

Housing, social capital and community development in Seoul

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ABSTRACT

The nature of Korea's tenure system and its future development has become an increasingly important aspect of housing policy and community development. A major question being posed is what are the implications of housing tenure differences in social capital for housing (estate) development? Are there differences in levels of social capital between 'homeowners and tenants' as well as 'public rental tenants and private rental tenants'? The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast elements of social capital across different housing tenures in the Seoul Metropolitan Region. Using the results of 260 questionnaires and we assess three commonly recognized elements of social capital: social trust, norms and networks. Respondents from across different tenure types reported differences in feelings of acceptance in the neighborhood, and involvement in formal and informal networks. This study found that some of the elements of social capital differed significantly between housing tenures and that housing tenure was also relevant to negative perceptions of socio-economic diversity in the area. This article concludes housing tenure is relevant to the development of neighborhood-based social capital and that this needs to be considered by those involved in implementing housing (estate) development and sustainable communities in Seoul.

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Introduction

There was general agreement that there was a need for high level of housing production, in order to eliminate shortage, to remove the poor houses and to provide for the rapidly growing number of households in urban Korea. In fact, there has been a very high housing output. Most low-density residential areas in the 1960s and 1970s gave way to high-density development. This marked the beginning of a boom in high-rise apartment construction in Seoul Metropolitan Region.

Since 1980s, this visible signs of high-rise development might be inevitable for large cities given that available land scare and very expensive and that escalating housing prices, coupled with a very population density. Massive high-rise apartments in other recently developed new towns or newly developing areas seem to dominate the urban landscape. Although many of the apartment estates with large, tall towers touted the concept of a self-contained community and attempted to introduce a human scale in their design, their gigantic physical size alone was not conducive to such ideals. Consequently, many of the traditional neighborhood characteristics that had been cherished over the years have either disappeared altogether or are only sporadically practiced (Kim and Choe, 1997).

Since the 1970s the tenure norms also have changed substantially. Tenure refers to whether occupants own or rent their home.

The nature of Korea's tenure system and its future development has become an increasingly important aspect of housing policy. This is mainly because of the increasing attention given to the question of equity in housing. In Korea, a deep social significance is attached to owning one's own house. However, a renter in Korea suffers many inconveniences because of the absence of well-defined laws and regulations dealing with the landlord–tenant relationship.

There is evidence that housing is an important dimension of people's lives and that there may be an association between housing tenure and social capital (Putman, 1998). Much of the pertinent research has focused on comparing homeowners with other tenure types, and explores their neighborhood connections. In this study, a major question being posed is: what are the implications of housing tenure differences in social capital for housing (estate) development?

The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast elements of social capital across different housing tenures in the Seoul Metropolitan Region (SMR). Using the results of 260 questionnaires and we assess perceptions of conflict across housing tenures and between socio-economic groups, feelings of acceptance and belonging in the local neighborhood, and levels of involvement in local formal and informal networks.

Social capital and housing tenure

Housing policies can improve social connectedness directly through enabling households to 'put down roots' in an area so that

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they can form social relationships based on place and develop a sense of belonging and attachment to neighborhood, if they wish. This could include assistance with home purchase and rental arrangements enabling tenants to experience sufficient control over their circumstances so that they can stay in place.

Much of the pertinent research has focused on comparing homeowners with other tenure types, and explores their neighborhood connections. Social capital has been a relatively recent development in theory and research. Social capital has several adolescent characteristics: it is neither tidy nor mature. Putman (2000, p. 19), who is arguably its leading proponent, suggests that 'social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. He conceives of social capital as a resource that evolves at the community level and is a distinctly social feature that is reflected in the structure of social relationships. Putnam focuses on the capacity of communities to cooperate for mutual benefit and argues that State intervention can be detrimental to the development of social capital (Putnam, 1995).

Bourdieu sees capital in three guises: as economic capital, as cultural capital, and as social capital. For him, social capital is "made or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). Bourdieu illustrates social capital as a form of capital possessed by members of a social network or group. Through connections among the members, the capital can be used by members as credits. In this sense, social capital is a collective asset endowing members with credits, and it is maintained and reinforced for its utility when members continue to invest in the relationship. In terms of Bourdieu's conception of social capital, he focuses on the way in which an individual's housing tenure, which is also socio-economically determined, may affect their experience of neighborhood-related social capital.

