



Neighbourhood of the Future

A formula for
caring and sustainable
neighbourhoods

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Foreword

"Impact is about more than just metrics. It is human and open to subjective interpretation. It describes what makes, shapes and breaks us. Something that affects people's lives positively, if it works out. We often look for it far from home, but find it so close. Positive impact starts with your friends, family and neighbours. Aim to have a good impact within your own living environment."

Google 'smart city' images and you'll see the same thing over and over again. A cold skyline with hyper-connected sensors and data centres in the leading role. Actual human beings don't play a part in this story.

Yet technology should serve people rather than the other way around. The impact of social media and technology on our society is undeniable. More than ever, we are connected to like-minded people from all over the world, but at the same time we are losing touch with our immediate surroundings and neighbours. Also, not everyone has access to digital technology. Think of the digital divide between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' – the latter often vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. In the UK today, around 6 million young people do not have home broadband, a laptop or desktop.¹ Another factor is that loneliness is becoming a worldwide epidemic, with around 33% of adults experiencing feelings of loneliness.²

Local authorities and organisations can make a difference. Through local community building, they stimulate informal neighbourly help (supporting community members to help each other) and the circular economy as well (promoting much-needed sustainability through exchanging and giving away items and skills). Local residents can gain access to the information, local knowledge, spaces and informal support that are already present within the neighbourhood – accessing and activating this social capital.

The more people get access to social capital, the better the neighbourhood is able to tackle social challenges itself. The neighbourhood becomes a resilient ecosystem, better equipped to withstand external threats such as a health pandemic, a food or energy crisis, criminal activity, or even a natural disaster.

Hoplr wants to make a tangible difference to neighbourhoods with its digital neighbourhood network and tools for local governments and community groups. That is why we are working on a formula that maps the social capital of neighbourhoods year after year. Based on this, we can develop and evaluate neighbourhood initiatives (bottom-up) and interventions (top-down) in order to unlock the immense potential of any local neighbourhood.

In this white paper, we define a way of understanding the dynamics of a neighbourhood's social capital. Then we aim to help you both map and develop the local community's value.








Jennick Scheerlinck,
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Hoplr

1 Catch 22 and Nominet, Digital disadvantage – barriers to digital skills and access, 2021.

2 Statista, Feeling of loneliness among adults 2021, by country, 2021.

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The value of a neighbourhood

1.



The value of the neighbourhood

Ah, the good ol' days: a roast in the oven, kids playing in the street, parents chatting over the fence, grandad mowing the lawn... Back then, the local community took care of its members. The good old days – better times indeed.

As soon as we are old enough to observe any potential downsides to social evolution – whether because of pollution from industrialisation, overconsumption from globalisation or information overload from digitalisation – we revert to the idea of the 'good ol' days'. It's a **tempting cliché, to blame change for the decline of our communities and social life**, and yearn for faded memories of a 'supposed' golden era.³

Our relationship with our neighbourhood is undoubtedly different today than it was in the past, but **the neighbourhood itself is by no means any less valuable**. Later in the paper, we will illustrate that the local community holds a wealth of potential, perhaps now more than ever. But first we look for the cause behind this change in relationship with the neighbourhood. We'll find it within a **transformation of our personal networks**.

1.1 The role of our personal networks in the neighbourhood

Networked individualism

Sociologists Rainie and Wellman coined the term '**networked individualism**'.⁴ In the past, our network used to consist of a few close-knit social groups in our physical proximity. Today, we are more likely to be part of numerous diverse groups with well-defined purposes. We may never even talk to or meet face to face with anyone in these groups. They may be groups with whom we explore our musical tastes, another that shares our political preferences or area of work

³ R. Forrest, A. Kearns, Social cohesion, social capital and the neighbourhood. *Urban Stud.* 38, 2125-2143 (2001); D. Schiefer, J. van der Noll, The essentials of social cohesion: a literature review. *Soc Indic Res.* 132, 579-603 (2017).

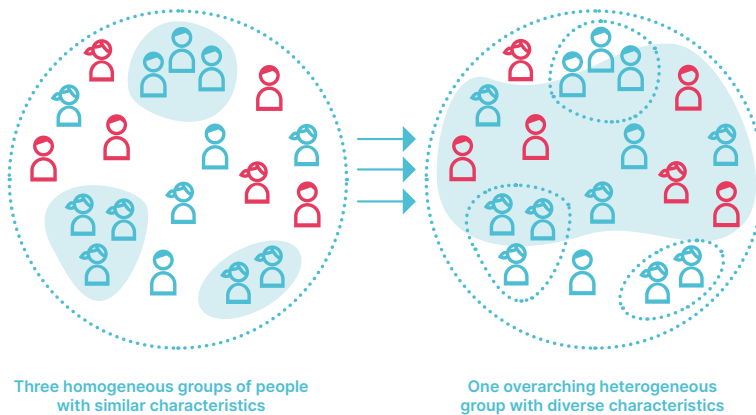
⁴ H. Rainie, B. Wellman, *Networked: the new social operating system* (MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 2012).

expertise. Today's society offers an immense buffet of communities, both online and offline, satisfying our conflicting hunger for both individuality and a sense of community.

Local diversity

As our identities and roles in society become more fragmented and not as intertwined with our local communities, **neighbourhoods are becoming increasingly diverse**. People with completely different backgrounds end up living next door to each other. The neighbourhood becomes a rich patchwork of diverse interests, talents, and cultural or religious beliefs.

In other words, under the influence of globalisation, urbanisation and the internet, the local community has evolved from a **homogeneous group** (where members have lots in common and behave similarly) to a **heterogeneous group** (with much diversity).⁵



5 K. N. Hampton, B. Wellman, Lost and saved . . . again: the moral panic about the loss of community takes hold of social media. *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews*. 47, 643-651 (2018).

1.2 Social capital of the neighbourhood

Social capital

Every individual network and community contains a certain amount of social capital: the sum of **resources that can be called upon, based on social relationships alone**.⁶

Think of a friend who offers tickets to a concert when they can't make it or a neighbour who drives you to an appointment if your car breaks down – **it is everything your network can do for you (from an individual perspective) or the community for each other (from an aggregate perspective)**.

Bonding versus bridging

Both homogeneous and heterogeneous groups possess social capital, albeit in different forms.⁷ In the case of a homogeneous group, we speak of **bonding social capital**. It contains important value in the form of security and social support through a sense of belonging, among other things.

However, studies show that mainly capital within a heterogeneous group, namely **bridging social capital**, has a **positive effect** not only on individual outcomes, but also on economic growth and acceptance for diversity.

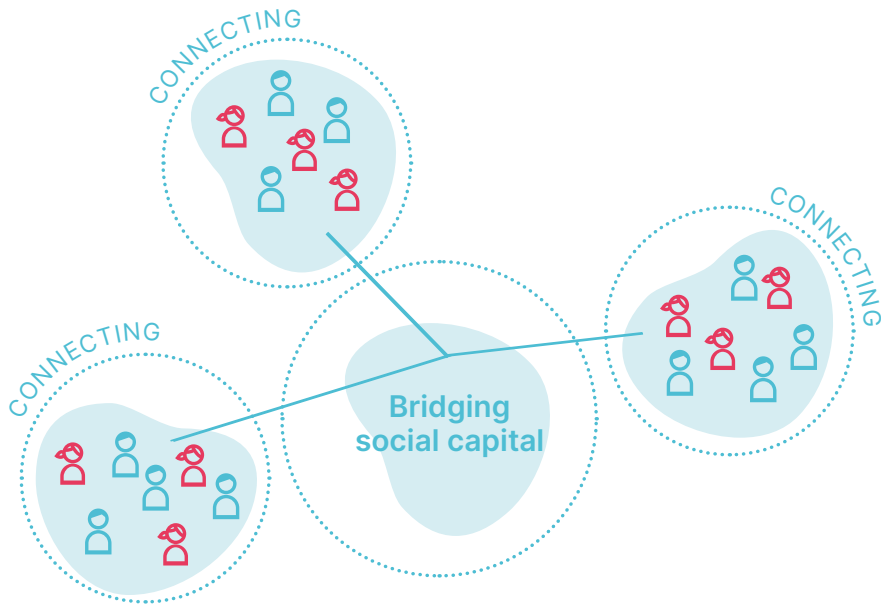
Bridging social capital of the neighbourhood

Back in the day, local residents used to rely on each other as a close-knit (homogeneous) community. But now, each member can **tap into their individual networks to better their neighbourhood**.

After a house fire turns the lives of some residents upside down, the community rolls up its sleeves to provide some relief. One resident creates a website where people can donate online. Another makes little soaps that neighbours sell to colleagues and family members to fundraise. Someone else is asking for insurance information at work. And the whole neighbourhood collects clothes and other useful items from friends and family.

6 J. S. Coleman, Social capital in the creation of human capital. American Journal of Sociology. 94, 95-120 (1988); N. Lin, Social Capital: A theory of social structure and action (Cambridge university press, 2004).

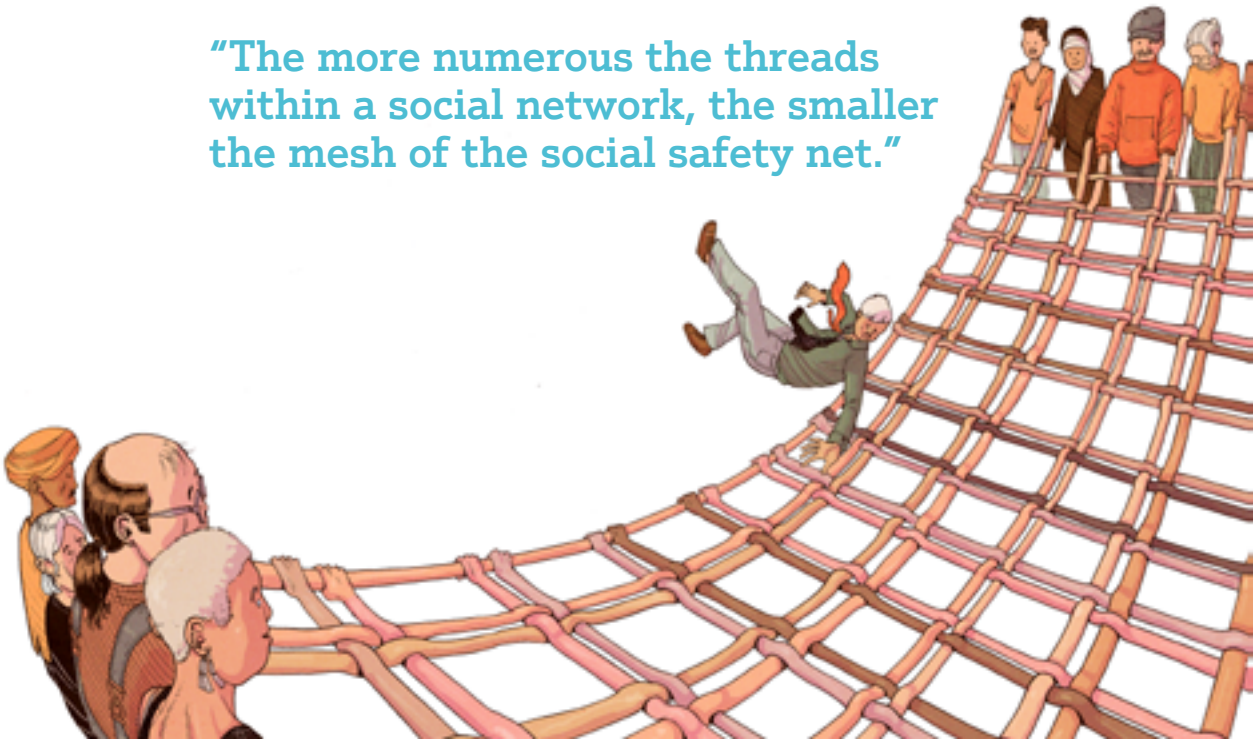
7 R. S. Burt, Brokerage and closure: an introduction to social capital (Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York, 2005).



