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Social Sustainability

A White Paper for Your Housing Group

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HOUSING GROUP

Introduction

Social housing providers often discuss the various functions they perform beyond the core provision of housing. These often include debt advice, support to help their tenants get into employment, volunteering opportunities, care and support services for vulnerable tenants, as well as working closely with other local service providers on a range of other activities for local communities. Housing providers strive to build communities that are strong and vibrant, as well as communities where people want to live (and want to continue living), where people forge ties with their neighbours, where people are included, where they feel a sense of pride and ownership, and where people invest (and feel invested) in their own neighbourhoods.

A key question for social housing providers is therefore centred on the notion of creating socially sustainable communities. The purpose of this paper is to clarify the concept of 'social sustainability' so that housing providers will be able to determine (from a position informed by evidence) the elements of social sustainability they can positively affect in the neighbourhoods and communities in which they work. We will explore the ways that social sustainability is defined in different contexts, the ways that it can be applied, and the elements to consider when curating socially sustainable communities, as well as potential metrics for measuring social sustainability.

Defining Social Sustainability

The term 'sustainability' is often used to refer to environmental or ecological sustainability specifically; however, with many challenging the primacy of the environment in sustainability, 'social sustainability' is emerging as an increasingly important theme (Turkington and Sangster, 2006; Valance et al, 2011).

The UN's definition of *sustainability* is perhaps the most famous and widely cited: '[s]ustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (UN WCED, 1987: 43). The EU Bristol Accord offers a more nuanced definition of *sustainable communities* as:

> Places where people want to live and work, now and in future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe, inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all. (ODPM, 2006: 12)

At the heart of both these definitions is the notion of 'liveability', which is undoubtedly key to social sustainability (Godschalk, 2004). A sustainable community is one in which not only are people able to live successfully, but 'actually *want* to live' (Valance et al, 2011: 345, italics added). That being said, we should not endeavour to pin down to precise a definition for sustainability. Social sustainability is best understood not as a single concept, but rather an amalgamation of intersecting elements (Valance et al, 2011). These elements will be presented and unpacked in the following section.

Likewise, social sustainability does not imply a specific level of investigation; one could talk of social sustainability at neighbourhood, local, regional or national level. For the purposes of this paper, social sustainability will be considered at the neighbourhood level for a number of reasons. Firstly, recent policy and academic literature has considered the neighbourhood as an important site for the consideration of sustainability (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Dempsey et al, 2009)

Secondly, the neighbourhood is the level most within the purview of this paper as a consideration of the role of housing providers in creating socially sustainable communities. Social sustainability at regional or national level is influenced by things such as macro-economics, migration and government policy. Whilst some larger national housing associations may be able to influence such things, many will not. For this reason, the literature discussed will be drawn less from economics and more from subjects such as geography, anthropology and sociology, which focus more on local, community level.

There are two concepts within social sustainability to consider: 'community' and 'space' – what constitutes a 'community' and how do people interact in the 'space' of communities.

Community

The notion of 'community' is one of those terms which we intrinsically understand, yet turns out to be more amorphous when we try to define it or consider its constituent parts (Jenks and Dempsey, 2007). Certainly there is a territorial element to it; community is hard to divorce from its geographical setting (Blackman, 2006; Dempsey et al, 2009): a 'community is that collectivity the members of which share a common territorial area as their base of operations for daily activities' (Parsons, 1991: 60).

However, it is more than merely a group of people living in an area; both sociology and anthropology tend to consider community as something more. There must be a 'collective conscience': a general shared sense of belonging, norms and beliefs that ties people together. These collective feelings exist above the individual, held by no one person in particular, but the community in general (Durkheim, 1997).

This means that a community can sustain membership change without losing its character, as the collective beliefs rely on no one member in particular. For example, at its most basic level, a group of three can be a community, as it could cope with one person leaving and still be able to maintain its character; two cannot constitute a community because it could not sustain one person leaving, whilst maintaining its collective character (Simmel and Wolff, 1950).

