Title: Conceptions of 'community' among older adults living in high density urban areas – An Australian case study.

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Abstract
Aim. To explore the social networks of community and its connection to location for older people living in inner city high density (ICHD).

Method. Using a case study approach employing qualitative (diaries, in-depth interviews) and quantitative (Global Positioning Systems and Geographical Information Systems mapping) methods, this paper explores the everyday interaction and social networks and where they manifest spatially for a group of older ICHD Australians .

Results. Social networks in two community territories were found to be of particular importance to participants in terms of influencing feelings of wellbeing, support, social inclusion and cohesion. These two territories include the building where older people reside and the area immediately surrounding the building.

Conclusion. This study highlights the importance of recognising the spatial aspect to better understand the social networks of community and their effects on wellbeing and social cohesion for ICHD older people.

Key words: community, city, older people, wellbeing

Introduction

Globally, population profiles are becoming older and our cities are increasing in density. In Australia, people aged 55 years and over account for almost a quarter of the total population and this is expected to increase to at least 30% by 2021 (1). Under current city planning convention, inner-city high density (ICHD) has become an Australian urban norm (2). This significant demographic shift of increasing density and population ageing will have a profound effect in the decades to come with the urgent need to better understand successful ageing in high density areas to consider appropriate policy and practice solutions. Community engagement of older people in civic and social life is related to, and an objective method of defining, successful ageing with links to improvement in wellbeing (3). Opportunity for such engagement is purported to be greater in ICHD environments (3). The supposed benefits of inner-city consolidation for community engagement is well explained (4-7) but there is little exploration of the actual social outcomes or how older people living in ICHD are engaged in communities. This paper explores the everyday social networks of community and the place where these networks manifest for older Australian people living in ICHD.

While the term 'community' is often considered ambiguous, previous researchers (8-11) have largely agreed there are three necessary components to any definition. These are (1) the presence of shared territory, (2) meaningful social interaction and (3) significant social ties. Other concepts of community exist, for example, cyber communities (the existence of community without propinquity, 12), however, the most significant communities in terms of building close, emotional and holistic ties (9) and a civilized, participative society (8), are still face to face and locally based. Previous research into communities can be grouped into two categories (13). The first is the territorial or geographical application of the word where community studies concentrate on objectively defined areas of residence. The second usage pertains to relational aspects within communities of interest, concerned with matters such as the degree of emotional feelings of similarity or homogeneity, collective consciousness, social connectedness and trust existing within people's everyday social networks (6, 14).

Communities of Interest

Mutual interest, social connectedness, homogeneity or similarity among members within communities of interest provides the cohesive force for cooperative behaviour, strong social networks and a shared sense of community (13). Such benefits could be considered ideal for naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs) (15). However, homogeneous groups or communities can also be dysfunctional by exacerbating any existing social cleavages (16). These social networks present challenges in terms of understanding their social cohesion in their residential choices.

Geographic Analysis of Community

An entrenched conceptual framework of community as territory underpins planning approaches like new urbanism (17). A territory-based focus assumes some

neighbourhood designs encourage community connections, while others do not (18). Substantial research has been undertaken on the design and function of buildings for warranted and well-intentioned physical community development and liveability objectives for residents. Certain shared building design features, for example, the carpark, mail boxes, central garbage deposit, communal barbeque and pool area, are seen to encourage frequent chance encounters. Such chance encounters foster social networks which result from everyday shared routines in close proximity (19, 20). Strict adherence to a geographic analysis approach, however, ignores other layers of everyday social organisation. For example, within residential buildings the Body Corporate may present an opportunity for social networking but there is limited literature dealing with residential building body corporates and/or their effect on building community. Similarly, the social significance of areas immediately surrounding a residence (e.g. the street), recognised by some seminal writers (19, 21, 22) as incredibly important community areas for residents where a great deal of community activity is organised, lacks census authenticity and has largely been ignored as units of analysis (10). Because of this, there has been a shift in the geographic analysis of place from it being treated as a static, bounded container for social relations to instead being conceived as the coincidence of a range of interconnected social processes operating at different scales over different time-periods (23).

Context of the Current Research

In identifying community this research draws on Kusenbach's (10) theory that urban communities are revealed in the often overlooked nested patterns of daily activity, neighbourly interaction and relationships, place attachment and collective representations. This research investigates the everyday social networks of older urban Australians through the place where social interactions occur, thus recognising the importance of the spatial aspect in understanding communities overlaid with residents' subjective perceptions and actual everyday activities. Such an approach is more complex but is more representative of the reality of ICHD residents' lives. The purpose of this paper is to use closely aligned quantitative and qualitative measures to explore community and its connection to place in ICHD for older people.

