

BONDS, BRIDGES AND LINKS:
SOCIAL CAPITAL CREATION AND PLACE-BASED MOBILITY

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Abstract

Local community development organizations are uniquely positioned to leverage the place-based facets of social capital. Distressed communities often turn to local organizations for help in reducing barriers to development, but the complexity of place-based challenges (income inequality, generational poverty) increasingly stand in the way. Extensive in-depth interviews suggest local organizations are leveraging social capital -- trust, norms, and networks -- to improve programs. It is used to bridge *across* heterogeneous groups and individuals, and linking organizations and policymakers is increasingly vital. Bonding networks *within* communities and organizations is less important, but the data suggest both types are bounded by place and socioeconomic context. (JEL codes: R58 (primary), I31, O35, O02, Z13).

I

Introduction

The idea that economic mobility is closely tied to a person's home neighborhood (Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Kline, P., & Saez, E. 2014) has spurred academic and practitioner interest in place-based initiatives to move families out of poverty and into the middle class. A strategy growing in prominence is the use of social capital—or the leverage of local social networks, shared norms, and trust. Existing literature suggests nonprofit community development organizations (CDOs), including community development corporations (CDCs), may be key in the effective use of place-based social capital strategies for community revitalization. CDO is an umbrella term for an array of community entities working to improve neighborhood-level socioeconomic outcomes. Programming by CDOs typically addresses poverty through initiatives targeting deteriorated housing, joblessness, welfare dependency, higher crime rates, higher school-dropout rates, health disparities, and disinvestment of private capital.

Community Development Corporations and Organizations

CDCs, an important subset of CDOs, are illustrative of the role CDOs writ large can play in improving local economic outcomes. CDCs emerged in the early 1960s as activist groups formed in response to redlining, urban renewal, and urban riots (Stoutland, S. E. 1999). They gained federal support in 1966, when Senator Robert Kennedy took a tour of a predominantly African American community in Brooklyn, New York. Like so many communities at the time, Brooklyn had gone through a period of community unrest linked to poverty, race, and political exclusion (Carlson, D., & Martinez, A. 1988).

In response to the experience, Kennedy and his staff proposed a strategy which combined resident self-help with community access to external capital structures. Thus the first CDC was

created – Brooklyn’s Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation. Brooklyn’s early successes with the CDC model quickly came to national attention (Perry, S. 1973). In the south, then Governor Terry Sanford created a source of state support available for CDC organizations and other nonprofits through the North Carolina Fund. Unusual for its time, the Fund combined federal and private revenue streams to support poverty reduction work for five years. Programs and individuals originally involved in the North Carolina Fund would later become features of the state’s community economic development industry (Korstad, R. R., Leloudis, J. L., & Barnes B. E. 2010).

By the late 1980’s, North Carolina’s CDCs had formed as a robust sector, gaining recognition for their efforts in affordable housing, support for local entrepreneurs, and the creation of other programs designed to stabilize the economy of neighborhoods. In 1999 the state government began appropriating \$4.5 million annually in general operating support for CDCs, a notable level of public support. With the arrival of stable public operational support, North Carolina’s CDC industry thrived and fostered a growing network of other CDOs with similar goals.

CDCs specifically, and CDOs more broadly, are usually nonprofit corporations designated as 501(c)(3) charitable entities. While a great deal of variation exists, CDCs are clearly distinguished from other CDOs by embracing all three of the components below, all of which were necessary to qualify for state CDC funding:

1. Localism: North Carolina’s CDCs are usually engaged in place-based strategies. The scale of place may be a single neighborhood or a cluster of rural counties, but the work centers on the notion that “active community participation must take place within geographic areas. (R. A., & Jones, S. R. (2009).” The nption is based on the belief that community economic

empowerment depends on exerting ongoing, sustainable influence over local decision making.

2. Diverse Programming: Although the mission of CDCs limits them to a particular geography, their strategy requires holistic thinking about how to sustainably develop the community's social, physical, economic, and institutional structures (Leiterman, M., & Stillman, J. 1993, Perry, S. E. 1987). This means CDCs have a mix of programs that broadly promote local development goals. While the mix of programming used by individual CDCs varies, the goal of such activities is substantially similar across organizations: creating sustainable economic development. As an example, a CDC might manage affordable rental housing and at the same time operate a small business incubator so people have the income they need to pay their rent.
3. Community Control: Community participation in CDC operations is a core value. Measuring this is difficult, but scholars tend to agree resident membership on the board of directors is a primary indicator (Perry, S. E. 1999). As a matter of practice, CDCs are expected to have at least a third of their board members come from the communities they serve, a practice originating with funding sources made available under the Equal Opportunity Act of 1964.

CDCs continued to grow in size and sophistication throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. In North Carolina, most were concentrated in urban areas, but rural organizations were growing quickly. The growth lost significant momentum during the 2008 recession. This reversal was compounded in 2013 when the state government ceased appropriations for CDC operating support. Interviewees suggested loss of state support was further exacerbated by a long-term

decline in private philanthropic support for community economic development, reflective of broader national level trends.

Until support declined, the funding structure for general operations incentivized social capital activity. Through community board representation directly and similar approaches more generally, CDCs were predisposed to activities that promoted local trust, norms, and social networks. Our research offers a compelling lens to view the effects of social capital on neighborhood economic improvements through both CDCs and a larger subset of CDOs.

