

Social Contact Networks as a *Securitability* Factor

Social networks (or social contact networks) are a significant source of *securitability* for many people in Latvia, providing both actual security and a sense of security. A large number of people network successfully in informal groups. However, due to historical reasons (i.e. the 50-year Soviet occupation), formal networks that could unite people to prevent, mitigate and cope with risks are an underused resource. Because social capital increases the *securitability* of those who know how to use it, polarization can and does take place: those with advanced networking skills improve their *securitability*, while those with fewer networking skills become increasingly insecure.

This Chapter includes information about the theoretical underpinnings of social networking. This type of information is not typical in UNDP Human Development Reports, but is essential in the case of Latvia, since few people in this country are aware of the advantages and mechanisms of social networking. The background offered in this section will show how networking can facilitate people's security, and how people can initiate their own networks or support existing ones.

This Chapter will examine:

- Definitions and dimensions of social networks and social capital;
- The advantages of networks;
- Differences between formal and informal networks;
- Who uses networks;
- How networks operate in Latvia;
- How networks enhance security and *securitability* factors (using case studies);
- Action necessary to increase social networking.

Definitions and dimensions of social networks and social capital

Social networks consist of relations between people, groups or organizations that are based on cooperation and reciprocity in order to achieve common goals. They might concentrate within just a single household, or they might extend further as formal

networks to the local community, region, city, country and even across the globe. They may be long-standing or short-lived. The term “network” is symbolic, describing people, groups and organizations as the knots of a “net,” and the relations among them as the lines. Analyzing the characteristics of social networks and the specifics of their development in Latvia has led the authors of this **Report** to develop recommendations on how to improve social networks as a *securitability* factor.

Social networks create definite advantages, or **social capital**, for those who network. Just as with “human security,” the term “social capital” is still in the state of being conceptualized and defined worldwide. According to researcher Pierre Bourdieu, social capital provides significant advantages to those individuals, families and groups with the best mutual contacts. The World Bank began to emphasize the significance of social capital in the context of human development during the 1990s. It initiated a systematic study through the *Social Capital Initiative*, in which it outlined social capital in the context of various disciplines.

Although it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between formal and informal networking, doing so is necessary to understand the specifics of the Latvian situation, in which informal networks are highly developed and considered as a primary source of security, while the potential of formal networks remains to be fully realised.

Informal networks exist among such groups as families, relatives, friends and neighbours. Informal networks are not usually regulated by written rules and are often guided by informal agreements or norms.

Formal networks, on the other hand, are usually based on relationships at work (personnel relations, unions) or within organized group activities (education, sports, entertainment, music, art, church, voluntary, self-help, etc.). Formal groups often have a definite structure, annual meetings, regulations, and formalized financial procedures, and for the most part are officially registered. They can be local, nationwide and international.



Aspects crucial to the success of networks

Certain aspects are crucial to the success of networks. These factors determine whether networks achieve their goals and can continue to exist when challenges arise. Networks can be successful if they harness the resources of their individuals and organizations to achieve their goals. Social networks mainly provide a structure for the exchange of resources. In order for them to be effective, they must efficiently access and coordinate their members' time, expertise and money. Another key to success is the ability of networks to interface with the external environment. They must have strategies for utilizing the resources available in the outside world.

Social norms enforced by networks must be aimed at facilitating cooperation. The most important norms are *trust in the performance of duties* and *keeping one's word*. The principle of *reciprocity* is important, since members of each social network are linked to each other through commitments, expectations and a mutual understanding that joint efforts will be productive. Networks are also self-regulated by their so-called "restricting solidarity." For example, people within a network monitor each other's behaviour because the unfair or immoral activities of one member can cast a shadow on the entire organization. The price for breaking any of the norms of the network is very high – loss of honour and trust in the eyes of the network members.

Some additional aspects are specific to the success of formal networks. These are analyzed later in this Chapter.

How social networks generate securitability

Networking in and of itself does not promote *securitability*. Networks can put an individual at risk to guarantee the safety of a group. Social networks also do not always reflect the interests of society at large. There are cases in which social networks act solely in their own interests, for example, criminal groups (mafia, street gangs) and ultra radical religious or political groups. Here, too, the activities of such networks are based on mutual trust, norms and sanctions, only their aims and the means they use for reaching their goals are detrimental to society.

Networks facilitate people's sense of security in four ways (see Box 5.2):

Different kinds of support (emotional, material, physical). Members of social networks can help each other in various situations such as lending or donating money, helping with child care, looking after an apartment or house during the owner's absence or illness, etc.

The exchange of information. The social network is a direct source of information that can serve to enhance security. For example, it may provide useful information about employment opportunities, the safety of streets after dark, or the best medical practitioners available. Information provides security when people are informed about their rights, receive warnings that help them to avoid risks, and receive confirmation or denial about perceived

Box 5.1

Definitions of the terms used in this Chapter

Social networks or **networks** refer to contacts and relations that are based on cooperation and reciprocity in order to achieve common goals.

Networking is a process whereby people approach each other for help and support.

Social capital is understood as networks of people and/or institutions working together in a spirit of trust, solidarity and inter-dependence to improve the productivity and well-being of their communities or interest groups.

A community is a group of people who may be united by a particular geographical location, some aspect of social identity and/or common motives.

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threats. If people successfully use social networks to get information, they can gain other significant resources, mainly time and new connections.

Socialization. The ability of individuals to rely on themselves and others for improving their *securitability* lies at the core of sustainable human security. The family is the primary socialization network that helps people to master the skills for improving their own *securitability* – how to overcome crises, develop positive relations, ask for help and provide help to others. Socialization skills, however, are honed by participation in any network.

A sense of belonging. Members of social networks develop a positive social identity and opportunities to maintain and develop ethnic, linguistic, religious, professional or other types of belonging.

Advantages of social networks over the individual and government in providing *securitability*

Social networks are irreplaceable in the benefit they provide to the individual, the community and the country as a whole (see Box 5.3). From the point of

view of the individual, social networks are flexible, effective, tailored to their needs, accessible, and efficient. From the community perspective, networks can enhance people's sense of identity and belonging, positively influence individual behaviour and serve to strengthen relationships. In politics as well, the participation of social contact networks in political decision-making leads to sounder policies.

