



**Toronto Social Capital Project**  
**Phase 1 Final Report:**  
**Review of Relevant Concepts and Research**

**July 24, 2015**

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## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
I. Introduction .....	5
II. Social Capital: Theory and Definition .....	6
III. Measuring Social Capital: Tools, Scales and Instruments .....	12
IV. The Landscape of Social Capital Research and Policy .....	18
V. Conclusions .....	22
Appendix A: Expert Interviews .....	23
Appendix B: Project Prospectus .....	24
Appendix C: Works Cited .....	26

## Executive Summary

This report sums up the progress on the Toronto Social Capital (TOSC) project made during Phase 1. As part of this Phase, we conducted a review of the relevant literature and consulted via interview with subject-matter experts. The report is divided into sections, each of which answers a key question regarding the background of the TOSC project and outlining the lessons learned. Below we summarize each of the subjects covered.

**How is social capital defined?** Social capital is not a unitary concept, nor is there agreement among experts on how to define it. There are distinct perspectives on what social capital is overall (e.g., a field of action, a stock of resources), as well as different concepts such as trust, social networks, and civic life, which are interrelated and in some cases may overlap. The concept of social capital may be best considered as an umbrella term that incorporates these different perspectives and concepts.

That being said, for purposes of the upcoming TOSC research a concise definition is required and the following is proposed: “social capital refers to the vibrancy of social networks and the extent to which individuals and communities trust and rely upon one another.” This broad definition can then be operationalized to incorporate the concepts that are most relevant to the project and the priorities of the Lead Partners (e.g., ethnic diversity and integration, economic opportunity and inequality, civic engagement, and health outcomes).

**How has social capital been studied, and what can we learn from this?** There has been a significant body of research conducted over the past several decades focusing on one or more aspects of social capital. The work of the Saguaro Seminar group at Harvard University is perhaps the best known and most relevant to the TOSC, consisting of a series of population surveys in specific US cities, based on Putnam’s model of social capital.

There have been a number of social-capital focused research studies in Canada. Of particular significance is the Equality, Security and Community (ESC) project (led by leading political scientists including Richard Johnston and Stuart Soroka) a decade ago which tested Putnam’s US-based evidence that increasing ethnic diversity led to declining social capital. Statistics Canada has conducted several studies focusing on social networks, social engagement and social identity that provide national benchmarks and some basis for longitudinal trends in social capital over time. And there have been a handful of city-specific studies examining specific aspects of social capital (e.g., Vancouver, Hamilton, and Edmonton). In Toronto, there have been a few studies focusing on public health (e.g., Urban Heart) that encompass some aspects of social capital at the neighbourhood level.

Generally speaking, social capital -- in the form of high levels of membership in social groups -- has proven more resilient in Canada than in the United States. This resilience applies to the general downward trend in civic life identified in *Bowling Alone*; to the deterioration of social capital associated with ethnic diversity in Putnam’s later research; and finally to the 2008 economic setback, which damaged many other areas of community well-being.<sup>1</sup> However, this is not a matter of inherent Canadian sociability (at least not entirely!) but a result of public policy and public choices.<sup>2</sup>

Collectively this body of research provides a valuable foundation upon which the TOSC project can be built. The previous work demonstrates how social capital can be measured in populations, and the Canadian research provides valuable benchmark data that provides the basis for comparisons (how Toronto compares with other Canadian cities, how Toronto may have changed over time). The ESC study conducted a decade ago included a large sample in Toronto (N=1,000), and so replicating several of the measures from this work may provide a basis for determining how specific aspects of social capital have changed over this time span. Most of this previous data will be accessible for this type of analysis, either by license (through Statistics Canada) or from the researchers themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Index of Wellbeing 2012

<sup>2</sup> Banting et al. 2011

At the same time, the existing body of research on social capital represents a patchwork that does little to answer the central questions around the state of social capital in Toronto today. The TOSC project will constitute a major leap forward in terms of defining social capital in a comprehensive way, linking social capital to key outcomes (e.g., economic, health, quality of life), and encompassing the entire city population to a level of detail that will provide for invaluable comparisons across important segments as defined by demographics, ethnicity and culture, geography and other potentially significant dimensions. The previous research in Canada has given little to no attention to how social capital operates across different parts of society. The TOSC, as conceived, stands to break new ground in filling in our knowledge of the resilience, vulnerability, and potential of social capital in a large, growing, and increasingly diverse Canadian urban community.

**Measurement – How can social capital be measured?** Previous research demonstrates how social capital can be measured along its different conceptual dimensions, and this provides a solid methodological basis on which to develop the methodology for the TOSC research in Phase 2. Some of these existing measures can almost certainly be applied to address some aspects of social capital, and new ones will need to be created for the remainder. It is expected that the research will encompass the four broad types of social capital measures identified in this report: trust, personal networks, associational behaviour, and life satisfaction.

The purpose and scope of the TOSC project will dictate some of the choices in how social capital will be measured. That is, the measures will be developed within the context of the research consisting of a sample survey with a representative sample of City of Toronto residents, with the data consisting of self-reported responses from participants to a questionnaire that will be no more than 20-25 minutes in duration. This means, for instance, that it will not be possible to collect in-depth information about personal networks and associational behaviours.

The TOSC focus on social capital in a large and highly diverse city will pose special challenges. Social relations may be most active over a smaller area – such as a block or neighbourhood -- than our sample can capture. Languages and cultural norms, as well as generational differences, will demand special attention. The biggest challenge will be achieving strong sample coverage – inclusion of a representative sample of Toronto residents, especially from difficult to reach groups (e.g., allophones, the homeless, and youth). This will be addressed in the development of the survey methodology over the next several months, and take into account the level of funding available for the Phase 2 work. Strategies include using multiple survey modes, interviewing in languages other than English, and oversampling small but important segments of the population.

**What else is currently taking place in Toronto that is relevant to this project?** Issues directly related to social capital – intercultural tolerance and exchange, economic inequality, and spatial isolation -- are currently on the agenda for researchers and civic organizations in Toronto. United Way Toronto, for instance, recently completed two major studies (on income inequality and precarious employment). David Hulchanski and his research team continue to study the growing divide in settlement patterns across socio-economic strata.

These initiatives touch on important aspects of quality of life that are pertinent to social capital, but none focus specifically on social capital in terms of specific concepts or a broad model. The TOSC project focus is new and unique in the Toronto context, and will establish a new benchmark for understanding how people get along in Canada's largest city.

Two significant things have been achieved through the research summarized in this report. First, we have a clear idea of how the TOSC project is in conversation with what has gone before, how it makes a contribution to an ongoing conversation, and how it breaks new ground. Second, we now know the biggest challenges we will have to contend with as we move forward into the research design. In addition to that design challenge, next steps for the project include a continued emphasis on fundraising, and a development of outreach strategy to potential project stakeholders.

## I. Introduction

The Toronto Social Capital project (TOSC), a partnership among leading civic organizations and the City of Toronto<sup>3</sup>, aims to advance our understanding of the role played by social connection in the life of the city. The project will entail a survey of Toronto residents to assess their social capital across a range of domains, alongside relevant outcomes of interest to the partners – such as socio-economic status, self-reported health, neighbourhood vitality, and life satisfaction.

This study builds on the work of the Toronto Foundation's *Vital Signs* program, and will be the first in Canada to bring many of these social capital measurements into focus on a municipal scale. Encompassing a large sample of Toronto residents, it will provide an analysis of the City's diverse human landscape, and allow comparisons between geographic areas of what some fear is an increasingly polarized city<sup>4</sup>. It will contribute to Toronto's future success by providing a sound empirical basis for investing in the City's social capital and social infrastructure; by raising awareness of the importance and benefits of social trust and community involvement; and by establishing a benchmark against which progress can be measured over time.

The project is being conducted in three phases:

- Phase 1, (January to September 2015) involves scoping the project and conducting consultation and outreach with stakeholders.
- Phase 2, (October 2015 to December 2016) will entail the development and implementation of the survey, and analysing the results.
- Phase 3, (January to March 2017) will involve the public dissemination of results and engagement with the community, with a focus on knowledge translation.

The following report is a summary of the work conducted during phase 1 of the project. This work included a review of the relevant literature on social capital theory and research, along with interviews with experts in related fields (including the geography of Canadian cities, the measurement of community vitality, and the sociology of happiness)<sup>5</sup>.