Not only does the neighbourhood hold a wealth of bridging capital; its **physical, social and civic context** provides members with a unique twofold value.

- On the one hand, imagine the potential for **vulnerable and less mobile people** – older, isolated people in particular. For those who have no friends or family to lean on, the neighbourhood may provide an important network of social relations and support. For those who are immobile, the neighbourhood forms an indispensable part of their care network.

“The more numerous the threads within a social network, the smaller the mesh of the social safety net.”



- On the other hand, there is the unique **common interest** for various local themes. Think of the initiatives that local residents set up together in the physical space: from car sharing to litter picks. Some of these initiatives even go on to address worldwide challenges on a local level, such as the global plastics, litter and climate crisis.

Why local community building?

Caring neighbourhoods of the future are committed to tackling city-wide or even global problems on a small scale. Local community building is therefore an investment in:

Welfare

- + The relationship between the strength of the social fabric and both psychosocial and physical well-being has been well documented.⁸ In neighbourhoods of the future, residents look after each other by offering social support and providing informal help. Vulnerable groups, too, learn that they can make valuable contributions to the community, allowing them to step out of their role as the ones in need of help. Older people live independently for longer, and the community actively fights social isolation.

Safety

- + Various studies show a strong link between a sense of community and a feeling of security.⁹ In neighbourhoods of the future, residents keep an eye on things, keep each other informed of any issues such as criminal activity, and call on each other when needed.

8 P. A. Thoits, Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 52, 145-161 (2011); A. M. Ziersch, F. E. Baum, C. MacDougall, C. Putland, Neighbourhood life and social capital: the implications for health. *Social Science & Medicine*. 60, 71-86 (2005).

9 C. M. Fourie, in *Collaboration, Communities and Competition: International Perspectives from the Academy*, S. Dent, L. Lane, T. Strike, Eds. (SensePublishers, Rotterdam, 2017)
J. D. Lichterman, A "community as resource" strategy for disaster response. *Public Health Rep.* 115, 262-265 (2000); R. J. Sampson, S. W. Raudenbush, F. Earls, Neighborhoods and violent crime: a multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*. 277, 918-924 (1997); C. van Eijk, T. Steen, Why citizens want to be co-producers, 10 (2013).

Citizen participation

- + The willingness of residents to work for the collective good of the neighbourhood is more present in connected communities.¹⁰ In neighbourhoods of the future, residents feel involved in both the community and local policy. They are more likely to take initiative, to volunteer and participate in projects run by neighbours, organisations and the government.

Mobility

- + In sustainable neighbourhoods, residents will travel less often by car, because there is plenty to do in the local area and because sustainable travel is the norm.

Climate and environment

- + In sustainable neighbourhoods, residents gladly exchange items, make group purchases and consume locally. Together, they get involved in developing and maintaining green spaces.

“Investing in local community building means investing in social issues such as mobility, environment, welfare, and citizen participation.”

¹⁰ A. L. Kavanaugh, D. D. Reese, J. M. Carroll, M. B. Rosson, Weak ties in networked communities. *The Information Society*. 21, 119-131 (2005); Y.-C. Kim, S. J. Ball-Rokeach, Civic engagement from a communication infrastructure perspective. *Communication Theory*. 16, 173-197 (2006); J. M. McLeod, D. A. Scheufele, P. Moy, Community, communication, and participation: the role of mass media and interpersonal discussion in local political participation. *Political Communication*. 16, 315-336 (1999); C. Talò, T. Mannarini, A. Rochira, Sense of community and community participation: a meta-analytic review. *Soc Indic Res*. 117, 1-28 (2014).

1.3 Challenge

Disconnection

If today's neighbourhoods really hold so much value, why doesn't it always feel that way? It seems as if we no longer judge the neighbourhood by its potential to enrich our lives, but rather by its **ability to accommodate our individuality**. 'They are quiet neighbours', 'we leave each other alone' and 'they come to water the plants when we travel' seem to be the most desirable qualities of the modern neighbour.

Is this all we can expect? Is this what present-day life has done to us? Have our virtual friends on the other side of the planet and online clubs distracted us so much that we **find it difficult to connect with our actual neighbours**?

Tapping into the social capital of the neighbourhood


The potential may be immense; that **does not mean that the neighbourhood's value is there for the taking**. Let alone that it is accessible for all members to the same extent.

Clichés such as 'things were better in the old days' are tempting to think, but they are most likely false and, at the very least, not constructive. What if we **were to use the beautiful aspects of our current reality to connect more with each other**? Then the neighbourhoods of the future would become caring, connected communities that not only bridge our differences, but embrace and use them.

"The secret of caring neighbourhoods of the future? Local community building, here and now."

A formula for social capital

In this white paper, we propose a **formula** that provides insight into the dynamics of a neighbourhood's social capital. With it, we aim to help you both map and develop the local community's value.



« Our relationship with the neighbourhood looks vastly different today than it has in the past. In this white paper, we illustrate that the local community still houses great potential, perhaps now more than ever. »





« Caring and sustainable neighbourhoods of the future are committed to tackling city-wide or even global problems on a small scale. »

Wat en wanneer je wil
abonneren!

BOEREN
& BUREN

De Meulekar
• Since 1865 •
Zeeuwse bloem
vermalen meel, brood en bakm

BOEREN
& BUREN

ZOETE
APPELDRAGEN
LOVE

LOKALE PRODUCTEN VIND JE HIER

1 BESTEL ONLINE

Kies uit een ruim aanbod
lokale en verse producten op
boerenburen.be

2 OP DE BUURDERIJ

Ontvang je producten
rechtstreeks van de boer

A formula for caring
and sustainable
neighbourhoods

2.



A formula for caring and sustainable neighbourhoods

So, the neighbourhood has an undeniable value, in theory. Intuitively, however, we can often feel that **one neighbourhood offers its members more value than another**. For example, there may be an area that is known as 'arty' or a town that has a good reputation for having a dynamic community due to social activism. Does that mean we can calculate the social capital of a specific neighbourhood? And perhaps more interestingly: does that allow us to make some adjustments here, twist a button there, and set the neighbourhood to **a maximum social capital**?

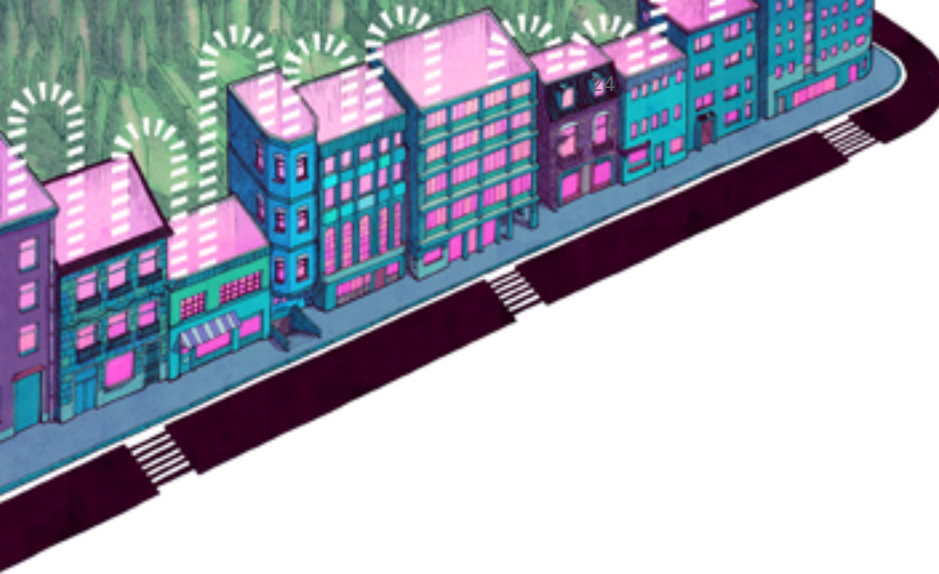
2.1 Social capital formula

On an individual level, a person's social capital is usually described as the sum of **resources that are available because of social relationships**. Think of the drill you borrow from next door, the ride a friend offers you, the local tradesperson recommendation someone gives. Add it all up and there you have it: your social capital!

The collective level is more complicated when it comes to social capital, as the neighbourhood's social capital doesn't **simply equal the total resources of its residents**. In our opinion, the formula for determining – or influencing – the social capital of a neighbourhood consists of two elements: **the potential of, and the access to, the neighbourhood's resources**.



Complicated social concepts cannot be expressed in a simple formula, but a formula helps us navigate through the concepts of this white paper and, more importantly, it will inspire you to get started.



2.2 Potential

The neighbourhood's **potential**, or 'urban surplus', consists primarily of the sum of resources or assets in a local community. These take many forms:

- time
- talents
- finance
- material
- knowledge
- space
- connections
- emotional support

Demographics and socio-economic status largely determine the degree to which these assets are present. How many people live in the neighbourhood? How diverse is its community? Is there vibrant local commerce?