From fostering small-firm entrepreneurship by infusing distressed communities with affordable capital to promoting sustainable home ownership, these organizations seek to promote improvements in the economic fabric of the neighborhoods they serve. Interviewees perceived that their decline since 2008 runs counter to a growing need for strategies that enable effective community development to increase economic mobility for residents in low-income communities. They pointed to social capital development, in particular, as an important strategy to support economic mobility.

This research, like the extant literature, is exploratory. CDOs vary widely in terms of size, activities and programmatic goals, making it difficult to conduct “apples to apples” comparisons. Through semi-structured interviews, we hope to provide preliminary insight into this topic to inform further research. As organizations designed to draw on community networks, CDOs offer compelling lessons in institutional use of social capital for economic development. Our research question is, to what extent do CDOs leverage social capital at the organizational and individual level? Specifically, we focus on the different types of social capital used in the context of scholarly narratives around the place-linked nature of the concept. In addition, we look at both

CDC's and other CDO's to determine whether the focus on both bonding and bridging capital through board composition changes the way the organizations view social capital in their work.

II

Literature Review

While first popularized with Putnam's idea of American social capital (Putnam, R. D. (2000), research has long hinted at the importance of shared trust, norms, and networks in creating better community-level outcomes (Gouldner, A. W. 1960). Although the direction of the relationship is often debated, quantitative analyses strongly support the idea of a connection between social network diversity and economic opportunity (Eagle, N., Macy, M., & Claxton, R. 2010). Here, we consider social capital as a CDO output that enables them to offer better services resulting in tangible economic benefits.

Some of the difficulty in assessing social capital effects is the concept can apply to interactions occurring at both the individual and organizational levels (Rohe, W. M. 2004). Additionally, the types of interactions thought to foster social capital are both formal and informal, from small-business networking opportunities crafted by local chambers of commerce to meetings between affordable-housing tenants (Bourdieu, P. 1985). In line with Putnam, we thus define social capital broadly as "features of social organizations, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions." (Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R., & Nanyetti, R. Y. 1993, p.167, Agnitsch, K., Flora, J., & Ryan, V. 2006).

This definition is appropriate because it encompasses the multifaceted nature of social interactions that might be used by CDOs and their clients. Social relationships between and among both community members and local businesses have an innate economic dimension. The

leverage of these relationships by CDOs enables businesses and individuals to “invest” their social capital and expect positive returns. One interviewee summed up the community economic development argument for social capital by describing the idea as “economic and cultural capital in which social networks are essential; transactions are used to provide reciprocity, trust, and cooperation; and, market stakeholders produce goods and services not mainly for themselves but for a common good of all.”

The literature suggests there are two primary types of social capital: bridging and bonding (Coffé, H., & Geys, B. 2007, Patulny, R., & Svendsen, G. 2007, Woolcock, M. 2010). Bridging capital strengthens networks of trust across groups or individuals with heterogeneous characteristics. For community development, bridging capital is vital because it can be used as a tool to connect low-income neighborhoods to economic opportunities and help them avoid social isolation. In contrast, bonding capital strengthens networks of trust within homogeneous groups or clusters of individuals. There is some debate about what type of social capital may be more likely to create desirable development outcomes. Some research suggests bridging capital is more likely to promote positive development outcomes compared to bonding capital (Knudsen, B., Florida, R., & Rousseau, D. 2005). But other lines of inquiry have found positive economic and community development outcomes associated with both categories (Crowe, J. A. 2007). Case studies of CDOs have argued that bonding social capital strategies may be especially useful in building place-linked networks within distressed communities (Mendell, J. 2010). Similarly, bonding strategies may be critical for CDO clients because they can be used to promote economic mobility by reducing poverty, increasing home ownership, and encouraging civic action (Ansari, S., Munir, K., & Gregg, T. 2012, Brisson, D. & Usher, C. 2007, Larson, L., Harlan, S., Bolin, B., Hackett, E., Hope, D., Kirby, A., . . . Wolf, S. 2004).

In general, there is relatively little research on how community development organizations use social capital in their operations or programs. Critics of social capital scholarship have argued community development analyses of social capital are incomplete because they do not fully consider linkages between local power structures and economic capital (DeFilippis, J. 2001). To partially address this concern, our research assesses a specialized subcategory of bridging relationships: linking capital. This type of social capital represents network associations between organizations or individuals that have disparate levels of influence or power (Woolcock, M., & Sweetser, A. T. 2002). In other words, linking capital reflects the notion that networks are not just about getting by or connecting with organizations, but gaining access to people and institutions, including government, that function in a higher social stratum of power, social status and wealth. Scholars have suggested linking capital may enhance the relative effectiveness of community developers because it can give access to additional resources, from influence to funding, that might not otherwise be available (Briggs, X., Mueller E., & Sullivan, M. 1997).

CDO Use of Social Capital for Community Economic Development

Little research is available on whether or how CDOs use social capital in operations and programming. The few studies which do exist focus on levels of social capital, but not how that capital is leveraged. When comparing Atlanta's CDC neighborhoods to non-CDC neighborhoods, for example, researchers found that communities with CDCs do not always have higher social capital levels (Knotts, H. 2006). Although Atlanta's CDC neighborhoods were more likely to report higher levels of trust (both among residents and in community institutions), they were less likely to score well on other social capital dimensions like civic engagement. Similarly, social capital levels have been shown to have minimal effects on other financial outcomes like increased rates of mortgage lending (Holyoke, T. T. 2004).

