

Growing Old on the Suburban Fringe: Master Planned Communities and Planning for Diversity

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the situation of older people who have moved to the post-traditional successor to the Australian suburb, the outer suburban ‘master planned community’ (MPC). The purpose of the paper is to discuss the needs and expectations of older residents for supportive community of place, in contrast to the needs and motivations of the property developer in ‘creating community’. The new MPC of Springfield Lakes on the outskirts of Brisbane will provide the backdrop for the paper; and qualitative data from interviews with older residents of Springfield Lakes and the staff of the development company, Delfin Lend Lease, will be used to illustrate the possible tensions and contradictions that arise from a strategy of planning for diversity. Springfield Lakes is emerging as a community that accommodates multigenerations, but there are questions about whether this strategy of diversity is in the interests of those older residents who might not exercise the agency to construct their own model of community in their Third Age.

The author is a member of an ARC Linkage project: ‘Building Sustainable Social Capital in New Communities’, in conjunction with the property developer Delfin Lend Lease.

INTRODUCTION - WHAT IS A MULTIGENERATIONAL COMMUNITY?

Two of the more absorbing issues facing contemporary policy makers and thinkers concern how we live in communities and how we are ageing. These issues are also prominent in popular discourse, in terms of the reflexive choices people make in the active construction of a future. This paper focuses on both of these issues and their relevance to older people who have chosen to live in the new outer suburban Master Planned Community (MPC) of Springfield Lakes in Brisbane. The paper explores the idea of a ‘multigenerational’ community from older residents’ perspectives, that is, a community where a meaningful cross section of age cohorts lives and where older residents feel part of the community and take an active, or reflexive, part in the sustainability of the community as an entity. The question addressed is: to what extent will older people become an enduring part of any community of place that develops in Springfield Lakes, and how might these people negotiate the need for networks of social support, or social capital, as they age and their needs change? An older person for the purposes of this investigation is someone at or near the age of retirement from full time work and/or a person whose children have grown and left home.

The reason for interest in a multigenerational community lies in its relevance for post-traditional or late-modern (Giddens 1991) society, where models of ageing and residence are changing. In post-traditional society, the fragmentation and mobility of traditional social support networks and other disruptions such as increasing rates of divorce mean that traditional social support networks are more tenuous for many. People are no longer necessarily remaining in their life long homes, with family and old friends in close geographical proximity to offer support. To be able to live and

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connect in a community that provides a social space for its ageing residents is appealing to planners, policy makers and older residents themselves, and corresponds to what many commentators have dubbed the search for 'community lost' or what Giddens (1991) calls 'ontological security': the re-capture of an anchor of trust and reliability in an increasingly unpredictable world. In a more grounded sense, the capacity to sustain multigenerations also plays a part in avoiding the 'boom and bust' character of more homogenous traditional suburban developments where the population has aged as a single cohort putting pressure on different resources at a similar time.

Springfield Lakes was developed by Delfin Lend Lease (DLL) with a commitment to the establishment of a diverse community, including multigenerations. Qualitative data from interviews with older residents and DLL staff to explore contrasting expectations and needs from a community of place in Springfield Lakes. The paper argues that as people approach later old age, planned diversity may work against the interests of those who do not have the inclination or resources to look beyond their immediate neighbourhood environs for social contact within the borders of the community. For those who do possess the necessary agency, the developer has provided a number of promising outlets for older people to develop social networks with those of a similar age in the immediate geographical area. To the extent that a multigenerational community is concerned, older people who can establish satisfactory networks and who are serviced by appropriate health, transport and aged care facilities may be content to remain and 'age in place' within the boundaries of the development, creating the basis for what may become a sustainable multigenerational community. For those who do not find this satisfactory, will they 'vote with their feet' and exercise the post-traditional Australian inclination to move on?