Besides the assets in and of themselves, the extent to which the assets allow for **collaboration**, too, determines the potential of the social capital. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Diversity is an important factor for this connective potential.

One neighbour may be a retired dancer (talent), another has a large space that's unused on weekdays (space), and a third is a member of a local senior citizens' association (connections). These are elements that, on their own, mean little to the community. But once these three residents come together, dance classes for senior citizens can bring more connection and well-being to the neighbourhood (connective potential).

In other words, the potential of a neighbourhood consists of its citizens resources, plus the **added value** that arises from possible collaborations.



It can be extremely valuable **to map these opportunities**. By listing the main stakeholders in a neighbourhood, it quickly becomes clear how collaborations can provide answers to a variety of challenges. At the end of this white paper, we'll briefly talk about a method to carry out this analysis within the neighbourhood, called 'Neighbourhood Capacity Mapping'.

2.3 Access

The fact that certain assets exist within the neighbourhood does not mean that they can be used freely by the whole community. For this to happen, there must also be **access to the assets**.

This access is determined by the extent to which **members can, and want to, connect to the community and its resources**. Connecting refers to both supplying, managing, maintaining and using resources.



The ability to connect to the community and its assets is largely influenced by the **spaces** within the neighbourhood, which either hinder or stimulate exchanges between neighbours.

Some isolated local residents might benefit from each other's company. But perhaps the neighbourhood lacks **public meeting places**, which makes it difficult for these citizens to come together.

The desire of local residents to connect to the community forms the last piece of the puzzle. We attribute this desire to the **social cohesion of the neighbourhood**.

A local sports club may have a space where young people can meet after opening hours. That does not mean that its board members **trust** them to take care of their infrastructure.

How strong are the ties between the local residents? What values and norms does the neighbourhood uphold? How inclusive is the local community? These **social dimensions** greatly impact the access to the neighbourhood's social capital.

With the right tools, you can **not only evaluate, but even influence** this access. This, as far as we are concerned, is the definition of community building. And here lies the key to social capital.

"A neighbourhood's resources are what they are: an abundance of potential to enrich the neighbourhood and its members. But the extent to which local residents can and want to make use of those resources... that's where you can make a difference."

« In caring neighbourhoods,
residents look after
each other in all sorts of
ways. Older people live
independently for longer
and social isolation is
actively countered by the
community. »





«Every neighbourhood holds a certain amount of social capital: resources – such as knowledge, materials and time – that can be used by the community, based on the network that is present. »



Wanting to connect to
the social capital

3.



Wanting to connect to the social capital

The **social cohesion** within a neighbourhood largely determines the extent to which residents want to connect to the network – and so the resources – of the neighbourhood.



Social cohesion determines **the extent to which residents are prepared to:**

- **share** their own resources with the community
- turn to the neighbourhood **when needed**
- **work together** to create a better neighbourhood.

3.1 Defining social cohesion

We all agree that social cohesion is a good thing. It is a state that a group may or may not be in (to a varying degree), and if so, **promotes the well-being of its members**.¹¹

Beyond that, it is a **complex, layered and contested concept**, and there is no single definition. So how do we evaluate the social cohesion of a neighbourhood?

In our opinion, social cohesion is the **result of numerous dimensions and their dynamics** that determine to what extent members want to be part of the group.

¹¹ D. Schiefer, J. van der Noll, The essentials of social cohesion: a literature review. Soc Indic Res. 132, 579-603 (2017).

Consequently, we can identify a few measurable dimensions of a neighbourhood in order to best understand its social cohesion.

Think of it as the assessment of a person's overall health. There is no ready-made test that puts a rating on a person's health. But we can check blood pressure, body mass index or run blood works. In the same way, we can **look at the local community from different angles to give an indication of its overall well-being, and then carry out an analysis.**

Then we can outline a 'treatment plan'. Using **neighbourhood initiatives (bottom-up) and interventions (top-down)**, we try to positively impact some of the relevant social dimensions, and so ultimately encourage people's willingness to connect with their community.

3.2 Dimensions of social cohesion

Countless dimensions directly influence social cohesion. **Some of them are measurable and under our influence, while others are not.** Nearly every study uses a different set of social dimensions.

Based on the most common ones, as well as our own experience, we propose a shortlist of **measurable and engineerable social dimensions** as a guide. In our opinion, they offer a fairly complete picture of the social cohesion in any given neighbourhood. At the very least, they offer a good starting point for an analysis and action plan, tackling:

- sense of community
- trust
- reciprocity
- shared values
- networks.

Below, we briefly discuss each of these dimensions: what do they mean for social cohesion in a neighbourhood, and how could a local organisation or government encourage them? As you will see, **each dimension underlines the importance of positive exchanges between neighbourhood residents.**

3.2.1 Sense of community

Meaning

A sense of community includes the image that residents have of the neighbourhood and the extent to which they **identify with that image**.¹²

It is all about the **'we-feeling'** that may or may not be present in a neighbourhood, comparable to that of a football club. Even though the supporters have not touched the ball during a match, they will gladly chant that 'we won'.

If residents strongly identify with the neighbourhood, they will find it important that the community is doing well. That's because their **identity and even pride** are, to some extent, intertwined with it. Consequently, they are more likely to invest in the neighbourhood.¹³

¹² D. W. McMillan, D. M. Chavis, Sense of community: a definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*. 14, 6-23 (1986).

¹³ L. Mahmoudi Farahani, The value of the sense of community and neighbouring. *Housing, Theory & Society*. 33, 357-376 (2016).

Community building by stimulating a sense of belonging

Residents get a stronger sense of community as they gain **positive experiences**, such as a fun local event or when a neighbour lends them a hand.¹⁴ Based on these experiences, people form a positive image of the neighbourhood, in turn leading to a stronger sense of community.

They can even be vicarious experiences. Witnessing **exchanges between other residents** help shape our image of the community. Such as seeing two neighbours having a chat on the doorstep, reading how a local resident helped shovel snow for someone who's housebound, or learning that the neighbourhood organised a successful fundraising campaign for a local charity sometime before moving in.¹⁵

Local governments and organisations can stimulate a sense of community by providing a (more inclusive) **platform for positive stories about the neighbourhood**.

Think, on the one hand, of **public and virtual spaces** where community members can meet for neighbourly exchanges. We will talk about these spaces in chapter 4.

Also, you can share and promote inspiring testimonies (which may have emerged from a neighbourhood analysis) using a **local communication strategy**.

Some examples that encourage exchanges between neighbours and make residents proud to be members of the local area:

- + Annual community fete or music festivals
- + Children's and family activities
- + LGBTQ+-specific events
- + Religious festivals or interfaith events
- + New Year's Drinks or marking national public holidays
- + Good neighbour awards
- + Neighbourhood Watch schemes

14 E. J. Lawler, S. R. Thye, J. Yoon, Social commitments in a depersonalized world (Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 2009).

15 J. D. De Meulenaere, B. Baccarne, C. Courtois, K. Ponnet, Neighborhood hotspot and community awareness: the double role of social network sites in local communities. Communications. 1 (2020), doi:10.1515/commun-2019-0135.

- + Testimonials from residents
- + Visits from local MPs or celebrities
- + Street cafes for the homeless
- + Buddy system for older people, those isolated or housebound
- + Welcome event for new neighbours
- + Solidarity or campaign actions
- + Digital neighbourhood network
- + Taking part in national environmental initiatives, e.g., Fridays for Future school strikes
- + Neighbourhood slogan.

3.2.2 Trust

Meaning

Trust refers to the **expectation that neighbours will behave** beneficially, or at least not harmful, to each other and the wider community. Without mutual trust, members are reluctant to cooperate, which is detrimental to the neighbourhood's social capital.¹⁶

Trust comes with an element of risk: 'Despite the possibility that my neighbour will never return my ladder, I will lend it to them anyway'.

Trust plays a role at different levels that are important for social cohesion in a neighbourhood:

- trust in an **individual**
- trust in a group **we identify with**
- trust in a group **we do not identify with**
- trust in an **institution**.

Two teenagers appear at your doorstep, asking if they can wash your car in exchange for some money. To what extent would you be more inclined to trust them if you knew they lived in your neighbourhood?

16 R. S. Burt, *Brokerage and closure: an introduction to social capital* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2005).

Community building by stimulating trust

If there is systematic mistrust in a neighbourhood, it is usually either a result of **bad personal experiences** or **low perceived safety in areas with high crime rates**.

Below, we share five suggestions to **boost trust in a neighbourhood**.

- + **Roles.** Role ambiguity means that it's not clear what someone can expect from another person, and what protocols are attached to an exchange. That is why it can be worthwhile to appoint a contact person in the neighbourhood, such as a buddy or neighbourhood ambassador.
- + **Transparency.** Say what you'll do and do as you say. Communicating in a timely, clear and consistent manner, and then acting on it, can help to restore trust at a local level.

Likewise, you can encourage other organisations to be more transparent. Maybe a local business networking group can hold an open day for members of the community to take a look inside some local companies or organisations – to have a glimpse of the workplace in action. This will help to forge positive connections between businesses and local residents.

- + **Environment.** Research shows a link between the state and satisfaction of facilities in the neighbourhood on the one hand, and social trust on the other.¹⁷ Consider the impact of degradation such as fly-tipping and litter, vandalism or broken street lights on feelings of safety and trust. The maintenance of a public space is important to boost trust and a love of the neighbourhood. Organisations like Keep Britain Tidy have many campaigns which focus on encouraging residents to practically demonstrate a love for their area.¹⁸

17 N. Hassan, T. S. Y. Lim, The quality of neighbourhood facilities and their effect on social trust in Salak Selatan new village, Kuala Lumpur. *Journal of Regional and City Planning*. 31, 264-284 (2020).

18 Keep Britain Tidy, Support our campaigns, 2022.

- + **Meetings.** Mistrust often stems from fear of the unknown. Opportunities for neighbours to meet can foster positive experiences, trust and a sense of invested belonging. Therefore, encounters with attention to diversity become all the more critical: meetings between young and old, between newcomers and established households, and between different ethnic minority or faith groups groups.
- + **Give trust.** A local government can change the narrative around a group or organisation by enabling them to make a positive impact on the neighbourhood. For example, you could ask the neighbourhood's young people to think up an action against litter.

Whatever the issue, let the neighbourhood know that you, as a local authority or organisation, have confidence in the group or institution in question. It's in all our interests to promote and celebrate social cohesion rather than live with social division.

