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Commitment to Place as Motivation for Citizen-Based Watershed Collaboration: BIMBY Effect

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A growing literature in citizen-based collaboration extols the many virtues of collaboration to address complex public problems. Little attention has been paid, however, to the underlying motivation for citizen participation. Drawn from three case studies of citizen-based environmental collaborations, this paper examines the motivations of citizens to engage in collaboration. The research suggests that a longstanding commitment to “place” is an important driver for collaboration. The findings of this paper can assist citizen-based environmental collaborative groups to identify ways to more effectively engage citizens in local collaborative efforts.

Keywords: Collaboration, Motivation, Watershed restoration, Social capital

Government agencies have been the primary managers of consensus-based environmental collaborations. Substantial research exists that examines why environmental collaboration occurs, along with the process itself, although that research generally addresses government organized collaborations (see, for example, Sabatier et al., 2005; Leach, 2006; McGuire, 2006), and still other research addresses organization motivation for collaboration (see Diaz-Kope & Morris, 2019). A different type of collaborative approach has been developed and used frequently in recent years. These collaborations are organized, led, and managed by grassroots organizations established specifically to address a particular set of environmental problems within limited geographic boundaries.

To date, no clear, research-based understanding has been developed as to how the motivation, processes, strategies, and institutional development for these grassroots collaborations differ from government-led collaborations. Social capital (Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998; Putnam, 2000) appears to be an important element for collective action and institutional performance in collaborative efforts (Adger, 2003). The process of developing the social capital, trust, and willingness to civically engage is important because, whereas government-organized collaborations begin the process with some level of existing social capital, grassroots-organized collaborations generally start with little social capital. Heightened levels of politically relevant

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social capital tend to enhance the likelihood of continued participation by members of a collaborative process and increase the opportunities for success. Grassroots collaborations must develop that social capital and establish themselves as credible participants in the policy process. It is important to learn more about how grassroots organizations, beginning with none of the legitimacy of government-organized collaborations, develop and maintain the social capital that is most likely a necessary condition for success in environmental collaborations, particularly voluntary collaborations.

This paper examines an important underlying concept that provides individuals the motivation to join in collaborative efforts to protect watersheds. This motivation is rooted in a combination of social capital and a commitment to a particular geographic place. What motivates individual citizens to participate in local grassroots efforts to restore, protect, and manage watersheds? This research is drawn from three case studies conducted in 2012 as part of a more comprehensive examination of local grassroots environmental collaboration (Morris et al., 2013). Two of the three cases, i.e., Lynnhaven River NOW and the Nansemond River Preservation Alliance, rely heavily on citizen participation to further their mission. The third case, the Elizabeth River Project, relies more heavily on organizational actors, but the motivations of the individuals within the organizations are, at their root, quite similar in nature. If our reasoning is correct, we should be able to detect a consistent theme of “commitment to place,” along with indications of strong social capital, in our data. We begin this paper with a discussion of social capital, followed by a discussion of the central concept of the paper (BIMBY, or **B**ecause **I**t’s **M**y **B**ack **Y**ard), followed by a brief discussion of the study methods employed in the paper. The focus then turns to a presentation and analysis of the data from three case studies and ends with concluding thoughts about the viability of the concept for theory and practice.

Social Capital as the Motivation for Collaboration

The literature on social capital underscores the importance of social relationships and their implications for the formation and effectiveness of social structures (see Bourdieu, 1991; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Siisiainen, 2003). Theoretical perspectives of social capital are attributed to the works of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam (Tzanakis, 2013). While some of the tenets of social capital overlap across the three perspectives, underlining ideologies differ. For example, Bourdieu takes a market perspective on social capital. He attributes economic profits as the principal motivation for actors to engage in linking to networks (see Bourdieu, 1986; Tzanakis, 2013). In this regard, Bourdieu views social capital as a “utility-maximizing” strategy to control capital and profit.

In contrast, Coleman (1988) views social capital as a collective resource that is *embedded* in social structures, which is evident as a result of the experiences and interactions among participants. Coleman (1988, p. S98) also states that social capital “...is not lodged ... in the actors themselves” but rather in the social bonds that exist between actors. Furthermore, Coleman suggests that social capital produces “dividends of trust” that accumulate within social networks, which in turn are transformed into a fungible resource (e.g., social capital). Unlike Bourdieu’s (1989) perspective, Coleman maintains that the motivation to form social networks is to advance the public good.

Building on Coleman’s work, Putnam (2000) conceptualizes social capital as the culmination of qualities (i.e., trust and norms) found in social organizations. These qualities facilitate the formation of voluntary associations. Putnam (2000, p. 19) has also written extensively on the concept of social capital, defining the concept as

...connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations.

