairs, involvement with local action groups; frequency and propensity to vote);
3. Views of the local area (views of physical environment, facilities in the area enjoyment of living in the area, fear of crime);
4. Social interaction and social support (contact with friends, family, neighbours, perceptions of social support, perceived control over life, satisfaction with life);
and
5. Trust and reciprocity (trust in other people, confidence in institutions, confidence in public services; perceptions of shared values).

The third dimension, “views of the local area” was included because past research suggested a correlation between satisfaction with living in a certain area and high social capital (Harper and Kelly 2003).

The ONS is also working to develop a bank of fully tested social capital questions¹. These could be used in different survey vehicles to provide nationally comparable data. The set of questions for international harmonization suggested in part 4 of this paper draw heavily on the ONS harmonization exercise.

The New Zealand social capital measurement framework includes four interconnected components:

1. behaviours (what people do, in particular, their participation and engagement in social networks);

2. attitudes and values (what people feel, believe and value);
3. population groups (what people are because the nature of the relationships will differ according to basic population characteristics; and
4. organizations (understanding organizations as social structures i.e. how many organizations of various types exist, their characteristics, and how they relate to one another) (Statistics New Zealand 2002).

The first two components, behaviours and attitudes and values, encompass dimensions of social capital related to the characteristics of individuals similar to those in the ABS and ONS frameworks. The last two components, population groups and organizations, emphasize the need to understand social capital as an attribute of groups.

Canada is one of the only participating countries to have developed a survey on social capital, the 2003 General Social Survey (GSS) on Social Engagement. The survey development was informed by current thinking on social capital but not designed around one specific conceptual framework. However, the Policy Research Initiative (PRI), a federal body tasked with horizontal policy integration, has elaborated an analytical framework based on a network approach to social capital (PRI 2004).

The GSS on Social Engagement was designed to shed light on the many ways in which Canadians engage in civic and social life and to develop a better understanding of how social networks and norms of trust and reciprocity may contribute positively to individual and social outcomes. Information was collected on Canadians' social contacts with family, friends and neighbours; their involvement in formal organizations, political activities and religious services; their level of trust in people and in public institutions;

¹ www.statistics.gov.uk/socialcapital/downloads/harmonisation_steve_5.pdf

and their sense of belonging to Canada, their province and their community. Preliminary findings show that people who derive their highest sense of satisfaction from life are those who describe their sense of community as very strong, those who are involved in one or more groups or organizations, and those who express confidence in their public institutions (Statistics Canada 2004).

3. Components of Social Capital

This section describes the main components of social capital as agreed upon for international harmonization at the Budapest meeting. Descriptions of each dimension of social capital are those proposed by the OECD in the e-mail discussion of guidelines for international measurement that took place prior to the Budapest meeting. Issues related to measurement of each dimension are summarized from the e-mail discussion without attribution.

Definition of social capital

The discussions about international social capital measurement used the OECD definition of social capital as a point of departure:

“networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups” (Cote and Healy, 2001:41). Four distinct dimensions of social capital were agreed upon at the Budapest meeting:

1. Social participation;
2. Social networks and support;
3. Trust and reciprocity; and
4. Civic participation.

The current proposal explicitly excludes the social capital arising from immediate families (those who reside in the same household), schools and workplaces. This

pragmatic limitation is intended to focus attention on areas where clear and simple internationally comparable measures are possible. For example, some involvement with organized groups may be an integral part of a person's paid job, either because they work for an organized group or deal with an organized group on behalf of their employer. Furthermore, the distinction between socializing in the workplace and just 'doing one's job' is real but subtle. Thus, the four dimensions outlined above refer only to the social capital built up by local communities and civil society.

Social Participation

Social participation includes involvement in organisations, associations and/or organised groups, including volunteering/unpaid activities carried out through these groups. The main difference between social participation and social networks hinges on the notion of involvement in organizations, associations or groups as opposed to activities undertaken informally as an individual. Social participation refers to **involvement in organised groups**, whereas social networks and support focuses on **informal involvement in activities**. Organised groups may be defined as follows:

- Formal groups e.g. a sports club or professional research association. For most of these groups a membership fee or subscription is required.
- Groups of people who get together regularly to undertake an organized activity e.g. a book club or wine club. Most of these groups will not require a membership fee or subscription.