3.2.3 Reciprocity

Meaning

Most favours – be it lending a ladder or sharing some information – are expected to be returned sooner or later. This pattern of expectations is called **reciprocity**. Reciprocity occurs in various forms, depending on the nature of a relationship or network.¹⁹

A. Negotiated exchange

Firstly, the norm '**negotiated exchange**' can apply. In this case, both parties involved will agree on the terms in advance. Who will do what and what is expected in return. The exchange takes place bilaterally, more or less at the same time.

- ⋮ An older woman needs help clearing snow from her drive.
- ⋮ A local resident is willing to help, but asks for a small fee.

¹⁹ L. D. Molm, The structure of reciprocity. *Social Psychology Quarterly*. 73, 119-131 (2010).

Negotiated exchanges often take place in cases of little trust. The chances of success for the neighbour in need of help depend greatly on their own actions, and therefore, capacities. Moreover, these exchanges rarely lend themselves to repetition or relationship development.

B. Reciprocal exchange

A neighbour could also share their resources without expecting anything in return. They do not know if the favour will be returned. This is called a '**reciprocal exchange**'.

An older woman needs help clearing snow from her drive.
A neighbour helps her and asks **nothing in return**. When, a few months later, the woman hears that the neighbour has become a father, she decides to cook a hot meal for the new family.

In this case, the exchanges are separate, unilateral, and form a healthy base for a **long-term relationship**.

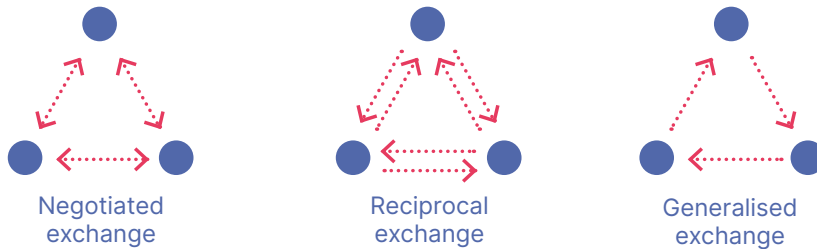
If the favour is never returned – especially when a clear opportunity arises – this may damage the **reputation** of the one who was at the receiving end of the former exchange, and the relationship between the two. In other words, there is still a certain expectation.



C. Generalised exchange

A third possibility is a **generalised exchange**, in which a neighbour does not necessarily give something in return to the person who helped them, but to another neighbour.

An older woman needs help clearing snow from her drive. A neighbour helps her and asks for nothing in return. When the woman, later that day, reads on their neighbourhood's online network that **another neighbour** is looking for recommendations to have a new pair of trousers shortened, she immediately offers to do the work for free.



In this type of 'indirect' exchange, local residents do not depend on one another, but on **all members who contribute to the network**.

This form of reciprocity brings important benefits to the neighbourhood. For example, exchanges can also manifest themselves in **actions of neighbourly behaviour**. In a neighbourhood where generalised exchanges are the norm, residents might pick up litter from each other's drive without giving it a second thought. Or they may automatically keep an eye out for one another.

In addition, there is an important advantage for residents who have broad resources to offer (for example, sewing skills). They are more likely to be able to help people across the entire neighbourhood, rather than one specific neighbour. Vulnerable residents can also **step out of their role as the ones in need of help by thinking about what it is they can give to others in terms of time, energy or skills**. Truly, we believe everyone has something to offer the neighbourhood.

The degree and form in which reciprocity is present determine the extent to which residents are **willing to contribute or dare to ask for help**.

Community building through reciprocity

It is difficult to set up a structure of generalised exchanges without strong social cohesion. However, a local government or not-for-profit organisation can help to increase the motivation to exchange resources.

Making exchanges visible within the neighbourhood plays an important role, for three reasons:

It makes it clear that it is the community's norm to help neighbours without expecting a favour in return.

- The neighbourhood's help requests are **shared with everyone**, which increases the chance that someone will see something they can help with.
- If our helpful actions are visible to the community, that is very positive for **our reputation**, which can be an exceptionally strong motivator.

Below, we share some suggestions to make the exchanges in a neighbourhood more visible.

- + **A digital neighbourhood network** allows local residents to make their help requests and offers visible for a long time. Reactions and exchanges are accessible to all members.
- + **A neighbourhood library or tool shed** are physical evidence of valuable exchanges in the local community.
- + **A neighbourhood communication campaign** highlights particularly special or unique exchanges. Think of neighbourhood projects such as good-neighbour awards or press stories about the area.

3.2.4 Shared values

Meaning

Values **are abstract and emotional beliefs that exist along a continuum** and drive specific attitudes and behaviours.²⁰

Put more simply, there are many values to which people **attach varying degrees of importance**. Integrity, productivity, respect, success, dedication, equality... These translate into norms – rules of conduct – that dictate the appropriate action in a given situation.

Our norms and values determine not only our behaviour, but also **how we evaluate the behaviour, and ultimately the character, of others**. If a neighbour's behaviour goes against our norms and values, that may negatively impact our opinion of them.

A resident attaches great importance to order and tidiness. They keep their front garden perfectly mowed and never keep their rubbish bin out on the street for too long. Another neighbour doesn't care so much about that sort of thing. They attach more value to freedom and flexibility. The former neighbour is annoyed with them and has no desire to have a pleasant chat again any time soon.

A sense of shared values has a major impact on a dimension we discussed earlier: trust. If we **expect someone to share the same values**, we are more likely to trust that we are working towards a common goal, while respecting the same rules.

Community building by emphasising shared values

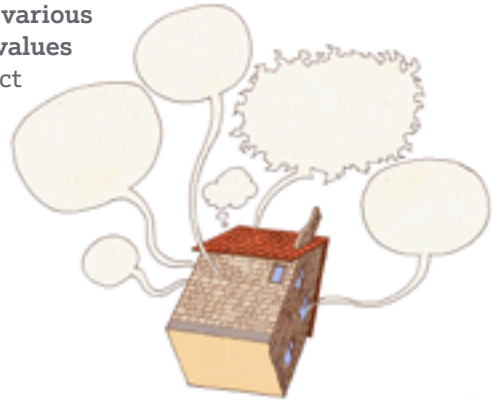
A mismatch of values is a major cause of friction between groups, such as different cultures and generations. Conflicting values can divide a community. On the other hand, shared values have the **potential to bring people together**.

²⁰ L. Wray-Lake, B. D. Christens, C. A. Flanagan, in Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research, A. C. Michalos, ed. (Springer Netherlands, Dordrecht, 2014), pp. 1102-1107.

Every two parties in a neighbourhood certainly have one shared value. It is important to **emphasise them**.

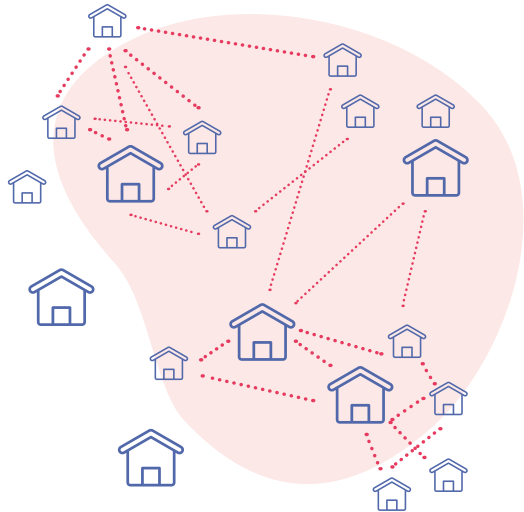
Here, we share an action plan of five steps to underline the shared values in a neighbourhood.

1. Using a **neighbourhood survey**, find out which norms and values stakeholders of the neighbourhood (residents, organisations, etc.) hold dear, at personal, social and neighbourhood level.
2. **Look for shared values** that are as inclusive as possible. Think of values such as respect, helpfulness and tolerance.
3. Translate the shared values of the neighbourhood into some kind of **neighbourhood manifesto**. Think of a slogan or a set of commandments.
4. Make the shared values **visible** in the neighbourhood. Either physically in the neighbourhood (e.g., a poster) or via a folder or website. This way, newcomers immediately know what the neighbourhood stands for.
5. As an optional final step, **connect various parties around the shared social values** to increase social cohesion. Connect youth and a local non-for-profit organisation around the environment, or couples from different ethnic-cultural backgrounds around work or parenting.



3.2.5 Network

The four dimensions we have mentioned (sense of belonging, trust, reciprocity and shared values) are cognitive, they exist mainly in the minds of residents and are highly subjective. Network, on the other hand, is a **structural dimension** that tells us something about the composition of the neighbourhood. It is more or less objective.



If we could visually map all residents and organisations in the neighbourhood, we **could draw lines between any two parties where a relationship exists**. These lines would tell us how well individuals and organisations are networked within the neighbourhood.

Clusters of homogeneous groups would likely emerge, with perhaps rather sparse (horizontal) bridges between them. These refer back to the **bonding and bridging social capital we talked about** at the beginning of this paper.

In addition, we would notice some (vertical) links between groups and organisations, which are contained in the **linking social capital**.

The better an individual or organisation is networked within the neighbourhood, **the more likely someone will be to join the overall neighbourhood network**, which also includes strangers.

Moreover, **the stronger the neighbourhood network** is today, the more appealing it will be for an individual or organisation to join it.

Someone moves back to the neighbourhood where she lived as a young girl. There are mostly new faces, but her parents and old neighbour still live there. She knows that the neighbourhood has a close-knit community whose members depend on one another. She is eager to be included in the community and happily takes part in a welcoming event for new residents.

