CHAPTER 8

Comparing Two Asian Perspectives: Nurturing Social Capital in Uzbekistan and Japan

Murod Ismailov and Yutaka Tsujinaka

Robert Putnam wrote in his *Bowling Alone* that "social capital makes us smarter, healthier, safer, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy" (Putnam 2000: 290). Likewise, a great number of other writers have attempted to connect social capital with institutional performance and democracy. In spite of massive empirical data accumulated by Putnam and his colleagues in the USA and Italy, there is still disagreement about whether good institutional performance and democracy can and should

M. Ismailov (✉)
Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan

Y. Tsujinaka
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan

Japan Political Science Association, Tokyo, Japan

T. Dadabaev et al. (eds.), *Social Capital Construction and Governance in Central Asia*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-52233-7_8

be seen as by-products of healthy networks of civic engagement that store social capital. Because the core concept was principally developed by Western scholars, and not focused on Putnam's achievements alone, the scope of chosen cases and their analytic utility remained largely limited to the geographic regions (mainly Western Europe and North America), which already had some form of functioning institutions and a democratic system

By utilizing survey data from the Japan Interest Group Study, this chapter examines the role of networks of civic engagement, i.e., neighborhood associations in Uzbekistan and Japan, which Putnam's terms one of "the former Communist lands of Eurasia" where "norms and networks of civic engagement are lacking, the outlook for collective action appears bleak" (Putnam 1994: 183).

To help readers understand the reasons for the selection of Uzbekistan and Japan, we examine neighborhood associations in Uzbekistan alongside structurally similar organizations in Japan. Japan and its neighborhood associations represent an interesting case for comparison because they closely parallel Western notions of democracy and its 'effective institutions' and 'democratic governance'. Additionally, the choice of the two countries is justified by the availability of empirical data regarding the structure, functions and effectiveness of respective neighborhood associations but also because of their cultural, historical and geographical detachment from the Western world.

The chapter's cornerstone argument is that, although the emphasis on 'social capital' in norms, reciprocity and civic networks is both logical and reasonable, the concept—due to its West-centric orientation—fails to explain why and how social capital could still be nurtured in societies with little or no tradition of 'Western-looking' democracy. This argument is one of many factors in a continuing debate about whether social capital should be associated with democratic governance and political participation, or vice versa.

Analytical Framework

The idea that strong social ties are crucial for the wider functioning of the community was well established long before the current debate about social capital began. Voluntary networks of civic participation are the main contributors to social capital. Such networks facilitate social cohesion

because people sharing similar concerns and interests come together and cooperate with each other. As observed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, whose work and ideas about social capital preceded Putnam's, social capital is "the sum of resources, actual and virtual, the accrual by an individual or group, by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships, of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 119).

The concept of social capital, had it been approached only by Bourdieu and other sociologists with an emphasis on networks and relationships of mutual assistance, could have been less contested than it is today. When social capital transitioned from being an exclusively sociological concept and entered the sphere of political science, it became increasingly contested. The signs of 'politicization' could already be seen in the work of James Coleman who completed a series of studies on educational attainment in American ghettos. Coleman's contribution to the formulation of the concept of social capital is significant because he considered social capital to be "a resource involving the expectation of reciprocity which moves beyond an individual to include wider networks whose relationships are governed by a high degree of trust" but also because he showed that social capital was not limited to the powerful and could transfer benefits to poor and marginalized communities (Field 2008: 23).

Despite the profound impact of Bourdieu and Coleman's work on the initial notion of social capital, a major debate was triggered with the publication of Robert Putnam's study on the differences in institutional performance between governments in the north and south of Italy (Putnam 1994). Because Putnam's findings regarding social capital theory are widely discussed and very broad in scope, this section includes a discussion of his work that is limited to the extent to which social capital is connected from democratic governance, either as its cause or as its consequence.

In his subsequent work on social capital, Putnam suggested that the problems that accumulated in democratic states, such as within the USA, should be considered partly the result of declining membership rates in many types of associations, voluntary groups and organizations (Putnam 2000). Voluntary associations and citizens networks are the main structural contributors to social capital, but it is trust among members of the community and the level of reciprocity that add cultural or attitudinal dimension to social capital (Putnam 1994; Inglehart 1997). In other words, social capital does not seem to be only about physical space, it is

also about the nature of relationships, attitudes and perceptions within that space (Tsujinaka 2002; Pekkanen and Tsujinaka 2008). Accordingly, the reduction of trust and citizens' interactions within a community or volunteer organization result in the weakening of social capital in modern democracies.