Historically, networks have been undervalued in Latvia as a political force. Recently, however, there has been a trend to recognize the value of social capital and the functioning of social networks at the local and regional levels, especially in government-supported social programmes. In order for social networks to flourish and attend to people's human security issues, community development must be seen as a priority at all levels of government.

Social networks must not compensate for the State's inability to carry out its role in full as an enhancer of security. They are not the main force in addressing large-scale unemployment, low wages or weaknesses in the social security system. Social networks do not usually have the widescale resources needed to provide uniform coverage or nationwide access to their services. Networks also cannot compensate for the lack of government investment in areas that are the responsibility of the State, such as the health care system.

Box 5.2

How social networks generate *securitability*

- Support (emotional, material, physical)
- Information
- Socialization
- Sense of belonging



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Box 5.3

Comparing sources of *securitability* Social networks vs. the individual and the government

Advantages over the individual

Awareness that the individual is not alone with his/her problem

Collective problem-solving often leads to better solutions

Wider range of available resources

Broader support base

Advantages over the government

Less red tape and more flexibility during the formulation and implementation of decisions

Often a more efficient means of resolving social problems at the local level

High personal interest and motivation of participants

Able to respond more quickly to changes in people's needs

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Network participation in Latvia

How intensely and how often people participate in both formal and informal social networks depends on different factors, the most important being: their economic situation, their subjective assessment of their economic status, place of residence, gender, age, occupation and type of education (see Box 5.5).

Economic situation

The **Survey** shows that participation in informal social networks is extremely important for enhancing the *securitability* of people with lower incomes. People feel safe if they are surrounded by others with whom they can meet and exchange information on a regular basis, as well as ask for advice, help and support. The *Survey on Living Conditions in Latvia in 1999* showed that respondents with lower incomes tend to meet their parents (or one parent) more often than others. Parents may be their primary source of reassurance, information, goods or services, loans, etc.

According to the *Views of the Poor: Social Appraisal of Poverty in Latvia* (World Bank and UNDP Programme on Poverty, 1999), the lack of money to cover travel expenses, gifts for visits and other expenses makes it difficult for low-income peo-

ple to maintain social contacts at either the formal or informal level. The resulting decrease in social contacts leads to social isolation, creating a negative effect on people's perception of their ability to influence events in their life.

Children and families with children are subject to the biggest risk of poverty and social exclusion. The Ministry of Welfare study *Identification of the Risk Factors of Social Exclusion in Children from Poor Families* (2002) shows that families with two or more children, children who live with one parent, families with at least one unemployed member, children whose parents are disabled, children who are disabled, children from otherwise disadvantaged families and families from Latgale are most likely to be poor. The more children there are in a family, the greater the tendency for these children to interact in a closed circle amongst themselves, rather than in wider social circles.

The support of education in the broadest sense of the term widens social contact opportunities for children and makes it easier for them to find healthy and useful ways to spend their free time. Relationships developed during the learning process provide emotional security and help children to expand their contacts for the further exchange of information, as well as the improvement of their employment prospects.

Self-assessment of level of income

The **Survey's** results show that people with an optimistic assessment of their *level of income* are more likely to recognise that active participation in social networks is an important *securitability factor*.

Special needs

Children with special needs and families with a parent who is disabled often find it difficult to improve their social contact opportunities due to the lack of physical access to educational institutions, specific education and training needs, and limited financial means. Only 14% of adults registered in Latvia with special needs are employed, illustrating that social exclusion continues into adulthood. In order to limit the social exclusion of such children, the government should plan for their integration into regular public schools. This requires substantial funding because such schools have to be adjusted to the children's specific needs, special staff has to be trained, and study aids purchased. Nevertheless, this is a real avenue for advancing the *securitability* of one very vulnerable segment of society.

Type of residential area

The less urbanized the environment, the more social networks play a role in enhancing people's security. This is seen in the *Survey on Living Conditions in Latvia 1999*, which shows that urban people are less inclined to contact their neighbours. The exchange of information and mutual support among neighbours is much more pronounced outside of Latvia's cities.

Gender

Male and female respondents hold fairly similar positions regarding the frequency of their social contacts. The *Survey on Living Conditions* reveals that both men and women meet their relatives equally often. However, more than a quarter (26%) of male respondents meet their colleagues after work, compared to only 16% of female respondents.

Age

The frequency and scope of people's social contacts decrease with age. People aged 65 and over have the fewest contacts, while 18-24 year olds

Box 5.4

Kaija Gertnere-Ozola

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On civic participation

Civic participation is based on the belief that individuals should be given a voice in their governance. However, it is often difficult to get people to participate or take an active interest in policy making. Solutions proposed by bureaucrats often leave little room for lay citizens to add their input. While the benefits of an active and engaged civil society can contribute to improving policy development, renewing faith in the public sector and building social capital remains a challenge.