Therefore, a community can be understood as a group of people living together in an area and sharing a sense of collectivity built upon common beliefs and norms. As well as being important for understanding how the literature to follow conceives of community, this is also potentially a point of interest for housing associations, many of which dedicate a great deal of resource into community investment. If community is thought of as consisting of these shared norms and beliefs, as well as the collection of people who share a geographical location, community investment may also come to be seen as a way to encourage or improve this shared identity, as well as improving individuals' lives. This could mean focussing investment on activities that have secondary benefits of bringing residents together, such as group events or peer learning. A good example of the latter would be 'digital champions', that many housing associations have as part of their digital inclusion schemes, whereby digitally savvy residents help less able residents (for example, Oyama and al Harbi, 2004).

Space

There are various ways of thinking about the 'space' of a community. One could think of space as simply the place in which people go about their activities. In other words, merely a vessel in which things happen. However, we favour the definition more often found in the social sciences, of space as a combination of material factors and social factors – spaces both influence and are influenced by the people within them. For example, Lefebvre (1991) discusses the 'social production of space', whereby spaces gain meaning from how they are used and perceived by people, as much as from their physical form. Similarly, Low (2008) uses the term 'synthesis' to describe how people knit together the various physical elements of their environment through use, and takes an area from a collection of physical forms to an actual space. In both conceptions, the relationship between people and space is symbiotic. The physical form of a space directs use and meaning, whilst simultaneously people impose their own use and meaning on the space simply through their everyday acts.

Understanding that this is how spaces exist, not as empty vessels for people but as both forming, and being formed by, people's actions is central to understanding much of the literature that is to follow in this paper. Moreover, it is relevant to housing associations directly. If the goal is to create socially sustainable communities it is certainly important to understand the relationship between communities and the space which they inhabit. Understanding how a community operates and interacts with space is will give a better understanding of how to effectively change that space in such a way as to encourage outcomes desired by the housing association. For example, as we shall see, a sense of attachment is an important element of social sustainability, but it would be impossible to make any changes to engender this without first understanding how space works.

Seeing space as an active agent, rather than a passive vessel, in everyday life opens the door to a more nuanced engagement with the physical form of a community, which as we shall see, runs through all the elements of social sustainability.

Elements of Social Sustainability

As mentioned previously, whilst 'liveability' could be pinpointed as central to social sustainability, it would be better to unpack the concept rather than aim for a single definition. There are a number of elements that contribute to a community being socially sustainable (Dempsey et al, 2009). Whilst, for clarity, these will be presented separately, they should not be understood as discreet. As will be demonstrated, they are largely interlinked.

Social Equity

A community with high levels of inequality is not a sustainable one; at its core social equity is about justice and equality. An equitable society is one in which there are no barriers to participation economically, socially or politically (Dempsey et al, 2009).

There is a general consensus around the services and amenities to which a resident needs access to be able to fully participate: doctor or GP; Post Office; chemist; supermarket; bank or building society; corner shop; primary school; restaurant, café or takeaway; pub; library; sports or recreation facility; community centre; facility for children; public and open green spaces (Dempsey et al, 2009). To these we could also add access to employment opportunities, public transport and affordable, secure, good quality housing (Bramley et al, 2009). Therefore, a sustainable community is one in which *all* residents are able to access *all* of these, with no barriers. Barriers can take two forms: geographical and social.

Geographical barriers are perhaps those that come to mind most readily. This is expressed in areas of deprivation or inequitable access to services and amenities. Geographical barriers can be literal physical barriers, such as a walls, buildings, or major road, which people cannot cross to get to where the required service or amenity is created, or "psycho-geographical", whereby people are theoretically physically able to cross a barrier but feel discouraged from doing so (Debord, 1958). To this end, a sustainable community must be 'porous' (Sennett, no date). That is, residents must be freely able to move across urban borders, whether that be into buildings, public space or other neighbourhoods, in order to access the services and amenities they need.

