Community and connection in regional Australia and Canada: Regional media as a catalyst for social capital development

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Abstract

Community is a term that is widely used but which presents definitional challenges. Its use in contexts from academic discourse through politics to everyday usage suggests a wide variety of interpretations and understandings, to the extent that some scholars have argued it should be abandoned. Nonetheless, the fact that it is so widely used suggests it is a term with resonance for many people, and that, as Kenny (1999) suggests, it should be used with caution rather than abandoned. As part of a wider study of communication and social capital in regional Australia and Canada, participants including journalists and community leaders were asked about their understandings of community, and about relationships between community and local media in their area. The responses suggest that local media help to build and maintain community, and through this to support the benefits often associated with social capital. Community, location and the kinds of human relationships indicative of social capital are closely linked, and are reinforced by local media through their focus on local news and information and on the concerns and interests of residents. And social media are extending this connection by providing an additional means through which people are able to communicate and participate and organisations exchange and share viewpoints and ideas with stakeholders and broader communities.

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Introduction

"Community" is a term widely used in a broad range of contexts, from academic literature to government to colloquial everyday use. It is a term with wide resonance in a number of areas, but is not readily or easily defined, suggesting little shared understanding across these different uses. Much of the academic literature on the topic is marked primarily by lack of agreement about what constitutes community (Bell & Newby, 1971; Hillery, 1955; Luloff, 1998; Worsley, 1992), while its use outside academia is so broad that some have suggested it has become virtually meaningless (Day, 2006; Ife, 2002). Consequently, determining what constitutes community is problematic. While much of the earlier literature on community focused primarily or partly on physical location, with

community closely linked to life in villages and rural areas, more recent conceptualisations of the term have moved away from this to foreground human relationships.

In the early to mid 20th century, much of the theorisation of community emphasised it as being at least partly a product of geographical place. In particular, community was widely seen as associated with life on farms and in villages, and was contrasted with life in cities. Theorists including Tönnies, Durkheim, Redfield, Wirth and Simmel (Bell & Newby, 1971; Day, 2006; Redfield, 1955; Theodori & Luloff, 2000; Tönnies, 1957; Wirth, 1938) either directly or indirectly associated community with traditional agrarian lifestyles, generally emphasising the positive connections between people that they associated with community.

However, more recent conceptualisations have moved away from this geographical emphasis to focus on the nature of human relationships, with community associated with characteristics such as common goals and social ties (Colombo, Mosso, & De Picconi, 2001; Day, 2006; Etzioni, 2001; Taksa, 1994). Through these characteristics, community can be seen as closely interrelated with social capital as conceptualised by theorists including Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1994; 1988) and Putnam (1994; 2000). Putnam (2000) describes social capital as the "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 67), and as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 19). Inherent in this is what he describes as the norm of "generalised reciprocity", the idea that "I'll do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return and perhaps without even knowing you, confident that down the road you or someone else will return the favour" (p. 134).

Although Putnam's work focuses to a large extent on his concerns over what he perceives as a loss of community and social capital in democratic societies, he nonetheless suggests social capital is more likely to be found outside cities, a view supported by the conclusions of other research on non-metropolitan life. For example, scholars such as Birch and Whittam (2008) argue that regional communities are not losing their sense of community, as "increasing importance is placed on social embeddedness and social capital in regional development" (p. 438), while a 2005 Australian Federal Government report found that levels of community involvement were high in rural areas and small towns (Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics, 2005, p. v).

If, as the literature suggests, connection between people is essential to the development and maintenance of community and social capital, institutions and other facilitators of such connections may be crucial contributors to both community and social capital. Local media are one such facilitating institution, particularly in regional areas, as they help to connect people within a region through their focus on local news and information, their accessibility to their audiences and their promotion of local interests (for further discussion, see Bowd, 2010). In emphasising local content and local advocacy, as well as maintaining what is widely perceived as a closer relationship between media and audience (Pretty, 1995), local media perform a somewhat different role from their metropolitan counterparts. They help to establish and reinforce local identity (Ewart, 2000) in the news and information they provide and the ways in which these are framed, and to establish and maintain the networks of social exchange suggested by Putnam as central to social capital. They also

encourage discourse about community development and increase "local capacities for self determining political, social and economic outcomes" (Lithgow, 2008, p. 7).

