7.   Community

RELATIONSHIPS AND RECIPROCITY

Cities have played a particular role in shaping understandings of community. The emergence of 'community' as a key problematic in social thought and object of governance is inseparable from processes of industrialisation and the growth of urban settlements. The search for 'community' was influenced by a growing dichotomy in the nineteenth century between town and country and a rejection of individual pathology as a cause of social disorganisation.[1] Rather, urban sociology, particularly through the influence of the Chicago School, sought to identify social and environmental determinants of human behaviour, bringing 'community' into view as a largely spatialised object of academic inquiry, social reform and policy design.

Community invokes social connectedness and the relationships of reciprocity that flow from belonging and commitment. Ideas have careers, but the rise to prominence in recent decades of 'community' in both social theory and political programs has few parallels. Yet, as the sociologist Gerard Delanty argues, community is a concept with a long history of loss and recovery.[2] Delanty summarises a vast literature by identifying four broad approaches to the concept, located within social, cultural, political and technological domains.

The first position associates communities with urban locations, often perceived in terms of disadvantage and deficit, requiring government intervention and civic action to achieve social uplift. The second position is culturally oriented, linking community with identity and belonging. The third sees community through the lens of political consciousness and collective action, and the fourth relates to mobility and cosmopolitanism, ascribing community with both diasporic and 'virtual' characteristics. In this chapter, we encounter community in each form.

Unlike other terms of social organisation (e.g. state, nation, society), community as a keyword rarely seems to be used unfavourably. For Brian Head, though, the concept is 'notoriously vague and value-laden', its normative underpinnings capable of sanctioning exclusion and oppression as well as inclusion.[3] The long-standing critique of community as a 'spray-on solution' for complex policy problems[4] is strengthened as successive government pro-

grams fall back on community bonds, networks and resources to compensate for state disinvestment.

The UK Cameron government's austerity program, initiated in 2011 in response to the global financial crisis, is a stark illustration. Under cover of legislation requiring local government authorities to balance budgets, the central government mandated that some local community services, notably public libraries, convert to volunteer operation or close.[5] As Eric Klinenberg (who we meet in this chapter) demonstrates, local community facilities such as public libraries contribute significantly to social connectedness and resilience; alternatively, their closure or absence is a marker of vulnerability.[6]

Sitting alongside widespread endorsement of the social value of community, though, has been a persistent critique of community organising, from the supposed impact of nineteenth-century cooperatives on market trading, through conservative alarm at Saul Alinsky's radical community politics in the mid-twentieth century, the repression of environmental groups, to criticism of community-organised volunteer action in emergency situations.[7] This critique has sometimes prevailed to devalue the possibility of community cooperation or suppress it entirely though brute force. Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons'[8] is the supreme example of the first tendency – a metaphor wildly extended beyond its fatalistic view of common-pool resources to justify privatisation of almost any shared resource.

Rebecca Solnit's work on disasters documents the persistent and reflexive characterisation of local communities as mobs, sometimes with lethal consequences as armed forces quash residents' attempts at self-help.[9] Contributors to this chapter echo this theme: 'hot' refers to contested climate politics and community mobilisation to create change. The chapter brings together a sociologist, urban planner and activist, designer and geographer. Eric Klinenberg focuses on the support of infrastructure such as public libraries that serve local communities as a key strategy for cities to respond to climate change extremes. Crystal Legacy's work with communities as part of social movements and public transport activism is directed towards understanding and mobilising the social, political and material resources of communities in diverse ways. Finally, Abby Mellick Lopes and Stephen Healy activate the concept of commons, as both material and social resources, in their work on urban heat in city contexts.

HEATWAVE

Eric Klinenberg is a sociologist interested in the social challenges of global warming, including the politics of heat, and Director of the Institute for Public Knowledge at New York University.[10] In 2002, he published *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*,[11] an examination of the social factors

that make extreme weather so much more deadly than it might otherwise be. Since then, he has continued researching the sociology of heat and health on a warming planet, leading younger scholars in a collective project that develops stronger social science approaches to the study of climate change. He has become a practitioner of planning and design to address wetter, hotter urban futures.

For several years Eric served as the Research Director for Rebuild by Design,[12] a project from the Obama administration that was set up to generate innovative infrastructure projects for the region of the USA affected by Hurricane Sandy, and for twenty-first-century cities more generally. The discursive construction of community holds less interest for Eric than the conditions under which social solidarity and support is built. Community, he argues, is 'a soft fuzzy, woolly word'.

