

BUILDING COMMUNITY: COLLABORATIVE INDIVIDUALISM AND THE CHALLENGE FOR BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

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ABSTRACT: Mixed-tenure developments, such as master-planned communities and urban villages, often presuppose that the design will build community and enhance social capital, thus mitigating the negative social impacts of suburban sprawl. However, research highlights the difficulties associated with creating community within such developments, citing demographic mix and service provision as both positive and negative elements. This paper explores the extent to which social capital exists in a planned, mixed-tenure development, from the perspective of residents living in low to medium-density dwellings in the estate. The results from a quantitative study examining sustainable community development on Queensland's Gold Coast, Australia, suggest that planned mixed-tenure developments have an equal chance of providing options for demographically diverse stakeholders as any other kind of development including the traditional suburban format. Outcomes such as increased levels of social capital appear to depend upon the combination of residents and their inclinations towards individual or altruistic benefits for their families, neighbourhoods, or communities. Inevitably, it seems that no amount of planning can provide a formula that will be effective in all instances.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Australia, and internationally, the need to sustainably manage urban population growth has spurred a redirection in planning away from traditional sprawl towards more compact, mixed use developments such as master-planned estates, urban villages and transit oriented developments. In addition to the mitigation of harmful environmental impacts such as pollution, a key design philosophy that frequently informs such developments is the purposeful

generation of 'community' and 'social diversity' through mixed land-use and equitable housing. In this context, it is often asserted that planned mixed use and mixed-tenure developments have the potential to re-build the community ties and social capital that have presumably been broken down as a result of sprawl. But is this achievable in reality? Can purposeful design that includes various accommodation options and services for a range of demographics and stakeholders create community and build social capital, the relationships of trust that bind people together for their mutual benefit within their neighbourhood?

The purpose of this paper is a) to explore the levels of social capital within a planned, mixed-tenure estate on Queensland's Gold Coast from the perspective of residents living in low to medium-density dwellings, and b) to compare and contrast findings with existing measures of social capital in traditional suburban environments. Our findings reveal that there are no significant differences between the levels of social capital possessed by residents in the case study area and those living in traditional inner-city Sydney suburbs. This suggests a somewhat tenuous link between the notion of 'planned' community and the actual occurrence of residential connectivity and social ties. We propose that it may be more appropriate to conceive of 'planned' communities as communities of 'collaborative individuals' who are connected via their pursuit of a common lifestyle exemplified in planned community forms.

2. SOCIAL CAPITAL, THE TRADITIONAL SUBURB AND PLANNED MIXED-TENURE DEVELOPMENTS

According to Robert Putnam (2000), communities today differ markedly from those of 50 years ago. Previously, people knew their neighbours, and had frequent conversations over the back fence and at the corner shop. These times have been replaced by limited community interactions, homes with security systems, and large, impersonal shopping centres. Simultaneously, broader social connections, community involvement and civic participation have declined, and there has been a "striking shift in the way we allocate our time- towards ourselves and our immediate family and away from the wider community" (Putnam 2000:107). To explain why and how people are losing connectedness to their communities, and investigate ways to reverse this trend, researchers often focus on the notion of "social capital". Social capital refers to human processes, networks and forms of civic organisation that are built up through trust and cooperation between people within a community for the benefit of all (Putnam, 1998). It is frequently associated with notions of social cohesion or the social glue that enables people, organisations, communities and nations to work together collaboratively for mutual benefit (Cox 2000). Putnam (2000) breaks social capital down into three dimensions: bonding, bridging, and linking. Bonding refers to informal networks with similar people, such as family and friends (i.e., people "like me"). Bridging refers to social networks between dissimilar people (i.e., people "unlike me"). Linking refers to the connections that people build with those in authority, particularly government institutions. These networks, interactions and connections between people generate norms of trust and reciprocity, which is the basis of social capital. According to Putnam

(2000), social capital is a key indicator of a community's capacity and readiness to successfully handle change by drawing on its "stocks of social capital" that can determine the likely success or failure of environmental and sustainability initiatives.