While this community connection and identification role has traditionally been fulfilled in regional areas by established media, the internet and social media are also starting to emerge as important connectors (McNamara, 2010). McNamara suggests "emergent forms of media" (p. 146) open up opportunities for civic engagement, but Sander and Putnam (2010) argue that the real connections are made face to face, with "cutting edge technology" (p. 13) and the "advent of social-networking-sites" (pp. 12-13) bolstering community interest, primarily by young people. Others such as Moss, Powell and Delsanto (2010) see social media as developing communication for the benefit of community members, although they also emphasise that online communities can be lost as quickly as they develop. Fleming and Thorson (2008) suggest that "new media not only help individuals acquire the information they need but also provide opportunities for people to become socially connected" (p. 16).

This paper explores understandings of community and the importance of local media – and increasing importance of social media – in supporting community connection in three regional areas in Australia and Canada. In Australia, the remote outback mining town of Roxby Downs and the farming and services centre of Mount Gambier – both in South Australia – were included, and in Canada, southern Vancouver Island and the city of Victoria. Located in the state's remote "Outback" desert region, Roxby Downs (pop. 4500) was purpose-built in 1987-1988 to service Olympic Dam, the world's largest uranium deposit, fourth-largest copper deposit and fifth-largest gold deposit (BHP-Billiton, 2010). Mount Gambier (pop. 24,000) is a centre for farming, timber and tourism and is the regional centre for the South-East region of South Australia and much of the Western Districts of Victoria (City of Mt Gambier, 2010). The city of Victoria, capital of the province of British Columbia, has a population of about 330,000 (Statistics Canada, 2006), and is located at the southern tip of Vancouver Island.

The study

Social capital has many facets and, according to Bourdieu and Wacqant (1992), both practical sense-making and reflexivity are required in order to know and understand it, as this "encourages us to look beyond the habitual frames through which we see the world" (Schirato, Buettner, Jutel & Stahl, 2010, p. 33). A qualitative study was therefore considered appropriate to explore beyond the habitual aspects of social capital, particularly as rapid social change confronts researchers with many different perspectives and varied contexts. The research questions examined in this paper form part of a broader study focused on questions surrounding the communication of sustainability and community investment in regional communities, the influence on communication of sustainability activists and those challenging community initiatives, and the role of media in promoting sustainability and social capital investment. This paper focuses primarily on issues of community connection and communication, particularly through its exploration of ways in which community and social capital are developed and maintained through communication, and more specifically local media and social media.

Overall, a qualitative approach was taken to provide opportunities to explore participants' understandings of community and social capital, and the ways in which they see local communication as contributing to these. Minichiello, Aroni and Hays (2008) suggest that "if we believe (as most researchers using qualitative methods do) that social reality exists as meaningful interaction between individuals then it can only be known through understanding others' point of view , interpretations and meanings" (p. 68). They contend that in-depth interviewing is the most appropriate way to "gain access to the individual's words, perceptions and interpretations" (p. 68) as interviewers "seek as much detail as possible about the research subjects' views on the topic via their expressed opinions" (Weerakkody, 2009, p. 178).

A combination of individual interviews and focus groups was utilised in this study and, along with the comparative study of three regions in two countries, was important in the analysis and sense-making of the data. Focus groups allow members to explore issues and present different points of view, while purposive sampling, in which participants are selected "for a particular reason that is based on the researcher's knowledge of the population and the focus of the research" (Stacks, 2011, p. 202), along with snowball sampling, was utilised to ensure participants were central to established community groups, organisations and media in the nominated regions. While the focus on community leaders and media representatives could be seen as a limitation of the study, it nonetheless helped to ensure participants were in a position to engage with the research questions. It also meant many participants were likely to be familiar with their local media in one or more capacities – as consumers, as contributors of information and/or as advertisers. While this could be seen as limiting the representativeness and generalisability of the data, it helped to maximise the amount of relevant data that could be collected, and to ensure a variety of perspectives were incorporated, even if it was not always straightforward to separate individual elements of each perspective where participants were, for example, community leaders, advertisers in local media and contributors of information to media.