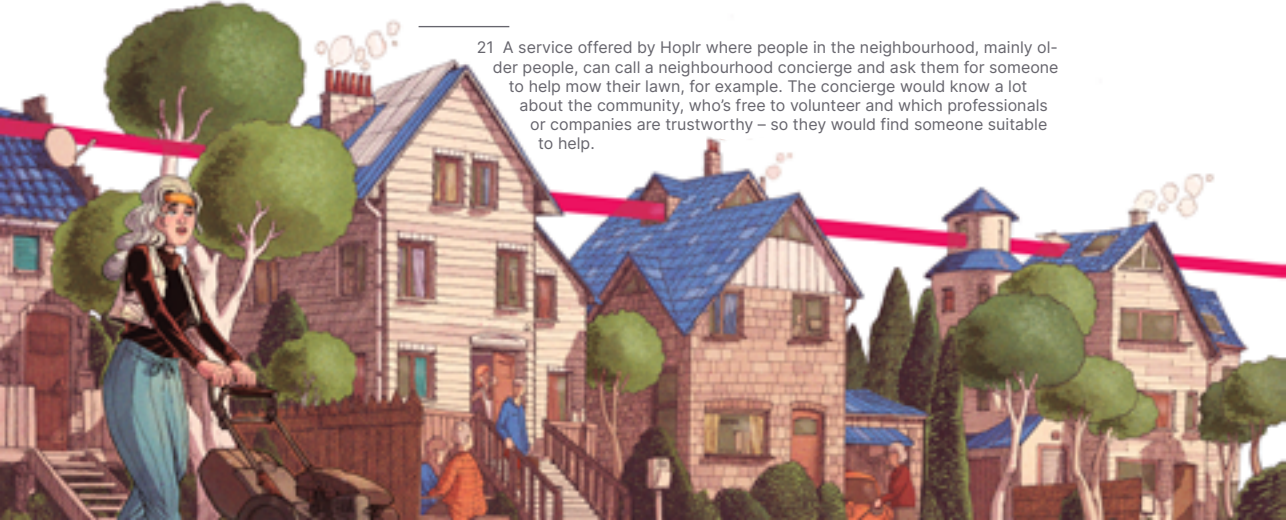
Community building through the expansion of existing networks

By stimulating new relationships between individuals, groups, and organisations in the neighbourhood, parties become better networked and social cohesion increases. In this way, more and more people feel willing to contribute to the local community.

Here, we share ideas for strengthening networks within the neighbourhood.

- + **Bridge figures.** They can play an important role by bringing different parties into contact with each other. Think of community workers, buddies, or the Neighbourhood Concierge.²¹
- + **Meetings.** Organise welcome events or other networking opportunities where local residents can meet each other.
- + **Actions.** Activities on themes that citizens care about offer an ideal environment for relationships to develop. Think of a drop-in service for new mums or an information session on the climate crisis.
- + **Physical and virtual spaces.** Quality, accessible spaces both offline (such as a park or indoor hall) and online (such as a digital community group on social media) are needed for spontaneous exchanges to occur.
- + **Advertise organisations.** By publicising local organisations, relationships between organisations and citizens, and between organisations themselves, can be established more quickly. Think of a directory of local traders or an open day where business owners showcase their skills and services.

²¹ A service offered by Hoplr where people in the neighbourhood, mainly older people, can call a neighbourhood concierge and ask them for someone to help mow their lawn, for example. The concierge would know a lot about the community, who's free to volunteer and which professionals or companies are trustworthy – so they would find someone suitable to help.





« Community feeling is all about the 'we-feeling'. If residents strongly identify with the neighbourhood, they will find it important that the community is doing well. »





« By stimulating new relationships between individuals, groups, and organisations in the neighbourhood, parties become better networked and social cohesion increases. »

« Making shared values, such as tidy environments or climate awareness, visual within the community, can unify and mobilise local residents. »





« Distrust often stems from fear of the unknown. With physical meetings, we can create positive experiences between people who would otherwise not naturally meet, and nurture a sense of trust and connection in the neighbourhood. »

Being able to connect
to the social capital

4.



Being able to connect to the social capital

Quick reminder

Do you recall the **two elements** that determine access to social capital?



So far, we have looked at the desire to connect, which is largely determined by social cohesion. Now we will look at the **ability**, the extent to which we can connect to the resources of the neighbourhood.

Communication infrastructure

A neighbourhood's communication infrastructure includes the **physical and virtual spaces** within which local residents interact.

To a large extent, it is the quality of this **communication infrastructure** that determines whether the neighbourhood is able to:

- **share** their own resources with the community
- turn to the neighbourhood **when needed**
- **work together** to create a better neighbourhood.

The importance of spaces

Without the presence of quality, accessible spaces where residents can systematically come into contact, it is **difficult to make use of the social capital of the neighbourhood**.

For without physical or virtual spaces, how could we:

- know **who** lives nearby
- know what **resources** are available in the neighbourhood
- **ask** for help
- **provide** help
- talk about **challenges and solutions**
- **join hands?**

Role of a government

Often, providing a space where neighbours can come into contact, amounts to an investment of time, money and energy. In this respect, the **role of a local government** is threefold:

- understanding **the needs** of the neighbourhood
- **providing** the required spaces
- **maintaining** the existing spaces.

Getting local residents involved in these processes is beneficial for the **end result, the engagement in the project and the social cohesion in the neighbourhood**.

..... A survey shows that there is support for the development of a new playground. If the neighbourhood can use its talents to design the playground (developing a garden, creating a piece of art for the playground, inventing a name etc.), the residents will undoubtedly feel proud. This promotes both the community feeling of belonging and the chance that they will later help with the playground's maintenance.

4.1 Physical spaces

Third places

With physical spaces, we mean all places in the neighbourhood that offer members the opportunity to interact with each other (such as a footpath), but even more so the **places that stimulate interaction**. Think of a local café, community centre or park.

Ray Oldenburg talks about third places.²² Where your home serves as first place and your work environment as second place, third places are:

- **accessible** to all
- aimed at **informal** conversations in a comfortable setting
- **familiar**, perhaps because there are often familiar faces
- a non-compulsory stop – visitors are there **because they want to be**.

Third places are **important for the social life of the neighbourhood**. They offer residents the opportunity to discuss community issues, exchange opinions, learn from each other etc., which can lead to relationships and actions.

Parochial room

Over time, neighbours can **parochialise** these places.²³ The parochial space is a layer between the private and public space.

Within the parochial space, people behave slightly differently towards each other. These exchanges do not have the intimate character of a friendly relationship, but neither do they have the detachment that exists between strangers. The parochial space invites **friendly recognition, light-hearted conversation and other expressions of neighbourliness**.

..... In a city centre neighbourhood, there are some busy shopping streets. Passers-by avoid each other's gaze. Only a stone's throw away, you find a small park. Residents see this as a place for the community. Passers-by almost always greet each other here, and they often stop to chat.

22 R. Oldenburg, *The great good place: cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community* (Marlowe, New York, 1999).

23 M. Kusenbach, *Patterns of Neighboring: Practicing community in the parochial realm*. *Symbolic Interaction*. 29, 279-306 (2006); L. H. Lofland, *The public realm: exploring the city's quintessential social territory* (Aldine de Gruyter, Hawthorne, N.Y., 1998), *Communication and social order*.



Subjective experience

Whether a space is public or parochial, **depends on the viewer**. A customer of a local café who does not live in the neighbourhood will see the café as a public space and will behave neutrally. A local resident might be more inclined to approach other customers and strike up a conversation.

The meaning that a space carries also varies **among residents**. The physical neighbourhood can be divided into concentric circles around someone's home.²⁴ The closer a place is, the more meaning it carries. For example, just by looking out the window, a person could learn a lot about their immediate neighbours.

A community bench can be worth a lot to someone who lives right around the corner, but not so much to a resident from the other side of town. **Strategic placement of such meeting places** can therefore be of great value.

Finally, the **history and associations** attached to a place are important.²⁵ A park where many pleasant neighbourhood activities have taken place in the past will be well loved and cherished. One that is associated with frequent nuisance will gain a bad reputation. For this reason, the usage and maintenance of a place are of great importance.

24 M. Kusenbach, A hierarchy of urban communities: observations on the nested character of place. *City & Community*. 7, 225-249 (2008).

25 T. Mannarini, A. Rochira, C. Talò, How identification processes and inter-community relationships affect sense of community. *Journal of Community Psychology*. 40, 951-967 (2012); Y.-F. Tuan, *Space and place: the perspective of experience* (Arnold, London, 1977).





4.2 Virtual spaces

The meaning of virtual space

Every space that allows exchanges between residents provides access to social capital to a certain extent. Besides physical meeting places, it could also be a noticeboard or a **digital neighbourhood network** such as Hoplr.

Virtual spaces provide **insight into the identity, resources, and challenges of the neighbourhood**. Like physical spaces, they allow residents to ask and answer questions, exchange information and form collaborations.²⁶

Persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability

Virtual exchanges are usually less suitable for forging strong ties. In the context of community building, on the other hand, they do have some **valuable features**.

Online exchanges (such as neighbourhood messages on Hoplr) are registered and saved, allowing them to be **accessed and shared by other neighbours, now and in the future**.

In other words, the exchanges that take place online have a great potential to make an impact on **residents who were not directly involved in the initial interaction**.

²⁶ J. De Meulenaere, C. Courtois, K. Ponnet, in Routledge companion to local news and journalism, A. Gulyas, D. Baines, Eds. (Routledge, Oxford, UK, 2020), pp. 398-407; C. López, R. Farzan, in Proceedings of the 7th international conference on communities and technologies (ACM, New York, NY, 2015), C&T '15, pp. 59-67.

This, in turn, has an **exponential effect** on:


- the development of **neighbourhood identity**²⁷
- the likelihood of members crossing paths with **relevant resources** (e.g., an invitation to a community activity, information, help, etc.)
- **observational learning** (gradually learning the norms of the neighbourhood, and finding it easier to ask for help).

Moreover, some local residents might find neighbourhood contact within the virtual space **more accessible** than the physical space.

27 De Meulenaere, J. D., Baccarne, B., Courtois, C., & Ponnet, K. (2020). Neighborhood hotspot and community awareness: the double role of social network sites in local communities. *Communications*, 1(ahead-of-print), <https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2019-0135>.



