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**Community Commodified:
Harnessing community in the marketing and creation
of residential developments**

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Social Science

at
Lincoln University
by
Peter Alan Stewart Chamberlain

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In New Zealand private property developers have begun to influence urban form in new ways by building large residential subdivisions and master planned developments reminiscent of those that have been built in the US for several decades. Many have used the concept of 'community' in their advertising and promotional activities as a key selling point for these developments. Thus far, while there has been a great deal of research involving the residents of these new subdivisions, an insufficient amount of work has been carried out on the property developers themselves, their motives, intentions, and methods in regard to building communities. This thesis presents the results of research that explored Christchurch real estate developers' understandings of 'community' and how they went about incorporating these understandings in shaping their developments and in the associated promotional material. In addition to in-depth interviews with real estate developers, advertising material, and observations of physical design are examined. It is concluded that community has become a product, commodified by the real estate industry, thus demonstrating that it is possible to commodify not only physical goods but also people's aspirations and desires.

Keywords: property, real estate, developers, community, commodification, advertising, marketing, planning, residential, subdivisions, housing, urban change, Christchurch, Canterbury

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The essential threads of the fabric of society are woven not from the marketplace but those things that live outside it and are not measured by a price tag.

(Marshall, 2000, pp. xvi-xvii).

In our modern consumer society it sometimes seems as though everything is for sale - our emotions and desires are becoming increasingly subjected to commodification. We are told that we are missing the 'threads of the fabric of society' but that they can be re sewn, at a price of course. To open a bottle of Coca Cola is to 'open happiness' and to drive a Honda is to unleash 'the power of dreams'. Of course, these are merely marketing slogans, designed to evoke positive emotions and feelings. Coca Cola cannot actually bottle happiness and Honda cannot build dreams. But what if a marketing slogan for a residential subdivision offers 'community'? Community is not a physical thing – we cannot touch it and it is difficult to define. It is nonetheless used extensively throughout advertising for residential developments, thus attaching a favourable idea to the capitalist growth goal.

Although New Zealand has a history of large scale state housing, private real estate developers are increasingly influencing urban form in New Zealand by constructing more, and much larger, residential subdivisions. Blake and Arreola (1996, p. 24) describe these residential subdivisions as "a place where developers have platted large parcels of land into smaller lots, installed the utility and street infrastructure, and sold the lots individually." These subdivisions have proved very popular in New Zealand, and it is this private sector activity that has most profoundly shaped New Zealand's urban residential form over the last few decades.

As stated by Garreau (1991, p. 286), "Property developers are first and foremost agents of change." In New Zealand this change is manifesting in both the urban landscape and the social fabric of our cities and surrounding areas. Despite their role as drivers of such significant spatial and social change there has been little social scientific analysis of their motives, their intentions and their methods. In the context of this thesis a particularly

important trend is the way developers are promoting their subdivisions using 'community' as a drawcard for prospective buyers. Their use of community in the advertising material pertaining to residential subdivisions raises several important questions. Is there a blueprint for community? How do developers attempt to create that which they claim about community in their advertising? How have property developers commodified the concept of community? The goal of this thesis is therefore to explore which aspects of community real estate developers are using to create and market their residential developments, and to examine the ways in which they harness community through various aspects of their developments and associated advertising material. Essentially, using Christchurch, New Zealand, as a case study area, I investigated if, why and how real developers have commodified the concept of community.

Planning for community is not a new phenomenon. During the 1960s and early 1970s planners, designers and developers in America created 'new communities' – social organisations, physical forms and marketing strategies based on big plans that have shaped urban landscapes over several decades (Forsyth, 2005). Gurstein (1993) traces the tradition back further still, claiming that the development of new communities has always intrigued planners who have attempted to improve people's quality of life.

Since the time of the ancient Greeks, where a national policy was established that required the building of new cities when the older ones reached a certain size, forming new communities has been seen as a solution to the problems plaguing existing urban communities (p. 56).

In the current context this meant that "community [has become] part of the core business of property developers, both as a marketing device, and through attempts by the developer to facilitate the formation of community within their estates" (Rosenblatt, Cheshire & Lawrence, 2009, p. 128). This thesis builds on Rosenblatt's work (2005) and his investigation of the way residential property developers have associated the idea of community with their product. Rosenblatt's work concentrates on the impact the commodification of community has on attitudes to community formation in a master planned community. In his later work Rosenblatt investigated developers' efforts to foster community through social interaction. While the work of Rosenblatt et al. (2009) relied on primary data collected from residents and advertising material, my own work focussed on

data collected from the property developers themselves and an evaluation of their advertising material.

1.1 Scope of this study

The nature of this thesis provides ample scope to engage with the debates surrounding community and community building. There is a long history of analysis of community and its meaning, its rise and fall and the factors that have contributed to this. I explore various interpretations and applications of community and discover how these relate to the actual practice of residential property development.

I did not think it necessary to speak to the residents of new residential subdivisions. While there has been an abundance of research which concentrates on residents (Gwyther, 2005; Rogers & Sukolratanametee, 2009; Williams & Pocock, 2009; Wilson-Doenges, 2000; Wood, Frank & Giles-Corti, 2010) there has been comparatively little work carried out where property developers are the primary source of data. The purpose of this thesis to discover if, why and how developers go about selling community alongside real estate.

1.2 Plotting the path ahead

The discussion thus far has introduced the research problem and provided an overview of the goals of this thesis. The following chapter provides a background to the issues surrounding residential subdivision development in Christchurch. A historical overview is given and the current issues are laid out to provide a context for subsequent chapters. Chapter 3 presents a review of the relevant literature pertaining to capitalism, commodification, community and urban change and shows how my work will contribute to this body of literature. Chapter 4 outlines my research methods.

Chapter 5 is the first of three results chapters and addresses property developers' interpretations of community and their motives and incentives. Chapter 6 presents the ways in which property developers attempt to build a relationship between the idea of community and their housing developments. The final results chapter provides evidence of advertising material which has used community in either its rhetoric or imagery.

Photographs are included as graphic examples of the methods employed by developers.

Chapter 8 is a discussion of these results, highlighting the interesting points and placing my findings within the current debates in the field. The final chapter highlights the key findings of the research and brings the thesis to a close.

Chapter 2

Background

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to put into context the issues that are raised in this thesis. The effects that global changes have had on New Zealand are considered and the issues specific to Christchurch are explored. While New Zealand is deeply affected by wider political and economic phenomena it is important to discuss the relevance these issues have in a more local context.

Since the 1980s New Zealand has experienced a wave of neoliberal economic and political change which “...reduced state spending and regulatory roles, privatisation, and modifications to the welfare state” (Cook & Ruming, 2008, p. 211). Global economic reforms brought about an “extremist property rights movement” in America, leading to a change in the suburban landscape (Knox, 2005, p. 37). New Zealand was heavily affected by similar reforms, with neoliberal politics having had an unparalleled influence on New Zealand governments since the mid 1980s (Memon & Gleeson, 1995). This wave of neoliberal reform was accompanied by the desertion of Keynesian policies, resulting in the increased deregulation of the economy and further privatisation (Knox, 2005). This affected the ability of New Zealanders to buy their own homes. Levels of home ownership fell from 73.87 per cent in 1991 to 67.8 per cent in 2001, and are expected to fall further to 61.8 per cent by 2016 (Centre for Housing Research Aotearoa New Zealand, 2011). In the past the New Zealand government would intervene to create conditions in which home ownership could be attained (Dixon & Dupuis, 2003) but the new system saw the state take a laissez-faire approach to helping New Zealanders own their own homes and state housing became less of a priority.

New Zealand governments possess exclusive power over national legislation and because of this, when neoliberal ideas penetrated the policies of both of New Zealand’s major political parties, “New Right interests were able to instigate a series of sweeping social and economic reforms which encountered little political resistance. Planning was one of the

first areas of state policy to be singled out for 'reform'" (Memon & Gleeson, 1995, p. 114). In contrast to the more prescriptive Town and Country Planning Act, a more market responsive, effects based planning regime was implemented (Memon, 2003). Swathes of peri-urban land were rezoned, allowing private property developers to acquire and subdivide land for resale as suburban residential sections. Knox (2008, p. 173) refers to these suburban residential subdivisions as the "nurseries of neoliberalism." The metropolitan space was mobilised "as an arena for both market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices" (Brenner and Theodore 2002, p. 21, cited in Knox, 2005, p. 37).

Developers have obviously played a central role in this but the study of their ambitions and practices has been neglected. Residential property developers are using planning models such as New Urbanism to plan for a 'sense of community' in their developments (Grant, 2006), however, further research is required to determine if, and how, these practices have been carried out in the context of Christchurch.

2.2 Christchurch, New Zealand – an overview of the issues

Christchurch, located on the eastern edge of the Canterbury Plains in the Canterbury region of the South Island is New Zealand's second largest metropolitan area with 7.5 percent of the total New Zealand population living there (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). According to the 2006 Census, 348,435¹ people usually live in Christchurch City; this is an increase of 24,375 people since the 2001 Census. Increasing pressure was put on space for housing as Christchurch continued to grow. The growth was concentrated on the outskirts of the city, encouraging the city limits to sprawl out onto the 'green belt.'

2.2.1 The Canterbury earthquakes

During the course of my research the Canterbury region was struck by three significant earthquakes. The first, on September 4th 2010, measured 7.1 on the Richter scale and was

¹ 2006 Census data is used due to the cancellation of the 2011 census as a result of the Christchurch earthquake on February 22nd, 2011, therefore the current population is not yet known.

strongly felt throughout Canterbury (GNS Science, 2011). The second major earthquake struck with a magnitude of 6.3 and was centred just ten kilometres to the south-east of the Christchurch metropolitan area (GNS Science, 2011). There were 181 fatalities as a result of this earthquake. The vast majority of casualties were concentrated in the city centre where two large office buildings collapsed. Many suburban areas to the east and hillside were also adversely affected. An estimated 7-10,000 people have lost, or will lose their homes and there was extensive damage throughout the Greater Christchurch area. A third earthquake, with a magnitude of 6.4, struck Christchurch on June 13th, 2011. Further damage was caused to land and buildings although the only fatality attributed to the earthquake was from a heart attack. At the time of writing this thesis (Thursday, January 12th, 2012) Christchurch had been shaken by 3009 aftershocks measuring magnitude three or greater (GNS Science, 2012). There is little doubt that the earthquakes have led to both permanent and temporary migration from the area. An estimated four thousand Canterbury residents emigrated abroad between March and July 2011 (Mackay, 2011) but the long-term demographic effects are not yet known. It is important to note that the majority of the primary data collection for this research was conducted in between the September and February earthquakes.

The February earthquake has had a significant effect on the state of Christchurch's inner city. After the earthquake the New Zealand government declared Christchurch and surrounding areas to be in a National State of Emergency. This State of Emergency was not lifted until April 30th, 2011 (Mackay, 2011). Much of the inner city, now referred to as the 'red zone' remains cordoned off from the general public as demolition and deconstruction takes place. Houses in the city's established eastern suburbs were also severely affected by the earthquake. While insurance settlements are ongoing, residential subdivisions which have been largely unaffected by the earthquakes are experiencing a surge in popularity. The new Sovereign Palms subdivision in Kaiapoi has been "swamped" with enquires as people seek to rebuild their houses on geotechnically safe land (Wright, 2011). Maxim Developments, developers of a new 2100 lot subdivision on the outskirts of Christchurch have brought forward their development plans, completing a year's worth of planning in

four months. They claim to have had 600 mainly residential red zone² buyers register their interest in the 'Highfield' subdivision between February and September 2011 (McDonald, 2011). While many people have left Christchurch and many more will be able to rebuild on their homes on their original sites it is clear that the earthquakes have amplified the popularity of residential real estate developments on the urban fringe of Christchurch.