On the one hand, Putnam maintains that a dense network of secondary associations contributes to social collaboration and trust and facilitates effective democratic governance (Putnam 1994). Accordingly, social capital is seen as a driver for improving the quality and health of democracy at large. On the other hand, societies with large reservoirs of social capital, i.e., with high levels of volunteering activity and civic participation, are better places to live: the schools perform better, the streets are cleaner, the roads are safer, and the budgetary policy is more transparent. According to Robteutscher (2008: 209), these two claims are not analogous. The first argument views social capital as a feature of communities and societies in general, which implies that whenever there is a large reservoir of social capital, citizens' participation will be high and government will be held accountable and responsible for the needs of ordinary people. The second argument, in Robteutscher's view, is situated at a micro-level because it argues that people who trust others and individuals who work together within various volunteer- and community-based organizations, behave in a more democratic, participatory manner.

The main analytical problem that this paper encounters is that social capital from the outset looks to be a West-centric concept because the existence of social capital is tightly linked to the experience of societies featuring some degree of democratic governance. Social capital is a priori a concept related to the performance of Western democracies more than to the rest of the world. The concept neglects the experiences of societies that do not conform to the Western understanding of democracy, i.e., with its emphasis on free and fair elections, freedom of expression, government accountability to voters, and so on, yet these non-conforming societies can still yield high (even higher than in some functioning democracies) levels of trust, reciprocity and civic engagement.

This is especially true with regard to some of the post-Soviet states of Eurasia, which, in prisoner's dilemma's terms, feature an 'always defective' social equilibrium because social capital in such societies is either limited or non-existent (Putnam 1994: 183). Although it is reasonably logical to assume that without trust and networks of civic engagement, "amoral familism, clientelism, lawlessness, ineffective government, and economic

stagnation" are more obvious outcomes than effective democratization and economic development, some societies that are poorly developed democratically still produce high levels of social capital.

At the same time, one could also anticipate that countries with higher levels of social capital would have a higher percentage of people expressing support for the performance of the regime, higher trust in its political institutions and a higher volume of support for the principles of democracy. However, several studies have shown that that there is no statistically significant relationship between the level of confidence in political institutions and the indicators of social capital in post-communist states (Dowley and Silver 2002: 511; see also, Rose and Weller 2001). Interestingly, even when some 'non-democracies' are removed from the list, the analysis of countries that had undergone the first 10-year post-communist transition period does not provide evidence of a link between social capital and aggregate levels of democratization (ibid.).

This chapter does not investigate whether individuals in possession of social capital are better democrats than individuals lacking such a resource. Instead, it examines the question of whether healthy stocks of social capital can still be accumulated in societies that do not have effective democratic practices and institutions.

Uzbekistan and Japan: A Comparative Perspective

At first sight, the attempt to compare social capital in these two countries is a daunting task. After all, over the past one hundred years, the two countries have evolved in diametrically opposite social, political, economic and cultural settings, which itself could be considered a major factor in generating 'dissimilar' social capitals. However, because this chapter's comparative method is based on Most Different Systems Design (or MDSD), our choice of countries with different socioeconomic and political outlooks is necessary. Our aim is to compare different systems that share a dependent variable (social capital). Regardless of social, political or economic differences, Uzbekistan and Japan are similar in one area: they cannot be characterized as Western (at least in cultural, historical and geographic terms). This similarity is key because our study tests the utility of social capital vis-à-vis democratic governance by moving beyond the West-centric paradigm of social capital.

The question is then, what makes Uzbekistan and Japan different? These differences are evident at two levels, the micro-level (structural and

functional characteristics of neighborhood associations) and the macro-level (political systems and institutional performance at the national level).

At the micro-level, neighborhood associations (NHAs) exist in various forms in both Uzbekistan and Japan. The Uzbekistani version of NHAs, more often known as the *mahalla*, have undergone a series of systemic changes over the past one hundred years as part of the Soviet and post-Independence policies but remain vibrant and effective community-based institutions that unite residents of a given locality regardless of age, gender, education or social status. According to Suda, for the last hundred years, the mahalla has been an important tool for solving issues in citizens' daily lives, either as traditional street-level units of self-rule in cities or in large villages of sedentary Central Asia. An *oqsoqol* (or community's elder) is elected by the residents at a gathering of the community (Suda 2006). The mahalla play a very important social, economic, ethical and even political role in community life in Uzbekistan by mediating internal conflicts, arbitrating the succession of property, and organizing and overseeing communal activities, such as weddings, funerals, and care for orphans, widows and the disabled. Trust, norms of reciprocity and citizens' overall engagement in community life sometimes depend on the influence, reputation and mediation skills of the elder.

