Does Place Matter? Sustainable Community Development in Three Canadian Communities

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ABSTRACT *The creation of a sense of place has emerged as a goal of many community development initiatives. However, little thought has been given to the role of physical spaces in the shaping of possible senses of place. This article examines three Canadian examples of community sustainable development initiatives to demonstrate that sense of place can be shaped and constrained by the geographical and environmental features of the physical space a community occupies. This finding suggests that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to community sustainable development is unlikely to be successful; a community's sustainable development ethic will be informed by geography. However, there is some evidence that a strong individual sense of place shaped by local space may act as a barrier to the acceptance of new people and ideas. Conversely, a strong sense of place can result in mobilization for sustainable development initiatives.*

Introduction

As sustainable community development initiatives continue to spread and evolve, 'place' has emerged as a central feature of sustainable communities and a desired outcome of sustainable development projects. This focus can be on the creation of place as championed within the 'smart growth' movement (Kunstler, 1993), or the focus can be upon preservation of an existing sense of place, such as the focus on the 'rhetoric of terroir' within the Slow Food movement (Honoré, 2004). Within almost every sustainable development discourse, the quest for place is idealized both as a lost past and a hoped-for future. This is not new; much has been written regarding the importance of place, and a sense of place (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977; Seamon, 1979), to the quality of life, to the liveability, and to the sustainability, of human communities (Roseland, 1997; Waterton, 2005; Hanna *et al.*, forthcoming). The importance of place is also now being recognized by Canadian policy makers (Government of Canada, 2006).

Place goes beyond the social and the abstract; there is also evidence that a sense of place, based on local distinctiveness, provides an economic and social advantage to a community (Mesch & Manor, 1998) and enhances the potential for sustainable decision-making (Uzzell *et al.*, 2002). Throughout the sustainable development

dialogue, place is framed in opposition to the placeless version of development described as a driver of our environmental problems. This placelessness is summed up well by Debord's description of the suburban landscape as conforming to the motto 'on this spot nothing will ever happen and nothing ever has' (1983, p. 177). Orr (2007) maintains that the weakening sense of place is at the heart of our ecological crisis.

Sustainable development can be regarded as a process of reconciliation of three imperatives: (i) the ecological imperative to live within global biophysical carrying capacity and maintain biodiversity; (ii) the social imperative to ensure the development of democratic systems of governance to effectively propagate and sustain the values that people wish to live by; and (iii) the economic imperative to ensure that basic needs are met worldwide (Robinson & Tinker, 1997; Dale, 2001). Community sustainable development initiatives must reconcile all three imperatives to achieve integrated decision-making. However, in the case-study work conducted by our research team we found that the shared sense of place within a community can shape how each of these three elements is addressed.

Given the importance of place in sustainable community development, there is surprisingly little discussion of the interplay of space, place, and sustainability. Lefebvre described natural space as a vanishing commodity (1974, p. 30), and thus viewed the construction of social and built space as the main shaper of place. Our case studies, however, suggest that both natural space and socially constructed spaces contribute to the evolution of a sense of place within a community; though 'nature' may be vanishing, its shadow still looms large, and even an idea of wilderness can contribute to the integrating of nature and society (Havlick, 2006). Lefebvre also claimed that a successful revolution creates a new space (1974, p. 54); thus it could be expected that successful sustainable development initiatives will be likely to change or build on the existing sense of place in a community in new and unexpected ways.

The physical space in which actors find themselves both constrains and directs the possible senses of place that can emerge. Natural space is not neutral: it evokes senses of place that impose direction upon the lives of those who reside there, working in concert with the historical-social sense of place within the community. The underlying physical characteristics of place can inform and influence, as well as shape our sense of place. This effect can be beneficial, as it creates resilience and a rallying point around sense of place, but it can limit diversity and transformability, making it difficult for some long-standing communities to move to new patterns or integrate new members into the community. This is not to suggest, however, that space fosters a unique sense of place upon a populace; multiple meanings of place are possible within the same geographical area (Anderson, 2004).