2.2.2 A suburban city

Before the earthquakes, growth on the outskirts of Christchurch encouraged the city limits to sprawl out onto the 'green belt.' Memon (2003) explains how people's preference to live in the suburbs has contributed to the decline of Christchurch's city centre;

Contemporary urban growth trends in New Zealand reflect the long standing cultural preferences for low density living in suburban and peri-urban settings. Consequently, growth pressures in the larger New Zealand cities are focussed on suburban and fringe locations while inner city areas in cities such as Christchurch are in a state of relative decline in terms of population and economic activity (p. 27).

While Memon describes this trend in New Zealand as 'contemporary,' it must be noted that this is not a new phenomenon. Christchurch experienced significant growth in its population from the mid 1950s to the mid 1970s. As Barber found in 1983, this growth was "rapid and almost uninterrupted... according to most demographic and economic indicators" (p. 308). This increase in population during the post-war period was located almost entirely in the rural area adjoining Christchurch's urban fringe (Barber, 1983) and by the end of the 1960s there were more people living outside of the city centre than in it (Buchanan, Barnett, Kingham & Johnston, 2006). The rapid growth in population around the urban fringe "reflects a preference by households for high amenities at acceptable personal costs" (Memon, 2003, p. 36). This rapid growth on the fringe of the city represents a balance between urban desirability and suburban liveability (Neuman, 2005).

² The residential red zone refers to residential zones with land damage deemed too expensive to remediate. It is distinct from the inner city red zone (drop zone), which refers to Christchurch's central business district.

2.2.3 The rise of residential subdivision development in Canterbury

Several factors have contributed to the rapid growth in the number of new residential subdivisions around Christchurch's urban fringe. The most significant of these was the introduction of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). The RMA paid little attention to the social aspects of the urban environment – creating problems for urban planning and management (Dixon & Dupuis, 2003). It has been argued that, as a result, social equity gave way to the environmental concerns of sustainable management (Memon & Gleeson, 1995).

At the turn of the century the Christchurch City Council, "as reflected in its strategic policy instruments, embraced a wider concern for 'social wellbeing' extending to concerns about issues such as housing, poverty, unemployment, leisure, culture, and the needs of young people" (Perkins & Thorns, 2001, p. 651). The Christchurch City Council is currently the second largest provider of public housing in New Zealand after Housing New Zealand (Ancell & Thompson-Fawcett, 2008). This wider concern for social wellbeing prompted former Business Roundtable head, Douglas Myers to describe the city as the 'People's Republic of Christchurch' (Auckland, Christchurch - a tale, 2000). Since the early 2000s, however, there has been a gradual erosion of the importance of social equity in Christchurch with the council advocating the sale of publicly owned assets to foreign owners, possibly paving the way for the sale of public housing.

Under the RMA, district plans are prepared by the Christchurch City Council and the two neighbouring Councils of Selwyn and Waimakariri. "The urban growth policies in the first generation of new 'effects based' district plans... [were] more 'market' responsive and less restrictive" (Memon, 2003, p. 35). To put it simply, "any land use or activity could be permitted so long as it did not have adverse effects upon the biophysical environment" (Perkins & Thorns, 2001, p. 641). This meant that land was able to be rezoned according to environmental rather than social or economic assessments. The number of dwellings on rural land has increased with the relaxation of planning controls on residential development in areas surrounding the city.

Despite determined opposition from Environment Canterbury (commonly known as ECan) (Watson, 2003), the Christchurch City Council has re-zoned large amounts of land for urban development in the former green belt (Memon, 2003; Winstanley, Thorns & Perkins, 2003). From the early 1990s the effects-based, market-driven style of the RMA legislation meant that the Councils were more susceptible to pressure from land owners and developers to re-zone land (Memon, 2003). Consequently, residential subdivision development has significantly increased since the RMA was introduced (Buchanan et al., 2006). Land that was once protected by the green belt legislation of the Town and Country Planning Act 1953 became open for development and demand was encouraged by developers who marketed these 'new communities' to the public. *The Press* (Christchurch's major print newspaper) now boasts a 'Subdivision Guide' in its property section, reflecting the increased supply and demand of new housing estates on the urban fringe.

Land owners foresaw more profit in selling or developing their land than in continuing peri-urban agricultural and pastoral production and many farms were subdivided to be sold in sections. The result was a rapid growth in the population of peri-urban areas. Statistics New Zealand (2005) describes the development of peri-urban areas as the greatest change in rural areas in the last thirty years. As Fisher (2003) explains, this is a global phenomenon; "In the developed world, population growth in the peri-urban regions of metropolitan centres has been rapid and dynamic since the population turnaround of the 1970s, when a shift in population growth towards nonmetropolitan areas occurred" (p. 551). Calling this the 'peri-urban phenomenon', "where developers subdivide rural land near cities into 'lifestyle' blocks", Statistics New Zealand expects this trend to intensify with population in peri-urban areas projected to grow by 34 percent between 2001 and 2021. It is important to note the difference between population growth and housing growth; a city's footprint can grow even as its population decreases.

The readily available nature of credit in the early to mid 2000s meant that people were able to borrow large amounts of money to buy land and build a new house on the desirable urban fringe. Further re-zoning went ahead despite the fact that growth projections for Christchurch showed there was no justification for such a large amount of residential development in peri-urban areas (Memon, 2003). It must be noted, however, that land use re-zoning has not been an unchecked rampage in favour of property developers. In 2003

the Environment Court declined a request from the Christchurch City Council to re-zone rural land at Belfast, Yaldhurst, and Burwood (Watson, 2003). While residential subdivisions are touted by developers as the solution to the growth problems that cities face, Environment Canterbury see a sprawling city as contributing to a loss of fertile soils and an increase in traffic congestion (Watson, 2003).

2.2.4 Looking to the future

To address the problems brought about by dispersed growth, Environment Canterbury, Christchurch City Council, Selwyn District Council, Waimakariri District Council and Transit New Zealand have collaborated to create the Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy ('the Strategy'). The Strategy was implemented to address land use issues and the pressure of Christchurch's expanding population until 2041. The Canterbury earthquakes have however, brought about major changes in the future development of the Greater Christchurch area. The Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) was established by the government under the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Act 2011 in order to oversee the first five years of the region's recovery.

Under the Act, CERA has been given wide-ranging powers which require councils to act as directed and amend or revoke RMA documents and city plans if necessary. The CERA Recovery Strategy is a long term plan for the development of the Greater Christchurch area, a document which effectively overrules the Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy. CERA has already used the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Act to approve changes to the Waimakariri District Plan allowing for the development of 550 sections at the Silverstream Estates subdivision in Kaiapoi (Rebuild Christchurch, 2011). This decision followed previous use of CERA powers to amend the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement, allowing areas of Kaiapoi to become exempt from noise contour restrictions imposed by Christchurch International Airport.

While the effects of the Canterbury earthquakes have not yet been fully realised, it is expected that thousands of people displaced from their homes will seek to rebuild in new subdivisions in the Christchurch area. "Prime Minister John Key has said he believed there

was sufficient land available in Christchurch to prevent soaring prices as people began to move out of damaged homes and into new areas” (Chapman, 2011).

As the number of peri-urban residential subdivisions increases, in Christchurch and elsewhere, it becomes progressively more important to understand the social issues underlying this phenomenon. Much work has been carried out regarding the nature of community within such subdivisions (Bajracharya, Earl & Khan, 2008; Bell & Lyall, 2000; Cook & Ruming, 2008; Dixon & Dupuis, 2003; Fisher, 2003; Knox, 2005, 2008; Miles, Song & Frank, 2010; Wood et al., 2010), however, much of this work has focused on ways of manipulating the built environment to create a sense of community. This raises important questions regarding the nature of ‘community’ more broadly and how it relates to the marketing and planning of residential housing developments.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This literature review will discuss work pertaining to capitalism, commodification and community. My particular focus will be on the ways community has become harnessed both in capitalist relations and by real estate developers in the context of urban development. The chapter will conclude with three research questions stimulated by this review of the literature.

3.2 Capitalism, the city and commodification in the real estate industry

Savage and Warde (1993, p. 4) define capitalism as “the economic order of Western societies in which production is organised around the search for profit.” The Industrial Revolution and the emergence of modern capitalist economies had a major effect on the shaping of cities because, as Knox and Pinch (2010, p. 84) argued, “It was the emergence of capitalist democracies that forged the basis for modern urban society.” One of the most important functions of the city is to fulfil the imperatives of capitalism and most important of these imperatives is the circulation and accumulation of capital. “Thus, the spatial form of the city, by reducing indirect costs of production and costs of circulation and consumption, speeds up the rotation of capital, leading to its greater accumulation” (Knox & Pinch, 2010, p. 105). The city has a dynamic relationship with the capitalist system – the city grows larger and more profit is generated. The profit is then used for continued investment in the growth of the city. This dynamic system of profit accumulation has widespread economic impacts. Knox and Pinch (2010) explain how the capitalist system envelops all aspects of modern economic life.

The superstructure of capitalism encompasses everything that stems from and relates to the economic order, including tangible features such as the morphology of the city as well as more nebulous phenomena such as legal and political institutions, the ideology of capitalism and the counter-ideology of its antithesis (p. 105).

The morphology of the city refers to its changing form and growth and is innately linked to the production of space by the real estate industry in commercial, industrial and also residential settings. Savage and Warde (1993) explain that the limited availability of land leads to the segregation of urban space under the capitalist system in which land is privately owned and has different values depending on its location and various potential uses. Some land will be used for the industrial purposes of service industries, some will be devoted to publically owned urban infrastructure and some will be made available for residential development (Savage & Warde, 1993). The 'production of space' refers to the process of capital accumulation transpiring within the real estate industry (Gottdiener, 2000). Gottdiener (p. 266) elaborates; this is "a process that involves investment, circulation and profit realization through the commodification of land." Because of the imperatives of capital accumulation in the capitalist society the notion of land has taken on a different meaning, one of status and wealth.

The new urban structure became increasingly differentiated, with homes no longer used as work places, and residential areas graded according to the rents that different sites could command. Social status, newly ascribed in terms of money, became synonymous with rent-paying ability, so that neighbourhoods were, in effect, created along status divisions (Knox & Pinch, 2010, pp. 20-21).

As used above, commodification refers to the way in which capitalism denotes a change in productive processes from making objects for their use value to producing things for their exchange value. Marx argued that this process is an "ever-increasing internal dimension of capitalism" (Raposo, 2006, p. 45) that has continued to expand, reaching into "every nook and cranny of modern life" (Thrift, 1994, p. 78). Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (2000, p. 61) see commodification as "a process whereby more and more human activities come to have a monetary value and effectively become goods to be bought and sold in a market." The commodification of everyday life progressed after the 1930s as advanced industrial societies began to change their form (Gottdiener, 2000). This change was due significantly to the rise of consumerism, which has been a prominent cultural theme and process in Western society since the end of the second world war and has increased in speed and intensity since 1980 (Knox & Pinch, 2010). Consumerism has meant the Western societies are increasingly organised around the "consumption (of goods and leisure), rather than the production of materials and services" (Scott & Marshall, 2005, p. 107). From the 1980s in

particular, goods, leisure and other human activities have become commodified and purchased by consumers in order to fulfil material needs and desires. Material desires represent a major reason for the transition to consumerism as “people have been made more materialistic, as capitalism has, in search for profits, had to turn away from the increasingly regulated realm of production towards the more easily exploited realm of consumption” (Knox & Pinch, 2010, p. 13). Thus, capitalism has been able to recreate and redefine reality “in order to generate new areas where commodification can be deployed” (Raposo, 2006, p. 45).