The report serves two purposes. First, it documents the work completed so far. Second, it will provide the foundation for the development of the research in phase 2.

### *Structure of the Report*

The main body of the report covers three thematic areas. Section 2 explores what the literature and experts have to say about what social capital is, and why it is worth studying. It touches briefly on the history of the concept, on the most significant debate surrounding its definition, and then specifically on how it has been defined by Canadian policy-makers and researchers. It closes by specifying the operating definition and model of social capital to be used by the Toronto Social Capital project, within this historical and theoretical context.

Section 3 summarizes the instruments and metrics that have been used to measure social capital, including notes on whether or not they have been validated. Throughout, this section links metrics to the operating definition of social capital within the Toronto Social Capital project, as well as describing any licensing or accessibility issues. Section 4 of the report reviews previous social capital studies and outlines the present landscape of social survey research in the region. The report concludes with key lessons learned from phase 1, and reflecting on how it will guide the upcoming project.

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<sup>3</sup> The partners are (in alphabetical order): The City of Toronto, The Environics Institute for Survey Research, the Maytree Foundation, the Metcalf Foundation, the Toronto Foundation, and the YMCA of Greater Toronto.

<sup>4</sup> McDonough et al. 2015, Hulchanski et al. 2010.

<sup>5</sup> While the interview data is integrated with the thematic findings, see also Appendix A for a separate summary of the interviewing process.

## II. Social Capital: Theory and Definition

There is broad recognition of a connection between the social life of individuals and communities, and various dimensions of human flourishing<sup>6</sup>. However, modelling this relationship has proved challenging, giving rise to a number of approaches that attempt to measure the results of people “getting along” with one another. In this section, the report locates social capital – as an idea – among a constellation of related concepts, and explains how the TOSC project will put that idea into action.

### *Why do we talk about social capital?*

L. J. Hanifan, a school superintendent in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century West Virginia, is cited by Putnam as the earliest coiner of the term “social capital” in the literature. His motives were both intellectual and pragmatic, in that he wanted a theory that would explain why schools need community involvement to succeed. In a more rural time, the school-house served as a critical nexus of social life in communities with few other public buildings. Hanifan developed a metaphor of social capital, relating it to the economic accumulation necessary to the success of business corporations – only when enough individuals develop a “surplus” can they invest it in common productive endeavours<sup>7</sup>. He explained the generation of this surplus in a way that names the two distinct directions that later theorists of social capital would pursue:

If [someone] comes into contact with his neighbours [sic], there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may *immediately satisfy his social needs* and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient for the substantial improvement of life in the whole community. *The community as a whole will benefit by the cooperation* of all its parts, while *the individual will find in his associations the advantages of the help*, the sympathy, and the fellowship of his neighbours. (Hanifan 1920, 79, emphasis added)

So from the earliest we find that social capital is used to denote both a collective good and an individual advantage, as well as an expression of an intrinsic human need. More recently, researchers have found it useful to focus on only one of these elements in order to answer more specific questions. While Hanifan’s idea of social capital didn’t take off immediately, it can be read as fore-shadowing the great concern over urban space, place and community that inspired the pro- and anti-suburban planning movements that have so deeply shaped cities like Toronto.<sup>8</sup>

Ideas such as those of Hanifan would also influence more contemporary thinkers, among them Robert Putnam. Putnam is best known for his 2000 book *Bowling Alone*, which used census data to diagnose a decrease in the vitality of social life in America since the 1960s; however, Putnam has worked on similar issues before and since, both in the United States and elsewhere<sup>9</sup>. His research broadly concerns the need for dense, reciprocal social relations in order to support civic virtue<sup>10</sup>, and thus the vitality and sustainability of liberal democracy. Putnam is certainly interested in positive outcomes for individuals, but his focus is on more intangible and collectively-enjoyed goods such as trust.

In parallel with this research, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was asking different, though related questions. He was interested in a pair of twin puzzles: how do economically marginal people string together adequate resources without significant market purchasing power, and how do elite individuals gain and maintain outsized access to opportunities and information?<sup>11</sup> Bourdieu’s emphasis on individual social capital is a result of his focus on the practice of everyday life, how ordinary or habitual actions produce

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Scott 2003, OECD 2001, Putnam 2000, Portes 1998, Kawachi et al. 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Hanifan 1920 *The Community Centre*. This title is quite prophetic for later, more urban considerations of the infrastructure needed to support social capital.

<sup>8</sup> Examples reach at least as far back as the contentious 1972 Spadina Expressway campaign, and continue to today as seen in Keesmaat 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Putnam 2000, Putnam 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Putnam 2000: 19.

<sup>11</sup> Bourdieu 1986; see also studies such as Stack 1974.

large social phenomena such as economic inequality.

Social capital as a concept has thus evolved to answer three related research questions:

- How does the social behaviour of individuals help them get by, or get ahead?
- Why do some communities have more vital collective social lives, and what are the consequences of these differences?
- How do the spaces in which we live, work and play influence our ability to connect to others, thereby enriching our lives, supporting one another's needs, and making change happen?

### *What is social capital?*

Putnam argues that “the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value,”<sup>12</sup> a bedrock statement with which – speaking generally – everyone agrees. However, just as contemporary social capital research has sought to address different questions, there are also distinct ways of modelling or defining it.

For Putnam and many others, social capital could be described as **a field of action**<sup>13</sup>, consisting of collective goods such as trust, belonging, norms of reciprocity, voluntary association (recreational or otherwise) and informal social control. These collective goods set up conditions for what is possible – or more often, what is easy and what is difficult. Within a rich field of social capital, it is easier to allow children to play outside without formal supervision, easier to recruit signatories for a petition to the government, easier to raise funds for school-based activities and amenities. Underscoring the “collective” nature of this social capital is that the benefits are independent of any one individual's contribution – you are always better off living in a “high social capital” area, whether you personally are socially active or not.

For others inspired by Bourdieu's work, social capital is seen more as **a stock of resources**<sup>14</sup>, accessible through a network of social connections, and embedded within those connections – to acquaintances, colleagues, friends and family. These resources include information about opportunities, access to institutions and channels of public influence, favours done and received, and material support. Individuals with high social capital are those with larger networks, whose members control access to a more diverse and more rarefied array of resources and information. This approach can also use groups – whether communities or organizations – as the basic unit of analysis, looking at their ties with other groups and the way they share information and resources between them. People may inherit or be gifted with these connections, but by definition they must act to engage with and call upon the resources embedded within.<sup>15</sup>

Researchers often use social capital concepts as **descriptive** terms, embracing a spectrum of social practices and dynamics. This work aims to produce depiction of how social capital differs between populations, changes over time, and correlates with other outcomes of interest.

Some studies have also developed social capital-based **predictive** models used to tie social circumstances to specific outcomes (such as life expectancy). Social capital as a model that can predict outcomes is still experiencing growing pains. It jostles for space in a marketplace of ideas regarding human social life (see *Cousins of Capital* sidebar), and though these ideas are not necessarily in conflict, there are credible arguments suggesting that social capital may be too broad a term for use in testing many hypotheses<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Putnam 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Putnam 2000; McKenzie, interview data; McKnight, interview data; Helliwell and Putnam 2004; Drukker et al. 2006; Scott 2003

<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu 1986; Franke 2005; PRI 2005; Macinko and Starfield 2001; van der Gaag 2005;

<sup>15</sup> Coleman 1990; Coalter 2008

<sup>16</sup> McKenzie and O'Campo, interview data.

### *Cousins of Social Capital*

Social capital is the focus of the Toronto survey project, but it overlaps with, or has similarities with, a variety of other concepts. In the research literature, these are considered as alternatives to social capital, elements or drivers of it, and/or mutually-reinforcing facets of social life.

*Social cohesion*: this term describes the degree to which a society actively pursues inclusion and the good of all its members (Soroka et al. 2007).