At first glance, neighborhood associations in Japan—referred to as *jichikai* (community-based self-governing organizations) and *chonaikai* (ward organizations) structurally and functionally look very similar to the Uzbekistani NHAs. Indeed, these are two self-administered governing associations of community residents that organize various activities, from cleaning up streets to assisting needy residents. According to Pekkanen, NHAs are Japan's most widespread organizations (approximately 300,000 associations nationwide) and they enjoy "extremely high participation rates". Moreover, although many Japanese NHAs were established in the first half of the twentieth century, almost 90% of currently working associations exist because of government promotion (Pekkanen 2003, Pekkanen et al. 2014). Compared with other civil society organizations, the NHAs in Japan are actively promoted and financially supported by local governments because NHAs are considered an indispensable organ for the circulation of information among residents, the maintenance of public facilities and the provision of fire and crime prevention activities. Pekkanen suggests that when government pays an NHA to clean or maintain a local park, the work is done more cheaply and effectively than when professionals are hired.

Additionally, the civic community is strengthened because local residents work together to maintain their neighborhood (Pekkanen et al. 2014).

Despite visible similarities, there are several major differences in the way NHAs function in Uzbekistan and Japan. First and foremost, Japanese NHAs have managed to retain some degree of autonomy and flexibility because, unlike Uzbekistani mahallas, they are not regulated by direct laws and government decrees, but by their own charters. Second, Japanese NHA board members do not receive a state salary, whereas, the community elder, his advisor and a night watch in the Uzbekistani NHA work full-time as public employees. Third, while many Japanese neighborhood associations maintain contact with local governments and exchange information on a voluntary basis, all Uzbekistani NHAs are obligated by law to report to the state twice a year about the activities carried out in respective neighborhoods. Finally, neighborhood associations in Japan, unlike NHAs in Uzbekistan, often collect compulsory membership fees. There is no formal membership fee within Uzbek mahallas, but many wealthy members of the community often make voluntary donations, which are used by the board members to rebuild local mosques or help people in need.

Another important aspect, which has direct and indirect effects on the activities of community-based organizations, is the demographic change within both Uzbek and Japanese societies. Notably, the demographic situation has almost reversed in the two countries because Uzbekistan has seen rapid population growth, especially since its independence in 1991, and Japan has been experiencing a dramatic decline in its population, due to low fertility and high aging rates. For example, the population of Uzbekistan in 2013 was 29,993,500. This represents an increase of 9,385,800 from the 1991 population of 20,607,700 (State Committee of Statistics, Uzbekistan 2013). Moreover, the population in Uzbekistan is predominantly young, with children younger than the age of 15 years comprising approximately 40% of the population and youth under the age of 24 accounting for nearly two-thirds (UNFPA, Uzbekistan). By contrast, Japan is one of the most rapidly aging countries in the world. From 1988 to 2007, the number of citizens over 65 years old in Japan constituted one-quarter of the total population, a figure projected to reach more than 40% by 2055. Additionally, since mid-2000, Japan's population has been gradually decreasing. According to Kingston, the implications are colossal: from pensions and elderly care to a shrinking labor force, economic stagnation, family patterns and social cohesion (Kingston 2011).

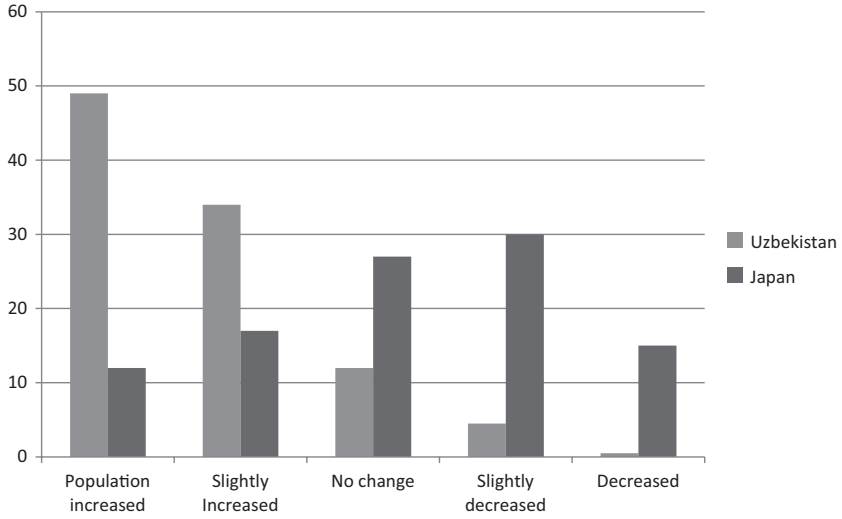


Fig. 8.1 Perception of changes in population growth over the years (%)

As part of the JIGS survey of NHAs in Uzbekistan and Japan, the respondents were asked if they had observed any changes in the population in their respective communities (see Fig. 8.1). A preliminary examination of the data shows that the perception of change in the population generally corresponds to the earlier-observed nationwide trends of population growth in Uzbekistan and steady population decline in Japan. This survey did not specify the composition of the population on the basis of age or gender, but the data accumulated thus far provide some insight into the potential for generating social capital. Japan's case is particularly interesting because of the assumption that elderly people can increase the stocks of social capital more effectively because their availability and free time allow them to be more active in the community.

