

A Social Capital Approach to Household Energy Consumption

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*Moving up the learning curve: Behaviour research on
energy use and its contribution to policy*

A Social Capital Approach to Household Energy Consumption

1. What is social capital?
2. Why social capital?
3. How does social capital relate to energy consumption?
4. Research implications
5. Policy implications

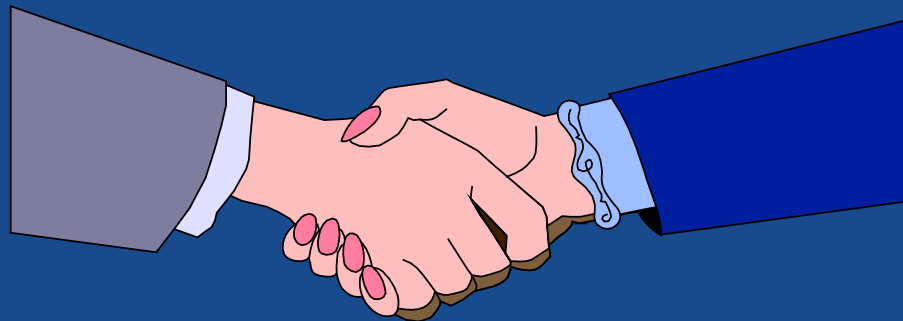
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1. What is social capital?

Definition:

Social capital refers to the social resources available through social networks, social norms and associated levels of trust and reciprocity



1. What is social capital?

History:

- Popularised in the 1980s and 1990s
- Exists due to interactions between 2 or more people
- Increases with use, rather than decreases



1. What is social capital?

History (cont):

- Three early influencers:
 - Pierre Bourdieu
 - James Coleman
 - Robert Putnam
- Some differences on definition & measurement

1. What is social capital?

History (cont):

- Pierre Bourdieu

“... the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Distinction, 1986, p.248).

1. What is social capital?

History (cont):

- James Coleman

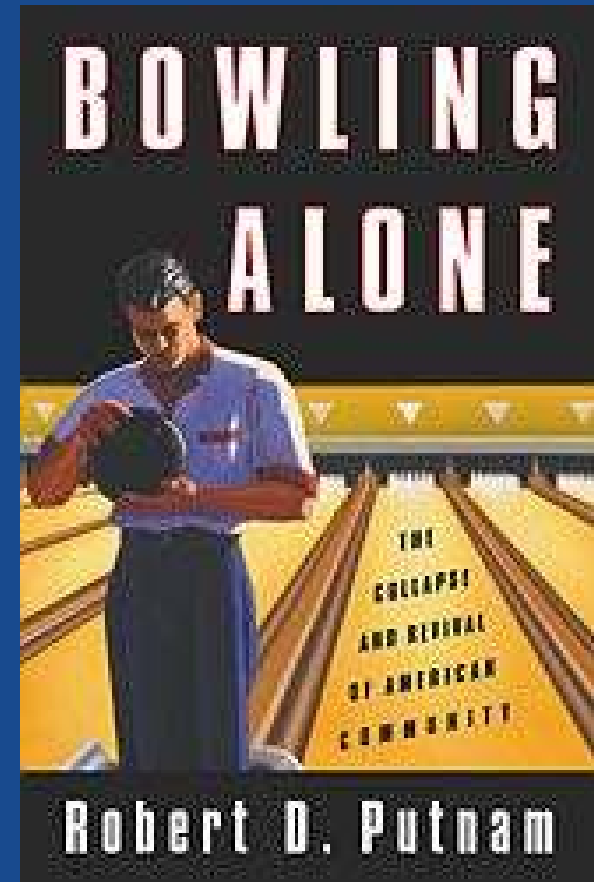
“... a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure” (Foundations of Social Theory, 1990, p.302).

1. What is social capital?

History (cont):

- Robert Putnam

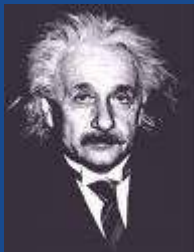
“... connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Bowling Alone, 2000, p.19).



1. What is social capital?

History (cont):

- Concepts of trust and reciprocity and social networks are well understood



“Every kind of peaceful cooperation among men is primarily based on mutual trust and only secondarily on institutions such as courts of justice and police.”

