

The Common Good in Hamilton's Downtown Neighborhoods:
Possibilities for Partnerships Arising from
Social Capital and the "Casi-No Movement"

by

David J. Anderson

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Introduction

Background

In 2013 a proposal was put forward to build a casino in downtown Hamilton, Ontario. The Ontario Lottery Corporation was expanding the number of casinos across our province. Some make the case that these casinos serve the common good. The provincial government uses revenue generated from all legal forms of gambling in our province as a source of funding for universal health care. Some of the revenue from legal gambling is also shared with local municipal governments as well as special community projects and infrastructure through what is called the “Trillium Fund”.

While a number of parties, including the Ontario Lottery Corporation, business leaders with interest in gaming, some City Hall staff and politicians, saw the proposed casino as good for the city, there was also a number of others who came together to oppose the casino proposal. These included individual citizens and citizen groups, small and larger businesses, health-care agencies and researchers, social services, social science researchers, politicians, churches, mosques and others who came together under the umbrella of what became known as the “Casi-No Movement.”

Among all those who opposed the building of a casino in downtown Hamilton there seemed to be something of a common vision for the downtown. Business and citizen groups, religious leaders, communities and individuals spoke to a vision for our neighborhood that was inconsistent with the presence of the casino. Elements of this

vision included care for the most vulnerable in the neighborhood as well as the small fledging businesses that were creating employment and providing places for community gathering. There seemed to be a shared vision of a flourishing neighborhood.

While the community said “no” to the proposed casino, there was a sense in which the community was at the same time saying “yes”. In this research project I was curious about this “yes” and in learning what possibilities there are for partnerships that would promote the common good in Hamilton's downtown neighborhood.

Rationale and Research Question

Since I am interested in what partnerships might arise out of the social capital accumulated by the Casi-No movement, I wanted to talk with various players who contributed to its accumulation and who are potential partners in working together in the future. These included religious leaders, business people, civic leaders and citizens who are connected with the downtown neighborhood.

My research question was this: *What would the “common good” look like for downtown Hamilton and what possibilities are there to partner in moving towards that future?*

As part of this research I wanted to review literature related to key sensitizing theoretical concepts sociological and biblical/ theological. These are now outlined in detail below.

Literature Review

Brueggemann, Walter. *Journey to the Common Good*. Kindle ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Walter Brueggemann begins this book arguing that “The great crisis among us is the crisis of ‘the common good,’ the sense of community solidarity that binds all in a common destiny—haves and have-nots, the rich and the poor.

We face a crisis about the common good because there are powerful forces at work among us to resist the common good, to violate community solidarity, and to deny a common destiny. Mature people, at their best, are people who are committed to the common good that reaches beyond private interest, transcends sectarian commitments, and offers human solidarity.¹

Brueggemann argues that the neighborhood is key to the common good, but observes that a competing vision tends to hold sway in our communities. Brueggemann suggests that the *fear of scarcity* drives our “entitled consumerism” and denial of neighborly responsibility.² The alternative to our sad condition is the practice of neighborhood, which he describes as a “covenantal commitment to the common good”. Brueggemann claims that “the journey from *scarcity* through *abundance* to *neighborhood* is the essential journey that ... that all humans must make in order to be maximally human.”³ Brueggemann also argues that this journey has “peculiarly” (not exclusively) been entrusted to the church and her allies.⁴

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Journey to the Common Good*, Kindle ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 1.

² Ibid., 29.

³ Ibid., 30, 31. Emphasis his.

⁴ Ibid., 31-36.

Volf, Miroslav. *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*. Kindle ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011.

Miroslav Volf is simple and direct when speaking about the vocation of the church and its members. “The challenge facing Christians is ultimately very simple: love God and neighbor rightly.”⁵ While this is simply stated, Volf acknowledges that the challenge is also complex and difficult. Christians must be able to speak and act meaningfully with respect to how God is related to human flourishing with regard to many concrete issues we are facing today—

from poverty to environmental degradation, from bioethical issues to international relations, from sex to governing. Without showing how a Christian understanding of God and vision of human flourishing apply to concrete issues, these notions will remain vague and inert, with little impact on the way we actually live.⁶

Volf argues that perhaps the most difficult challenge for Christians is to actually believe that God is fundamental to human flourishing. By this Volf is suggesting that such belief must be more than theoretical, but a driving force that moves Christians to concrete actions in the world and engagement for the sake of the common good.

But what should such engagement look like? Volf suggests that “Christian identity in a culture is always a complex and flexible network of small and large refusals, divergences, subversions, and more or less radical and encompassing alternative proposals and enactments, surrounded by the acceptance of many cultural givens.”⁷ The Christian presence does not seek to wholly transform the culture, nor does it

⁵ Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), 73.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 93.

accommodate to the culture, instead it engages. It is the engagement of the whole person in all aspects of the culture in fostering human flourishing and serving the common good; it involves not only the private sphere, but the public. “It concerns social relations—people’s rights and obligations—in business, politics, entertainment, communication, and more.

Christian engagement touches all dimensions of a culture and yet doesn’t aim to transform any of them totally. Instead, in all of them it also seeks and finds goods to be preserved and strengthened. It is total in scope but limited in extent—limited not just by resistance of individuals, social systems, and whole societies to change, but also limited by the finitude and fragility of humanity as well as by its inalienable goodness.⁸

McKnight, John P., and Peter Block. *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2010.

John McKnight and Peter Block, like Brueggemann, talk about the journey to neighborliness.⁹ They write not as theologians or churchmen, but as social scientists interested in urban community. In *The Abundant Community* they contrast the life of the *citizen* and of the *consumer*. They define a citizen as “one who chooses to create the life, the neighborhood, the world from their own gifts and the gifts of others.”¹⁰ Citizens are involved in participatory creation. In contrast, they define a consumer as “one who has surrendered to others the power to provide what is essential for a full and satisfied life.”¹¹

⁸ Ibid., 98.