Methods

This paper forms part of a larger research project exploring active ageing, liveability and social connectedness in rural, regional and urban centres in South-East Queensland, Australia. The research methodology used for the current study involves several different data collection methods: time-use diaries, survey responses, GPS (Global Positioning Systems) tracking and GIS (Geographical Information Systems) mapping, and in-depth qualitative interviews. Ethical approval for this project was obtained from a university Human Research Ethics Committee, and all case study participants provided written informed consent prior to their participation in the current study.

Participants

A total of 12 participants (6 men, 6 women) living in selected ICHD areas were used for this research (see Table 1 for a summary of participants' profile), with all but one of the sample drawn from a database of past research participants who had indicated a willingness to participate in further research. Participants were then recruited if they were now aged 55 years or older and allowed exploration of differences that might emerge as a function of age or gender. Since the original sample from which these participants were drawn lacked any persons of low socioeconomic status, the twelfth participant was recruited through a community group to facilitate inclusion of a case study within this particular demographic.

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Case Study Location

The case study location is Brisbane, Queensland. The study was undertaken in late March to early April at the start of autumn, normally characterised by pleasant outdoor weather conditions. Participants were selected from six ICHD areas (defined as 30 or more dwellings per hectare) within five kilometres of the Central Business District (CBD).

Apparatus

Global Positioning Systems (GPS)

Objective and accurate measurements of participants' physical movements throughout the seven-day trial period were obtained by issuing them with lightweight portable autonomous GPS devices with a reported accuracy to be +-3 metres (24).

Daily Diaries

Participants kept a daily diary of activities/destinations for the same week that they were using the GPS tracking device. The diary recorded demographics, daily travel and activities for each participant. Despite the disadvantages of diaries in terms of participant commitment and the possibility of missing data (such as socialising and television viewing), the diaries offered an efficient and affordable way to track specific details about activity (i.e., duration, frequency, social context and location) and add to the authenticity and detail of the GPS data. This information, together with the mapping, directed and supplemented the interview.

In-depth Interviews

Residents' perceptions of place and community were elicited through their responses to questions focussed on both the positive and negative experiences and features of their respective communities. Using the diary and map information, the in-depth interview explored a number of open-ended questions around level of social activity, engagement, social inclusion, support, behaviour and networks. All interviews were recorded.

Procedure

Participants were given a typed set of instructions about the use and battery charging of the GPS device (previously trialled for ease of use and comprehension), with the GPS device and diary posted back to the research team for interpretation prior to the interview. The recorded GPS data were merged with interactive individual 'activity maps' created for each participant using visual images derived from GIS and converted into Google Earth files. These '*individual time/space life path maps*' were then reviewed and compared with the time-use diaries to identify any key patterns, issues or anomalies to be discussed at interview. The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes on average, with the diary and mapping analysis providing a useful tool to generate discussion. This process captured both narration and mapped information for the target week in each participant's life. The interviews involved a general discussion followed by a day-by-day review of the participant's community activities. Through the interviews, diaries and mapping, the study captured the frequency of participants' social activity on different days and at different times, identified the sites used for spending free time, and allowed interviewers to explore the manner in which the participants' respective ICHD environments facilitated their social interactions.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data derived from interview were analysed as individual case studies to determine community activity for each participant, as well as their experiences within their residential environments. The interview transcripts were read and re-read, and manually coded with 'chunks' of data arranged into emerging themes and meaningful categories of placed-based community. This method of aggregating the data enabled detection of similarities and differences between the experiences of the case study participants with regard to their place-based communities and community activity. To enable full understanding and interpretation, each participant's diaries and time/space life path maps were also qualitatively analysed to identify key patterns of community activity during the monitored week. These findings are summarised and presented below.

Results/Discussion

This study found that the social networks in two community territories (the apartment building and the area immediately surrounding the building) were of particular importance to participants. From the results, a major feature of these two territories appears to be a strong sense of ownership and community engagement. They were also identified as important by the participants through the social network activity undertaken within the territories and the effect that both of these factors had on feelings of wellbeing, support, social inclusion and cohesion. This section explores these two community territories and discusses their significance to older ICHD residents.

Building

When asked about their community, most residents started discussing their immediate environment (the community of the building in which they live). Similar to findings in previous studies (see for example, 17) very few of those interviewed were well

acquainted with other residents in their building and their interaction was mostly brief, trivial and regularly involved practical, small exchanges, e.g. *You just see people in lifts…and…around* [the building] (CS1). These greetings invariably were the result of chance encounters through using shared building design features like elevators, carpark, swimming pool, barbeque facilities and the like – [I] *just stand and talk if they* [other residents] *are at the letter-box* (CS8). Such features provide opportunities for chance meetings fostering casual relationships and social networks among building residents (19, 20). One resident noted that this friendliness did not extend beyond the greeting to activities such as being welcomed into another resident's apartment or invited out for a meal or beverage.