Place and space are defined very precisely, but differently, in academic discourses. The general academic understanding is that 'place' is 'space' with human derived meaning and cultural identity: place is 'Humanised Space' (Tuan, 1977, p. 54). Or, to put it another way, 'when space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place' (Tuan, 1977, p. 73). Taylor (1999) stresses the importance of place for human well-being: 'space is everywhere, place is somewhere. Place has content; the idea of an empty place is eerie, an empty space is merely geometrical . . . place is a space with attitude' (Taylor, 1999). Lefebvre, with his distinction between natural space and

socially produced spaces that then evoke place (1974), provides a more nuanced gradient of description, but the general concept is the same.

Thus, academic discourse describes sense of place as dynamic, historical, contingent, and inseparable from human perception and experience (Tuan, 1977; Brandenburg & Carroll, 1995; Brown & Raymond, 2007). These perceptions, however, are dependent on physical characteristics of the landscape that exist independent of human perception; many people are, after all, attracted to live in certain places because of very distinct geophysical characteristics (Vogt & Marans, 2004; Stedman, 2006); those who need to, live in mountains; others embrace the vast distance of the prairies; others are drawn to the ocean. This link suggests something that has not been well reflected in the literature—not all spaces can become places. This is likely why one-size-fits-all approaches to sustainable community development fail, and is reflected in the incredible diversity found in nature, sometimes over very short distances. Sustainable development initiatives, to succeed, must foster a sense of place that is possible within the given space.

The case-study communities examined in this article share on the surface strong traits; they are roughly the same size, are located in the same small region of the world, and are rural in nature. However, they occupy three distinct geographical spaces—island coastal, high alpine, and rolling timberland—and these landscapes shape the economic base of the communities as well as the demographic profile of the average resident. Communities are embedded in distinct geographical places, independent of the human built environment; what is there to begin with has a lasting impact. It is commonly thought that decadal or even generational timescales are needed to provide a deep sense of place. Welsh '*cynefin*' and German '*Heimat*' are words that described this deep connection between the place and the individual (Rodwell, 2007). The word '*cynefin*' is about place of birth and upbringing, the environment to which one is naturally acclimatized (Sinclair, 1998), through a life 'lived and laboured in one place' (McNeillie, 2005). It is likely, however, that the degree of natural capital, diversity, and aesthetic quality in the landscape in which a community is embedded will directly correlate with the strength of this identity, or the speed with which notions of *cynefin* and *Heimat* develop. But while the physical landscape is independent of the human built environment, the built, or created, environment, and the human perceptions and narratives developed within it, must maintain, and ideally reconcile, social and economic imperatives with the physical landscape to be sustainable. As noted by Heyd (2005), '*cultural matrices*, which guide everyday life and integrate nature and human beings in a community, are the *crucial conditions for sustainability*.' However, human place is too often created, especially since the Industrial Revolution, without respecting and understanding this ultimate dependency. The sustainable development movement holds to the belief that a sense of identity grows partly from physical place, and that creating communities in touch with their environment is a key precursor to sustainable community development (Brady, 2006). It has been argued that the ethical codes and practices associated with a sustainable region embody a moral geographical project (Whitehead, 2003). Wilderness in particular has been described as a space uniquely suited to the ethical considerations of nature, culture and society (Havlick, 2006).

What this article seeks to examine are the links between physical place and the effect it has on the social capital within the communities that live in these places.

In short, how does physical space shape the potential for the creation of place? Are there qualities of ecological and created place that enhance social capital formation and increased sustainable community development? Does a strong collective identity to physical space worsen the effects of homophily within a community? Brennan frames the challenge as one of understanding how the freedom of the cosmopolitan and nomadic lifestyle provided by a globalized world and the rootedness found in a strong local sense of place come into conflict. Though a local sense of 'home' can counter the shallow values found in a global culture, the dilemma is how to avoid 'dangerously conservative, hierarchical, communitarian rootedness' (Brennan, 2006).