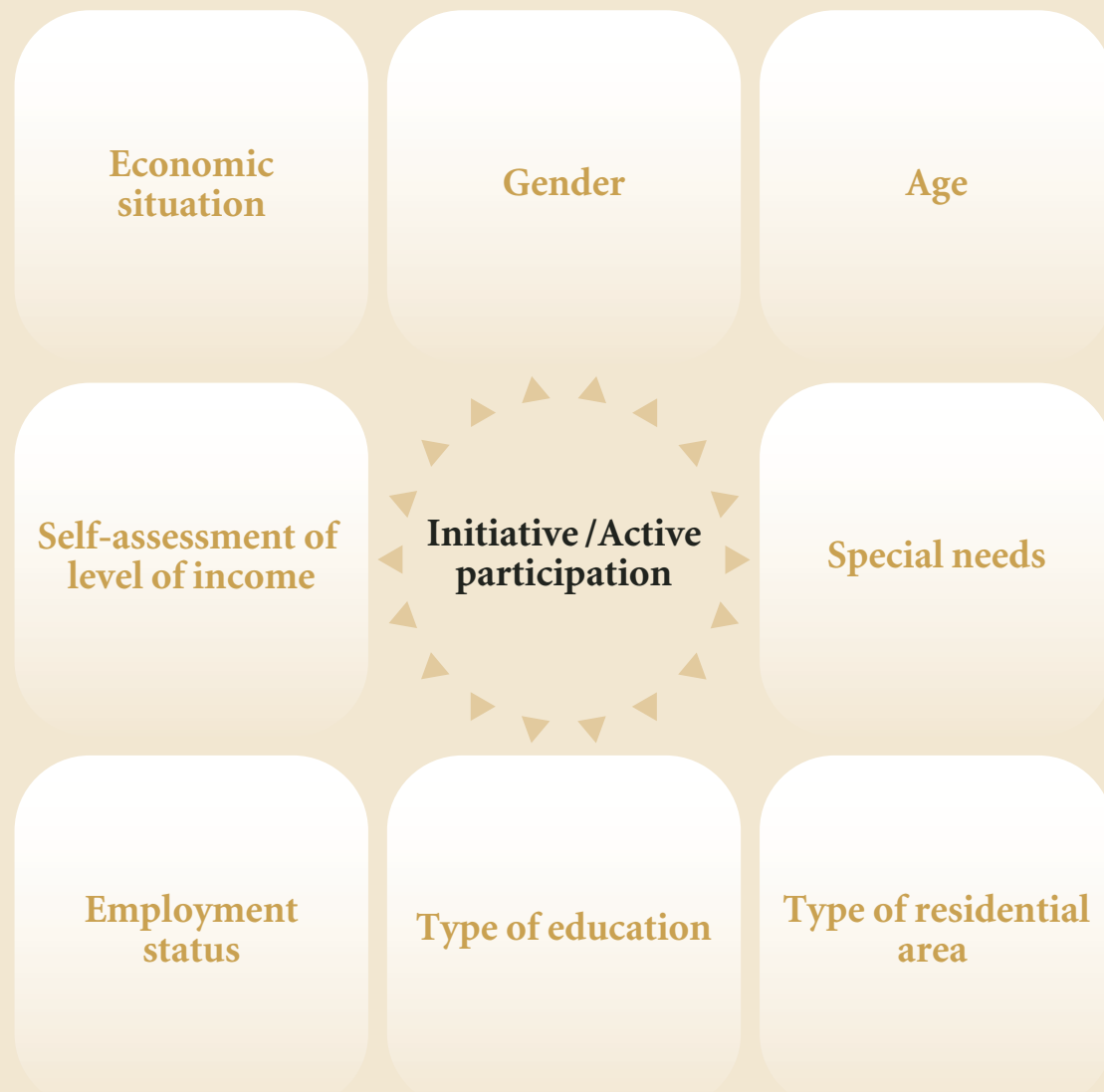
Cooperation between Latvia's NGOs and the government is in the process of being structured. NGOs often criticise the government for neglecting the needs of society and for relying on communications that are one-way, rather than based on dialogue. The Rules of Procedure for the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers, which took effect on June 1st 2002, provide for NGO representation at weekly meetings of State Secretaries. The adoption of these Rules is a positive outcome of the State Chancellery's initiatives to establish greater transparency and to enable civil society to participate in (or monitor) decision-making processes. As a result, the NGO sector in Latvia has been provided with an excellent opportunity, but often lacks the capacity to use it fully.

If civic participation is to have a valuable impact, it will require commitment, cooperation, transparency, and resources to guarantee quality representation and input by society.

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Box 5.5

Significant factors influencing participation in social networks



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socialize most often. According to the *Survey on Living Conditions*, a sharp decline in the frequency of contacts with friends occurs after the age of 44. As age increases, the individual's ability and readiness to use social networks as a source of security diminishes. Up until the age of 65 few people have any problems finding someone to contact if they really need to. However, every tenth person aged 75 and over feels lonely and unable to find company. Elderly people also experience more difficulty in finding a reliable person with whom to discuss their personal problems. One in seven of those over 65 have no

weekly contacts with relatives or other people outside of the household.

The elderly are a group with a high risk of social exclusion and insecurity, and could benefit from social networks. However, their reluctance to use the social contacts at their disposal for security purposes appears to increase with age. For example, those aged 65 and over contact their neighbours more often than other groups (84.1% at least once a month), but often use these contacts for other purposes than to help themselves become more secure.

Employment status

According to the *Survey on Living Conditions*, the unemployed have the most frequent social contacts with their relatives and other people outside the household. Entrepreneurs and the self-employed opt more for professional ties.

Type of education

Research on participation in different organizations (trade unions, political parties, religious, sports, leisure, interest/environmental and other organizations) or formal social networks shows that people with a lower level of education participate in formal social networks less often than others. For example, about 40% of respondents of the *Survey on Living Conditions* with a university education are members of some type of formal organization. However, the figure drops to nearly 27% for those with a technical post-secondary education, close to 22% for those with a high school degree and less than 14% for those with a primary education.

Although social networks can be used to help friends or relatives who are elderly, chronically ill or disabled to increase their security, this is not always done. The *Survey on Living Conditions* showed that less than 14% of respondents had taken care of a friend or relative free of charge. A different study on social networks in Latvia showed that over 47% of respondents had no one they could rely on for even a

small loan. Over half (57%) said they had no one to turn to in the event of major financial problems (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, 2001).

Differences between informal and formal networks as security-enhancing factors

Studies reveal a difference in attitude of people in Latvia toward informal and formal networks as *security-enhancing factors*. Most of the **Survey's** respondents place primary importance on informal networks as "active" sources of security. They would first turn to their family, friends, neighbours, and other informal circles when in need. Social organizations are rated as secondary or "passive" sources of security, along with the government. (see Box 5.7)

As reflected in the *Survey on Living Conditions*, Latvia's informal contact networks are common and close-knit. Eighty-three percent of the respondents contacted their friends and neighbours at least once a week, 79% contacted their parents, 65% contacted their spouses' parents, and 62% contacted their siblings.