*Social engagement*: an area of study in the General Social Survey which incorporates many of the common measures of social capital, including associational behaviour, access to social supports especially during times of change, and unpaid socially-productive work such as childcare. (Statistics Canada 2008)

*Social solidarity*: social cohesion (see above) that arises from mutual interdependence – which in turn arises from having specialized individual capacities (Jary and Jary 1991)

*Social control*: a norm of behaviour promoting the informal intervention against anti-social behaviour. (C.f. Sampson et al. 1997)

*Social identity*: a term used to emphasize how a sense of belonging to a group or place is acquired through life experiences and social connections, that is, actively. (Helliwell, interview)

*Social isolation*: an inverted measure of social support, describing the likelihood of being unable to access support when needed (C.f. Lewchuk et al. 2015)

*Locational isolation*: a geographic measure of the difficulty faced by individuals in forming networks. (Mcknight, interview)

*Community Vitality*: an element of the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, measuring several dimensions of social life including social capital. (Scott 2003)

*Natural Communities*: a term used to indicate organic networks of caregiving, support and concern, including families, faith communities and some geographic areas (Van Pelt 2011).

*Arrival Cities*: The concept of arrival cities is not directly related to social capital, but underscores the connection between suburban growth, immigrant integration, and social capital. An Arrival City is an urban, geographic area marked by transition, mobility and intense reliance on informal social networks. (Saunders 2007)

*Generosity*: the incidence of “other-regarding” behaviours, linked to increased trust and happiness (C.f. Helliwell et al. 2010).

The TOSC project, intended to establish a benchmark and barometer for social capital in the city, is playing the role of filling in a descriptive landscape. Since we are not testing a hypothesis, the predictive power – and thus the empirical specificity – of our social capital model is less important. As a baseline study, the focus is on the variety of metrics (see section 4) and on recommending an agenda of future, more directed research, depending upon the analysis of our results.

### *Bonding, Bridging and Linking Social Capital*

Putnam distinguishes between different types of social capital by the nature of the social relation in which it is embedded (or which is used to generate it).

*Bonding* social capital is the term used to refer to norms and resources embedded in close, strong ties, such as between family members and within ethnoculturally-homogenous communities. It is marked by a higher probability of sharing more resources and by greater internal social control – both for good and for ill.

*Bridging* social capital refers to the norms and resources embedded in weaker ties, such as those between professional colleagues or within networks marked by strong interpersonal differences of age, ethnicity, income, gender, language and status. Bridging connections are generally marked by a lower willingness to share significant resources, but a greater diversity of total resources available.

*Linking* social capital is a special proposed type that consists of informal connections to institutions (including government), usually as held by groups or communities. Having linking social capital is usually about having the know-how to organize and voice an agenda that is comprehensible and plausible to decision-making powers.

### *Why should we study social capital?*

Social capital is a metaphor drawing our attention to the way that the stuff of relationships -- trust, cooperation and solidarity -- can be compared to economic capital. Economic capital is surplus wealth that can be leveraged to create more wealth. We want to understand social capital because it is assumed that a society with a deficit of social capital will experience conflict, whereas one that has a surplus will benefit from positive synergies.

Human history is in part a story of conflicts between identity groups, be they racial, ethnic, national, religious, linguistic or class-based. Canada has made efforts to replace conflict with tolerance – and beyond that, integration and social synergy. Toronto, the country's largest and most diverse community, could be seen as an experiment in the replacement of intergroup conflict with social solidarity. This study intends to measure the degree to which there is trust or mistrust between groups and their capacity for collaboration and collective action.

No matter the model, social capital has an enormous impact on people's lives. Mostly, having social capital is better than not having it, although there are some for whom it can become a burden.

At an individual level, social capital connects people with economic opportunities, and helps redistribute some resources outside of the formal market economy; it therefore may play a role not only in improving one's economic position, but in buffering the negative effects of low income<sup>17</sup> – although the degree to which this is true is uncertain.<sup>18</sup> Having an adequate social network increases subjective well-being and life satisfaction<sup>19</sup>, as well as acting as a buffer against the traumatic potential of negative social experiences such as discrimination.<sup>20</sup>

At a community level, measures of social capital are correlated with outcomes such as mortality<sup>21</sup>; how it does this is not clear, but possibilities include mediating the negative health consequences of economic inequality<sup>22</sup>, or by encouraging active participation in fitness-oriented social groups<sup>23</sup>. Social capital helps restrain anti-social behaviour within communities by facilitating social control (see box

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<sup>17</sup> Edin and Lein 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Moskowitz et al. 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Helliwell 2013

<sup>20</sup> Helliwell, interview data

<sup>21</sup> Kawachi et al. 1999

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Dunn, interview data

“cousins of capital”). Finally, the trust resulting from socially-vital community life – particularly one that encourages active membership in voluntary groups -- is a prerequisite for effective civic engagement with government and other institutions.<sup>24</sup> Leadership in voluntary associations builds soft skills for conflict mediation and collective expression.

On the other hand, there can also be negative consequences that accompany social capital. Alongside the ability to exert control over anti-social behaviour, for example, social networks can exert downward-levelling norms that discourage innovation and economic success – or social engagement beyond the existing network.<sup>25</sup> And while social capital is an important source of support in difficult circumstances, it levies a psychological and physical cost on highly-connected individuals who consequently face heavy demands from members of their social network. Among those living in geographic areas of concentrated poverty, measures of social capital correlate with *lower* levels of personal well-being, even though densely-connected communities are collectively better off.<sup>26</sup>

Carrying on from this finding, social capital appears to function very differently for elite individuals and communities versus marginal ones (as suggested by Bourdieu’s twinned research questions on getting by and getting ahead). The uses and outcomes of social capital can appear so distinct in some studies that O’Campo speculates that it might only be serving as a proxy for class difference. The meaningfulness of social capital may be limited “if the evidence shows that the social capital of the poor performs different functions with different results than the social capital of the wealthy<sup>27</sup>. McKenzie suggests that more work is required to determine whether social capital has a unique value in measuring social life, or if it is best deployed as a descriptive or “catch-all” term<sup>28</sup>.

What we already know about social capital, therefore, underlines its importance while also leaving major questions unanswered. Research into social capital continues because it seems to explain the persistence of local economies in a globalized world<sup>29</sup>, but also the way that world seems to have created considerable *anomie* in democratic countries.<sup>30</sup> There is a concern that people are disinvesting from social life and thus the common good, but it’s not clear that this U.S.-based research applies, or applies to as great an extent, in Canada.<sup>31</sup>

Theoretically, social capital and its benefits may be endangered by the combined trends of income polarization<sup>32</sup> and ethno-cultural diversification. Yet if social capital remains strong, there is strong interest in whether it can be mobilized among communities on the margins to improve their civic voice and economic circumstances.<sup>33</sup> While the notion of social ties as “capital” is a metaphor, it has the advantage of priming us to think about how to invest in these ties, and also about how they depend upon, and increase the capacity of, other assets available to individuals and communities.<sup>34</sup>

It is important to better understand the dynamics of social capital because we may be relying on it to perform the impossible, expecting those with the least resources to lift themselves out of poverty through the sheer magic of social connection: “there has been little discussion of the possibility that focusing on what materially- and politically-disenfranchised communities can do for themselves may be akin to victim-blaming at the community level.<sup>35</sup>”

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<sup>24</sup> McKenzie and Harpham 2006: 31, Nicholson and Hoye 2008: 51.

<sup>25</sup> Macinko and Starfield 2001

<sup>26</sup> Caughey et al. 2003

<sup>27</sup> O’Campo, Interview data

<sup>28</sup> McKenzie, Interview data

<sup>29</sup> (Helliwell)

<sup>30</sup> Putnam 2000

<sup>31</sup> Scott 2003, Turcotte 2015, Banting et al. 2011

<sup>32</sup> Kawachi et al. 1999, Hulchanski 2010,

<sup>33</sup> Consider for example the movement around Community Benefits Agreements; see Galley 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Policy Research Initiative 2005

<sup>35</sup> McKenzie and Harpham 2006: 21

The fact that not all networks generate usable capital in proportion to their “density” has led to a theoretical distinction between “bonding” and “bridging” capital: dense networks of like people may help in “getting by,” but individuals and communities must diversify their networks in order to “get ahead.”<sup>36</sup> However, despite this accessible and popular theoretical advance about the varieties of social capital there is still work to be done distinguishing them: “the like us/unlike us presumption that lies at the heart of the distinction between bridging and bonding is hard to appreciate given the multi-dimensionality of [...] individual[s] (sex, age, class, occupation, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political belief, abilities, interests)...<sup>37</sup>”

#### *The Government of Canada’s Definition of Social Capital*

The Canadian government has its own highly-specific model of social capital, developed over several years of work by the Policy Research Initiative (PRI)<sup>1</sup>. While narrower than the model likely to be adopted by the TOSC project, it is still significant because of its influence on important data sources such as the General Social Survey, as well as on existing social capital-oriented policies in Canada.

