Economic Context and Civic Engagement: the Effects of ‘Localism’ in Four Michigan Cities

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I thank Grand Valley State University and the Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarship for the Student Summer Scholars Grant to conduct this research project, H. Whitt Kilburn, associate professor at Grand Valley State University, for his mentorship and guidance of this research, and the various city developers for their participation in the interviews conducted throughout the course of this project.
Abstract

The economic structure of a city affects the civic well-being of its residents. The degree of ‘localism’ in an economy affects the area’s social capital, contributing to the development of its civic institutions. I examine the relationship between localism and social capital in case studies of four Michigan cities: Flint, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Pontiac. A more local, or independent economic structure, is resilient to harmful effects of globalization. Local business leaders support civic institutions. Bridging social capital flourishes, creating a civically engaged population. Big-business dominated economic structures, on the other hand, foster an unstable environment and are relatively more susceptible to the effect of global economic forces. The heart of a locality’s economic structure, thus, provides insight into the development of a city’s civic institutions.
The World War II generation brought a sense of leadership to the world with their inclination to participate civically within their community (Putnam 2000). Though civic participation flourished during this era, it proceeded to decline during the following decades and is still in present decline (Putnam 2007). The lack of social capital, being the number of social ties and resources an individual has, within communities to this day is said to result in the decline of civic engagement and well-being (Tolbert II 2005).

With the level of social capital contributing to the levels of civic engagement and overall well-being throughout a specific area, it is possible that social capital varies across civic institutions as a result of local economic context. I am studying the possible relationship between social capital, local economic context, and collective well-being across four Michigan cities (Flint, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Pontiac). The study of these case studies provides a contemporary reevaluation of the results discovered by C. Wright Mills and Melville J. Ulmer considering their data on local economic context (Mills and Ulmer 1946).

Mills and Ulmer (1946) evaluated the differentiation in interests across small- and big-business cities to see if the city agenda within four Michigan cities affected the civic well-being of the community (Mills and Ulmer 1946). This study further suggested that small-business oriented cities foster greater stocks of social capital, in turn providing for the positive civic well-being of the residents of a particular small city (Mills and Ulmer 1946). Big-business oriented cities, on the other hand, have lower stocks of social capital when considering the overlay of big-business systematic power within the area, resulting in lower levels of civic well-being among the residents of a particular big city.

Considering the results uncovered by Mills and Ulmer (1946), the question of the level of “localism” impacting the level of social capital within a civic institution, impacting its overall
development as a result, arises. This study addresses the question by evaluating the theory of “localism” when economic development is considered within the four case studies that strategically correlate with the four unidentified cases within Mills and Ulmer’s 1946 study (Mills and Ulmer 1946). Through the reevaluation of the case studies explored within the 1940s, I will provide evidence of a contemporary relationship among the ‘localism’ of a specific locality’s economic structure, social capital, and corresponding levels of civic engagement and civic well-being.

My theory will incorporate three prominent concepts of recent literature and propose a contemporary relationship to the study of a city’s economy and its effect on the collective well-being of a city and its residents. A literature review focused on social capital relative to localism, business structure and its effect on economic stability, globalization impact on business structure, and a discussion of the results of Mills and Ulmer (1946) will expand on the relative relationship. The description of the theory of localism relative to social capital and collective well-being will solidify the relationship further. Results showing how the theory is relative to small-business cities as compared to big-business cities will prove the consistency of the relationship. Concluding statements will draw together the relationship from two perspectives (both positive and negative) through a contemporary approach, proving “localism” affects social capital, thus affecting the collective well-being of a particular area.

**Social Capital Relative to Localism**

Social capital varies in respect to an individual’s involvement with their community and the resources they obtain through their locality and networking (Brehm and Rahn 1997). Depending on the relationship between social capital and civic engagement, civic community either flourishes, producing greater means of association, an increased quality of life, and
enhanced civic well-being, or falters through such means (Tolbert II 2005). The relationship, then, has the capability of facilitating a stable and well-off civic community or one that is unstable and worse-off.