« Involving local residents in the development of physical spaces is beneficial for the end result, the involvement in the project and the social cohesion in the neighbourhood. »

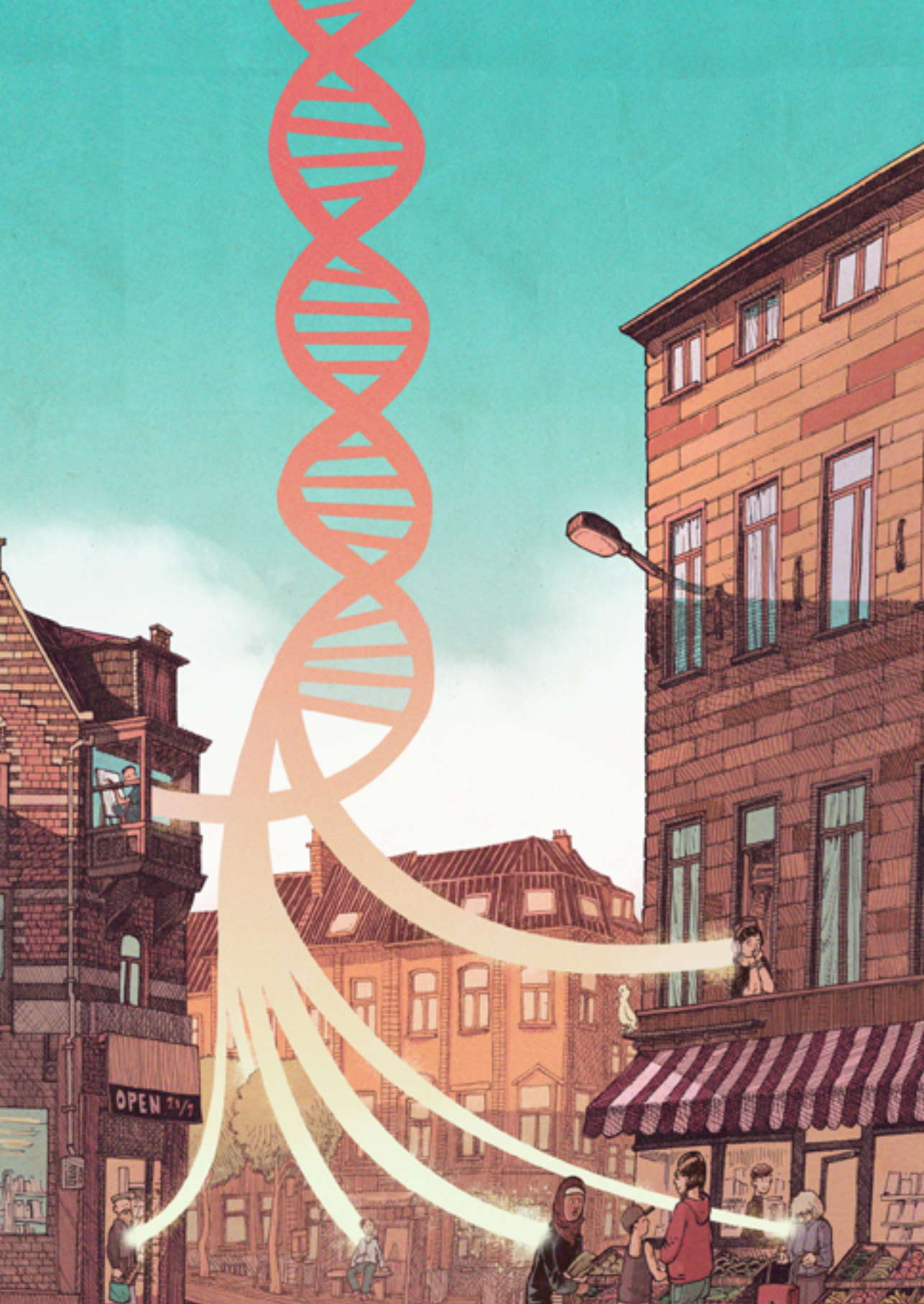


« Virtual spaces provide insight into identity, resources and challenges of the neighbourhood. Just as in a physical space, residents can collaborate and exchange information. »



Neighbourhood dynamics

5.



Neighbourhood dynamics

In chapter two of this white paper, we proposed a **formula**, which we have elaborated on in the previous chapters. We used this formula as a guideline to talk about the social capital of a neighbourhood.



Of course, social capital is not so black and white. Numerous factors impact people's desire and ability to connect with the community. **Many of these factors are beyond our control.** We call them preconditions. We will discuss these further on.

Moreover, **social cohesion and spaces in a neighbourhood are anything but separate.** We'll call them the 'yin and yang of the neighbourhood'.

We'll conclude that the dynamics of a neighbourhood are innumerable, which is good news – offering **ingredients that potentially have an exponential effect on access to the neighbourhood's resources.** This brings countless opportunities to increase the social capital of the local community.

5.1 The influence of spaces on social cohesion

The spaces of a neighbourhood **shape its social cohesion**.

Some examples:

- + In a clean neighbourhood, where vandalism or litter is rare, the **feeling of trust** and belonging may be greater.
- + Neighbourhood art, statues or other recognisable symbols are part of the image of the neighbourhood and help to form a shared **identity**.
- + The presence of local shops and trade facilities makes it easier to forge **neighbourly relations**.
- + A virtual space where neighbours can discuss community-related topics makes it easier to see what **values** neighbours hold dear.

5.2 The influence of social cohesion on spaces

The opposite is equally true. Social cohesion will **be reflected in the spaces** of a neighbourhood.

Some examples:

- + A neighbourhood with a strong sense of community will gladly support the **local economy**.
- + In a neighbourhood where residents trust one another, **citizen initiatives** are more likely to pop up.
- + A local community that can vocalise its shared appreciation for a clean neighbourhood, is more likely to help **take care of its physical spaces**.
- + In a neighbourhood with a strong sense of reciprocity, the use and success of a **digital neighbourhood network** will be greater.

5.3 Preconditions

The communication environment of the neighbourhood includes the intangible factors, or **preconditions**, to which the spaces, relationships, and exchanges within the neighbourhood are subjected. This environment can be favourable or unfavourable, and influences different groups in different ways.

We distinguish **six types of preconditions** that determine the communication environment:²⁸

Sociocultural preconditions

Is there inequality in the neighbourhood? What is the narrative around certain groups? Are residents by nature rather individualistic or community-oriented?

Psychological preconditions

Do residents feel safe in the neighbourhood? Are residents naturally trusting or guarded? Do residents tend to attach a lot of importance to their hometown and local community?

Economic preconditions

Can residents meet their basic needs? Do they have personal means to get in touch with community leaders and groups? Do they have the time to concern themselves with the neighbourhood?

Technological preconditions

Are people digitally excluded or digitally savvy? Is there reliable internet in the neighbourhood?

Physical preconditions

Where is the neighbourhood located? Is it rural or urban? Is the neighbourhood intersected by a busy road? Is the neighbourhood accessible to disabled people and those using mobility aids?

Supralocal preconditions

What role does the area play for non-residents? Is there a lot of tourism? Are there any facilities, such as a swimming pool or train station that attract people to the neighbourhood?

28 S. J. Ball-Rokeach, Y.-C. Kim, S. Matei, Storytelling neighborhood paths to belonging in diverse urban environments. *Communication Research*. 28, 392-428 (2001).

The role of a local government

The communication environment and its preconditions are fairly **consistent** within a neighbourhood. Therefore, it is difficult to make an immediate impact as a government or organisation.

However, it is important **to be aware of** these preconditions and to take them into account, for example, in the development of initiatives.

It is valuable to include these **preconditions in a neighbourhood analysis**. It is then possible to evaluate whether certain actions relating to the communication environment are possible and appropriate.

« In a neighbourhood where residents trust one another, citizen initiatives are more likely to pop up. And these initiatives often have the ability to bring neighbours closer together. »



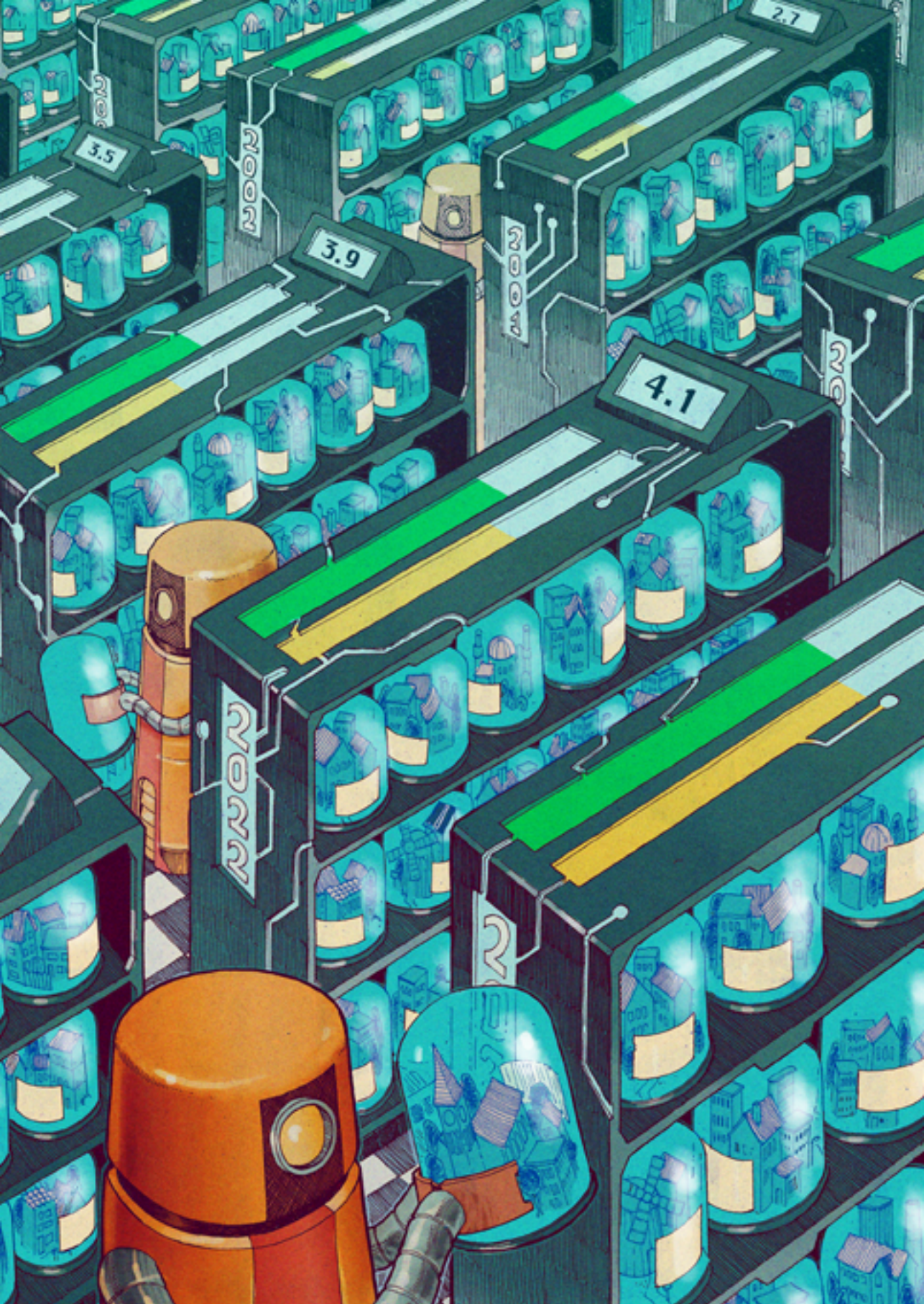


« The presence of local shops and trade facilities makes it easier to forge neighbourly relations. A neighbourhood with a strong sense of community will gladly support the local economy. »



Conclusion

6.