These influences and connections through identity to place are important, as sustainable development is not possible without a community having a strong identity (Pol, 2002). To explore this issue, we examine three case studies collected from a diverse selection of communities in Canada. These case studies examine sustainable community development, either a project, social action, or community response to a perceived environmental or social need, or a town that is struggling to come to terms with economic restructuring and social change. By studying the ecological place and social identities linked to physical place, and how the communities value those identities and respond to change, we can begin to understand the nature of the relationship between physical place and sustainable community development.

The Case Studies

The cases used in this study were developed as part of a Canada Research Chair in Sustainable Community Development, led by the first author (www.crcresearch.org). Following methodological precedents in the social sciences (see e.g. Stake, 1996; Yin, 2003), each case can be considered as contextually and functionally discriminate, and in this sense each case acts as a distinct learning opportunity, one that is important precisely because of its uniqueness. Yet the consideration of the cases together also allows them to be considered as a collective case study, as identified by Stake (1996), in which a group of cases is studied to allow for comparison. The three case studies chosen, all from British Columbia, Canada, are: community participation in the Whistler 2020 comprehensive sustainability planning process; community action on Salt Spring Island; and the town of Merritt, British Columbia.

Whistler

Whistler is 120 kilometres north of Vancouver, British Columbia, located in an alpine region of the coastal mountain range. A relatively new community, the Resort Municipality of Whistler was incorporated in 1975 and is now home to approximately 9,800 permanent residents, 2,500 seasonal workers, 9,100 second-home owners, and over 2 million visitors annually (Resort Municipality of Whistler, 2007a). One company, Intrawest, is the primary employer; the company owns the ski mountains and has significant commercial real estate holdings. This is a single-resource economy, and the community is wholly dependent upon the natural character of the environment for its livelihood. The main 'village' of Whistler is

car-free, modeled upon European alpine settlements, and dominated by high-end retail outlets and services for the tourist population.

Whistler's permanent population is relatively wealthy; according to the 2001 census, the median individual income was $27,116, compared with a provincial median of $22,095, and the incidence of low-income families is 2.8%, compared with a provincial average of 13.9% (BC Stats, 2007a). It is relatively young (81% under 45, compared with the provincial average of 61%), highly educated (28% of those over 20 have taken a degree, compared with 18% for the province), and recreation-focused (40% of the labour force is employed in art, entertainment and recreation, or accommodation and food services, compared with 11% in the province as a whole). There has been substantial and rapid growth of private and commercial real estate development in recent years, with average single-family home sales in 2002 of $1,259,400, and over $90 million spent on new construction in 2005 (Resort Municipality of Whistler, 2007b). This has led to a significant shortage of affordable housing for the service workers who operate the city's resort infrastructure.

In spite of massive development in a relatively short period of time, now complicated by hosting the 2010 Winter Olympics, Whistler has been governed by a series of environmentally conscious municipal councils that have enacted legislation such as development caps, resident restricted affordable housing that provides non-market rates for those living and working in the municipality, and the Protected Areas Network (PAN) that protects large corridors of sensitive habitat zones from development (Resort Municipality of Whistler, 2007b). The Whistler Comprehensive Sustainability Plan (CSP), Whistler2020, is a community-created and -supported initiative. This case study analyses the reflections of 14 community leaders representing various sectors on their involvement in, and perspectives on, the plan. The main thrust of the plan is to restrict development to preserve the character of the place, while also ensuring that a reasonable amount of affordable housing is created to provide accommodation in the town for the service-sector employees crucial for the operation of the economy.

The population in Whistler is mainly there because of the landscape character and the recreational opportunities it offers. Thus, the majesty of the mountains provides Whistler with its aesthetic and cultural identity rather than long-standing generational populations. This perspective has been examined by Stedman (2006), who found that 'counter to popular assumptions, seasonal residents exhibit higher levels of attachment [to place].' However, this, according to Stedman, is not rooted in social networks and community meanings such as would be found in more stable populations, but is 'fostered through meanings of environmental quality'.