There is a range of literature that suggests a relationship between the physical design and layout of an urban environment with many arguing that suburban sprawl is, at least in part, responsible for disconnected communities and social isolation (Srinivasan, O'Fallon and Dearry, 2003: 1447). The layout of traditional suburbs and their promotion of automobile use is said to reduce the number of interactions between residents having a negative effect on social capital, social bonding and people's sense of belonging to their neighbourhood (Freeman, 2001; Burton, 2000). According to Leyden (2003: 1547) most modern car-dependent suburbs are not places designed to encourage social interaction. Similarly Freeman (2001) and Burton (2000) propose that increased reliance on the car to travel from one destination to another in lower density areas discourages "lively" streets, and reduces the opportunities pedestrians have to spontaneously interact face to face in public open spaces (Freeman, 2001; Burton, 2000).

Aspects of contemporary urban planning and design literature make the assumption that a relationship exists between urban form and the presence of 'community' and/or social capital. Nevertheless, there is debate between the types of urban form that promote or discourage the development of community ties. On the one hand, planned mixed-tenure developments, often compact and encompass a range of housing densities, aim to reduce automobile travel and urban sprawl by providing key services and amenities within close proximity. It is frequently asserted that such developments encourage greater use of public transport, provide social mix, and regenerate inner urban areas through purposive planning (Freeman, 2001; Burton, 2001). For example, inclusion of public recreational facilities and areas within easy walking distance of residences can facilitate social interaction between neighbours (Farrell, Aubry & Coulombe, 2004). In medium to higher-density areas, amenities within walking distance of homes are seen to provide common places where neighbours can meet frequently, spontaneously interact, and form social bonds, leading to the development of social capital (Freeman, 2001).

On the other hand, some argue that housing density that increases crowding actually weakens social ties (Freeman, 2001). The concept of social mix has also been more difficult to achieve in reality, with studies in planned mixed-tenure developments, such as urban villages and gated estates, suggesting that communities can still remain isolated despite opportunities for interaction promoted by design. Planned developments are often criticised for providing inflexible and prescriptive living that generates a range of social, economic and environmental problems (Brindley, 2003; Burton, 2003; McLoughlin, 1991; Neal, 2003; Thompson-Fawcett, 2003). Further, researchers such as Burton (2003), Brindley (2003) and Thompson-Fawcett (2003) have suggested that many planned mixed-tenure developments have, 'in-practice', failed to meet initial concept objectives of social mix, housing affordability, service provision

and proximity (Jarvis, 2000, 2001; Atkinson and Kintrea, 2000; Van Beckhoven et al., 2003; Tunstall, 2003).

Studies comparing levels of social capital, community and social involvement between mixed-tenure developments and traditional suburbs in America have also produced results that do not necessarily support the claims of 'better community interaction' heralded by proponents of planned, compact urban environments. Kim (2001) failed to find any significant differences in social capital when comparing Kentlands (a traditional suburb) and Orchard Village. Similarly, Brown and Cropper (2001) did not find any statistically significant differences between a standard subdivision and a planned, mixed-tenure development in Salt Lake City (Utah), although rates of neighbourliness were higher in the Salt Lake City community. In contrast, however, Leydon (2003) found that residents in planned, mixed-tenure developments walked more, had higher levels of social involvement and social capital, were more likely to know their neighbours, more trusting and more socially involved than their sprawled suburban counterparts.

In the Australian context, there has been little research into levels of social capital within planned mixed-tenure developments, due in part to the difficulties associated with measuring social capital and the recency of many of these developments. Indeed, only a handful of studies have compared and contrasted levels of social capital between locations in Australia, primarily examining differences between rural, outer-metropolitan and inner city locations (Onyx and Bullen, 2000; Onyx, Osburn and Bullen, 2004). The aim of this paper is to explore the extent to which social capital is present within a planned, mixed-tenure and socially-diverse estate in an Australian setting. The composition of the study area exemplifies the type of tenure and social mix proposed for South-East Queensland housing developments in the SEQ Regional plan (Office of Urban Management, 2005).

3. METHOD

3.1 The Case Study Area

The study was conducted in a planned, mixed tenure/ mixed density development on the Gold Coast, South-East Queensland). To ensure the anonymity of respondents, the site will be referred to as 'the case study area'.

The case study area covers approximately eight square kilometres, and is comprised of low to medium-density accommodation (houses on large and small lots, town houses and units), recreational areas (walk ways and parks) with provision of various kinds of services (corner shops, schools, medical services and petrol stations).

3.2 Survey Questionnaire

Initially, each household in the study area received a brochure explaining the project and the times researchers would be door-knocking to distribute and collect questionnaires in their street. Of 375 questionnaires distributed, 276 were returned, a 74 percent response rate. Due to missing data, particularly with

respect to the income (n=31), age (n=14) and gender (n=9) of some respondents, the responses of 209 respondents provided the sample for analysis.