There are also social barriers to access that are equally important. Removing physical constraints does not necessarily give an individual freedom to actively participate (Fromm 1941; Berlin, 1958). A well-known example of this is in health care, where ethnic minorities are less likely to access health services even if they have easy geographical access, because they may lack the 'linguistic competence' or the 'cultural competence' (Szczepura, 2005).

In terms of addressing these points, there are a number of tangible things that a housing association could do. Firstly, clearly before worrying about social or psychogeographical barriers to access, physical access must be provided. This means the previously mentioned essential services and amenities must be located in close proximity to the community in question, or, where this is not possible, access to community transport should be available to easily travel there. Equally important would be to identify where existing services are at risk of closure and help communities maintain them, for example by facilitating the community to take over a local pub or café.

Once physical access is ensured, psychogeographical barriers can be tackled. Debord (1958) explains that the wish to take certain routes over others is based on our brain's unconscious perception of the environment. Therefore, the porosity of an area can be improved by removing or discouraging things that create negative perceptions and encouraging or enabling those that create positive ones.

The chief instigators of negative psychogeographical perceptions are anti-social behaviour, vandalism and graffiti, which all create a negative perception of the safety of an area. Positives include well-maintained homes and public spaces, and general neighbourhood cleanliness (Ross and Mirowski, 1999). Therefore, routes via which residents can access the services and amenities discussed previously should reflect this. Ensuring that these routes are clean, pleasant, well maintained and that they feel safe will mean residents feel able and are willing to walk through them, thus removing or minimising any psychogeographical barriers to service access.

It is also important to address social barriers; all groups in the community must be provided with the linguistic and cultural competence to access services. This means providing language classes for those whose English is insufficient. It also means making sure that all groups are accessing the available advice and guidance. Likewise, housing providers do not necessarily need to deliver all of these services themselves; many housing associations refer residents to other service providers in the local area to ensure ESOL classes are provided for residents. Housing associations should make sure their community and outreach work is reaching all demographics, and if it is not, should specifically target those who are being missed. Another element of social barriers is cost; the services and amenities need to be affordable for all in the community.

Social Capital

Social capital is somewhat linked to the discussion of social barriers to access, and equally runs through many of the elements to follow. As an important part of sustainability (Forrest and Kearns 2001), social capital can be summed up as 'who you know' – an individual with lots of social capital is one who can wield their social connections to gain access to desirable or valuable people, networks, groups or institutions, and can use this to advance their own ambitions. Social capital is not physical,

but 'exists in the relations among persons' (Coleman, 1988, p101). The most commonly cited example of this is the 'old boys network' that allows certain people to access careers such as politics, finance or law, whilst locking out others who do not have the right connections (Bourdieu, 1986).

The more social capital a community has (both as a whole community and as individuals), the more socially sustainable it will be. High social capital makes reciprocity and spontaneous cooperation (Putnam, 1993) amongst community members more likely, and therefore creates a more cohesive community. Hence, it is widely felt that social capital is a desirable social good (Forrest and Kearns, 2001).

Fortunately, social capital can be engineered. Whilst individuals cannot be directly given social capital, institutions (for instance, a housing association) can invest in creating social capital by running formal groups or events that bring people together and therefore allow attendees to make connections and accrue social capital (Sander and Lowney, 2006). There are a few ways this could be achieved - for example, through volunteering or community champions schemes. Similarly, housing associations could facilitate 'timebanking', where residents trade portions of their time to offer their skills to each other, again bringing together people who may not otherwise meet, as well as meeting residents' needs. These methods all have the advantage of reaching across artificial or social boundaries by bringing together diverse populations and people of different generations.

Whatever method is chosen, the housing association would have to make sure that the social capital being created is being distributed equally across the community. It is no good running schemes like those suggested if it is consistently the same people using and leading them. Whatever schemes are implemented, housing providers should endeavour to get all members of the community involved. These activities should take place at various times and places throughout the community, and, where necessary, housing providers may need to actively encourage particular people and groups to participate.

Social Interaction, Collective Groups and Networks

As described previously, a group of people requires shared beliefs, ideas or attitudes to develop to be considered a community. Social interaction is crucial to this – without interaction these shared concepts clearly cannot develop. Interaction also allows social networks to develop, which support individuals' values and identities and are hence civic society itself (Dempsey et al, 2009).