METHOD

The paper draws on qualitative research by the author as part of a larger Australian Research Council Linkage project 'Building Sustainable Social Capital in New Communities', in conjunction with Delfin Lend Lease (DLL). The paper uses illustrative examples from in depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 older residents of Springfield Lakes and fifteen key staff and executives from the property developer. Older residents are defined as those aged from 55 onwards and/or whose children have grown up and left home and/or who are retired or are contemplating retirement soon. This is a broad and somewhat cumbersome definition of older residents, but the neat separation of child rearing and an 'empty nest', work and retirement, and the ages at which these milestones occur is no longer straightforward, given the complicating factors that go along with changes to the institutions of marriage, family and career in post-traditional society. The majority of participants were recruited through their membership of community organisations, through developer sponsored community welcome nights and also via a letter drop by the author. There was a balance of genders and participants ranged in age from 50 to 74 with an average age of 62. Over half were born overseas, in the UK, Eastern and Western Europe and the sub-continent. Most participants were in a stable relationship, and approximately half had been divorced or widowed prior to their current relationship. Participants had lived in Springfield Lakes for between one and three years.

The Delfin Lend Lease staff interviewed included operational staff at Springfield Lakes with roles such as marketing, sales and community development through to senior management and the CEO of the company.

SPRINGFIELD LAKES THE MPC

Springfield Lakes has been developed as a new suburban Master Planned Community (MPC). The development is located 25 kilometres to the south west of Brisbane, in an area the Queensland Government (2005) has dubbed the 'Ipswich Growth Corridor'. The first land was sold in 2001 and as of late 2005 the development had a population of approximately 5000 people. Springfield Lakes

will be home to around 30,000 people by 2020. The developer estimates that at least 15 percent of the current occupants of the development are over 55.²

While there is little agreement on a definition for MPCs (Minnery and Bajracharya 1999), they can be described as holistically planned residential developments, where land is set aside for a range of uses and residential types as well as retail, recreational facilities and employment opportunities. MPCs generally have an integrated aesthetic design, including landscaping, uniform signage and a conspicuous 'entry statement' which meets people as they arrive at the development. DLL is known for the incorporation of artificial lakes into its developments, which act as focal points for a range of organised activities. The developer imposed building covenants on residents that resulted in a degree of consistency in aesthetic form.

Community

Perhaps the most significant departure from the traditional post-war Australian suburban development was the offer by the developer to new residents in the MPC of the opportunity to become part of a ready-made 'community':

Springfield Lakes is South East Queensland's most exciting and convenient new address. *A vibrant and thriving community* situated in the heart of the Lakes District. The spectacular Lakes are just the beginning. The impeccably landscaped parks and green open spaces [show] superior attention to detail - all the trademarks of a Delfin address are evident at Springfield Lakes. As well as being an address of picturesque gullies, and rugged mountain backdrops, Springfield Lakes is a fully planned community. No other place in Brisbane or Ipswich can match the scale of what Springfield Lakes offers. (Delfin Lend Lease 2005b [italics added])

Community building has been a deliberate strategy for Delfin Lend Lease since the company began developing master planned communities in South Australia in the 1980's (Bosman 2004). The idea that the creation of community adds value to both present and future developments is central to the discourses of both the marketing and the employees of DLL, and provides the company with what it sees as its competitive advantage:

Our brand...is about building community in a timely fashion
(General Manager, Urban Community, DLL. Oct 04).

The creation of community through planning and built design is not a new concept - The MPC as envisaged by the developer conforms to many of the principles of New Urbanism, an urban design doctrine originating in the US, but with its roots in the late Victorian era 'Garden City' movement in the UK (Howard 1965 [1902]). According to New Urbanism, the thoughtful design and diversity of housing, amenity and physical layout increases opportunities for encounter and interaction, leading to the development of communities of place (Hillier 2002). The movement came about as a reaction to what was perceived as the rootless and anonymous 'urban sprawl' that characterised much of the mass suburbanisation carried out in the post-war period in the developed West. This advocacy of local and bounded community is faithful to the communitarian ethic that envisages the metropolis as a series of 'urban villages' where, it is believed, 'everyone can relate in a civil and urbane fashion to everyone else'. (Harvey 1997). This *Gemeinschaft* manifestation of human relations is promoted and marketed heavily by the developers of Springfield Lakes:

We want people to belong to a community where they are proud to live, a sanctuary that provides peace of mind and a sense of belonging ... special places where

² The area is too new to have been included in the 2001 census

fulfilment and community spirit are not just words but a way of life (Delfin Lend Lease 2005a).

In addition to designing for community and marketing the development, the developer of Springfield Lakes has gone to some lengths to act as a catalyst for the development of place-based associations, activities and community infrastructure. DLL has devoted human and financial resources to the establishment of clubs, recreational associations and a small, serviced community centre. The company has organised 'community events' such as outdoor cinema evenings, fairs, fun runs and children's entertainments, all with a view to hastening the development of a sense of place, identity and history for the new residents of Springfield Lakes:

We have events that are repeated to try and create a sense of history – Delfin take the initiative and then gets the community to take over (Manager Community and Education Services DLL, 6/05).

