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must pay more for items such as washing machines "because there is less space for a Wal-Mart to muscle its way in beside the nearest freeway."

But the similarities outweigh the differences. "The classic European city no longer represents the real Europe," Marshall writes, any more than New York's Greenwich Village represents America. "The perfect European city we see on postcards and brochures is Europe in a box, kept there to remind the natives of their heritage, to look pretty, to reap tourism dollars. Meanwhile, the real day-to-day action goes on in the suburbs." *Mon Dieu!* What would Henry James think?

## ***Bowling and Civic Rot***

"Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" by Robert D. Putnam, in *Journal of Democracy* (Jan. 1995), 1101 15th St. N.W., Ste. 802, Washington, D.C. 20005.

More Americans go bowling today than ever before, but too many of them are bowling alone. Nearly 80 million went at least once during 1993, a 10 percent increase over 1980. Nevertheless, bowling in organized leagues has plummeted 40 percent. This development may seem unimportant in the larger scheme of things but Putnam, director of Harvard's Center for International Affairs, insists that, on the contrary, it is very significant: one more sign, whimsical though it may be, of the decay of America's "civil society."

Americans' inveterate inclination to form civic associations greatly impressed Alexis de Tocqueville when he visited the United States during the 1830s. He considered, as do many latter-day Tocquevilles, that such civic engagement is vital to making democracy work. Putnam agrees. His own 20-year study of Italy, published as *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993), showed that the quality of governance in different regions varied with the level of civic engagement, as reflected in such things as voter turnout, newspaper readership, and membership

in choral societies. Many other observers have stressed the importance of a healthy civil society to the new democracies in Eastern Europe and elsewhere.

Putnam's evidence of civic decay in the United States goes beyond organized bowling (and the oft-deplored decline in voter turnout in national elections):

- The number of people reporting that they attended a public meeting on town or school affairs in the previous year fell from 22 percent in 1973 to 13 percent 20 years later.

- Participation in religious services and in church-related groups has declined by perhaps one-sixth since the 1960s.

- Participation in parent-teacher associations fell drastically—from more than 12 million in 1964 to barely five million in 1982 before recovering somewhat (to seven million today).

- The number of people who volunteer for mainline civic organizations is down. Volunteering for the Boy Scouts is off 26 percent since 1970; for the Red Cross, 61 percent.

- Membership in traditional women's groups has steadily declined since the mid-1960s. In the national Federation of Women's Clubs, membership is down 59 percent since 1964; in the League of Women Voters, it is off 42 percent since 1969.

- Membership in fraternal organizations, such as the Lions, Elks, and Masons dropped substantially during the 1980s and continues to fall.

It is true that newer organizations, such as the Sierra Club and the American Association of Retired Persons, have greatly expanded their memberships, says Putnam, but most members of such groups never even meet; they just pay their dues and perhaps read the organization's newsletter.

What has caused the erosion of America's "social capital"? A big factor, obviously, has been the movement of women into the work force. The loosening of ties within the family may be another. TV and VCRs, by turning citizens into couch potatoes, may also have played a role. Whatever the causes of the rot, Putnam concludes, America's civil society urgently needs repair.