

BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Marshall Center alumni networks strengthen multinational security cooperation

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To meet the security challenges of the 21st century, security experts argue that new policies should exhibit enhanced cooperation and coordination among state and nonstate agencies at all levels – local, regional and international. Moreover, cooperation needs to be supported by common principles, norms and rules, predictable behavior and mutually agreed upon tools to address threats.

Political scientist Robert D. Putnam (1995) argues that social capital fosters cooperation based on shared norms. He defines social capital as social networks based on shared norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits. “Social capital,” Francis Fukuyama (2002) explains, “is what permits individuals to band together to defend their interests and organize to support collective needs” (p. 26). It improves collective trust and social cohesion and positively correlates with economic growth, international trade, macroeconomic stability, and political and civic involvement (Beugelsdijk and Schaik, 2005).

Given its relevance, a question naturally arises: How can social capital develop in the security context? Previous research has looked at international education in the military environment as a transmitter of democratic values and norms and as a facilitator of professional networking (Kennedy, 1998; *The Economist*, 2011). However, existing literature features no empirical research on the development of social capital in the context of global security.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to establish an academic understanding of social capital in the security context and to explore the extent to which international education of

security professionals develops social capital. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, this study found that international security policy education (ISPE) and shared experiences contribute to 1) fostering social and professional networks that are used as capital for cooperation; 2) the development of trust; 3) emerging shared norms; 4) intercultural competence; and 5) the application of acquired values, norms and practices in participants’ home countries.

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE SECURITY CONTEXT

Based on previous definitions of social capital in the civil sector, social capital in the security context is conceptualized as social and professional networks – based on shared experiences, norms and values, and mutual trust – that facilitate the cooperation of security professionals for future benefits. Social capital can be viewed from both an individual and a social perspective. The individual dimension emphasizes that, unlike political, physical and human capital, social capital can only be acquired through interaction with others (Chalupnick, 2010). This view explains differential success of individuals in

a competitive environment: The more connections (capital) one holds, the more favorable the outcome (benefits).

The social perspective on social capital emphasizes shared values or norms that permit cooperation within a group of security professionals. According to this perspective, social capital is a type of positive group externality in the sense that every member of a security group can benefit from the group's resources (knowledge, information, connections, etc.).

METHODS

The research for this study was focused on the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. It employs qualitative and quantitative methods of investigation, and the main instrument for collecting data was semistructured interviews conducted in 2012 of 93 Marshall Center alumni from 41 countries. Interview questions inquired about respondents' perceptions on forging friendships and professional connections, establishing trust, acquiring values and norms, and their overall Marshall Center experience. Participants were prompted with broad, open-ended questions to ensure that they were not led toward certain answers. Data was analyzed with NVivo 10 qualitative software and was further coded and analyzed with quantitative methods (binary logistic regressions).

FINDINGS

Professional and social networks

The formation and growth of networks of cooperation are the sine qua non of building social capital among Marshall Center alumni in the global security community. Alumni forge and use professional and social relationships for personal or professional benefits. Analysis reveals that the process unfolds as follows: Participants establish a large number of friendships (social networks) while in Garmisch, but the relationships decrease in number and intensity over time (upon graduation) and become what network theory calls "weak ties" (relationships with acquaintances in which frequency of

meetings, emotional intensity and intimacy are low – Granovetter, 1973, 1982).

Weak ties are relevant in large and diverse networks, such as the multinational and multiagency Marshall Center network, because they connect members of different groups (cultures, countries or agencies). Through their connections, Marshall Center network members create bridges of communication that accelerate bureaucratic processes and ensure faster and less redundant flow of information. For this reason, weak ties are the basis for fostering highly utilitarian professional

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connections. Their benefits are reflected in an increased transfer of information and facilitated cooperation across security agencies and borders and reduced "red tape." These connections also make it easier to locate professional expertise or assistance in a foreign country and search for jobs. They even act as icebreakers in international negotiations.

Trust

Trust is an essential component of social capital and for the formation of networks. Because networks have no organizational authority, trust allows members to cooperate efficiently (Gausdal, 2012; Tilly, 2005). This study indicates that the Marshall Center environment

— including its location; a climate of open relations with faculty and other students; rich social, cultural and professional activities; and a diverse but balanced national representation — is conducive to developing trust. Furthermore, shared experiences, involvement in sports, sufficient time to interact with colleagues and rigorous selection of participants by their governments are contributing factors to establishing trust-based relationships.

