



Better Together Instead of Bowling Alone

Posted by [Glenn](#) on May 30, 2006 - 11:52am in [The Oil Drum: Local](#)

Topic: [Sociology/Psychology](#)

Tags: [bowling alone](#), [community](#), [peak oil](#), [robert putnam](#) [[list all tags](#)]

How each community deals with peak oil will be different for because of its unique history, geography, infrastructure, politics, etc. But perhaps most important will be whether the community itself shows up at all. I suspect that many communities will pull together to face these challenges head on in a cooperative manner while in many others the community may dissolve in the face of adversity into extreme individualism or an "every man for himself" Hobbesian nightmare.

It was about a year ago that Prof. Goose put up [this post](#) about Peak Oil and Social Capital (click on the comment thread ("No Oil Here Either") from that old post which is still available). I thought we might renew this conversation. How would you evaluate your own social capital? How would you rate your community in general in terms of social capital? Are you doing anything to help improve the situation or do you think that's a waste of time?

I've just started reading [Bowling Alone](#) by Robert Putnam (2000), which outlines the decline in American civic participation and it's root causes. I'm only in chapter 3 right now, but it's an extremely insightful analysis of what constitutes civil society at the grassroots level. They have all the [data from the book](#) posted at [bowlingalone.com](#). And they have the more solutions oriented "[Better Together](#)", which offers ideas on building a more participatory civic culture in America.

The last 6 months of attending community board meetings, talking to local elected officials, other advocates and community residents has made me realize just how accessible and interesting local civic participation can be if one chooses to "get involved". I am slowly building up a pretty good network of local connections (or as Putnam describes it - Social Capital) in my area based on my work on environmental issues. And I have learned a lot by talking to and watching the people who have been doing this a lot longer than I have.

Just as important as building your financial preparations for peak oil, is building your social network - deepening bonds and relationships with good friends and family, reaching out to new people (bridging) in your area that operate in different networks. And this does not necessarily mean sitting around in a circle singing kumbaya - it could mean joining a regular dinner party, a book club, a sports team, etc - whatever you enjoy (besides sitting around watching TV). It does require some time and effort on your part, but probably not much money. And the returns to you can be immediate and long lasting.



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