In comparison to such findings, a few scholars have found that CDCs play a critical role in fostering collective action and that they have high utilization rates of social capital stocks. For example, case study research of CDCs in California and Maine has found these types of institutions are well positioned to improve neighborhood economic outcomes by using bridging capital to manage intersectoral partnerships (Squazzoni, F. 2009). More recently, case studies by the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond have chronicled a wide array of benefits that can accrue to community-development finance institutions when they engage in organizational forms of social capital (Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond 2018).

One major limitation of the existing literature is it tends to analyze community development use of social capital through case studies involving single organizations or programs or via quantitative analyses of development activity within a single region or municipal area (Briggs, X. 2010, Mitchell-Brown, J. 2013). Our research adds to the literature by presenting a statewide view of the extent to which CDOs, with emphasis on CDC's, engage in strategies that draw on social capital networks. By including a larger variety of organizations in our interview dataset, our findings may be more generalizable than past research.

Place-Based Variation in Effectiveness of Social Capital Strategies

“Place matters” is an oft-repeated theme throughout the development literature (LaMore, R.L., Link, T., & Blackmond, T. 2006). There is a strong consensus that geography and institutional history can influence a community's social and economic destiny. Corollary arguments have been made that link place to a variety of patterns in community and economic development (see, for example, Rupasingha, A., Goetz, S. J., & Freshwater, D. 2000). Evidence of linkages between place and multiple dimensions of economic mobility also now exists (Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., Hendren, N., Jones, M. R., & Porter, S. R. 2018). Research has chronicled how social capital levels

seem to vary at the national (Knack, S., & Keefer, P. 1997), regional (Staber, U. 2007) and local levels (Casey, T., & Christ, K. 2005, Curley, A. M. 2010). Social capital strategies used by CDOs may be place linked. Because they work primarily at a local neighborhood level, CDOs may be uniquely equipped to make use of social capital.

An awareness of place—especially through an urban/rural lens—is critical for the effective use of social capital strategies by community developers (Krumholz, N., Keating, W., Star, P., & Chupp, M. 2006, Silverman, R. 2001). The sociology literature has frequently made distinctions between urban communities dominated by heterogeneous social ties and rural areas characterized by homogeneous social ties (Beggs, J. J., Haines, V. A., & Hulbert, J. S. 1996). Some research suggests urban areas should have higher levels of social capital stocks compared to rural areas (Lannoo, S., Verhaeghe, P. P., Vandeputte, B., & Devos, C. 2012). But others, including Putnam, argue urban areas are more likely to have lower levels of interpersonal trust and less capacity to solve collective action problems (Putnam, R. D. 2007). Some have argued prosperous rural communities have a high degree of civic and social activity, likening it so social glue for areas with less population density (Mencken, F. C., Bader, C., & Polson, E. C. 2006, Godoy, R., Reyes-Garcia, V., Huanca, T., Leonard, W. R., Olvera, R. G., Bauchet, J., & Seyfreid, C. 2007).

However, because of geographic distance, beneficiaries of rural community development may be less likely to interact with each other (Wilkinson, R. G., & Pickett, K. E. 2009). Rural residents may instead seek connections outside of their local area (Goudy, Willis J. 1990). In practice, such behavior tends to leave rural low-income and minority residents with fewer opportunities to participate in meaningful local social networks (Stinner, W. F., Van Loon, M., Chung, S.-W., & Byun, Y. 1990). At the same time, clients in urban areas may have many, but often weak, social ties (Granovetter, M. S. 1973). Although urban areas can serve as social capital engines

because they contain diverse individuals who are likely to connect frequently, it could be difficult for development organizations to leverage these weak connections.

Mechanisms of Action for CDO Use of Social Capital Strategies

There has been limited theory-building on the question of why and how CDOs' use of social capital strategies might enhance programmatic outcomes. However, by drawing on literature concerning connections between community economic development and local social capital levels, several theoretical mechanisms of action emerge. Social capital may enable CDOs so have more interactions with local governments. Because government institutions play a key role in social capital formation and set the "rules of the game" for solving collective action problems, bridging and linking capital activities could improve organizational capacity and help CDOs achieve their strategic goals (Skocpol, T., & Fiorina, M. P. 1999, Ostrom, E. 2000). As public financing of community development work continues to decline, CDOs use of use of social capital networks to strengthen ties to both public institutions generally and individual policymakers specifically may be especially important (Thomson, D. E., & Etienne, H. 2017).

While the type of programming used by individual CDOs varies, the goal of such activities is substantially similar across organizations: creating sustainable economic development (Glicksman, A., Ring, L.N., Gray, R.,Cohen, R. B. 2015). To the extent these programs seek to help clients realize their full economic potential, the economic development literature suggests some additional reasons for the effectiveness of community-based social capital strategies (Feldman, M., Hadjimichael, T., Lanahan, L., & Kemeny, T. 2016). Of note, programmatic activities in the community development realm are frequently aimed at improving the human capital of clients. Because human and social capital are strongly intertwined, programs that increase the education or financial knowledge of community members also improve the strength of local social networks

(Teachman, J. D., Paasch, K., & Carver, K. 1997). Human capital theory suggests that, by encouraging formal and informal participation in civil society, community members may be better able to build their financial and educational resources (Nie, N. H., & Verba, S. 1987).