We note that Siisiainen (2003) draws a clear distinction between the underlying bases of Putnam’s conception of social capital and that offered by Bourdieu (1986; 1990). Where Putnam (2000) sees social capital as the result of community integration, Bourdieu conceives social capital as a struggle between participants, each in pursuit of their own interests. In the context of collaboration as set forth by Gray (1989) and others, the underpinnings of Putnam’s (2000) definition are better aligned than are those of Bourdieu. The bulk of the extant literature conceives of collaboration as a fundamentally collective (and cooperative) enterprise.

Arguably, civic virtue (a standard of expected behavior that attaches with citizenship) is an integral part of social capital. The concept of civic virtue speaks directly to ideals of democratic citizenship and civic participation (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). In this sense, the efficacy of social and political systems depends on the engagement of citizens and their involvement in civic life. According to Walzer (1991), it is the daily interactions among members of civic groups and voluntary associations that forge the bonds that hold society together. These bonds cultivate a sense of community and shared vision that forms the basis for participatory endeavors. Social capital, and therefore collaboration, is built on interconnected networks of people who work together to realize a shared goal. While goals at a community level are likely both broad and general (“we want to live in a safe place”), the goals in a collaboration are often more narrow and more focused. In other words, social capital is a diffused idea in a community of people, while a collaboration is typically created to meet a specific goal (“we want to eat oysters from this river by 2020”).

The dominant streams of thought in the literature on social capital help define the term. One stream concludes that social capital is built through social norms of reciprocity and trust (Simmel, 1950, as cited in Kenney, 2000; Putnam, 2000). In this perspective, the actions of participants are grounded in the expectation that one’s willingness or enthusiasm to do one thing is based on another person’s willingness to do something in return (Coleman, 1988). In this conception, social capital is primarily transactional in nature; agreements are constructed on trustworthiness, legitimacy, and/or expectations (Trachtenberg & Focht, 2005; Coleman, 1988).

The other stream of thought examines social capital in a network context, in which relationships of participants create social structures over time (Lin, 2001, as cited in Floress et al., 2011). These social networks serve to build trust that, in turn, produces increasing amounts of social capital (Putnam, 2000; Leahy & Anderson, 2010; Floress et al., 2011). A significant volume of research has been published regarding the centrality of social capital in activities such as natural resource management (see Parisi et al., 2004; 2010; Wagner & Fernandez-Gimenez, 2008; Leach & Sabatier, 2005; Leahy & Anderson, 2010;). Nonetheless, the concept of social capital and its effect on policy outcomes represents an ongoing dialogue among scholars (Leach, 2006; Floress et al., 2011; Parisi et al., 2004; Leach & Sabatier, 2005).

Related to the concept of social capital, many scholars conclude that “collective efficacy” is dependent on local spatial and socioeconomic conditions (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Parisi et al., 2004). Weber’s (2000) research on collaboration groups concludes that most of the core members tend to be highly educated, hold white-collar jobs, and earn salaries above the national average. Parisi et al. (2004) examine 324 localities in Mississippi and report that the predominant level of

education is a critical component of environmental activism in a community. The authors also argue that, in low-income areas, environmental activism is challenging because citizens there may feel disenfranchised from their larger community because of the effort to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter.

Weber (2009) reports that people in a community will participate in collective action efforts when there is a shared commitment to a geographic place. Weber's (2009, p. 318) study of a watershed in Montana finds that a "common vision of place" allows participants with rival interests to set aside their disagreements and focus on a shared goal, specifically, the shared interest in the watershed and a desire to preserve the location for enjoyment by future generations. Parisi et al. (2004) conclude that "spatial identity" (i.e., regional location and size) of the community is an important element of environmental activism.

Wagner and Fernandez-Gimenez's (2008) study of environmental collaborations in Colorado identifies several factors that facilitate the formation of social capital. First, the authors find that the establishment of clear ground rules that consider the viewpoints of all stakeholders builds cooperation and trust. Second, they find that the formation and use of open forums among residents, group members, and agency staff are a valuable tool to enhance collaboration. They argue that opportunities to promote the exchange of information, viewpoints, and ideas can serve to foster respect, understanding, and trust among participants. The authors also report that certain activities can serve to diminish social capital in some groups.

The themes for this research are derived from the model presented by Morris et al. (2013). In that study, one of the important concepts is social capital; in this instance, social capital is conceived as a necessary prerequisite to collaboration but also a product (output) of collaboration. An indeterminant amount of social capital is required to incentivize individuals to participate in collaboration, but the very process of collaboration serves to build additional social capital. In the systems-like model presented by Morris et al. (2013), social capital begets social capital. The authors report that social capital tended to increase across the cases over time, and that social capital plays a pivotal role in successful collaboration.