- Albert Einstein

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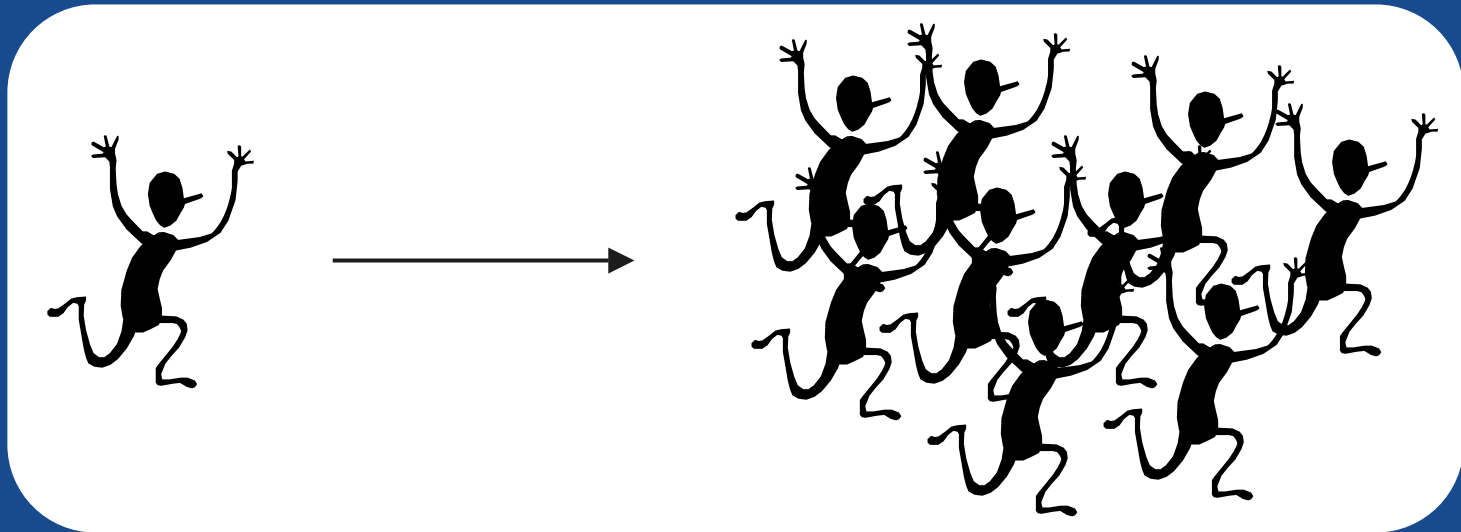
3. How does social capital relate to energy consumption?

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2. Why social capital?

- To change the focus from INDIVIDUAL to SOCIAL



- To recognise the VALUE in social resources
- Higher social capital = lower crime, better health, etc.

