



Sense of Community

Overview

This factsheet will cover the concept of ‘sense of community’ within the neighbourhood. Sense of community has been described as the degree to which a person feels that they belong to a readily available, supportive and dependable social structure [1]. Social interaction within a community has been shown to reduce social isolation and enhance community connectedness. By contrast, reduced interactions can have a negative effect on social capital, decreasing social bonding and a sense of belonging to one’s neighbourhood [2] [3]. Interactions can be enhanced or restrained through the design of the neighbourhood. Sense of community can be associated with the social characteristics of place and also connection with the physical characteristics of the built environment [4].

Liveability benefits of encouraging a sense of community include:

- psychological benefits for community members from improved social interaction
- the community benefits from an increase in the quality and quantity of social networks and connections (i.e. improved social capital)
- commercial benefits through improvements in the perceptions of the local area leading to higher demand for local goods and services

“Meeting and socializing in public streets and squares has traditionally been a feature of urban living. The provision for vibrant and well located spaces for people to meet and for informal interaction amongst people contributes to the quality of life in the public domain. Without useable gathering places people can lose a sense of community and feel isolated even in a densely populated environment.” [5]

“The complexity created by diversity is often described as a feature of high-quality built environments, and this has a direct influence on people’s sense of a particular place. Places are meaningful because of the activities going on there. Where the quality of the urban environment is poor, activities which are particularly dependent on favourable physical conditions either never develop, or disappear.” [5]

What our findings revealed...

[Sense of Community](#)
[Barriers to Community](#)
[Community Engagement](#)

Sense of Community

Survey responses in the QUT HD Liveability Study indicated residents were not likely to have strong connections with their neighbours. Two thirds had not visited a neighbour in the past week (66%) and only approximately one in five respondents (19%) would run into friends and acquaintances when they go shopping in their local area. Almost half had not attended a local community event (such as a church fete, school concert, craft exhibition) in the past 6 months. Approximately two thirds were not active members of a local organisation or club.

Interview data further contextualises the concept of ‘community’, indicating that, while residents may not talk to their immediate neighbours, they enjoy a sense of community that their broader neighbourhood offers. This is created by access to local goods and services and a familiarity with the area as well as people working or living in the area.

I liked how West End has that one street, that one little hub where you can have your choice of coffee shops or restaurants or delis and I've been looking at getting ...a house in the suburbs and one thing I look at when I go into the suburbs is whether or not there's that sort of area where the community can gather. That's something that pulls the community together because once you're living in a place for a while you recognise the faces like they're all extras in your own little movie that you see. Catch the same bus as you and you see at the shops and that sort of familiarity. I like [that] because you just feel like a part of it, a community within a bigger city... often that can get lost.

It's more community-oriented. There's markets down there on a Saturday and in the area they've got this festival and that festival and you've got Davies Park just over there and you've got Musgrave Park there. So it has a feel to it.

One resident discusses how having shared services in high-density locations can promote a sense of community, that may not be present if services are not shared.

I think [high-density living] is good, because it just ... brings people together, and I think it makes communities ... Because I think it's a myth, this whole thing about, being out and having a house, and getting to know the neighbours, and... I think it's more social living here, [with] shared services, like there's one pool for everyone, instead of everyone having to have their own pool, everyone having to have their own lawn mower... I think it makes more sense to live in a... high-density apartment like that. And then, basically have parts around which everyone can use.

Having a connection to the community did not necessarily mean that residents had friends living in the local area. Residents continued to maintain relationships with friends outside of the local area; less than a third (29%) said they chose their dwelling because of social contacts in the area. Establishing friendships with people in the local area would depend on how involved in the community people were.

I guess the more sort of activities you do in that area, the more sort of friends you develop there. I had a few friends living in the area when I moved in then... just once you start establishing that routine of whatever activities you're doing then that sort of helps build [those friendships]

I have quite a number of friends that I can visit and do visit who are really very, very close travelling distance to me.

Sense of community can also be enhanced through the physical aspects of the built environment. For example, in observations of how the built environment affected interactions, the type of shop front was observed to play an important role in fostering a sense of community. Where a shop front was open it allowed interaction between people on the street and in the shops. On the other hand, closed or blocked shop fronts created a more sterile environment that limited the shop/street mixing.

Barriers to community

One barrier to developing a sense of community includes limited accessibility and walkability within the neighbourhood, particularly related to feelings of safety. This is further explained in Factsheet 7 Accessible and Sustainable Transport. A sense of community, reflected partly in feelings of trust and safety of being able to walk to local amenities and facilities, may be influenced by time and space considerations and associated with gender, as the following two quotes illustrate.

I: And do you ever walk at night around West End?

P1: *Yeah, I would walk down to Boundary and I'd have no problems walking down that way. I'd probably, I don't walk home by myself after say six thirty from the city [to my] home.*

I: So that particular area that you feel a bit concerned about?