Therefore, social ties are extremely important to social sustainability. However, the strength of ties naturally varies throughout a community (Dempsey et al, 2009); a community where everybody has strong ties to everybody else is a rare one. However, weak ties – what some refer to as 'sidewalk

contacts' (Jacobs, 1961) in 'spaces of transit' (Amin, 2002) – can be more important in creating and maintaining a community than strong ones. Residents being on friendly terms with a broad number of people in their community is more conducive to a socially sustainable neighbourhood than having a small number of deeper relationships (Granovetter, 1973). A housing association wishing to develop a sustainable community would certainly have to work to engender these social ties. Principally, there are two ways this could be done.

The first is through urban form. Neighbourhoods that are high-density and mixed-use (in other words not solely residential), with plentiful good quality and accessible public space are thought most conducive to this. High-density mixed-use neighbourhoods create social ties by encouraging chance interactions (the previously mentioned 'sidewalk contacts') between residents, as people are in close proximity with each other and can walk to get what they need (Jacobs, 1961). In contrast, low-density residential developments, where the car is necessary to get anywhere, generally remove or discourage most opportunities for interaction with other community members and residents.

Therefore, a housing association should seek to build these high-density mixed-use neighbourhoods, and be sure to include lots of public congregation space and converging routes between residences and amenities, to maximise the chances of interaction and thus the formation of weak ties. It should also be ensured that existing public space is viewed in a way that encourages positive use of it. For example, community events could be held that will help to create positive associations and images of the space for local residents, which in turn encourages more positive usage.

Such events would also fulfil the second method: participation in collective groups. Whether the groups are formal or informal, participation brings together community members and thus incubates social ties (Dempsey et al, 2009). To this end, housing associations should run community events and push strongly to get as many people involved as possible. These could be formal events, but equally effective could be simply facilitating informal groups. For example, providing a space for residents to play sport together, or facilitating the setting up and advertisement of shared interest groups. Another simple, but likely quite effective, change a housing association could make would be to, wherever possible, deliver interventions and services in a group format, as opposed to one-to-one work.

A caveat to this is that evidence from the United States suggests that there is a strong negative correlation between commute to and from work and involvement in the local community (Putnam, 2000). Therefore, attempts to get people involved in collective groups must take this into account. For example, investment in creating local employment opportunities could have the secondary benefit of boosting community participation. Similarly, a housing association should make sure that there are plenty of events and groups that run during the evenings and particularly at the weekends

for those who are unable to take part during the day, or don't wish to after commuting home from work.

Community Stability

A community requires well-established, long-term residents in order to be sustainable (Silburn et al, 1999). This is because relationships (or social capital), social networks and social groups need to be built up over time, and can only be maintained with a critical mass of people to perpetuate them. That being said, a certain amount of population turnover is healthy for a community, as new people bring new ideas, relationships and connections (Kearns and Forrest, 2000). Nevertheless, low turnover is generally regarded as a positive social quality (Power, 2004).

From a housing association point of view this emphasises the importance of a core of long-term residents. The previous three elements realistically can only be achieved on any scale in a community that has a solid foundation of long-term residents (or at least, residents who intend to put down roots). These are the residents who will view the community as their home and therefore make an effort to involve themselves in groups. Moreover, as social capital and networks can only develop over time, through repeated interaction, a community that has too transient a population will struggle to develop either.

To this end, a housing association would want to really focus on making sure its communities retain residents by being places people wish to stay, rather than being suitable only for particular life stages (Dempsey et al, 2009). This is of course is a virtuous cycle. The more residents wish to stay long-term and be invested in the community, the more socially sustainable the community becomes, and the more it will be appealing as somewhere to stay long-term.