⁹ John P. McKnight and Peter Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2010).

¹⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹¹ Ibid.

McKnight and Block propose that the way of the citizen is the path to the more abundant life of neighborhood. They call for a shift in thinking and acting.

It is a movement from purchasing what turns out to be dissatisfaction, to producing satisfaction. To shifting from the lens of consumption to the lens of citizen community as the core resource for a satisfied life.

Making the shift requires only that we act as if each of us and all of us have all that is needed to break our habits of consumption and its limits to satisfaction. We have the gifts, the structures, and the capacities needed right now. We have the capacities in our families and in our communities. All we need to do is shift our thinking first and then act on that shift. This is true, independent of the culture we live in, east or west, urban or rural, rich or poor.¹²

The sharing of these gifts, structures and capacities is key to the flourishing of our communities. Connecting gifts through associations then becomes very important “important because if we want to wean ourselves away from our dependence on the consumer economy and lifestyle, associational life gives us one powerful means to do this.”¹³

Bell, Daniel M. *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World*. Kindle ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.

In *The Economy of Desire*, Daniel Bell engages the work of Deleuze and Foucault, two important postmodern philosophers, to describe the nature of the postmodern world in which we live. Bell considers how the global economy deforms desire in a way that distorts relationships between people and with God and how Christianity, with its tradition of works of mercy, moves beyond capitalism, beyond philanthropy and welfare, and heals desire. Bell argues, “The economy of desire that is

¹² Ibid., 115-116.

¹³ Ibid., 129.

capitalism forms human desire so that it is quintessentially self-interested. Rejecting the notion that there is a shared good or common purpose that ought to shape how we labor and use material goods, *homo economicus* is an interest maximizer.” He continues,

In contrast, Christianity proclaims that there is indeed a good that unites all of humanity, that there is a love in which we are all invited to share. This common good is the end or purpose for which we were created, namely, communion in the divine life. Moreover, it is this common good that shapes our labor and our consumption, how we make use of the goods God provides.¹⁴

Bell also offers a critique of Christian advocates of capitalism that suggest that pure capitalism needs only to be reformed by “the inclusion of the interests of others in the moral calculus of the market.” Bell shows that the capitalist market seeks to supply not only the demand, but also the supply of love and generosity. He argues that “there can be no coexistence of the capitalist market and the virtue of charity. One cannot serve both God and capital.”¹⁵

Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madson, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. *The Good Society*. Kindle ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

Robert Bellah and his coauthors add at least two important contributions for consideration. The first has to do with the role of institutions in our common life and the second has to do with the role of the public church.¹⁶ Bellah et al. argue that if we are to better our common life we need both to understand “how much of our lives is lived in

¹⁴ Daniel M. Bell, *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World*, Kindle ed., The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), loc. 2532-2540.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, loc. 2565.

¹⁶ Robert N. Bellah et al., *The Good Society*, Kindle ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

and through institutions, and how better institutions are essential if we are to lead better lives.”¹⁷

In light of this Bellah et al. encourage the church to resist the cultural move towards the privatization of religion and instead live its life as a public church. The church is needed as a social embodiment of an alternative to the institutions that pull us apart or inhibit human flourishing, an embodiment of a better way that we find described in places within the biblical narrative.¹⁸

Simpson, Gary M. “God in Global Civil Society.” Unpublished manuscript. Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, 2008.

In his work, “God in Global Civil Society,” Gary Simpson describes what he calls the colonizing effects of the spheres of the *market* and of the *political state* over the *lifeworld*. Simpson writes,

We often experience the domination and colonization of the lifeworld by money and power. When money and power colonize our lifeworld, we experience injustice, diminished wellbeing, meaninglessness, suffering, oppression, and a host of other seriously unpleasant things.¹⁹

Simpson offers a picture of this in his sociological map, in Figure 1, below.

¹⁷ Ibid., loc. 119-120.

¹⁸ Ibid., loc. 4506-4513.

¹⁹ Gary M. Simpson, “God in Global Civil Society” (Unpublished manuscript, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, 2008), 7.

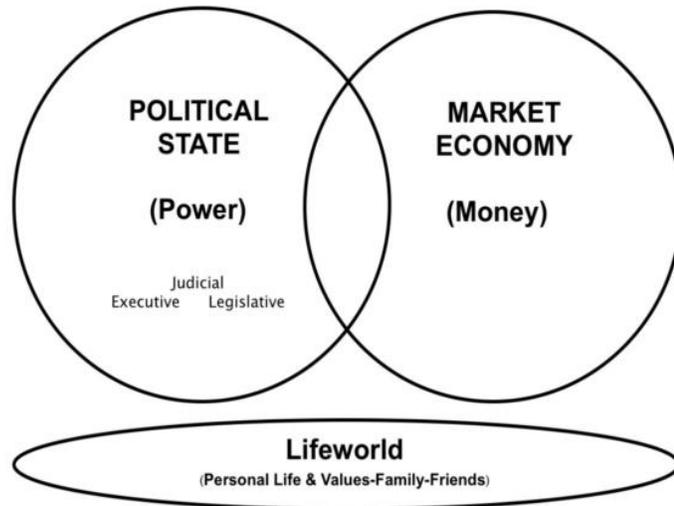


Figure 1: Sociological Map²⁰

Below in Figure 2, the hope that “*civil society* would become a vigorous reality and thus a normative aspect of western civilization” is illustrated,²¹

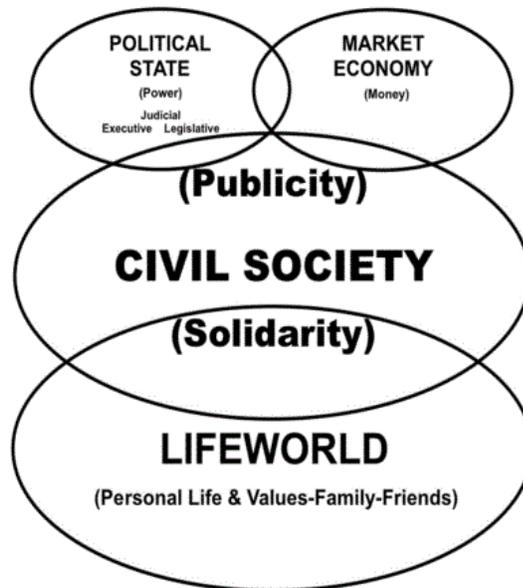


Figure 2: Simpson's Sociological Map²²

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 8. Emphasis added.