Conclusion

The neighbourhood holds an enormous value for all residents, which can be summarised as **social capital**. This value extends to the whole of society, within themes such as safety, mobility and care bringing to life phrases like ‘think global, act local’.

However, this social capital does not seem to be equally present in every local community. Governments are becoming aware of the potential of the local level and are asking themselves **how they can stimulate engagement in the neighbourhood**. In this white paper, we put forward a formula.



It is not easy for a local government to make an impact on the potential, the resources of a neighbourhood. However, we believe that **all the tools needed to tackle a challenge are already present in every neighbourhood**.

A local government or organisation can make a significant impact on the access to the community and its resources. This is what we refer to as **community building**. It's all about stimulating the extent to which residents can and want to connect to the neighbourhood network.

We linked the desire to engage in the community with social cohesion. Social cohesion is made up of a whole range of **social dimensions that a local government or organisation can stimulate to varying degrees**.

We linked the ability to tap into the neighbourhood's resources to the spaces where neighbours can interact. Government should focus on **places and channels that encourage encounters and exchanges**.

The role of local government is to act **as a facilitator** in a well thought out and inspired way, and, therefore, to invest in community building.

This is done, firstly by mapping **the neighbourhood's challenges and opportunities, and then creating neighbourhood projects and spaces** that enable and entice residents to connect to the neighbourhood network.

Hoplr wants to do its bit as a digital neighbourhood network and knowledge centre for communities. We are currently working on the **Neighbourhood Score**, which uses an automatic neighbourhood scan to reveal various dimensions of a neighbourhood year after year, based on the formula we have discussed in this paper. This score will serve as guidance to develop and evaluate any neighbourhood interventions and give a strong sense of direction.

The Neighbourhood Score will serve as a layer on top of our **existing digital neighbourhood networks**, where hundreds of thousands of neighbours are already exchanging information, help and items.

In addition, we are in the process of launching our **Neighbourhood Concierge**, which combines the familiarity of a friendly face, with the efficiency of a digital dashboard that matches supply and demand.

Bonus: Getting started with local community building

7.

Bonus: Getting started with local community building

Investing in the social capital of a neighbourhood ideally runs in two phases: **measuring (neighbourhood analysis)** and **stimulating (neighbourhood project)**.

- First, it pays to investigate the peculiarities of a neighbourhood, by **listening to its residents**. This way, you'll learn which interventions are expected to have the greatest potential impact.
- Then comes the time for action. Based on the challenges you'll have identified, you aim to develop one or more projects that will make the greatest **impact on the local community**.

7.1 Neighbourhood analysis

The challenges and opportunities of a neighbourhood are mapped by means of a neighbourhood analysis. We base this analysis on three components:

- the resources of the neighbourhood (potential)
- some social dimensions within the neighbourhood (access)
- neighbourhood spaces (access)

You may have a pretty good sense of how a neighbourhood is doing already. But you'll want to avoid **drawing conclusions based on gut feelings** alone. At least because you most likely do not identify with some socio-demographic groups in the neighbourhood.

Therefore, we look for both quantitative and qualitative data, at least partly **with the local residents**. Next, we briefly discuss the four most important methods of collecting data.

7.1.1 Methods

Consultation of available existing data

The county councils probably have a lot of **useful information** to hand.

For example:

- **socio-demographic** data
- data on **local trade, local organisations**
- **results** from previous studies
- **other** available information such as a neighbourhood map, unemployment figures, number of community initiatives, number of visitors of neighbourhood events.

Survey

A **lot of anonymous quantitative data can be** collected relatively easily by means of an online, paper and/or telephone questionnaire.

The biggest challenge in creating a survey is **to choose your questions wisely**. The questions must gather the necessary information and be accessible and digestible.

Interviews

Interviews will likely give you limited data on a few topics, but on the other hand, they allow you to collect **in-depth, qualitative data**. Therefore, it is a good way to gather subjective and anecdotal information that can't be expressed in numbers.

It is advisable to do your interviews with some key figures in the community. These are people who **know a lot about the neighbourhood, or who can represent a certain group within the area**.

Focus group discussion

In a group discussion, local residents are invited to **enter into dialogue together**. This can take the form of a workshop, focus group, neighbourhood panel, neighbourhood walk, etc.

Neighbours share ideas and are inspired by each other during these events. That is the strength of a group discussion. There is ample room for talking through challenges and solutions, which are nuanced by different voices from the community.

Combination

Each of the above methods brings specific advantages and challenges. This is precisely why it is so valuable to provide a **combination** of methods:

- A neighbourhood analysis usually starts with a **preliminary investigation**.
- Followed by a phase with a **survey and interviews**.
- Finally, the results are an excellent basis for a **group discussion**.

7.1.2 Developing a neighbourhood analysis

Following the chosen methods, you will need **questions**. Questions you include in your survey or interview, but also research questions on topics that you want to know about. Below we share some inspiration for both.

Composition of the neighbourhood

Official administrative data can already provide a lot of insight into the composition of a neighbourhood. Such a consultation is indispensable to carry out a sample and to optimise representativeness.

For this reason, too, it is essential to include some **socio-demographic questions** in other methods.

Example questions.

Research question: What is the distribution of the sample audience in terms of gender, age, seniority in the neighbourhood, migration background and spoken language?

- + What gender do you identify as?
- + What is your age?
- + What is your marital status?
- + How long have you lived in this neighbourhood?
- + Were you born in this country?
- + Were your parents born in this country?
- + What is your first language?
- + What language do you speak most at home?

Diversity

It is mainly during spoken **conversation** – either one on one or in a group – that local residents give meaning to the composition of the neighbourhood, for example, the diversity.

Example questions.

Research question: Do residents in the neighbourhood accept and respect diversity in the community?

- + "People of different origins live well together in the neighbourhood"
- + "People from different generations live well together in the neighbourhood"
- + "Newcomers and long-time residents live well together in the neighbourhood"
- + "Diversity enriches this neighbourhood"

Sense of community

Community feeling can **vary greatly within the same neighbourhood**. Research shows that young families, residents who spend a lot of time close to home, and people who have lived in the neighbourhood for a long time, experience a stronger sense of community. Young people and residents facing a language barrier tend to experience a lower sense of community.

Because community feeling is very subjective, it is important to collect a range of opinions, with **special attention to the particular groups**.

Example questions.

Research question: To what extent do local residents experience a strong sense of community?

- + "If someone takes the initiative to organise something in the neighbourhood, I still feel that 'we' are organising something, rather than 'they' are organising it"
- + "I feel connected to the neighbourhood"
- + "I hope to live in this neighbourhood for a long time"
- + "It is important to me that my neighbours think I am a good neighbour"
- + "If there is a problem in the neighbourhood, the residents are likely to deal with it effectively"

Trust

Research shows an inverse relationship between trust and **diversity**. Trust will not only be experienced differently by people, but also shown towards different communities in the neighbourhood.

We must avoid targeting any communities. In **other words**, we'll aim to keep the **questions as general as possible**.

Example questions.

Research question: To what extent do local residents have faith in their neighbourhood and trust their neighbours?

- + "I would feel unsafe walking alone in the neighbourhood after sunset
- + "If I were to lose my wallet in the area, there is a good chance that I would get it back with its original contents"
- + "I would be willing to lend the chairs that are in my dining room for a neighbourhood's party"
- + "I trust that the local government has my best interests at heart"
- + "If I were looking after my own or someone else's child and there was an emergency, I would trust my neighbours to look after the child"

Reciprocity

Knowing whether a network of generalised exchanges is present in a neighbourhood provides a valuable indication of the **ease with which residents connect to the social capital**.

Since reciprocity is partly related to a person's reputation in the neighbourhood, these questions are better asked **anonymously**.

Example questions.

Research question: To what extent do neighbours help each other without expecting anything in return?

- + "If a neighbour helped me with computer problems, I would probably pay them"
- + "Most residents of this area help each other without having to be asked"
- + "If I were to lend a drill to a neighbour, I would expect something in return"

- + "When I see litter on the street in our neighbourhood, I put it in the bin, even if it is not mine"
- + Have you helped a neighbour for free in the past year?

Shared values

You may want to find out whether local residents today **feel that they share values** with their neighbours. The best way to ask this is through an anonymous survey.

It can also be useful to find out **which exact norms and values community members might share**. An anonymous survey can list a few and residents can then indicate their importance.

A **group discussion** might be interesting to create such a shortlist.

Example questions.

Research question: What values do residents share?

- + To what extent do you think it is important that local residents help each other spontaneously?
- + To what extent do you think it is important that local residents do not gossip about each other?
- + To what extent do you think it is important to others in the community that the area is quiet after 10pm?
- + To what extent do you think it is important for others in the neighbourhood to maintain their front garden and driveway?

Network

We get a better picture of the networks in a community by enquiring about them in **an anonymous survey, but also by entering into dialogue** with the most important groups and organisations in the neighbourhood.

Example questions.

Research question: How well are local residents, groups and organisations networked in the neighbourhood?

- + How many of your neighbours can you turn to for a chat?
- + How many of your neighbours can you turn to for help?
- + How many of the neighbours you can turn to for conversation or help would you describe as 'from another generation'?
- + How many of the neighbours you can turn to for conversation or help would you describe as 'from another culture or nationality'?
- + How many organisations or businesses in the neighbourhood have you called upon in the past?

Spaces

The **need for more meeting places** in the neighbourhood and the way they are used, can easily be questioned through an anonymous survey.

Which places already fulfil a meeting function today may be too broad a question and require some nuance. We think it's better discussed within interviews or through a focus group.

Example questions.

Research question: Which spaces in the neighbourhood have the potential to stimulate contact between residents?

- + Do you think there are enough meeting places in the neighbourhood?
- + Do you think the public spaces in your neighbourhood are well maintained?
- + Where do you most often come into contact with local residents today?
- + If you needed help, how would you get in touch with your neighbours?

- + Which places in the neighbourhood encourage residents to chat and interact?
- + Which places have an important meaning to you in your neighbourhood?

Resources

A survey can be used to map **the resources that local residents are prepared to share with their neighbours.**

What organisations and groups are present and **how they can help the neighbourhood** are topics better mapped out by entering into a dialogue.

Example questions.

Research question: What resources are present in the neighbourhood today that can be used for community building or to address other challenges in the area?