For the PRI, studying social capital is “viewing networks of social ties as a form of capital asset... [which] can be invested in and drawn upon.” (2005)

The federal model of social capital was developed in response to concerns that existing models were difficult to quantify and measure – specifically, as an indicator of the effectiveness of policy interventions, such as job-bridging programs. While the PRI work does not reject the general usefulness of ideas such as interpersonal trust or a sense of belonging, they restricted their proposed model of social capital to measurements of the structure of social networks, and their “countable” uses, such as the exchange of tangible resources or verifiable information (Frank 2003).

The practical application of this model is discussed in the section on measurement, below.

#### *How will the Toronto Social Capital Project define social capital?*

As stated in the current project prospectus (see Appendix B), social capital is defined as: “the term used to describe the vibrancy of social networks and the extent to which individuals and communities trust and rely upon one another.” This operating description of social capital emerges from the linked outcomes that the project partners wish to understand and improve:

- Intercultural, interethnic and interlinguistic tolerance, integration and solidarity.
- The social effectiveness of neighbourhoods in generating civic engagement, interpersonal trust, and in buffering against the effects of inequality and disorder.
- The ability of all Toronto residents to access information, resources and opportunities which allow them to improve their health, prosperity and well-being.

From these outcomes also emerges a logic of how to measure the “vibrancy” of Toronto, within the constraints of a largely-quantitative survey of individuals. Under this logic, social networks are vibrant when they produce high levels of interpersonal trust and informal support, high levels of associational involvement (both informal and formal), and a high diversity of contacts between professions, income levels, ages, genders, cultures and other demographic categories.

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<sup>36</sup> Putnam 2000

<sup>37</sup> Nicholson and Hoye 2008: 25

### III. Measuring Social Capital: Tools, Scales and Instruments

#### *How is social capital measured?*

As with any concept in social science research, there is robust debate and innovation surrounding the question of how to quantify social capital. Because it describes human social groups, this problem is not trivial. Researchers of social capital find that mapping out social connections in a network is difficult enough, but mapping out all the interactions within a network – visits, favours, exchanges of information, recreational activities, political activities and so forth – approaches the impossible.<sup>38</sup>

However, there are validated proxies for the strength of social capital possessed by an individual or a community. The TOSC project is spared many of the more severe measurement difficulties by first, taking a broad umbrella approach to social capital, and second surveying randomly sampled individuals, without follow-up through their networks. These two assumptions cut down considerably on the menu of metrics from which to choose. At the same time, the project will select many, or perhaps even all, of the metrics presented here in order to generate as nuanced a final result as possible.

As discussed in section 2, social capital can be thought of as a **field of action** or as a **stock of resources**, or more narrowly as the **structure and interaction of social networks**. From all of these concepts we get 4 general types of measurement that can be used to generate survey questions:

- A. *Measures of interpersonal trust, attitudes, and neighbourhood social life;*
- B. *Measures of the structure of personal social networks;*
- C. *Measures of associational behaviour – recreational, spiritual, charitable, civic and political;*
- D. *Measures about health, happiness and life satisfaction deriving from social vitality.*

In the remainder of this section we review each of these types of measurements in turn.

#### *A. Measures of interpersonal trust*

One of the most well-validated and often-repeated measurements of social behaviour are questions related to trust. By asking participants about trust, researchers aim to learn about the cognitive assumptions that underpin the participant's social behaviour; that is, by knowing what people think we learn something about how they will act.

The most basic and common question about trust is to ask participants to agree or disagree with each of a pair of related statements: "Overall, most people can be trusted," and "You can't be too careful when dealing with people"<sup>39</sup>. These are known as *general trust* questions because they do not specify who is being (dis)trusted; the evidence suggests that the responses to these questions maps to long-lasting psychological values engrained by personality, childhood and cultural upbringing<sup>40</sup>. The results vary considerably across nationality, and the questions are not salient for all people: individuals from some cultural backgrounds tend to reject the premise of the questions as being nonsensical, since one cannot express a definite opinion of the trustworthiness of a non-specific person.<sup>41</sup>

A more nuanced version of the trust questions look at *specific trust* by giving participants a concrete scenario: that of the "dropped wallet." In dropped-wallet questions, participants are asked about the likelihood that, if they dropped their wallet containing an amount of money (\$200 is a common figure), what are the odds it would be returned with the money by one of a list of social actors. These actors frequently include: a close neighbour, a stranger, and a police officer.<sup>42</sup> The answers to these questions

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<sup>38</sup> Friesen, interview data.

<sup>39</sup> C.f. the Canadian General Social Survey.

<sup>40</sup> Helliwell, Interview data.

<sup>41</sup> Da Silva et al. 2006.

<sup>42</sup> C.f. the Equality, Security and Community survey, from York University.

have been found to map more closely to an individual's present circumstances, including their feelings of safety and belonging and the strength of their social network.<sup>43</sup>

These questions have been validated through their use in many surveys, including the Canadian General Social Survey (GSS) and the York University Equality, Security and Community (ESC) survey of Canadians, as well as through statistical modelling<sup>44</sup>.

The general and specific questions, taken together, display distinct "footprints" when sorted by respondent nationality: people distribute their trust in social actors differently depending on where they live and where they came from<sup>45</sup>. Significantly for the TOSC project, with its interest in the city's diversity, these "footprints" persist for a long while through migration experiences, before slowly merging with the general trust attitudes of the host community.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, there is an interesting tendency for most individuals (and, collectively, communities) to significantly *underestimate* the rate at which the people around them are actually *trust-worthy*. This has been demonstrated by correlating wallet-drop questions with actual dropped wallets containing money; the rate at which money and wallets were returned by strangers vastly outperformed the rate at which people predicted they would be<sup>47</sup>. This leads to the question of whether merely reporting on good deeds has the potential to strengthen cognitive or attitudinal social capital.

There are other measures which are not based on trust but which tie closely to the idea that assumptions and attitudes inform social behaviour. These measurements assess the "effectiveness" of neighbourhoods through the eyes of the people who live in them. They are trickier to establish rigorously compared to the trust questions because they require careful attention to the definition of "neighbourhood" and thus usually entail a geographic component to study design.

Neighbourhood effectiveness questions are those that start with the formula:

"Is this the kind of neighbourhood where...." And continue with statements such as:

"... people are likely to supervise the play of neighbourhood children?"

"... someone is likely to intervene if they see something dangerous happening?"

"... you can always find someone to help if you need it?"

"... there are always people out and about on the street?"

The responses to these questions, while subjective, have been shown to track separately from the questions about personal attitudes – that is, people are not merely restating their opinions on trust when they answer, but reflect concrete social norms that drive and sustain social capital: *informal social control* (the willingness to police anti-social behaviour), *bounded solidarity* (the willingness to help those who are in trouble), *reciprocity exchanges* (the recognition of non-monetary debts among members of a group) and *enforceable trust* (the ability of groups to suppress anti-social behaviour).<sup>48, 48</sup>

As a group, measures of general and specific trust, as well as neighbourhood perceptions, can be taken as gauging the general willingness of respondents to trust, support and rely on other people in their social environment.

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<sup>43</sup> Helliwell, interview data.

<sup>44</sup> Soroka et al. 2003

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*

<sup>47</sup> Zlomislic 2009, Helliwell, interview data.

<sup>48</sup> Portes 1998, Macinko and Starfield 2001

## B. Measures of the structure of personal social networks

A robust way of rapidly probing the structure of a social network is asking one or more questions known as “name generators.” A name generator in this context is a question consisting of a stem that prompts the participant to reflect on the people they know, followed by a list of sub-prompts that *generate* a set of social contacts.

The aim of name generators is to produce a description of social networks which can then be quantified into a “score,” allowing the social capital of individuals (or groups) to be compared and contrasted<sup>49</sup>. They are therefore of great use when researchers are interested in how social capital is unevenly distributed and how this distribution affects outcomes of interest for surveyed individuals.

