

State intervention and social capital development at neighbourhood level

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How is social capital, crucial to efficient urban governance, evolving in Chinese urban society? This paper discusses community restructuring in Shanghai from the 1990s onwards as well as the link between creating social capital and the urban governance framework of basic services.

Our findings have led us to conclude that in a society lacking a strong tradition of unity, the State can exert considerable influence on neighbourhood social capital. In Shanghai, two types of relations were formed early on between these two entities. The first one is governmental, characterised by a hierarchical management system, while the second one is social, and first emerged while four-level networks were being set up. The first mainly entails the establishment of a local government network by uniting decision-making and executive powers. The second however, aims to accelerate the creation of negotiating bodies within the society which will be able to independently manage community affairs, while respecting the separation of decision-making and executive powers. This new method of state intervention has changed the way organisational resources are distributed within society and has greatly contributed to strengthening cooperation and trust in the neighbourhoods. The first policy encouraged participation at all levels and weakened the mutual trust among residents. However, the consultative organisations incorporated afterwards encouraged citizens to become involved and cooperate with each other. These changes imply that the institutional infrastructure of the society created by community-building has more social scope. This is why cooperation and trust among citizens is expected to develop in spite of the fact that inflexible institutional planning does not encourage mutual trust and internal reciprocity.

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