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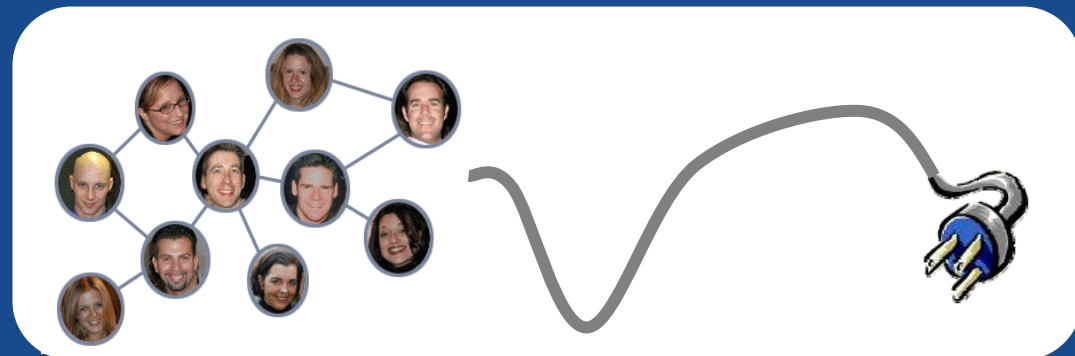
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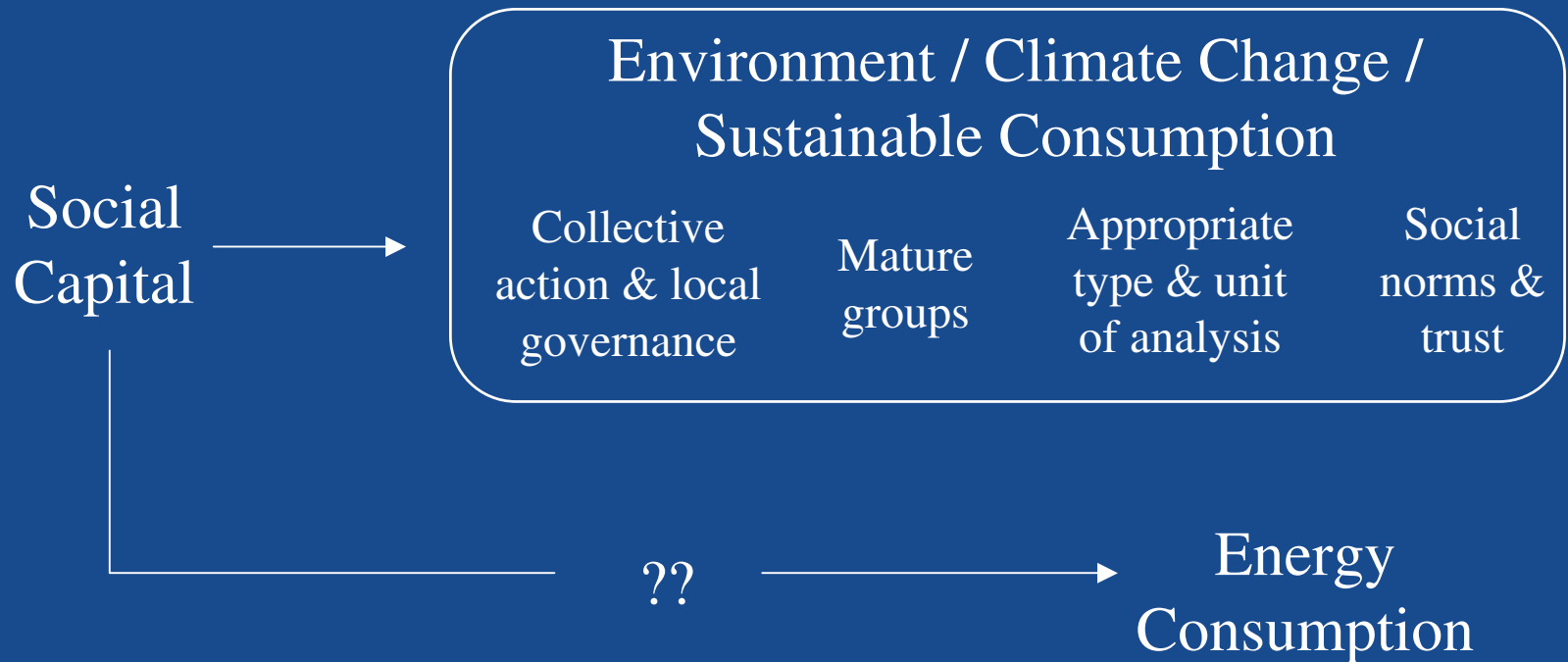
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3. How does social capital relate to energy consumption?



3. How does social capital relate to energy consumption?

- Environment / Climate Change
 - World Bank (1990s) - Social Capital Initiative; social capital inspires collective action on environmental problems
 - Pennington & Rydin (2000) - in Britain, would be difficult to build social capital for benefit of environment