III

Methodology

Meta-analyses have shown that social capital's wide array of operationalizations and definitions have led to little consensus on the best methodological practices for studying the concept (Van Deth, J. 2003). As mentioned earlier, some literature notes qualitative data collection in this area often suffers from a lack of depth because it rarely considers the bonding, bridging, or especially the sub-category of linking, typology of social capital. In response, we used semi-structured-interviews to ask respondents consistently about these categories of social capital use. This is consistent with other literature which explores how community organizations draw on networks, norms, and trust relationships to promote sustainable development (Dale, A., & Newman, L. 2010). Like other work that seeks to explore community power structures and political regimes, ours include interviewees broadly representative of a cohort of current and former leaders across the public and nonprofit spectra (Stone, C. N. 1993).

Research that uses single-state data sets is subject to perennial concerns about generalizability. Our focus on North Carolina is designed to ensure that respondents share a similar understanding of community development institutions. And as noted earlier, the state's historical financial incentives for community involvement in these types of institutions provide a compelling context for social capital research. Our approach is consistent with literature that demonstrates single-state studies are valid research designs in these types of analyses (Nicholson-Crotty, S., & Meier, K. J. 2002). Additionally, literature on the study of community

leaders has shown the methodology is appropriate because it facilitates a wide range of contextual variables than would otherwise be obtainable through quantitative methodologies (Bryman, A. 2004, Conger, J. A. 1998). Our findings speak to the use of social capital by CDOs in a way that is not specific to any single state.

To develop our list of interview respondents, we first constructed a list of *thought leaders*. Thought leaders are individuals who were involved with North Carolina institutions that have been integral to state-level support of CDO work. Next, we included *practitioner leaders*, those whom thought leaders identified as being involved with CDOs throughout the state. This snowball approach is consistent with established research methods for interviewing community leadership (Bonjean, C. M., & Olson, D. M. 1964, Purdue, D. 2005, Robinson, O. C. 2014). In total, 101 potential interviewees were identified. The authors attempted to contact each potential respondent, following up multiple times where necessary.

Two question templates were created, one for each group of interviewees. Table 1, in the Analysis and Findings section, highlights the different types of organizations included in the dataset and the social capital method(s) discussed by the respondents during the interview process. Each template was designed to fit the knowledge area and experience of the targeted leadership group. For thought leaders, interview questions focused on defining and discussing different types of social capital use in a community economic development context. The question list was crafted to gather information from thought leaders' high degree of institutional knowledge and intersectional experience in the state's community development networks.

For practitioner leaders, a separate list of questions was designed to create conversations around whether the interviewee's organization engaged in programming that leveraged social capital. Additionally, questions were asked to engage practitioners in discussions around whether

social capital had any role in how their organization measured success. Interviews with practitioners were designed to assess individual-level and organizational-level use of social capital strategies “on the ground” in everyday community-development work.

The nature of programmatic work conducted by CDCs specifically (due to the expectation of community members actively being involved on boards) and CDOs more broadly predisposes them to be located in urban areas. Because our lens of analysis includes leaders representing statewide organizations, many of them are located near North Carolina's capital of Raleigh. But while the location of respondents is clustered, figures 1 through 3 illustrate there is variation across represented organizations in terms of socioeconomic context. Levels of aggregate social capital, income, and economic mobility vary even within the tight geographic clusters of interviewees.

FIGURE 1

Respondent Organization Locations and Social Capital Levels

Figure Explanation: Social capital index scores for each county, normalized and displayed in terms of how many standard deviations the county is from the state’s mean level of social capital. Values can theoretically range from a maximum of +3 standard deviations above the mean to a minimum of -3 standard deviations below the mean. Values incorporate individual, associational, and civic-participation operationalizations of social capital (Rupasingha, A., Goetz, S. J., & Freshwater, D. 2006, updated 2014).

FIGURE 2

Respondent Organization Locations and Household Income

Figure Explanation: Median levels of household income for each county in 2017.

Because practitioner leaders tended to come from organizations in urban areas, only about half of respondents come from counties with median incomes below the state median of \$50,320.

United States Census Bureau. Estimated median household income in the past 12 months from 2013–2017. American Community Survey.

FIGURE 3

Respondent Organization Locations and Economic Mobility

Figure Explanation: Net percentage gain (or loss) to an individual's income at age 26 from residing one year or more in the county during childhood, transformed to show the difference between households at the 75th percentile of the income distribution minus individuals living in households at the 25th percentile of income distribution (Chetty, R., & Hendren, N. 2018).

Ultimately 7 statewide thought leaders and 15 community development practitioners were interviewed in February and March 2019. Each interview lasted between one and two hours. Interview sessions included at least one primary interviewer, but in most cases multiple researchers were present taking simultaneous notes. Each interview was transcribed with the permission of the respondent. Interview notes and transcripts were later compared and coded to ensure reliability. Our results outline common themes identified by respondents. To be included

as a primary finding, more than half of respondents must have addressed or identified the theme as a core component of social capital use by CDOs.

The results of the interview process demonstrated how complex and intricate the use of social capital is by CDOs. The data clearly showed respondents tended to talk about use of social capital through different “pathways.” By pathways we refer to the tendency of social capital concepts to be applied simultaneously at many different levels. In interviews, respondents were encouraged to be clear on what level, type, and structure pathway they were discussing. By using this consistent framework across respondents, we were better able to aggregate what might otherwise be very disparate discussions.