This paper seeks to delve deeper into the concept of social capital as it relates to collaboration for watershed protection. Is there some specific element of social capital that seems pervasive, or one element of social capital that is more prominent than others? For example, is trust more pervasive than reciprocity or respect? By re-analyzing the interview data from the 2013 study, we seek to determine whether there is an element (or elements) of social capital that becomes more prevalent, or more central, in collaboration.

Methods

We employ a qualitative comparative case methodology for this study. We rely on several sources of information and data for our analysis. As an embedded multiple-case design, we investigate multiple units of analysis. Our primary unit of analysis is the three grassroots environmental organizations under study, along with the partners with whom they collaborate to accomplish their missions. We also focus our attention on the individual actors within each grassroots structure as the source of information about the motivations, contributions, expertise, and actions of actors within each organization. Our attention to individual actors allows us to examine individual motivations for collaboration.

The cases are drawn from the Hampton Roads, Virginia, region, at the confluence of James River, the Chesapeake Bay, and the Atlantic Ocean. The cases were chosen because of their physical

proximity to one another, the fact that all three rivers under study empty into the same larger water body, and that each of the three cases represents a different form of watershed protection. For each watershed, the grassroots organization under study is the only grassroots environmental organization active in that watershed. By choosing cases in the same geographic area and in the same state, we eliminate large differences in cultural and political factors.

This study utilized interview data as the principal source of data. The data were from in-person interviews of participants in each of the three case studies, along with local government officials, state and federal officials, and representatives of other nonprofit environmental groups. We employed a snowball sampling method, and each of the interviews took between 60 and 180 minutes, depending on the interest and position of the interviewee. We began by interviewing the chief executive officers (CEOs) of each organization and asked each CEO to recommend additional interviewees.

Each additional interviewee was also asked for additional names of potential interviewees. Our final list includes the CEOs and founders of each organization; other interviewees included board members, committee chairpersons, representatives of partner organizations, and general organizational members. In some cases, individual people were interviewed more than once; typically, multiple interviews were conducted with the CEOs, and some board members or committee chairpersons. A total of 81 interviews of 61 separate respondents were conducted between January 2012 and October 2012; all but one interview included at least two members of the project team. Appendix A contains summary information regarding our data collection.

Semistructured interview protocols were developed for the interviews; the team developed separate protocols for each of three classes of interviewee (CEO, founder, and member/partner). A core set of questions regarding the role of social capital was asked of each interviewee regardless of class; these questions are provided in Appendix B. Although not reported in this paper, survey data were also collected from the general membership of two of the three case studies. All three of the case organizations were 501(c)(3) (nonprofit) corporations; the researchers were given access to meeting minutes, agendas, planning documents, and reports as well as advertising and promotional materials produced by each organization. The documents provided additional evidence of the themes identified as a result of the analysis of interview data and also identified some themes not found in the interview data.

Analysis Technique

Each interview was recorded with the consent of the interviewee. The interviews were then transcribed by a professional transcription service and double-checked for accuracy by members of the study team. We utilized hand coding by five coders. The team used inductive reasoning to identify broad themes that emerged from the interviews. One weakness of hand-coding is that it is prone to perception by the person conducting the analysis (McTavish & Pirro, 1990). To mitigate this, after the first round of coding, the coders discussed discrepancies to clarify and refine concepts and protocol, then re-coded and compared again. After a second round of coding, no discrepancies were identified.

Findings

Summary of Themes

Our analysis of the data revealed common themes across all our case studies. To begin with, all cases involved collaborations formed to solve a large-scale problem involving multiple actors with complex power dynamics. Against this backdrop, the members of these collaborations, especially the founders, revealed their deep personal attachment to the rivers as a strong source of

motivation. This personal attachment, what we coded as commitment to place, was expressed by interviewees in several ways, such as mentions of growing up on the river, caring about the issue as it is in their “backyard,” and wanting to restore the river to how they remember it being.

The founders of these grassroots organizations leveraged their social connections with community members, government officials, and other key actors to initiate their collaborative process by serving as conveners and bringing people together. They channeled their commitment to place into a positive future vision for their river, deliberately framing the goal in a way that would be hard to argue against. They found that the positive results of their initial efforts led to an increase in social capital, with more individuals joining in with a sense of shared purpose and wanting to associate with the emerging positive identity of these collaborations.

We found that there was a high level of sophistication within these groups, as they carefully deployed their social capital to acquire resources for their organizations and to accomplish goals. The groups built a trustworthy reputation within the community and presented themselves as experts on the problems in their watershed. They viewed education of not just key actors but also the broader community on the issue as an important path to achieving their goals. All three organizations were successful in their efforts, with the older organizations evolving to pursue more ambitious goals.