In terms of *how* a housing association can encourage community stability, the biggest factor is the socio-economic status of the community. Evidence from the Netherlands suggests people are much less likely to feel like leaving a community that is improving its socio-economic condition, whilst more people tend to leave those communities shrouded in a perception of decreasing status (Feijten and van Ham, 2009). Therefore, the best thing a Housing association can do to create communities in which people wish to remain is to help those communities improve the perception of their economic status, by helping as many as possible into good, secure work. Supporting local social enterprises and helping residents who wish to start their own businesses would also help create the perception of a community improving its socio-economic status, and thus be somewhere people wish to stay.

The other major intervention that could be done is to ensure communities are balanced across all age demographics. This is because the strongest indicator of high turnover is a young population: neighbourhoods with a high proportion of young adults (nineteen to twenty-nine) are much more likely to experience high turnover (Bailey and Livingston, 2007). This is unsurprising, since this age range represents perhaps the most transitory in life, generally encompassing some or all of the following major life changes: leaving education, leaving the family home, embarking on a career and starting a family. Thus people in this age range are of necessity the most transitory in spatial terms, needing to move to accommodate these changes.

Therefore, it would be undesirable to have a neighbourhood too dominated by people in this age range, and a housing association wishing to create a sustainable community would have to be conscious of the age profile of its communities and try to engineer a balance between ages. The alternative is to tackle the necessity to move. If neighbourhoods offer the necessary amenities and services for various life stages, and the possibility of moving into a bigger (or smaller) property if necessary, the push to leave the community when changing life stage could be removed or reduced (Dempsey et al, 2009).

Pride/Sense of Place

A community lacking a sense of pride or attachment to its neighbourhood will struggle more to engender community stability, as it will be a less attractive place to stay for a longer period of time.

Attachment can relate to both the physical place and people, but also to less tangible aspects such as common norms, beliefs or collective sense of belonging (Kearns and Forest, 2000) and the meaning that can be attached to a place in memories and experiences (Tonkiss, 2005). In order to stoke this attachment in residents, a place must have its 'own order, its special ensemble, which distinguishes it from the next place' (Relph, 1976: 2).

In short, in order for residents to be proud of or attached to their neighbourhood it must *mean* something to them beyond being the place they live. This is where our previously discussed conception of 'space' is most relevant. Space is given meaning by how people decide to use it and the images and values they attach to it. Therefore, in order for a sense of place or attachment to develop, communities must be allowed to shape their own space, to decide for themselves how it should look and how it is used. In being allowed to do this, they will naturally interact with each other and the built environment, and begin to give meaning to the physical forms of their neighbourhood.

Sennett (2006; nd) proposes 'incomplete form' as a possible way forward here. This does not mean creating buildings and public space that is literally unfinished, but rather 'light architecture' - leaving built form open to change and interpretation, architecture that is not deterministic. This means buildings that can be easily added to or altered as required function changes and public space that is adaptable to how the community wishes to use it, as opposed to buildings too architecturally wedded to their initial function and public space that insists on a certain use.

Architecture of this sort would allow communities to shape their physical environment such that it reflected how the community saw it and wished to use it, and would therefore be an excellent way to create the sense of place necessary for social sustainability. From a housing association point of view, this might express itself in housing that is internally adaptable, allowing dwellings to change as families' life stages change. It may include shared community structures that can be adapted to multiple uses by the community and public space with no particular implied use.

Another possibility is to involve the community in the design process itself. This should involve a range of methods of engagement, as there is not going to be one method that suits all people in all situations. The consultation process must be well publicised and events must take place at different times of day and in different locations. The actual method of engagement should be dictated by those taking part, and crucially, community members should be able to see the impact of their involvement in the final output, otherwise they will feel apathetic about the process (RIBA, 2011). RIBA (2011) gives a number of examples of how architecture firms used community engagement in designing projects, all of which a housing association would most likely be able to do. Neighbourhood Planning is one way this can be done, with the housing association supporting the community through the process of exercising the right to do this.