To understand the relationship between social capital and democracy, existing disparities between the two countries' political systems and governing practices have to be scrutinized at the macro-level. In terms of a formal understanding of political systems, the two countries are located on different sides of the spectrum: post-communist Uzbekistan is a presidential republic, whereas Japan's political systems is a constitutional monarchy.

However, the nature of their political regimes is more important than their formal political systems.

Uzbekistan's political regime is often described by Western authors as 'non-competitively authoritarian', because competition from challenging political forces is eliminated, and electoral institutions serve mainly to legitimize leadership in non-competitive regimes (Levitsky and Way 2002). This type of regime contrasts with other former communist states of Eurasia (such as Kyrgyzstan, the Ukraine, Georgia or Russia), which employ a competitive authoritarian mode of state administration (Suda 2006).

Compared with Uzbekistan, Japan is unquestionably a more democratically advanced country, yet its democracy is very different from that of most Western European countries, such as Germany, France or the UK. Until recently, there was wide consensus that the unique feature of Japanese democracy was the dominant position of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which has held uninterrupted power for more than half a century. Although the democratic system in Japan has, at times, required more transparency, mainly due to 'hidden' integral links between the LDP, the bureaucracy and powerful corporations, referred to as 'Japan Inc.' or the 'Iron Triangle' (Kingston 2011), its overall performance has contributed to the high degree of governmental accountability and civic and political liberties enjoyed by Japanese citizens.

In the next two sections, we examine the available JIGS data to look at the nature of social capital in these two societies and attempt to answer one of our main research questions: can social capital be generated in a society that lacks genuine democratic institutions?

JIGS Data on Neighborhood Associations

There are a number of challenges involved in measuring social capital. Compared with other types of capital, such as material capital (stock of capital goods), natural capital (renewable and non-renewable resources in the earth and atmosphere), and human capital (educated, skilled and healthy labor), social capital cannot be easily quantified and measured. As was noted earlier, social capital is a combination of both structural (networks of civic engagements) and cultural/attitudinal factors (norms of reciprocity, trust between members of a civic network). A large number of empirical studies on social capital apply various analytic and methodological tools to compensate for issues relating to quantification and measurement.

We maintain that although social capital cannot be measured directly, it can be projected through alternative indicators (proxy indexes) that capture norms and networks. Social capital can also be tested through its hypothesized effects on life in the community. In other words, trust and reciprocity between citizens is very subjective and is therefore hard to measure, but the frequency of interactions between citizens and face-to-face communication is a useful criterion for examining whether trust and reciprocity exist in the society.

This also explains why we chose to observe citizens' interaction at the neighborhood level. Although they can vary widely across a region or country, neighborhoods are appropriate scales to measure social capital because neighborhoods generally set consistent patterns of neighborly interaction.

We broadly categorize the available data on Uzbekistani and Japanese NHAs into three categories: (1) the extent of face-to-face interactions between neighbors and changes over time in such interactions; (2) activities carried out within respective NHAs; and (3) rates of participation in NHA activities.

Face-to-Face Interaction Among Citizens

The JIGS NHAs Survey asked respondents in Uzbekistan and Japan about the state of face-to-face interactions between local residents. The options to choose from were: "Active cooperation on daily issues", "Regular interaction", "Minimum (occasional) interaction" and "No interaction at all".

Figure 8.2 shows the results for this question. In general, "Regular interaction", which implied "polite greeting" and "friendly talk" between residents was the most common response by the Uzbek (45%) and Japanese (58%) respondents. Interestingly, both Uzbekistani and Japanese NHAs showed almost identical results (25% and 26%, respectively) with regard to "Active participation on daily issues". In terms of "Minimum interaction", the Uzbek NHAs seem to have a slightly larger number of residents who engage neither in active cooperation nor regular interaction. Given the conservative nature of both Uzbek and Japanese societies, our initial expectation was that both countries' NHAs would have only a small number of entirely inactive residents. Indeed, the data show that within a Japanese NHA, almost all residents are involved in community life in some way, and in the case of Uzbek NHAs, only 2% of residents do not interact with their neighbors at all.