> *Most of the people who live in* [apartment] *blocks like this…seem to me to be pretty much friendly, extremely friendly when they see you but they do not go out of their way to make friends with you* (CS1).

Organised social functions are a typical and important component of this community territory (10). Most residents reported social activities organised by the body corporate or management of the apartment building and acknowledged the importance of these activities to fostering a sense of community.

> *I think we do* [have a sense of community]. *There's sausage sizzles…which I think are a very good way of breaking the ice…It is a great way of meeting other people* (CS11).

While residential building communities could be regarded as territory-based with the expected absence of emotional feelings of similarity between members (13), the majority of participants recognised and discussed the high level of similarity (homogeneity) between residents in their respective buildings. Residents identified that the majority of other residents were retired or semi-retired, and felt a sense of connection and support of tangible needs.

> *We have got a lot of home occupiers of advancing age. So it's a good ageing community to live in* (CS12).

Savage (25) suggests that urban localities offer opportunity for new kinds of solidarities among people who choose to live there. Feelings like those cited above and below are positive outcomes of homogeneous communities.

> *Very helpful, very kind. We look after each other.. If somebody gets ill* [in our building], *there's somebody to cook them a meal, take them to the doctor* (CS12).

This resident was confident that such support assisted in lengthening the period of ageing in place possible for those affected residents. Such communities are in keeping with Quinn's description of NORCs which offer the immense psychological benefit of supporting older people to age-in-place (15). This very successful building community was well supported by an equally highly functional body corporate.

Although body corporates were acknowledged for organising activities with the potential to promote a sense of community, many residents reflected on the community dysfunction that resulted from the operations of these bodies.

> *… we realised it was getting a bit cliquey...If you are in the group, you could just about do anything… there was victimisation there against one lot of unit members. It was really bad* (CS1).

There is limited literature dealing with a residential building body corporate either functional or dysfunctional and its effect on a building's community. As mentioned above, most interviewees acknowledged the homogeneity of their respective building's owner occupiers. Where homogeneity, in terms of lifestyle similarities and shared interests, resulted in a highly functional and functioning building community, strong social networks and a shared sense of community were created and reported. However, the problems of Body Corporate management dysfunction identified were common among the participants causing stress, disquiet and resulting in one resident moving premises.

> *I thought I got sick of apartment living but I think it's more - apartment living is more about the community again. Is there a community within the apartment block or is there a power-play on the body corporate within the block?* (CS2).

Area immediately surrounding the building

The importance of the territory immediately surrounding the participant's building in terms of social cohesion, sense of wellbeing and community activity was identified conceptually in the semi-structured qualitative interviews. This territory was identified as an area which extends beyond the apartment building, can be seen by the resident from their apartment and/or street level and in the resident's opinion has a major impact on his or her immediate residential liveability and personal wellbeing. Most of the comments that best encapsulate the community activity within this category related to participation in community action groups rallying against built environment changes that were deemed detrimental to personal wellbeing and liveability.

> *The big negative for us would be this development going ahead but we can't do anything about it. I did my best. We objected. It cost me personally. It cost me in terms of health at one stage, it cost me emotionally, financially. But all I can*

> *say to myself is that I did my best and - it won't be very nice when they start.* (CS4)

While not always recognised by interviewees as a community, participants' level of interaction and involvement demonstrated place-based community in this territory. The participants had significant vested interest in the area that immediately surrounds their residence and revealed considerable detailed knowledge of the people and activities of this territory. Knowing other people and having an interest in common does not necessarily require face to face individual contact or constitute a community of territory or interest, for example, email petitions, protest marches and the like (17). The distinction is the face to face contact and conversation with neighbours (6). It is suggested that because place-based communities appear to be on the decline (6, 26), the social neighbourhood has been reduced to shared political interests against threats to property value and potential change (6). Putnam's observations would appear to represent the community activity undertaken by participants regarding the area that immediately surrounds their residential apartment building. Plans for further increases in density were of particular concern which resulted in community organising activity to vocalise objections to such proposals.