Although McCool & Martin (1994) suggest that this is not unexpected, and that newcomers and visitors are more highly attached to the landscape and environment than long-term residents—largely for sentimental reasons—this meaning fostered by environmental quality is also very evident in the permanent population of Whistler. As Smith (2007) states when commenting on the Whistler 2020 planning process:

> There is no question that understanding the importance of 'place' in Whistler's
> sustainability journey is one of the keys to evaluating the determinants of

Figure 1.   Whistler, Canada.

success in community engagement. Most people living in Whistler have
relocated to this mountain community by choice, creating perhaps what one
could loosely categorize as an intentional community with shared values
related to the natural environmental. Not intentional, in the sense of creating
'relationship to each other' perhaps, but intentional in creating 'relationship to
place'. (http://www.crcresearch.org/node/410)

Although Whistler is very successful economically, it can still be regarded as a
single-resource economy, with the corresponding vulnerabilities. The grandeur of
the mountains has shaped the 'place' of Whistler into a centre that has much to
offer a certain demographic (wealthy, able-bodied, and interested in the outdoors).
The social sustainability of the community, despite efforts by town officials, remains
low. For instance, many workers are forced to live in communities far from Whistler
itself, which is unsustainable and contributes to separation between young and older
residents. The space that Whistler occupies shapes a sense of place that has fostered
a very strong commitment to ecological sustainability. Social sustainability and
economic diversity appear to be negatively impacted as a result of a human response
to strong dominant physical place characteristics.

Salt Spring Island

Salt Spring Island shares the same physical majesty as Whistler, but of a different
character. It is the largest and most populous of the Gulf Islands, covering an area
of 18,535 hectares and with a population of over 10,000 people (Garvie, 2001).
By virtue of its population size, Salt Spring has all the amenities of a small urban

centre, such as educational, social, and health services, and shops, despite its geographic isolation. The island economy includes tourism, agriculture, and the service industry, as well as a growing telecommuting population. The population is supplemented by tourists and seasonal residents in the summer, with a weekly seasonal Saturday market of local farmers and artisans drawing as many as 3,000 visitors (Friends of Salt Spring Parks Society, 2003).

Although Salt Spring Island continues to have a reputation as a community of artisans, farmers, and retirees, recent demographic analysis suggests a changing population profile. The island population has increased approximately 50% every decade for the last 30 years. The population is slightly older than a comparative average in the province. A high proportion of the island residents (34%) are self-employed. About half the income reported on the island comes from non-employment sources, including government transfer payments, corporate pensions, and investment income. The incidence of low-income families on the island is significant, with 47% of the households reporting income of less than $30,000. In contrast to this, since the 1996 census, buyers of high-end properties are noticeably more affluent than in the past—the island has become a preferred address (Garvie, 2001).

In early November 1999, residents learnt that land developers had purchased 10% of the island, including large tracts of forest uplands, farmlands, and almost all the lands surrounding the near-pristine waters of Burgoyne Bay. Within a week of purchase, the company began clear-cut logging the lands. The new owners logged heavily, despite the community's repeated request to slow the rate of logging, and to use sustainable logging practices, and by the end of 2000 over 400 hectares of forest had been logged. Concerned by the ecosystem damage, the community then successfully negotiated a land purchase as a result of extensive community involvement, as well as involvement from many organizations such as Capital Regional District (CRD) Parks, Islands Trust, the Nature Trust of BC, the Land Conservancy of BC, North Salt Spring Water District, and the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative. Although much of the forest was logged, land was also bought for conservation. Burgoyne Bay Protected Area resides within a larger protected area of 1,800 hectares of park, ecological reserve, and community watershed lands.

This strong and immediate response was a direct result of the perceived threat to the identity of the place. This community has a very strong sense of its island as being a place in a very meaningful way. There is a strong expression of love for the landscape character of the island, and indeed this is critical to the economy of the island, where tourism and artistry are significant contributors (http://www.crcresearch.org/node/408). The importance of this identity is intrinsically linked with the social and ecological life of the island. The developers, at the receiving end of the community action, saw the island as an economic space with trees to be exploited. In the Gulf Islands this identity and place respect has even been institutionalized with the creation of the Islands Trust Act through municipal legislation in 1974, with the specific focus to 'to preserve and protect' the unique natural features of the Gulf Islands. One can argue about the sustainability of preserving and protecting, over sustainable management and local and respectful resource use, but ultimately it is unique place that is being protected—and thus the trigger that results in evoking a strong local response from the community when it is under threat.