3.3 Demographics & Lifestyle

Respondents reported their gender, age, annual household income, whether they had children, home ownership status (rent or own) and their current housing type (detached house or unit); they were also asked about the importance of privacy and whether they considered this when making residential decisions. Frequency of participation in outdoor activities was assessed through questions related to six activities in the local area: walking, enjoying the scenic views of the local area, swimming, feeding wildlife, going on picnics or cycling.

3.4 Social Capital

Social connectedness within the community was measured using Bullen and Onyx's (1998) 34 item social capital scale, which is comprised of eight distinct categories (Participation in Local Community, Proactivity in a Social Context, Feelings of Trust and Safety, Neighbourhood Connections, Family and Friends, Tolerance of Diversity, Value of Life and Work Connections). Following Onyx et al. (2004), the Work Connections factor – asked only of those employed – was not included. For comparison purposes only, the mean social capital score of five communities in NSW (Overall), a community in inner Sydney (Ultimo/Pymont) and a rural NSW community considered high in social capital (West Wyalong) are included in the study. SPSS software was used to calculate descriptive statistics including means, frequencies and percentages for the key demographic characteristics, lifestyle and elements of social capital.

4. KEY RESULTS

4.1 Demographic & Lifestyle Profile

The 209 respondents ranged in age from 17 to 82 years, with an average age of 43 years. Approximately half of the respondents were female (51 percent), had children (54 percent) and reported a household income of more than \$50,000 a year (48 percent). Very few respondents were renting (19 percent), with the majority owning their own homes (81 percent) and living in detached housing (71 percent). Those in higher density housing were more likely to be renters (36 vs.17 percent, $\chi^2(2)=12.72$ $p<.002$), living alone (13 vs.4 percent, $\chi^2(2)=8.33$ $p<.02$), with a partner (34 vs.27 percent, $\chi^2(2)=6.16$ $p<.05$) or friends (11 vs.3 percent, $\chi^2(2)=11.87$ $p<.003$). Residents living in detached housing were more likely to live there with a partner and children (52 vs. 21 percent, $\chi^2(2)=22.34$ $p<.000$) and be slightly older. Income did not differ significantly as a function of housing type. The majority (95 percent) of the residents felt privacy was extremely or very important, with over half (62 percent) agreeing that privacy was a consideration when they moved to the area.

The majority of residents reported frequently participating in outdoor activities, particularly enjoying walking (87 percent) and the scenic views of the local area (81%). Less than half reported swimming (39 percent), feeding

wildlife (45 percent), going on picnics (37 percent), cycling (24 percent) or participating in other outdoor activities (3 percent). The residents were particularly likely to report shopping at local shopping centres (98 percent), to patronise local cafes (73 percent) and to use local medical services (79 percent). However, they were less likely to report participation in local sport (27 percent) or that their children attended local schools (33 percent), as Figure 1 illustrates.

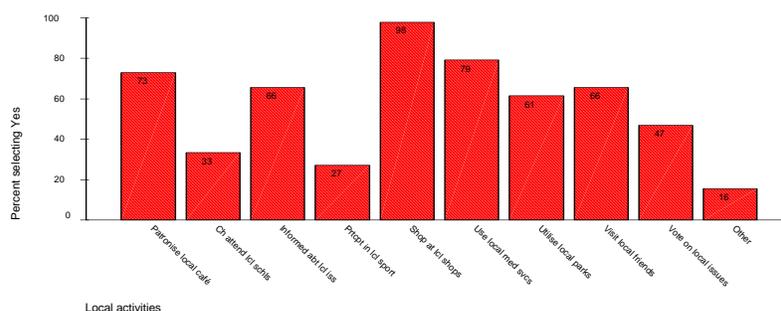


Figure 1. Participation in Local Community Activities

The majority (at least 65 percent) of residents were either mostly or very satisfied with the local shopping facilities, general conditions of the area, and the services and facilities provided within the case study area (Table 1).