As more and more aspects of everyday life became subject to commodification, the built environment began to assume the “backdrop of an increasingly ubiquitous consumer culture” (Gottdiener, 2000, p. 268). The real estate industry is central to this process. Driven by profit, the real estate industry is continuously seeking ways to maximise sales and increase market share. One of the ways it has done this is by assigning a monetary value to particular land- and property-related aesthetics, services and ideas and has commenced to sell them in a market. Residential developments have become showcases for consumerism as suburbanisation has encouraged a ‘commodity fetishism’ – “an [obsessive] tendency for households to compete with one another and display their wealth through consumer products” (Knox & Pinch, 2010, p. 24). These developments embody particular representations comprised of signs which are created to enhance the marketability of land and houses. Community, security, lifestyle and amenity are targeted areas of real estate advertising – elements of human life that have been identified as a valuable tool that can be pre-packaged and sold.

Where once it was considered a fact of life (Marshall, 2000) community has now become a status symbol for those who can afford to pay for it. It has become, in association with residential land and houses, a “positional good” – a symbol that exhibits either the superiority or inferiority of the consumer (Knox & Pinch, 2010, p. 54). While community is a non-material object it can be considered as an intangible asset that is closely linked to the many aesthetic elements associated with real estate development. This raises important questions about the nature and form of community, so before continuing with a discussion about the ways the idea is harnessed in real estate development I will turn to debates in the literature about the meaning of community.

3.3 Exploring community

Definitions of community have a decidedly elusive character. Upon beginning the literature review I found that there is no one 'correct' definition of community and that perceptions and interpretations of community differ greatly. Nevertheless it was useful for my purposes to review the community literature in order to gain a deeper understanding of the plethora of interpretations of the term and assess their relevance in terms of the production of residential property by real estate developers.

3.3.1 What is community?

Bell and Newby (1971) contend that most sociologists have weighed in with their own definition of community – and therein lies much of the confusion. There is also confusion between empirical descriptions of what community is and normative prescriptions of what community should be (Bell & Newby, 1971). Rather than specifically defining it, Thorns (2002, pp. 108-109) identified three major uses and associated meanings of community. They are geographical expression (physical boundaries defining a territory, giving those within that territory a sense of identity that comes with being marked off from outside groups), a local social system (the extent to which people living within a locality operate within a local social system) and human relationship (the notion that community is based upon intimate human associations, affective ties and emotional bonds).

Thorns (2002) makes reference to an article from the 1950s which identified ninety-four different definitions of community. The only common factor in these definitions was that they all involved people, although many emphasised relational associations and common values. Similar features are also reflected in the more recent literature: Williams and Pocock (2009) highlight the importance of shared values and common goals while Scott and Marshall (2005) see a common sense of identity as contributing towards community belonging.

Incorporating these factors Etzioni (1996) claims to be able to define community with reasonable precision, seeing community as having two characteristics.

(1) A community entails a web of affect-laden relations among a group of individuals, relations that often crisscross and reinforce one another (rather than merely one-on-one relations or chains of individual relations); and, (2) community requires a commitment to a set of shared values, norms, and meanings, and a shared history and identity - in short, a shared culture (Etzioni, 1996, p. 5).

While this definition encompasses the common elements that are identified in the literature the concept remains fluid and ambiguous. This is due in part to the fact that the very existence of community is debatable. Some, for example, see community as Utopian, “...for it is as much an ideal to be achieved as a reality that concretely exists” (Delanty, 2003, p. 18). Others have taken a different epistemological and ontological tack. In her 2003 study, Rollwagen asserted that the essentialist and static approaches to community must be rejected in order to examine the function and meaning of community.

We need to understand the concept in a way that better reflects the complexity of social interactions and identities in these places... It [community] was not always a positive aspect of daily life, nor was it a static idea that was always defined the same way (Rollwagen, 2003, p. 15).

Others have taken a similar view. Bell and Newby (1971), for example, realised the paradox of attempting to create an objective, essentialist definition of community and Jeremy Brent, a community worker who has himself struggled with the concept of community, elaborates; “A paradox of defining community as an objective structure is that as soon as one tries to, it ceases to have a verifiable existence – which has long been a puzzle to sociologists” (Brent, 2004, p. 219, citing Bell and Newby, 1971). The elusive nature of community can also be attributed to a common factor across all of its definitions – people.

Community is constructed by the people who are engaging in it, therefore, in this sense, community is “...self identifying with members belonging if they think of themselves as members” (Fitzsimons, 2000, p. 8). This means that an absolutely clear working definition of community is unfeasible due to its discursive nature. Definitions of community are also hindered by time and cultural differences. While some values remain constant, the meaning of community has evolved over time. Marshall (2000) supports the notion of the dynamic nature of community, stating “Community, something you can define many ways, is different now because our places are different” (p. xvi). Conversely, McBride (2005, p.

119) argues that the ideal of community is more static, stating that it “remains remarkably constant even in the face of an ever-changing world.” McBride, though, is referring to the way in which community is principally viewed in a positive light, not as something that actually exists in the world having immutable form.

3.3.2 Perceptions of community

The presumption that community is positive and constructive for society is common in the literature. Fitzsimons (2000, p. 8) addresses the “warm glow produced by the term ‘community’”, stating that “it is a brave person who would contest the desirability of a term which speaks of belonging, locality, social cohesion and cooperation (sic).” Bauman (2001, p. 1) uses imagery to emphasise the amiable nature of community; “It is like a roof under which we shelter in heavy rain, like a fireplace at which we warm our hands on a frosty day.” Delanty (2003, p. 8) accentuates that the wholesome qualities of community are by no means a recent development; “From the ancient Greeks to the Enlightenment community expressed the essence of society, not its antithesis.”

It is important to note, however, that meanings, interpretations and definitions of community lack consistency and despite the presumed benefits of community some have criticised its widely accepted positive nature. Williams used the concept extensively in his work, to the point where he began to question its meaning. “It was when I suddenly realized that no one ever used ‘community’ in a hostile sense that I saw how dangerous it was” (Williams, 1979, cited in Shepherd & Rothenbuhler, 2001, p. 253). McBride (2005) asserts that our perception of community as something to be desired and imagined may actually hinder the development of actual communities. In this sense, we constantly struggle to build that which we cannot obtain. Our imagined, often nostalgic version of community obscures our vision of what community might be in today’s world.

Bryson and Mowbray (1981) were also suspicious of the use of the term ‘community’, describing it as a ‘parenthood-type phrase’ that was being used to portray social unity and solidarity. They noted the rise in popularity of the use of the term ‘community’ during the 1970s and referred to its extensive use as ‘Spray-on community’, an ideologically driven illusion. Freie (1998, p. x) introduced the idea of ‘counterfeit community’, “symbolic claims

of community that are used to manipulate people.” Freie noted the overwhelming presence of the theme of loss in regard to community in the literature, a topic to which I shall return. Somehow though, the term was being used everywhere, from ‘new communities’ being built to ‘community atmospheres’ and ‘community in the workplace’. Freie emphasised the importance of people’s individualism and their reluctance to give this up in exchange for community. Counterfeit community presents a way of maintaining individualism, whilst displaying the favourable dimensions of a community-minded person. “Counterfeit community does not transform the individualistic definition of self; rather it accepts individualism and, without tempering that individualism, elicits feelings of connectedness and community. It is more therapy than communal relationships” (Freie, 1998, p. 6). This is extremely important in terms of this study as property developers seek to balance the desire for expression of individuality with the ideals of community.

3.3.3 Diversity – conducive or harmful to community?

There are some who have argued that community is in fact harmful to society. Brent (2004) explains how his view of community contrasts the popular themes of warmth and cohesion.

My own experience is, on the contrary, that community activity creates conflict and division. Though community action is partly based on reassuring ideas of cooperation (sic) and mutuality, it is also divisive, dividing the inside from the outside, and producing internal strife between different factions (p. 214).

Brent goes on to state that disunity and division go hand-in-hand with community politics, a view that contrasts with the romantic notions of community put forward by community Utopians. Another perspective on this argument is that division and conflict may well be part and parcel of community but that such conflict can be seen as healthy. In a heterogeneous group, there will be more contrasting opinions and debate which will draw out people into the public realm (Oliver, 1979). Oliver further explains this argument about the benefit of community conflict when he writes that “drawing in like-minded citizens, municipal specialization limits the political conflicts that typically arise in heterogeneous communities and lowers the incentives for civic involvement” (p. 205). Blakely & Snyder

(1997) have a similar perspective and see community as the answer to social struggles that arise within groups: “Without community, we have no hope of solving our social problems, or ever really gaining control of our deteriorated neighborhoods” (n.p.). Community can be seen as both the cause of and the solution to social conflict. This raises an important question in regard to the use of community by real estate developers. If community contains both negative and positive connotations, do real estate developers simply pick and choose its more favourable elements when creating and marketing their developments?

The benefits and disadvantages of homogeneity within a community is another important debate within the community literature. Putnam suggests that like-minded citizens may exhibit a degree of cohesion. “One might expect the numbing homogeneity of these new suburban enclaves to encourage a certain social connectedness, if only [of] the ‘bonding,’ not the ‘bridging’ sort”³ (Putman, 2000, p. 210).

Wilson-Doenges (2000) suggests that a lack of tolerance for increasing diversity may be partially to blame for a declining sense of community. This is supported by the idea that diversity and community are, to a certain degree, incompatible.

The most serious political consequence of the desire for community, or for co-presence and mutual identification with others, is that it often operates to exclude or oppress those experienced as different. Commitment to an ideal of community tends to value and enforce homogeneity (Young, 1990, p. 234, cited in Winstanley et al., 2003).

This is in direct contrast to the opinions of New Urbanists and associated others who promote heterogeneity as a pathway to community. The Congress for New Urbanism (2001) has even included the promotion on diversity in its charter; “Within neighborhoods, a broad range of housing types and price levels can bring people of diverse ages, races, and incomes into daily interaction, strengthening the personal and civic bonds essential to an

³ One might accuse ‘social capital’ of the same failings as community. For example, Aldrich & Crook’s (2008, p. 388) study gives credence to the “counterweight theories of civil society in which local citizens join together to balance against state plans.”

authentic community.” Despite New Urbanists’ support for the diversity argument, the very practices that they employ may in fact be more conducive to homogeneity than heterogeneity. Critics of New Urbanism have pointed out that it promotes diversity and community but its practices do not always correspond. Similarly priced sections, uniformity in designs, and targeted marketing, in combination will inevitably lead to a socio-economically homogenous community (Winstanley et al., 2003).