3. How does social capital relate to energy consumption?

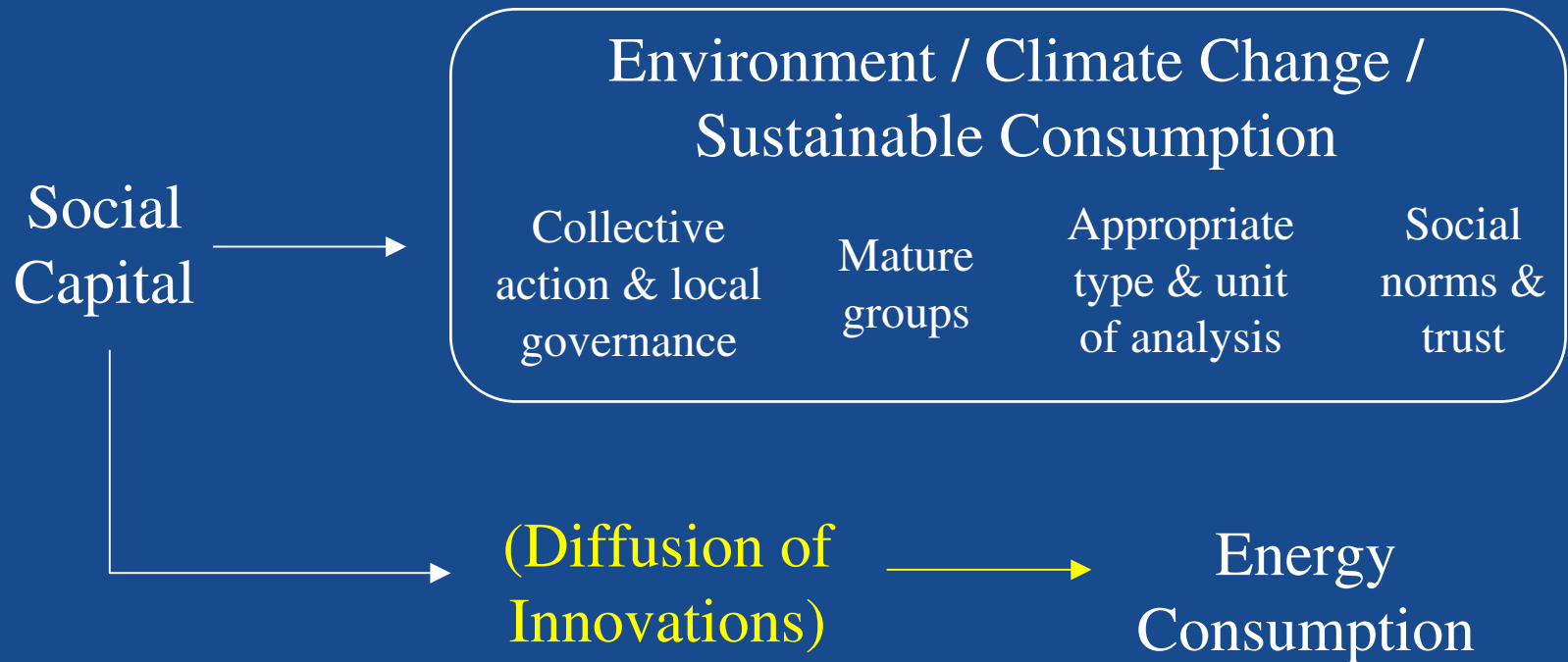
- Environment / Climate Change (cont.)
 - Pretty & Ward (2002) - mature groups better maintain social capital for environmental sustainability
 - Adger (2003) - bonding & networking social capital help with adaptive response to climate change
 - Grafton & Knowles (2003) - no links at international level

3. How does social capital relate to energy consumption?

- Sustainable Consumption
 - Askew & McGuirk (2004) – social distinction and social conformity in addressing water conservation
 - Lai (2001) – social capital makes consumption easier through trust



3. How does social capital relate to energy consumption?



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4. Research Implications

- Design of studies must be careful about definition, method of measurement and level of analysis
 - United Kingdom Office of National Statistics - Social Capital Question Bank
- Social class
- Future research
 - Conceptually: diffusion of innovations
 - Socio-technical questions
 - Methods: multi-method research, including social network analysis

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5. Policy Implications

“We have always said that human capital is at the core of the new economy. But increasingly it is also social capital that matters too - the capacity to get things done, to co-operate, the magic ingredient that makes all the difference.”

– Tony Blair, UK Prime Minister, NCVO annual conference 1999



5. Policy Implications

Performance and Innovation Unit report (2002)

Local governance important

Community level probably most appropriate to approach social capital and energy consumption

Conclusion

Literature justifies this research into link between social capital and energy consumption, particularly through examination of the diffusion of innovations

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