Figure 2. Salt Spring Island, Canada.

In reality, the understanding of the dependence upon place on Salt Spring Island is more sophisticated, as can be seen in the words of the campaign manager for the preservation of critical watersheds in this case study: 'The vision of the land protected for ecoforestry, organic farm trusts, community watershed, and parkland is compelling and keeps me involved' (Elizabeth White, Campaign Appeal Fund Coordinator in Penn, 2000, personal communication). This shows that the understanding of place is linked to the access to, and dynamism of, a diversity of sustainable functions that simultaneously support the ecological, social, and economic imperatives of the community.

Similar to Whistler, the dominant beauty of the landscape has attracted a diversity of human and financial capital not normally seen in smaller communities. The strong place-identity of the island has enhanced the social cohesiveness and network capacity of the island (Dale & Sparkes, 2007). Visionary and spiritual people, as well as people with a variety of well-developed professional, leadership, managerial, and entrepreneurial skills, have been attracted to the island because of its physical beauty, which then engenders a strong sense of identity, both to the landscape and culturally. As a result, the community has a sizeable capacity for social action, and ability to mobilize social capital for collective action, based on deeply held incentives to protect its place.

Merritt

The small community of Merritt is a rural town located in the Nicola Valley of southern British Columbia, Canada. Merritt used to be a rather remote and

unchanging community before a new highway from Vancouver was built in 1986, making the community more accessible. The economy was based on the forest and mining industries, and cattle ranching. With the exception of mining, these activities remain the dominant economic and social identity anchors for the community. Though the surrounding landscape is certainly pristine by many standards, the seemingly endless rolling forestland lacks the 'majestic' aesthetics of Whistler or Salt Spring Island. This more subtle landscape has largely been the site of resource extraction, an ethos that informs the community.

Although Merritt has experienced many of the economic swings common to single resource-based communities across Canada, it has generally been prosperous. It may be that with respect to growth, the greatest economic asset is no longer the extractive resources that the community was built upon, but rather the less consumptive aspects of its location (Hanna *et al.*, forthcoming). Merritt is relatively close to several major cities, and it is set in a particularly beautiful landscape consisting of rolling hills of grasslands and ranchlands. Housing prices have been, until recently, mostly affordable. All this makes it attractive to a new cohort of the retired and weekenders looking for homes in the British Columbia (BC) interior. These people come with few, if any, ties to the traditional industries, and few links to the existing community. In terms of place quality responsible for the economic development of community, Merritt has characteristics in common with both Whistler and Salt Spring, although extractive rather than recreational.

Merritt had developed as a typical western Canadian resource town until an influx of new residents, who did not have the historical strong ties to the community, and resultant new development began in the 1990s. The town now suffers from many of the problems that plague small communities across North America: a downtown in decline; the relocation of retailing to the edge; banal new architecture; and the loss or weakening of community and government services. Based on socio-economic indices, Merritt ranks among the ten worst communities in BC, although the 2006 indices show an improvement over previous years (BC Stats, 2007b). Merritt now ranks seventh, with first being the worst. Such factors would seem to point to weak or declining social capital, and on a practical level such evident social problems might overshadow the attributes that make the community attractive to outside investment, visitors, and new residents. Interestingly, the majority of interviewees in this case study described social capital in their community through physical place descriptions (Hanna *et al.*, forthcoming). This was a perspective that both settled residents and new arrivals shared, the established residents recognizing the importance of place: 'Quilchena Avenue [the main street] used to be like a meeting place, the Wal-Mart parking lot isn't like that, and some people refuse to go there.' The loss of landscape distinctiveness may detract from newer residents moving there due to the physical place characteristics: 'pretty soon, the things that make Merritt attractive to outsiders are all going to be gone'.

