

Sustainable Communities: The Important Role of Local Government in Building Social Capital

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- ◆ *Local Governments are elected to represent their local communities; to be a responsible and accountable sphere of democratic governance; to be a focus for community identity and civic spirit; to provide appropriate services to meet community needs in an effective and efficient manner; and to facilitate and coordinate local efforts and resources in pursuit of community goals* [1]

[1] Australian Local Governments, at their 1997 National General Assembly, adopted a Declaration on the Role of Local Government. This Australia wide *Declaration* complements the *Code of Good Governance* and enunciates fundamental principles for Local Government throughout the country

To facilitate and coordinate local efforts
local government requires a high level of support and cooperation from both:

- ◆ The community
- ◆ Community organisations / service providers
- ◆ Other levels of government

- ◆ How does the need for community partnerships relate to social capital?
- ◆ How can an understanding of this concept and the facilitation of processes that build social capital, lead to sustainable communities?

Political Context


- ◆ Local government diversity of service provision throughout the country
- ◆ Community expectations are increasing
 - require more than 'services to the property'
 - increasing demand for 'services for the people'

- ◆ Shifting focus from 'hard infrastructure' provision to spending on social services
- ◆ Costs and restrictions over revenue-raising ability is increasing
- ◆ There is a widening gap between community expectations and access to funds available to meet these expectations

- ◆ The independent action of local government cannot guarantee community sustainability
- ◆ Community initiatives leading to community led action are the key
- ◆ Local government can play an important role in facilitating partnership development

Social capital

- ◆ Described by Putnam (1993) as 'those features of social life that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives'.
- ◆ Social relations characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity

- ◆ Sustainable communities must develop relationships – within and outside the community
 - ◆ Trusting relationships underpin cooperative, collaborative efforts that lead to sustained mutually beneficial outcomes
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- A stylized silhouette of a mountain range in shades of teal, located at the bottom right of the slide.

- ◆ Research shows that communities rich in social capital demonstrate outcomes essential to community sustainability, eg:
 - strong social connections
 - High levels of participation
 - Willingness to work together for common good

- ◆ Local government can encourage trusting relationships to develop through involvement in community projects/community engagement strategies
- ◆ Examples given are:
 - Township Development Toolkit 2002
 - District Advisory Networks

- ◆ Community engagement strategies such as those listed strengthen community connections and build both:
 - *linking social capital*; encouraging / enabling disparate communities to work together
 - *bridging social capital*; strengthens ties across diverse (heterogenous) groups

In summary

- ◆ Sustainable communities:
 - Develop trusting relationships at the community level
 - Work together cooperatively to identify community priorities
 - Are prepared to work with community groups, service providers and all levels of government to achieve the desired outcomes of the community

- ◆ Local government can facilitate practices that encourage cooperation and interaction within communities, between communities and service providers - and all levels of government.
- ◆ Has a responsibility to 'nurture networks of social relations characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity that will lead to outcomes of mutual benefit' (Stone and Hughes 2002)