



Community Capitals and Sustainability

Connections to Community Development

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Sustainability as a Community Development Principle

Sustainability asks:

1. What are we changing?
2. Who and what may be affected?
3. What may be strengthened or weakened?
4. What are the consequences over time
– including the consequences of doing nothing?



Community Development Through a Socio-Ecological Systems Theory (SEST) Lens

SEST views the community as a larger interconnected system made up of interacting subsystems

Within this system:

- Community Capitals represent key assets and capacities.
- Community well-being reflects the condition of the wider system.
- Policies, institutions and decisions shape the system across levels.
- Change in one subsystem can create intended and unintended effects elsewhere.
- Sustainable Community Development therefore requires attention to relationships, feedback, balance and change over time.



Updating the Systems Lens: From Six to Eight Forms of Capital

Hart & Smith systems logic remains useful:

- **COMMUNITY** = larger socio-ecological system
- **CAPITALS** = interacting subsystems
- **WELL-BEING** = condition/outcomes of the wider system
- **POLICY & INSTITUTIONS** = multi-level influences on the system

Updated capital layer for this webinar:

- Natural • Built • Organizational • Political • Financial • Cultural • Human • Relational



The Eight Forms of Community Capital Within the Sustainability System

- **Environmental sustainability:** Natural Capital + Built Capital
- **Economic sustainability:** Organizational Capital + Political Capital + Financial Capital
- **Social sustainability:** Cultural Capital + Human Capital + Relational Capital



The capitals are interrelated – the boundaries are not rigid

Why the Systems Relationship Matters

A change in one capital can create positive or negative effects in others

Systems thinking therefore requires us to look for:

1. Interdependencies
2. Feedback effects
3. Synergies
4. Trade-offs
5. Intended and unintended consequences
6. Distribution of benefits and costs



The value of the capitals lies in their relationships – not in the list itself

Community Well-Being Sits Inside the Same System

- Community well-being is not separate from the capital system
- Hart & Smith identify interconnected well-being dimensions including:

Health, Income, Education, Housing, Energy, Sanitation, Environment, Transport, Security, Food, Recreation and Communication



Capital conditions influence well-being – and changing well-being conditions feed back into the community system

What This Means for Community Development Practice

Before asking '*What intervention should we implement?*', ask:

- What parts of the community system are involved?
- Which capitals are strong, weak or excluded?
- Which capitals may be strengthened?
- Which may be unintentionally weakened?
- What feedback effects or trade-offs may emerge?
- Who experiences the benefits and costs?
- What may change over time?



Conceptual Take-Away

1. Sustainability gives us the orientation
2. SEST gives us the systems logic
3. Community Capitals give us the structured lens
4. Community Development gives us the participatory and collective practice context

The next question is: ***How do we move from understanding the system to using the framework in practice?***