Name generators are a way of getting more granular information about the differences between individuals in their access to strong social networks and the resources embedded in them. While attitude-related questions track the differences between circumstances, places, and cultures, name generators differentiate between individuals with “high” and “low” social capital. They have the potential to be more time- and resource-intensive as research tools compared with trust and quality-of-life questions (see below), but offer correspondingly rich data – and there are ways to economize the presentation of generators to reduce the added burden.

The simplest form of *name generator* consists in asking a participant to name, one by one, members of their social network according to a prompt (“close friends,” “relatives you are close with,” or similar). Each entry is followed up by collecting demographic information on the social contact. This is the most time- and resource-intensive form of generator, and is better suited to small-scale studies with interest in in-depth information, including qualitative information, regarding how individuals experience and interact with their social network<sup>50</sup>.

More practical for larger studies is the *position generator*. Rather than tally a complete inventory of social contacts, a position generator asks participants whether they know someone who occupies a particular profession, position or social status (for example, “do you know anyone who is an engineer?” or “do you know someone who works at a community centre?”) The positions listed are generally designed to cover a maximum diversity in income, status and demographics as possible within a limited number of questions (it is possible, for example, for a well-calibrated generator to include compound questions such as “do you know someone who is a doctor, and who is also a woman?” or “do you know someone who is an engineer, and who is more than 50 years old?”) Rather than collecting full follow-up information on each positive response, many studies adopt a 3-point scale to summarize the intensity of the relationship, listing each contact as either “family,” “friend,” or “acquaintance.”<sup>51</sup>

Finally, there is also the *resource generator*. This generator asks a person if they could access, when they needed, a given resource from within their social network. The resource may be tangible, such as childcare, or intangible such as “information about a new job.”<sup>52</sup> This eliminates the need to ask about specific people and it may be easier for participants to recall, selecting freely from among their social connections as they consider how they might go about accessing the listed resource. The resource generator can also include the 3-point intensity scale question.

These generator questions have been used by many smaller-scale studies, and have been the subject of considerable methodological discussion, debate and refinement. Van der Gaag’s work on social capital measurement is an in-depth review of generators and how to use them; he recommends the use of position and/or resource generators over name generators<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> For an example of this see van der Gaag 2005: 80

<sup>50</sup> Van der Gaag 2005: ch. 5; Franke 2005

<sup>51</sup> Van der Gaag 2005: ch. 6

<sup>52</sup> Van der Gaag 2005: ch. 7

<sup>53</sup> Van der Gaag 2005

For both the resource and position generators, the length of questioning can be reduced by adopting a “highest reach” approach. Under this approach, questions are asked in a descending order of rarity or status, until there is a positive response. For example, if it is more common to have a friend who works in retail than to have a friend who is a doctor, anyone who says they do have a friend who is a doctor isn’t asked about having a friend in retail – this shortens the survey time. There is evidence to validate the assumption that once the “highest reach” of a person’s social network is established, all more common contacts can be assumed<sup>54</sup>.

The Government of Canada, through the work done by the Policy Research Initiative, has compiled a separate list of linked, quantitative indicators to describe network structure and behaviour. This is the core of government social capital analysis in Canada, and relevant for the TOSC project which may draw (though not exclusively) on survey questions used in federal government surveys. The PRI recommends the following set of indicators be used in social capital assessments:

- *Network Size*: the number of people with which the participant has one of a list of relationships (such as family, or friends);
- *Network Density*: the extent to which the people in the network know each other, not just the participant (note that this generally requires follow-up data collection);
- *Network Diversity*: the heterogeneity of the people in the network, along axes of interest such as income, or ethnicity;
- *Relational Frequency*: how often does the participant contact the people in the network, for and for how long?
- *Relational Intensity*: how much emotional investment is there in the relationships represented by the network (compare this to the 3-point intensity scale discussed for generators, above)?
- *Conditions of access to resources*: under what circumstances would members of the network share resources they control with the participant (compare this to the resource-generator)?
- *Fraction of resources actually shared*: there is a difference between the total amount of resources controlled within the social network, what is actually asked for, and what is actually used;
- *Norms and rules*: what kind of values do the people in the network hold, that guide their social behaviour?
- *Institutional structures and arrangements*: this last metric is specific to social capital among organizations, and measures the pre-existing history of formal agreements between actors in the network.

For most of these measures, the concept is one of a linear scale, with a higher value on the scale indicating a higher *predicted* or hypothesized amount of social capital.

### C. Measures of associational behaviour

An important aspect of social capital theory is the idea of community, or collective, social vitality – the extent to which people are meeters, joiners and co-operators amongst themselves. The decline in this culture of joining and belonging is the central concern addressed by Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*.<sup>55</sup> It is therefore a central area of measurement for social capital studies. These questions, which tend to come in list form, differ from generators in that they measure individual-to-group connections, rather than individual-to-individual connections.

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<sup>54</sup> *ibid*

<sup>55</sup> Putnam 2000

Just as in the discussion of generators above, measuring associational behaviour requires two dimensions: breadth and intensity. Breadth of associational life is measured in a similar way to social networks, by asking participants to consider a list of types of group or organised activity (“faith community,” “sports league,” “political party,” and so on) and indicate whether they participate in each one. The list may be tailored to the study’s target population and the specific area of interest. However, research such as Putnam’s suggests that formal membership must be regarded cautiously as evidence of being socially active. Organizations, especially large national or international ones, that demand little beyond the payment of membership fees, do little to build social capital for any but the most committed and involved members.<sup>56</sup>

Associational questions might also include an intensity follow-up for those groups where the participant gives a positive response. The structure is flexible, but might include asking if the participant has played a leadership role, has contributed volunteer labour to the organization, has engaged in fundraising, or if they attend weekly or monthly in-person meetings. It is through these deeper forms of association that people build up the connections and soft skills that undergird social capital – on both the individual and community level.<sup>57</sup>

Associational behaviour has been explored by researchers such as Putnam and McKnight.<sup>58</sup> Association was, of course, the central concern of *Bowling Alone*, and also plays a significant role in Canadian GSS and ESC studies.

#### *D. Measures of health, life-satisfaction and happiness incorporating social factors*

In this fourth category, the study of social capital is often not at the centre of the research, and not all metrics of well-being are automatically appropriate for a social capital-focused study. However, holistic approaches to studying happiness and health have for a significant period now included assessments of how social ties contribute to general life satisfaction and life goals. This area is therefore the border-land between interest in social capital as a broad category of general benefits, and interest in social capital as a causal mechanism of desired outcomes (see section 2 for more on this distinction).

The contribution of previous research is an ongoing discussion for the TOSC project, but for the purposes of the report, two relevant scales are highlighted as examples.

First, the Cutrona Social Provision Scale has been used by Dunn, among others (see PEPSO in section 4) to measure a form of social capital<sup>59</sup>. The Cutrona scale measures the extent to which an individual’s social relationships meet a series of six human needs:

- Information
- Reliability of support in times of stress
- Reassurance
- Emotional attachment
- Sense of group belonging, and
- Opportunities to provide assistance to others<sup>60</sup>

The participant isn’t asked who or how they would receive the social support, but only whether and to what degree they feel they could access it socially, on a sliding scale from “none” to “a lot”.<sup>61</sup>

Second, the World Health Organization (WHO) publishes a 26-item questionnaire called the WHO Quality of Life – BREF tool (WHOQOL-BREF). This questionnaire is developed to provide cross-culturally

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*: 58

<sup>57</sup> C.f Coalter 2008

<sup>58</sup> McKnight 2013

<sup>59</sup> Dunn, interview data

<sup>60</sup> Consider the relevance of the “Generosity” entry in box 1: Cousins of social capital.

<sup>61</sup> In a Likert scale measure, participants are asked to indicate their level of agreement or the level of intensity of a phenomenon under study on a graphical line – sometimes with fixed intervals and sometimes freely.

comparable data on participant's life satisfaction in various areas, including social relationships and specifically within the context of their community. It therefore may be worth adapting for the Toronto study for the purposes of identifying the differences in social capital generation between neighbourhoods and within Toronto's uniquely diverse population.