Moreover, the interpersonal trust established among participants while in Garmisch is extended to nonspecific Marshall Center alumni (alumni who have not personally met before). This facilitates the foundation of category-based trust, with the Marshall Center representing the category. This find-

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ing is particularly important for developing social capital in the security context, in which alumni need to cooperate with other alumni whom they have never met. The presence of trust, therefore, would positively affect the speed, nature and quality of cooperation.

Values, practices and norms

Fukuyama (2002) argues that social capital formation cannot occur unless shared norms and values emerge — the prerequisite for cooperation in all forms of group endeavor. Marshall Center alumni reported increased awareness and acquisition of cooperative democratic attitudes and norms. Participants became more tolerant and accountable and more appreciative of a culture of dialogue, listening, debunking stereotypes, interest-based negotiations and involvement in voluntary activities.

Many respondents recalled that the class atmosphere was confrontational and tense at the beginning of the program, but became cooperative toward the end. This is explained

through their attitudinal shifts. Alumni reported that, in Garmisch, they understood the value of agreeing to disagree and listening, as well as the meaning of “different truths” and ways of thinking. Furthermore, they learned to transition from taking an official stance on matters to expressing personal opinions. This not only avoids conflict but enables participants coming from countries in conflict with each other to contribute to dialogue, interact constructively and even establish personal relationships. These findings are relevant in the context of security because these cooperative values are essential features of democracy.

Participants’ experiences at the Marshall Center also contributed to increased intercultural competence. Respondents perceived their exposure to the multicultural environment as a life-changing experience. This contributed to an increased awareness and openness to other cultures and a higher ability to communicate, relate and work with representatives of different countries and cultures. This is particularly relevant in a global security context, in which security professionals of different cultural backgrounds are required to communicate and cooperate efficiently for the success of multinational operations.

Agents of change

These findings indicate that ISPE and shared experiences at the Marshall Center contribute to building social capital among security professionals. However, other questions arise at this point: What are the consequences of the formation of social capital, and to whom are the alumni applying their social capital in their professional and personal settings?

About half the participants reported employing various systems to implement their Marshall Center knowledge in their country. They are the Marshall Center’s agents of change. This had two major consequences. First, at the national level, respondents challenged long-standing patterns of social interaction and potentially created new norms. Second, at the global level, they contributed to emerging shared transnational standards. This occurred because, although the systems of practice varied based on the settings in which they were implemented, they were instrumental in transferring common Marshall Center norms, procedures and principles to various countries.

For instance, these agents of change

implemented training and established new security organizations and practices (leadership and communication) stemming from Marshall Center principles. Consequently, new norms, such as coordination across agencies and borders, challenged the old and became common transnational standards. These norms are important in a security context because they improve operational communication among national and international agencies and multinational cooperation.

Marshall Center agents of change also sought to implement projects in their home countries' civil societies. They established nongovernmental organizations and involved the community they serve in their programs. Employing nongovernmental practices and community projects contributes to the education of civil society on its rights and its empowerment.

This study also shows that the agents of change share important characteristics. They involve themselves in professional networks, exhibit an increased level of interpersonal trust and report acquiring personal values while at the Marshall Center. More specifically, alumni who engage in Marshall Center professional networks are five times more likely to be agents of change in their own country. Moreover, alumni who report gaining self-knowledge during the programs are three times more likely to be agents of change. This finding is critical to the Marshall Center for delineating future strategies, for it identifies the importance to alumni of remaining engaged in Marshall Center activities upon graduation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Marshall Center experience contributes to building social capital in the global security context. Programs forge social and professional networks, foster trust and promote shared norms, values and procedures among participants. Moreover, half of alumni apply and implement these practices, norms and values in their countries, becoming active agents of change. Because of their significant role in building shared transnational values and norms, the Marshall Center should attempt to identify and intensify relationships with its agents of change.

Moreover, given the relevance of trust in the security context, developing trust should be a goal of ISPE at the Marshall Center. Although it is part of its seal and motto, "Democratia per fidem et Concordia," trust is not included in the

Marshall Center's mission statement. In becoming a goal, however, it should increase attention to the length of resident courses and depth of interaction among program participants. Both variables affect the degree of trust attributed to relationships forged in Garmisch. The number of longer courses was reduced in the 2014 curricula, while the number of specialized short courses was increased.

Does this mean that cutting back on the social and trust aspects of the Marshall Center experience will negatively impact a critical dimension of building social capital? □

The author's complete dissertation can be found here: http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/incm_etd/1/

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