The stability of a civic community depends on the economic structure of the locality at hand (Brehm and Rahn 1997). An important aspect of an economic structure involves its level of ‘localism,’ described as the diversification of the economy through locally owned businesses. Locally orientated businesses acquire stake within a community, creating a relationship between themselves as well as with the city of their locality and its residents (Tolbert II 2005). This relationship has the capability of producing an interdependent and thus stable environment as a result of the higher levels of ‘localism’ within a specific locality. ‘Localism,’ then, has the ability to affect not only civic engagement levels within a specific locality, but the collective well-being of the locality’s residents. Localities that experience greater levels of ‘localism’ have higher levels of civic engagement and collective well-being in comparison to localities experiencing lower levels of ‘localism,’ resulting in declining levels of such means (Tolbert II 2005).

**Business Structure, Economic Stability, and Civic Well-Being**

The concentration of economic power within a specific city has the ability to affect not only the internal economic structure of the community, but the civic welfare of the city’s inhabitants. This concentration of power affects the stability or instability of a city’s internal infrastructure, differing as a result of the business environment within a specific city. The variance of business activity, then, contributes to the collective civic well-being of a specific area. Thus, it is important to evaluate the relationship between the business structure of a specific area and its effect on the city’s collective economic stability to further identify the relationship’s effect on collective civic well-being.
During the World War II era, the U.S. federal government was concerned about the health and well-being of cities with heavy reliance on military production. The question that was brought forth by the government essentially stated, “What would happen to the cities that relied exclusively on the war industry for their livelihood and civic well-being?” This concern for war industry-dominated cities prompted the government to hire two researchers by the names of Dr. C. Wright Mills and Melville J. Ulmer to study the relationship between business activity, economic stability, and collective civic well-being (Mills and Ulmer 1946).

Six American cities based on population (with preference for small and medium-sized cities for the interest of their report) and industrial concentration (serving in the industrial organization of the city) were selected for the study to evaluate the relationship furthermore (Mills and Ulmer 1946). By selecting six American cities along these characteristics, Mills and Ulmer could compare a specific case study to another prevalent city for industrial organization comparison (Mills and Ulmer 1946). By comparing the internal business structure of the case studies, Mills and Ulmer could then examine its overall effect on the economic stability and collective civic well-being of a specific city.

The following table (Table 1) presents the three pairs of cities used within the study performed by Mills and Ulmer (1946). The first pair of cities (selected for study (City A and City B) were to represent a big-business city (A) and a small-business city (B) with populations in 1940 of a rounded value of 150,000 inhabitants (to prevent disclosure of city name) (Mills and Ulmer 1946). By selecting these particular cities with similar populations in the Middle West, Mills and Ulmer could correctly examine the effects of variant business activity on the internal health and well-being of a given city. The second pair of cities (City C and City D) were selected to represent, again, a big-business city (C) and a small-business city (D), but with rounded
populations of 60,000 inhabitants in 1940 (Mills and Ulmer 1946). In this way, Mills and Ulmer could compare their results from cities with higher populations and differing business activity with cities with smaller populations and differing business activity. The third pair of cities (City E and City F) were used to represent an intermediate pair in the eastern region of the United States with populations of both 30,000 inhabitants in 1940 (Mills and Ulmer 1946).

Table 1. City Pair Selection for Mills and Ulmer Case Study, 1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City (A-D)</th>
<th>Rounded Population, 1940 (Mills and Ulmer 1946)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City A: Big Business</td>
<td>150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City B: Small Business</td>
<td>150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City C: Big Business</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City D: Small Business</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City E: Intermediate</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City F: Intermediate</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Mills and Ulmer (1946); 1940 Census