I don't know what it is but I think that the community relationships or the relationships that form a sense of community are quite fragile things, they wither on the vine if they are not fed soon enough. In other words, if the intersection points aren't there soon enough then patterns are established elsewhere which means that really the ability to be able to create the richness of what's needed is lost (CEO DLL, 9/04)

THE CONDITIONS FOR COMMUNITY

Suburban Homogeneity

It is one thing for a developer to set the scene for the development of community, but another for the idea to take hold and develop organically within the boundaries of the development. In many social studies of communities where a strong levels mutual support, or social capital, exist there is a certain degree of homogeneity about the population . In landmark studies of new suburban communities in the post war era, such as those done by Gans in Levittown in the US (1967); Bryson and Thompson in 'Newtown' (1972) and Richards in 'Green Views' (1990) (both in Australia) there is a certain self-selecting homogeneity about the people who choose to come and live in these new suburbs. Class and age homogeneity were strongly influenced by the nature of the development, the block sizes, the pricing structure and the fact that these suburbs were still largely dominated by the stable nuclear family, by relatively low class and occupational mobility and comparatively set expectations about residence and life course. Gans (1967), describes the new arrivals to Levittown as socially homogenous, but more importantly, 'compatible' in that they had arrived in the suburb with similar aspirations and similar expectations about community. Similarly, Richards (1990) in the Australian context describes a new suburban development inhabited almost exclusively by young families with children. In their earlier study of a new suburban development Bryson and Thompson (1972) find that the vast majority of residents are under 40. Fava (1956) provides the following proposition about the process of neighbourhood and community formation in the more traditional suburban settings of the past: 'High neighbouring is more characteristic of suburbanism than urbanism, and is due to the presence in suburbs of selected demographic and socio-economic groups, siting arrangements and other ecological characteristics; but it is also due to the selective migration to the suburbs of people predisposed to neighbouring'. In the traditional suburbs Gans, and Bryson and Thompson describe, class and age homogeneity were almost assured by the nature of the development, the block sizes, the pricing structure and the fact that society was still largely dominated by the stable nuclear family, by relatively low class and occupation mobility and comparatively set expectations about residence and life course.

In order for a supportive local community to form, one that results in the generation of local stocks of social capital and one that can provide residents, including older residents, with a degree of emotional and material support in their later years, there needs to be some form of common link, a common habitus (Bourdieu 1977) or set of dispositions among the residents of a community. It is worth noting that in the context of a multigenerational community that age, after race, is the most important factor in 'homophily' or those characteristics that determine the propensity of people to form social bonds (McPherson, et al. 2001), the 'homogenizing factor' of social networks. In other words, age homogeneity is a strong enabler of community.

The Post Traditional Suburb and Diversity

In contrast to the social conditions that formed the basis for these traditional suburban developments, in more post-traditional times, or what Giddens (1991) calls 'late-modernity', roles within society have become less predictable due to factors such as the redefinition of family roles and structure, greater occupational mobility and less job security. Older people are no less subject to these changes than younger generations. The boundaries between working life and retirement are blurring, as are the neat separation of child rearing and the 'empty nest'. People are getting divorced in greater numbers and at different points in the life course and are either remarrying or staying single. Older people are also living longer, healthier and more active lives. For older people, the period between the intense responsibilities of work and family, and frail old age is now increasingly seen as a project or an opportunity to construct a 'Third Age' (Laslett 1996). Along with this fragmenting of roles and structures in old age, people are becoming aware that their own physical and social welfare is a matter for negotiation (Featherstone and Hepworth 1989; Phillipson 2004). Older people are more inclined to relocate: the general population moves house on average once every five years, with only a slight decrease in mobility with advancing age (ABS 2003).

Conditions of increased mobility, fractured roles and greater social and family instability have meant the property development industry no longer caters for a single socio-demographic category when building suburban developments. DLL, sensing the changing circumstances of its market is now planning and selling developments to appeal to a more heterogenous market:

'If you look at traditional greenfield developments they were characterised by a dominance of young individuals: first home buyers, young childless couples and young families. Now because the mix of community that we are creating through our housing choice, through the amenity we are providing, our community is taking on a much more mature suburb-type age profile and it means that you've got to provide different sorts of amenity to cater for a more diverse demography. So I think that both factors are relevant: both societal change and also how we deliver development.' (General Manager, Urban Community, DLL, 10/04).

