



SOCIAL CAPITAL AS A TOOL FOR ENGINEERING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN  
DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY OF THE THRIVING PLACE  
FAMILY MEAL AND HOMEWORK CLUB (FMHC) IN BRIDGETON.

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## Introduction

This report presents a research project carried out in 2018 as part of a Master's degree in Education, Public Policy and Equity at the University of Glasgow. The project worked with Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, part of which is the Thriving Places initiative. Thriving Places adopts an intensive neighbourhood approach to delivering community programmes in the most deprived areas of Glasgow. This approach aims at building social capital and empowering communities through making the most of the assets in a neighbourhood, be they buildings, organisations or people. As earlier research into the Thriving Places Family Meal and Homework Club has substantiated the existence of social capital in the club, I sought to explore how participants of the club have used social relationships developed through the club to benefit themselves as individuals and to better their community. This research had two main objectives, namely:

- i. To explore how parents have utilized the stock of social capital in the club to their personal benefit.
- ii. To explore how the social relationships developed through the initiative has been utilized by the parents to champion causes within their community.

## Methodology

Eight individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with five parents who are attendees of the club, and three partner organisations involved in the delivery of the club. To further explore the research objectives and triangulate information from interviews, an Axiom report evidencing the impact of intensive engagement with the whole school community via co-production was also analysed. All interviews were audio recorded with consent. Interviews were manually transcribed due to the small sample size, allowing the researcher to become immersed in the data. Prior to conducting the research, ethical approval was sought and obtained from the University of Glasgow School of Education Ethics committee.

## Key Findings

Results from the data analysis (across themes identified in the literature) showed the following:

- I. Revalidation of the existence of contemporary measures of social capital such as mutual trust.

- II. Results also showed that through the presence of bonding social capital - which is the link between like-minded people that encourages the development of strong ties - the participants have been able to develop generalized trust, reciprocity and a sense of community.
- III. Furthermore, results suggest that some personal benefits are accrued by the participants of the FMHC, such as increased confidence levels and employability skills training, all as a by-product of attending the FMHC. This is premised as the factor that keeps participants coming back year after year.
- IV. Finally, findings show that the development of social relationships has benefited the community in a number of ways. For instance, the community have benefited from collaboration within its ethnically diverse population, with a number of Chinese families now leading the Clyde Gateway Express campaign.

## Conclusion

The FMHC through its stock of social capital has been pivotal in enhancing and empowering the inhabitants of the community, building social relationships to aid individuals' personal development and to champion causes within their community through active participation. From the results we can establish that building social capital in disadvantaged areas might be one of the ways to increase citizen participation, empowering citizens to campaign on real issues affecting them, advocate for policies in line with their vision for the community and more generally become partners in development with the government.

## Further Research

The theory of participatory democracy posits participatory democracy as a process of collective decision making whereby the electorate can monitor politicians' performance by comparing citizens' proposals - in this case specific policy demands such as the Clyde motorway - with the policies implemented. Further research might explore the effects of governmental responses; in this case on the confidence levels of parents who advocated for policy changes and what it means for their community concerning future engagement with the government.