FIGURE 4

Discussion Pathways Framework for Social Capital Interactions

For example, in this framework, an organization may use programming to develop linking social capital through formal networks. This is exemplified by one respondent, who described her organization’s efforts to bring representatives from banks into community gatherings so they could form relationships and share information with residents. Other respondents used different pathways with different types of social capital building. For example, one leader in affordable housing described pursuit of individual-level bonding capital through informal networks. This same pathway was used by a second respondent for a completely different programmatic area. They described the organization’s efforts to ensure continued care of rehabilitated neighborhoods through a garden-of-the-month club, more of a traditional bonding/bridging approach.

IV

Analysis and Findings

While each leader had a clear conception of what it meant to be successful, there were few standard rubrics or quantitative outcome measures. In general, respondents tended to measure success by whether they believed the organization was achieving its primary mission. Consistent with the wide array of organization types included in the dataset, leaders tended to view success as outcomes tied to the specific programmatic strategies being deployed. Perceptions of success tended to fall into two primary categories. First, output measures were frequently cited by respondents. For example, a leader engaged in creating affordable homeownership opportunities defined success as the number of homeowners created. Though these types of success measures were widely discussed, respondents also noted they were insufficient to gauge impact. Second, some respondents viewed success through the lens of organizational sustainability and the ability to leverage and establish relationships with other organizations. This is noteworthy because research tends to view social capital as a method for community developers to better achieve their goals. But in many cases, our data suggest the creation of organizational relationships is a measure of success in and of itself.

As we explore in the next section, leaders tended to frame strategies for mission success in ways that almost universally emphasized bridging social capital, especially the linking sub-form. However, there was a great deal of variation, influenced by programmatic scope and targeted audience. For one practitioner leader, success clearly using linking capital took the form of connecting community institutions to external resources: “We nail [developing bonding relationships] down the line, depending on what it is. You have churches that need relationships with financial institutions.” Another leader pointed to a CDO that was able to create a

relationship with a local business which in turn enabled employment for young community members, an approach that is more difficult to classify.

Emphasis on Bridging vs. Linking Social Capital Interactions Across all CDOs, including CDCs

Across all respondents there was a strong consensus that bridging/linking social capital activities are an integral component to community development work. For example, one leader commented that they received a \$1,500 grant from a city government to establish a community garden, a linking connection. Though the garden was not ultimately a programmatic success, the CDO considered the project a victory because it built social networks across various socially equal neighborhood groups, more bridging.

At an individual level, social networking activities were frequently a mechanism that connected clients with potential employers or community bankers, an individual form of linking. With individual connections, leaders are also linking organizations. Nearly all respondents expressed the significance of using social networks to build a connection with policymakers and funders. One respondent even stated, “individual relationships with policymakers are the most important.” As we later explore, linking social capital may operate as a resource that allows community developers a path to secure limited financial resources.

Leaders frequently mentioned the importance of cementing organizational relationships with local finance institutions and key public-sector agencies (e.g., police departments) as critical to ensuring their activities were accepted by a community’s power structure. In particular, practitioner leaders indicated being viewed as “nonthreatening” by local partners was key. Respondents expressed that being seen as an organizational ally and partner by community institutions enabled the organizations to act as consensus-building conduits.

Our data on the importance of organization-level relationships, especially for linking capital, is consistent with literature suggesting successful community organizations find ways to become embedded in local power structures. To the extent CDCs are able to be seen as partners by local development regimes, they are likely to achieve greater sustainability. However, many interviewees indicated being visible to local governments is becoming increasingly difficult. For example, CDC boards, by design, often consist of leaders who are respected within narrow (bonding) social networks but are not necessarily prominent in the community at large.

Bonding Social Capital Not a Focus, May Develop More Organically

As Table 1 shows, most categories of respondents tended to deemphasize the importance of activities related to bonding social capital. This finding is unusual, especially with our emphasis on CDCs. Literature suggests the organizational structure of CDCs, by directly sharing power with the community being served, would predispose them to a focus on bonding capital. For example, despite the common practice of having community residents on the board, no practitioner leader described use of these board members to foster bonding capital in the community. Even when asked directly about building relationships within the community, respondent examples tended to shift into a focus on external relationships. In one case, a practitioner commented that integrating individuals into outside community networks was key to ensuring (internal) neighborhood economic success. Such comments imply a perception that social network activity is only valuable when it creates external relationships, a surprising result for the specialized, internal member-focused CDC community.

TABLE 1: Emphasized Social Capital Methods by Organization Type

To be clear, interviewees did give examples of bonding network development. But these cases often suggested social capital growth in ways that were not intentionally fostered by the CDC. One respondent stated their organization sought to develop support networks because “...when people are allowed to interact with each other and understand they are not in their position alone, it becomes empowering.” In another case, an organization sought to rehabilitate and employ former convicts while building affordable housing. Over time, these employees were able to develop stronger trust relationships within their community. The respondent noted stronger trust reciprocity as key to reintegrating program beneficiaries, but also expressed that this outcome tended to happen on its own.

There is one exception to our finding that bonding capital tends to be less emphasized by CDOs. We found respondents involved in small business or entrepreneurship were somewhat unique in that they did place an intentional focus on bonding relationships. For example, by bringing business interests together and establishing minority business coalitions, multiple leaders talked about wanting to build place-based entrepreneurial networks.