There has been considerable debate about how to operationalize and measure social capital (Lochner et al., 1999; Paldam, 2000; Macinko and Starfield, 2001; Stone and Hughes, 2002; Harpham et al., 2002). With respect to the social capital within neighborhoods, the vast majority of studies have used solely quantitative measures of social capital. Within the quantitative tradition there have also been considerable differences in the actual measures of social capital used, with a wide variety of measures spanning voting behavior, voluntary group membership, trust and informal socializing, through to more complex consideration of social networks and the resources available through them.

This study represented a response to Putman's call to explore the various dimensions of social capital. Specifically, the study objectives were to identify and contrast elements of social capital across different housing tenures in Seoul. Social capital is now deployed as a concept in many different fields. There are reliable data and evidence that housing is an important dimension of people's lives and that there may be an association between housing tenure, community development, and social capital (Hugman and Sotiri, 2001). There have been various attempts to pinpoint the use of social capital in terms of housing tenure and community development.

Much of relevant research found that homeowners tend to be more involved in their local community networks (Ditkovsky and van Vliet, 1984; Winter, 1994; Hiscock, 2001) and those in owner-occupied properties had a stronger sense of neighborhood cohesion than those in social rented properties (Macintyre and Ellaway, 1999; Hiscock, 2001; Winter, 1994; DiPasquale and Glaeser, 1999). Some research has focused on comparing homeowners with other tenure types, and explores their neighborhood connections. Rohe & Basolo's work has strongly shaped that homeownership creates incentives to improve one's local area, as the value of the home

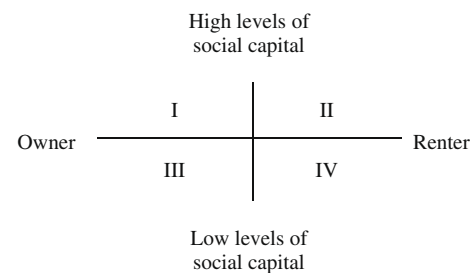


Fig. 1. Levels of social capital by tenure types.

is tied to the quality of the community (Rohe and Basolo, 1997). It is also argued that homeownership provides a barrier to geographical mobility (Glaeser and Sacerdote, 2000; Reingold et al., 2001). Homeowners felt more part of their neighborhood community than compared to social housing tenants in UK (Hiscock, 2001).

However, according to Ziersch and Arthurson (2007), overall the findings indicate that housing tenure is pertinent to the development of neighborhood-related social capital. Private rental tenants fared worst on a number of the social capital indicators. They argued that the development of social capital varies between public and community housing tenants. In addition, some differences in social networks have been found amongst public housing tenants, depending on whether their housing is clustered together or scattered (interdispersed) more widely amongst homeowners.

In a comparison study of scattered site and clustered public housing located within one wealthy suburb in Washington, DC, Kleit (2001) found that residents interdispersed amongst homeowners had broader social networks than clustered residents, and that these networks extended beyond the immediate neighborhood. Alternatively, where public residents were clustered together they were more reliant on those who lived close by.

There are a few studies on the issue of social capital in terms of housing tenure in Seoul. Not much research has focused on comparing homeowners with other tenure types, and explores their neighborhood connections on social capital and housing tenure in Korea. Some studies in Korea suggest that the estates for homeowners tend to be more involved in their local community networks such as joining local organizations working to solve local problems and in local social interactions (Chun, 2004; Seo, 2007; Chung, 2006). Chun (2004) observed that in terms of demographic characteristics, people with children are likely to participate more in the local community than are those without children.

This study explores the experiences of residents across a range of housing tenures (homeowner, private rental, long-term public rental, 5-year public rental) living in a socio-economically diverse Seoul neighborhood. This study provides some insight into 'the differences in levels of social capital between non-homeowning tenures'.

From the literature, it is possible to identify a number of proposed conceptual component elements that individually and together are believed to constitute social capital. This can be conceptualized in terms of networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits. As shown in Fig. 1, different housing tenures vary in the levels of social capital by tenure group.

Housing development and social capital

Mass apartment construction

In urban areas, the maze of narrow alleys lined by single or two-storey houses, which characterize the old residential areas, was

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