3.3.4 Geographic location and community

The importance of spatial or geographic location has been an important element of the community literature. Some academics suggest that place is of vital importance to community “...because people are motivated to seek, stay in, protect, and improve places that are meaningful to them” (Manzo & Perkins, 2006, p. 347). Place attachment is seen as a catalyst to residents becoming involved in the local planning process (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). ‘Geographical expression’ appears as one of Thorns’ (2002) aforementioned three major usages of the term ‘community.’ Thorns does not argue that geographic expression is a necessary element of community, but rather a common way in which community is perceived or represented. Similarly, Knox and Pinch (2010, p. 193) list locational factors as a function of community, “relating to the social and material benefits of relative location.” Geographic location is conducive to community because people are more likely to settle for social interaction with local contacts that are more readily accessible (Knox & Pinch, 2010). Geographic proximity, however, is not a mandatory ingredient of community. For Marshall (2000, p. xvi) the biggest change in community is that today it is “less linked to a physical place than ever before.” An obvious illustration of this is the prevalence of virtual communities. These groups are accessible from anywhere in the world, but their placelessness does not detract from their eligibility to be classified as communities.

Virtual communities may exist as ‘computer-supported social networks’, spanning the globe, yet still offering its members the advantages that community provides (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). There are even claims that virtual interaction could overshadow more traditional forms of social relations. Shields (1996, p. 1) has stated that face-to-face communities are being neglected in favour of these virtual communities, raising fears of the public sphere declining into a “virtual world controlled by telecommunications

corporations where only the privileged have access and the body is disdained as an embarrassing and imperfect support for minds infatuated with virtual, representational bodies." This idea is explored in the 2009 film, *Surrogates* (Mostow, 2009) in which humans live in isolation, only interacting with each other through surrogate robots that represent their improved selves. While this may be a somewhat extreme scenario, it serves to highlight the growing influence that technology has over life within a community. Crang (2011) suggests that we must challenge the 'logic of substitution' where 'virtual communities' replace 'real' ones and look instead at how they co-constitute each other (see also Perkins & Thorns, 2012).

3.3.5 Community lost?

Modern sociological thinking surrounding community has been dominated by a theme of loss (Delanty, 2003). There is a perception that we once had a sense of community but we somehow lost it to urbanisation and capitalism. It is this loss with which many social scientists have been concerned (Wilson-Doenges, 2000). Sociologists such as Ferdinand Tönnies, Max Weber and Robert Nisbet, claimed that it was the "decline of the institutions of the Middle Ages that led to the sense of the loss of community" (Delanty, 2003, p. 15) and both Tönnies and Emile Durkheim believed that "urban life weakens kinship ties and produces impersonal social relationships" (Kornblum, 2002, p. 383).

The loss of community, as referred to by these theorists, could be due in part to its fragility. Garreau (1991) associates the fragility of community with its voluntary nature, asserting that community is entirely voluntary. Marshall, on the other hand, claims that this was not always the case. "Community was once not something you chose; it was something you were a part of, that you only separated from with great effort and difficulty" (Marshall, 2000, p. xvi). According to Marshall, community has become "an option rather than a fact of life. It has become an accessory one can choose or buy, like a lifestyle or a Jeep Cherokee" (p. xvi). It seems that the optional extra of community is still desired and searched for. "Community is nowadays another name for paradise lost – but one to which we dearly hope to return, and so we feverishly seek the roads that may bring us there" (Bauman, 2001, p. 3).

Much of the literature concentrates on the contrast in community between the city and rural areas. McLennan et al. (2000, p. 178) emphasise this contrast:

The suspicion of the city and its failings in terms of personal and social life continues. It is often implied – or expressly stated – that rural areas and small towns have a sense of ‘community’ which is lost in a city environment, and that people help and care for one another in rural areas – a reflection of Gemeinschaft.

Gemeinschaft, a German term used by sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, refers to the close-knit personal relationships of small communities. He contrasted this with gesellschaft – a lack of community in urban areas characterised by well-organised industrial society. Gesellschaft is essentially seen as everything that community is not (Bell & Newby, 1971). The contrast between gemeinschaft and gesellschaft societies is typified in the literature on the decline of community in the city which, in New Zealand, is perpetuated by the commonly held perception of it being a rural nation. Bell (1997) for example, refers to a ‘mythical rural imagery’ which exists in both the rural and urban imagination. “It is constantly present in interpretations of New Zealand tradition and identity, and in the commodification of the New Zealand colonial or ‘country’ style. It has become a dominant and recurring motif in popular nostalgia” (Bell, 1997, p. 148). The ‘rural myth’ helps to maintain the idea that community was somehow lost when we veered away from our colonial roots. Current residential development practices attempt to counter this loss by providing country style living in rural ‘villages’ located in the hinterland of main urban centres.

The theme of loss represents only one side of the discourse on community which also includes the realisation of community, “...a theme in some of the most influential universalistic political ideologies of modernity” (Delanty, 2003, p. 18). Herbert Gans’ (1967) study on the American community of Levittown (now Willingboro), Pennsylvania, found, for example, that the lack of community in suburban life was generally exaggerated, stating that “new towns are just old social structures on new land” (Gans, 1967, p. vii). After two years of participant observation Gans found that the ‘Levittowners’ came together as a community to form social organisations, and that people there were generally happy in their interaction with fellow Levittowners and their environment. This contradicted the popular view of homogenous, dull and repressive life in post-war suburbs.

Gans' work also emphasised the search for community in modern urban life. As people 'feverishly seek the roads to community' it is the developers of residential subdivisions that are offering a product which they claim can fulfil people's desires for a close-knit village-like setting in which to build a home.

3.3.6 Community and real estate development

The perceived loss of community and the ongoing endeavour to reclaim it leads on to the discussion of community and property developers. From the 1950s, capital investment in the production of housing began to change in the United States. "Developers, banks, government agencies, and individual as well as corporate investors belonging to the second circuit of capital began the mass development of suburbia" (Gottdiener, 2000, p. 267). The 'second circuit of capital' refers to the real estate sector in which capital accumulation takes place. The creation of large scale communities for the middle class meant a mass movement of people into areas outside of the central city, as discussed above.

The continuation of capitalist politics facilitated these large scale residential developments. To aid in this pursuit of capital, developers used community as an integral part of their marketing strategies. Perkins' (1989) study found, for example, that developers combined images that portrayed community and the rural idyll in their advertising in an attempt to sell housing within their subdivisions. Similarly, Wood (2002, p. 2) found that the "wholesomeness of 'community' as witnessed in the advertisements "is concentrated not in the bricks and mortar but in 'nature'."

Places where community is perceived to exist are exploited through claims that they can be reproduced. "The vernacular architecture and communities of European cities and the traditional American small town" have been idealised by developers and held up as an example of how a model community should work (Winstanley et al., 2003, p. 176). They have emphasised the loss of community in the city, while at the same time flaunting claims that a sense of community can be recreated in new housing areas. These developers have capitalised on the perceived loss of community by offering that for which people were so desperately searching. People were no longer merely being sold houses; they were "being

sold community as lifestyle, prestige or security or some combination of the three” (Forrest, 2004, p. 19).

Talen (2000) described how urban planners responded to the proclamation of a loss of community. Urban planners sought ways to

*reestablish civility and public life—generally referred to as **community**—using the tools of the planning trade. The problem, for planners, is that the notion of community is easily misinterpreted and misapplied, and planners have not exhibited any particular sign that their use of the term is well thought out (p. 172, emphasis in original).*

This is supported by Rosenblatt, Cheshire and Lawrence (2009, p. 125) who suggest that developers need to have a clearer understanding of the various meanings of the term community, both in the social science literature and among the resident population, and to recognize the limits of their community-building ambitions.”

The spread of this type of community-oriented suburban housing development has not been limited to the United States of the 1950s. Similar types of marketing strategies have been identified in modern day ‘gated communities’ in North America, Europe, Australasia and elsewhere. Ansley (2004, p. 16) describes these gated developments as:

... a kind of community spreading throughout New Zealand, enclaves surrounded by walls, accessible only through locked gates, rules governing the design of homes and the behaviour of owners who are generally older, childless or professional people intent on surrounding themselves with like-minded citizens.

Aitken (2009, pp. 223-224) cites Dear and Flusty who coined the term ‘dreamscapes’ to describe “the community-based ramifications for middle-class consumers of the postmodern esthetic.”

Described as places for concentrating ‘like activities’ and ‘like people’ in a society of increased interest and commodity specialization; peripheral ‘dreamscapes’; and protected, gentrified, downtown communities create places for affluent groups who can afford to secure their investments against outside influences. They display characteristic forms of architecture, landscaping, insurance, surveillance, and security.

Raposo (2006, p. 43) formulated a perspective on these 'dreamscapes' which "envisage[d] gated communities as a unique form of segregation as it associated both physical-architectural barriers... and voluntary segregation...in addition to a specific real estate product or commodity." This brings me back to the discussion of the ways community has been commodified by the real estate industry.

3.4 The commodification of community

The above discussion on the development of residential real estate shows that certain aspects of people's lifestyles combined with their desires for, and concerns about, community have been exploited by the real estate industry. The question addressed in this thesis is the extent to which, in a capitalist society dominated by ubiquitous consumerism, community has been not merely exploited, but explicitly commodified, for the purpose of exchange. A related question centres on the ways in which this process might occur.

Baudrillard (1983a, 1983b) argues that commodification is about sign-exchange, where objects are absorbed into their image. "What is increasingly being produced are not material objects but signs." The production of signs occurs in the "proliferation of non-material objects that comprise a substantial aesthetic component" (Lash & Urry, 1994, p. 15, cited in Knox & Pinch, 2010, p. 54). Following this line of reasoning, it could be argued that developers, driven by profit incentives, are selling community as a sign.

Guterson (1992), has attempted to outline this process as it worked out in US master-planned urban areas. In his paper, Guterson states that "If the traditional American town of the past existed to produce a commodity – shoes, bath towels, sheet metal, whatever – then in Green Valley and other master-planned towns of today the community *is* a commodity" (italics in original, p. 60). This again highlights the transition from producing things for their use value to producing things for their exchange value. In his book, *Metroburbia*, Knox (2008, p. 173) contends "To the extent that community has survived, it is community commodified; the classic idea of community exists only in developers' advertising copy and the rhetoric of new urbanists". He refers to community as a "ready-made accessory" which is "furnished by the real estate industry."

What is it about community that makes it prone to, or available for commodification?

McBride (2005) believes the answer lies within the realm of consumption. "Community is the opposite of what we have, and hence eternally desirable as the unknown. Consumption teaches us to desire, never expecting gratification; thereby community as an ideal becomes especially conducive to commodification" (p. 115). This is supported by Brent (2004, p. 213) who asserts that "However much we may want it, community never seems to arrive." McBride sees community and consumerism as mutually reinforcing systems of desire, citing a complicated relationship between our desire for community and our desire to achieve it. We never expect our need for community to be gratified, but we go on desiring it nevertheless.

3.4.1 Advertising

Advertising material is a critical aspect of residential subdivision development. While 'community' and 'neighbourhood' are terms that refer to different things, both are general terms for "a cluster of inter-related situations relating to specific aspects of social organization" (Knox, 1995, p. 213). Residential subdivision developers seem to use these terms synonymously throughout their advertising rhetoric as the lure of community aims to seduce potential buyers.