The division between the older town and the newer developments has created conflicts in the community, with loss of a shared sense of place and weakening identity with place impacting social capital formation. The more established residents have a greater sense of place, and indeed the older parts of the community have more local distinctiveness (Hanna *et al.*, forthcoming). However, the social agency in the town is low, in part due to a lack of bonding capital between those

(a)

(b)

Figures 3 a & b. Two views of Merritt. The historic downtown has seen businesses close as sprawl continues.

living in the older and newer developments in the town, but perhaps also in part because sense of place in the community has been compromised by development that fills space with mono-functional units (residential subdivisions and big box stores) out of keeping with both the built and the natural character of the community, thus inhibiting both physical and, therefore, social connectivity between them.

In Merritt, external development pressures have resulted in the disconnected space exhibited by the community today, as the old residents have not been able to adapt to the new development. A marked contrast also exists between the old and newer residential development in the town. The newer, suburban development has not been built in the local vernacular, and has obscured some of the natural topography and landscape, thus inhibiting new residents from understanding what it is that defines the place aesthetically and culturally for the older inhabitants. The division of the urban form into two places, with no space for meaningful interaction and connectivity, also creates a physical and social barrier between the two parts of the community. If the new development had been built in keeping with the pre-existing place of Merritt, allowing for shared identification with historical use of space, and space for connectivity of the new and old, and the social and landscape form, then the lifestyle and the location of activity of the two communities would be more integrated, breaking down barriers, creating a shared sense of place and one local distinctiveness. Further research is now being conducted on the dynamic interrelationships between loss of landscape, weakened identity with physical place, and social capital formation.

Discussion: Communities of Place

Although each of these case studies was originally undertaken by the first author to examine the dynamic relationships, if any, between social capital (specifically network formation) and sustainable community development, cross-case analysis drew our attention to the importance of a strong sense of identity to place as another factor in sustainable development initiatives. Interestingly, in one case, Merritt, residents described social capital primarily in terms of a description of physical place (Hanna *et al.*, forthcoming). Collectively, the case studies exhibit a range of senses of place related to the nature of the spaces in which the communities have developed. On Salt Spring Island the sense of place has resulted in a diversity of sustainable development initiatives reflective of the community's social, economic, and environmental features. Whistler's sense of place has resulted in an environmentally sustainable development focus, but has also resulted in social concerns and a lack of economic diversity (though one certainly can't say the economy of the town is not exceptionally strong, it is certainly reliant on a narrow activity base and thus vulnerable to changes in the world economy). Merritt, by not considering the importance of the physical place in recent cycles of built development, is exhibiting social malaise. The historic role of landscape as a site of resource exploitation might inform this development direction. The three aspects of sustainable development have the weakest purchase in Merritt.

Many analysts have concluded that identity with a community develops over time; the longer the time, the stronger the identity (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974;

Beggs *et al.*, 1996). However, this article suggests that time is only one factor among others; and, in Canada, the physical characteristics of place and space may play a more critical role. Whistler, for example, is a relatively new community, founded in 1975, yet a strong place identity has already developed and drives significant planning processes in the city. This supports assertions made by researchers such as Cuba & Hummon (1993) and Stedman (2002) that find no link between time and attachment, and supports our argument that dominant physical characteristics can inform and influence the direction of identity with place.

Does a sense of place inspire connectivity between people, and between people and the environment, because of identity with certain landscape features? Certainly on Salt Spring Island this seems to be the case, as community social capital was quickly mobilized against the private logging enterprise. In Whistler also, community identity is based on the physical environment. If built community design allows space for greater human and ecological connectivity, does a stronger sense of identity to place lead to greater diversity, adaptability, and capacity to respond to changing internal community dynamics as a result of exogenous global changes? In Merritt, where this connectivity has been eroded through development that has not considered the physical character of the place, identity is being lost and social capital is being inhibited.

Conclusion

From the evidence of these case studies, the sense of place that emerges within a community is shaped and informed by the geographical space that the community occupies. Communities that have the fortune to be located in a beautiful, unique, or dominant landscape, or with a defining geographical characteristic(s), around which identity and notions of *cynefin* and *Heimat* can be focused, have inherently a stronger, faster-forming identity with place than communities in more monochromatic landscapes, or those that lack the opportunity to connect with the landscape. If this connection is not present then the meaning, or value, placed by the community on physical place is reduced and the opportunity for a strong, interdependent relationship prevented. This increases the likelihood of typical community development paradigms dominating the agenda, rather than sustainable community development rooted in the connections between space and place.

