

Public Abstract

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Graduation Term:WS 2007

Department:Rural Sociology

Degree:PhD

Title:How Communication Impacts Network Structure and Access to Community Social Capital

This dissertation concentrates upon an interactional community perspective that focuses upon the networks of common experience within a place (Colclough and Sitaraman 2005). Little empirical research exists about how information and communication (ICT) is affecting the social network structure and the building of social capital in rural communities. Lin's Theory of Social Capital is adapted to theorize how social structure elements of rural networks affect certain network characteristics and access to social resources. Community leaders from ten rural communities were surveyed about their communication during a recent project. Social network analysis (SNA) techniques were utilized to analyze the structure of the networks.

Results indicate that rural networks that have greater and more diverse social structure elements possess more information leaders (greater indegree centrality). Social structure elements include personal assets, information assets, and communication assets. Networks with greater and more diverse social structure elements and more information leaders have more "social bridges" and more "weak ties" for instrumental action. Networks that utilize ICTs (a communication asset) more frequently have a greater number of network components than those that utilize face to face or telephone communication although ICTs do not have a direct affect upon the building of social capital. The multiple network components characterized by the disconnectedness of the network structures may provide evidence that leads to two different conclusions: leaders may be collaborating in smaller dynamic sorts of "working" groups that may transition as projects change or there may be a lack of collaboration regarding rural community projects.