A similar approach to data-gathering was taken in each of the three centres, although the mix of focus groups and individual interviews reflects both the nature of each of the centres and the availability of participants. In Roxby Downs, participants in the focus group included representatives of a local newspaper and community radio station as well as the local council and local business, the local community board and the regional development authority, community sustainability coordinators and community directors, with some participants fulfilling more than one of these roles. Telephone interviews were conducted with a mining company public relations director and community liaison staff. Two focus groups were conducted in Mount Gambier, reflecting the varying availability of participants. Those who took part included representatives of two local councils, and of local schools and community organisations, as well as local media. Separate interviews were conducted with senior council staff. In Canada, the emphasis was on interviews, with participants including members of the Office of Community Based Research at the University of Victoria, as well as representatives with community relationship responsibilities in corporate organisations, credit unions, community council, local media and communication, and a micro-lending society. Others interviewed included a social media specialist, university communications, campus/community radio representative, and a PR director-community activist.

The interviews and focus groups were transcribed and coded according to the dominant themes that emerged. Open coding of the data can "break down data into overlapping or discrete parts" (Weerakkody, 2009, p. 282), and thus team members could, by "grouping evidence and labelling ideas" (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 132), gain understanding of the perspectives that emerged. In addition, after each focus group and interview the three team members discussed and reviewed responses. Themes emerged around understandings of community and social capital, the role of media in communicating messages to communities, the emergence of social media, and the complexity of social capital development.

Perspectives on community

Responses of participants to questions about understandings of community suggest that in regional areas of both Australia and Canada, there is a strong link between community and geographical location. This link was evident despite the different types of community under study – a small, geographically remote community in the case of Roxby Downs; a larger regional centre in the case of Mount Gambier; and a mid-sized city and geographical hub in the case of Victoria. While Victoria has a much larger population than the other two centres in the study, and is a provincial capital, its relationship with nearby Vancouver (pop. 2.1 million [City of Vancouver, 2010]) and its location on Vancouver Island tend to position it as a regional centre rather than a dominant city. In each location, the emphasis by participants on association between community and geographical location represents a shift away from much recent theorisation of community, which focuses primarily on the nature of human relationships and either downplays or rejects the influence of location. In particular, the growth of the internet has been noted as encouraging the development of communities of interest which may have no geographical basis.

In this study, many of the participants identified some kind of link between community and physical place. For the most part, this represented a readily recognisable boundary – the boundaries of Vancouver Island (or the southern part of the island) in the case of the Canadian participants, and the physical space encompassed by local council, service or newspaper circulation areas in the case of the Australian participants. For one Canadian community organisation participant, for example, community was "the people who live there (in an area) and are impacted by it or involved, engaged in it" (CI2). A Canadian credit union representative saw community also as defined primarily by geography, in this case the boundaries of credit union membership: "Our definition of community would be related to the areas that we serve . . . so we look at community as being our market area" (CI3). For a Canadian television journalist, community was identified both as Vancouver Island as a whole and as individual towns on the island:

> When we talk about the community, we talk about the island that is our community . . . Not just Victoria, we're a pan-island station. We focus on many communities throughout the island, so when we come into the communities, it just doesn't meet Victoria … it means Courtenay, it means Port Hardy, it means Tofino. (CI4)

However, for others, the influence of geography was inseparable from the human relationships dimension of community. This was particularly evident in Roxby Downs because of the town's transient population and physical isolation. As an outback mining centre, it tends to attract people who live and work there for only a few years before moving on. At the same time, its isolation – the nearest sizeable town is Port Augusta, more than two hours' drive away – encourages self-reliance by both town and residents. A further contributor to the nature of Roxby Downs is its structure, as it has a community board set up in 2002 to oversee an "ever evolving" community plan (Roxby Downs Council, n.d.). This means that both formal and informal leadership rely heavily on community involvement, something that presents particular challenges in such a transient community. Deliberate efforts have had to be made to build and sustain community relationships, as community structures are at risk of breaking down as leaders move away, something identified as problematic by focus group participants:

> Succession planning is really, really important, because of the transience, so it's about community leadership, but also sharing that knowledge with others, so that when you do inevitably move on, there's someone there, or a group of people who are able to take over those particular roles, otherwise, the structure would collapse. (RDFG)

But the nature of the town also encourages new arrivals to fill gaps left by those who had left: ". . . the new people who come into town, then make the town what it is again, and continue to fill up the holes of the people who've then left" (RDFG). One focus group participant suggested the sense of community in Roxby Downs was enhanced by a lack of traditional support networks: "I've heard stories of a couple of the women staying at home with nine children, with the families, to allow a family who went out to the New Year's Eve function or whatever, and it just seemed to be a . . . way of doing things, and I think that brings it a lot closer, because the need is a different need, you know, there are no grandparents" (RDFG).