A paradox in this story is that an identity too closely linked to a dominant activity seems to provide a degree of sense of place and identity, but tends to reinforce the strong bonds of exclusionary social networks that restrict creativity and visionary agenda. This effect can overly concentrate sustainable development initiatives on one of the three aspects of sustainable development at the expense of the others. Whistler is certainly an environmental and economic success story, but one has to wonder if the social, specifically cultural, side of the equation is being downplayed, and whether the economic base of the community is resilient enough. On Salt Spring Island, the diversity of the population attracted to the place, that is a vibrant artistic community connected to a strong sense of place, in concert with the dominance of the natural capital and the landscape character of the area, mitigates social exclusion.

In Merritt, where the sense of place has been weakened, it has been difficult to diversify their traditional economic base and promote sustainable economic, environmental, or social development.

What this means for the design of new communities, and renovation of old communities, is that a landscape perspective needs to be taken (a scale that has most value when dealing with communities and the interaction between people and the environment, found in very definite spatial settings in which we humans build our environments). Place is, therefore, an intrinsic amalgamation of spatial character-istics, dynamic systems, and human values, as well as a synergy of local and global (Brennan, 2006). Emergent senses of place impact the connectivity in a community, and directly affect social capital formation, and thus ultimately our possibilities for a sustainable future (Dale & Onyx, 2005).

There are several sustainable community indicators that emerge from this cross-case analysis that might be of interest for further research. First, communities need to encourage a diversity of connections to space, for both physical and social connectivity. Too narrow a focus can too easily lead to only one aspect of sustainable development being considered, at the expense of the other two imperatives. Second, diversity within a sense of place builds adaptability, which may be particularly important to local resilience in the face of exogenous global changes. Third, communities with a weaker sense of place are less likely to proceed down a sustainable path; stronger emotional ties to physical space may naturally lead to greater sustainable community development. Fourth, proximity appears to be another indicator; that is, opportunities for connectivity are strongly related to the amount of social capital available in the community. In addition, if, as we suggest, connection to the natural space is important for sustainable community develop-ment, then the proximity of the natural to the social is important. Clearly, this has implications for the design of the built environment, creating space and opportunities for access to the natural. Favourite places with strong physical identities encourage people to linger and interact with each other, and with the natural. Such communities thus create more diverse opportunities to build social capital that encourages sustainable community development. Fifth, preference; strong location character coupled with liveability, is becoming increasingly important for attracting younger professionals and reducing the loss of skilled people from the community. This is important in an increasingly knowledge-based and service-based economy, where physically beautiful areas with diverse cultural options have greater ability to attract and retain more diverse skills. It is also possible that the stability and vibrancy of a community increases social capacity, reducing barriers to innovation and enhancing diversity of response to exogenous changes. Our relationship to place occurs at multiple level scales, at the community and landscape, but sense of place is also personal. A personal 'sense of place' is a uniting of self and space so that one's identity is intrinsically linked with one's environment. A social sense of place, therefore, is one where the life of the community is intrinsically linked to the environment. The stronger the bond between the physical characteristics of place and the community, and between individuals within the community, the more motivated the community will be to preserve that identity and sense of place (Stedman, 2006). If members of a community have few strong feelings towards the space in which their community is embedded, believing it can exist equally well anywhere else, with no

meaningful and direct relationship between the human culture of the place and the local environment, then more significant change and perturbation would be required to provoke social action. In such situations the response may be too late to sustain community, and in others may never occur in the first place.

Lastly, connectivity and access to the physical environment (or lack thereof) directly impacts sustainable community development. In two cases, the dominance of the landscape led to more controlled development, where the close proximity of the built environment to the natural environment is easily maintained, with the additional connectivity provided by the recreational infrastructure designed to bring people from the built into the natural environment. In both of these cases, access to the quality of the natural has attracted a particular human population, where the natural physical and social space is dynamically interconnected.

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