Declining CDO Financial Capacity Causes Reliance on Linking Capital

Research has long demonstrated funding is a core predictor of CDO programmatic success (Gittell, R., & Wilder, M. 1999, Glickman, N. J., & Servon, L. J. 1998). Several respondent practitioner leaders indicated their organization primarily used social capital to secure funding and increase organizational capacity. For the many CDOs facing endemic funding constraints, *programmatic use* of social capital was secondary to using trust and networks to *gain resources*. One leader embodied this theme by stating “even if we have relationships and partners, it still does not cover our operational expenses.” While talking about recent funding

reductions, one leader noted it was primarily their relationships with policymakers that enabled the CDO to continue operations.

Beyond leverage of linking capital to capture traditional funding streams, respondents frequently indicated they were forced to find other creative ways to leverage social capital for operational support. One respondent described the state's CDC community as "hanging on by a thread," which created a need to leverage both community networks (for volunteers) and the personal networks of well-connected board members (for fundraising). The primacy of leveraging networks for funding is consistent with the decline of public financial support for CDOs in general (Bratt, R. G., & Rohe, W. M. 2007). While creative uses of social capital can help support program expenses, there are few avenues to cover operating expenses in the absence of public funding. Ultimately, an overall lack of organizational capacity restricts the use of more meaningful and nuanced strategies. As one practitioner leader noted: "We need to be [organizing], but we don't have enough staff to do that....as we get more dollars in the door, then we can do all those things."

Even when linking capital is used successfully to secure more resources, there is a need for caution. The types of networks created by linking capital in this area may not necessarily promote long-term sustainability. Of note, some respondents emphasized the social networks created between community developers and funders are often symbolic or transactional -- it can be difficult to create, as one respondent put it, a meaningful "intersection of values." Policymakers were perceived as having low awareness of the effectiveness of CDOs. For that reason, leaders generally reported mixed success in being able to secure prolonged commitments.

When CDC leaders reported success in securing external funding, they often described relationships unique to individuals. Many respondents noted that continued funding often relied

on personal relationships between local leaders and policymakers or grant funders. Interviewees gave examples of organizations that were led or founded by charismatic individuals who use social networking to help their CDCs grow and thrive through these individual relationships. Perhaps this is easier given the focus of CDC boards including community members. But while these founders were key to bridging the gap between community needs and resources, the funding streams declined (or ceased completely) upon their retirement.

When linking social capital networks are not institutionalized, but are instead concentrated within a small cadre of local leaders, leveraging these relationships over the long term becomes difficult. To the extent historical funding success has relied on relationships forged by individual community development leaders who come from the community being served, organizational sustainability should be a concern. Maintaining individual linking capital relationships by transferring them to the next generation of board members and executive management is, at best, a difficult proposition.

Social Capital is Partially Place-Based and Determined by Geography

Extant literature on the place-linked nature of social capital suggests networks, trust, and shared norms operate differently across geography. Tables 1 and 2 show our data concur, suggesting CDOs use different methods to promote and harness social capital networks based on geographic location and local level socioeconomic needs.

TABLE 2

Emphasized Levels and Definition Components of Social Capital

Thus, CDOs, and CDCs in particular, may ultimately be in a unique position to leverage social capital strategies in part because of their local approach and understanding of existing

development barriers. The economic needs of communities served by these organizations are not static, and interviewees often noted that use of social capital networks enables them to be responsive and adaptive to changing community needs. A typical example included one practitioner who discussed creating programs addressing emergent local opioid-abuse issues. A different leader discussed the importance of launching recovery initiatives in targeted areas after hurricanes and other natural disasters. In conjunction with a local understanding of community needs, the data also suggest CDOs operate with an innate understanding that “place matters.” For example, rural leaders frequently noted rural clients are limited by sheer geographic distance to places where jobs are available. Similarly, urban leaders noted their own unique and place-dependent needs, such as neighborhoods with starkly uneven economic growth.

Finally, pre-existing local trust networks are often shaped by the unique institutional history of a community. The importance of CDO’s being able to navigate these pre-existing relationships, which emerged frequently in our interviews, speaks to the place-based nature of social capital, especially for CDCs. For example, one leader noted intentionally not beginning programmatic activity until staff had a chance to build trust and ensure that community members believed the CDC was able to act in their best interest. Other respondents concurrently noted the process of building community trust can sometimes be a challenge. The distressed populations served by community developers often have numerous needs, and finding consensus on how to prioritize those needs is difficult. Even once community needs are agreed on and prioritized, the process of building trust and legitimacy within the community can be long and arduous.

Conclusions and Implications

As one interviewee noted, CDCs were “engaging in social capital leverage before they even knew what it was called.” Our findings suggest use of social capital can enhance local community economic development outcomes. Respondents expressed the leverage of trust, shared norms, and social networks are integral to organizational measures of success. Notably, ideas of success for CDOs overall tend to revolve around strategies that emphasize the linking form of bridging capital. The prominence of linking capital as both a programmatic strategy and organizational output or outcome is a recurring theme in our research findings. Across both practitioner leaders and thought leaders, examples involving social capital focused most frequently on creating linking connections across heterogeneous organizations or individuals.