Case Studies

The three case studies are grassroots environmental organizations located in southeastern Virginia, at the southern end of the Chesapeake Bay. Known as Hampton Roads (or historically as Tidewater Virginia), this area is home to one of the largest maritime ports on the East Coast as well as the largest operating naval base in the world (Morris et al., 2013). The region is also home to roughly 1.6 million residents. Hampton Roads refers to the body of water represented by the confluence of the Chesapeake Bay, James River, Elizabeth River, and Nansemond River. A third river, the Lynnhaven River, empties into the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay on its southern shore, just a few miles east of the confluence of the other rivers. Each of the rivers framed in the cases—Elizabeth, Lynnhaven, and Nansemond—suffer from different environmental threats. However, the common threads are geographic proximity, the use of collaboration to frame collective action, and a strong sense of place among participants.

The Lynnhaven River and Lynnhaven River NOW: The Lynnhaven River, located in its entirety within the city of Virginia Beach, is a tidal estuary that empties into the Chesapeake Bay at the confluence of the Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Historically a remarkably productive oyster fishing area, the river’s oysters were in high demand because of their unique taste. As the city’s population increased and more houses were built along the river, runoff into the river from faulty septic systems, stormwater discharges, sanitary discharges from recreational boats, pet waste, and other sources led the Virginia Department of Health to close nearly all of the river to shellfish harvesting. Residents also regularly reported foul odors emanating from the water. Today, roughly 225,000 people live within the boundaries of the Lynnhaven’s 64-square miles of watershed (Lynnhaven River NOW [LRN], 2010).

Lynnhaven River NOW (LRN) was formed in 2002 by three leading citizens from Virginia Beach. Two of the three had been raised on the river, and each had gone on to successful careers. Saddened by memories of the river as it was in their youth, the three decided to work to restore the river. Working with their neighbors, friends, and city officials, they formed LRN with the goal of restoring the river for oyster production by 2007 (Fine, 2012). As of 2022, there were nearly 150 acres of sanctuary reef in the Lynnhaven River; the organization boasted more than 6,000

households as members; and had received more than \$1 million in grants to develop new oyster reefs (LRN, 2023).

A common theme emerging from the interviews conducted for the LRN case study is the strong commitment to place. This theme is consistent with Weber's (2009) finding and was also reflected in the organization's public communications as well as the themes found in newspaper articles. The three founders of LRN all have a long association with the area and the river, and all three live on the river. This deep commitment is clear in comments of two of the founders from our interviews. Andrew Fine (2012) recalls his experiences as a child growing up on the river:

I had enjoyed all of the pleasures of playing games in this most gorgeous setting and when we were hungry, we would go down and take oysters out of the river and either eat them raw, or finding a crate and making a little fire and grilling them. That is pretty firmly etched in my mind.

Another of the LRN founders, Harry Lester (2012), described his historical connection to the river as follows:

I came to Hampton Roads in 1969 ... I was a junior officer in the Navy and I used to go to the Duck Inn [near the mouth of the Lynnhaven River] and they had these aluminum trays and would shuck the oysters right in front of you and it was just wonderful. In our adult lifetime, because of all these forces ... the runoff because the city grew and all the stuff came of the yards and streets, the pets, the animals, the stupid geese, and the runoff from people's lawns. We didn't really know what it was. All we knew was that we couldn't eat the oysters...

Lester (2012) also illustrates his personal motivation to make a difference in the river:

It is not a river in New Jersey; that is my river, and I want to be helpful. There is social capital being built because people are feeling good about what they are doing. I did something good today: I picked up after my pet. I think it probably makes people feel better about themselves ... People love to be part of a winner.

Lester's comments are instructive at another level as well. Unlike the other two founders (and many members of LRN), Lester was not raised on the river; he came to the area for the first time as a young adult. However, his interest in the river is tied to his presence in the area. This is a refrain heard from many members of LRN. At a fundraising event sponsored by LRN in 2016, the annual Oyster Roast, a family in attendance commented that they had lived in the area for less than a year but were drawn to LRN because of the focus on community. They did not live on the water but had been attracted to LRN because of a newspaper article reporting recent gains in water quality in the river.

As another member of LRN, Kevin Dubois (2012) noted, "I live on the river so I am a stakeholder in that regard." This sentiment was echoed by nearly all interviewees and serves to explain the motivation present among members to restore the river. That same motivation serves to incentivize people not just to give their time (or money) for individual projects but to serve as committee members and to convince their neighbors and friends to participate in LRN. It is also notable that it is not just residents with property on the river, or indeed near the water, who participate in LRN. Laurie Sorabella (2012), the organization's second executive director, stated that:

...whenever we would be at a civic league or someplace like that, maybe they would say they were working on an environmental initiative and maybe you could help us with that sort of thing ... They were helping us and giving us a forum for educating and talking to people. We could help them do some of their environmental initiatives, too. I feel like there was some community engagement we were able to get with that.

