SESSION 2.1 –
SOCIAL, HUMAN & CULTURAL CAPITAL FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES

One of the biggest questions facing the social planner is...

How can I build a strong community?

How you as a Planner can build Strong Communities

WHY:

• People, individuals and communities are important. Communities need to be nurtured or else all other areas of society, the economy, the environment etc., are at risk

• In recent times:
  - examples of social dislocation locally and internationally that have increased interest in this field
  - an increased interest in people's social connections and social needs

Loss of Social Capital during 1900s
& the impact of this loss

• "… by virtually every conceivable measure, social capital has eroded steadily and sometimes dramatically over the past two generations."

• "Does social capital have effects on individuals, communities, or even entire nations? Yes, an impressive and growing body of research suggests that civic connections help make us healthy, wealthy, and wise. Living without social capital is not easy, whether one is a villager in southern Italy or a poor person in the American inner city or a well-heeled entrepreneur in a high-tech industrial district "

[Journal of American Planning Association, (JAPA)2004, No 2]

Government's Response

• **Strong Communities** is one of Queensland State Government priorities

• Strong Communities is also a policy in the SEQ Regional Plan 2009-2031

• Australian Government **social inclusion** policy –
  "vision of a socially inclusive society is one in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society "

Today's Themes

1. Social capital (and other forms of capital)

2. How social capital contributes towards strong communities

3. How you can build strong communities high in social capital

Hutchison and Vidal's 2004 JAPA article

- Social capital is seen to be a merit good for societies

- Roles of planning in building social capital:
  - Engaging communities in planning
  - Planning for cultural diversity
  - Political engagement in planning
  - Governance structures that support integrated and participative approaches to community planning

……the cohesiveness of people and societies, social networks and support structures, community participation, tolerance of diversity, trust in people, altruism, upholding norms (Cuers, 2010)

Other forms of Capital defined

- **Human capital:** training or education that increases productivity and earning capacity. Human capital resides in the human, not in their bank account!

- **Cultural:** high cultural knowledge that can be used to the owner's socioeconomic advantage. For example knowing how to 'dress for success'

- **Financial:** stocks of money, investments

- **Physical capital:** infrastructure (real estate, equipment etc).

• Each form of capital can be seen independently but are best viewed as interdependent. They can metamorphose, or change in form from one to another……..

• Social capital can aid in obtaining human capital and then human capital can aid in obtaining financial capital. Someone might get a great job due to network of contacts which builds their financial capital

• Cultural capital can help along the way. Social capital is valuable to individuals and to communities because it is convertible into the other forms of capital; when socially disadvantaged or impoverished people seek to improve their lives, social capital is the strongest resource at their disposal

Using Social Capital to Build Strong Communities

- Different dimensions of social capital

- How planners can build strong communities high in social capital

Social Capital: Different forms

1. ***Bonding*** social capital: links amongst people who are similar (culture, income, religion etc); important type of capital for 'getting by' (Vidal)

2. ***Bridging*** social capital: links among people who are unlike one another; crucial for 'getting ahead'. Connects people or groups who previously did not interact with one another (Vidal, Briggs)

3. ***Linking*** social capital: vertical links to people in positions of authority; plays a special role in poverty alleviation (Woolcock)

Bonding & Bridging Social Capital

1. ***Bonding*** capital = brings together people who already know each other and have some affinity (can help people cope in adverse situations)

2. ***Bridging*** capital = connects people or groups who previously did not interact with one another (strong community bonds that are not exclusionary can provide an excellent foundation for building of social capital)

Both are important and both have a role to play in community and individual well being

= Building connections between communities and people in authority

Building social capital needs to be complemented by seeing communities in their broader institutional context; communities do not exist in political isolation

Bonding Social Capital

- **Good points:**
    - Can be critical to the ability of families and individuals coping with adverse circumstances and for developing support networks within communities

- **Bad points**
    - Strong connections within a community that perpetuates an exclusionary culture

Good Points of Bonding Social Capital

• Highly bonded communities may have high levels of social support. The good aspect is social support is a critical need for most human beings as that helps us to get by or cope with particular challenges. Many psychology studies have found social support is a key protective factor in preventing and reducing incidents of social and emotional problems such as mental health problems, domestic violence and child abuse.

• Social capital can be seen as a resource possessed by a social system that helps the system as a whole to solve shared problems etc.