Simpson describes the place of overlap between our everyday lifeworlds and civil society as occurring through the medium of “solidarity” and the overlap between civil society and spheres of the state and the market, through the medium of “publicity.”²³

Simpson describes this *solidarity* as a certain “we-must-indeed-all-hang-together-or-most-assuredly-we-shall-all-hang-separately ethos rooted in robust empathy.” Such solidarity functions like a “sleuth.” It operates through a plurality of relationships to detect “how cultural, economic, and political problems, disruptions, and injustices show up, smell, and overtake the world.” As a sleuth civil society solidarity might research the factors of causation for various social ills such as domestic violence, the lack of affordable housing, and so on. Simpson argues that,

Civil society organizations, identify, distill, and frame critical issues, They give these critical matters a moral language, cultural energy, and ethical agency. Often times, civil society solidarity manifests itself through proposals, programs, and practices for moral and cultural formation or critical reformation.”²⁴

Civil society *publicity* acts as a “sluice” and draws attention to “prophetic criticism, moral wisdom, and innovative proposals for more just peacemaking ways as public opinion, and transmits this public opinion to the state and the economy for democratic discernment, deliberation, and decision. Publicity gives solidarity a fully public voice.”²⁵

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 8-9.

²⁵ Ibid., 10.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

In his influential book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Robert Putnam defines “social capital” in this way:

Social capital refers to 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. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.²⁶

Putnam finds that there has been a great decline of social capital in many areas of life.

Putnam observed that while there has been a massive decline in membership in many traditional civic, social and fraternal organizations, typified by bowling leagues, the actual number of people bowling increased dramatically, hence the title of his book.²⁷

Putnam argues that there are two forms of social capital. He describes these as “bonding” and “bridging”. *Bonding* social capital reinforces the exclusive identities of homogeneous groups. “Examples of bonding social capital include ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based women’s reading groups, and fashionable country clubs.”²⁸

Bridging social capital on the other hand is more “outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages. Examples of bridging social capital include the civil rights movement, many youth service groups, and ecumenical religious organizations.”²⁹ Both of these forms of social capital are valuable in their own way.

²⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), loc 152-155.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, loc. 1874-1876.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, loc. 237-238.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, loc. 239.

From the literature I've discussed above, come a number of related theoretical concepts and perspectives that will provide a field of meaning in which my research question can be discussed. I will briefly outline these below.

Theoretical Perspectives

Human Flourishing and the Common Good

In this study I was interested to discover to what degree the “no” to the proposed casino was in fact a “yes” to an alternate vision for the city that moved beyond personal interest. I was interested to learn what that alternate vision might look like. Might it be something akin to the *common good* described by Volf, Brueggemann, Bell and others? Might they speak to the *human flourishing* that the Christian biblical narratives speak of as God's intention for the world? As these authors speak to human flourishing and the common good it is clear that these ideas have clear and direct import for the concrete issues facing our world and its neighborhoods today.

Neighborliness, Neighborhood, Community and Civil Society

The common good is directly related to ideas of the practices of *neighborliness*, *neighborhood* and *community*. I have mentioned above that Miroslav Volf calls the church to really believe and act as though, “the presence and activity of the God of love, who can make us love our neighbors as ourselves.”³⁰ I would like to call such belief, action and practice “neighborliness”. Neighborliness is a practiced spirituality that corresponds to the fact that God is interested in flourishing of persons and communities.

³⁰ Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*, 76.

The neighborhood, whether construed widely or narrowly in geographic terms, is a place where such a spirituality is practiced. In our pluralist society there may be various religious convictions present in a neighborhood, yet, I would argue that the spirituality and practice of neighborliness is open to all. My understanding of neighborliness then, corresponds with Block and McKnight's understanding of the vocation of a *citizen*, who chooses to help create the life of the neighborhood and the world using their own resources and with the resources of others, who seeks the flourishing of individuals and community. The neighborhood—where neighborliness is practiced—functions like Simpson's civil society, sleuthing needs and sluicing attention where it needs to be brought to bear.

The Market and the State

Neighborliness then is an alternative to the practiced spirituality that is nurtured in people by the power of the market. Rather than have us live as neighbors, the market trains us as *consumers*. As a number of the authors I have discussed agree, the consumer attitude focuses people narrowly on the scarcity of resources to provide personal satisfaction. Neighborliness and citizenship refocus our attention on the abundance of gifts, structures and capacities that are present in the community right now. As Daniel Bell observes, however, the market remains a powerful and tempting force in our culture. Bell argues that from a Christian point of view, the alternative to capitalism is the kingdom of God.³¹ This is not to say that this alternative is an altogether future possibility, however. The Christian tradition teaches that the kingdom of God is at hand,

³¹ Bell, *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World*, loc. 1868-1869.

which means that an alternative economy is “a real, genuine possibility here and now.”³² This alternative is best described by the neighborliness being discussed and proposed here, where we learn to love our neighbors as ourselves.³³

The robust life of institutions once founded by neighbors in the past has become greatly impoverished in our day. The institutions of the market and the state have become so totalizing in their scope that there are few institutions free from their demands, free to serve the common good. As Bellah suggests, however, the church may yet remain such a place. As McKnight and Block suggest, it may also be that neighborhoods still provide a ready foundation for seeking the common good.

