



Reflections on community

What makes a place a home?

Much of our contemporary planning debate focuses on the belief that vibrant places can be created with the right approach to urban design, built form, street networks, housing orientation and relationships to key community amenities.

But most people's experience of community has less to do with the built form that surrounds them and much more to do with social factors in their lives.

In fact there are many examples of communities which thrive in places that are considered "badly" planned and other "well" planned places where significant social problems occur.

So should the question be what makes a good place or what makes a great place to live?

Creating Communities promotes the idea that we need to get the spacial and social dynamics of "places" working in unison. Urban planning and the planning of neighbourhoods is a spacial construct and community is a social construct.

So while there is no doubt that well planned neighbourhoods (spacial) provide very helpful raw materials for community, planning for robust communities requires a sociological response. A thorough sociological response needs to incorporate ideas of social capital, wellness, quality of life and anthropology into the planning process and facilitate them into being. (See table one)

A considered response to all these prerequisites is necessary to give communities the best opportunities to flourish.

Table One: Prerequisites for individual and community wellbeing

Social Capital	Wellness	Quality of Life	Anthropology
Opportunities for involvement in:	Clear values & goals	Vision & leadership	Sense of belonging
Local politics	Fulfilment & satisfaction	Collective values & goals	Sense of meaning
Clubs and associations	Equality	Sense of an assured future	Shared experiences, places & history
Forms of worship	Education	Strong community structures	Individual responsibility
Volunteering	Exercise	Social cohesion	Distinctiveness
Sporting activities	Diet	Affordability	Social association
Work based socialising	Reduced travel time	Community safety	Interpersonal relationships
Cooperation between people & organisations	Accessibility	Community health	Ritual
	Social support	Community participation	Community celebration
	Health care	Equality	Recognition of cultural heritage
	Affordable housing	Intergenerational activity	Celebration of diversity
	Strong family ties	Strong local economies	
	Religious affiliation		
	Working conditions		
	Environmental quality		
	Social cohesion		

Creating great places to live is as much about understanding the components of community as it is about the process of getting there.

Creating Communities approach focuses on the following:

- Vision
- Planning
- Commitment to outcomes
- Leadership
- Ownership
- Partnerships
- Facilitation
- Continuity
- Capacity building
- Reflection, review and renewal of community initiatives.

The model we have developed and used on many projects has been proven to deliver significant positive benefits to social capital, wellness and quality of life. (See table two)

Creating Communities impact on social capital

Creating Communities strategic approach builds social capital through facilitating linking social capital or vertical ties between stakeholders and formation of a common language, values and vision. The formation of social capital is evidenced through cooperation between stakeholders, sharing of resources, reduced transaction costs and increased opportunities.

Also, implementation of community development plans builds social capital by facilitating:

- Horizontal ties or bonding social capital between families and friends through local events and activities and the formation of clubs and associations;
- Bridging social capital between groups through vision workshops, annual review workshops and collaborative projects between community groups and individuals;
- Linking social capital between and with external stakeholders for the delivery of facilities and other community projects.

The social capital benefits of this approach are

many including:

- Building strong networks of partners who can collaboratively leverage greater resources for the community than individuals working in isolation,
- Reduction in entrenched issues through joint problem solving,
- Increased opportunities,
- Improved accessibility to health and other services,
- Shared values, trust and reciprocity,
- Improved information exchange,
- A safety net during times of difficulty.

Creating Communities impact on wellness and quality of life

Probably the greatest impact Creating Communities has on wellness and quality of life is through providing the context in which values can be expressed and drawn together to develop a commonly held set of guiding principles and vision.

Eckersley and Mackay agree that a guiding story or vision that embodies people's values and which can connect them to leadership is critical to quality of life. "In the past, the quest for material progress and prosperity provided much of that 'guiding story' for Western nations.... It seems it no longer does. Progress needs to be redefined, the story rewritten, taking account of a new global context – social, economic, environmental, cultural and spiritual." (Eckersley 2004: 125)

Creating Communities also works to ensure that physical, economic and social resources are delivered through working closely with relevant government and non government stakeholders so that they are integrally involved up front in projects.

Other psychosocial affects which increase behavioural risks such as weakening social cohesion and increased social fragmentation are mitigated through the work Creating Communities does in encouraging and supporting all forms of civic association.

Table two: Intentional Communities Matrix

Ourselfs	Our community	Our endeavours	Our place
Individual wellness (physical, mental, spiritual)	Cultural heritage	Diverse industry	Safety and security
Personal development	Collective identity	Competitive advantage	Functional planning
Self-determination	Ownership	Innovation and entrepreneurship	Aesthetic attributes
Access and amenity	Cooperative spirit	Nexus	Civic attractors
Personal worth	Civic creativity	Growth and renewal	Respite spaces
	Community giving	Sustaining structures	
	Tolerance/honesty/trust		
	Group cohesiveness		