"Advertisements... rely on a repertoire of images and values that speak to different people's sensibilities and fantasies and thereby address their desires" (Caldeira, 2000, p. 263). The advertising is designed to connect with people's innermost concerns: those associated with, for example, their intimate social relations, what is considered to be healthy and safe, their happiness and the importance of a raft of cultural traditions (Goss, 1993; Gottdiener, 2000; Leiss, Kline & Jhally, 1986; Leonard, Perkins & Thorns, 2004; Perkins, Thorns & Newton, 2008). One such concern is what Wood (2002, p. 3) refers to as the "anxieties of a heterogeneous social order." "Thus the reader of the advertisements as prospective purchaser 'buys', literally and figuratively, into the notion of re-ordered social space (of a constructed homogeneity)" (p. 3). Developers must be "diligent in preparing marketing material and ensuring that it resonates with their intended target market. Marketing can mean the success or failure of a project" (Maxwell, 2004, p. 1). Potential

buyers see images that they can relate to which implies that their new neighbours will be on a similar social stratum.

If the ads fail to articulate images people can understand and recognize as their own, they fail to seduce. Therefore, real estate advertisements constitute a good source of information about the lifestyles and values of the people whose desires they elaborate and help to shape (Caldeira, 2000, p. 263).

The advertising is designed to portray both the physical qualities of the real estate and also the non-physical commodities such as experiences, signs and feelings. Maxwell (2004) elaborates, explaining how community is promoted as something which is not organic but rather a saleable item, made available by the real estate industry. This raises interesting questions about the extent to which community is actually being sold as opposed to being used to sell sections and houses.

The marketing material tells us that we can buy good places: community, friends and acquaintances, lifestyle, health, exclusivity, prestige, privacy and security. According to the marketing materials, these features are not created by civic action, careful relationship building or self-discipline, but commodities purchased with the price of a home (Maxwell, 2004, p. 5).

Rosenblatt et al. (2009) add credence to such claims. Their study of an Australian master planned community created by Delfin Land Lease (DLL) involved an investigation of advertising material which touted community as a feature of the development. "First, at a discursive level, Springfield Lakes – like most of DLL's master planned communities – is heavily marketed as a place where the spirit of community is strong even before prospective buyers move in" (Rosenblatt et al., 2009, p. 130). The use of community throughout the advertising rhetoric is then further enhanced by the design of the development, which is promoted as being conducive to the building of community.

This raises questions regarding spatial determinism, the doctrine that human behaviour is determined by environmental conditions or location. It is highly questionable however, that there is a direct causal determining link between spatial form and human social life (Hayden, 2003; Sorkin, 1998; Talen, 1999; Toker & Toker, 2006; Torre, 1999; Winstanley et al., 2003). For Talen, (1999, p. 1374) "The theoretical and empirical support for the notion

that sense of community (particularly its affective dimensions) can be created via physical design factors is ambiguous at best.” In their exploration of New Urbanism within the context of Christchurch Winstanley et al. (2003) suggested “It might be possible that new urbanism and the new Christchurch residential developments offer increased opportunities for **communal** activities rather than community per se” (p. 178, emphasis in original). It is important not to overestimate “the power of architecture in shaping social dynamics” (Toker & Toker, 2006, p. 156).

New Urbanism represents an approach to planning which attempts to solve the social and environmental problems brought about by a sprawling city. “It addresses many of the ills of our current sprawl development pattern while returning to a cherished American icon: that of a compact, close-knit community” (Katz, 1994, p. ix). This brings forth an important question in regard to this research. Community may have a plethora of definitions in the literature and it may be used extensively throughout the marketing material for residential developments, but what does community mean to property developers? Garreau (1991, p. 301) asked a director of a large Californian property development company what community meant to him. “What he seems mostly is a little perplexed by the question. Says Tom Nielsen, ‘It doesn’t mean – anything more than a marketing term’” (p. 301).

Capitalism has recreated and redefined the reality of community. It has transformed it from something that we are born into, to something that we buy into. Community becomes an amenity that is readily available to those who can afford it – an optional accessory (Marshall, 2000, p. xvi). Developers create their own visions of community and sell these elements that were once thought to be lost. Developers also take on a lead role in the creation of a brand name which they then market to the public (Lang & Danielsen, 1997).

Understanding the role of developers in creating communities is as problematic as its many definitions and means of creation, although, as argued above, it is clear that that they have used rapid urbanisation and a perceived loss of community to their advantage. Generally, developers identify community as something that people want and value and Knox (2005, p. 40) explains how developers have been able to capitalise on this: “In response to disenchantment among consumers with placeless Fordist subtopias, developers were quick

to see the commercial advantages of switching their activities away from standardized subdivisions to focus instead on packaged subdivisions.”

3.5 Research questions

The research reported in this thesis addresses the gap in our knowledge around the role developers take in the process of urban change and the ways in which they are helping shape both urban form and understandings of ‘community’. Although a great deal of work has been carried out regarding the nature of community within residential subdivisions (Perkins, 1989; Bajracharya, Earl & Khan, 2008; Bell & Lyall, 2000; Cook & Ruming, 2008; Dixon & Dupuis, 2003; Fisher, 2003; Knox, 2005, 2008; Miles et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2010) it is important that we interrogate meanings of community held by the developers of these subdivisions and the practices they employ to create and market it to potential residents. The purpose of my research is to discover if, why and how real developers have commodified the concept of community. Additional to this broad objective I have formulated three central research questions:

1. What do residential property developers understand by ‘community’?
2. How do residential property developers connect ideas about community with various other aspects in their new housing developments?
3. What relationships are established by residential property developers and their associates between community and new housing developments in advertising and related marketing strategies?

Chapter 4

Research Methods

4.1 Introduction

This study was conducted primarily at an exploratory level, employing qualitative social science research methods in order to gauge the thoughts and opinions about, and interpretations of, community by residential property developers in Canterbury.

Qualitative social science research methods lent themselves well to my research questions, as they yielded results that are richer in meaning than quantitative data (Babbie, 2007).

The research was therefore descriptive, rather than predictive, in nature. Qualitative research methods were also conducive to the exploratory nature of my research because they are used in the development of theory and help create a foundation for larger scale and more complex studies (Hakim, 1987). My research comprised a multi-method approach including research on the history of urban development in Christchurch, a review of the literature pertaining to community and commodification, observations of, and on-site visits to, residential subdivisions, in-depth interviews with residential property developers and an analysis of their advertising material. The research methods will now be explained and justified and details of ethical considerations given.

4.2 Qualitative research strategy

Qualitative research is an epistemological position which Bryman (2001) describes as interpretivist. While quantitative research adopts the natural scientific model, qualitative research emphasises “the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” – that is, qualitative research methods are meaning-centred (Bryman, 2001, p. 402). These methods aim to see the world as it is seen by the actors being studied (Bryman, 2001), which meant I was able to explore a view of the world from the perspective of property developers by implementing a process which is more productive than a standardised quantitative approach (Flick, Kardorff & Steinke, 2004). This approach enabled me to discover and examine the meanings held by developers in regard to community. Qualitative research methods were necessary to

answer the 'how' questions which were raised in the literature review. Practices and processes became apparent because I was able to adjust my line of questioning to suit the individual participants. The data that were collected could then be analysed by identifying themes and contrasts across the various responses I collected. "Although qualitative research is about people as the central unit of account, it is not about particular individuals *per se*; reports focus rather on the various patterns, or clusters, of attitudes and related behaviour that emerge from the interviews" (Hakim, 1987, p. 26, italics in original). A qualitative approach to the research allowed me to look at the patterns across property developers as a group, rather than examining individuals.

The interpretation of the social world by focusing on subjective meanings is a cornerstone of qualitative research (Flick et al., 2004), which attempts to explain social action in terms of the subjective meanings of the actor (Bryman, 2001). This subjective meaning can only be gleaned through qualitative methods, which tend to be more frequently used in disciplines where the emphasis is on description and explanation as opposed to prediction (Hakim, 1987). Criticisms of a lack of rigidity in such a study are unwarranted due the need for flexibility and feedback throughout the research process.

Consistent with this qualitative research approach I encouraged the real estate developers to tell their own stories and express their own opinions on the development process and its link to community. As explained by Walker (1985, pp. 21-22), I wanted the participants to 'do the thinking for me' "because they are directly involved with the issue or can bring a wide range of knowledge and experience to bear on it." Their narratives are important to the meaning and structure in interpretations of community.

4.3 Data collection

Data were collected from four main sources. Secondary data were collected from the literature pertaining to the subject matter and also from advertising and marketing material designed to promote residential subdivisions. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with property developers and on-site observations of residential subdivisions in Canterbury.

4.3.1 Literature review

The literature review is crucial as it determines where this research fits in the context of the existing body of knowledge on this topic (Babbie, 2007; Davidson & Tolich, 1999c). It states what the research is about and creates a statement of the issues (Davidson & Tolich, 1999c). This is important given the exploratory nature of this study.

The initial phase of my research involved researching the history of residential property development in Canterbury and compiling a comprehensive database of relevant literature from both New Zealand and overseas. The literature pertaining to community and commodification was then analysed in order to gain a deeper understanding of academic perceptions of the topic. Interpretation of the literature provided a sufficient base of references that served as secondary data to support the primary data.

4.3.2 In-depth semi-structured one-on-one interviews

As Flick et al. (2004, p. 65) explain, “It is first necessary to make a reconstruction and analysis using a variety of ethnographic procedures, derived from interviews and documents.” I used in-depth, semi-structured interviews, observations and analysis of relevant documents during my research. “In-depth interviews in qualitative research draw on an interpretive theoretical framework which emphasises that meanings are continually constructed and reconstructed in interaction (Laimputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 57). The purpose of using in-depth interviewing is to collaborate with the developers to understand the meanings that they associate with community.

A list of questions provided a guideline for discussion on the relevant subjects, but essentially the interviews were semi-structured conversations. Interviews were recorded (with permission from the interviewees), transcribed and the data coded and analysed.

4.3.2.1 *The interviewees – participants’ range of experience*

Developer 1

Developer 1 works for a large Christchurch based property development company. He is a

general manager within that company. This organisation specialises in large scale housing developments within the Christchurch area.

Developer 2

Developer 2 is a 'one man band' property developer. Developer 2 described himself as a retired property developer, but he has a vast knowledge of the industry after completing several subdivisions in Canterbury.

Developer 3

Developer 3 is another 'one man band' property developer. He develops only small scale housing developments, building the houses and selling sections as complete house and land packages.

Developer 4

Developer 4 is part of a relatively small organisation that produces large scale residential subdivisions around Christchurch. Developer 4 has knowledge of the property development industry outside of New Zealand, having worked overseas.

Developer 5

Developer 5 is a general manager within a large South Island property development company. He has experience in creating overall visions for subdivisions and housing developments, as well as project management and marketing.

Surveyor 1

Surveyor 1, a registered surveyor, is the director of a prominent planning, surveying and engineering company in Christchurch. He has considerable experience in subdivision planning in Canterbury.

Surveyor 2

Surveyor 2, a registered surveyor, is a director within a Christchurch based land development consultancy. He has experience in subdivision concept design and project management.

Surveyor 3

Surveyor 3 is also a registered surveyor and the director of a planning, surveying and engineering company in Christchurch. He has experience in the planning and management of residential subdivision projects.

4.3.2.2 Sampling

Interviewees were selected by using the internet to identify residential property developers in Christchurch. Potential interviewees were emailed an invitation to participate in the study along with a copy of the research information sheet. Those who responded and were willing to participate were then contacted by telephone to arrange an interview. If no reply was received via email the potential participants were contacted directly by telephone and asked to participate in the study. The interviews were conducted in the homes and offices of the participants. Interviewees were asked if they knew of any other developers who could potentially be interested in participating in the study, however this recruitment method yielded no further participants.