> [Community] means different things to different people and generally invokes more nostalgia and romance than genuine analysis. I am interested in the nature of social ties, what makes them weak and how they become strong, as well as in how local organisations can foster mutual support. I'm concerned about the risk of isolation, as well as the possibilities for developing new forms of collective action. We're not going to solve global warming or cool hot cities through individual actions. We need coordination, and in that sense community matters.

Eric points to the rising temperatures and elevated risk of catastrophic heatwaves; but also refers to the heated and contested politics over how we will remake social life on a melting planet.

> My work focuses on a variety of emerging conditions that make cities especially vulnerable to heat crises. First, cities are heat islands, because pavement and metals attract the sun's warmth and pollution traps it. That means urban areas are hotter than the suburbs, particularly at night, depriving urban dwellers of natural cooling. How can we redesign cities to keep them cool?
>
> Second, cities have a growing number of older people living alone, some of whom are socially isolated. Isolation is a major risk for suffering heat-related illness or death because people often don't realise that they are overheating, and social support is a key to survival. How can we build stronger connections between people who live in cities, nurture systems of mutual support in places where residents are most at risk, and ensure that states do more to ward off disasters?
>
> Third, and perhaps most urgently, how can cities help accelerate the process of mitigation and decarbonisation, in the context of national and international inertia?

Eric's research is designed to make the conversation about hot cities a community-based and -grounded agenda that is more expansive and sociological.

> The study of global warming cannot be dominated by climate scientists because hot weather gets dangerous through its interaction with social conditions, from neighbourhood poverty to social isolation, poor communication, and political neglect. I've spent years fighting to get social scientists a seat at the table in policy debates about how to handle heat, and I imagine I will be at it for many years to come.

Notwithstanding the powerful analysis and advocacy of Eric and other social scientists on behalf of community connectedness and mobilisation, he sees the breakdown of urban infrastructure as a catalyst for radical change.

> Years ago, the politics of heat were made complicated by the fact that most powerful and affluent people have easy access to air conditioning. They could press a button and the problem would disappear. Now, few people feel so secure in their situation.
>   The heat is overwhelming our infrastructure, and power grids in wealthy cities are at risk of breaking down. When that happens, there's obviously no air conditioning. There are also no elevators or water pressure in high-rise buildings. There might not be electricity at the hospital, either. The heat is making everyone uncomfortable and insecure. Unfortunately, that's probably necessary if we're going to change the planet.
>   The weather won't transform these things; only people can.

Eric's widely read 2018 book *Palaces for the People*[13] takes its title from a phrase used by the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie to describe public libraries, institutions his trust invested in significantly. The terms of Carnegie's investment funded library buildings provided that local communities organised and sustained the service. Eric sees a similar integration of physical and social infrastructure as a key strategy for cities to respond to climate change extremes and discusses some instructive examples in the book.

Increasingly, he argues, governments and disaster planners are recognising the importance of social infrastructure and social networks as part of climate security, and he notes a trend towards investment in multipurpose infrastructure that serves both classic civil engineering as well as social purposes. However, he cites a public health official's observation from overseeing relief work in New York City after Hurricane Sandy in 2012, which reflects the significance of social networks, particularly in an emergency.

> What's happening on the ground is not under an incident command system, he told me. It's the fragile, agile networks that make a difference in situations like these. It's the horizontal relationships like the ones we're building that create security on the ground, not the hierarchical institutions. We're here to unify the effort.[14]

A POLITICS OF SOLIDARITY

Crystal Legacy is an urban planning academic and public transport activist at the University of Melbourne who has published widely on infrastructure politics, urban conflict, and citizen participation.[15] Engaging in community-based participatory action research on transport planning positions her as a political actor, drawing her into conflict around transport projects with high political profiles and, in Crystal's view, profoundly negative impacts on communities and the environment. A key concern is that listening to communities in urban infrastructure planning may be thwarted by a consultation industry that mediates between development authorities and communities. Her work focuses on urban politics and reframing the role of citizens in transport planning.

> The critical literature on participation warns that a focus on 'consensus' evades the political in planning, preventing citizens from confronting and challenging discourse and prevailing orthodoxy about the way the urban ought to be constituted. These critiques raise important questions about the efficacy of participatory planning and its political formation. The extent to which citizens' participation can ever challenge dominant trajectories has reached a point of conceptual 'crisis'.[16]

Crystal sees infrastructure as a political pressure point, where community mobilisation confronts sectoral interests and path-dependent planning. Her theoretical interests in communicative planning and deliberative democracy inform her position as a researcher-advocate. Contemporary models of critical urban governance and transportation planning also extend to the area of autonomous vehicles where she is exploring with a team the relationships between transport innovation, urban governance, and strategic planning.