> *Unfortunately, what's going to happen, they are widening Kingsford Smith Drive to six lanes, so they are going to take – that's a community hall… They are going to put another* [building]*…right in front of our place. So we used to meet in that little park* [to protest the development]... *We have no right of appeal of any planning in that area* [immediately surrounding the resident's building], *which frightens me terribly.* (CS12)

This epitomises Suttle's (19) concept of the defended neighbourhood with residents demonstrating psychological, financial and social investment in this community zone. As mentioned above, despite their social significance in shaping communities, such areas have largely been ignored as places or territories of analysis (10).

Limitations of research

One limitation of this research is that it is based on a small sample of older Australians living in one capital city. Nevertheless, the sample size contributed to the feasibility of the innovative approach taken in this study, involving the gathering of information from multiple sources and the undertaking of analyses linking and relating both subjective (perceptions of behaviour obtained through the interviews) and objective (actual behaviour gathered from the GPS and GIS and expanded through the individual diaries) indicators. The results provide insight into the community experience of older adults living in ICHD settings and their experiences are likely to have relevance to other high density contexts elsewhere. Further qualitative, quantitative research is needed to explore in more depth, the social network experience of older people living in ICHD

environments. In particular, more research is needed to understand community experience and development in terms of its implications for older people.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of recognising the spatial aspect to better understand the social networks of community and their effects on wellbeing, social inclusion and cohesion for ICHD older people. Indeed, the American Association of Retired Persons (3) acknowledged the importance of considering the geographic aspect of community when developing programs and policies aimed at encouraging or strengthening community engagement. This has implications for theory building as well as practical application in areas such as urban planning and design, community building and policy development. As this research is based on the everyday practices, neighbourly interaction and relationships, place attachment and collective representations of a sample of older ICHD people, it provides a useful example of a methodological approach for furthering investigation into important issues like community engagement. The theoretical analysis of community being revealed in the 'nested patterns' of daily activity at different spatial scales may need to be modified and/or tested through more detailed empirical analyses focusing on different types of communities and other population groups. The challenge posed is for more commentators to explore community and its connection to location in the context of high density environments for older people.

Key points

- It is important to consider the geographic component to better understand the social networks of community and their effects on wellbeing, social inclusion and cohesion for ICHD older people.

- Community activity experienced by older people within ICHD territories can be functional and/or dysfunctional and can directly affect wellbeing.

- Exploring everyday practices, neighbourly interaction and relationships, place attachment and collective representations is important to understanding community so as not to miss the diversity of social networks and their impact, either positive or negative, for older ICHD people at different spatial scales.

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Table 1: Summary Table of Case Study (CS) Respondents and Location Profile

Person	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Income	Working/ Retired	Length of time in residence	Location#	Population*	Land mass	Distance from Brisbane GPO
CS1	57	Male	Married	>70K	Works**	> 11 years	Newstead+	4818	1.3km^2	3kms NE
CS2	62	Female	Single	>70K	Works**	> 9 years	West End^	6206	1.9km^2	3kms SW
CS3	64	Female	Married	40-50K	Retired	2 years	Kelvin Grove Urban Village+	4246 (for whole of Kelvin Grove area)	Urban Village 16ha	3kms NW
CS4	65	Female	Married	>70K	Retired	> 6 years	Kangaroo Point+	6868	1.3km^2	0.75km SW
CS5	70	Male	Single	>70K	Works**	8 years	Highgate Hill^	5428	1.2km^2	2kms SE
CS6	72	Female	Widowed	<20K	Retired	49 years	West End^	6206	1.9km^2	3kms SW
CS7	73	Male	Single	>70K	Retired	9 years	Hamilton^	4366	1.7kms^2	5kms NE
CS8	75	Female	Widowed	Unknown†	Retired	35 years	Highgate Hill^	5428	1.2km^2	2kms SE
CS9	78	Male	Married	Unknown†	Retired	10 years	Kangaroo Point+	6868	1.3km^2	0.75km SW
CS10	79	Male	Married	>70K	Retired	9 years	Kangaroo Point+	6868	1.3km^2	0.75km SW
CS11	80	Female	Married	50-70K	Retired	10 years	Kangaroo Point+	6868	1.3km^2	0.75km SW
CS12	80	Male	Married	>70K	Retired	> 6 years	Hamilton^	4366	1.7kms^2	5kms NE

*Population data from 2006 Census, gathered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (27)
† Income not disclosed
# Each of these areas are targeted for further urban renewal and being developed specifically for high density living. The different inner-urban areas have different topography and varying levels of infrastructure and available services
^Hamilton, Highgate Hill, West End, (well established residential areas)
+Newstead, Kangaroo Point and Kelvin Grove Urban Village (areas which have undergone massive transformation from semi-industrial to high residential density)
**Three of the respondents were in full- or part-time work.