However, people in Latvia are only gradually getting involved in social organizations. Latvia's inhabitants may have the desire to act, but still lack the impulse to take initiative. Many have a passive attitude

Box 5.6

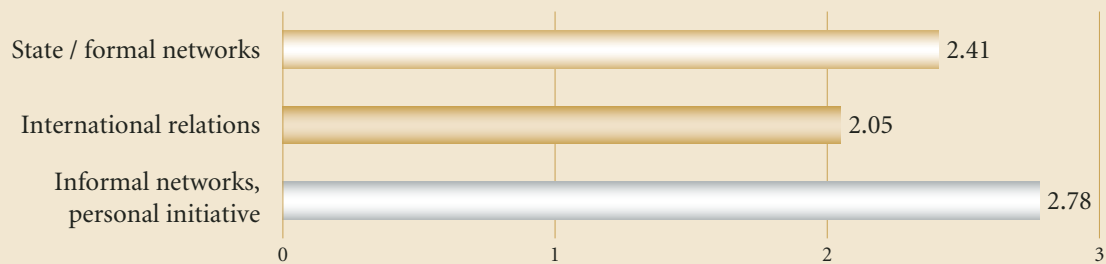
Who helps whom?

In the case of illness 80% of men and 60% of women would ask for assistance from their spouses with household tasks. The next most important source of household support for both genders is their mother. Only 2% indicate that they would not seek assistance from anyone with household tasks. In the case of emotional difficulties (feelings of depression and a desire to talk to someone) 22% of men and 11% of women would not seek out anyone.

This and other data indicate that relatives expect more help from the women than from the men in their families. Men rely on their spouses or partners to a greater degree than do women, while women are more likely to look for help from a close friend. Men seek emotional assistance from others less frequently, even in cases when their emotional and physical health is at risk. Women are more deeply involved in mutual assistance networks than men. They are called on for help more often, and they assume more responsibility for the health and well-being of other family members.

Statistics from the Social Relationship and Social Support Network Study, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the University of Latvia, 2001

Box 5.7

Factors enhancing *securitability*

1 – decreases my sense of security 2 – does not affect my sense of security 3 – increases my sense of security 4 – greatly increases my sense of security

The State / formal networks pertains to the justice, police and internal security, social security, health care and employment services systems, as well as the national government, local governments, national armed forces, churches and social organizations.

International relations pertains to NATO, the UN, the EU, the USA and Russia.

Informal networks / personal initiative pertains to family, friends, neighbours, informal circles and one's own actions.

UNDP Latvia Survey on Human Security 2002

toward State institutions and NGOs (see Box 5.7). According to a Ministry of Justice commissioned survey on integration issues (Market and Public Opinion Research Centre [SKDS], 2002), only 10.1% of its respondents participated in trade unions, 9.7% were active in sports clubs, 9.1% were members of churches or religious organizations, and 8.7% participated in different clubs and activity groups. Fifty-eight percent stated that they do not participate in any formal group.

Of those polled in the **Survey**, over half said that they have not participated in any activities to solve their personal problems or those of their closest relations. Twenty percent had turned to local governments for help, 12% to the police, 8.5% had participated in meetings where they could express themselves, and only 2.2% had taken part in any NGO activity.

The precise number of people involved in NGOs in Latvia is not known, since no such official statistics are collected. Yet it is clear that formal social networking in the form of NGOs is developing at a slower rate than would be desirable for Latvia's successful national development. According to the Centre for Non-governmental Organizations (<http://www.ngo.org.lv>), a correlation exists in Latvia between the number of NGOs and the level of people's welfare. There is a higher standard of living in those municipalities in

which NGOs are most active. The NGO Centre concludes that: "considering the role of the NGO in diminishing social tensions and in providing non-traditional solutions, it would be beneficial to encourage the creation of NGOs and their activity in smaller towns and in the countryside."

Although the prevailing attitude is that friends and family provide more security than more formalized forms of networking, there are many cases in which this is not true. Economic security issues such as wages and job safety are better resolved through formal, collective action. United neighbours can get local governments to ensure neighborhood safety, and environmental groups can stop polluters from infringing on people's long-term health security.

The reasons for the different perceptions of informal and formal networks are partly due to Latvia's recent history. Economics professor Chris de Neubourg, in a study of social risk-prevention strategies in transition-period societies, noted that the Soviet-era social security system did provide the minimum basic necessities. Nearly everyone had a job, and the employed were covered by basic accident and illness insurance. Daycare facilities and housing were subsidized by the State, as were health care, energy, and university tuition fees. Those who were employed and had families could feel generally secure. Others, such

as people who were disabled and had special needs and orphaned children living in institutions, were subject to greater insecurity, since they were not recipients of guarantees given to the employed and lacked the contacts and support of family members.

The USSR did not provide a sense of security for those seeking to address such issues as human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and other liberties that are normally taken for granted in democratic societies. Those who did so ran a great risk of being harshly dealt with by the Soviet regime, and of having their personal security severely compromised.

The development of formal networks to enhance security and securitability

Preconditions for the success of formal networks

The development of formal networks for the purpose of enhancing people's security can be fostered if there is public recognition and support of the need for their establishment.

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Box 5.8

On connections and social contact networks during the Soviet period and today

Were there social contact networks during the Soviet period? Undoubtedly there were – primarily informal ones. The main difference lay in the degree of freedom within society and the possibility of real civic involvement. During the Soviet period, society was run on the basis of such “collectivism” stereotypes as: “the majority is right,” “the collective good is more important than the individual good,” “family responsibilities are less important than social responsibilities or distinction at work,” etc. These stereotypes were in conflict with peoples’ everyday needs, which they met through informal “connections.” Connections were used to gain access to a better physician, to receive an apartment, to obtain tickets to the theatre, to buy imported shoes or French perfumes, or to place a child in a pre-school establishment. Social networks based on connections cannot be likened to social contact networks, which are formed on the basis of individual freedom and respect for human rights. Connections put people in humiliating situations involving the exchange of services and/or the payment of bribes.