Involvement in an organized group can be further separated into active and passive involvement. Examples of active involvement would include attending group meetings², participating in group activities or serving as the organization's treasurer in a volunteer/unpaid capacity. Passive involvement would include taking out a membership in a group or supporting a group by donating money rather than time. Some researchers, such as Putnam, suggest that passive involvement or "associational membership" is qualitatively different from active involvement, as it does not generate the generalized trust inherent in the notion of social capital.

The types of groups to which people belong can vary considerably (e.g. sports, religion, politics, arts, health, etc.). The possibilities are extensive and vary from culture to culture. To facilitate international comparability, it is important to define a broad list of the types of organized groups to be included in measures of social participation.

There was some consensus that it is more important to measure the intensity of involvement in organized groups than to have detailed information on the type of groups to which a person belongs. Intensity of involvement could be measured by:

- how frequently an individual meets with a group (e.g. the number of times in the past 12 months);
- how much time is spent with the group (e.g. number of hours per month); and
- how many groups in which an individual is involved.

² Groups may meet face-to-face or virtually.

There may, however, be a correlation between intensity of involvement and type of group. For example, characteristics of the individual, such as being a parent or a veteran, may be linked to the types groups with which a person is involved and this may also be linked to the number of groups to which a person belongs.

Social networks and support

Social networks and support refers to informal involvement in activities as an individual.

This includes the following:

- provision of unpaid help (e.g. advice, housework, help with shopping) to friends, relatives and neighbours outside the immediate household;
- receipt of unpaid help from persons outside the household; and
- other active social involvement with friends, relatives (outside the immediate household), acquaintances and work colleagues.

Like social participation, social networks and support can be measured by the frequency of networking, the type of networking/support activities, the time spent in these activities and the size of social networks. As noted earlier, social networking explicitly excludes activities that take place within the immediate family (those who reside in the same household), at school and at work.

Civic participation

Civic participation was defined as a distinct dimension of social capital, separate from social participation and social networks and support, because it links trust to some aspects of political participation. There may be some conceptual overlap between civic and social participation (Healy 2002). For instance, organized groups of a political or civic nature may also be included in the list of groups used to measure social participation.

The notion of civic participation includes a range of items, such voting, involvement in civic groups and political parties, perceptions of the neighbourhood and local services and trust in local and national institutions. The diversity of measures, the subjectivity inherent in measuring perceptions, and the difficulty of clearly defining concepts such as “neighbourhood” make it difficult to extract a key indicator from these questions. For the purposes of harmonised international questions, it is preferable to identify objective actions or events. For example, actions of political participation may imply a degree of engagement in government decision-making.

The most obvious measure of political participation is voting, as in whether or not a person voted in the most recent election. This information could be obtained from a survey question or administrative data, although the latter might not provide details on voter characteristics necessary for the analysis of social capital determinants and

outcomes. It was suggested that an international question on voting be restricted to the most recent election for national government. Voting in local elections is also significant, but different types of local and regional government make it somewhat harder to define an internationally comparable measure.

Other indicators of civic participation could include specific actions that demonstrate engagement in the political process. These might include contacting a politician, government or local government official, signing a petition, taking part in a public demonstration or donating money to a political organization or action group.

Trust and reciprocity

Trust is perhaps the most important and the most complex dimension of social capital. Given the relative subjectivity of attitudes and the importance of cultural specificity, it is difficult or even impossible to measure trust with a single survey question in the context of international comparability. The World Values Survey contains one general and commonly used question on trust:

“Generally speaking would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” (www.wvs.isr.umich.edu).

This question is widely used and baseline data is available for many countries. However, some feel that the general notion of ‘trust’ only makes sense with respect to specific contexts, such as asking about whether you trust local shopkeepers to deal fairly with you. Alternative approaches, such as asking several general questions on trust, or asking

questions about trust in specific contexts, or in specific institutions were not considered to be workable for a short module of internationally comparable questions. Consequently, while recognizing the significance of trust, no recommendation was put forth on its measurement.