Questions about health are of special interest to social capital researchers because of the strong, but still evolving, base of research that connects health outcomes (including mental health, and particularly in wealthy societies) to the social environment. Research on the "social determinants of health" has uncovered some truly dramatic findings: there can be as much as 20 years' difference in life expectancy between two neighbourhoods in the same, Canadian city.<sup>62</sup> The TOSC survey will likely be limited to the health indicators that are self-reportable.

### *From where might the TOSC project draw existing questions and measures?*

There is a rich assortment of established survey instruments that are either publically available for research use, or of which the authors have kindly offered the use to the TOSC project. The advantage of adopting questions from other instruments is two-fold, in that it provides the basis for comparison of previous data from Toronto or other parts of Canada, and also brings with it some of the rigour of previous validation.

- The Canadian General Social Survey: this annual survey of the whole Canadian population produces data on rotating themes of interest to government. The very large sample base provides good validation for many of the questions discussed above, and city-level data could be licensed for a fee.
- The Equality, Security and Community Survey: based at York University, this survey was designed to measure the "distribution of well-being in Canada," including social connectedness, civic engagement and trust. Conducted on a national scale, it nevertheless contains an urban over-sample to attain greater representation of diverse city populations. Both the aggregated data and the questionnaire are available under a no-cost license.
- The Saguaro Seminar Community Benchmark: intended to follow up on the findings of social capital decay in *Bowling Alone*, the Saguaro benchmark survey instrument is designed for use in a variety of U.S. jurisdictions from towns to states. The questionnaire is made available through the Saguaro Seminar website.
- The World Bank Social Capital Assessment Tool: Like the WHO scale discussed above, this instrument is designed to help compare social capital dynamics across cultural differences, though it has an emphasis on application to poverty reduction strategies in poorer countries. Nevertheless, the question wording may be a useful asset in ensuring that the TOSC survey instrument is applicable across linguistic and cultural differences within Toronto.
- Neighbourhood Effects on Health and Well-being study: conducted by the Centre for Research on Inner-City Health (CRICH) at St. Michael's Hospital, this survey sampled 100 clusters of census tracts (neighbourhoods) in Toronto -- covers the geographic ground we want to cover, but not universal across the city; questions about social cohesion and support were validated with qualitative interviews and observational study. Primary Investigator Patricia O'Campo has indicated that she is willing to share study instruments with the TOSC partners.

The purpose of adapting and adopting questions elsewhere is so that, to the extent possible, we avoid having to pilot-test the individual elements of our own questionnaire. Generally we can assume that the questions used in these tools have validity ascertained through previous research.

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<sup>62</sup> Hamilton Spectator 2010.

## IV. The Landscape of Social Capital Research and Policy

The Toronto social capital project takes place against a background of related work conducted in Canada and elsewhere. In this section we review the objectives and results of the main studies and programs that have influenced the current state of social capital research, including the TOSC project. This is not an exhaustive list of all social capital research, providing only a brief overview of the most recent and relevant work. We also review current or ongoing studies that, while not directly on the subject of social capital, form the TOSC project's immediate context.

### *What past social capital research has directly inspired the TOSC project?*

The TOSC project's approach to survey-based social capital research – broad, descriptive and defined by a city of interest – is substantially inspired by the work of the Saguaro Seminar at Harvard University. Saguaro's Community Benchmark surveys have created a large set of comparable data from big and small American cities – as well as some studies conducted on the scale of U.S. states or counties. These surveys have been conducted in two waves, the first in 2000 and the second in 2006<sup>63</sup>. The objective of the benchmarking was not only to increase the volume of available data on social capital, but also to provide a baseline from which to investigate questions of economic inequality and urban diversity. The TOSC project is very much part of this legacy of urban benchmarking.

Putnam and Saguaro's work in the 2000's sounded alarms regarding a general decline in social capital, as defined by the vitality of associational life in communities as well as by norms of interpersonal trust and reciprocity; among other causes, the increasing ethnic and economic heterogeneity of cities appeared to be corrosive to these measures of social well-being. Small wonder, then, that Canadian researchers have shown strong interest in expanding on this analysis – applying it to a context marked both by a historical scepticism regarding national identity (the “two solitudes” of English and French Canada) and a decades-long shift towards official multiculturalism and sharply-increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity.

An important starting point for this expanded Canadian social capital analysis would prove the Equality, Security and Community (ESC) survey, which started in 1999 and was based out of York University's Institute for Social Research and directed by Richard Johnston at the University of British Columbia<sup>64</sup>. Alongside Saguaro's analysis of U.S. communities, researchers combined ESC data with other instruments (such as the World Values Survey) to examine the Canadian social capital landscape.

This research contributed to the social capital in two ways. First, it substantially strengthened the correlation between certain measures of social capital (interpersonal trust, and associational life) and general life satisfaction, or happiness.<sup>65</sup> Second, it showed that population diversity did not necessarily lead to a breakdown of trust and social solidarity; Canadian multiculturalism policies seemed to be substantially effective at maintaining social capital within a highly diverse population.<sup>66</sup>

Since at least 2003, Canada has also collected national-level data on social capital indicators through various Statistics Canada surveys – most importantly the General Social Survey. The General Social Survey alone has focused on social capital-related themes 3 times, in 2003 (on social engagement), 2008 (on social networks), and 2013 (on social identity)<sup>67</sup>. These surveys provide a longitudinal perspective on many of the basic social capital metrics discussed in section 3.

Statistics Canada has recently published a review of the trends presented by this data which presents a mostly positive picture. Over the 10 years of study, Canadians became more likely to have recently

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<sup>63</sup> See <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/programs/saguaro>.

<sup>64</sup> See <http://www.isr.yorku.ca/download/ESC/esc.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Helliwell and Putnam 2004

<sup>66</sup> Banting et al. 2011

<sup>67</sup> Statistics Canada 2015

done their neighbour a favour<sup>68</sup>; to have three or more close friends<sup>69</sup>, including friends from different ethnic groups<sup>70</sup>; and to claim membership in a group, association or organization.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, Canadians saw their friends less often<sup>72</sup>, and were neither more nor less trusting of others<sup>73</sup>.

Public sector social capital research in Canada is not limited to data collection through surveys. The Canadian federal government went through a period, around 2003-2005, of significant interest in developing a model of social capital that could transform the way policies, programs and partnerships were delivered. This interest can be traced to a broader desire to better understand the strengths of civil society, and move towards a more distributed philosophy of government programming; consequently, this public-sector social capital research was less interested in the effects of social capital on the lives of individuals or communities *per se*, and more interested in the social capital of *organizations*.<sup>74</sup>

The Policy Research Initiative (now known as Policy Horizons), a federal government think-tank, produced a number of thematic studies on the applications of social capital research to issues such as immigrant settlement, civic engagement, and bridging unemployed people back into the workforce.<sup>75</sup> However, federal government interest in social capital waned since 2005<sup>76</sup>, with favour turning to concepts such as a social enterprise and entrepreneurial values.<sup>77</sup>

Other research in Canada incorporated social capital or related concepts into more holistic, accessible measurements of the well-being and progress of Canadian society. The Community Foundations of Canada have published *Vital Signs* reports since 2001 on the state of various communities; the flagship Toronto report consistently reports on Leadership, Civic Engagement, and Belonging<sup>78</sup>. In 2014 they reported that 66.8% of Torontonians felt a strong sense of belonging in their community, compared with 69.1% in 2013 and 67.5% in 2012.

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIWB), a project of the University of Waterloo Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, specifically challenged the idea of Gross Domestic Product as a “score” for Canada – bolstering it with a series of 8 benchmarks, one of which is Community Vitality (which itself contains a score for “social capital”)<sup>79</sup>. They have been publishing reports on trends within these benchmark categories since 2011. Like other domains of wellbeing, community vitality has seen a gentle upward trend since the 1980s, but its improvement lags well behind the growth of the economy. On the other hand, community vitality seems to be the most resilient of the benchmarks to the 2008 economic downturn, continuing its slow but steady improvement.<sup>80</sup>

Both Community Foundations and the CIW have conducted in-depth studies of community well-being that zero in on social capital issues. The Vancouver Foundation conducted a survey of Metro Vancouver in 2012 on *Connections and Engagement*. Based on a survey of charitable organizations which identified

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<sup>68</sup> In 2003, 61% of Canadians had done their neighbor a favour in the past month; in 2013 this figure was 70%. (Statistics Canada 2015)

<sup>69</sup> From 70% in 2003 to 75% in 2013. (*ibid*)

<sup>70</sup> From 54% in 2003 to 59% in 2013. (*ibid*)

<sup>71</sup> From 61% in 2003 to 65% in 2013. (*ibid*)

<sup>72</sup> From 56% in 2003 to 44% in 2013. Interestingly, those who were active users of social media saw their friends in person *more* often (both *ibid*). This is particularly interesting in light of Helliwell and Huang's (2013) finding that “online friends” did not make people any happier and were unlikely to represent any real social capital; the finding may suggest a distinction between having “virtual-only” friends one has never met, and using virtual socialization to help maintain “real-life” social networks.