Mills and Ulmer (1946) discovered higher levels of civic welfare in small-business cities, which fostered greater levels of economic stability. Small-business cities fostered a business infrastructure with higher levels of ‘local capitalism,’ one which accumulated a sense of civic spirit among the variant local executives and small-town corporations of a given small-business city (Mills and Ulmer 1946). With the accumulation of higher levels of civic spirit, local executives immersed themselves within their local environment, showing overwhelming interest for the civic welfare of their community. Thus, the connection between the interests of local executives and the interests of their community coincided, creating a business environment structured on the basis of collective civic enterprise. Small business cities promoted positive civic welfare through the collective interests of both local executives and the community, with overwhelming development of a city’s civic agenda (including local business, education, and communally fostered events).
On the other hand, civic welfare levels were found to be subsided within big-business cities, inhabiting lower levels of economic stability and lower levels of ‘local capitalism’ in comparison to small-business cities. Corporate executives within big-business cities, accumulated with few industrial firms providing for most of the business activity within the city, fostered self-interests rather than collective interests seen within small-business cities, as profit opportunities remained of utmost importance to corporate agendas (Mills and Ulmer 1946). The civic agenda of the local community, then, served little importance to business executives within big-business cities, as local interests and corporate interests conflicted with one another. As a result, the civic welfare of a city and its community members faltered.

**A Contemporary Approach: The Relationship between Economic Stability and Globalization**

In relation to the study performed by Mills and Ulmer (1946), it was discovered that within big business cities, such as City A and City C, few large corporations held the majority of power within the cities, thus enabling them to impact the entirety of the business structure within said cities. This impact few large corporations have in “big business” cities creates a socioeconomic dependent relationship between the large corporations and the well-being of a “big business” city as well as its residents. If the corporations see success, so does the “big business” city. In contrast, if the corporations falter, the collective well-being of a “big business” city and its residents heads in a negative direction. Essentially, “big business” cities that create a dependent and instable economic structure also foster an environment susceptible to global forces.

“Big business” cities that are dependent on few large corporations for their collective well-being are susceptible to the impact of global forces, which Mills and Ulmer (1946) allude to
within their case study. Large corporations, in essence, do not have local and dependent ties to the area in which they are receiving the majority of their internal revenue; there is a lack of collective interest among the corporate executives and the residents of a said area. For this reason, the corporations are more likely to leave the area if their corporation begins to falter (Irwin, Lyson, and Tolbert 1998). The corporation may have loss in profit (a driving mechanism of large corporations) or may be impacted by driving forces of globalization. As a result of a lack of ties to a said area as well as a lack of collective interests with the area, the corporation feels no reason to stay and leaves an area, once dependent on the corporations for their livelihood and collective well-being, to fend for itself.

“Small business” cities, in comparison, do not depend essentially on few large corporations for their collective well-being. Instead, within “small business” cities such as City B and City D in relation to Mills and Ulmer’s (1946) study, an environment fostering a civil society develops (Irwin, Lyson, and Tolbert 1998). A civil society fosters high levels of local institutions and organizations, creating a network that not only bridges the variant organizations together, but binds them to a point where they become reliant on one another for their collective well-being (Irwin, Lyson, and Tolbert 1998). As a result of this “bridging” and “bonding” of networks within a “small business” city, the city fosters an independent and stable environment more stagnant against global forces.

**Level of ‘Localism’ Affects Social Capital and Well-Being**

With the level of stability of a specific area being dependent on its internal economic structure and degree of localism, the question as to why this relationship exists arises. When there are higher levels of ‘localism’ and a strong internal network of small and locally owned businesses within a specific area, there appears to be greater stability throughout. On the other
hand, when there are lower levels of ‘localism’ and a weak internal network of locally established businesses within a specific area, the area experiences a weakened stable environment, one more susceptible to the effects of global forces. A variant degree of ‘localism,’ then, affects the civic well-being of an area’s residents as a result. Thus, the following question is brought into perspective: Why does an area’s degree of ‘localism’ impact the collective civic well-being of its residents and to what extent does the imposed relationship exist?

The degree of ‘localism’ present within a specific area subsequently impacts its level of social capital. When there is a higher degree of ‘localism’ within a specific area, higher levels of social capital result. Reversely, where there is a lower degree of ‘localism’ within a specific area, lower levels of social capital result. The degree of ‘localism’ within a specific area, ultimately, contributes to the area’s level of social capital.