Social Capital

Coming into this research I have assumed that there is a certain amount of social capital that was accumulated by the Casi-No movement. To put this into Putnam’s terms my assumption was that this social capital was primarily of the bridging type. Many different groups of people came together to oppose the proposed casino for downtown Hamilton. These included individual citizens, business owners, business organizations, mosques, churches and church organizations, neighborhood associations, health care workers, health researchers and health industry leaders, various professional organizations and individual professionals, just to name a few. Each of these groups came with significant bonding social capital. What I was hoping to discover through this research was the extent to which there might be new social capital around a shared vision for the common good in Hamilton’s downtown neighborhoods.

³² Ibid., loc 1903.

³³ See also, Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*, 73.

Biblical and Theological Perspectives

The theoretical perspectives of that I have discussed above have their own biblical and theological roots. There are two more that I would like to add to this conversation: the first might be called the *missio Dei*, and the second, *God's preferential option for the poor*.

Missio Dei in Vicinia

Missio Dei is a term that reminds us that the God who is revealed in the biblical witness and in history is a God on a mission. This God is not some deistic remote god who wound up a clock only to remain aloof and hands-off. Rather, this God has entered our world and has an ongoing mission to restore the world to its best possibilities.

I have written elsewhere of the *missio Dei in vicinia*, which is to say, the mission of God in the neighborhood. It seems that God often works locally.³⁴ In the prologue to his Gospel, the evangelist John talks about the cosmic significance of the incarnation, of God coming into the world. One paraphrase renders a key verse in this way,

“The Word became flesh and blood, *and moved into the neighborhood*. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish.” (John 1:14 Message, emphasis mine)³⁵

It is a primary Christian conviction then that God is at work in the world, and if so, also at work within our local neighborhoods. The Christian vocation, therefore, is to listen and discern where God is at work and to join with God in what God is already doing and

³⁴ David J. Anderson, “Missio Dei in Vicinia: The Mission of God in the Neighborhood: An Ecclesiology for the Local Parish” (Unpublished essay, Luther Seminary, St Paul, MN), <http://djanderson.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Term-Paper-FINAL.pdf> (accessed November 1, 2013).

³⁵ In my view, “moved into the neighborhood” is a fair translation, literally, *tabernacled among us*.

seeking to do. The primary location for the Christian vocation, then, is in ordinary, everyday life. In “Missio Dei in Vicinia” I argued said that,

By locating our vocation here (that is in the neighborhood) we mean that our Christian life and mission are located primarily with our family, coworkers, classmates, and neighbors that we encounter every day. By talking about our neighbors, we do not limit ourselves to the people who literally live next door, but in the sense of Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), those we may encounter on any day, near or far, who are in need.³⁶

God’s Preferential Option for the Poor

Another key theological perspective is sometimes described as *God’s preferential option for the poor*. This idea is a basic principle in Catholic social teaching³⁷ and has become an important understanding for the church beginning especially in the 20th century. This perspective acknowledges that in both the Old and New Testaments, God seems to have a particular concern for the poor and the disadvantaged. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus expresses that his solidarity with those in need—the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, and those in prison—is so complete that when assistance is given them, “the least of these who are members of my family, you (have done) it to me,” (Matthew 25:40 NRSV). God’s particular concern seems to be not only for the poor, but also for those who are marginalized in any way. Strangers, orphans, widows, the sick, those in prison, those suffering from mental illness or other “demons”³⁸ seem to have a special place in God’s economy, where God desires to see these restored to their

³⁶ Anderson, “Missio Dei in Vicinia: The Mission of God in the Neighborhood: An Ecclesiology for the Local Parish,” 16.

³⁷ Beginning with Pope Leo XIII, “Rerum Novarum: Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on Capital and Labor,” (Rome: The Vatican, 1891).

³⁸ By “demons,” I include any force that oppresses human beings and keeps them from sharing equally in the common good.

community and to equal access to the common good. From this perspective those who would be oppressed by gambling addiction, the demons of consumerism and from poverty might all have a special place in God's concern.

Methodology and Rationale for Use

For this research I employed a simple exploratory method. The process of simple exploratory research involves an initial review of literature related to the topic. From that literature key sensitizing concepts are noted. A tightly formed research question is posed that relates to the sensitizing concepts. A number of interview questions that relate to the main question and prepared and become the basis for qualitative interviews. The data from these interviews is coded and interpreted using the sensitizing concepts. Finally conclusions are drawn from these findings and reflections.

The strength of qualitative interviews is that they focus on depth. In this project I was interested mainly in the specific situation of downtown Hamilton and the social capital formed around the Casi-No movement. The qualitative interview was fitting as Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin explain, "Through such interviews, researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own." In addition this method "allows the researcher to explore complex, contradictory or counterintuitive matters."³⁹

In this method careful attention is given to framing the research question, selecting interviewees and to the specific interview questions and follow up questions. In this method the main research question concerns the matter to be considered in depth. A

³⁹ Herbert J. Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 3rd, Kindle ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012), 3, 4.

research question can focus on any matter of things. In this case not merely looking at the results of the Casi-No movement (they won that fight for now), but the motivations of people and groups, and what the accumulated social capital means for the future of the neighborhood.

The specific interview questions are designed with care to get at deeper levels of understanding on the question and the various questions are designed to come at the question from different directions and at deepening levels of the main research question. In all of this it is vitally important to select people who are knowledgeable in the context to be interviewed.

Following the interviews the data is transcribed to allow coding that recognizes the sensitizing concepts raised by the literature review and other reflections as well as other important themes that arise. These are used together to form a theory that explains or draws conclusions from the data.