Downside of Bonding Social Capital

- The potential for exclusion. For example, a socially cohesive group of discriminatory 'NIMBYs' (Not In My Back Yard)

- People living in socially isolated, geographically segregated and poor communities trying to escape cycles of poverty and welfare dependency. Having supportive neighbours who are in the same situation may only help in limited ways.

The 'bridging' connections that provide more social leverage by connecting the poor to the non- poor and different geographical areas to each other are important

Bridging Social Capital

- Holds the most promise for planning that seeks to promote greater equity in cities (bridging among diverse groups within a neighbourhoods as well as to outside groups).

- Forging new connections between disadvantaged groups and with others with more resources holds greater promise as an approach to increasing opportunity and voice for the poor

Bridging Social Capital

- Bridging within a community among people with diverse interests and points of view

- Bridging links between the disinvested community and the mainstream. Examples being bridges to individuals and organizations with money and political influence

Note: effective use of building bridging social capital requires sustained investments in building community capacity

Effectiveness of Bridging Ties

• Culture/class are influential intervening variables in community functioning and effect the use of social capital (expectations or norms; social boundaries or communication styles, community ties to one's own ethnic or religious group)

• 'Bridging ties' are particularly crucial in diverse societies:
  1. Expand social and civic identities
  2. Open up insular communities of interest
  3. Help resolve ethnic and other intergroup conflicts
  4. Reduce status differences among groups over time (e.g. by widening access to valuable information)

What does this mean for me?

Could building social capital play a role in new approaches to perennial social problems? And promote community equity?

"Community planners are strategically situated to strengthen social capital"

Planners: 4 Leverage Points for Developing More Social Capital

1. **Change civic behaviour:**

    - Encourage behaviours that include joining, participating actively in, and leading new and renewed civic institutions that tackle tangible problems

2. **Help people acquire new civic skills, especially for the next generation and those with less status in the community:**

    - Training and support to acquire new skills may include; running a meeting, enhancing interpersonal skills in spheres such as negotiating with others, managing small group dynamics and dispute resolution, defining a public issue and participating in shared decision making….

Planners: 4 Leverage Points for Developing Stronger Social Capital

3. **Build more extensive, boundary spanning (bridging) and resource rich networks to accomplish specific goals:**

    - Across neighbourhoods, between neighbourhoods, across public and private funders, between neighbourhoods and funders

4. **Build supportive new norms – a culture that values and enable collective efficacy:**

    - Cultivate norms of mutual aid, broadly defined community responsibility, political engagement and working through differences.

Implications for Planners

1.   Trust.
An initial step in the role of planners in building social capital is to conduct their planning work in ways that build public trust (e.g. via community engagement processes)

2. Example.
Community interventions and public processes can contribute towards the development of social capital by modeling the most productive behaviours: collegiality, competence, dependability and honesty about motives and interests

3. Reflection
 Be aware of behaviours that undermine, block or demolish trust and know how to take effective countermeasures

Tools for Planners –
Building Strong Communities high in Social Capital

1. Engage communities in planning
2. Plan for cultural diversity
3. Political engagement in planning
4. Governance structures that support integrated and participative approaches to community planning
5. Enhance access and mobility
6. Appropriate and affordable housing
7. Urban design and form that enhances safety, contributes towards a sense of place and encourages social interaction
8. Utilise indicators to identify and measure community strengths

What more can planners do to build strong local communities?

1. Locally available community meeting spaces, opportunity for social interaction (e.g. community centres, urban village squares)
2. Public seating (don't underestimate the value of a park/street bench)
3. Children's playgrounds (with good seating for parents)
4. Men's Sheds
5. Community Gardens
6. Local corner stores
7. Dog off leash areas
8. Plan and deliver community facilities in time with development

Conclusions

1. Social capital is one of many forms of essential capital, along with financial, environmental and institutional ones

2. Different forms of social capital can all help to foster self creating capacities to develop strong communities

3. Planners can and should consider new and different ways to build strong communities with high social capital, combining old and new technologies and ideas

References

See:

Strong Communities Handbook: *ways in which urban and regional planning contribute towards high levels of social capital and community strengths in new and re-developing communities .*
QUT Community Practice Unit (2006), ed. Cuers, S., Hewston, J. *)*

Available on:

http://www.qcoss.org.au/upload/850__Strong_Communites_Handbook[1].pdf

How can I build a Strong Community?