In a surprising result considering our focus on CDCs, with the exception of practitioners involved in entrepreneurship and small business promotion, few leaders viewed their organizations as promoters of bonding capital. Generally, bonding networks were framed as the inputs of community development work. This was distinctly different from discussions of bridging/linking networks, frequently conceptualized as organizational outputs or outcomes. This pattern may be important because some literature suggests bonding capital is frequently a product (rather than an input) of CDO programming. The data thus suggest a possible gap between theory and practice.

The use of individual linking capital for financial resources was mentioned in almost all interviews. Perhaps in response to the declining trend of financial support, the data hint at an increasing reliance on relationships between individual charismatic CDO leaders and policy actors. And while this strategy appears to be working for now, most respondents are concerned with what will happen when the individual leaders that have fostered these relationships retire. CDOs that rely

upon the individual networks of charismatic leaders could benefit from trying to institutionalize linking social capital in ways that facilitate long-term sustainability.

Finally, the data point toward social capital as being a characteristic of communities that is at least partially bound by place and geography. Respondents were predisposed to similar types of social capital utilization (bridging/linking), but examples of programs and organizational emphasis were strongly place-linked. These findings echo other research which suggest that social capital networks have a high degree of variance across local neighborhoods. The interviews provide evidence CDOs, especially CDCs, may have a unique capacity to shape community programs in ways that are extremely responsive and local in nature. While more research is needed to fully understand the nuance of our findings, the data suggest the ability of CDCs to be adaptive and have an innate understanding of neighborhood-level economic needs is a key success factor.

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TABLE 1
Emphasized Social Capital Methods by Organization Type

Organization/Area	Focus Area(s)	Social Capital Method(s)			
		Bonding	Bridging (I)	Bridging (O)	Linking
Community Development Corporations (CDCs)					
CDC #1 Durham	Affordable housing Financial education	×	×	×	
CDC #2 Fayetteville	Affordable housing Personal financial counseling				×
CDC #3 Winston-Salem	Affordable housing Commercial development training			×	×
CDC #4 Columbus County	Personal financial counseling Public-health programs Workforce training	×	×	×	
CDC #5 Edgecombe County	Affordable housing Commercial development Small-business counseling		×	×	×
CDC #6 Lee County	Affordable housing	×	×	×	
CDC #7 Wake County	Affordable housing Public-health programs Workforce training Youth development		×	×	×
CDC #8 Wayne County	Affordable housing Workforce training Youth development	×	×	×	
CDC #9 Western NC region	Personal financial counseling workforce training		×	×	×
Other Community Development Organizations					
Community development finance institution #1 Statewide	Research / policy advocacy Small-business counseling Small-business financing			×	×
Community development finance institution #2 Statewide	Affordable housing Small-business financing			×	×
Other 501(c)3 #1 Chapel Hill	Affordable housing Personal financial counseling	×	×	×	
Other 501(c)3 #2 Kinston	Affordable housing Workforce training		×	×	
Other 501(c)3 #3 Statewide	Small-business counseling Workforce training			×	
Other 501(c)3 #4 Statewide	Affordable housing Personal financial counseling Research / policy advocacy			×	×
Statewide Support and Partner Organizations					
State government agency	Development support services Grantmaking/funding				×
University program	Development support services		×		
Regional bank	Small-business financing Grantmaking/funding	×	×	×	
CDC trade association #1	Development support services Research / policy advocacy			×	×
CDC trade association #2	Development support services Research / policy advocacy			×	×
Foundation 501(c)3 #1	Grantmaking/funding			×	×
Foundation 501(c)3 #2	Grantmaking / funding				×
Total		6	11	18	13

Note. I = Individual-Level Bridging, O = Organizational-Level Bridging

TABLE 2
Emphasized Levels and Definition Components of Social Capital by Organization Type

Organization/Area	Definition Components			Levels	
	Trust	Norms	Networks	Individual	Organization
Community Development Corporations (CDCs)					
CDC #1 Durham	×		×	×	×
CDC #2 Fayetteville	×			×	
CDC #3 Winston-Salem	×			×	×
CDC #4 Columbus County	×			×	
CDC #5 Edgecombe County			×	×	×
CDC #6 Lee County			×	×	×
CDC #7 Wake County		×	×	×	×
CDC #8 Wayne County	×			×	
CDC #9 Western NC region	×		×	×	
Other Community Development Organizations					
Community development finance institution #1 Statewide	×		×	×	×
Community development finance institution #2 Statewide			×		×
Other 501(c)3 #1 Chapel Hill	×			×	×
Other 501(c)3 #2 Kinston	×			×	×
Other 501(c)3 #3 Statewide	×				×
Other 501(c)3 #4 Statewide			×		×
Statewide Support and Partner Organizations					
State government agency		×	×	×	×
University program	×		×	×	×
Regional bank	×		×	×	×
CDC trade association #1	×	×	×	×	×
CDC trade association #2			×		×
Foundation 501(c)3 #1	×		×		×
Foundation 501(c)3 #2			×	×	×
Total	14	3	15	17	18