The marketing for Springfield Lakes reflects this view, with diversity promoted as 'lifestyle choices':

Living Options is all about choosing the lifestyle that suits you. Springfield Lakes has a wider and more exciting range of homes to choose from than ever before. South East Queensland's leading builders have now joined forces to bring you an amazing choice of Living Options. Springfield Lakes is all about lifestyle choices. So whether you're seeking land, a house, or a hassle-free house and land package, Springfield Lakes has a Living Option to suit you (Delfin Lend Lease 2005b).

In Springfield Lakes, this commitment to diversity has resulted in a mix of housing types and block sizes on offer and a resulting diversity of age groups living in close proximity. This mix has diluted the age homogeneity that might have been the case in traditional suburban developments consisting

of street after street of quarter-acre blocks and family homes where community consisted of relationships with neighbours most likely developed through children's school activities, local sporting clubs and other such sites for common experience.

It is more straightforward to generate the grounds for reciprocity required for relationships rich in social capital or the benefits that individuals derive from membership of networks (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988), when needs and interests align with those at similar stages in the life course and with similar outlooks and motivations. For older people, who are a presence in Springfield Lakes, but still a minority presence, the formula and needs for community are necessarily different from their younger neighbours.

OLDER PEOPLE'S NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF COMMUNITY

So whether it is the push of social change leading the design of Springfield Lakes or a unilateral commitment to diversity on the part of the developer, the socio-demographic complexion of the new suburb has changed in developments such as Springfield Lakes, where a significant minority of the population is over 55. The importance of community of place, that is the type of material community characterised by networks containing valid and useful stocks of social capital, has been shown to be of increasing importance to people as they age. This becomes particularly important as people enter frail old age and their ability to call upon the support of more geographically dispersed social networks decreases with lack of the means or motivation to travel great distances. Local reserves of social capital can become important for older people by their manifestation in the favours, watchfulness, friendship and security that those who live in close proximity can provide. In fact a number of recent quantitative studies in Australian and other western settings have concluded that the strength of local non-kin social networks is a better indicator of life satisfaction and indeed longevity, than the strength of family bonds, which are unlikely to be local (e.g. Giles, et al. 2005; Litwin 2001).

With these needs in mind, the following observations of community in an MPC are based on qualitative interviews with older residents of Springfield Lakes. The interviews explored the barriers and the potentials for material community that older people may be likely to expect through living in a development subject to the types of planning and interventions that have been carried out in Springfield Lakes.

The diversity amongst interview participants is a reflection of the diversity of the wider population of Springfield Lakes. Of the 30 people interviewed to date³, over half were born overseas and migrated to Australia as adults from a range of countries including Britain, Eastern and Western Europe, India and Sri Lanka.

The question is, to what extent will these older people become an enduring part of any community of place that develops in Springfield Lakes, and how will these people negotiate the need for networks of social support, or social capital, as they age and their needs change?

What did older residents want from the community?

The participating older residents of Springfield Lakes moved there for a variety of reasons and from a range of backgrounds and locations, although the majority of the participants interviewed for this study have come to Springfield Lakes from Brisbane, and many from surrounding suburbs. The backgrounds to decisions to move are as varied as the people themselves. People chose the development largely for its aesthetic appeal, for its investment potential and in many cases because it provided a convenient intersection between their various interests, such as family, part time work and old friends.

³ Names are pseudonyms

The developer's construction of community hardly figured in people's decision to buy a house in Springfield Lakes, but there were several key themes emerging from the data, which speak of participants' expectations about community. Firstly, there was an expectation of permanence about community and place for these older residents. For the most part they were hoping to become members of the community and many had already taken active steps towards this goal, by scrutinizing their neighbourhood and their neighbours and in many cases joining community groups, attending church or just walking the same route on a regular basis.

Networks of kin were of prime importance, but also for many, children and grandchildren were located out of easy reach. This spoke of a necessity to create a life independent from close family.