The Nansemond River and the Nansemond River Preservation Alliance: The city of Suffolk, formerly Nansemond County, was formed in 1974 with the consolidation of the county and the city of Suffolk. The Nansemond River originates on the northern edge of the Dismal Swamp and runs through Downtown Suffolk, located in the southern part of the city. The river then runs northeasterly through the city for about 20 miles before emptying into the James River at Hampton Roads. The river supports a range of agriculture, including peanuts, tobacco, cotton, and soybeans. Blue crab, shad, and oyster fisheries were once on the river, but a combination of overfishing, pollution, and a loss of habitat to explosive residential development have reduced farm acreage significantly in recent decades. In addition, stormwater runoff, faulty septic tanks, animal waste, and sewer overflows have created an ongoing problem with high levels of fecal coliform bacteria in the river. In addition, runoff from fertilizers from farm operations and suburban lawns has also contributed to impairments in the river. The growth in residential neighborhoods has also resulted in the loss of hundreds of acres of wetlands and riparian zones, both important natural filters that capture runoff before it reaches the waterway (Nansemond River Preservation Alliance, 2011).

As noted in the LRN case study, the commitment to place serves as a powerful force that motivates citizens to participate in collaborative efforts. Particularly in this case study, almost every person interviewed expressed a historical and strong commitment to the river. For some interviewees, the connection was specifically to the Nansemond, a process begun at an early age:

I was born and raised actually two blocks from here and then when I was about seven years old my parents moved to a section called Riverview and it was, in fact, at the time on the river. That part of the river has since been dammed to form Lake Mead but when I was a kid we were called "river rats." We played and the river was our backyard ... And then later when I was 15 years old my grandfather gave me a wooden lapstrake boat, with a 35 horse motor and that was the biggest thing going at the time. And a bunch of the kids around town had that brand of boat and so then we started water skiing and venturing up further and down the river. Then a group of us used to go, three or four summers in a row, we'd actually take the boats and team up with two people per boat and we'd run all the way to Virginia Beach and through the Lesner Bridge, Lynnhaven River, Crystal Lake ... I grew up enjoying the water. My home now, we live on Chuckatuck Creek. That's more of my immediate involvement because I still love the water and want to preserve it in a lot of ways (Eure, 2012).

Other participants did not grow up on the river but moved to the area as adults. They saw their involvement in NRPA as a pathway to active involvement in the community:

I live in Suffolk: this is where I live; this is where I bicycle; this is where I buy my groceries and everything ... And I thought, well, the Nansemond River is in my back yard and I want to help. So I just volunteered (Barnum, 2012).

There is also an important recognition among the NRPA membership that their fellow members share the same commitment to place. As Elizabeth Taraski (2012) said,

Social capital is very important ... we didn't form in response to any type of urgent detrimental event that was happening in Suffolk. It was different groups of individuals coming together with a common interest ... It's the water. So many of these people have boats or they fish or they just live on the water ... so it's the water. I feel that it's people's place to preserve and restore [the river] for future generations also ... I've heard so many stories about downtown Suffolk who used to go swimming in that water...

One group of residents that has largely resisted the efforts of NRPA is the local watermen. In local parlance, “watermen” refers to the people that work as local commercial fishermen. The NRPA is trying to entice the watermen to participate in the group, but there has been much resistance:

Yes, I think, and we don't have them yet; we're working on them. We've got to get the watermen behind this 100% ... But they're sort of, like, skeptical about what we're doing. Most of the people in Nansemond River Preservation Alliance are not your local watermen and local villagers, and so they're looking at this group of “come heres,” that's what they like to call it, who are a little more affluent ... and I have to say that a lot of times, the group that is advocating for environmental action is a little more educated, a little more affluent, and ... they don't want this group of people to come into their waterways where they've been throwing a beer bottle overboard for twenty five, thirty, one hundred years, and tell them what they can and cannot do. And so there's a little pushback from that ... I want them to help me with the oyster [restoration] thing and they're arguing with me about the concept of oyster restoration for restoration's sake and using tax money to do it (Smith, 2012).

This comment from Karla Smith, a lifetime resident of the river, highlights a clear tension between the watermen who have lived and worked on the water for generations, along with the more recent residents of the area who want to work to preserve and protect the river. Chesapeake watermen have an accurate reputation for a strong distrust of government and independence (see Warner, 1976; Blackistone, 2001), and they see environmental protection groups as a threat to their way of life. Smith is aware of the importance of including watermen in the group and extending the bonds of social capital and seems confident that NRPA eventually will be successful:

I'm slowly winning them over ... I think they're starting to be nicer to me. But it's political, I mean, it's socially political in this community. I don't know when we're going to win over the rank-and-file neighborhood people. One family at a time. But once they're all on board, I think [NRPA] could be a force that will be hard to deal with. You know, they're not putting us down, they're just not running to join ... you have to tread carefully (Smith, 2012).

