

**STRENGTHENING LOCAL CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS:
A STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPING SOCIAL CAPITAL
AND COMMUNITY CAPACITY.**

**An Abstract of
A Thesis
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This thesis recounts the experiences of a Peace Corps Fellow (PCF) Community Development Internship spent in the Village of Princeville, Illinois. At the outset of this internship, two main goals were undertaken to generate and increase social capital within Princeville: (1) Organizing residents of Princeville to undertake specific community and economic development tasks; and (2) Establishing sustainable community development in the community, by enhancing local social capital within the community. Social capital is the ability of community members interconnect with one another, work together, trust each other, and feel empathy (Putnam 1993, p. 167, 1995, p. 67; Roseland 1998). Many projects were proposed and not all were completed successfully. However, the many projects completed made a tangible difference to the community in Princeville, as evidenced by a media account, and a permanent job offer made to the PCF.

The community was struggling to identify a path for future development. Princeville had strong ties to its agricultural past. And yet, it was at risk of losing this identity as it becomes increasingly integrated into the Peoria metropolitan area. The PCF internship experience showed that a development strategy could be found to unify these disparate visions of Princeville into a single development strategy, based on the idea of Heritage Tourism. Several projects including a heritage museum, bicycle path and uptown redevelopment all attempted to create a vision of the past as way of promoting future development.

Community development in general succeeded in Princeville chiefly because of the progressive thinking within the community, and the inclusion and

legitimization of alternative ideas by local leadership. Examples of the community's forward thinking abound, including Tax Increment Financing, strategic community visioning through the MAPPING program at the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, the Peace Corps Fellows Program, the Economic Development Committee, the Downtown Revitalization Committee and the Community Development Office, and may one day also include an administrative position.

The future for Princeville will continue to be successful if the community can continue to overcome its past problems: 1) the lack of inclusive leadership; 2) the underdeveloped sense of community, and; 3) a lack of social capital. The broader implication of this thesis is to show that community development should not be viewed as a single objective, that once achieved can be ignored. Rather, community development, and sustaining social capital is a process of continually working to keep local residents involved in improving the local quality of life for all who live there.