Social contact networks develop as an act of free will in a civil society, based on the understanding of one's rights, duties, needs and abilities. They are a sign that alienated individuals are striving to renew their belonging to an “us” – and to establish relationships that will help them to overcome their limited individual possibilities and resources.

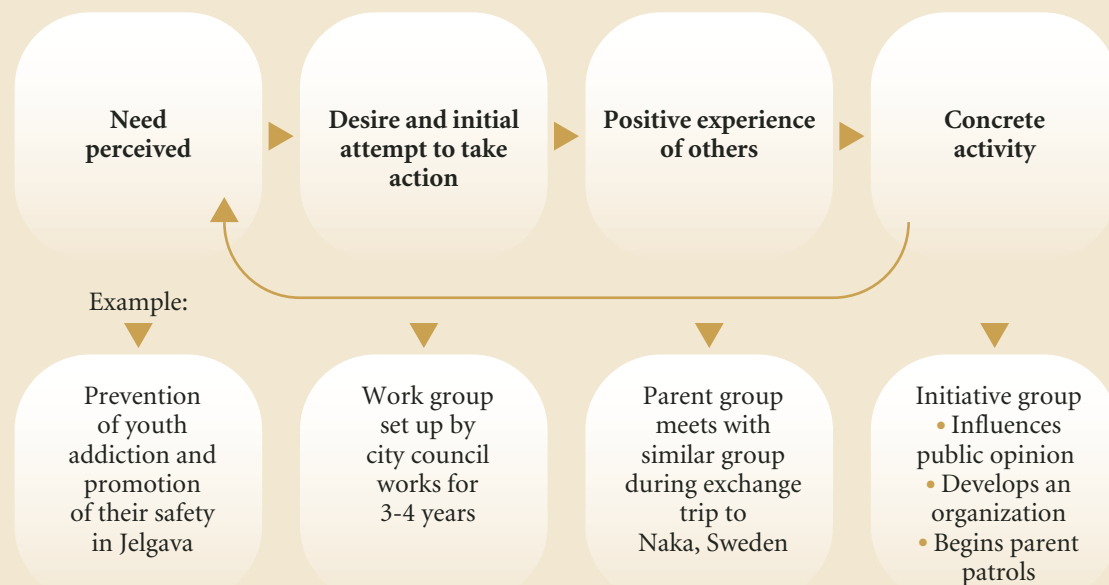
The study on poverty done in Latvia by the World Bank confirmed that those who have lost a sense of identity, who feel alienated from their families and neighbours, and who are isolated from sources of support tend to sink deeper into poverty and depression.

The development of social networks in Latvia is being hindered both by a lack of interest and a lack of resources. People who try to develop social networks find themselves in a situation that can be likened to children playing in a sandbox. They can do all they want within the confines of the sandbox, but the adults (municipalities, national government and parliament) remain uninterested in their activities. Their resources for the most part are very limited. Currently the development of a civil society and the creation of NGOs in Latvia is being supported mainly by foreign donors. Many people still do not realize the potential effectiveness of social contact networks. It is for this reason that a better understanding of social networks and social capital is a priority for the people of Latvia.

UNDP Latvia, 2003

Box 5.9

Preconditions for development of sustainable formal social networks in Latvia



UNDP Latvia, 2003

Formal social networks evolve according to certain patterns. The authors of this **Report** analyzed several successful networks in Latvia and drew out four important preconditions for the establishment and development of a sustainable social network – *a need or problem, a desire and initial attempt to take action, the positive experience of others and concrete activity* (see Box 5.9). Positive factors that contribute to the sustainability of networks, such as the upholding of social norms, the coordination of member’s resources, and the successful use of external resources mentioned earlier in this Chapter also contribute to the success of networks.

The example of parents working together in the city of Jelgava to protect their children’s security will be used as a demonstration of the four preconditions (see Box 5.10).

The creation of a social network begins when *a need* is perceived by members of the community. For *Parents for Jelgava*, the initial need was to prevent drug addiction among the city’s youths.

The *desire and attempt to take action* for improving the situation is the next step that brings people closer to creating a network. The Jelgava City Council set up a work group of different types of professionals to address drug addiction among youths.

Another crucial step in the process of creating social networks is the *positive experience of others*. Under current conditions in Latvia, people don’t often harness networks to enhance their *securitability* unless stimulated to do so by outside actors. Members of the working group in Jelgava gained an understanding of their goals, roles, procedures, etc. from the successful experience of a similar group of parents in Naka, Sweden.

Finally, *concrete activities* emerge, such as the launching of the *Parents for Jelgava* public organization and the initiation of parent patrols in the city.

This pattern holds true for all of the other cases examined in this **Report**.

Leaders also play an important role in the creation of formal social networks. They may have had previous experience in such networks, and are capable of inspiring others to contribute their time and energy for the good of the public.

The **support** of the local inhabitants, municipalities and entrepreneurs is crucial to begin the process, as is pointed out by a number of respondents questioned within the **Survey**. Municipal support can come in the form of financial and human resources, the distribu-

tion of information, moral support and gratitude. Donations by entrepreneurs are often essential for the success of formal networks. Public support provides encouragement to the new organization's members, as do reports in the mass media, which forward the message and attract new participants.

As formal social networks develop, new needs are identified and new opportunities are created. In the short time since its foundation, *Parents for Jelgava* has already expanded the scope of its activities. It now organizes seminars and prepares information for parents on how to teach their children to enhance their own security and avoid violence on the street.

The role of networks in increasing security in the seven realms

Networking can increase security in nearly any realm. It can be especially effective in strengthening individuals' *personal security* – as illustrated by the *Parents for Jelgava* case (see Box 5.10) – and in improving economic security.

As described in Chapter 2, *economic security* means having sufficient and predictable income, and is one of the main issues about which people in Latvia feel insecure. The same has been shown in *Attitudes to Particular Integration-Related Issues 2002*, a study commissioned by the Ministry of Justice. Over 40% of respondents mentioned unemployment and over 30% low income as the two major risk factors that make them feel insecure.