Table 1. Satisfaction with Local Services and Amenities

	Very Dissatisfied	Mostly Dissatisfied	Neutral	Mostly Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Distance from employment	2%	6%	27%	33%	32%
Distance from parks and gardens	2%	6%	20%	42%	30%
Distance from recreational facilities	3%	8%	25%	43%	22%
Distance from work	2%	7%	24%	33%	34%
General condition of the area	1%	6%	17%	59%	17%
Local schools	2%	4%	36%	32%	27%
Neighbours	3%	3%	24%	40%	29%
Noise level	4%	12%	21%	42%	21%
Public transportation	0%	6%	10%	40%	27%
The local services	1%	3%	17%	52%	23%
The local shopping facilities	0%	3%	8%	49%	37%

4.2 Social Capital

Results from the Bullen and Onyx Social Capital scale are summarised in Table 2.

The case study area is best described as a 'community of individuals', with residents living and enjoying the private lifestyle considered normal in today's urban environment. Residents are assertive and proactive on an individual level,

with little community involvement. A series of t-tests revealed that only one of the eight elements of social capital differed according to dwelling choice, such that those who lived in detached houses scored significantly higher on the Social Capital sub-scale Participation in Local Community (12 vs. 9.9, $t(225)=3.07$, $p<.002$). Compared with residents living in higher density homes, those living in detached houses were more likely to volunteer for local groups, attend local community events, be active members in local organisations and participate in community projects.

Table 2. Social Capital Scores for the Case Study Area (Total Sample)

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Score</i>
Community	11.4
Proactivity	15.9
Trust	12.7
Neighbourhood	12.7
Family/Friends	9.4
Tolerance	6.1
Value of Life	5.9
Total Social Capital	80.3

Social capital also differed depending on whether residents rented or owned their accommodation. Owners scored significantly higher on measures of Proactivity in a Social Context (24 vs 22, $t(177)=2.57$, $p<.011$) and Trust/Safety (13 vs 12, $t(250)=2.65$, $p<.008$), whereas renters scored higher on contact with Friends and Family (9.9 vs 9.3, $t(260)=2.05$, $p<.041$).

4.3 Comparing Social Capital – Planned vs. Traditional Developments

Table 3 illustrates that, in many respects, the social capital score of residents of the case study area is similar to the overall mean of the six traditional, unstructured locations selected for comparison. Compared to rural areas (West Wyalong and Broken Hill in rural NSW), the case study area scores lower on three sub-scales, specifically Participation in Local Community, Feelings of Trust and Safety and Neighbourhood Connections. This is not completely unexpected given that rural areas typically display higher levels of social capital, but the finding that the case study area residents have a markedly similar score as residents from an inner Sydney suburb (e.g. Pyrmont) on the subscales Participation in Local Community and Neighbourhood Connections, illustrates how limited neighbourhood contact and participation is for the case study area residents. The case study area has limited 'stocks of social capital' with residents less involved with their neighbours and the local community than a comparison neighbourhood in inner city Sydney.

Table 3 illustrates the results for each social capital factor and the total social capital score for the case study area in comparison to the seven traditional communities.

Table 3. Social Capital Compared

<i>Factor</i>	Case						West	Broken
	Study Area	Pymont	Narellan	Greenacre	Deniliquin	Wyalong	Hill	
Community	11.4	11.7	12.6	11	14.3	15.5	15.9	
Proactivity	15.9	15.8	15.8	14.9	14.3	15	15.2	
Trust	12.7	12.2	13	10.6	13	16.1	13.7	
Neighbourhood	12.7	11.8	14.1	13.6	15	15.2	14.4	
Family/Friends	9.4	9.7	9.4	9	9.4	9.1	9	
Tolerance	6.1	6.4	5.4	5.3	5.8	4.8	5.7	
Value of Life	5.9	5.5	5.5	5.3	5.8	6.2	5.9	
Total Social Capital	80.3	79.7	82.6	76.7	84	88.2	80	

4.4 Discussion

Residents enjoy living in the case study area, value the natural environment, are extremely satisfied with their accommodation and local services, and are happy and healthy. However, they place an extremely high value on privacy, rarely interacting with neighbours and seldom participating in local community events. This lack of interaction means that the case study area, one example of a planned, mixed-tenure development, has limited 'stocks of social capital' more representative of traditional suburban development, as noted by Burton (2000), Freeman (2001) and Srinivasab et al., (2003). The case study area is higher in linking social capital, the connections that people build with those in authority, particularly government institutions, but lower in bridging and bonding capital, the personal connectedness that operates between similar and dissimilar people respectively.