<sup>73</sup> Statistics Canada 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Franke, interview data.

<sup>75</sup> PRI 2005

<sup>76</sup> Friesen 2013

<sup>77</sup> Franke, interview data

<sup>78</sup> See <http://torontosvitalsigns.ca/>

<sup>79</sup> Scott 2003

<sup>80</sup> Canadian Index of Wellbeing 2012

isolation and loneliness as areas of great social concern, the Vancouver study asked residents about their social connections – in some ways a key prototype or learning opportunity for the TOSC project. The survey included questions about knowing and helping neighbours, diversity within one’s network of friends and associates, and participation in community activities. The results were largely consistent with the trends observed in broader national studies, although presented in a somewhat more pessimistic or “glass half-empty” manner. For example, while two-thirds of Vancouverites found it easy to make new friends -- although those who were recent arrivals in Canada were among those who found it difficult<sup>81</sup>. Overall, the Vancouver study’s usefulness is limited by the absence in it of any reference to Canadian work on social capital and connectedness that existed at the time.

The CIW in-depth community studies include assessments of community vitality in Waterloo region, the Kingston area, and Guelph in Ontario, as well as Wood Buffalo in Alberta and Victoria in British Columbia. As in other studies, the results showed a strong connection between subjective well-being (happiness) and most measures of community vitality such as average number of friends, level of social support and indicators of trust. However, other consistent findings across these studies were even more interesting: for example, while joining and participating in community groups generally made one happier, this was not true for participation “public interest” groups<sup>82</sup>! In the Victoria study, those in precarious employment were found to be more active in community groups than either the traditionally employed or the unemployed – the latter of which was marked by a lower sense of belonging in one’s community<sup>83</sup>.

Canadian cities are beginning to take their own interest in studying and promoting social capital. The Cities of Edmonton and Hamilton, for example, have both launched projects detailing the social assets and barriers existing in particular neighbourhoods – including places to meet, things to do, and attitudes or worries. In Edmonton, the Abundant Communities Initiative was launched by the city to address a perceived crisis of loneliness or social isolation, and to build up the “collective efficacy” of neighbourhoods; starting with a pilot in one neighbourhood in 2013, they expanded the program to three others the following year<sup>84</sup>. The project model was drawn from McKnight’s work on cataloguing the informal, hidden capacities of neighbourhoods in terms of the talents, experiences and interests of residents – in order to imagine new possibilities for group activity and connection.<sup>85</sup> However, no results have been published as of 2015 and it is not clear whether the pilots are still running.

Hamilton by contrast is taking a more general social geography approach to understanding those neighbourhoods perceived to be troubled or undesirable. The studies, which incorporate door-to-door in-person surveys and geographic analysis, have a twin goal: to identify and celebrate strengths as well as to capture the concerns of people living in the area – and transform them into an agenda for action.<sup>86</sup> Hamilton published 3 interim reports on neighbourhood studies in 2014 and the analysis and follow-up are ongoing.

### *What current research in southern Ontario informs the context of the TOSC project?*

Toronto and the surrounding region are the subject of many current research projects that address the twin concerns of rapid geographic and economic change in Canadian cities. While the issues that fall under this umbrella are myriad, including transit, environmental sustainability, and resilience to the effects of climate change, there are a few that specially inform any social capital work going forward. These are economic inequality, precarity and flexibility within the labour market, and the infrastructure of healthy communities.

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<sup>81</sup> Vancouver Foundation 2012

<sup>82</sup> Phillips et al. 2014a,b, Smale 2012

<sup>83</sup> Phillips et al. 2014c

<sup>84</sup> Lawrence 2013.

<sup>85</sup> McKnight and Block 2012

<sup>86</sup> See <http://crunch.mcmaster.ca/projects/hnstudy>

The work of Hulchanski, Walks and others at the University of Toronto on the spatial dimensions of economic equality is foundational. *The Three Cities Within Toronto*, published in 2010 and based on Canadian census data, demonstrated that over the past 40 years mixed-income neighbourhoods have been disappearing from the city<sup>87</sup>. Increasingly, Torontonians live in neighbourhoods that are spatially segregated by income – either in a high-income core surrounding the subway lines, in growing low-income inner suburbs, or in the shrinking number of mixed income neighbourhoods in between. The implications for bridging capital are clear; if growing social capital depends on reaching across differences between people, spatial polarization may make that more and more challenging. In a later paper, Hulchanski further detailed what this means for newcomers to Canada and Toronto: arriving in a time of spatial and economic segregation makes settlement (which itself depends on building social networks) all the more difficult<sup>88</sup>.

Income inequality in Toronto is also the focus of the United Way's Building Opportunity projects, which are based partly on a new survey of Torontonians conducted by EKOS Research (n=2684). The first report on results of this survey, *The Opportunity Equation*, was released in February 2015. It shares with the Toronto Social Capital project an attention to the effect of neighbourhoods, and an emphasis on the relationship between social networks and opportunity – in this case, specifically for youth. The survey questions asked include a measure of general trust (“...would you say that most people in this city can be trusted...?”, with 57% of respondents agreeing), and found that most people surveyed felt they could “make a difference where they live[d].” Given the spatial dimension of inequality explored by both the “Three Cities” work and the United Way, the TOSC project has considerable scope to fill in important details behind these findings.

A second major United Way study stretching beyond the city boundaries of Toronto is *The Precarity Penalty*, released in May 2015. This report is also based on the results of a separate survey, conducted by Leger and named PEPSO for Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (n=4165). The survey included questions on voting, community participation and social isolation. It found that residents of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area who were precariously employed<sup>89</sup> were less likely to vote, more likely to experience social isolation, and *more* likely to volunteer in their communities – but in a much more instrumental way. Precariously-employed people might come to see social involvement in an understandably self-interested way, as primarily networking towards greater economic success. While this fits well with the hope that social capital growth can improve people's situations, there could also be a downside to this “instrumentalization” of social life.

In 2013, the *Toronto Star* published a series of articles on social cohesion and support under the Atkinson Series banner. “Me, You, and Us,” by Michael Valpy, summed up several connected concerns about declining political participation, increasing economic inequality, and a growing sense of social fragmentation and alienation. Valpy suggests that Canadian society is “losing its glue”<sup>90</sup> with, among other things, the disappearance of long-term full-time employment for most working adults. These jobs weren't simply about income, he suggests, but also stability and rootedness in a community, and taking part in the social relations of work (including through unions). The Atkinson articles also detail a growing gap between generations, old and young, how they view each-other and how they participate socially and in politics (with younger people more comfortable online and less likely to vote). The series sums up many of the policy problems currently engaging researchers, as the TOSC project gets ready to launch.

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<sup>87</sup> Hulchanski 2010.

<sup>88</sup> Hulchanski 2014.

<sup>89</sup> The PEPSO survey uses a definition of precarious employment which consists of averaging responses to 10 questions regarding job conditions, scheduling and benefits.

<sup>90</sup> Valpy 2013.

## II. Conclusions

The TOSC project is a partnership among organizations who have come together to conduct a major research project to examine several inter-related processes under the umbrella of social capital. The aim of this survey is to produce a benchmark of the social capital of Toronto residents, which will support and inform initiatives to achieve the vision of an even better Toronto. This vision calls for a Toronto in which residents get along with and support one another, in which they are able to access economic opportunities, and play an active role in the civic and institutional life of the city.

The first phase of the TOSC project included a comprehensive literature review and consultation with experts familiar with the research topics of interest. This report presents a summary of this work. What have we accomplished?