Safety and Security

Maslow's (1954) 'hierarchy of needs' places safety as second only to physiological concerns (hunger, thirst, etc.) in terms of importance to the individual. This hierarchy is equally applicable to communities. Within a neighbourhood, safety is a basic requirement that needs to be fulfilled before any other elements of social sustainability can be considered (Barton et al, 2003; Valance et al, 2011). Quite clearly, no community where residents feel unsafe is socially sustainable. High visibility within the neighbourhood (for example public space that is overlooked by housing) is often seen as important in increasing the feeling of safety and decreasing crime and vandalism (Jacobs, 1961). Needless to say, tackling anti-social behaviour and vandalism will also increase the perception of a neighbourhood as safe.

Summary

The elements that make up social sustainability are:

- Social equity: communities where there are not geographic or socio-cultural barriers to key services.
- Social capital: the ability of individuals to get access to valuable people, groups or institutions.
- Social interaction, collective groups and networks in the community: community members have ties (weak or strong) with many other members of the community and take part in collective activities, formally or informally.
- Community stability: a core of long-term residents who are committed to active involvement in the community.
- Pride/sense of place: community members feel a sense of attachment to where they live
- Safety and security: community members feel free from worries about the safety or security of both their selves and the community more broadly.

As mentioned previously, these are not disconnected elements; together they are the constituent parts of social sustainability, but they equally affect and interact with each other.

Thinking about social sustainability in this modular way may prove useful, as it makes it more tangible, with specific goals to aim for within the constituent elements, rather than the more abstract notion of social sustainability as the goal in itself. This may also mean it is more possible to quantify and therefore measure through the proxy of measuring individual elements.