> The utopian imaginary of reduced automobile ownership and a new shared economic future sits in tension with suggestions that car dependency, urban sprawl and transport inaccessibility will be exacerbated. The issues are situated in a complex governance landscape involving an influential private sector who are increasingly setting the agenda.[17]

The path for Crystal's evolution as a critical activist was laid by her students, particularly in their opposition to a planned major inner urban road development in Melbourne that would destroy significant areas of parkland, force residents out of their homes, and buttress car-dependency.

> I've always been politically active but in terms of research, I had never really entered that space. I was just focused on research and publishing. A group of graduate students from two planning schools wanted to protest against this project by using their planning expertise. They wanted to talk about alternatives to that project. They organised community events. There was a protest. There was a park festival in

the part of that park which was going to be lost if that project had been implemented. I was really inspired by their effort and work.

I started going to their events and they asked me to come and speak. I was just so angry about that project. That initially captured my interest in terms of moving towards a more critical space and also bringing those two worlds, activism and academia, together. There was a groundswell of opposition against this project, and it's one of the few instances here in Victoria [Australia], where a project of that size – after having the contract signed and ready to go – was actually cancelled.

If the episode demonstrated that change is possible where major infrastructure projects are involved, it also alerted Crystal to the systemic forces and infrastructure politics that can work to thwart and resist new collaborative models and ideas of urbanism.

Change is possible.

Looking for places of hope is really important, but ironically after the cancellation of that project we got investment in the biggest road program we've seen in a generation.

We saw the abandonment of one road, and we saw commitment to two very big ones. It was a very disappointing time because the politics around contesting large transport infrastructure has started to evolve beyond fighting a single project and taking on the system to the political economy of how we do infrastructure planning.

Calling out our dependency on mega infrastructure planning, including rail projects, and connecting that to climate change is really important, because big infrastructure is very carbon intensive, and it's also predicated on an assumption that we ought to continually move around the city. That movement is a right we must facilitate.

Crystal is sceptical of whose rights are advanced and prioritised in such projects, suggesting that investment in transport infrastructure rarely has much to do with people, and that powerful vested interests in freight movement, for example, exert significant influence over policy and planning decision-making and investment.

When I think of hot cities what I think about is the rising temperature in terms of political activism around issues of public policy and planning. I'm really interested in the idea of hot cities in terms of 'hot' issues. What are the conditions producing a rise of the political temperature? What moments are so pressing to make a group of citizens or constituents want to come forward and become political actors in a conversation about the future of the city?

I'm really interested in linking hot cities back to questions of citizenship and democracy, and participation in planning processes or city shaping processes. There was a 'hotness' about that project I described that was really galvanising. There were protests and strikes, people barricading access to government offices, sit-ins on

major streets to stop the traffic. There was this level of contestation that was creating what felt like a moment in which change was possible.

And where I feel things are today is that this heat has dissipated. In some ways it feels like a normalisation or just surrendering to the insurmountable challenge of trying to change the political economy of cities.

The promise of unfettered mobility, techno-optimistic discussion of electric vehicles and autonomous transport alarms Crystal, particularly the ways in which it is embedded within prevailing modes of neoliberal planning. She is wary that such innovations, while moving us past carbon-emitting transport technologies, serve to 'reproduce automobility, independent private vehicle ownership and occupancy, in a city that really can't take any more cars'.

When we hear 'autonomous' vehicles, many people quickly associate that with the car. We've had autonomous vehicles for a long time. There are autonomously run public transport systems around the world, but automation is not anything we think about in the context of public transport. The reason why we're so excited about autonomous vehicles is because that means you and I can own a vehicle that we don't actually have to drive. The promise of the autonomous vehicle is also problematic, because it suggests that you can live further away from where you need to travel to because you don't need to give your attention to the activity of driving.

The concern is that rather than move away from building cities whereby people are living a little closer to where they work, or trying to build high-quality amenity and public transport options, you abandon that because the autonomous vehicle is a game changer in terms of productivity. So, the way we talk about transport systems in a city like Melbourne is that congestion is bad for productivity. We need to do something about that. Part of the problem, the productivity problem, goes away if you can sit in the car, and work on your laptop on your way to work.