Research Design

The Researcher

I come to this research as one who has participated around the edges of the Casi-No movement. In many ways I was a latecomer to the party after many public meetings and events had occurred and after much of the discussion had taken place in the local newspaper and elsewhere in the public square. Only after acknowledging that religious leaders had not collectively contributed to the discussion, did I organize a response and become more involved personally.

After the public debate around this proposed casino had been carried on for some months, it was brought to my attention that religious leaders had been virtually silent on

the question beyond the writing of a few individual letters. I realized that if religious leaders were able to gather to speak with a united voice, that voice might gain a greater hearing by the city's politicians, who had an important decision to make regarding whether the city was willing to host the casino downtown. Because I have a number of ecumenical connections I decided to gather religious leaders from across the city to speak to the question of the casino proposal. Our group included broad spectrum of Christian voices (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, United, Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, Presbyterian, Baptist, Associated Gospel, Brethren in Christ, Plymouth Brethren) together with two local synagogues and the Downtown Islamic Association.⁴⁰ I became the spokesperson for that group when we made a delegation to city council.

Because of my involvement, I come to this research with a sense that those who were part of this movement shared something of a common vision for the downtown. Through my discussions with others I have already heard something of a shared vision for a compassionate, diverse, flourishing and neighborly community.

As a parish priest at the Church of St. John the Evangelist (SJE), one of Hamilton's downtown parishes, I give leadership to a congregation that is learning that it has a mission in promoting the common good in our city. The research question has import not only for me personally, but for our faith community as we discern God's call to us in our wider neighborhood context.

In this research project I was interested to explore and define what the shared vision of the common good for the neighborhood might be as well as to identify some

⁴⁰ I was also in touch with the local Hindu Association. I was surprised to learn that that they had taken a position in favor of the proposed casino for downtown Hamilton. "Religious leaders" were not unanimous.

possibilities for opportunities for partnerships in working towards this vision among the various parties who were part of this movement.

The Interviewees

I chose to interview four key representatives of the various interests that came together to form the Casi-No movement. I chose one interviewee who might represent the business community and who is a director of one of the downtown neighborhood associations. Another interviewee is someone who has worked in the non-profit sector in downtown for many years and who is active in a number of associations that accomplish great things in these neighborhoods. Another was a community leader and immediate past chair of another vital neighborhood association as well as a member of a small Mennonite congregation located downtown. My fourth interviewee was a religious leader of young Baptist congregation that is much attuned to Hamilton's urban issues.

Other Research Details

Interviews were conducted between August 16 and September 15, 2014. Each interviewee was contacted initially by e-mail or telephone with a follow-up by e-mail explaining the project, a copy of the interview questions, along with a consent form to be signed and returned to me in hard copy at the time of the interview. Interviews were arranged at a place of convenience to the interviewee. Two forms of recording were employed to ensure that interviews were not compromised by any failure of technology. I listened to the recordings as I read the transcriptions for the initial coding of the interview responses.

Research Findings and Interpretation

In the following section I share my research findings with interpretation corresponding to the theoretical concepts and biblical and theological concepts discussed above.

The Common Good and Hamilton's Downtown

A Vision for the Common Good: What's So Good about Downtown?

The Common Good is Common

In talking to respondents⁴¹ it became clear that there was in each a shared passion, hope and vision for downtown Hamilton that is encouraged by positive things that are happening in the neighborhoods right now. It was clear from the outset that this vision for downtown was inconsistent with the casino that had been proposed for downtown. But a “no” to the proposed “casino” was a “yes” to what? Perhaps it is not surprising that a number of characteristics of a vision for the common good were shared by the people I interviewed.

The most frequently mentioned attribute of their vision for the common good was that was that it would be held “*in common*,” which is to say that everyone in the neighborhood should enjoy the common good. The common good is understood to be shared and inclusive and not the private possession of any person or group of persons. As one respondent described it, the “common good was defined by what was good for the whole neighborhood. . . . as ‘is this good or bad for our neighborhood, for our well-being,

⁴¹ From this point in the paper I use the words “respondent” and “interviewee” interchangeably.

for our community.”” What makes the common good common is that it is freely available to all.

Neighborliness as a practiced attitude in terms of concern for the other and *citizenship* were likewise categories that were identified as part of the common good.

Healthy Neighborhoods

Respondents talked about *livability* and *belonging*. Livability is a sign of the common good in the neighborhood. Livability is connected with meaningful work, opportunities for excellence in educational pursuits, safety from crime and other harm. Livability is also connected with a person’s sense of well-being and the opportunity to enjoy a healthy quality of life.

Healthy neighborhoods also foster a sense of belonging. One respondent described them as “safe, secure, natural, accommodating, attractive, inviting and welcoming.” Another way to describe healthy neighborhoods is to say that they support human flourishing.

Missio Dei in Vicinia and the Kingdom of God

Two of my interviewees employed biblical and theological language to speak about the common good. It was observed that various understandings of the common good might align to one degree or another with a biblical/theological understanding of the kingdom of God, although any of our individual understandings would only be partial. One respondent claimed “no privilege for a private Christian view of God’s ‘yes’ for the city of Hamilton, into which all of our partial ‘yesses’ may or may not fit.” Both respondents shared an understanding that God is at work in the neighborhood. Although

not all respondents used this language, I am not sure that any of them if asked specifically would disagree.

Signposts in the Journey to the Common Good

Each of my respondents spoke hopefully about downtown Hamilton's neighborhoods and their future. This hopefulness is rooted partly in a number of good news stories. It seems as though the threat of a downtown casino has been quashed for now, though the specter remains. New development is happening in many downtown neighborhoods. New small businesses such as art galleries, coffee shops and restaurants are thriving in many downtown neighborhoods. Local democracy in the form of vibrant neighborhood associations and processes of participatory budgeting are on the rise. Hamilton is a compassionate city with the highest rate of volunteerism in Canada.⁴²

Threats: Putting the Neighborhoods at Risk

While the respondents felt very positive about the future for downtown Hamilton's neighborhoods, there was agreement about the potential risks.