First, we have more firmly situated the TOSC project within the landscape of research, policy change, and action on social capital issues. On the one hand, we now understand how TOSC will be a contribution to an ongoing conversation about diversity, equality and social vitality – part of a larger and lively conversation. On the other, we also understand how TOSC will contribute something new – an empirically-grounded analysis centred on holistic indicators of social capital in a Canadian city.

Second, we have identified the most significant challenges for the research, which relate to inclusiveness and geographical representation. By inclusiveness we mean how to ensure the research includes participation from all parts of the city's population, and therefore captures its considerable diversity. By geography, we mean the challenge of establishing a set of geographic sectors such that our survey adequately samples from all of them, but between which we can make meaningful distinctions – since social capital remains, so powerfully, a space- and place-based process.

The next steps in the TOSC project include the following: a) development of a detailed research design that encompasses the relevant measures of social capital, the methods for data collection and sampling; b) fundraising to collect the necessary resources for Phase 2; and c) development of an outreach strategy to promote the project among relevant stakeholders across the City. The knowledge gained through this process of initial research and consultation will continue to support and inform all of these efforts.

## Appendix A: The Expert Interviews

As part of phase 1 of the project, we spoke with a number of key experts either in the subject area of social capital, or in Toronto-area survey research (including current or recent major research projects). Experts were identified through a review of the social capital literature, with a focus on Canadian authors, and through the Environics research network. Sixteen people were contacted by email with a two-week follow-up as needed, and 12 were eventually interviewed.

Interviews ran between 30-60 minutes and were open-ended, with the following questions to guide the discussion:

- What are the most important topics and issues that social capital research might address?
- What are the most relevant research and activities we should know about in doing our study?
- Who are some other people we should talk to about social capital survey research?
- Do you have any recommendations about study methodology?

The resulting discussions provided important insights regarding the design and focus of the Toronto study. Several interviewees emphasized the challenge of ensuring geographical representation through a single-mode survey of the size envisioned for the TOSC project, and introduced ideas for oversampling areas or communities of interest. We had fruitful discussions with John Helliwell and Richard Johnston on the complex variations on measuring interpersonal trust, a key dimension of our study model.

There were also lessons learned. Some of our interviewees felt that the timing of our conversation came too early in the project development process, though they invited us to recontact them with further points for discussion once the project design is more developed.

The list of experts interviewed includes the following:

1. James Dunn, McMaster University
2. Sandra Franke, Employment and Social Development Canada
3. Milton Friesen, Cardus
4. John Helliwell, University of British Columbia
5. Richard Johnston, University of British Columbia
6. Michelynn Laflèche, United Way Toronto
7. Wayne Lewchuk, McMaster University
8. Kwame McKenzie, Wellesley Foundation
9. John McKnight, Northwestern University
10. Patricia O'Campo, Centre for Research on Inner-City Health, St. Michael's Hospital
11. Myer Siemiatycki, Ryerson University
12. Alan Walks, University of Toronto

Below are a few key quotations representing a few of the insights gained in our discussions:

“as for trust – you want to measure it in several dimensions, hence the wallet questions. You want measures of network size, and network use. We found in our surveys that network size... expresses the extent of communication and whether you feel they support you.” –John Helliwell

“the more you focus on informal associational activities, in general you're moving into a space where the public benefits are diminished... you can look at an association as a group of people who come together for the exclusive benefit of themselves. It's their own mutuality that is the outcome. But there's a continuum of associations, and at one end is the absolutely parochial, inward-looking association, at the other end is an association that has strong internal trust-mechanisms but is also productive of public goods.” –John McKnight

“in the immigration experience, there was one big positive and one big negative. The positive was social support they got from their ethnocommunity, if they were connected, it was off the charts. Expat effect. The decline in social status that most people experience moving to another country was a huge kick in the stomach.” –James Dunn

## Appendix B: Project Prospectus

# Toronto Social Capital Project

*A Toronto's Vital Signs Initiative*

***The Toronto Social Capital Project is a major new research initiative to map the level of social trust and community engagement among residents, and provide a foundation for strengthening the social fabric of the city.***

**What is social capital?** Social capital is the term used to describe the vibrancy of social networks and the extent to which individuals and communities trust and rely upon one another. Social trust is essential for communities to function, for people from different backgrounds to find common ground, and for residents to have access to opportunities that will improve their lives. There is ample evidence that high levels of trust and social connection are not simply “feel good” notions, but key ingredients to making both individuals and communities productive, healthy and safe.

**Why is this important for Toronto?** Toronto is among the most ethnically diverse cities on the planet, and widely recognized as having avoided the ethnic tensions experienced in many other cities. While there is good reason to feel proud about the city’s diversity, previous research suggests social capital is more easily achieved in smaller homogeneous communities (when members share historical, ethnic and cultural ties) than in larger and more diverse metropolitan areas.

In Toronto’s most recent *Vital Signs* report, the Toronto Foundation confirms our city to be among the most liveable cities in the world. At the same time, the annual reports have long been tracking numerous trends that will challenge the city to remain liveable and vibrant, including a fast-growing and aging population, an ever-expanding ethnic diversity, and an increasing division into high and low income neighbourhoods. Other disturbing trends include high youth unemployment, declining social mobility, persistent child poverty and growing public health challenges.

Given these trends, social capital will become even more important to our collective wellbeing. Will we develop the networks and resources needed to address the challenges and maintain our quality of life. The first step is to take stock of our social capital.

**Why we need to measure social capital now?** There are good benchmarks for Toronto’s economic performance, public health, financial security, and infrastructure, but very little evidence about its social capital. This project will address this gap through comprehensive research to document how the city is doing today, how it has changed, and identify areas of success and challenges. Some of the questions that will be answered include:

- To what extent do Torontonians trust one another?
- How often do they feel connected to, and actively engage with, their neighbours, with people outside of their cultural groups, and with community organizations?
- How is this similar or different across the many diverse parts of Toronto, by neighbourhood, ethnic group, socio-economic status and generation?

These questions matter because social trust and engagement are critical to a good quality of life, a healthy population, safe streets, and economic prosperity.

**Toronto Social Capital Project.** This project will provide the public, private, not-for-profit, and philanthropic sectors with the empirical basis for data-driven policies, programs initiatives, and investments that will sustain and strengthen the community’s social capital, social cohesion and subjective well-being, and the benefits that flow from them.

The project will entail a comprehensive survey of the Toronto population to measure social capital using both established indicators from previous research in other jurisdictions as well as new measures tailored to the City. The research will also incorporate relevant measures of people’s circumstances and outcomes (e.g., economic, public health, well-being) to help determine their link to social capital. The

survey will encompass a large sample of Toronto residents (between 4,000 and 5,000) to ensure coverage of the City's diverse population and allow comparisons at a local area level.

The project is being conducted in three phases:

- Phase 1 – Project scoping and stakeholder outreach (January – September 2015)
- Phase 2 – Research design and implementation (October 2015 – September 2016)
- Phase 3 - Public release and community engagement (October 2016 – March 2017)

Phase 3 will involve active engagement with community leaders and organizations across the City to ensure the findings and insights are understood, and to encourage their use in future planning, decision-making and investments.

The Toronto Social Capital Project is a collaborative initiative of six leading civic organizations: the Environics Institute for Survey Research, the Toronto Foundation, the YMCA of Greater Toronto, the City of Toronto, the Metcalf Foundation and Maytree.

**What the study will accomplish.** This study will be the first of its kind in Canada, and will make an important contribution to the future of Toronto in terms of:

- Providing all sectors with a sound empirical basis for reviewing and building policies, initiatives and investments that support and strengthen the City's social capital resources in ways that enhance the broader community;
- Identifying new areas of opportunity for addressing challenges and supporting positive change;
- Raising awareness of the importance and benefits of social trust, reciprocity and community involvement, so these are given a greater priority; and
- Establishing a benchmark against which progress can be measured over time.

**Opportunities for sponsorship.** The project is currently inviting organization in the private, public and non-profit sectors to participate as sponsors. In return for a financial contribution to help cover the research and dissemination costs, sponsors will be publicly recognized and be given the opportunity to participate in the public release and community outreach activities once the study is completed.

**For more information.** Dr. Keith Neuman, Executive Director at the Environics Institute for Survey Research, at [keith.neuman@environics.ca](mailto:keith.neuman@environics.ca) or 416-969-2457.

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