The significance of urban infrastructure planning for just and sustainable cities and the necessity for community engagement in planning conversations, as well as momentum for academic activism, can quickly become overwhelmed by cascading climate and heat crises.

After the bushfire crisis, there was a galvanising, a coming together of transport academics and progressive practitioners and people who are working in the community saying we have to start reframing how we talk about transport and mobility in this city and make that connection to climate change, because there's too much at stake for us not to.

Then, of course, we had a pandemic [COVID-19] and that created another set of conditions and opportunities where we stepped into it thinking maybe this is the time where we can have those conversations about the importance of main streets, the importance of active transport and increasing pedestrianisation, so that we can live comfortably and well under pandemic conditions where we're not allowed to do a lot of movement.

Then all the energy that was there just dissipated. Somehow, we've moved on and now we've got the geopolitical crisis that we're facing, the pandemic still lingers,

and I still wonder how or where to locate politics in the transport mobility space in a way that can rise to this moment of extraordinary change and uncertainty. In a way that can capture the imagination of people who don't think about these things every day.

COMMUNITY AS COMMONS

Abby Mellick Lopes and Stephen Healy frame community action through the lens of the commons, drawing on design practices to enable agency and purpose in city-shaping, particularly in relation to urban heat and environmental comfort. Abby is the Director of Postgraduate Design Studies at the University of Technology Sydney.[18] Abby uses the term *transition design* to frame the focus and ethos of her work. Stephen is an Associate Professor in Geography and Urban Studies based at Western Sydney University's Institute for Culture and Society.[19] His research focuses on diverse economies, heterodox economic models and practices that challenge market individualism, labour practices and ownership models that constitute capitalist economies.

Abby and Stephen are involved with the Community Economies Research Network (CERN),[20] a transdisciplinary and multi-institutional group combining academic practice and activism to mobilise community-based research around social and environmental justice. The Cooling the Commons[21] project they co-lead seeks to rethink design processes and reimagine economies to activate principles and practices of commons or shared resources as a response to climate change challenges. Abby describes the project.

> Cooling the Commons was looking at Penrith [Western Sydney, Australia] as a kind of poster child of urban heat – 50-degree summer days on the horizon and so on. We were identifying the missing middle between the top-down view of geographic inequity – the places that have the least trees, or the lower socio-economic areas and that bottom-up view of vulnerable communities – and a different perspective which remakes the idea of community consultation in a far more grounded way eliciting creative contributions. Recognising the ways in which citizens see themselves as part of a social commons, even if the messaging they're constantly getting is not that at all.
>
> We spoke to vulnerable communities to understand the ways in which the built environment was shaping and constraining their capacity to live well during summer, capturing their stories and putting those stories together with analysis or observations, applying a discipline of noticing to those contexts to create a rich reading of their experiences.
>
> We identified a real need to defend commons because they were being rampantly destroyed through development. The residents that we spoke to had very different memories of what it was to live in that city with infrastructures that allowed them to move around comfortably, including shade and shelter, and linkages that allowed

them to move between home and services. All of that had been stripped out before their eyes.

One of the most resonant dimensions of that research is the creative capacity and vision and aspiration of people to really contribute to change.

Stephen's research on the future of local manufacturing in de-industrialising regions – while seemingly quite distinct – found strong resonances with Cooling the Commons.

We were particularly interested in surfacing concepts of 'just sustainability', forms of economic and environmental justice across a range of manufacturers, some of which were cooperatives, some were family enterprises, some were social enterprises, and some were conventional manufacturers. But what was interesting about people's lives is what they do on an everyday basis, and how it is possible to continue to manufacture in the Australian context.

In that process of listening and noticing we found real commitments to care, incredible investment in place, and real concerns about ecology. The culmination of the project was staging a collective conversation where mainstream manufacturers were put in dialogue with social enterprises who were doing responsible recycling.

There was a moment of recognition about what a common future would look like and what it would mean to support enterprises operating at that scale. The lesson there was that people have a lot to say about what kind of future they want, and a lot of knowledge they can draw on to get there.

What research can supply is the context for creative expression. I see that same impulse being mobilised around how we create common and shared responses to the challenge of urban heat. Climate change came up again and again as both a practical concern and as something they felt compelled to respond to.

While the commons is characteristically thought of in terms of physical resources, Abby and Stephen's work draws attention to sociality and the immaterial resources of communities. Stephen places this in the context of hot cities.