The Elizabeth River and the Elizabeth River Project: The longest-serving organization of our three cases, the Elizabeth River Project was formed in November 1991 in the home of one of its four founders. Since that time, the group has expanded to include thousands of residents of the cities that border the river; more importantly, the membership includes scores of the businesses and organizations that rely on the river for their operations.

The Elizabeth River is a tidal estuary that runs from the Great Bridge Locks in the city of Chesapeake in the south and empties into Hampton Roads and the confluence of the James and Nansemond rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. The main branch of the river divides the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth, and three separate branches run to the east, west, and south into the cities of Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, and Chesapeake, respectively. The main stem of the river, along with the three branches, are lined with large commercial and military port facilities, including ship repair, chemical and fuel storage, commercial container operations, a large coal embarkation facility, and both navy and coast guard bases. Often described as the “birthplace of maritime industry in America,” the Elizabeth River is not only one of the most polluted rivers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, but indeed one of the most polluted rivers in the nation (Kobell, 2011). Four hundred years of heavy industrial and military use have produced a heavily contaminated river bottom, and tons of pollutants regularly wash off the surrounding land into the river. Exceptionally high levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), a leading cause of cancer in fish as well as a significant risk to human health, can be found in nearly 20 acres of sediment in the river bottom. Nine Superfund sites can be found along the river's shores, and the

U.S. EPA has designated a dedicated team to address remediation efforts along the river. In addition, a range of pollutants from stormwater runoff also creates issues for water quality in the river. The nutrients found in this runoff generates disproportionate algae growth, which depletes the dissolved oxygen in the water necessary for marine life (Elizabeth River Project, 2008a; 2008b).

A strong commitment to place has served as a strong motivator for participation in the Elizabeth River Project (ERP). The four founders immediately recognized the power of this factor as they began discussions with stakeholders in early 1992. “We used the argument of history, culture, and pride in the river, that those who participated could be keepers of that tradition” (Adams, 2012). Each of the four founding members had their individual reasons for joining the effort and their own reasons for their commitment, although none of the four was originally from the area. One of the four, Marjorie Mayfield Jackson, lived on the river at Scott’s Creek in Portsmouth and had done so since 1983. She described her motivation as follows:

People thought the river was pretty much dead. They didn’t even know its name and the headlines in the paper were that the fish had cancer. I had taken a sabbatical from [the Virginian Pilot newspaper] for six months so I had spent a lot of time sitting in the back yard. I would see herons eating fish. Clearly it was not dead. It was quite beautiful in my little corner ... I was ashamed that I lived in a community where the river had such toxins the fish had cancer. That is really why I tried to do something about it. At some point I decided what would really matter to me was if I could help clean up that river that was in my backyard (Jackson, 2012).

Walter and Josh Priest, brothers actively involved in some of the most successful projects undertaken by the ERP, exemplify the motivation that being raised on the river can have. Both spoke joyfully and fondly about their childhood growing up in the Larchmont neighborhood in Norfolk. Walter Priest became one of the leading experts in the region for wetlands, the “go-to” person for the development of restoration plans. Many of the interviewees related how Priest could see possibilities when surveying a damaged site: “...he understands the potential and what needs to be done to realize it” (Reisch, 2012). The attachment of Josh Priest to the river in his youth was so strong that Josh spent eighteen months participating in the first volunteer wetlands restoration undertaken by the ERP at the Birdsong Wetlands in the Larchmont neighborhood. Like the Priest brothers, most of the ERP participants interviewed either lived or worked on the river or conducted scientific research on the river. Many drew attention to their attachment to the river and the sense of responsibility that attachment generated. This is consistent with the “paradox of scale” discussed by Bonnell and Koontz (2007), in which local watershed issues tend to have greater salience for participants. It is often easier to commit to address watershed problems in one’s own backyard; indeed, many became involved “because it’s in my backyard” (Morris et al., 2013).

Discussion

An Alternative: Because it’s My Backyard!

Some readers of this paper are likely familiar with the popular acronym “NIMBY” (Not In My Back Yard). NIMBY is a term often employed to convey opposition to the threat of a negative change in the local environment or setting. The term is generally considered to carry a negative outlook or connotation. This opposition has been engaged, for example, to oppose citing decisions such as prisons, power plants, mining operations, and economic development projects. Residents often view these projects as contrary to local quality of life, health, or property values.