And to my way of thinking...we have to go where we want to be because the kids just go off wherever they need to go because work will take you anywhere now. So it's very unlikely that your kids are going to be anywhere near where you are anyway. (Jane, 61)

So since Christmas, we went down there in May and now [our son is] up here for a week and we'll probably go back down [to Melbourne] around about Christmas time, back down to him. With [our daughter], we saw her at Christmas. Then we usually see them probably three or four times a year, I suppose. (Barbara, 56)

For others, children had problems of their own or were viewed as people to be seen occasionally, but not too often:

I haven't got time and I can't put up with little kids [grandchildren] for too long. There's just too many of them, three of them in one household and I just can't put up with it. (Marion, 61)

Interviewer: Do you have any kids in Australia?

Dave: Two.

Interviewer: Two, whereabouts are they?

Dave: Don't know.

Interviewer: Okay.

Dave: I know where one is. One's in Tamworth where my ex-wife lives. He's got a place of his own. He lives in Tamworth. The other one disappeared when I met [my current wife].

(Dave, 62)

Many accounts of community or the desire for community are consistent with a recognition that family may not always be there and that if Springfield Lakes were to become home for any length of time, then the material support and security of a friendship network could become important:

So I guess what we're saying is that the thing about a community is that you've got friends in the district who you can rely on and they care about how you're going, how is the house, is everything alright. And you know in an emergency, yes, you can rely on them (Rex, 67).

One of the things I'd like to try out here is a Lions Club, because I think that as a method for building a community, the Lions is an excellent organisation. It gives people a common focus. Basically a lot of people like ourselves who are towards

their retiring age or whatever, and the kids the empty nest situation I believe that a Lions Club would flourish here. (Mike, 63)

Neighbouring and Older People in Springfield Lakes

The neighbour relationship in contemporary suburban settings is a delicate balance between the desire for privacy and the opportunity for long term reciprocity (Crow, et al. 2002). What often transpires between neighbours is a relationship which is characterised by cordiality, the exchange of trivial acts goodwill such as clearing mail when on holidays or feeding pets, but stops short of more major commitments or reciprocity, what many would refer to as 'living in each others' pockets' (Baumgartner 1988; Richards 1990). There is a generalised norm of 'good neighbourliness', which allows this type of relationship to take place with little negotiation.

There are of course circumstances in which neighbours do become close and supportive, normally neighbours who have lived in close proximity for many years, have shared common experiences such as raising children and are often of a similar age and outlook (Rosel 2003). These are people who share a common need or desire for closer social support than might be the case in typical neighbour relations, in which social networks of support extend beyond the geographical confines of immediate neighbourhood.

For the older people of Springfield Lakes, there were certain barriers to the establishment of these types of close neighbourhood relationships, generally arising from the diversity implicit in the development of the MPC. For most participants, there was an openness and willingness to engage with neighbours in the immediate vicinity, but the prospects for close and lasting relationships were generally seen as weak, resulting from a lack of commonality or 'homophily' required for engagement. Relations with close neighbours were for the most part cordial, but often fell into the 'arms length' category:

William: You don't see much of [the neighbours].
Beryl: You don't sort of see them, they stay indoors a lot.
Interviewer: So the people you have met?
Beryl: Oh, have been very nice. Very nice.
Interviewer: So how much do you have to do with them?
William: Not a great deal.

(Beryl, 58; William, 63)

Yeah, I know the people both sides. As I said, this fella's just moved in here and he's got a young girl, she'd be about 7 or 8. We talk to them. We don't sort of live in one another's pockets, we say hello and how are you, that type of thing. These people next door, that's just a husband and wife next door and I don't think if you didn't see them hanging out the washing, you would never see them. They keep themselves to themselves. You know, we see them go out walking and things like that. (Craig, 61)

Another important barrier to the formation of lasting neighbourhood relationships in Springfield Lakes was the issue of property tenure and the perceived effect that 'renters' had caused on both the tone of the area and the prospects for a harmonious community atmosphere. The behaviour of the local housing market in recent years has meant that many houses in Springfield Lakes have been purchased by speculative investors and leased. Various participants held the developer responsible for the number of rental properties in the area, (despite the fact that the developer has no legal recourse to investors buying and leasing property). The exact proportion of rental properties in Springfield Lakes is not clear but there was a perception by many that they were being overrun, or

at least surrounded, by 'renters', and that to engage with renters on the same basis as an owner-occupier was pointless, if not mildly distasteful:

Its not a matter of who rents and what it is like, it's a matter that you put all your money into your home and all that sort of thing and how many is it? Five homes in all this street and you've got all the rest is rentals. It's a lot of rentals in an area just in one street and no matter where you go you're getting more rentals outweigh the owners. (Deidre, 58)

While most were quick to point out that they had 'nothing personal' against renters, the feeling remained that they were an aesthetic blight on the community, with unkempt yards and multiple parked cars, but also that it was hardly worth the trouble to engage these people in any sort of meaningful neighbourly relationship as they would move on anyway:

[we are] not happy with the rental people and the rentals around the place. A lot of [us] have bought their houses here to retire, and to have good neighbours and to have a perfect, I suppose community, they think that way... They don't have ambition to own a house, they have no plans for the future, or they have no... it's just day to day living, (Alison, 50)

But a lot of the people are rental people and they come and go....
And on top of that, they shift on and their jobs move them so they're not too long in one place anyway. (Rob, 67)

Although not a widespread feeling, the racial diversity in Springfield Lakes was having an effect, compounding a sense of isolation for some:

I'm surrounded by them [Asians]. They don't worry me but they don't mix. So you may as well be living on a desert island, that's how I feel where I am, I don't know a soul. The people across the road from me, they're Aussies but they both work every day and their kids go to day-care and I never see them. I've seen them once since Easter, it's true. (Marion, 61)

Community Involvement

These barriers to close neighbouring and social support have meant that for many, social support will remain elsewhere. For a number of participants, adult children were still close by in surrounding suburbs, but there was an acknowledgement, as described above, that children could not be relied upon to stay in the one place. For a number of participants, this reality has led to an active choice to become involved in the wider community and it is here that the developer has managed to cater for the needs of some its older residents. Over half of the (non-random) sample are members of various community groups within the boundaries of Springfield Lakes, most notably the Springfield Lakes Leisure Group, an association of self-described 'empty nesters' who take part in recreational activities and have become a close knit and supportive group:

Joyce: We joined [the Leisure Group] as soon as we got here.
Phil: Went down and had a few words and sort of clicked with the people who were there, and then we kept going. (Joyce, 58; Phil, 63)

Pam: Yes, I knew there was a meeting on, so I decided I would come and meet the other people.
Interviewer: You just went along by yourself?
Pam: Yes.

Interviewer: That's good. A lot of people aren't that brave, are they?

Pam: No, well I sort of like to get out and meet people.
(Pam, 75)

It's just been really good for me because I get really, really homesick, and I've got two children that I've left behind [overseas]. They're not little, they're 35 and 30, but mothers always think of their children as children. I do miss them a lot, and my friends. (Sara, 57)

Of all the associations and clubs listed by the developer as active in Springfield Lakes, apart from children's play groups, it is the groups supported by older and retired residents, such as women's groups, yoga, art and weight loss groups that have been the most active. For those participants for whom the need existed, such as those who had moved a significant distance from their previous home, or had mobile or perhaps estranged families, many had sufficient agency to seek out social connections in the immediate area through organisations like the Leisure Group, other community associations and church groups. For others, life within the boundaries of Springfield Lakes was a more solitary affair, reliant upon connections with family and old friends who lived elsewhere:

Interviewer: So, what about if you think about three or four closest friends or maybe the three or four people you trust the most who aren't in your family?

Kathleen: It's a hard one.

Interviewer: Yeah it is but whereabouts are those people and what sort of contact do you have with them?

Kathleen: Tweed Heads.

Interviewer: Are they all people that you've known for a long time?

Kathleen: Oh yeah.

....

Kathleen: Yeah, I do. I ring a lot. I ring them but I've never ever had a lot of friends. I'm not that type.

...

Kathleen: It would be a bit hard for us to be members of the [Leisure Group]. [My husband's] never home.

Interviewer: Because he's away a lot?

Kathleen: On weekends, yeah, and I don't like to go on my own without him.
(Kathleen, 58)

DISCUSSION

Apart from networks of kin, which remained a critical source of social and material support for most participants, other networks of social support came from people of a similar age, consisting of old friends outside of Springfield Lakes and new friends within its borders. This characteristic of social networks accords with the theory and previous empirical evidence, as outlined above, that people have a natural social affinity with those in a similar age cohort, notwithstanding the obvious differences in experience and outlook among those within a particular age cohort (Conway 2003).