Social capital fosters environments where expansive connectedness among individuals is inherently present (Putnam 2000, 19). As a result of such extended connectedness, relationships between individuals based on reciprocity and trustworthiness form, paving a ‘bridge’ between separate individual identities and creating one collective identity. A reconstruction of social identity essentially takes place, further eliminating social distance commonly experienced between individuals from different backgrounds. Thus, if social distance is eliminated, the greater the possibility of a reconstruction of separate social identities into one sole coherent identity, promoting social capital furthermore.

As a result of the reconstruction of social identity into a single, collective social identity, the human mind allows itself to become cultivated in a variety of interests, including those involving the interests of the public. The human mind, recognizing the inherent interests of the public good, then, develops a type of utilitarian morality, involving the sacrifice of one’s own
greatest good for the good of all those involved (Mill 1863). This type of utilitarian morality develops as a result of a reconstruction of social identity among variant social networks and, instead, creates one collective social identity.

When one human being identifies with another, they develop a consciousness that involves one another’s happiness (Mill 1863). The interests of the human beings that identify with one another become collective, as the means of promoting such interests involves the happiness of all those concerned (Mill 1863). As a result, human beings develop collective interests to allow for the promotion of collective happiness. In this way, it can be concluded that once human beings identify themselves with other human beings, they begin to immerse themselves within the collective interests of all those involved to allow for happiness to ensue.

Considering the collective interests that develop amongst people as a result of the positive relationship between levels of ‘localism’ and corresponding levels of social capital, the overall civic well-being of residents within cities with such a relationship prospers. With residents steering away from self-interests and instead immersing themselves in the interests of the city, residents become more involved in working towards a mutual and locally-rooted goal. Thus, with collective interests in mind, residents immerse themselves within civic activities and become more civically engaged within their community. As residents become more civically engaged, the civic well-being of both the city and its residents thrives.

In such a positive relationship, it can be further concluded that not only is there widespread coherency in collective interests among residents within cities with higher levels of ‘localism’ and social capital, but there is also coherency in interests between the city, its residents, and its local business executives. Local business executives see the benefit in immersing themselves within their community, with their actions serving in the interests of the
city. These executives rely on the local community for their livelihood. Such dependency results in the local executives to work towards promoting the civic well-being of the city, as well as its residents, because by doing so, all benefit. Thus, a dependent relationship forms between the city, its residents, and its local executives, creating a stable environment where it is in the interests of the community to work towards promoting collective civic well-being, benefiting all those involved.

When the relationship among levels of ‘localism,’ corresponding levels of social capital, and civic well-being is put into perspective, it can be concluded that such a relationship in its positive form exists in small and locally rooted business cities because of the stable economic structure and civil society created. On the other hand, the negative form of the relationship, when there are lower levels of ‘localism,’ lower corresponding levels of social capital, and decreased civic well-being, exists in big business cities because of the instability of the economic structure and civil society created.

**Contemporary Examination of Economic Structure**

**Preliminary Approach**

To test the relationship among levels of ‘localism,’ levels of social capital, and the corresponding civic well-being of a city and its residents in relation to my theory, I replicated the case studies of Mills and Ulmer (1946) from a modern perspective. By examining the case studies from 1940, I examined the prevalence of Mills and Ulmer’s findings based on economic structure and degree of ‘localism.’ With use of these findings, I also evaluated many subsequent theories, bringing a contemporary approach to the subject that included theories of economic development, relevance of social capital, and civic enterprise. By using a multitude of
perspectives in accordance with the findings from the Mills and Ulmer (1946) case studies, I had the necessary evidence needed to develop my theory further.

To examine the Mills and Ulmer (1946) case studies through a contemporary approach, I used census data from the 1940 census to gather actual population statistics in relevance to the six case studies from the decade. Using the rounded population statistics in 1940 from the Mills and Ulmer (1946) case studies, I matched the rounded population statistics to actual population statistics from the 1940 census, producing the results in Table 2. Although the Mills and Ulmer (1946) case studies involved six case studies, in relevance to my approach, I analyzed only four of the case studies in depth (City A through City D), since City E and F proved to be irrelevant to the development of my contemporary theory.