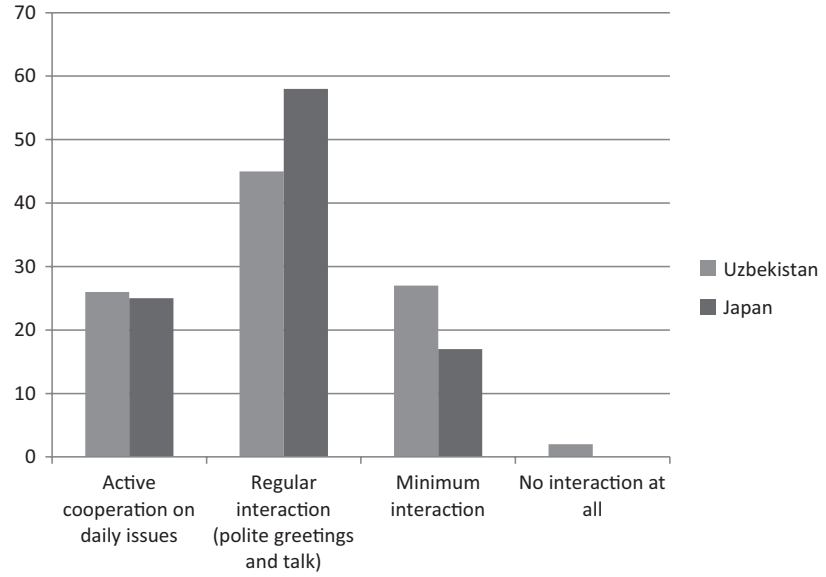
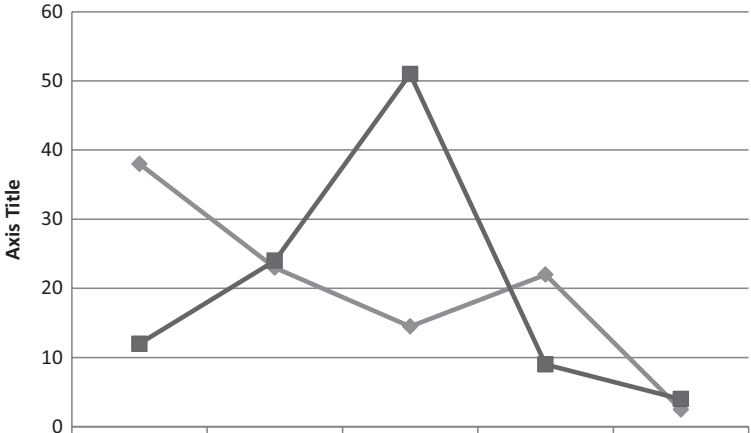


Fig. 8.2 Face-to-face interaction between citizens in two NHAs (%)

The JIGS NHA surveys were carried out only once in a certain period of time and therefore cannot be considered an effective instrument to answer questions about change over time. Nevertheless, because the surveys were the first such nationwide studies in both Japan and Uzbekistan, and since little was known about whether such work would be continued over time, it was considered necessary to ask about change over time as a survey question. The reported answers are subject to the usual bias about perceptions in change over time, and are far less accurate than comparing contemporary measurements; however, this method is still capable of providing clues about changing trends in citizens' interaction.

Thus, the surveys asked the respondents in the two countries to compare interactions between residents at present with those of 5 years earlier and to specify whether the NHAs had become "More active", "Slightly more active", "Unchanged.", "Somewhat less active" or "Less active" in terms of face-to-face communication. The results are given in Fig. 8.3.

The perception of change in citizens' interactions at the community-level in the last five years vary somewhat between the two countries but are in line with our initial expectations. Especially notable is the perception



	More active	Slightly more active	No change	Somewhat less active	Less active
Uzbekistan	38	23	14.5	22	2.5
Japan	12	24	51	9	4

Fig. 8.3 Changes in face-to-face interaction between citizens within two NHAs in the past 5 years (%)

of an "unchanged situation" in Japanese NHAs (51%) and Uzbekistani NHAs (14.5%). Indeed, from the outset, we assumed that the lack of systemic political and social changes in Japanese society (especially in a short time span of 5 years) would make respondents believe that the nature and volume of interactions between citizens did not change. Assuming that the economic situation in Japan changes from time to time due to Japan's vulnerability to global financial economic shocks and because of demographic imbalances, it appears that the nature of social interactions does not substantially change over time. The situation is considerably different in Uzbekistan. We assumed that in a society undergoing a slow and painful transition from command-administrative structures to a market economy, the nature of social relationships at the community or national level would not be constant.