Chris de Neubourg points out that economic security is enhanced not only by participation in the job market, but also by a reliance on one's family and participation in other social networks. Social network researcher J. Coleman shows the correlation between social capital and economic development. He emphasizes that social systems with numerous and diverse social organizations that develop a high level of civic participation have a much higher potential for economic development than do those in which the civil society aspect is under-developed.

One of the primary advantages of networking as a source of *securitability* is its pro-active nature. In regard to economic security, an active approach and participation in social networks (family, friends, local community) and the utilization of their resources is much more productive than the passive approach of

harbouring high expectations toward one's local or national government.

Most of those surveyed for this **Report**, however, felt that the government is best prepared to reduce existing economic threats, and that individuals on their own are the next most important agent. The use of social networks through cooperation with others to reduce economic insecurity has yet to become a general practice in Latvia (see Box 5.12).

Further studies in the context of this **Report** reveal that the more people involve friends and family in the resolution of their problems, the less they fear about their future economic well-being. Most people in Latvia have tried resolving their economic difficulties first and foremost within the circle of their family and friends. The lower one's income, the greater the significance of active participation in informal social networks to increase one's sense of security.

An analysis of the results of the **Survey** in several different ways supports the assertion that participation in a social network decreases people's fears about their economic security. Active participation in social networks is related to levels of income. Respondents with a higher per capita income believe to a greater extent that their participation in social networks contributes to avoiding a sense of insecurity (see Box 5.11).

Networking enhances other securitability factors

The ability to network is not only a *securitability factor* in its own right. It also enhances other *securitability factors*. For example, it helps individuals to increase their own role as *securitability factors*. Involving passive people with high expectations towards the government and social organizations in formal networking activities increases their initiative and their understanding of themselves as sources of security. This increase in individual *securitability* then strengthens the networks these people have joined. The organization *Karosta K@2* is one example of such a reciprocal relationship (see Box 5.13).

The polarization of society in relation to social capital

The differences in social capital that arise from networking can polarize society in the same way as

income disparity. Those who network continue to improve their human security, while those who do not are at a disadvantage. People who participate in networks (see Box 5.5) and have the skills crucial to the success of networks are able to take full advantage

of the benefits offered by networking. The example of the *Mežaparks Development Association* shows how a group of people with a high sense of security can further strengthen its positions through networking (see Box 5.14).

Box 5.10

A network to enhance personal physical security – *Vecāki Jelgavai* (Parents for Jelgava)

Vecāki Jelgavai (Parents for Jelgava) is an NGO that organizes voluntary parent patrols along the streets of Jelgava on Friday nights. The principal aim of the patrols is to protect young people from different dangers, including drug addiction. The patrols take place within the framework of a project entitled *Liels un mazs drošā pilsētā* (Big and small in a safe city). This project was initiated by a group of parents who, with the support of the Jelgava City Council, had travelled to Sweden to see how a similar organization operates. Their further implementation of the project demonstrates that individuals with incentive can contribute to the development of security in their local municipality.

Every Friday night at eight o'clock in the evening, ten parents meet to discuss the assignments of the evening, before setting off on their weekly patrols around the city. Each participant receives a uniform of sorts – a jacket emblazoned with the reflecting sign *Parents for Jelgava* and a flashlight.

Two groups of parents set out on their rounds. Each group consists of three fathers and two mothers and is equipped with a mobile phone and a first aid kit. All of the patrols' equipment has been obtained with the help of Jelgava business leaders and the City Council.

The patrol covers about 12 kilometres. The routes are designed according to the recommendations of young people as to which streets and parts of the town are the least safe. The routes cover shops that sell alcohol and tobacco, cafés, bars, restaurants, casinos and Internet clubs, night clubs, parks and other places that are popular among young people. During the patrols, parents talk with the youngsters they meet and give them cards with the telephone number of the organization. They inform the youths of their mission, and are simply present if needed. The parents do not moralize and ask the youngsters to go home. Their aim is to guarantee the children's safety during the late evening hours, for example, by walking them home or ensuring that children under 16 do not spend the whole night at the Internet clubs. They also try to ensure that shops do not sell alcohol or tobacco to minors. *Parents for Jelgava* has established close cooperation with the police and a local hospital that provides assistance in the case of emergency. The patrols end at 2 a.m., when both groups of parents come together to discuss their experiences of the evening. Then they go home.

The organization has a rule against the participation of novices in such patrols. Each newcomer is tested and must go through training. A senior member must provide a recommendation on behalf of any potential newcomer. Currently there is a waiting list for parents wishing to participate, and most of the parents who have already gone out on patrols are eager to do so again.

Sarmīte Viksna, a mother from Jelgava, is pleased that the project has helped to create stronger links among parents, irrespective of their positions and professional affiliations. Entrepreneurs and even city council employees, as community members who care about the safety of their own children and that of other children, are welcome to provide material and moral support.

This case study is based on an interview with Sarmīte Viksna, a mother and initiator of Parents for Jelgava. UNDP Latvia, 2003

Human security through a sense of community

When people unite in social networks, they gain the opportunity to increase the security of their community in unprecedented ways, such as by intervening among their own community members to prevent hooliganism and vandalism. Members of *Parents for Jelgava* said that their visual presence alone provided an added sense of order, for example, in Internet cafes where children younger than 16 are not allowed to be at night.

Social networks have a greater influence if they unite individuals that are respected in local circles. Minor crimes such as vandalism can be reduced, especially if those stopping the situation are friends of the family or parents of a friend. Social networks reinforce the sense of community and pressure those inclined toward criminal activities to abide by the community's norms.