The residents of the case study area were generally satisfied with the amenities and physical features of the area, but dissatisfied with the social mix. It can be postulated that the case study area is a community of individuals, where residents enjoy an individualistic, modern, urban lifestyle, even though the physical layout of developments such as the case study area are purportedly designed to enhance social involvement and interaction (Freeman, 2001; Farrell et al., 2004). A more definitive explanation of the case study area community can be gained by conceptualising the community as having two distinct dimensions: structural (i.e., buildings and facilities) and functional (i.e., interactions between people and their environment). Ideally, these two dimensions overlap to form a cohesive, healthy and sustainable community (Garcia et al., 1999). In the case study area, the structural component of the community is in good condition, and residents are extremely satisfied with the natural environment, their accommodation, parks, schools and recreational facilities. It is the functional aspects of community interaction that are under-developed in terms of the ideal indicators of social capital that hold residents together as a community. As individuals, residents are obviously satisfied with their area. However, more research is needed to understand whether or not communities such as these, with low social capital, can maintain resilience in

times of stress without an investment in local community networks.

The case study area community has slightly lower stocks of social capital than those reported by other Australian communities in Bullen & Onyx' 1998 study and a closer examination reveals less involvement with the local community and neighbours than inner city Sydney residents (see Bullen & Onyx, 1998). Comparisons of the case study area results with existing studies of social capital failed to find any significant differences between levels of social capital in planned estates and social capital scores in either rural and inner-city locations or traditional unstructured developments. This supports findings of Kim (2001) and Brown and Cropper (2001) who suggest that while planned-estates, urban villages and TODs proclaim to generate community and build social capital, achieving these goals in reality is less easy. Therefore, while the provision of amenities and services satisfied the needs of residents, there is less evidence that aspects of planned developments such as the case study area facilitate social connectedness, thus supporting the conclusions reached by Atkinson et al., (2000), Van Beckhoven et al., (2003) about unmet objectives of residential developments.

The results overall, indicate a community that is characterised, essentially, as individualistic, where the private lifestyle considered normal in today's urban environments is highly desirable. The most common activities of enjoying walking and the scenic views of the local area suggest that the natural environment is important in terms of its intrinsic value to residents' satisfaction, rather than as a resource for community interaction. This is confirmed by the findings that, while the use of local services such as shopping centres and cafes is high, the more communal activities that would conceivably build strong links between people of the area are relatively low. For instance, the low participation in local sport and low levels of local school patronage by local children suggests that the potential for community connectedness to develop around parental activities with children is not substantial. There are 54 percent of residents with children, and 52 percent of residents living in detached housing with a partner and children, which suggests a commitment to the area, without a deep social involvement. Interestingly, the notion of Proactivity in a Social Context demonstrates a high commitment of those in more permanent residential accommodation to band together to protect those features of the local environment although those features are enjoyed privately rather than communally.

In the contemporary social context where globalisation focuses attention on a world without borders, Weeks (2005) argues that there is an opposite reaction locally expressed as a "surprisingly resilient instinct for identity and context" linking people to "specific places and localities". However, a commitment to preserve a locality may not be derived from any altruistic notion about the common good, but, rather, be a manifestation of "collaborative individualism" (Hase & Phelps, 2004). Community cohesion may result from the intersection of individual lifestyle interests that have brought similar people together (Freeman, 2001; Sander, 2002; Leydon, 2003). The community is drawn together, initially, because of the attractions of a specific place (Johnson et al., 2005), and

protection of a lifestyle becomes a prime motivation. Such an explanation can be deduced from the findings about the case study area, where privacy and environmental enjoyment predominate over social issues in the community.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which social capital was present in a planned, mixed-tenure, socially diverse development, from the perspective of residents living in low to medium-density dwellings. The findings support studies that have found no significant relationship between social capital and the 'planned' or more 'traditional' nature of local areas. On this basis, the findings suggest that neither rural, sprawling suburban, nor planned mixed-tenure housing developments can claim to be the perfect community design that will facilitate residents' social interaction, build trust between neighbours, and underscore a shared commitment to their neighbourhood. It may be the case that other configurations of social organisation, such as those identified in the current case study location, are built upon individualistic interests. There is a need for further research in that comprehensively compares a range of 'planned' and 'unplanned' residential areas in Australia in order to establish a firm basis for generalizations to other locales outside the case study area. Nevertheless, this study has provided a solid foundation for questioning the relationship between urban design and social capital in the Australian context.

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