One explanation could be the increasingly high rate of internal (rural-to-urban) and international (country-to-country) migration, which affects the nature of interactions, the accumulation of norms of reciprocity and the trust among citizens between 'new' and 'old' neighbors. We consider

trust to be an important indicator because when linked to the ability of each country's NHAs to generate and preserve social capital, it can reveal whether the generation and preservation of social capital is constant or is prone to extensive fluctuations. Thus, trust among citizens can provide clues about the health and quality of social capital in societies under investigation.

Interestingly, juxtaposing responses to questions about whether interactions between residents became "more active" showed that Uzbekistani neighborhoods saw positive improvements that were considerable (38%), whereas a lower rate (12%) was observed in Japan.

Activities Carried Out by Neighborhood Associations

Although there is little doubt that perceptions about the levels of face-to-face interactions and communication between residents can provide some answers about the state of social capital in a given society, it is the examination of the functions of the NHAs that can shed more light on whether the necessary structural conditions are in place for generating social capital.

To investigate this further, the JIGS survey asked the NHAs about the activities and work they performed. Obviously, a neighborhood association is a platform for various types of activities, ranging from cleaning up streets to helping pupils perform better in school. In the actual NHA surveys, the respondents (mainly NHA staff) were given a choice of approximately 30 activities normally carried out by communities.

A quick glimpse of the data shows that NHAs in both countries carry out regular neighborhood-based organization activities, yet the priorities and the extent of work that can 'facilitate social capital' are somewhat different in both cases. We assume that not all activities performed within and by an NHA can lead to strengthening of the networks of civic engagement and enhancement of the trust and reciprocity among residents.

By examining the 10 selected items in both countries, we can broadly categorize the activities into four separate groups based on the nature of the work conducted. Table 8.1 shows them in order of priority in terms of their presumed impact on generating or enhancing social capital (see Table 8.1).

As shown in this Table 8.1, the presumed impact of conducted activities on generating social capital is derived from the volume of citizenry engagement (i.e., participation). According to this logic, the wider the coverage of participants, the stronger the impact of a given activity on

Table 8.1 Types of NHA activities in Uzbekistan and Japan and their presumed impact on social capital

Nature of activities	*Type of activities*	*Participants*	*Presumed impact on social capital*
Social activities, i.e., where a high level of socialization among residents occurs	Festivals (UZB & JP); Senior citizen care (UZB & JP); Sporting and cultural activities (JP); Meeting houses, children's activities (JP); Assistance in education (UZB & JP); Cleaning of a neighborhood (UZB); Disabled care (UZB); Assisting weddings and funerals (UZB).	Community as a whole	Strong
Safety-promoting activities	Fire prevention (JP); Disaster prevention (JP); Crime prevention/night watch (UZB); Traffic safety promoting activities; Adolescent care (part of a policy to minimize crime rate among juveniles) (UZB); Maintenance of street lights (JP).	Community as a whole	Strong
NHA management activities	Maintenance of bulletin boards (UZB).	A certain group of individuals	Medium
Technical works	Maintenance of street lights (JP); Garbage collection (UZB & JP); Maintenance of sewage pipes (UZB).	A certain group of individuals	Low

JP: Japan; UZB: Uzbekistan

building networks of civic engagement. In this respect, both Uzbekistani and Japanese NHAs conduct more social and safety-promoting activities than just technical or administrative works. Some activities overlap in terms of their overall significance and participation ratio, such as the maintenance of street lights, which can be technical work carried out by an NHA electrician or a safety-enhancing activity carried out by different residents on a rotational basis. Almost 86% of NHAs in Japan selected this option as a regularly conducted activity.

In the case of Uzbekistani NHAs, the highest number of respondents (67%) chose "crime prevention/night watch" as the most regularly conducted activity. Crime prevention/night watch activities do not necessarily imply that local or national police are inadequately responsive to neighborhood security challenges and that residents choose to fight crime on their own as a result. Instead, one explanation is that Uzbekistan has seen dozens of terrorist attacks and radical religious intrusions in recent history, and therefore the government and police now actively engage local citizens in crime prevention by organizing regular meetings and exercises. Whatever form such interactions take, it is clear that the majority of NHAs in Uzbekistan actively encourage residents to participate in vigilante group activities. Additionally, because the boundaries between neighborhoods are rather vague (similar to other countries), vigilante duties not only promote engagement within a given locality but allow for networking with residents of neighboring communities.