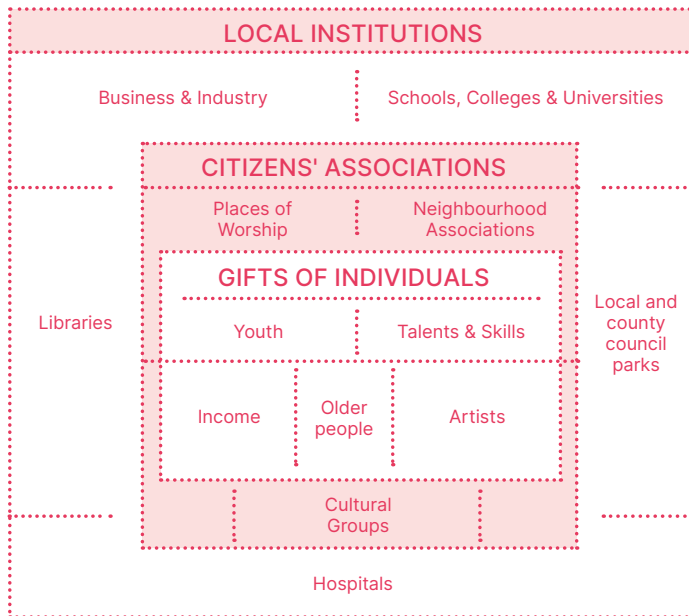
- + What kind of help could you offer?
- + Do you have any talents that could be useful for the community?
- + How much time could you spare to help a neighbour or the community?
- + Do you have a lot of knowledge about a topic that could benefit the neighbourhood?

7.1.3 Visualising input

To map the input of residents in a meaningful way, it is best to use a suitable **frame of reference**. Below, we share two methods. These can be completed or evaluated in cooperation with residents.

Neighbourhood Capacity Mapping

The diagram below is often used in Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), an approach to sustainable community-driven development. It tries to **visually represent all local institutions, voluntary organisations and groups**. A walk through the neighbourhood is very suitable for this purpose.



Then, for each party or group, we fill in which **valuable resources (such as spaces, knowledge and helping hands) they can offer** to move the neighbourhood forward. This way, it becomes visually clear which partnerships have the potential to tackle neighbourhood challenges.

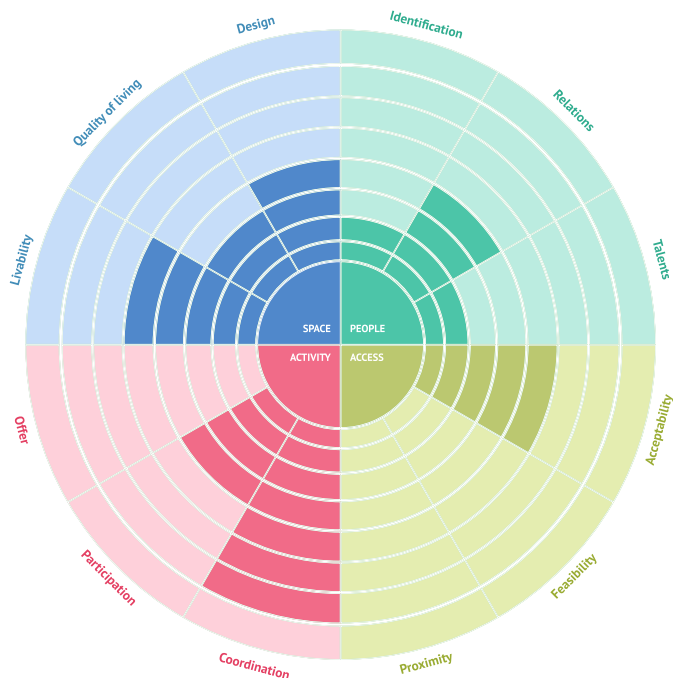
Do not shy away from including **groups of people or institutions around which tensions may exist**. Everyone has something to offer the neighbourhood. Fruitful cooperation also gives such parties the opportunity to present themselves more positively.

Neighbourhood lens

The degree to which residents appreciate their neighbourhood can be reflected in the neighbourhood lens. The neighbourhood lens consists of four domains, namely **spaces**, **people**, **access** and **activities**. Each of these comprises another three subdomains.

You can fill in the neighbourhood lens yourself based on data from a survey and/or interviews, and **then have the scores evaluated within a group discussion**. Alternatively, you can fill in the puzzle together with those present at a workshop.

The neighbourhood lens is an excellent **starting point for a dialogue** about the neighbourhood. It makes it easier to see in which main and subdomains there is the most need for improvement.



7.2 Neighbourhood projects

Next, we will translate the challenges and opportunities of a neighbourhood into one or more community projects. We want to increase access to social capital by:

- strengthening social cohesion in the neighbourhood
- optimising the spaces of the neighbourhood.

As much as possible, we want to **enable the residents** to deal with the challenges. This is in line with Asset Based Community Development.

What does a neighbourhood project look like? That depends on a number of things:

- What challenges did the neighbourhood analysis reveal?
- What do the authorities or local residents want to work on as a priority?
- What is needed to improve the situation?
- What can local residents do?
- Which institutions, organisations and groups want to get involved in the project?
- What support, if any, do local residents need from the authorities?

A survey and interviews revealed, among other things, that the neighbourhood **does not** experience a **strong sense of community**. Nobody really seems to care much about neighbourhood life. We want to work on that.

In order to get neighbours to **meet each other more frequently, and be proud of their neighbourhood**, we looked for shared interests and desires during a workshop. A workshop showed that there was support in all groups for setting up community gardens.

We also looked at the available **resources**. Many local residents have green fingers, even more are eager to learn and spend time on maintenance, and some organisations in the neighbourhood can share their expertise on growing fruit and vegetables. We also decided to plant a 'neighbourhood sign' centrally in the community garden. It will be beautifully designed, with a brand-new logo, developed by some creative minds from the area. The board will feature five important core values of the neighbourhood, which we will formulate

together. In addition, the sign will have room to post community messages.

The **local council** will provide the necessary space, look for inspiration from other boroughs where community gardens have been successful, and provide financial support.

7.2.1 Inventory

To conclude, we share below a far from complete **inventory of possible neighbourhood projects or interventions**, small or large, with varying degrees of involvement from the local government.

Digital neighbourhood network

Online network where neighbours are in contact with each other to exchange help requests and resources.

Example: Hoplr, WhatsApp, Facebook group...

Events

Different parties from the neighbourhood come together in an organised setting.

Example: new year's drinks, welcome event for new residents, pop-up cinema, car boot sale, local open business day...

Grants

The local government offers financial compensation for actions that benefit the social fabric of the neighbourhood.

Example: neighbourhood budget, subsidy for a neighbourhood party, reimbursement for street decorations...

Identity of the neighbourhood

Determining together what the neighbourhood stands for and communicating this in an accessible way.

Example: neighbourhood logo, slogan, manifesto, artwork...

Macro-communication

Neighbourhood communication from the local council or other relevant institutions.

Example: communication about ongoing roadworks or maintenance which is likely to cause inconvenience or noise disturbance, neighbourhood news, raising awareness of area-related topics, announcing upcoming activities, neighbourhood participation, dialogue...

Neighbourhood initiatives

Neighbourhood residents devise and implement a project, with or without limited support from the local council.

Example: neighbourhood litter pick, community allotments, neighbourhood library, dance lessons for seniors, neighbourhood barbecue...

Network of key figures and intermediaries

Database with contact details of people through which you can reach diverse or minority groups (mainly vulnerable or otherwise hard to reach).

Example: care providers, community workers, police community support officers, associations, local traders, religious communities...

Participation project

The government offers residents a say in the form of feedback, advice, opinions, ideas or action.

Example: feedback on playground redesign plans, citizen budget, neighbourhood agenda, anti-litter and fly-tipping campaigns, collecting ideas on community building....

Physical space

The local authority carries out an intervention in the space of the neighbourhood or allows others to do so.

Example: a new park, playground redesign, neighbourhood benches, work of art, noticeboard, school opening up the playground to the neighbourhood...

Social project

The local authority invites residents to join them in a project aimed at inclusion within or outside the neighbourhood.

Example: buddy work, volunteer work, fundraising, solidarity actions...

Thanks to ...

The authors

The diehard advocates of local communities who brought this white paper to life.

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And of course, the entire Hoplr team that shapes and grows our vision on a daily basis.

Our illustrator

Miel Vandepitte

We say it, he shows it.

Our proofreaders

Each and every one of them has made valuable contributions to breathe life into this white paper. Talk about social capital!

Luc Galoppin, Cato Waeterloos, Bastiaan Baccarne, Jeroen Vandeveld

Our clients

Over 120 local governments in the Benelux that surprise and inspire us again and again to build more and better neighbourhood networks.

Our users

More than 600,000 users who make our job the greatest in the world: bringing neighbours together.

You!

Thank you for reading this white paper, right down to the acknowledgements! Do you have any comments, questions or if you're curious about what we do, please contact us at: <https://services.hoplr.com/nl/contact>.

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Your neighbourhood houses immense potential! Something that everyone can enjoy!

In theory.

However, we can feel that one neighbourhood has more to offer than another. Is this true? Is it possible to calculate the social capital of a specific community? And perhaps even more interesting: does the formula we can set up offer maximum social capital?

This white paper 'Neighbourhood of the Future' was conceived and written by the Hoplr knowledge centre. We bring together insights from academic literature into a simple formula, designed to map, and even maximise, the social capital of a neighbourhood.

Why? The dynamics of a local community are complex, but we can't let fear of imperfection paralyse us. Our communities need action to create caring neighbourhoods where people can have positive encounters... We offer lots of great examples and ideas for how to bring about a thriving local area.

This paper outlines a new way of looking at the neighbourhood, a way that is rooted in Asset-Based Community Development, a sustainable community-driven approach to development. We aim to encourage you to work towards creating a more caring, safe and supportive neighbourhood. We've made it quick and easy to read, and we hope you find it beautifully designed and supplemented with compelling illustrations.

"This publication provides a valuable and grounded basis for better understanding the place of technology in neighbourhood-based community development."

Dr Bas Baccarne, Senior Researcher, imec-mict-UGent

"I was very impressed with the white paper because it presents complex issues and concepts in a manageable way to the reader. It presented a very convincing vision of how we, as citizens, researchers and governments, can understand and study social capital at the neighbourhood level, but also how we can use it constructively."

Dr Cato Waeterloos, Senior Researcher, imec-mict-UGent

Published and
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