Gray (1989, p. 206) suggests that the basis of NIMBY results “...from an unequal distribution of costs and benefits.” A venture thought to be harmful to a community places unacceptable costs on local residents, which in turn leads to resistance in the community because the community bears an outsized cost from the project. People who benefit from a proposal are less likely to speak against the project than those who bear the costs; thus, the loudest voices are from those who object to the proposal. The interests of the negative forces thus determine the behavior of the group (Gray, 1989). The effectiveness of NIMBY as a strategy is well documented, as is the dependence of NIMBY on citizen self-interest and a sense of connection to the community.

We argue that a connection to the local community can also provide a positive motivation, for many of the same reasons that connection can act as a negative force. In essence, citizens can be engaged to address environmental issues in their communities *because* the problems are immediate and local and thus salient to all. The underlying problem may not be readily apparent, but the potential for harm due to inaction or indecision can provide a strong motivational force for citizens to join with other citizens to tackle problems in their community. People become engaged due to a different twist on the motivation in NIMBY—*Because It’s My Back Yard* (BIMBY). The connection to place, a critical component of BIMBY, is entirely consistent with the underlying elements of social capital. If social capital is the result of “a dense network of reciprocal social relations,” as Putnam (2000, p. 19) states, then it follows that citizens with shared goals and values can work with fellow citizens to address common issues in the community. In communities with high levels of trust, residents who may otherwise be less motivated environmentally than others may join collaborative efforts because of a shared idea of what a “desirable community” looks like and because it affects their community directly. It is relatively simple to motivate people to participate in something that can have tangible effects on the immediate community, and that is also important to their friends and neighbors. BIMBY is thus a positive element, in that it serves as a motivating force for citizens to collaborate with others for locally driven change, rather than as a force to prevent undesirable, and likely externally driven, change.

The concept of “place” in BIMBY is a central component in our explanation of how citizen collaborations operate. If this explanation is accurate, then BIMBY also contributes to our understanding of why grassroots citizen-based collaborations succeed where large-scale, agency-based collaborations (see Moore and Koontz 2003) have previously failed. People who live on a river experience the effects of pollution firsthand, while water quality problems elsewhere are more abstract—indeed, they are “someone else’s problem.” This effect can be made clear through the example of a large-scale environmental problem. The Chesapeake Bay, a large estuary on the east coast of the United States, has suffered decades of environmental degradation. The Chesapeake watershed encompasses parts of six states and the District of Columbia and is home to millions of people in some of the most populous regions of the nation. At least two of the states that are responsible for pollution in the bay, New York and Pennsylvania, do not border the bay and therefore receive no direct economic, cultural, or recreational benefit from the bay. If the literature is correct, i.e., that important elements of successful collaboration include trust, common goals, and shared risk, then the effort to collaborate across thousands of square miles and a long list of stakeholders is a huge task.

This line of thought also suggests that, as the scale of the problem increases, the more difficult it becomes to include all stakeholder interests in the process. For example, farmers in Pennsylvania have different interests than farmers in Maryland, and the interests of each are represented differently in each state. We can infer that farmers may share interests as members of a shared economic group, but we can think of them as a “community” only in a very general manner. The groups do not regularly interact; they may not be geographically co-located, and they have a different history. In contrast, these factors are much less important at the local level; by definition,

people in a community live close to each other and are thus likely to share a common history and culture, i.e., the elements that serve as the basis for a shared experience. Social capital exists at some level in the community because of the regular social interactions between people. If our conception of BIMBY as a motivating force is useful, the takeaway is that it is more straightforward to bring people together around a positive activity in the community.

Conclusion

This research establishes a theoretical and empirical backdrop for the concept of BIMBY, a commitment to place that motivates individuals to collaborate within their local communities to achieve ecosystem restoration. This positive motivating force leverages existing social bonds and trust within local communities to strive for internally driven change. More importantly, it provides additional insight into the broader concept of social capital, and aids our understanding of why social capital is an integral element of successful grassroots environmental collaboration. Our findings suggest that BIMBY represents a collective view of social capital (e.g., Putnam, 2000; Lin, 2001), as opposed to a more transactional conception of social capital (e.g., Coleman, 1988). The attachment to place, and to people in that place, is unmistakable. This suggests that there is close conceptual link between social capital, as defined by Putnam (2000), and BIMBY. Yet, we also note that, while the extant literature does not address the centrality of “place” in the formation and maintenance of social capital, our research suggests that place-based measures may be key to a more complete understanding of, and perhaps limitations to, social capital, at least in terms of watershed collaboration. It remains the subject of further research to determine whether BIMBY is applicable to other interaction settings.