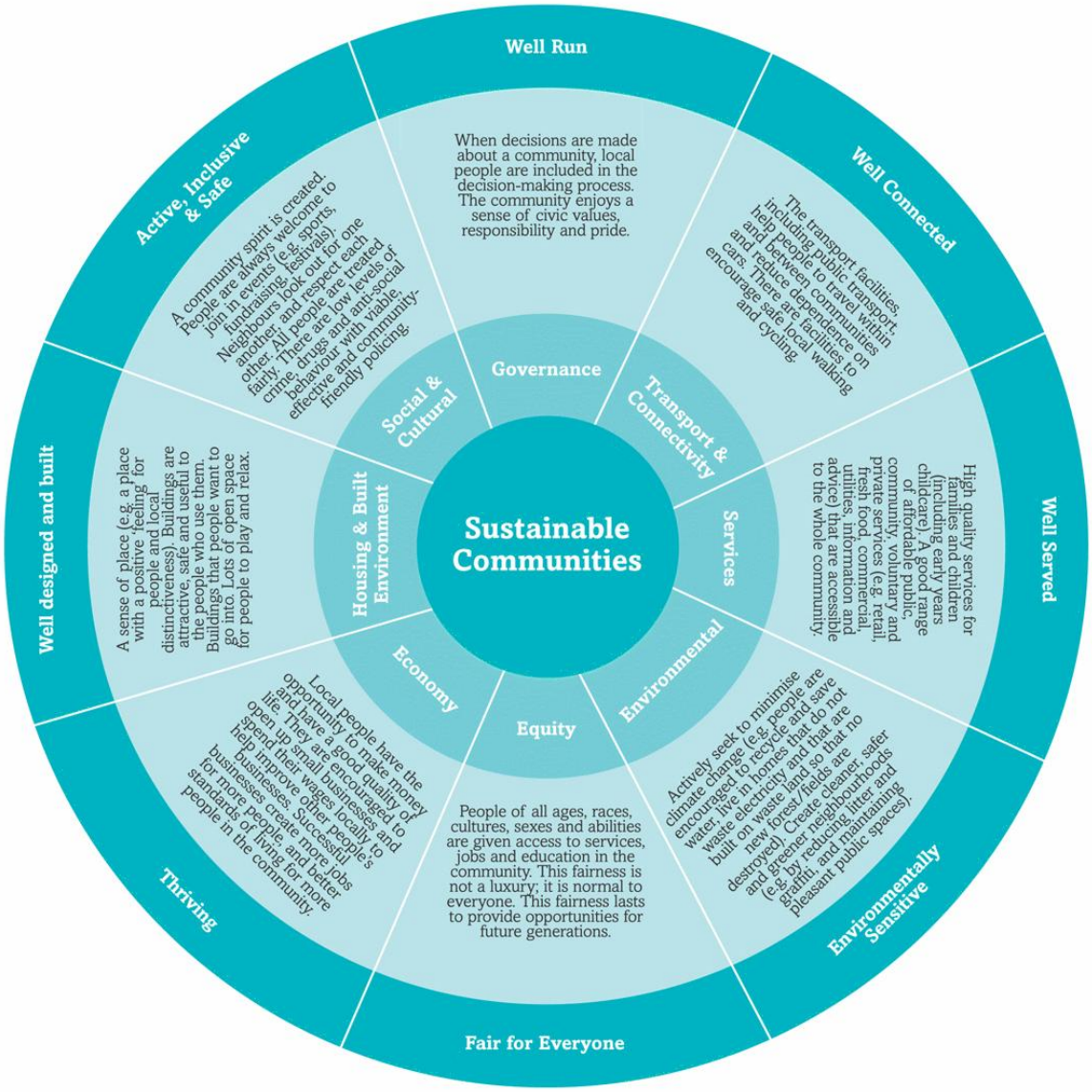
Measuring Social Sustainability

There are a handful of existing methods to measuring social sustainability, all of which broadly get at the same elements outlined above. Bramley et al (2009) developed a set of metrics building upon the above elements. Each element was broken down into a number of topics, with residents asked to give negative, neutral or positive response to various statements in each topic, such as 'the neighbourhood reflects me' and 'I am proud of my neighbourhood' within the *'Pride/Sense of Place'* element.

The negative, neutral and positive responses were assigned a score of 0, 100 and 200 respectively. Doing this across all the elements and then taking a mean provided what could be termed a 'social sustainability score'.

There is also an example of a housing provider attempting to measure social sustainability. Dixon and Woodcraft (2013) developed a framework for social sustainability for house builders, after the Berkeley Group commissioned Social Life and the University of Reading to develop a framework. The aim was to create a practical and cost effective way of measuring community strength and quality of life across the Berkeley Group. The framework consists of three dimensions: 'amenities and infrastructure', 'social and cultural life' and 'voice and influence'. They also identified 'change in neighbourhood' as important, but at the time the 2011 census data was not available to compare against. To develop the metrics, pre-existing national datasets or industry standard assessments tools were used, with 45 questions arrived at in total. A 'red, amber, green' scale was developed to visualise whether the result for an indicator was worse, about the same, or better than expected in comparison to national datasets.

However, perhaps the most widely used is the Egan Wheel (Manzi et al, 2010) below. As can be seen, although labelled differently, the wheel more or less describes the same elements of social sustainability that have been outlined in this paper. Its strength is that it is non-hierarchical, and so reflects the nature of social sustainability as made up of multiple interlocking factors that must all be present in a community.



Source: Freethinker (2014)

This is not to suggest that a housing association necessarily follow any of these methods, but it is indicative that it is reasonable to try and quantify and measure the social sustainability of communities.

Ways Forward

A number of suggestions for achieving sustainability were discussed previously, within the context of each element. For ease, these have been summarised in the table below.

Element	**Potential Ways to Address**
Social equity	Improve community transport; facilitate community ownership of amenities; make routes to services and amenities accessible and welcoming; language classes; targeted outreach work to unengaged demographics; ensure affordability of services and amenities.
Social capital	Volunteering and community champion schemes; timebanking.
Social interaction, collective groups/networks	High density, mixed use neighbourhoods; pleasant and plentiful public space; community events in public spaces; deliver services as group work.
Community stability	Support residents into work; support local businesses; support local social enterprises; help residents set up community businesses; ensure mix of age demographics in neighbourhoods; provide amenities necessary for all life stages.
Pride/sense of place	Incomplete form via adaptable dwellings and community structures; open and adaptable public space; Neighbourhood Planning and co-production; tackle ASB and vandalism.
Safety and security	Neighbourhoods with high visibility; tackle ASB and vandalism.