Bridging/bonding/linking social capital

Note that in order to measure bridging, bonding or linking social capital, it is necessary to collect information not only about the characteristics of the respondent, but also of those people in the respondent's networks. This may not be feasible in a short set of internationally comparable questions.

4. Harmonized Questions for International Comparisons - A Beginning

The Budapest meeting sought to enhance the international comparability of social capital data. The participants agreed, in outline form, to a set of key questions and indicators on social capital. These questions could be used by countries when seeking international comparability for national data collection exercises. This section presents a short list of questions that could be used to measure three of the four areas of social capital identified in Budapest:

1. Social participation;
2. Social networks and support; and
3. Civic participation.

Although there was general interest in measuring trust and reciprocity, no consensus was reached on framing an acceptable measure.

Why strive for international comparability?

There is considerable interest in social capital as a tool for better understanding well being. Much data covering aspects of social capital already exist, despite “a lack of coherence and integration in the production and analysis of that data” (PRI 2004: 5). The current effort in international cooperation advances social capital research by helping to reach a consensus on definitional and measurement issues. This process has allowed countries to share experiences and best practices and the development of a harmonized

social capital question module will facilitate cross-country comparison, including benchmarking and tracking change over time. Harmonized questions also permit one to compare the relationship between social capital and well-being outcomes across countries.

In some respects, an international understanding of social capital is an extension of the kind of analysis that is done nationally, given the cultural specificity that exists even within countries:

- National profile
 - Profile of sub-populations
 - In-depth studies done on local communities.

Considerations for development of harmonized questions

The proposed questions are but a first step towards international harmonization.

Countries might adapt these questions to meet their specific cultural context or to maintain a consistent time series with data that has already been collected. However, even if used in its entirety, the set of questions only measures select aspects of social capital and is in no way intended to be exhaustive or definitive.

There are many challenges in developing a set of survey questions for use internationally.

Some important considerations include:

- Issues of translation (both linguistic and cultural)

- For example, the notion of “community” may not have an equivalent in languages other than English and may be interpreted differently across cultures and even in rural versus urban areas.
- The survey context/motivation/order of questions
 - An international survey module could be used in a variety of survey vehicles. As part of its harmonization exercise, the ONS is examining the results from the same social capital questions asked in different survey contexts to determine which questions yield consistent results across surveys.
- The mode of survey collection
 - Some questions may be better suited to a face-to-face personal interview than to a self-completed mail-back questionnaire.
- Reference periods
 - Different reference periods may be better suited to certain types of questions. For example, a short reference period is more appropriate when there is a need to recall specific events with some accuracy, but a longer period is needed to measure activities that take place infrequently or only at a certain time of the year.
- Minimum set of context and outcome variables
 - Analysis of social capital requires a minimum set of context variables (age, sex, education, marital status, number/age of children, labour force activity status, location, income, etc.) as well as outcome variables

(measures of well-being). These have not been specified for the international question set at this time.

Source of questions

The suggested questions include items from the United Kingdom Harmonised Question Set, United Kingdom Home Office Citizenship Survey and European Social Survey. They have been developed by experienced survey practitioners and have been fully tested. The ONS has extensively tested the United Kingdom Harmonised Question Set and the European Social Survey has been tested by different organizations in a number of countries.

The Harmonized Question Set is the main outcome of a process of defining and measuring social capital in the United Kingdom. It allows for comparison of results and the aggregation of data from different surveys. It was initially designed for face-to-face interviewing, but is being revised and tested for use with both telephone interviews and self-completed mail-back surveys.

www.statistics.gov.uk/socialcapital/downloads/harmonisation_steve_5.pdf.

The Home Office Citizenship Survey is a new survey in the United Kingdom covering topics such as volunteering and community activities, race equality, family issues and attitudes to regulations on licensing and gambling. www.statistics.gov.uk/socialcapital

The European Social Survey is an academically led and methodologically rigorous biennial study of changing social attitudes and values within Europe. The principal long term aim of the project is to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions, its political and economic structures, and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations. There are two questionnaires: a) a face-to-face interview questionnaire of around 60 minutes average duration; and b) a short supplementary questionnaire (self-completion or face-to-face).

www.europeansocialsurvey.org

PROPOSED SOCIAL CAPITAL QUESTIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL HARMONIZATION³

1. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Reference period: past 12 months

INDICATOR 1.1

Type of group(s) in which respondent is involved

This question measures involvement in organized groups. It is similar to the UK Harmonized Question Set, but simpler.