My frame of reference is that we're pretty much locked into some of the worst-case scenarios that the IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] has described. That world has already happened, and I think it becomes more critical to think about how people living with low incomes or people in oppressed communities or people living with disabilities or with young children are impacted by urban heat. There's definitely a matter of justice here, in the sense that the commons serve as a shared concern in a way that private responses do not.

The commons represent a set of resources outside the home where people can have a socially adaptive response to urban heat. Both extreme heat events like heatwaves, but also that chronic persistent heat that we experience regularly in Western Sydney.

The value of the commons is that it enrols more people into a kind of collective consideration of how we respond to the heat effectively. Once we begin thinking in that way then I think adaptation and mitigation get repositioned.

The idea of urban commons as a related and spatially contingent set of social, physical and institutional resources has a long, if contested history.[22] In the context of hot cities, Abby and Stephen suggest, holding fast to the concept offers flexibility to transcend private/public divides, and to revive under-recognised or under-utilised spaces. Abby continues,

> I'm thinking about the riverland spaces outside the home that are really powerful commons. For example, Lake Parramatta, which has been remediated after a 70-year hiatus due to pollution; it has been cleaned up and is now open for swimming again. There are other sites that a lot of people can't access. Our work will start to uncover key interventions that will bring alive and support that kind of access and collective responsibility in relation to those commons.
>
> One of the things that came up was the use of transgressive commons – places like McDonald's and the shopping mall as cooling refuges. Now local councils are thinking through the core refuge idea. I think there's more potential for that in relation to public buildings and even private houses in neighbourhoods and communities. Also, the idea of temporary commons [pop-ups] which can transform a space for a certain time. Again, they can invite new social practices and ways of inhabiting although these are very fragile because they can easily be stripped out and not allowed to flourish.
>
> We're keen to find evidence for how we can make arguments around changes to material infrastructures, to spaces and the resources that communities need to effectively live well as the climate changes.

In Stephen's words, to live well in a climate change future will require radical change. However, does the concept of transition design, which Abby uses to describe her practice, suggest incrementalism? Is there room for radical change? For Abby, radical change is typically associated with certain kinds of dramatic visible change, detached from a community footing.

> I think we need to recode the idea of radical. I think change can be really modest, even mundane and seemingly imperceptible. If we're thinking intergeneration-ally, if we're thinking about a community ethos and the ineffable shift to a more commons-based approach to the future, this is still radical, but it's going to look and feel very different to what we typically associate with the radical. I am all for the term and its political baggage in a sense and doing work to recode what it is that we expect from radical change. If we don't change, we will be changed – there's a radical need for intervention, both for survivability but also for a different kind of community.

REFLECTIONS: COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION

Community cannot be reduced to an idea: it is both real and ideal, an experience and an interpretation, and unavoidably normative.[23] However, community can also be seen as a dynamic process: constituted through practices, meanings, people, spaces and structures.[24] The researchers contributing to this

chapter take a similarly constructivist and relational stance, seeking to uncover and understand the knowledge, resources and social networks that can be mobilised at local levels to respond to immediate threats such as heatwaves, as well as resist structural forces facilitating unchecked urban growth, spatial inequity and climate vulnerability. This is critical given the scale of the urban heat problem.

> For years, climate scientists have warned us that a warming world is an extreme world, one in which humanity is buffeted by both brutalising excesses and stifling absences of the core elements that have kept fragile life in equilibrium for millennia. At the end of the summer with major cities submerged in water and others licked by flames, we are currently living through this extreme world, one in which natural extremes come head-to-head with social, racial and economic ones.[25]

There's agreement that approaching communities through a stakeholder logic – as a constituency to be engaged and consulted over infrastructure planning, local climate change responses or emergency responses – may be a strategy of containment, both politically and intellectually. Political decision-making and urban development timeframes may be unsympathetic, with infrastructure projects driven by investment logics and political timing, and increasingly reliant on consultants to mediate development authorities and communities. Such processes are unlikely to involve the 'deep listening' that is needed to understand the impact of climate change on communities and identify effective grassroots responses.

Change – how it is perceived, experienced, and sustained at the local community level – is a central concern in this chapter. Each of the contributors engages with local communities through participatory research practices and processes: co-investigation and partnerships, design interventions, political activism, and combinations of each. 'Listening' and 'noticing' recur in descriptions of their research and professional practice. Research as creative and critical participatory practice provides context for expression, creating, in Stephen Healy's words, a knowledge commons that enables the 'capacity and vision and aspiration of people to really contribute to a change'.

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