Powers and Principalities

Respondents talked about forces at work in Hamilton's downtown neighborhoods that tend to work against the common good. As I noted above, Gary Simpson describes both *the market* and *the state* as spheres which tend to limit and colonize our lifeworlds, resulting in "injustice, diminished well-being, meaninglessness, suffering, oppression,

⁴² The claim that Hamilton is a compassionate city is supported in part by the fact that Hamilton has the highest rate of volunteerism in Canada. See, Hamilton Community Foundation, "Hamilton's Vital Signs," Hamilton Community Foundation, <http://hamiltonvitalsigns.ca/belonging-leadership/> (accessed September 15, 2015).

and a host of other seriously unpleasant things.”⁴³ These powers have a way of oppressing people and communities. Respondents expressed a concern that the good things that happen in the downtown neighborhoods not be “on the backs of the poor.” It was recognized that the “besetting sin” of the both the market and the state tends to be that the needs of the poor and other voiceless persons and communities are ignored.

The Market

Gentrification. Each of the respondents indicated that market pressures were already putting downtown neighborhoods at risk. Gentrification is a concern. With the positive things that have happened downtown, many people who currently live elsewhere are encouraged to think that the downtown neighborhoods will be a great place to live. Cranes are in the sky and a number of new condominium projects are underway. According to one respondent, when this new housing comes on stream an additional 5,000 people will be living downtown. With housing prices in nearby Toronto having become some of the most expensive in North America, Hamilton is seen as an attractive and trendy alternative. As one of the respondents said, “All of the cool kids are moving to Hamilton.”

Not all of the effects of gentrification were considered unpleasant. As one respondent pointed out, most of the new businesses in the downtown neighborhoods are not part of multi-national companies, but local individual entrepreneurs who are trying to earn a living by opening a business. It was noted that before downtown Hamilton’s more recent economic difficulties, it was a “vibrant retail and residential part of town for generations.”

⁴³ Simpson, “God in Global Civil Society,” 7.

Affordability, commodification and displacement. Parts of the Kirkendall neighborhood in west downtown where gentrification has taken place have been marketed by real estate agents as the “trendy Locke Street area.” Increasingly, Hamilton’s downtown neighborhoods are being commodified.

Housing prices have been increasing steadily in the downtown neighborhoods. Some neighborhoods have seen significant increases in housing prices. Housing prices have increased significantly so that many individuals and families no longer find it affordable. Artaban Place, a low-income housing development connected with the church where I serve, was singled out by two respondents as an example of a place where affordability in a neighborhood was maintained only through special intervention. The residents of Artaban would no longer be able to afford to live in “the trendy Locke Street area” except that Artaban provides a place.

Respondents were concerned that downtown Hamilton’s neighborhoods would no longer be affordable for many current residents as prices increase and rental housing is converted or torn down to make way for new condominium housing. All respondents were adamant in the belief that a turnaround for Hamilton’s downtown neighborhoods should be a turnaround for everyone. Respondents argued that if improvements to the neighborhoods had the effect of displacing people, they could not really be called “improvements,” but rather represented in effect an “imposition” of one new neighborhood over another, essentially destroying the existing one.

City Hall

Privilege. Together with the market, the state is one of those spheres that impose upon our lifeworld. One of the ways that the state tends to operate is that it privileges

those who have capital or money over others. Respondents did share some experiences that they felt were examples of city hall privileging certain groups and voices over others. In the discussions over the proposed casino some city councilors went so far as to declare that they believed that the downtown core could not be considered a “real neighborhood,” that the only people who mattered in the neighborhood were those who drove in from other places to work in the office towers. The residents of this neighborhood were considered expendable. Politicians have been heard to make disparaging remarks about “*those people*” who live downtown and have made references to the “bums” who occupy its streets and parks.

A similar dynamic was at play in city hall’s recent discussions and decisions regarding “complete streets.” *Complete streets* is a transportation and urban design approach that requires streets to be places that are safe, convenient and accessible to all people regardless of their age, abilities and mode of transportation. Complete streets are for all people whether they are walking, bicycling, driving cars, using public transportation or accessing local business. Again, some councilors expressed that suburban drivers should have a priority in being able to get in and out of the downtown neighborhoods as quickly as possible. Certainly the streets of downtown neighborhoods have seen a priority given to the automobile and to the quickest possible access into, out of and through the downtown. Hamilton is well known for its complex system of one-way streets allowing for speedy travel, especially in the east-west corridor. Only recently, and seemingly reluctantly, has a more complete streets approach been adopted by the powers at city hall.

Neighborhoods undervalued. One of my respondents who is a director of one of the local neighborhood associations believes that neighborhoods are not adequately “on the radar at city hall.” The City of Hamilton is organized by a ward system. Most of the downtown neighborhoods fall within Ward 2, with some neighborhoods on the periphery of downtown in Ward 1 and Ward 3. Respondents observed that it seems that within the remainder of the wards there tends to more homogeneous populations. Some of these are suburban, some are rural and others are long-standing working class neighborhoods in the shadows of Hamilton’s old steel mills. Respondents reported that the ward system seems to assume that all neighborhoods within a ward are more or less the same, and even that the needs across the city are identical ward by ward. Ward 2, where most of the downtown neighborhoods are located, is a great example of diversity where one-sized-fits-all solutions are likely to fail. That said, the present Ward 2 councilor received high marks from most interviewees for his ability to communicate and keep in touch with his ward’s neighborhoods. He is in the unique position, among the rest of the city’s councilors, in having his entire ward covered by vibrant neighborhood associations.

City Hall also figures in some of the barriers for Hamilton’s downtown neighborhoods moving towards the common good and I will discuss those below.