It measures involvement by the range of different types of groups (e.g. religious, political, neighbourhood groups) but not the total number of groups (e.g. an individual could belong to several religious groups). It mainly measures “active” involvement, including “passive” membership or just belonging to a group but excluding involvement defined solely by giving money to the group.

SOURCE: UK Home Office Citizenship Survey (HOCS) 2003

I'd like you to think about any clubs, groups or organisations that you've been involved with during the last 12 months. That's anything you've belonged to, taken part in, supported, or that you've helped in any way, either on your own or with others. Please exclude giving money and anything that is a requirement of your job.

In a moment I'll give you some cards. Please pick out the ones that best describe any groups, clubs or organisations you've taken part in, supported or helped, over the last 12 months.

- a) Children's education/schools
- b) Youth/children's activities (outside school)
- c) Education for adults
- d) Sports/exercise (taking part, coaching or going to watch)
- e) Religion
- f) Politics
- g) The elderly
- h) Health, disability and social welfare
- i) Safety, first aid

³ Note: Most of the following questions were designed for use in face-to-face interviews and require the use of a card listing answer categories. However, they could be adapted for telephone or self-completed surveys.

- j) The environment, animals
- k) Justice and human rights
- l) Local community or neighbourhood groups
- m) Citizen's groups
- n) Hobbies/recreation/arts/social clubs
- o) Trade union activity
- p) Other

INDICATOR 1.2

Type of active involvement in groups

This question measures “active” involvement in organized groups as defined by providing unpaid help to the group.

It measures involvement by the range of different types of unpaid help one might provide to groups. Answers are not specific to a specific group or type of group. For example, the respondent might provide several types of unpaid help to one group or to several groups.

SOURCE: UK Harmonised Question Set

(DoVolWk) During the last 12 months have you given any unpaid help to any groups, clubs or organisations in any of the ways shown on this card?

SHOWCARD

1. Raising or handling money/taking part in sponsored events
2. Leading the group/ member of a committee
3. Organising or helping to run an activity or event
4. Visiting people
5. Befriending or mentoring people
6. Giving advice/ information/ counselling
7. Secretarial, admin or clerical work
8. Providing transport/driving
9. Representing
10. Campaigning
11. Other practical help (e.g. helping out at school, religious group, shopping)
12. Any other help
13. NONE OF THE ABOVE
14. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

INDICATOR 1.3

Type of involvement by type of group

This question measures type of involvement (“active” and “passive”) by type of organized group. It distinguishes between two types of passive involvement – membership and donating money – and two types of active involvement – participating in the group or doing volunteer work for the group. However, answers do not refer to a specific group.

SOURCE: European Social Survey

E1-12 a) For each of the voluntary organisation I will now mention, please use this card to tell me whether any of these things apply to you now or in the last 12 months, and if so which.

	None	Member	Participated	Donated money	Voluntary work
E1 Firstly a sports club or club for outdoor activities?					
E2 An organisation for cultural or hobby activities?					
E3 a trade union?					
E4a business, professional, or farmers’ organisation?					
E5 a consumer or automobile organisation?					
E6 an organisation for humanitarian aid, human rights, minorities or immigrants?					
E7 an organisation for environmental protection, peace or animal rights?					
E8 a religious or church organisation?					
E9 a political party?					
E10 an organisation for science, education, or teachers and parents?					
E11 a social club, club for the young, the retired/elderly, women, or friendly societies?					
E12 any other voluntary organisation such as the ones I’ve just mentioned?					

ALTERNATE OPTION

A series of three linked questions measuring active involvement in groups **and frequency** of involvement.

SOURCE: Suggested by Simon Field.

INDICATOR 1.4 A

Type of group(s) in which respondent is actively involved

Similar to Indicator 1.1, but with a more restrictive definition of involvement, i.e. “taking part in activities”.

Q1 During the last 12 months have you taken part in the activities of any of the following types of group

- prompt with list as follows

[]

INDICATOR 1.4 B

Frequency of active involvement by type of group

This question provides information on frequency of active involvement. It refers to types of group, not specific groups per se. If the respondent belongs to more than one group within a specific type (e.g. more than one religious group), it may be difficult to report frequency (e.g. attends one group annually and the other group monthly).

