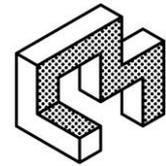




Eric Klinenberg



Biography

Eric Klinenberg is a sociologist, Professor and Director of the Institute for Public Knowledge at New York University (NYU). He is the author, among other books, of *Palaces for the People : How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (Crown, 2018), *Heat Wave : A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), as well as the co-editor of *Antidemocracy in America* (Columbia University Press, 2019).

“Social Infrastructure and the Future of Civic Life”

Tuesday 17 Nov, 4:30 PM

Abstract

Social infrastructure refers to the physical places and organizations that shape the way people interact. Social infrastructure is not “social capital” —a concept commonly used to measure people’s relationships and interpersonal networks— but the physical conditions that determine whether social capital develops. When social infrastructure is robust, it fosters contact, mutual support, and collaboration among friends and neighbors; when degraded, it inhibits social activity, leaving families and individuals to fend for themselves. Social infrastructure is crucially important, because local, face-to-face interactions —at the school, the playground, and the corner diner— are the building blocks of all public life. People forge bonds in places that have healthy social infrastructures, not because they set out to build community, but because when people engage in sustained, recurrent interaction, particularly while doing things they enjoy, relationships inevitably grow.

In this talk I argue that social infrastructure plays a critical but under-appreciated role in modern societies. It influences seemingly mundane but actually consequential patterns, from the way we move about our cities and suburbs to the opportunities we have to casually interact with strangers, friends, and neighbors. It is especially important for children, the elderly, and other people whose limited mobility or lack of autonomy binds them to the places where they live. But social infrastructure affects everyone. And while social infrastructure alone isn’t sufficient to unite polarized societies, protect vulnerable communities, or connect alienated individuals, we can’t address these challenges without it.

Link to the webinar: https://cutt.ly/Klinenberg_Metrolab