Our preliminary observation of the available JIGS data highlights that the nature and scope of activities that increase social capital can reflect some physical, environmental or cultural peculiarities specific to a given country or region. In the case of Japan, one of the activities that respondents selected was "disaster prevention" (55%), which was not present in the answers provided by Uzbekistani respondents. Because of Japan's physical environment and the higher probability of earthquakes, typhoons and tsunamis in its location, we anticipated that it would be mentioned by most of the respondents. Indeed, activities related to disaster prevention generate face-to-face interaction, communication and even interpersonal trust because the majority of disaster drills require these characteristics.

We find a similar culturally specific situation in Uzbekistani respondents' choice of "organizing weddings and funerals" (48.5%). In conservative Japanese society, wedding ceremonies and funerals have always been part of the private domain and open only to a very narrow circle of family members and close friends. By contrast, in Uzbekistan, which also has a

conservative culture, weddings and funerals are considered to be more public events than they are family events. For instance, it is considered normal for a few thousand people to participate in a wedding celebration or a funeral procession in some capacity or another. In fact, it is these events that either foster or undermine norms of reciprocity among residents. This is especially true in regard to attendance at funerals (where no invitation is needed, and everyone must attend) and further epitomized in a widely known local saying that "You can miss a wedding party, but always show up at a funeral". The norms of reciprocity and trust are very strong in the sense that attendance at an event obliges the host to be present at the events of attendees. This may be true in many cultures, including Japan, but in Uzbekistan, it is characterized by much wider civic engagement. It is not surprising therefore, that local NHAs have been seen as the main coordinators of such events. Partly in recognition of the role of NHAs, and due to their significance in relation to the 'social capital–governance nexus', the Uzbekistani government has actively requested local NHAs' help in curbing the number of luxurious and lavish celebrations in recent years.

Data provided thus far demonstrate that both Japanese and Uzbekistani NHAs perform fairly similar activities that can promote active civic engagement, and activities that are country-specific (such as disaster prevention or assistance in weddings and funerals) and can still store a considerable degree of social capital.

Rates of Participation in Neighborhood Activities

To link tendencies relating to NHAs' functional performance with the actual state of citizen participation, one has to observe the rates of resident participation in NHA activities. As part of the survey, NHA staff members were asked about citizen participation in events and community activities.

Possible responses were based on the percentage of households participating, ranging from, "less than 20%", through "20 to 40%", "40–60%" and "60 to 80%" to the highest category, "over 80%". Because not all NHAs carry out the same types of activities, NHAs that did not engage in the relevant activity were excluded from the analysis.

Our comparison of Uzbekistani NHAs with Japanese NHAs shows that participation rates for many activities were high across the board. For example, the rates of residents' participation at general NHA meetings were relatively high. In total, 34% of Japanese NHAs seem to have achieved the

almost universal rate of "over 80% participation," whereas the Uzbekistani NHAs achieved this rate 28% of the time. Cleaning activities (44%) and festivals (25%) also seemed to attract a significant number of residents of Japanese NHAs, which is not very different from the same activities in Uzbekistani's NHAs. We can also see a slight decrease in the participation rate in sports and recreational activities (with between 40–60% of residents taking part), which accounted for 32% in Japan and 35% in Uzbekistan. Again, the figures for both countries do not differ greatly. Part of the reason why there is a smaller number of NHAs with high participation rates in sports and recreational activities is due to age restraints; not all senior residents were physically fit to attend.

In this section, we discussed some of the available data that showed that, outside a few culturally and politically specific aspects, the overall state of citizens' interactions and face-to-face communication does not differ substantially between the two countries. Both countries seem to feature almost identical conditions with similar potential to promote social capital. The next main question is whether the notion of social capital can and should be related to democratic governance, political participation or the overall institutional performance of a state.

Implications

Despite serious limitations on studying social capital, such as difficulties related to the measurement of trust and reciprocity as well as possible respondents' bias in undertaking surveys, this study has established that both Uzbekistani and Japanese neighborhood associations have relatively similar functions, types of activities and citizen participation rates. Regardless of the countries' differing political regimes (one could call them non-competitive authoritarianism vs. deliberative democracy), NHAs in both countries can nurture, stock and enhance social capital through functioning face-to-face networks of civic engagement.

According to van Deth (2008), even though involvement in an association implies higher levels of social capital that will be matched by higher levels of political engagement, these interpretations often overlook one important argument. From an individual's perspective, social capital often has the same effect as other types of capital: it increases the opportunities for autonomy and the pool of the available opportunities. A more self-ruling and resourceful citizen can be expected to be more dependent on his/her own aptitudes in order to address everyday challenges. Under

such conditions, politics do not become less important. However, in comparison with other activities and opportunities, political engagement diminishes in significance for the individual. Because an individual can manage a high level of resources, he or she is less interested in participating in collective action, which is an indispensable feature of the democratic decision-making process (van Deth 2008: 201–202).