For each positive response, ask two further questions:

Q1.1 How often would that be?

1 On most days

2 Once or twice a week

3 Once or twice a month

4 Less often than once a month

INDICATOR 1.4 C

Type of active involvement by type of group

Similar to Indicator 1.2.

Q1.2 Did this involve giving unpaid help to the group or organisation?

If yes

Q1.2.1 Would that involve?

1. Raising or handling money/taking part in sponsored events

2. Leading the group/ member of a committee

3. Organising or helping to run an activity or event

4. Visiting people.

5. Befriending or mentoring people.

6. Giving advice/ information / counselling

7. Secretarial, admin or clerical work.
8. Providing transport/driving
9. Representing
10. Campaigning
11. Other

2. SOCIAL SUPPORT

Reference period: past month

INDICATOR 2.1

Type of informal unpaid help provided to non-household members

This question measures the range of different types of unpaid help provided informally to those not residing with the respondent. It does not measure the size of the network i.e. the number of different people helped.

SOURCE: UK Harmonised Question Set

(HlpGiv) Now I'd like to talk about any unpaid help you may have given people who do not live with you. In the past month have you given any unpaid help in any of the ways shown on the card. Please do not count any help you gave through a group, club or organisation.

SHOWCARD

1. Domestic work, home maintenance or gardening
2. Provision of transport or running errands
3. Help with child care or babysitting
4. Teaching, coaching or giving practical advice
5. Giving emotional support
6. Other
7. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

INDICATOR 2.2

Frequency of provision of informal unpaid help to non-household members by type of help

SOURCE: suggested by Simon Field.

For each positive response, ask:

Q2.1 How often would that be?

- 1 On most days
- 2 Once or twice a week
- 3 Once or twice a month
- 4 Less often

INDICATOR 2.3

Type of informal unpaid help received from non-household members

This question measures the range of different types of unpaid help received informally from people not residing with the respondent. It does not measure the size of the network i.e. the number of different people who provided help.

SOURCE: UK Harmonised Question Set

(HlpInt) Now I'd like to talk about any unpaid help you may have received. In the past month have you received any unpaid help in any of the ways shown on the card. Please do not count help from people who live with you or from an organisation or group.

SHOWCARD

1. Domestic work, home maintenance or gardening
2. Provision of transport or running errands
3. Help with child care or babysitting
4. Teaching, coaching or giving practical advice
5. Giving emotional support
6. Other
7. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

INDICATOR 2.4

Frequency of receipt of informal unpaid help from non-household members by type of help

SOURCE: suggested by Simon Field.

For each positive response, ask:

Q2.1 How often would that be?

- 1 On most days
- 2 Once or twice a week

- 3 Once or twice a month
- 4 Less often

3. SOCIAL NETWORKS

Reference period: Current usual behaviour

INDICATOR 3.1

Frequency of contact with friends, relatives or work colleagues

This question measures how often the respondent makes contact with members of their social network. It does not measure the size of the network i.e. the number of different people with whom they interacted.

It does not explicitly exclude household members, nor does it specify interacting with work colleagues outside of the workplace.

SOURCE: European Social Survey

C2 Using this card, how often do you meet socially with friends, relative or work colleagues

- Never
- Less than once a month
- Once a month
- Several times a month

- Once a week
- Several times a week
- Every day
- (Don't know)

INDICATOR 3.2

Frequency of contact with friends, relatives and neighbours by type of contact

Similar to Indicator 3.1, but specifies different types of social contact. It does not measure the size of the network i.e. the number of different people with whom they

interacted, but answer categories do distinguish between contact with relatives, friends and neighbours.

It explicitly excludes household members and does not make mention of work colleagues.

SOURCE: UK Harmonised Question Set

The next few questions are about how often you personally contact your relatives, friends and neighbours. Not counting the people you live with, how often do you do any of the following?