City A had both a similar rounded population and actual population in 1940, which identified the case study as Flint City. City B had a relatively similar rounded population and actual population in 1940, identifying the case study as Grand Rapids City. City C had a quite similar rounded population and actual population in 1940, identifying the city as Pontiac City. Additionally, City D had a similar rounded population and actual population in 1940, identifying the city as Kalamazoo City. City A and City C, both big business cities with differing populations, were used to analyze the effect of ‘localism’ and social capital on economic structure. On the other hand, City B and City D were used to examine small business cities with differing populations to determine the same effect on economic structure as the first pair of cities.
Table 2. City Rationale for Mills and Ulmer Case Studies, 1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City (A-D)</th>
<th>City Name</th>
<th>Rounded Population, 1940 (Mills and Ulmer 1946)</th>
<th>Actual Population, 1940 (1940 Census)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City A: Big Business</td>
<td>Flint City</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>151,543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City B: Small Business</td>
<td>Grand Rapids City</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>164,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City C: Big Business</td>
<td>Pontiac City</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>68,626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City D: Small Business</td>
<td>Kalamazoo City</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>54,097</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 1940 Census

**Qualitative Collection**

Upon identifying each of the prevalent Mills and Ulmer (1946) case studies with their corresponding site name, I identified community stakeholders within each of the cities and then contacted them for telephone or in-person interviews. Each interviewee was selected based on their prominence and involvement within their specific city, working with their community either through civic projects or directly with the city under analysis.

Interview sessions, each lasting approximately 20-30 minutes in length, focused on the questions presented in Table 3. Questions were meant to gather information about the economic structure of each of the four cities, including information pertaining to city cooperation, project coordination, and civic enterprise. Such information, once collected, was analyzed, further examining levels of ‘localism,’ corresponding levels of social capital, and collective civic well-being relative to my contemporary theory and the findings discovered within the Mills and Ulmer (1946) case study.
Table 3. Interview Questions for Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What was the initiative behind your project? Is there a “bigger picture” involved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are you hoping to accomplish with your project?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How would you describe your working environment, specifically your ability to make progress?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is local government cooperative with your initiatives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do citizens have a positive reaction to your project? If so, are they showing willingness to help?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If citizens are involved with the project, how are they furthering along progress?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Are big businesses cooperating with your project, through advertising, fiscal, or other means? What about small businesses? Which of the two shows greater cooperation, if any?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. If businesses are not showing cooperation, why do you think this is?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How do you feel about big business corporate owners? What about small business owners? Do you think they differ in their feelings towards “community?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Do you see support for the small business sector? If you do, how so?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Do you believe your city fosters a “civic environment,” keen to supporting the civic well-being of its residents? Why or why not?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Small-Business Cities Promote Higher Levels of ‘Localism’ and Social Capital

Using the information collected within each interview, evidence for the relationship among levels of ‘localism,’ corresponding levels of social capital, and collective civic well-being was prominent. The case studies of Flint (City A) and Pontiac (City C), regardless of their populations, inhabited lower levels of ‘localism’ in comparison with the small-business case studies (Cities B and D) when qualitative data from the interviews was taken into consideration. In both cities of Flint and Pontiac, as a result of the dominant manufacturing sector, big-business
thrive.\textsuperscript{1} As a result of the prevalent big-business sector, ‘localism’ faltered as a result of the economic structure (Mills and Ulmer 1946). Lower levels of ‘localism’ prominent within big-business cities, thus, dictated their level of social capital, proving to be lower in comparison with the small-business case studies.

Although civic projects are continually implemented within big-business cites such as Flint and Pontiac, the projects see growth once first implemented, but progress slowly deters.\textsuperscript{2} The project of the “Rise of the Phoenix” implemented in Downtown Pontiac to revive the downtown area saw much interest from both the community and business stakeholders at the start, but experienced a progressive halt.\textsuperscript{3} The HOME program in Flint (for community housing development) saw progress at the beginning, but as a result of intervening big-business interests, the program failed to comply with community and development initiatives, contributing to its lack of continued progress.\textsuperscript{4} An attempt to promote civic agenda that is focused on the community is more difficult to implement when the interests of the business sector prevail in big-business cities (Friedland and Palmer 1984). Considering the stagnant interests of big-business within Flint and Pontiac, lower levels of ‘localism’ and social capital resulted, contributing to the collective well-being of the cities and their residents.