4.3.2.3 Sample size

The sample size of eight participants is, even for a qualitative study, relatively small. This was due in part to a low response rate, which was largely attributable to the effects of the Canterbury earthquakes. Eight of the potential participants I identified were either unable to give up time for an interview or they did not respond. Some developers were unable to give up time due to the effects of the Canterbury earthquake in September, 2010. Nonetheless, the sample, augmented with secondary data, allowed me to establish important themes and trends and overall, the depth and quality of the data gathered proved to be sufficient for the purpose of this thesis.

4.3.3 Observations and photographs

Simple observations of residential subdivisions were a useful way of seeing firsthand how these places are being built and how developers had attempted to build community into the environment. The physical construction of new residential subdivisions was the focus of the observations. Human behaviour within the developments was not recorded and

people were excluded from photographs where possible. Digital photographs taken during these observations were used as primary data to support my secondary data and the information gleaned from interviews. Photographs are a useful and now popular tool in qualitative social research. "Accepted as a subjective and reflexive form of qualitative data production, methods based on photography and video are now entrenched in major fields of inquiry..." (Knoblauch, Baer, Laurier, Petschke & Schnettler, 2008).

Just as a digital voice recorder aids in recording data, a camera can "capture details that would otherwise be forgotten or unnoticed" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 127). Photographs are interwoven with the text in order to add substance to the research findings. "Certainly, for the reader of a qualitative study, pictures give a sense of being there, seeing the setting... firsthand" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 128).

I took some photographs in subdivisions which were referred to by the interviewees and others were chosen based on their advertising material. All photographs were taken by the researcher and were purely for use in this thesis. One of the observations was guided by Developer 2 who took me on a conducted tour of his major developments upon completion of his interview. Additional observations were conducted upon completion of the analysis of the interviews in order to collect photographic evidence of examples mentioned by the developers and surveyors.

4.3.4 Advertising material

Advertising material was collected to explore the idea that developers are 'selling community'. The main sources of information were newspapers, the internet and billboards. Information packages detailing the features of various subdivisions were also collected. These were obtained from site information offices and via mail. The property section of *The Press*, Christchurch's major newspaper, was examined when it was published on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Other newspapers such as the Real Estate Outlook and the Southern Real Estate guide were also trawled for relevant advertising copy. Advertising material was then stored digitally to be analysed and coded.

It is important to note that the advertising material collected is by no means representative of all advertising for residential developments. The advertising material was used to emphasise that the use of community to advertise real estate is prevalent in New Zealand. Only the advertising copy that specifically referred to community was collected. Furthermore, although my study was conducted in the setting of Canterbury I used advertising material from other parts of New Zealand also. Advertising material promoting developments outside of Canterbury are still relevant to the study and added weight to the rest of the data. The advertising material was complemented by the information gleaned from the property developers and the photographs.

4.4 Data triangulation

The data collected during this study pertain to residential property development and the commodification of community; however, no one method was sufficient to answer my research questions. Babbie (2007) suggests that it is best to bring more than one research method to bear on the topic. This is called triangulation. “In social research, *triangulation* refers to using different research methods to hone in on an event from two or three different angles” (Davidson & Tolich, 1999a, p. 34, italics in original). Comparisons and contrasts may then be made between the data sources, adding to the depth of the research. For example, the illustrations given by property developers during interviews can be compared to the observations I made during visits to various developments. Also, the developers’ interpretations of community can be compared with the way community is portrayed by the advertising material. Similarities in the data produced by different methods strengthen their validity, (Davidson & Tolich, 1999a) and differences and variations can be discussed.

4.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are an important aspect of any social research. An application was submitted to the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee for consent to interview the property developers. Initially I considered bypassing this process because I was to be interviewing property developers within their professional capacity. However, “Ethical decisions necessarily involve one’s personal sense of what is right” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998,

p. 36). I decided that the subjective and personal nature of my questions in regard to community warranted the approval of the Human Ethics Committee. As stated by Snook (1999, p. 73), "In research, both means and ends must be subjected to ethical appraisal."

Interviewees were provided with a research information sheet prior to the interview and all participants signed a written consent form. This meant that participants were well informed about the research procedure and were given the opportunity to either decline or be involved (Snook, 1999). The participants understood that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the research process. This is consistent with the injunction that researchers must record, analyse and publish data in a way which prevents the identification of the participants (Snook, 1999). "A research project guarantees confidentiality when the researcher can identify a given person's responses but essentially promises not to do so publicly" (Babbie, 2007, p. 65). Participants were assigned aliases and only the researcher had access to the corresponding names. These names, contact databases, original recordings and transcriptions were stored securely by the researcher. Interview transcriptions and interview notes were sent to participants following interviews so they could change or delete anything they said before it was included in subsequent research publications.

Ethical considerations were also taken into account while taking photographs during observations. Where possible, people were not included in photographs. Special care was taken when photographing areas that are popular with children such as playgrounds. These areas were photographed only when they were not in use.

At all times throughout the research care was taken to adhere to the five basic ethical principles (Davidson & Tolich, 1999d). No harm was done to participants, all participation was voluntary, the confidentiality of participants was maintained at all times, deceit was avoided, and the data were analysed and reported faithfully.

4.6 Data analysis

This section outlines the methods used to analyse the various forms of primary and secondary data collected for the study. The NVivo qualitative data software package was

used to analyse data. According to Welsh (2002, p. 5), “It is important that researchers recognise the value of both manual and electronic tools in qualitative data analysis and management and do not reify one over the other but instead remain open to, and make use of, the advantages of each.” Therefore, a mix of electronic and more traditional methods of data analysis were employed.

4.6.1 Interviews

There is no one ‘correct’ approach to the analysis of in-depth interviews that will lead two researchers to the same conclusions about a set of data (Jones, 1985). This especially relevant to my study which is exploratory and descriptive in nature. Qualitative data analysis is a process of “inductive reasoning, thinking, and theorizing” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 140). The goal of the analysis was to make sense of the data and make a structure (Jones, 1985), giving this meaning in order to form a narrative (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). A difficulty with exploring an idea such as community is the highly variable and contested nature of the concept. While I realised that I could not empathise with research participants completely (Jones, 1985) I attempted to form an accurate portrayal of the thoughts and opinions of the developers in the narrative.

Five of the eight participants agreed to a voice recording of their interview. These recordings were transcribed and imported to the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Before NVivo was used to analyse the transcripts they were read thoroughly and memos pertaining to the data were made. The second level of analysis was then carried out by coding like responses and topics into various nodes or categories. Notes were taken during interviews that were not digitally recorded. These notes were also imported to the NVivo software and sorted into nodes.

The coding process “identifies and aggregates *areas of theoretical and empirical interest*” in the interview transcripts and notes (Davidson & Tolich, 1999b, p. 169, italics in original). The categories of data were then organised into a meaningful order that would form the basis of the text. The collection, coding and analysis of the data was carried out concurrently in order to fine tune the data collection process (Davidson & Tolich, 1999b). This meant that interview guides and questions differed from the beginning of data

collection to its conclusion.

4.6.2 Photographs

There are many methods used to analyse photography within qualitative studies. Knoblauch et al. (2008) state that “the variety of methodological approaches in the analysis of photography is so vast that a common ground remains to be established.” My own data analysis proceeded intuitively; photographs were sorted into categories using the NVivo software and links between interviewees’ responses and the observations were identified. Where appropriate, photographs were interwoven with the text so support the given examples and ideas gleaned from the primary data.

4.6.3 Advertising material

The advertising that was collected throughout the course of the study was collated and organised into categories. Text from newspaper advertisements was typed and inserted into various nodes using the NVivo software. The images in the advertising material were also coded. The images and text from the various forms of advertising material were then used as examples in the text to help explore the idea that property developers have commodified community.

4.7 Summary

This chapter has given details of the qualitative research strategy that was employed throughout this study. The research strategy has been explained and justified within the context of this research. The key features of the research methodology are as follows:

- A qualitative research strategy was employed in order to gauge themes and patterns in the subjective interpretations, motives and approaches of property developers in regard to community.
- Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with property developers and observations and photographs of residential subdivisions in Canterbury.

Secondary data was in the form of a literature review and an analysis of advertising material used to promote residential subdivisions in New Zealand was also used.

- The various forms of data were triangulated in order to focus on the research questions from different angles.
- Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Research was carried out in accordance with obligations to conditions set out by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee.
- Data analysis was carried out using a mix of electronic (NVivo software) and more traditional manual methods. The data analysis helped to shape the data collection as the research questions evolved throughout the process.

Chapter 5

Property Developers

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will address the first research question which asks what residential property developers understand by 'community'. I justify my decision to use property developers and surveyors as my sources of primary data by demonstrating how important they are to the residential property development process. The developers' various interpretations of community are then explored within the context of new housing developments. The notion of an instant community is considered and contrasts between new developments and established suburbs in regard to community are explored. Finally, I explore the varied motives of the property developers, focussing on the balance between creating community and financial imperatives.

5.2 The development of residential real estate

While the focus of this chapter is centred on developers' understandings of community, I would first like to elaborate on what it means to be a 'developer' within the context of this thesis and examine the residential property development process. Before I began the data collection process I knew very little about the type of people I would be interviewing. Quickly, I came to realise that developers are not a generic group that can all be placed in the same category.

While most of my primary data were gleaned from property developers, I also thought it pertinent to speak with surveyors due to their critical role in the property development process. This is validated by Table 5.1 (page 43) which shows that surveyors play an integral role in the subdivision development process. Their insights were also valuable in determining how ideas about community are connected to elements of built form in residential subdivisions. The surveyors whom I interviewed were all part of major engineering companies in Christchurch. By talking to these people, I was able to gain further insight into the intentions and priorities of the property developers themselves.

Table 5.1 An overview of the subdivision development process in New Zealand.

Stage	Actions	Actors
1. Site identification & feasibility study	An appropriate site for development is identified and planner/surveyors conduct a feasibility study to see if the site is economically viable.	Developers, planner/surveyors
2. Land acquisition & demographic identification	The developer purchases the land from the original land owner. Market research is carried out to identify the target demographic for the new development.	Developers, original land owners, property lawyers, market researchers
3. Surveying & site planning	Create a plan that is suitable to the target demographic. Consider layout, roading, sewerage, electricity grids, storm water, high pressure water. Look at other subdivisions to see what works well and what does not.	Developers, planner/surveyors
4. Resource consent, rezoning & subdivision application	Obtain resource consent to create a residential development OR apply for a plan change - changing land use zone to residential. Apply for subdivision consent from local council – application distributed to experts for comment, planners submit a report on application, objections/appeals considered and a decision is issued.	Developers, local council, regional council, general public, planner/surveyors, land development experts, property lawyers, affected parties
5. Design covenants & property titles	Create design covenants (attached to the titles). Divide land into sections and obtain titles for sections from Land Information NZ.	Developers, planner/surveyors, Land Information NZ
6. Site construction	Subcontractors hired to carry out planner/surveyor's design. Site infrastructure linked to existing infrastructure. Roads and footpaths implemented. Reserves created, trees planted.	Developers, planner/surveyors, subcontractors
Marketing	Real estate agents implement a marketing strategy. Create a website for the development and advertise the development in newspapers and through other media. Larger development companies may implement their own marketing strategies. Advertising reflects elements of the physical design and the desires of the target demographic.	Developers, advertising agencies, real estate agents, market researchers
7. Selling	Selling the sections to property buyers – this may be carried out by real estate agents or it may be done by the developer.	Developers, real estate agents, property buyers, property lawyers
8. Governance	Governing the building of houses and ensuring that design covenants are adhered to. This begins once the first section is sold and will end at a time decided by the developer. Liquidated damages enforced for non-compliance.	Developers, residents, builders, architects

The surveyors to whom I spoke were able to offer particularly useful insights into the type of people who are classified as 'developers'. Because their clients are property developers they are familiar with the type of people who are developing residential property. The hazards of property development were emphasised by the surveyors who highlighted the risk taking characteristics of property developers who are effectively gambling with large sums of money.