Thus, social networks can increase both the personal security of those who participate and the secu-

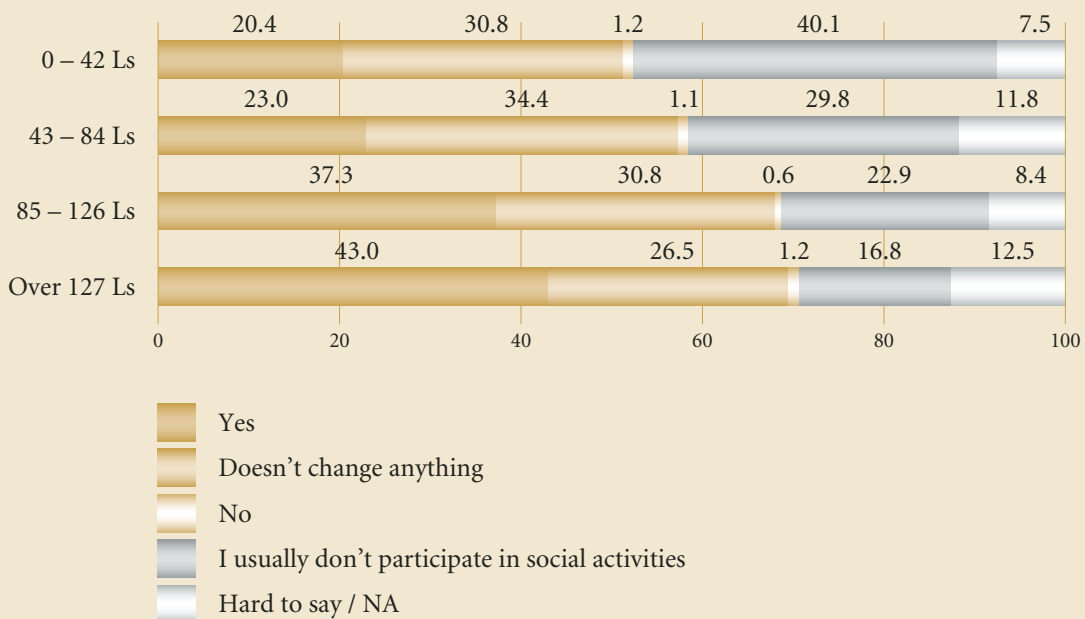
rity of the community as a whole. In the case of *Karosta K@2*, the image of Karosta's socially excluded inhabitants is being transformed. The events and activities organized by the artists' group are facilitating the positive socialization of the neighbourhood's children, giving them the opportunity to express their interests and show their potential. The skills and self-confidence these children acquire will help them to strengthen their individual *securitability factors*.

The *Mežaparks Development Association* helped to deter the controversial privatization of the *Saules dārzs* parkland, proving that social networks can protect the interests of the local community against the seeming omnipotence of oligarchic entrepreneurs. Its input into the city's development plan caused the local residents to feel that justice and security can prevail.

Networking has the added benefit of increasing trust in cooperation partners and reducing high expectations that people may feel toward their government. It strengthens people's belief in their own

Box 5.11

Can active participation in social activities improve one's life or that of one's closest relations? Range of opinions among different income groups (% of respondents in each income category)



Market and Public Opinion Research Centre (SKDS), 2002

Box 5.12

Cooperative credit unions in Latvia – enhancing economic security

The credit union is a financial cooperative established and governed by its members to meet their financial needs and improve their well-being. The credit union's capital is accrued from its members' deposits, which are accepted irrespective of their amount. This allows people to accrue funds for particular purposes. Loans are issued only to credit union members.

Members of the credit union are simultaneously its owners and clients. Only members are eligible for its services. All participants have equal rights regarding the control of the credit union, because each member has one vote. The minimum number of members is 20 and the minimum capital is 2000 lats.

In most cases, people choose to become members of credit unions because they are not happy with the services provided by commercial banks. Second, people feel more secure when they discuss the private issue of money with familiar people in familiar surroundings.

Security is increased by the fact that the credit union's members are in similar situations. Wealthy people rarely get involved in the credit union movement. The income range of most members varies from those who live on welfare to the middle class.

The case study is based on an interview with Brigita Baltace, Board Chairperson of the Cooperative Credit Union Association of Latvia, and from information in the home page of the Cooperative Credit Union Association of Latvia (<http://home.delfi.lv/lkkss>). UNDP Latvia, 2003

ability to effect change through their dialogue with government institutions and leads, in turn, to greater responsiveness on the part of government institutions. This results in an improved climate of mutual trust.

Summary

There are many issues in life that an individual cannot address alone, and that can best be dealt with in cooperation with others. Participation in social networks strengthens the relationships among individuals and among different social groups. It unites people with similar views and approaches toward achieving a common goal, facilitates trust and solidarity and encourages voluntary work. A united network of community members can work wonders to increase the security of its members and that of the community as a whole.

In Latvia, people enjoy rather extensive informal social contacts with their family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues, but often lack the required knowledge, skills to utilize formal networking in order to increase their level of security.

The family is the primary source from which a child's networking skills are developed. It is here that he or she first sees how people attempt to solve issues of insecurity – by asking for help and offering it to others, by finding ways out of conflict situations, etc.

The social *milieu* is a determining factor for the success of certain networks. It is difficult to develop vibrant social networks in insecure and weak communities. For this reason it is essential for people to strengthen their allegiance to their communities, and to understand that this allegiance can be based on such elementary factors as a common geographical location, as in the examples of Karosta and Mežaparks.

Formal social networking, especially in the form of NGOs, is developing at a slower rate than required for Latvia's successful development. Many people have serious doubts about their ability to effect change and have a passive attitude toward actions taken by the government. High expectations also prevail in regard to municipal and government institutions as sources of security. Latvia's evolution into a strong and prosperous nation requires the

Box 5.13

Karosta K@2 – enhancing individual securitability in Liepāja

The *Karosta K@2* NGO operates in Karosta (War Harbour), a run-down, northern suburb of the city of Liepāja. This part of the city dates back to the end of the 19th century, when it was built as a support base for the Czarist Russian Empire's Baltic Sea Fleet. The name 'Karosta' came into use only after Latvia established its independence in 1918. Karosta flourished during the first period of Latvia's independence, when it was considered to be a prestigious place to live.