Barriers: Keeping the Downtown Down

Divisions in the Body Politic

When asked about barriers that might keep Hamilton’s downtown neighborhoods moving toward the common good interviewees often spoke about the social divisions that exist across the city and within our neighborhoods. One obvious and growing division within the downtown neighborhoods is the divide between rich and poor. Concerns over

the gentrification of the downtown neighborhoods and about the marginalization of poorer residents have already been discussed.

Another obvious division in the city are those that run along rural, suburban and urban lines. These divisions are supported by the city's history as an amalgamation of a number of municipalities which each have their distinct character and history. Dundas, Ancaster and Stoney Creek are suburban areas which each have their own small-town feel. Flamborough and large parts of Ancaster and Stoney Creek are more rural in nature. The majority of the land mass of the city of Hamilton is in fact rural. These divisions often leave citizens in various part of the city with the feeling that they don't have much in common with each other and adds to the sense that one part of the city can ignore or "write off" other parts of the city.

Other geography tends to divide the city. An escarpment runs across the city from east to west dividing the lower city in the north from the upper city in the south. The lower city includes the downtown neighborhoods along with the city's more industrial and harbor areas. The upper city, which locals describe as "the Mountain," tends to be more suburban. Only a few transportation access points between the lower and upper parts of the city exist where these have been dramatically carved in the escarpment face to allow major street's access. The escarpment divides the city physically, socially and psychologically.⁴⁴

There is also a division between the east and west parts of the city. In broad generalities the west seems to be more affluent than the east. When asked where

⁴⁴ In Appendix III, I provide maps of the City of Hamilton and its downtown neighborhoods in order to give a sense of geography.

displaced people from the downtown might move, people tend to assume that they will move to the “east end.”

There is a need to bridge all of these divisions as they certainly militate against the “we-must-indeed-all-hang-together-or-most-assuredly-we-shall-all-hang-separately ethos” that would be helpful in moving towards the common good. This will be discussed below as I come to the topic of social capital.

Role of Churches in Building Social Capital

All respondents agreed that churches and other faith groups have a great potential to harness social capital for the common good. On their own churches have a way of bonding people together in a common identity; many see such bonding as a primary activity and purpose.

Churches also have a capacity for bridging between groups to create new social capital. More than one respondent commented how Christ’s Church Cathedral, the Anglican cathedral in downtown Hamilton, had become a hub for the downtown neighborhoods. Many downtown activities seem to be centered on the cathedral. The Casi-No Movement itself held one of its important events inside the cathedral.

Some respondents also talked about how churches together have shown the capacity to build “bridges of peace” across the city, and particularly across some of the divisions in the body politic that I have described above. Denominational and ecumenical ties between churches tend to transcend the rural/suburban/urban, upper/lower, rich/poor, east/west divisions in the city. Two respondents talked about the influence of the True City Movement in particular. This is an ecumenical group of churches who come together across a number of differences with a sense of common mission in the city. These ties

can lead to a greater understanding between disparate neighborhoods, their needs and aspirations and can potentially be leveraged to create new opportunities for building bridges between communities.

Respondents also recognized that churches already play an important role in creating social capital by providing non-market space in which such capital is created. Countless neighborhood groups meet in churches and for the most part churches provide that space at little or no cost. Even where fees are charged, these are most often far under the market rates. Art spaces, recovery groups, exercise classes and service groups: the list of community groups that are part of the fabric of any neighborhood would be endless and this is an important contribution that churches make in their neighborhoods. Where churches are closing in downtown neighborhoods because of declining numbers, neighborhoods find themselves with a significant deficit of space where community events can be held. The amount of social capital available is negatively impacted where these churches close.

Churches also contribute to the social capital of a neighborhood by serving as a sort of school of leadership. Churches are places where people gather and where individual members are encouraged to exercise their gifts. Leadership gifts that are honed within the church become resources for the entire community as people become more engaged in their neighborhood. Increasingly, despite their reputation as inward-looking institutions, churches are finding a way to look to be active participants in their neighborhoods for the sake of the common good.

Finally, churches are places that are interested in Christian formation. As such they seek to form their members in a lifestyle that should be something of an alternative

to the dominant culture's capitalist fixation with self-interest. As one respondent expressed, "In our church we call each other on the bullshit (sic) of upward mobility." Churches are meant to form people as followers of Jesus who gave a new commandment. "Love one another as I have loved you. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34 NRSV). This love is key to the neighborliness described above, and that neighborliness is key to moving neighborhoods to the common good.

Partnerships Arising from Social Capital

Building Bridges and Creating Conversations

The social capital that exists in these neighborhoods can be harnessed to continue to further build bridges and to create conversations about what the common good for our downtown neighborhoods would look like. Such conversations are required because the neighborhoods need to clarify what sorts of neighborhoods they want to become. Without conversation the powers of the market and the state will dictate their terms. Within such conversations competing visions can be challenged and alliances formed for moving neighborhoods towards the common good.

An excellent example of this comes from a story shared by one respondent. Recently a number of people from downtown churches were together for what might have been a purely social occasion. The type of occasion was incidental for it only happened to serve as an opportunity for people to talk about their neighborhood. Out of this conversation and a shared vision of "complete streets," a number of people decided to work together to create what would become known as the "Yes We Cannon"

movement for a “walkable Hamilton.”⁴⁵ The bike lanes currently being installed the length of Cannon Street are the result.

A Needed Conversation: What Are We Going to Do About Housing?

Perhaps the most needful conversation for our city and for its downtown neighborhoods at the present moment is the question of what can be done about affordable housing. Average wait times for affordable housing in the City of Hamilton are two years. Those who wish to live in specific areas such as Dundas or the Mountain may wait as long as seven years.⁴⁶ With the rise of housing costs, increasing rents and with the stock of affordable housing in the downtown neighborhoods decreasing daily, a housing crisis is not far in the future.

A number of organizations, including churches like SJE and its Artaban Non-Profit Homes, and its new partner at Indwell (formerly Homestead Christian Care)⁴⁷, are working to create affordable housing in Hamilton. There is an opportunity to bring these various groups together.