P1: *Yeah, I guess it's just that extra bit of caution that I take to avoid any possibility of anything happening you know. Like for me, it's just not worth taking that risk. Not that I've ever felt threatened or have ever seen anything but I am aware that there are some pockets that are pretty isolated and I just don't want, it's not worth the stress of [it]. Just when you're walking past someone in the street, you know nothing happens but you yourself just get that sick feeling and that adrenalin pumping and you go, God I hope this person doesn't just whack me! And then they pass and nothing happens but you know (female resident)*

P2: *Walking around the streets at night I do (feel safe), coming back from the cinema, it's just dead quiet. After ten o'clock at night, the amount of traffic on the road is significantly less, so there's hardly any traffic noise, surprisingly. So yeah, there's just this feeling of peace and quiet and safety (male resident)*

Another related barrier to developing a sense of community may result from residents choosing not to socialise or shop within their local area. Coupled with a reliance on car-use to access these distant services, this minimises residents' chance interactions with others.

West End has the West End markets where the Coles supermarket is. I don't tend to shop there. Because when I go shopping I like to go to one place to get nearly everything that I need to get. So strangely enough I actually drive to Carindale. I mean that's only like eight or ten kilometres and most people think I'm mad but it's convenient for me to take one drive once a week and get nearly everything that I want. ... I choose to go and shop at Carindale but I only need to do that once a week or once a fortnight.

Community engagement

A heightened sense of community may also lead to more engaged community members, yielding benefits relating to public participation and involvement in community outcomes. On the other hand, some people felt less attached to community issues and were less likely to get involved.

The city council wanted to stop the inner city ferry service stopping here, on the grounds it was some mistaken belief in economic viability I think. There [were] a lot of petitions involved through the local councillor to retain the ferry stop here.

No I wouldn't [rally with neighbours over a proposed local construction]. I'd just move, [it's] not worth it [laughs]. Like what am I going to do...

Recommended Guidelines

The following table presents practical suggestions for Residents, Local Authorities, Designers and Developers to enable a greater sense of community within the local area.

	Residents	Local Authority	Designer	Developer
Develop locally relevant urban design guidelines to facilitate walkable neighbourhoods/precincts; Ensure High Density dwellings are located within areas designed with accessible and desirable community spaces		✓	✓	✓
Provide opportunities for interaction and observation/informality		✓	✓	✓
Create sheltered, shady and direct routes to popular, high frequency destinations and services		✓	✓	✓
Ensure adequate lighting at night on major paths		✓	✓	✓
Integrate Crime Prevention through Design (CPTED) principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • casual surveillance opportunities and sightlines • land use mix and activity generators • definition of use and ownership • lighting • way finding 		✓	✓	✓
Walk or cycle to local services rather than using car	✓			
Attend local community events	✓			
Implement Neighbourhood Watch initiatives in the local area	✓	✓		
Provide rate relief for residents who forgo private vehicle		✓		
Provide discounts for use of local services		✓		

Further Information / Existing Guidelines

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) Planning Scheme Policy

http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/bccwr/plans_and_strategies/documents/crime_prevention_whole_policy.pdf

Community Design Guidelines: Portland, Oregon

<http://www.portlandonline.com/bps/index.cfm?c=34250&a=58822>

Community Design Principles: City of Tempe, Arizona

<http://www.tempe.gov/comdev/docs/CommunityDesignPrinciples.pdf>

Your Home Technical Manual and Website

Sustainable Communities:

<http://www.yourhome.gov.au/technical/fs21.html>

Transport Plan for Brisbane 2008-2026

Strategic Objective 6: More Clean and Green Personal Transport

http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/BCCWR/_assets/main/LIB528/OBJECTIVE6_GREEN_TRANSPORT.PDF?xml=/BCC:PdfHitXml:svDocNum=9

Brisbane City Council Neighbourhood Plan

HTTP://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/BCC:BASE:1475133226;pc=PC_1935

References

1. Sarason, S. B., *The psychological sense of community: perspective for community psychology*, 1974. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.
2. Freeman, L., *The effects of sprawl on neighbourhood social ties*. Journal of the American Planning Association, 2001. **67**(1): p. 69-77.
3. Burton, E., *The compact city: just or just compact? A preliminary analysis*. Urban Studies, 2000. **37**(11): p. 1969 - 2006.
4. Pretty, G. H., H.M. Chipuer, P. Bramston, *Sense of place amongst adolescents and adults in two rural Australian towns: The discriminating features of place attachment, sense of community and place dependence in relation to place identity*. Journal of Environmental Psychology, 2003. **23**: p.273-287
5. Centre for Subtropical Design, *Subtropical Design in South East Queensland, a handbook for planners, developers and decision-makers*, 2009. Queensland University of Technology: Brisbane.
6. Photography Page 1: Lorraine Bell, 2008. Highgate Hill, Brisbane.