Clearly, if socially sustainable communities are to be created then, as well as the above suggestions, an element of measurement needs to take place to make sure any interventions are in fact having

the desired effect. As outlined there are existing ways of doing this, however developing its own metrics may be something a housing association would wish to consider. Doing so would make sure that the measurement would be reflecting elements that the housing association felt most germane to their wider business objectives and fitted in with existing projects and programmes.

It would seem quite possible to design such a measurement system based on existing and available metrics, rather than creating new ones. HACT's Social Value Bank contains many outcomes that could quite readily be used to assess the elements of sustainability. Similarly there are many more open-data measurements that could be generated via Community Insight that would also easily serve the purpose. The table below outlines some suggested examples in both categories for each element of social sustainability.

Element	**Social Value Bank Outcome**	**Community Insight Metric**
Social Equity	'full-time employment'; 'secure job'; 'high confidence'; 'able to pay for housing'	'Index of multiple deprivation'; 'health deprivation'; 'households in poverty'; 'households with no car'; 'unemployment to available jobs ratio'
Social Capital	'able to obtain advice locally'; 'talk to neighbours regularly'; 'member of social group'; 'active in tenants group'; 'high confidence'	'social rented housing'; 'private rented housing'; 'owner occupied housing'; 'population density'
Social interaction, collective groups/networks	'regular attendance at voluntary or local organisation'; 'able to obtain advice locally'; 'talk to neighbours regularly'; 'go to youth clubs'; 'member of a social group'; 'active in tenants group'	'no people in household have English as a main language'; 'population density';
Community Stability	'good neighbourhood'; 'talks to neighbours regularly'; 'feel belonging to neighbourhood'; 'feel in control of life'	'population aged 0-15'; 'population aged 65+'; 'migrants; 'vacant dwellings'; 'owner occupied housing'; 'social rented housing'; 'economically active'; 'unemployment to available jobs ratio';

		‘unemployment benefit’; ‘youth unemployment’
Pride/Sense of Place	‘No problem with vandalism/graffiti’; ‘not worried about crime’; ‘no problem with anti-social behaviour’; ‘no litter problems’; ‘good neighbourhood’; ‘feel belonging to neighbourhood’; ‘afford to keep house well decorated’	‘anti-social behaviour’; ‘criminal damage’; ‘vacant dwellings’
Safety and Security	‘no problem with vandalism/graffiti’; ‘not worried about crime’; ‘no problem with anti-social behaviour’	‘anti-social behaviour’; ‘criminal damage’; ‘vehicle crime’; ‘violent crime’

As can be seen, between the Social Value Bank and the data sets available via Community Insight, all the elements of social sustainability have a range of measures that could be used to quantify them, and provide an indication of whether the sustainability of a community is increasing as interventions are undertaken. Additionally, HACT and OCSI will be releasing a tranche of 600 new indicators on Community Insight in the autumn, which may provide further relevant indicators.

On top of this, if it were something a housing association felt would be useful, there is a range of more qualitative primary data that could be collected. For example, to target effectively the removal of psychogeographical barriers residents could be asked for their views on the areas through which they must pass to access services. Similarly, qualitative research could be carried out to investigate more in depth issues like pride and sense of place. Nonetheless, this would seem more likely to be useful additional work if desired, rather than central to measurement. The above metrics suggest it would be more than possible to develop a measurement of the social sustainability of a community without having to create any new metrics specifically.

Conclusions

Sustainability has in recent years moved on from being solely concerned with environmental or ecological sustainability towards interest in social sustainability. One result of this is that various definitions have been developed by different sources leading to some confusion over the meaning of the term. However, social sustainability is more usefully understood as an amalgamation of various subordinate concepts that are all interrelated.

The most effective way of tackling social sustainability is to take steps to address the elements individually, as this gives more tangible objectives than a general aim of ‘sustainable communities’. There are a handful of different methods for looking at and measuring social sustainability, however there is most likely scope for a housing association to develop its own metrics, based on that indicators it would consider most useful and that would most fit wider business goals.

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