During the Soviet occupation Karosta came to serve the needs of the Soviet military and was closed to the public. Once the Soviet army left Latvia in the 1990s, Karosta's population plummeted. Many empty apartment buildings were vandalized or destroyed. Karosta turned into a slum neighbourhood. Its partly inhabited buildings were being gradually taken over by homeless and other low-income inhabitants, including families with children.

Life began to change in Karosta when it was chosen as a venue for professional activities by a group of international artists. The artists designed numerous art projects, including an extensive art exhibition in 2002 called *Subjective Objective*, creative workshops for Karosta's children, and an international seminar of cinematographers, *Transit Zero*. Some artists then moved to Karosta permanently and began to work for the territory and its inhabitants. Together, they created the public organization *Karosta K@2*.

The goal of *Karosta K@2* is to use culture, education and information to help those living in Karosta to resolve such painful issues as social integration and poverty. *Karosta K@2* is cooperating with different international foundations and organizations to attract funds for new projects. Local artists, volunteers and visitors from abroad are already participating in various projects. According to one of the founders of the organization, "we have established a partnership with the European Culture Foundation because we can offer Europe something that others do not have."

Karosta K@2 offers children and adults different ways to spend their free time, such as courses in the Latvian language, drawing, photography, Internet use, etc. One room is open for children on a daily basis. In cooperation with students of the Liepāja Pedagogical University, *Karosta K@2* has set up a New Media lab where young people can access the Internet, use video and audio equipment, and work on cultural exchange projects. A conference on the further development of the Karosta Dwelling Fund has also taken place.

The founders of the organization stress that relations with Karosta's inhabitants, especially with its children, are beneficial for everyone involved. They point out that "one of our achievements is to make children believe that nothing is impossible. That they are not smaller than others. Actually, they are a lot bigger." With the support of the organization, Karosta children have taken part in the movies *Kurpe* ("Shoe") and *Mostieties* ("Wake Up"). They have also made their own films and news programmes, and participated in local and international photography exhibitions.

The support of the city is crucial for the organization to carry out its plans of restoring Karosta, developing a culture centre and improving its infrastructure. *Karosta K@2* is hoping to set up a youth hostel, a Baltic international school of cinematography, and a multifunctional exhibition hall that could host concerts and performances. In this way the organization hopes to broaden its contacts and attract more visitors from abroad.

The case study is based on an interview with the founders of Karosta K@2, Kristīne Briede and Calle Bjorsmark, as well as on information available in Karosta's Internet home page – <http://www.karosta.org>. UNDP Latvia, 2003



readiness of its people to participate more in the policy-making processes of the country, and to work on providing security in realms not covered by the government, but still necessary for society.

Securitability can be enhanced by promoting public awareness of social networks and acknowledging their contributions, first and foremost by local governments. This type of promotion is extremely important in Latvia, where many people feel incapable of advancing their economic, physical and

community security. The promotion of positive examples increases awareness and encourages people to work towards resolving problems that are important both for them as individuals and for the community as a whole.

Local, regional and national government institutions need to support the wishes of local communities to organize themselves for creating a more secure environment. In Latvia, the wish to act often gets realized only with the assistance of an outside source.

Box 5.14

The Mežaparks Development Association

The *Mežaparks Development Association* is an independent, voluntary membership organization set up in 1997 following a conference entitled *Mežaparks – the First Garden City in Europe*, which was widely attended by the people of the neighbourhood. The principal aim of the association is to facilitate the sustainable development of Riga's Mežaparks neighbourhood, to ensure a high-quality and secure neighbourhood, and to preserve its existing cultural, historical and natural heritage for the present and future generations.

Currently two networks operate within the association. One of them organizes lectures on historic and cultural issues of the neighbourhood, and offers consultations on Mežaparks' architecture.

The other network unites people who are ready to donate their time and professional skills for the benefit of their neighbourhood. Activities include open forums on such subjects as urban development, the elaboration of proposals and projects for the improvement of the neighbourhood, better building codes, green zones in residential areas, transport and waste management systems. The association organized a public opinion poll on the Riga City Development Plan and communicated the opinion of the neighbourhood to the relevant authorities. Its members publish articles on Mežaparks in the media. They cooperate with the Mežaparks Elementary School, the *Saules dārzis* Young Friends of Nature Centre, the Riga Samaritans, the local post office and housing authority, the Latvian Centre for Sculptors, the Riga Zoo and others.

The association's expanding membership includes active members of society from different professions – politicians, environment experts, artists, writers, historians, teachers, etc. The diversity of contacts is resulting in a broad range of avenues of cooperation with different institutions – local authorities, the mass media and NGOs. The association's high level of initiative and its adeptness at coordinating its resources, its dynamic interface with the external environment and the presence of other crucial success factors has led to the sponsorship of its projects by such organizations as the Culture Foundation of Latvia, the Centre for NGOs, and the EU Phare ACCESS Latvia Programme, etc.

Currently the association plans to expand the functions of a Mežaparks elementary school so that it serves as a local culture centre as well, creating yet more networking opportunities among the young people of the area. The association also plans to enliven Mežaparks' social life by organizing street festivals and other events.

This case study is based on an interview with Kristīne Āboltiņa, one of the founders of the Mežaparks Development Association and initiator of the Sustainable Mežaparks Development Plan 2002. UNDP Latvia, 2003

Financial and moral support by local government institutions, NGOs and entrepreneurs is essential for the productive work of social networks. There are many different ways in which the surrounding community can support social networks. Each of the cases described in this Chapter demonstrates a wide array of support methods. Entrepreneurs can finance certain activities and provide supplies, inventory, and other resources. Local governments can provide moral support in the form of awards and praise, as well as assistance in dealing with administrative matters if necessary. NGOs can support the development of other social networks by offering information, advice, and help in attracting funding.

Social networks perform a crucial integration function for those with high insecurity levels and are the major source of *securitability* for poor people. Special attention should be paid to the role of social networks in facilitating children's integration in society. Children from poor families often have restricted social contacts, which are realized mainly among their peers. Social networks aimed at integrating children from poor families into society are centred around the system of education in the widest sense of the word.