1. Speak to relatives on the phone (Spkrel)
2. Text or email relatives, or use chatrooms on the internet to talk to relatives (Txtrel)
3. Speak to friends on the phone (Spkfr)
4. Text or email friends, or use chatrooms on the internet to talk to friends (Txtfr)
5. Speak to neighbours (Spkng)
6. How often do you meet up with relatives who are not living with you? (FreqMtR)
7. How often do you meet up with friends? (FreqMtF)

SHOWCARD

1. On most days
2. Once or twice a week
3. Once or twice a month
4. Less often than once a month
5. Never
6. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

4. CIVIC PARTICIPATION

INDICATOR 4.1 A

Engagement in civic action

Reference period: past 12 months

Measures range of civic actions, but does not count number of specific actions (e.g. respondent might have attended numerous public meetings). Activity is restricted to concerns over a **national issue**.

SOURCE: UK Harmonised Question Set

(SolvNP) In the last 12 months have you taken any of the following actions to show your concern over a national issue?

SHOWCARD:

1. Contacted a radio station, television station or a newspaper
2. Contacted the appropriate organisation to deal with the problem
3. Contacted an MP
4. Attended a public meeting
5. Attended a protest meeting or joined an action group
6. Helped organise a petition
7. None of these
8. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

INDICATOR 4.1 B

Engagement in civic action

Reference period: past 12 months

Similar to Indicator 4.1A, but with a different list of activities. Not restricted to concerns over national issues.

SOURCE: European Social Survey

There are different ways of trying to improve things in [country] or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?

- B15 Contacted a politician, government or local government official
- B16 Worked in a political party or action group
- B17 worked in another organisation or association
- B18 Worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker
- B19 Signed a petition
- B20 Taken part in a lawful public demonstration
- B21 Boycotted certain products
- B22 Deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons
- B23 Donated money to a political organisation or group

B24 Participation in illegal protest activities

Yes

No

(Don't know)

INDICATOR 4.2 A

Voted in most recent national election

Question is restricted to national election. Reference period may be very long and respondent characteristics may have changed since the time of the election (e.g. labour force activity status). Preamble to question attempts to minimize potential for social desirability bias.

SOURCE: European Social Survey

B13 Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country] national election in [month/year]?

Yes

No

Not eligible to vote

(Don't know)

INDICATOR 4.2 B

Voted in most recent election by level of government

Measures voting behaviour in both most recent national and local council elections. It may be necessary to modify this question for countries where there are more than two levels of government. Reference periods may be very long and respondent characteristics may have changed since the time of the election (e.g. labour force activity status).

SOURCE: UK Harmonised Question Set

(Vote) Can I check, did you vote

1. ...in the last general election (national election)?
2. (Did you vote) ...in the last local council election?
3. DID NOT VOTE IN EITHER ELECTION
4. NOT ELIGIBLE TO VOTE IN EITHER
5. Don't know

5. Conclusion

Empirical research into social capital continues to pique the interest of researchers and policy makers alike. Much of the attraction stems from the potential of social capital to broaden the notion of well being beyond the economic realm. “There has been growing appreciation of the importance of social and environmental as well as economic consideration in pursuing national prosperity and well-being. Social capital provides some of the important social indicators for understanding outcomes across economic, social and environmental domains” (Edwards 2004:9).

The review of national approaches to the measurement of social capital reveals a common thread – the centrality of networks. Understanding networks and is key to the measurement frameworks in all four of the countries that have a federal program of social capital research, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. While approaches vary across countries, the current effort in international cooperation advances social capital research by helping to reach a consensus on definitional and measurement issues. At the Budapest meeting, four main dimensions of social capital were agreed upon based on the OECD definition: social participation, social networks and support, trust and reciprocity and civic participation.

The proposed international question set represents a step towards some degree of comparability based on collective expertise. How these broad measures of social capital will relate to well being outcomes in various countries remains to be seen. The real benefits of this exercise in international harmonization will come as the questions are

implemented, the data analyzed and the experiences shared in order to further advance the state of empirical social capital research. As stated by Healy, “over time, any agreed set of questions or guidelines would require review and development, testing out measures against experience of their use and developments in the understanding of social capital. Gaps in the questions or guidelines might be filled in, and detail filled out.... International pooling of experience in this regard would be useful especially as work progresses in relation to questions on trust and norms of reciprocity” (Healy 2002:17).

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