The respondents mentioned that churches have a great opportunity as they exist as non-market space in our neighborhoods. With church closings and the potential of development of these and other properties still being used for church purposes it was

⁴⁵ See <http://walkablehamilton.org/>.

⁴⁶ Denise Davey, “Wait Times for Subsidized Housing on Rise in Hamilton,” CBC News, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/news/wait-times-for-subsidized-housing-on-rise-in-hamilton-1.1323410> (accessed September 15, 2014).

⁴⁷ See <http://indwell.ca/>. “Indwell creates affordable housing communities that support people seeking health, wellness and belonging. Our programs support 250 households in Hamilton and Woodstock.

proposed that churches can also play a role as housing intensification continues in the downtown neighborhoods.

The Anglican Diocese of Niagara was recognized as a leader by providing unique community space at the former St. Peter's Church site, under the auspices of HARRP.⁴⁸ The diocese also has development opportunities under discussion at two downtown sites, at All Saints' Church, where the present building has become unsafe and needs to be torn down and at Christ's Church Cathedral where development opportunities also exist. It remains to be seen whether these sites will be given over to market-based housing for the benefit of the church institutions, or whether there might be an opportunity to create some form a mixed housing. If the market is not allowed to have the final say on how these properties are developed, the church might make a prophetic statement about its presence with God in the neighborhood.

Conclusions

There are many good things happening in downtown Hamilton. The common good implies that all citizens should enjoy health, security and well-being and that no members of the community should enjoy some special benefit on the backs of other members of the community. Neighborhoods are ideal contexts for the advancement of the common good and the practice of neighborliness is critical in working towards that ideal.

There is a great deal of social capital in downtown Hamilton and the time is ripe for people to come together to address some of the serious challenges that face our neighborhoods. Chief among these challenges is a housing crisis. Hamilton already faces

⁴⁸ Hamilton Association for Residential and Recreational Redevelopment Programs. See <http://harrp.ca/>.

a housing crisis in terms of a shortage of affordable housing. This problem will only become worse with the possible gentrification of downtown Hamilton. It is vital that citizens come together to find to insist that our downtown neighborhoods continue to have a place for everyone.

Hamiltonians do not need to wait, nor should they wait, for the institutions of the market or of the state to solve these issues. It is time to bring people together from across the city, as was done in the Casi-No movement, to say “yes” to Hamilton, to say yes to a vision for downtown Hamilton with vibrant neighborhoods to be enjoyed by all people.

APPENDICES

Appendix I: Interview Questions

1. Given what we learned from efforts in the “Casi-No” movement, how might you describe the common good for downtown Hamilton?
2. What are the main things that you feel put downtown Hamilton at risk?
3. What do you perceive as barriers in this neighbourhood in moving towards the common good?
4. What contribution do you (or does your organization) make towards the common good in Hamilton’s downtown?
5. What opportunities do you see for partnerships that would promote the common good in Hamilton’s downtown neighbourhoods?

Appendix II: Consent Form

Consent Form

This interview is part of a course project conducted by David J. Anderson, as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry program at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. The purpose of the course project is to explore through research and qualitative interviewing how congregations can grow in their participation with God in global civil society.

The information from this interview will be collected in three forms. First, there will be two audio recordings of the interview with the second serving as a backup to the first. Second, a written transcript made from the audio recording(s). Third, the interviewer may make some handwritten notes. This information will be kept by David Anderson for future reference for a period of up to one year, after which the three forms above will be destroyed.

Unless you specifically request otherwise, your name may appear in the final report and direct quotations may be included.

Upon completion of the research, participants may receive a copy of the project paper, if requested.

By signing this consent form as a willing participant in this study, you agree to the terms listed above. If you have any questions about the research or the project, please contact David J. Anderson at danderson002@luthersem.edu or 905-522-0602. Thank you.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix III: Maps



Figure 3: Map of Downtown and Area Neighborhoods

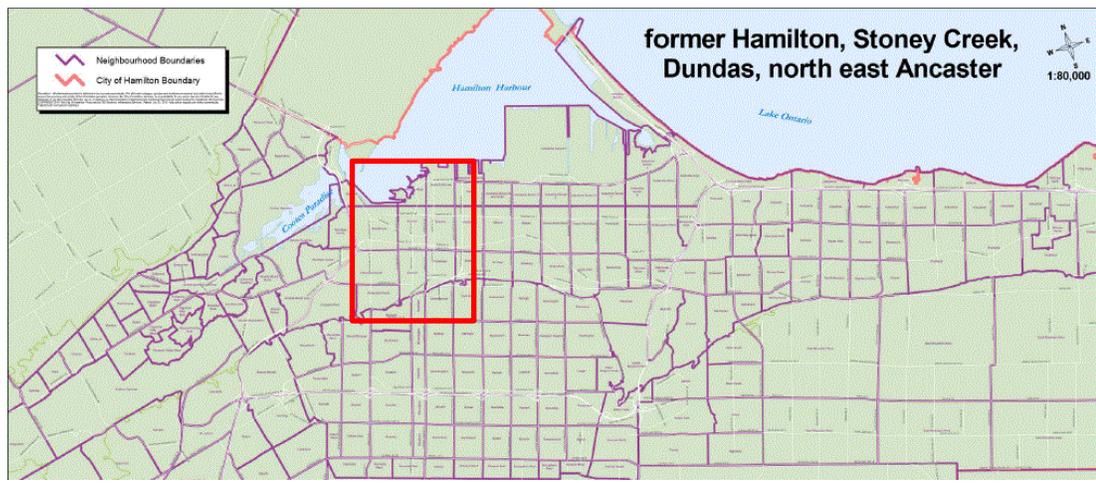


Figure 4: Map Showing Downtown in City Context

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