The importance of human relationships to community was also highlighted by participants from the other centres. In Mount Gambier, one of the focus group participants, a school principal, suggested connection was crucial:

> I think effective communities; I think if we talk about sustainability, have to have something where every player wins a prize basically. It's very difficult to sustain non-authentic relationships, I mean just because there's a local council doesn't mean that everybody feels connected to their local council or their local church or their local motor vehicle registration department. There has to be a sense of identity that's shaped by a sense of belonging. (MGFG1)

This participant saw a connection between connection and community structures: "I think the heartbeat of a lot of communities is around our relationships and that's much more important than our structures, but we often build structures hoping that that will build relationships" (MGFG1). The multi-faceted nature of community was summed up by one Canadian credit union participant: "I think community means a lot of things in different circumstances, right? It could be a community of interest, it could be a place, it could be just a collection of people" (CI6).

The comments by all of the participants support the idea of a multiplicity of definitions and understandings of community. While many of the comments suggest stronger links between community and geographical place than indicated in much of the more recent literature on the topic, there are also indications of communities based on culture and interest, and, underlying all of this, of the kinds of connections between people that are strongly suggestive of the characteristics of social capital. Involvement and connection with what is happening in a region were seen as central to building community, and this also helps to encourage the development of social capital.

In Roxby Downs, getting people involved in community activities was identified as crucial to encouraging them to stay in the area longer: "One of the things we … is the quicker we get people involved with anything in the community the more likely they were to stay" (RDFG). The outcome can be seen in the comment by one participant: "I've been here three [years], we like the place very much and I've never been busier, but I love it." Such involvement helps to establish complex community networks, the "dense networks of social exchange" referred to by Putnam as encouraging social capital, something particularly evident in Roxby Downs through its many community-based organisations. The Roxby Downs focus group participants agreed that "everyone in this room" is involved in a range of committees, which meant "you've got those little networks happening, those linkages" (RDFG). As one described it, "it's a big spider web" (RDFG).

However, the size and nature of a regional community may impact on its ability to maintain a spirit of community and sense of connection. Comments by one Canadian participant, a local activist, suggested that the size of Victoria, at more than 300,000 people, militated against this: "We're not really connected in this community. I mean physically in this region there's 13 municipalities for 400,000 people. So there's actual divide geographically . . . and then there's – the sense that I've had after living here for quite a number of years that – so many people have come here from elsewhere . . . the people who've come here have probably been people who perhaps were not deeply connected to the community in their own home town" (CI1). However, another Canadian participant, the television journalist, expressed a different view: "That's what's great about this island is that ability – that community – a sense of community. Once you have met somebody they feel like they have got a connection with you" (CI4). This suggests that people respond to the idea of community and connection in different ways – what one person sees as connection, another might not, further indicating the challenges of the term "community" and the imprecision of much of its use.

Regional and social media as promoters of community and social capital

Within the broader context of community, many of the participants in this study identified local media as central to establishing and maintaining community communication and connection, something that can in turn help to maintain the kinds of characteristics associated with social capital. Each of the regions included in the study has a range of local media available to them, as well as broader state- or province-based and national media. In Roxby Downs, there are two local

newspapers and a community radio station; in Mount Gambier, a local newspaper, television station, commercial radio stations and community radio station; while Victoria has a daily newspaper plus several smaller weeklies, television services and both commercial and community radio. Social media are becoming an important part of the mix, with organisations increasingly turning to tools such as Facebook to connect people with common interests or residence or to seek community input. The diverse backgrounds of the participants in this study, and the range of ways in which they were involved with media – as journalists, advertisers, contributors, lobbyists, audiences or some combination of these factors – meant they brought a wide range of perspectives to the topic. Nonetheless, the importance of local media in communicating within and connecting people in communities was highlighted by many in both Canada and Australia.