The case studies of Grand Rapids (City B) and Kalamazoo (City D), on the other hand, inhabited a positive relationship among levels of ‘localism,’ corresponding levels of social capital, and collective civic well-being when qualitative data from the interviews was taken into consideration. Regardless of their populations, these cities inhabited economic structures less

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\textsuperscript{1} Oakland County Community and Development Representative, telephone conversation, July 29, 2013  
\textsuperscript{2} Genesee County Representative, telephone conversation, July 29, 2013  
\textsuperscript{3} Director of Business Administration in Pontiac, telephone conversation, July 29, 2013  
\textsuperscript{4} Genesee County Representative, telephone conversation, July 29, 2013
reliant on big businesses and focused more on locally rooted businesses.\textsuperscript{5} Civic projects were implemented with community initiatives centered on educating the community on the importance of unified and local development.\textsuperscript{6} The Kalamazoo Promise (promoting youth to stay in school in Kalamazoo to receive help for college at Kalamazoo Valley Community College) focused on educating youth about the benefit of a localized community.\textsuperscript{7} Local First in Grand Rapids (promoting a network community of locally oriented businesses) focused on channeling collective interests of the community for the continued progression of a ‘localized’ and stable civic institution.\textsuperscript{8} Furthermore, many of the initiatives within these two cities cater to the promotion of ‘localism,’ with interests among the city, its businesses, and its residents being both mutual and locally rooted.\textsuperscript{9}

As a result of this promotion of ‘localism’ through the initiatives within the communities, levels of social capital increased, as levels of connectedness and trust inherently flourish when members of the community have collective interests in supporting their cities (Hawes, Meier, and Rocha 2012). The collective interests among members of the communities, then, create a civic community focused on benefiting its collective well-being.\textsuperscript{10} Civic engagement among members of these communities, and thus collective civic well-being, increased as a result of the creation of civic communities with similar interests.

**Economic Structure Determines Social Capital and Civic Engagement**

Depending on the degree of ‘localism,’ the extent to which an economic structure is driven by small, locally rooted businesses, within a specific geographic area, the level of social

\textsuperscript{5} Director of Kalamazoo Economic Development, telephone conversation, July 11, 2013
\textsuperscript{6} Representative of Grand Rapids Local First, telephone conversation, July 29, 2013
\textsuperscript{7} Director of Kalamazoo Economic Development, telephone conversation, July 11, 2013
\textsuperscript{8} Representative of Grand Rapids Local First, telephone conversation, July 29, 2013
\textsuperscript{9} Representative of the Grand Rapids Downtown Market, telephone conversation, July 8, 2013
\textsuperscript{10} Representative of Grand Rapids Local First, telephone conversation, July 29, 2013
capital is affected. ‘Localism’ promotes an institution that involves reciprocity, cooperation, and mutual interests in favor of the community. Thus, as a result of higher levels of ‘localism’ within a specific geographic area, higher levels of social capital ensue, as a civic network is created among members of the civic community.

A greater level of ‘localism’ acquired within a specific locality creates a “bridge” between local enterprises and the citizenry of the community (Irwin, Lyson, and Tolbert 1998). This bridge facilitates a network bonded together by collective interests of the community, connecting once separated associations. The acquisition of such a network promotes collective interests of mutual reciprocity, trust, and cooperation (Paxton 2002). A sense of civic “duty” to positively contribute to a civic institution, then, develops within local enterprises as well as an institution’s residents, creating an environment with a collective identity of mutual and locally rooted interests (Paxton 2002).

Collective interests of a locality’s residency hold greater stance in cities with greater stocks of localism; cities with a greater small-business orient have been found to facilitate such stock. Small-business cities acquire an environment auspicious to local economic development, producing a greater sense of civic spirit for the promotion of the civic well-being of the institution (Mills and Ulmer 1946). The economic structure of small-business cities promotes stability, as such cities are not as subject to global and economic collapse as their big-business city counterparts (Mills and Ulmer 1946). Economic stability, then, produces a stagnant environment, favoring localism and inhabiting a greater sense of civic spirit among the residents within a small-business city as a result.