The three case studies described in this paper provide strong evidence for the concept of BIMBY. First, all three cases are of citizens coming together to identify long-term goals of ecosystem restoration, i.e., these goals were not externally imposed on them by government agencies or larger environmental groups but rather formulated by each grassroots group. Second, these citizens demonstrate a strong attachment to these ecosystems based on their past experiences and their relationships with other individuals in the community. Third, individuals who formed these grassroots groups with a shared long-term vision as well as deep commitment to the outcome were able successfully to *sustain* collective action over a long period to achieve tangible results. It is important to emphasize that BIMBY cannot solely drive collaboration among individuals within a community without a foundation of social capital, i.e., trust and social ties, which can help “bring people along” with a founding group’s vision. This is illustrated by the case of the Nansemond River, in which local watermen who were distrustful of government and environmental groups, even though they saw the river as their backyard and claimed ownership of it, were unwilling to collaborate with the grassroots group. In this case, it may be that the commitment to place (and to a way of life) of the watermen mitigated against collaboration with those in the community who did not have as deep a connection to place.

Our findings have important implications for institutional arrangements for ecosystem restoration efforts. While the focus thus far has been on rational choice models of citizen participation, we have identified a value-based motivation for collaboration that is a potent driver for voluntary action. Stakeholder analyses must go beyond cost–benefit analyses and consider the local community’s social cohesion and cultural commitment to the natural resource as a key factor that can make or break the success of these restoration initiatives. Moreover, an increase in the attention paid to the importance of “place,” and how “place” fits into broader concepts of social capital, provides an additional avenue of inquiry for future studies of collaboration.

Notes

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Appendix A: Summary Data Collection Information

Data Category	Subcategory	Number of Interviews (61 individual respondents)
Interviews		81
	Founders	12
	CEOs	9
	Board Members	6
	Members	41
	Partners	13
Newspaper articles		802
	Lynnhaven River NOW	324
	Elizabeth River Project	431
	Nansemond River Preservation Alliance	47
Organizational Documents		
	Watershed Plans	5
	Reports	17
	Websites	9
	Meeting Agendas	37
	Committee Reports	22

Appendix B: Interview Questions

NOTE: The original project (Morris et al., 2013) included six separate interview protocols for data collection. The following are questions from those instruments that yielded relevant responses to the analyses reported in this paper.

Context

Q: In your judgment, what was the state of the watershed at the time the organization was founded?

Q: Tell me about the origins of the organization. What was the genesis of the organization? Why was it formed? Who were the major players involved?

Q: Are there specific events that served as an impetus for the formation of the organization?

Q: What do you think are the most important events in the history of the collaborative?

Demands

Q: In your judgment, what do you think citizens wanted in the way of changes in the watershed?

Q: Did your organization meet with any representatives of interest groups? What did they want to see happen?

Q: Was there any collective effort in place to address issues in this watershed? How active were these collectives? What did they want to happen?

Support

Q: Do you believe the organization received initial support from the community? From the state? From the national government?

Q: Do you think the community at large accepted the organization as a group capable of addressing water quality issues in the watershed?

Q: Did members of the organization have existing contacts with others in similar organizations (either local or regional)?

Q: Were there other groups (or networks) in existence that were working on the problems in the watershed?

Q: How would you describe the level of initial motivation of the group members?

Collaboration Process

Actors

Q: How did you decide who should be involved? Why?

Q: Are there specific individuals in the community whose support is critical to the success of the group's activities?

Q: Is there a central person critical to the process that acts as a facilitator?

Q: What motivated you to become involved?

Q: What do you think motivated others to become involved?

Social Capital

Q: What is your perception as to how much trust exists among participants?

Q: Do you trust others involved? Are you at ease when working with others of these projects who might have different interests than you?

Q: Were there individuals or organizations that you particularly trusted to work with honesty and good faith?

Q: Between community members, government agencies, private sector organizations, and environmental organizations who are you most willing to share information with? Which do you feel have been most willing to share information with you?

Q: How is it decided on who gets to participate in various projects, and who does not get invited? Do groups want to participate who do not get to? Or do you let any who desire to be involved participate?

Q: How are leaders selected? Has leadership changed? How? In what ways?

Q: Do you feel as though you have a legitimate role in the efforts to address the water quality

issues? What are you doing to further your legitimacy in the community? Do others take you seriously, and listen to your position?

Q: Do you feel that volunteers have been allowed to participate freely and used appropriately?

Q: Do you feel that everyone is represented in the process?

Q: Do you feel that all are treated fairly?

Q: Do you believe the processes are open and transparent?

Q: Has this process been able to take time to identify common interests among participants?
How so?

Q: Has the process taken time to develop and agree on a common knowledge base?

Q: Do you feel that all participants have been able to influence decisions? Why or why not?

Watershed Outcomes

Q: In your judgment, has the quality of the environment in the watershed changed as a result of the group activities?