For several of the journalist participants, encouraging community connection was integral to their role as communicators. One Canadian newspaper journalist argued that a key element of her role as a reporter for a local weekly publication was the cultivation of community: "That's not something they often talk about in journalism school but it's the reality of working in a community newspaper is that I work so closely with so many people here that I'm trying to support the community" (CI7). While this did not mean she was not prepared to tackle the "tough stories", she saw her job as bringing news and information about what was happening in the community to residents, and to "support the community because I think newspapers help people make decisions, by giving them the news and information that they need to make those decisions" (CI7).

Another of the Canadian journalists worked for a television station that had previously been corporate-owned, but which had been bought out by staff. It had adopted a strategy of focusing primarily on Vancouver Island in its news coverage (CI4) and of supporting the island's interests: "I think there is a real – especially on this island there is a real drive for a local and a real drive for community" (CI4). She saw the media as having a crucial role in community-building:

> We pride ourselves on having a non-agendad news cast. We're not going by the press releases. We're not going by what's happening and municipal politics necessarily. We want to tell the people stories; people-driven stories and I think once you start building that people start coming forward and saying "Well, we want to tell our story too", so I think that's a different take on it but that's where you build a community. I think that's really key. (CI4)

In Roxby Downs, building community was an explicit element of the mission of one of the town's two newspapers, which had been set up by the community development board primarily for "promoting the community, building pride in the community, connection in the community all of those things" (RDFG), and which focused on local news while also highlighting issues of community importance such as men's health (RDFG).

Local media further encouraged connection by communicating cultural diversity. For example, the community radio station in Roxby Downs broadcast a number of culturally focused volunteer-run programmes: "People come in and want to share their particular culture on the radio. We had a Latin show that's actually just finished up this week, but, they played all Latino music, spoke English so that it could involve everybody else" (RDFG). Diversity was also noted as a feature of

programming at the Canadian campus/community radio station, in particular, "third language" (non-English and non-French) programming (CI5).

From the perspective of organisations trying to get messages out to people in their region, the accessible nature of local media was valuable: "You can text, you can bring a story in, you can send a photo in, you can take a photo at home and send it in, it's very accessible" (RDFG). The media were seen as generally supportive of community events such as environmental activities, and promoted them through TV, radio and newspapers (MGFG2). One of the Mount Gambier participants, a council employee, pointed out that:

> We're in a fairly unique position here in Mount Gambier because we have access to a television station, we have a commercial radio station, we have an ABC, we have a newspaper, plus we have a community radio station. So it is rather unique, so those people are only a phone call away and they are hungry, whatever we can give them they'll publish. (MGFG2).

Elements of news coverage that focused on local people were seen as particularly important in building community connections. For a local mayor in Canada:

> A very important part is sports because people who – when they see their kids in a photograph in [the paper], they cut it out, they get pictures of it, they get reproductions of it, they tell all their friends, they tell the kids – so a picture of a seven-year-old has a multiple effect. (CI7)

Similarly, a Roxby Downs participant highlighted the "social pages" of the two local newspapers as valuable: "I think also the fact that both papers have full page social photos, like they have a page full of social photos, if not a page and a half or two pages, depending on the time of year – it's a really good incentive for people that might not otherwise be inclined to pick up a paper, to pick it up and have a flick and see if they know anyone." (RDFG)

Not all views of local media were positive. Concerns were expressed about what was seen as a tendency to sensationalise (MGI1), although the same interviewee, a sustainability activist, highlighted the benefits of local media over metropolitan media: "I wouldn't read the papers in Adelaide because it's all opinion whereas when I read the papers here it's just topics what I'm interested in, like it might tell me that the library's got a day happening or it might tell me that these children did this or those people did that or this group's meeting here or they're starting a new men's circle group or this" (MGI1). A Canadian community activist expressed concern at what she saw as the over-simplification of issues: "The media tends to be a black and white vehicle, like they're like a hero and a villain right, and if there isn't a hero and a villain, they've got to have a conflict" (CI1). But overall, local media were seen as valuable contributors to community connection and as promoting the interests of their region.