It is not clear if this argument explains why Uzbekistan, with its rigid political environment, allows the generation of high levels of social capital of a non-political nature. This argument may be more relevant to Japan than it is for Uzbekistan.

This chapter is not the first to ask whether participation in narrowly defined organizations, i.e., NHAs in our case, promote the type of social networks (with high levels of trust and reciprocity) that Putnam sees as crucial to a functioning democracy. The survey data presented in previous studies can support some of our observations about the relationship between social capital and democracy. One such study by Dowley and Silver examined the experiences of post-communist states after their first 10-year transition and intended to discover whether countries with higher levels of social capital have a higher percentage of people expressing support for the performance of the regime, higher confidence in its political institutions and a higher percentage committed to the principles of democracy. The study found that the overall relationship between indicators of social capital and democratization in the post-communist countries was weak. Their analysis of aggregate measures of social capital and democratization failed to find a positive correlation between the two, regardless of external evaluations of the democratization level (i.e., Freedom House Index) and survey-based responses about the degree of confidence in the political regime and satisfaction with democracy (Dowley and Silver 2002: 524).

Another study on the worldwide distribution of social capital (i.e., its key component—'trust') shows that although trust is high in advanced democracies, such as Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands, it is also surprisingly high in China, Indonesia, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Even though there is a small trust advantage in favor of democratic countries (29% of individuals in democracies are trusting as opposed to 26% in autocracies), there is no difference with regard to association membership, and there seems to be more volunteering activity in autocracies than in democracies (Robteutscher 2008: 222).

The concept of social capital may fit well in post-communist and less democratically advanced Uzbekistan because citizens in Uzbekistan have

learned to build and maintain a wide range of informal networks "to compensate for, or even subvert, the formal commands of a repressive society, and many networks have remained in use following the collapse of Communism" (Rose and Weller 2001: 3). In addition, this chapter provides a number of additional assumptions about the high levels of social capital within Uzbekistani society, which are similar to Japanese society.

First, following Erickson and Nozanchuk, we hold that extensive involvement in everyday activities in clubs and associations (sports and recreational activities, cleaning and recycling, festivals and so on) can reduce enthusiasm for political engagement, or, in other words "intense involvement in a very apolitical organization is at best irrelevant to political participation and may even divert people from political activity" (1990: 206). Regarding Uzbekistan and Japan, this can partly explain why there are relatively high and similar levels of community-based non-political interactions aimed at resolving daily issues. According to Herman Lelieveldt, the range of neighborhood-oriented forms of participation is much broader than what is covered by conventional studies of political participation, where the emphasis is almost exclusively on political institutions. However, the main difference between NHAa and political entities is that the former are the "locus par excellence of informal governance". To be specific, even though neighborhood associations do not intend to enter politics or influence government policies, they are essential to keeping neighborhoods habitable. Therefore, residents who do not participate in the classical sense of demanding change from government, can still be considered to be co-producers of 'policies' by engaging in NHA activities (Lelieveldt 2008: 332). Therefore, regardless of the nature of political regimes in Uzbekistan and Japan, the NHAs in both countries wield high levels of social capital.

Second, we argue that in some societies, high levels of social capital are not entirely due to the associational strength of a neighborhood, but are because of less visible 'non-institutionalized' practices and institutions, which can effectively reinforce the norms of reciprocity and trust among neighbors. Because of their 'hidden' nature, such practices and institutions are often overlooked by studies on communities and social capital; for instance, the JISG surveys used in this study did not emphasize them. In the case of Uzbekistani NHAs, one of the most important informal institutions is the Elders' council, which convenes at both urban and rural tea houses (*choikhona)* almost daily. This is not only a perfect ground for deliberation of local issues between senior citizens, but, given the impor-

tant role of elders in decision making, such councils often have more power to initiate a public event, gathering or dispute resolution, than the formal executives of an NHA. Although the role of seniors in local communities is also high in Japan, they meet on a regular basis at neighbourhood clubs to discuss important issues without necessarily making decisions on them.

The notion of 'social capital', especially in the context of societies in which traditional norms and practices play greater roles (sometimes greater than government-imposed norms), is not necessarily associated with higher levels of Western democracy and is not dependent on the overall effectiveness of political institutions at the national level. This does not mean that there is no positive relationship between social capital and democracy. To prove the existence of a positive relationship, however, more empirical data will have to be collected, examined and compared. Further empirical studies will be needed to help the concept of social capital relocate from its West-centric 'comfort zone' into wider cultural and political territory.

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