FIGURE 1
Respondent Organization Locations and Social Capital Levels

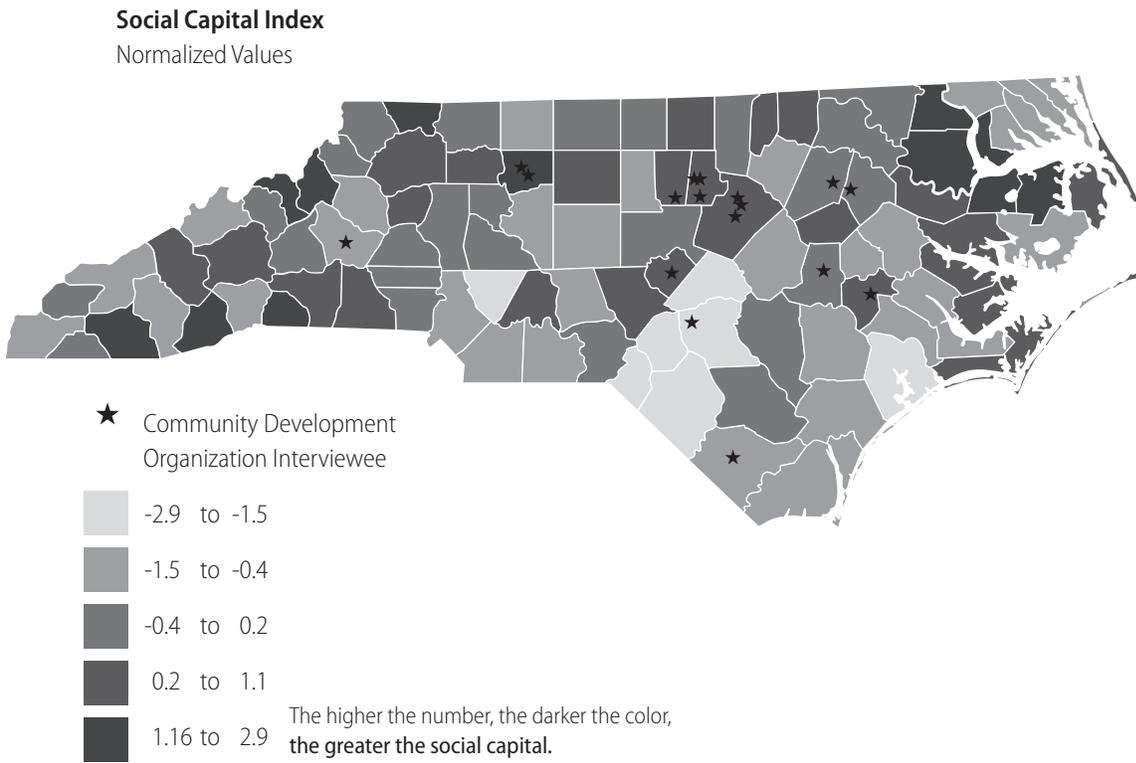


FIGURE 2
Respondent Organization Locations and Household Income

Income Levels

Median Household Income 2017

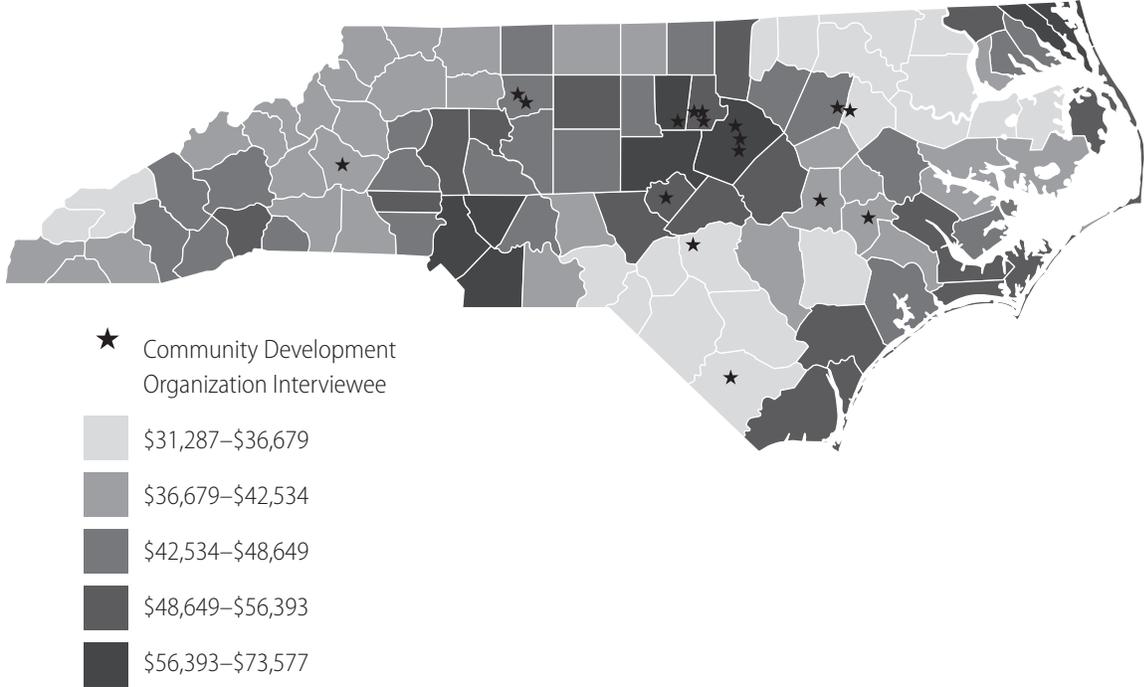


FIGURE 3
Respondent Organization Locations and Economic Mobility