Participants also highlighted the increasing role of social media in connecting people and providing opportunities for people to communicate. A Mount Gambier radio journalist suggested that:

what I have found is that through Facebook and Twitter, probably not so much Twitter, mainly Facebook, we are connecting more with our younger audience. And they don't listen to the radio, they go and listen to the commercial radio station which is more their demographic. But the stories that we are producing, the stories that we're telling about different community members, all of a sudden they're being exposed to that. (MGFG1)

The Canadian television journalist was also a supporter of social media:

Recently we've started a [station] news official Facebook page, [station] news Twitter account – the interaction – it's more interaction. You know, people may not pick up a pen, write a letter, pick up the phone or even email, but they're willing to write a couple of – 140-character tweet saying "Hey guys, there's a car crash in Courtenay that you guys need to get to" – it's really important. (CI4)

She said Twitter was particularly valuable: "I only follow people on the island and so I'm finding out community events we didn't know about; things that we can help out; causes we can help out with and that's where I think it's really helpful." (CI4)

Local councils and other organisations, too, were increasingly using social media:

Facebook is becoming a bigger tool for us. I introduced it last year for a community consultation we did on redevelopment on One Bay Road [a local development project] and with the sole purpose of attracting younger people to the conversation. And it did work, so that's been a really powerful tool. (MGFG2)

Social media provided a way for people to communicate with each other and with organisations about what was going on, as one Canadian credit union representative suggested: "When we put out a project, we follow the response on Twitter now and we're like 'okay, people are talking about our work' and that's exciting" (CI3).

Discussion

Participants in all three locations emphasised the importance of community to their region, although what they meant by the term appeared to vary, reflecting the challenges more broadly of defining community. However, there was a strong geographical emphasis, supporting studies such as Bowd (2010), which found that for many Australian country newspaper stakeholders, physical location was a central element of community. The association between community and individual towns and localities suggests that for many people in regional areas, community might be defined first by location and then by human relationships, something that represents a shift away from much of the theorisation of community in recent decades (Colombo et al., 2001; Day, 2006; Etzioni, 2001; Taksa, 1994). But the importance of connection between people was also highlighted, reflecting characteristics typically associated with social capital as defined by theorists such as Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu. It is also suggestive of the association between community, social capital

and regionality reflected in the work of Putnam, and the assessment (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004, p. 379; Putnam, 2000; Ife, 2002) of social capital as being stronger in regional areas.

Local media can make a significant contribution to culture, communication and life in small towns and regions by helping individuals and communities make sense of themselves, their world and their place in it (Ewart et al., 2005, p. 92). Fleming and Thorson (2008) contend that "local media coverage of community affairs and activities is an important force for building relationships and developing social norms among individuals" (p. 414), in the same way that Chia and Peters (2008) found that local stories' focus on news and communication that mattered to their audiences gave meaning to communities and to the grass-roots programmes that were important to them. In both Canada and Australia, almost all of those interviewed indicated that regional media were important to their communities. While this may in part reflect the fact that most participants were community leaders – who interacted with media in a variety of ways – or journalists, the prevalence of this view among participants suggests a perspective held more broadly within their communities. Communities rely on "their" media outlets for news and information about local happenings and for this news and information to be presented in ways that support the region's interests. Local media were seen as instrumental in building and maintaining community, and through this, social capital. The local news focus of regional media – particularly in relation to coverage of local people and issues – was noted as particularly important in sustaining community, as it helped to connect people. This was the case in all three centres in this study, despite their varying sizes and types, although the responses of some participants suggested community connections were more challenging to develop and maintain in the relatively large city of Victoria.

However, participant responses also suggested that established media were not the only source of community connection, with a wider communication focus incorporating online newsletters and community meetings, as well as social media, seen as instrumental in bringing grass-roots information and news to communities. Social media in particular are playing an increasingly important role in establishing and maintaining community connections, with a range of organisations making increasing use of such media to connect people and distribute information to stakeholders and interested individuals. While this might in some ways detract from the role of traditional media by decreasing their capacity to act as gatekeepers and distributors of news and information, it may at the same time provide ways for traditional media outlets to expand both their audiences and their ability to keep in contact with their circulation and broadcast areas.

Putnam has suggested that potential benefits from social capital include the resolution of collective problems, increased awareness among people of the ways in which their fates are linked, and improved wellbeing (Putnam, 2000). This study detected elements of such benefits in all of the sites included. The presence of a well-regarded local media, supported by increased use of social media, can play a valuable role in contributing to the ongoing maintenance and development of community in regional areas, and through this to the supporting of benefits and characteristics associated with social capital.

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