I think generally developers are people that are quite sort of... they're risk takers. You're not going to get someone who's not a risk taker going into land development because the rewards are high but if it doesn't work out the consequences are severe as well (Surveyor 2).

I asked the surveyors if the developers are generally practised property experts or people such as farmers who are subdividing and developing their own land. Surveyor 2 made the distinction between 'private people' and genuine property developers. "No no, generally they're property developers and they've either bought land off farmers or they've bought it somewhere. You don't generally get too many farmers or private people getting into land development." This was supported by Surveyor 3 who stated that while there are some casual or one-off individual property developers, their clients are generally genuine experienced developers.

The majority of people we deal with are people that we call "developers" in inverted commas. They've done it before. They know what they're after. They do it as a business. There is occasionally - we do have individual clients as well. I think the majority of work would be done by developers but if a farmer or a particular owner has owned some land and they wish to go ahead with it then yeah, sure. That happens as well. But it's probably less common.

Surveyor 2 attributed this to the financial aspects of property development, explaining why it may not be practical for farmers, for example, to get involved in the property development business.

I mean, it's just the funding – they may have owned the farm and it may be worth quite a bit but to get the funding and the risk involved with spending four or five million dollars on building roads and infrastructure.

Surveyor 3 did not notice any significant differences between individual clients and experienced developers. "I think you'd find... yeah the odd private people might take more of an interest and say we want a certain kind of landscaping or try to achieve a particular objective. But I can't think of many off hand that would be massively different."

It is important to note that there are contrasts in the scale of subdivisions that developers

undertake. The scale of development, as will be discussed later, has an influence on the developer's ability to 'plan for community'.

While residential developers are important, they are not the only ones involved in building and selling communities. There are many specialist roles involved in real estate development but the developers play an important part throughout the process. Table 5.1 provides a brief overview of the development process, identifying the different stages and the actors who are involved. While property developers do brief the surveyors on their general vision for a new housing development the design is left largely to the surveyors themselves. It is the job of the surveyor to work with developers, creating an overall plan for residential subdivisions. Weiss (1987) refers to 'subdividers', describing them as practical city planners. "The actual working out of a city plan lies largely in the hands of the subdivider. He is creating the city of the future on the outskirts of the city today" (p. 56). The developer may be described as the subdivider, however, while it is the developer who drives the expansion of the city it is the planner of the subdivision that has the greatest influence over its form. Surveyor 3 elaborated on the role of the planner/surveyor, noting that the experienced property developers will learn from past experiences and that these experiences influence their expectations and decisions. He underlined the developers' expectations of design regarding marketability and profitability.

I think they [the developers] expect us to do a good design and they want something that's marketable. And they certainly will be critical if they don't get the yields and the expenses are higher than they expect on a cost per lot basis. But other than that I think we've got a fairly free hand to come up with a design that we think is appropriate for the site.

I discovered however, that while the surveyors have the most significant influence over the form of residential subdivisions, the developers also influence the design. I discussed with the surveyors the role of the developers in the design process. "They'll have their own views as well and they may better it or they may improve it or make their own comments accordingly" (Surveyor 3). Surveyor 3 noted that it is his job to listen carefully to what the developers want to achieve with the subdivision. "That's part of our role I guess is to try and understand what they're trying to achieve." Surveyor 2 also stressed the significance of the developers' input.

Generally those people [developers] have quite solid views on what they want so they have a pretty good idea of what they want anyway. So they have quite an input into it. Along the way they are always quite in touch with you and very much involved in the process.

As shown by Table 5.1 , property developers *and* surveyors are an integral part of the property development process, justifying my decision to use them as my primary sources of data. While all developers play a significant role in the property development process it is important to note the difference between small and large property development companies. Small ‘one man band’ property developers are heavily involved in every aspect of a residential development. They operate individually and create subdivisions on a much smaller scale than the larger companies. Because of the money and expertise required it would be difficult for a one man band developer to create a subdivision of significant size. Small scale property developers hire planning and surveying companies, who generally interact only with small companies and individual property developers, to create a plan for their sites. I found that the roles of property developers vary greatly from those who take a hands-on approach to those who delegate and outsource various tasks and responsibilities. Regardless of the role developers play in the process, they each have their own interpretations and understandings of community which they bring to bear in the development of residential real estate.

5.3 Developers’ understandings of community

The wide body of literature on the subject of community and the extensive use of the concept in developers’ advertising material led me to an important question; what do developers understand by ‘community’? Obviously, different people will have different interpretations of community in the context of residential developments. Developer 1 corroborated this, stating “...some people have got different opinions as to what makes those things good and what doesn’t.” Consequently, the purpose of this research question is not to make an evaluation of developers’ interpretations of community based on what is stated in the literature, but to gain a deeper understanding of what they mean and what they want to achieve when they claim to be creating new communities or residential subdivisions with a sense of community.

During my discussion with Developer 1 I discovered that the property development company he works for hires survey companies to conduct research into what it is that people want in a residential subdivision. This practice is due, in part, to the large scale of the property developments that Developer 1 undertakes. He noted that research participants do not specifically say that they want a sense of community, but they do ask for all of the things that make up the popular perception of what is required to create a community.

They want a particular sized section and a particular orientation and those sorts of things to suit their own immediate needs. They then want... schools are an important part. Other amenities like parks and that sort of thing. Public transport is becoming more important than it used to be. So they go through a list of individual items and then they get to the bottom of it – what we've found from the surveys is, you put all those things together and that's what they think is needed to make a community. So it's not that they purposefully go out and say, 'Well, I want to go to somewhere where there's a sense of community... I want these things, and these things all put together actually will deliver a community.'

In this sense, the amenities and services are the most important aspect of community. While Developer 1 sees these elements (schools, parks etc.) as being the physical building blocks of a community, it is ultimately people that are responsible for creating a community.

But overall I think people, I mean it's the people that make a sense of community so you've got to have them. But it's certainly becoming more and more the forefront of people's thinking about what it is they get out of living in a certain place, rather than just the house they live in.

This is supported by Developer 5 who stated that “communities are made up of people.” Developer 5 mentioned that for community to develop, there needs to be a “strong core of individual personalities”, referring to these people as the “pioneers” of his company’s developments. He told me that the first residents to move into a new subdivision are critical to the development of community within a new residential area. Listing them by name, he attributed the success of past developments to the strength of character of the original residents. These individuals took on an unofficial role within the development, making new residents feel welcome and fostering resident interaction.

Of all the developers to whom I spoke, Developer 5 put the most emphasis on the importance of social structures contributing to the success of a residential development. He told me that “Social structures help a network of relationships to form between people – this is the glue that holds communities together” and “The community is the sum of its parts, but also, the sum of its social structures.” By social structures he was referring to the relationships that form through schools, meeting neighbours and the interaction between residents at focal points within the development, such as parks and commercial areas. Commercial areas are of particular importance to Developer 5; “A true community has commercial opportunities.” Community is very much a focus of what Developer 5 is trying to achieve. This is evident in the design of subdivisions and it comes through strongly in the company’s advertising material. “It’s [Community is] fundamental to what we do.” This was a stark contrast to my conversation with Developer 3 who avoided all questions pertaining to community, instead focussing on the development process.

It was interesting to note that certain developers spoke of community not only in regard to their residential developments, but also in regard to their companies in general. Developer 1 talked of the sense of community within his own organisation and how this is translated into what they do. He said that values such as honesty and integrity are an important part of this. Similarly, Developer 5 stated that community has become the “catch cry of the company” – implemented in both the advertising and design of their developments.

The surveyors I spoke with had their own opinions on what it means to be a community. Surveyor 1 alluded to the resident’s “empathy for their landscape” stating that once people get to know their surroundings they will have more pride in their area - they develop a sense of community. In regard to the advertising material for residential subdivisions however, Surveyor 1 referred to community as more or less a “throwaway line.” Developer 1 acknowledged this opinion saying that community is “the latest and greatest in terms of... well it’s... some cynics think it’s really just a marketing ploy and it doesn’t really mean much.” Ultimately, it is up to the developer and the surveyor to actually create an attractive place which is conducive to enhanced social interaction. They then either push the community message in their advertising or merely promote the elements of their development that they believe will be favourable to developing a sense of community.

In general, the developers' interpretations of community related to happy people interacting and 'getting along' with each other. As Developer 5 said, "Happy residents make for a good community." Developer 4 stressed the importance of neighbourliness and reciprocal favours between residents.

I think it's people looking after each other. That's very typical of what we have already. We've only got 40 or 50 houses out at Clyde Rydge out of the hundred that we've sold. Others are holding off building – others are starting to build shortly. But already there's a very strong community feel. Somebody goes on holiday – they keep an eye on the house down the road.

Developer 1 also underlined the importance to community of positive social interaction, saying that "people will enjoy living in a certain place better if they get on with the people that live with them." This is also at the forefront of Developer 2's mind when creating a residential development. Developer 2 sees social interaction within a development as most important component in building a sense of community. In the opinion of Developer 4 this anecdote epitomises the essence of what it means to have a sense of community;

I walked into a place, one fellow popped into the office the other day... they said 'Can you come and see me before you go home?' And I said 'Yeah, that'd be fine.' So I popped in and saw him. And out the back they had a couple of residents having a glass of wine and salmon on rye bread. And to me that sort of epitomised it. And they were totally different demographics. Like – one couple – the kids had gone and married, an older couple – almost at retirement stage and the other couple there had an eight week old baby playing on the floor. You know... to me, I walked out of there and I thought, yeah, that's cool. That's really what it's all about, you know?

5.3.1 The importance of diversity to community

During my discussions with developers and surveyors I raised the issue of diversity and its relationship with community. Developer 1 informed me that "overseas planning experts" are telling him that diversity is an important part of community and that it should be considered when designing the plan for a new housing development. He told me that this is logical, and that a new residential development should just be a "smaller slice of what the whole of the city provides in a condensed area within the city itself... Part of the rationale behind having a master plan is to try and get a better, fuller spectrum of people living in it."

Developer 1, for example, drew attention to differing section prices attracting people from a wider range of socio-economic status groups. He did mention, however, that the range of socio-economic status within a residential subdivision would not be as wide as in the city itself.

We're not going to have 2 million dollar homes all in one particular area and then an Aranui on the other side where they're only \$200,000. But we will at least have a bigger range between those two extremes than we get in most subdivisions.

Surveyor 2 agreed that diversity is important, stating that there is “less of a community feel where the mix isn’t there”, highlighting the integration of different age groups as a key factor.