Economic stability has been suggested to be not as profound within big-business cities in comparison to small-business cities. The interests of big businesses to focus on profit
opportunities subject such entities to the insecure forces of the global market (Mills and Ulmer 1946). Prevailing interests in opportunities beyond those within the local market, furthermore, suggests the deterioration of big business agenda away from promoting the collective interests of a community. In comparison, small businesses have greater stock in the interests of the community, as their interests are more locally rooted. Thus, the localism seen within small-business cities provides a larger ground for promoting collective community interests versus the profit-driven agenda of big-business cities.

A civic network catered to the promotion of the collective interests of the community creates an environment that is, essentially, “bound” together. Members of the community inhabit social ties to not only their community, but with one another, having the capability of producing attitudes and behavior of similar interests among citizens of a specific community as a result of ‘bridging social capital.’ Social distance (the level of distance between social classes) is of a small quantity when ‘bridging’ social capital is concerned, allocating for the expansion of collective interests among members of a specific civic institution (Putnam 2007). As a result of the lack of social distance within a community, a civic institution binds together, fostering greater levels of social capital.

All branches of a civic institution with high stocks of both ‘localism’ and social capital, including businesses, find themselves “tied” to their community. They socially identify with their community as well as the residents within, increasing the likelihood that they become civically engaged within their community to support the collective well-being of the institution. By becoming immersed within civic activities promoting the interests of the community, residents contribute to not only the well-being of their area, but also its resiliency to the impact of global forces. When a community fosters an environment with civically engaged residents and a
network interested in promoting collective interests, the civic institution remains stagnant to
globalization and foster a stable economic environment. Thus, the institution fosters both greater
levels of civic engagement among its residents as well as higher collective civic well-being.

Big-business cities inhabit a negative relationship between levels of ‘localism,’
corresponding levels of social capital, and civic well-being in comparison with small-business
cities. Big-business cities are driven by corporate executives mainly focused on the profits of
their company rather than the overall interests of the community in the area to which the business
is located. Since business executives with profit-driven agendas are more interested in the self-
interests of their company, they are more likely to move out of the areas in which they currently
reside if, for example, adequate amounts of profit are not being reached or the company becomes
affected by global forces. Their insensitivity to move makes the geographic areas once currently
reliant on big businesses instable, creating an environment that is more susceptible to swift
changes in the economy.

Small-business cities, on the other hand, inhabit a positive relationship between levels of
‘localism,’ corresponding levels of social capital, and civic well-being. These specific cities are
driven by small and locally rooted businesses. Small businesses rely on their community for their
success, which inhabits local business owners to become immersed within the interests of the
community for it to thrive accordingly. Thus, small businesses are “tied” to their community, and
are sensitive to leaving the area in which their business subsides, as they become dependent on
the civic institution. The social ties among the city, its businesses, and its residents within the
community create a civic environment focusing on mutual interests in favor of the promotion of
initiatives benefiting the collective community at large. As a result of these mutual interests,
residents of small-business cities become more civically engaged within their community
because they know that by doing so, not only do they (the participants) benefit, but so does the rest of their community. The dependent relationship built among such communities creates a stable environment relatively unsusceptible to global economic forces.

The economic structure of a particular area impacts its level of ‘localism’ and social capital, contributing to the well-being of its residents at large. It important to recognize the consistency of the relationship to understand what affects the development and progression of an area. Education on the importance of such factors can begin the process of understanding why a specific area has a stable and unified or an unstable and disoriented civic institution.
Literature Cited


Dissemination Plan

In addition to presenting my research at Student Scholars Day at Grand Valley State University on April 9, 2014, I plan to present this research project at the 22nd Annual Illinois State University Conference for Students of Political Science on April 4, 2014 at the Bone Student Center in Normal, Illinois upon project acceptance. I will also be submitting an abstract to the 2014 Posters on the Hill in Washington, D.C. and, upon acceptance, will be presenting my project in D.C. in early 2014.