The developer's role in the lives of the older residents of Springfield Lakes is important. A commitment to diversity in housing size and design within the development has meant that a diversity of residents with a diversity of motives, interests and ambitions has moved into the development. This is perhaps the most telling departure from the social homogeneity and cohesion that characterised many of the traditional suburbs that were the subject of the landmark sociological

suburban studies. This strategy of diversity has led to the production of what Lefebvre (1991) would call 'abstract' social space, a space created by interests other than those who utilise or live in that space. In the case of Springfield Lakes, this is embodied in an 'unnatural' or non-organic residential spatial distribution. The antithesis to abstract space is that of 'absolute' space, one which has grown organically from the felt needs of those for whom the space is home. While it is debatable whether there is any such thing as an absolute space in a contemporary metropolitan setting, the contrast is made to highlight the fact that the interests and influence of planners and developers may not always be totally aligned with those of their target markets, despite the success of the product for the developer. The developer admits as much when it speaks of creating a community in as short a period as possible, in order to provide a showcase for the production of another social space in a different time and place.

The developer of Springfield Lakes, unlike many, has committed to the ideal of a socially sustainable community in the interests of its long term reputation and a desire to leave a socially responsible legacy. But is constrained in a number of important ways by its responsibility to its shareholders, that is, to provide a return on capital by selling as many blocks of land as it can in the shortest time possible. This tension has social consequences. For the 'young old' without the immediate need for community, or without the social or cultural skills required to negotiate more organised forms of community, it could mean potential isolation in old age, or to move on to other residential alternatives when the time comes.

The creation of diversity, in this case a multigenerational community is something about which the developer prides itself. There is an understanding that this diversity is an advertisement for 'sustainability' – that feature of community that allows it to withstand the boom and bust cycles that characterise more homogenous developments where everyone ages together. It is in the long term interests of the developer to create places that can be showcased into the future. Reputations as a 'nappy valley' or a development populated overwhelmingly by a greying demographic both work to isolate sectors of a potential market.

The diversity inherent in the development of Springfield Lakes is a result of both the fragmentation of social structures and institutions in late modernity and the developer's response to this market reality. This diversity has led the situation where the natural or organic connections that come from neighbourhood relations with those of a similar age and outlook are less likely to occur. In the absence of these strong neighbour networks, older people will probably need to look further than their street or immediate neighbourhood for enduring sources of social capital. Where many developers stop at the planning and designing stage the MPC, DLL has taken community creation a step further and has intervened in the establishment of various community groups and associations. The developer has created the opportunity for those with the agency to pursue a social network within the boundaries of Springfield Lakes.

That older residents need to seek out social connections rather than the natural associations which come from a lifetime of propinquity and shared experience also speaks of the importance of individual agency in the construction of a satisfactory Third Age for people who decide to move into this type of development.

As it stands, in Springfield Lakes, diversity has become a reality and, in a positive vein, could even bring with it the type of tolerant civic norms and cosmopolitanism favoured by many of the more idealistic commentators on community (Cox 1995; Young 1990) but usually associated with more self-conscious inner city locations. In a general way, these types of norms could benefit the older residents of Springfield Lakes as they lived their lives within its boundaries in terms of feelings of physical security, general acceptance and status. However, this type of cosmopolitanism tends to

keep to itself. This type of community is more often than not satisfied with the idea or 'sense' of community, rather than the more material form of community that generates the sort of social capital that older people might come to rely upon in their advancing years for emotional and physical support. This looser form of community may not be the ideal model for people as they enter advanced old age and require more material support, the type that comes from close, even intrusive, forms of local community.

CONCLUSION

So the prospects for a sustainable multigenerational community within the boundaries of Springfield Lakes are mixed. The developer can certainly point to the diversity of population in its current manifestation, and the mix of housing types should preclude any repeat of the homogeneity of the suburban developments of the past. But whether a truly sustainable multigenerational community develops will depend more on the agency of its older residents than might have been the case traditionally, where community roles might have been a more organic evolution of shared experience and commonality of life stage within a suburb. If retirement has indeed become a project of the self, a life stage under construction, then those who take the initiative have the means and the beginnings of the infrastructure to become active members of the local community. For those who don't, the choice might lie between social isolation or yet another move.

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Changing City Structures 12

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