I think it's just good for the community. Perhaps it's good for people themselves. Because everyone... as you go through life you're at different stages and I just think it's good to have that involvement with the different stages. I think it makes people feel better that they're, you know, some old guy on the corner can have a chat to someone young that's drinking beer and chasing girls and vice versa. I just think that it's good for people in general to have that mix of ages of the people that they talk to and interact with.

Developer 2 sees what he calls “a good cross-section” of people in his developments and, interestingly, he also gave an example which highlighted a mixture of age groups

You know, Marsden Park - I used to say the only thing I haven't got there is a cemetery. I saw it as a cradle to the grave development. And I saw it in my warped way as the cheap sites are right down the bottom end – a bit smaller average sections in a more distant cheaper part of the development if you like. The bigger sections and higher prices were down the stream and then we had an area we actually set aside for a rest home.

Developer 4 also spoke of a mixture of different age groups as being important to the development of a new housing subdivision. Like Developer 2, he linked the diversification of age groups to the physical layout of the site. In one case, Developer 4 redesigned a development in order to incorporate both a preschool and a retirement village, consequently increasing the diversity of age groups in the housing development. It was

interesting to note that most of the discussions surrounding diversity centred on either socio-economic background or age, while other aspects of a diverse community were ignored.

5.3.2 Instant community – just add residents?

This section focuses on the idea that a new residential development can instantly become a community. This is an important idea in regard to developers' understandings of community and the way this is connected to their marketing strategies. Despite the claims of the advertising material (to be explored in Chapter 7), it seems that property developers do not necessarily subscribe to the notion that it is possible to create instant communities. Regarding community Developer 1 said "It's something that builds up over time... You can't create it over night. It's not possible... there are all those sorts of things that you want to try and develop but it takes a long time to do it."

The property developers I spoke to emphasised that community is something that begins to develop at an early stage of the subdivisions. Developer 5 highlighted the importance of open space amenities being in place early in order to expedite the development of community in a new town or subdivision. He emphasised that community is not an afterthought, but an integral part of his company's initial plans, stating that "Building a community from day one is first and foremost in our minds." Surveyor 2 agrees that while the development of communities starts at an early stage it is by no means a rapid process, linking the gradual development of community to the physical development of trees and parks within new housing developments.

Well it starts when people move in. Obviously without people it's not going to be a community. But I think as people stay there for longer and the amenities... well like the street trees and things grow, and then the reserves start to, you know – the bushes and the plants start to grow it creates – it goes from a new subdivision, which six months beforehand was probably a paddock or an orchard or something like that, to new grass and it starts growing and then you getting more people moving in and then you get people moving out and new people coming in and I think all that sort of stuff builds up and adds little bits to the community.

He went on to mention the growth of commercial areas as a result of the growing population of the housing development.

Suddenly the local dairy gets a bit bigger because there's a whole new block of people there. And the hairdresser starts up or suddenly now there's a whole bunch of people walking around the community system and someone says well we can put a cafe in here now because we've got another five hundred houses. You know, they're going down here to get the milk and paper every morning so we'll put a cafe in here. So it just slowly builds up.

It is obvious that developers are under no illusion that any one thing can create a community. Nor do they think that community is something that can be achieved immediately. Developer 1 sees community building as a result of a range of factors over time. "So there are all those sorts of things that you want to try and develop but it takes a long time to do it. But they will help give a sense of community to that area."

5.3.3 Established suburbs and 'new communities' – a contrast

This section concentrates on the way developers contrasted established city suburbs and their own residential developments in regard to community. Unsurprisingly, the property developers favoured their own developments over existing suburbs with their "awful soulless malls" (Developer 5). Developer 5 went as far as saying society has been "eroded" in the suburbs. Residential subdivisions which are planned to encourage social cohesion are the antithesis of this social erosion. Developer 4 mentioned the lack of interaction between residents of as an important difference between his company's developments and an existing suburb of Christchurch.

If you go buy yourself a house in Sydenham and you move in – chances are you probably won't talk to your neighbours for a period of time if at all. But on all our developments you will find that all our neighbours know everybody else.

This reinforced the developers' idea of neighbours talking to each other and people knowing each other being an important component of a community. Surveyor 3 also mentioned enhanced social interaction by means of subdivision design as a key difference between the two styles of residential areas.

I think if you talk about the sense of community as being... what I just talked about as some sort of focal point within a subdivision and a reserve and a walking track and a pond or whatever people walk around and enjoy going for a walk around at night with the neighbours then yes I think they do have a better sense of community than perhaps some of the older style suburbs have.

Surveyor 2 had another explanation for why there may be a stronger sense of community in new subdivisions. The shared experience of moving house gives new residents common ground upon which they can build relationships.

Well I think because you're going into something new you're talking to the neighbours... and because it's a new development you're all moving in there, you want to see the new people who live down the road and you've got someone to talk to about the new house and what the development's like and things like that. It makes people talk more to each other than it would if you just moved into an existing built up area.

Developer 4 referred to this as a “pride of place involvement right from the beginning.” The residents have a shared identity as original residents of a new development, beginning the line of caretakers of the land they live on. Developer 5 directly linked this shared identity to a sense of community in new residential areas. “A strong enough sense of shared identity leads to a sense of community evolving over time.”

But what of those people who move into a subdivision at a later point – when the original residents have been there for some time? As Developer 4 said, they are fitting into a community that they were not originally a part of. He went on to say that “Eventually they probably will [fit into the community] and to be honest, they’ve probably got more of a chance of fitting into the community in Oakleigh than they have anywhere else.” Developer 4 attributes this enhanced integration to the non-physical, social aspects of his developments such as residents’ associations and community meetings.

5.4 Making money or making communities? Or both?

In such a high risk business one would think there is little room for concurrent objectives (such as creating community) some of which might impinge upon the financial bottom line.

This was a theme that emerged as I spoke to the developers in regard to the balance between financial imperatives and creating housing developments that incorporate community values. Most of the developers I interviewed see the implementation of community oriented imperatives as being conducive to their financial bottom line. For Developer 4, commercial and community imperatives “run hand in hand”.

And if you're not greedy then it's going to work. And that's very much our philosophy. I mean, we – from our commercial perspective – we tend to enjoy leaving something for somebody else.

Developer 4 believes that if property developers are not constantly concerned about their financial bottom they will do a lot better. “Because you’re selling quality anyway and I think people always migrate to quality at the end of the day.” Developer 1 believes that it is logical to create a quality subdivision which incorporates community values as it will ultimately make his organisation more money.

Well the more successful we can be here in terms of creating a good subdivision where people come to live – that we're going to make money out of it anyway. So it's pretty simple, straight forward and logical.

Likewise, Developer 5 said that it is not difficult to balance financial imperatives with the need to plan for a sense of community. “No it’s not hard. Our overriding ambition is to do things well. Do things well and you’ll make money.” Surveyor 2 emphasised the importance of amenities to the economic success of a subdivision.

And things like amenity – a lot of that will make them more money, it will sell sections quicker. So I think the economics of it is the driving force but.... making it look nice and feel good is all part of it as well.

Regarding this theme, the question I asked of developers was “How do you balance the need to plan for community with your own commercial imperatives?” Interestingly, Developers 2 and 4 spoke of the balance between making their developments more attractive, or beautifying them as a way of planning for a sense of community.

I enjoy spending money, and making money but sometimes you've got to leave a bit in for the next fella. And the beauty of doing that too is that if we provide, as we did in Brookvale's case, something that's attractive, people want to be there – you shorten up your sell down time. So you get your money back in your pockets sooner so you can get to the next one. Whereas if you provide something that's mediocre and doesn't match up to the people's expectations or the quality of your competitors you're dead in the water (Developer 2).

Developer 4 commented on the contrast between his developments and existing residential subdivisions that have been built solely with financial imperatives in mind. He asserted that many of the land developments that are created in Christchurch are based on a tight budget. Developer 4's company does not always seek to increase profits by reducing spending on what he referred to as "beautification" and "presentation." Instead, they spend more money on aesthetic elements, "and as a consequence of that you create desirability."

The balance between profit seeking and community-oriented planning was also tied to the overall growth of the city. Developer 1 sees his company's large scale master planned housing developments as being beneficial to the city as a whole. "We've committed to this type of master planned community because we think that not only is it good for us, financially, but it's good for the community and it's good for the city." Developer 1 believes that the master planned subdivisions being created by his organisation are beneficial to the city on a long term basis as they combat the effects of urban sprawl, increased use of motor cars and the consumption of productive agricultural land. "We've got to be very careful – we are here and we will always be here long term. You can't just think of the finance because it'll bite you in the bum ten years, twenty years or one hundred years down the track."

Property developers are primarily engaged in the pursuit of profit, but they do not all share the same opinions in regard to this objective. As Developer 4 stated, "Most developers have their hearts in the right place. I mean they're there to make a profit like everybody is. How they go about making their profit... some *modus operandi* (sic) are slightly different to others." He remarked that property developers would all react differently to my questions, but that their principal motives are sincere. "But you know –

we like to think we're in it for the right reasons. We're the sort of people that – you shake a hand, that's it. It's very, very simple.”

Chapter 6

Connecting Community to the Built Environment

6.1 Introduction

Central to the discussion of the commodification of community by the real estate industry are the mechanisms employed by real estate developers to create a convincing cultural performance. This chapter explores the second research question which asks how residential property developers connect ideas about community to various other aspects of their new housing developments. During my discussions with developers it soon became apparent that the nature of the built form is of crucial importance in establishing a relationship between community and new housing developments. There are many underlying questions in regard to the nature of the built environment as interpreted by property developers. My interviews with Christchurch property developers and surveyors yielded a plethora of discussions regarding attempts to ‘plan for community’ – creating a vision for the built environment that will enhance social interaction and feelings of ‘togetherness’.

This chapter will investigate the developers’ views of the ‘master planned community’ and the ideas that influence the overall plans for new developments. More specifically I consider elements of the environment that are said to be conducive to the development of community. Pedestrian connectivity and carefully considered streetscapes, for example, are said to enhance social interaction. Community focal points are created for people living with the developments to meet and socialise. The perceived benefits of shared recreation facilities such as tennis courts and open space reserves are explored. Finally I examine the importance of commercial opportunities and section densities within larger subdivisions and new towns.

6.2 Masters of the planned community

I asked the developers about the methods they use to attempt to plan for a greater sense of community within their subdivisions. As mentioned earlier, Developer 3 has no concern

for attempts to build community into his smaller subdivisions. For Developer 3, any added amenities that are above and beyond requirement would only serve to eat into his profit margin whereas the larger scale developers take a different approach to planning for community. Developer 1 claims that his company make efforts to endorse the type of social interaction that leads to a community.

While it's... like you say, the cynics can say it's all airy fairy and 'what does community mean?' – I think there's a genuine effort on our part to promote those sorts of social interactions within a subdivision that will grow and turn themselves into a community.

It is interesting to note that Developer 1 referred to the residents turning themselves into a community. "The idea is that you get to know your immediate neighbours and then they might know someone else within the subdivision and you get to know their neighbours and so on. It gains momentum and builds the social fabric of the place" (Surveyor 1). This resonates with the aforementioned assertion that the property developers see people as the most important element in community development. The developers are merely the providers of an environment that is conducive to social interaction. But how does one create such an environment? Is there a 'blueprint for community'?

Community components are all included in what property developers and the advertising material refer to as the 'master plan.' Discussions with developers regarding master planned communities yielded valuable insight to both the developers' interpretation of community and how they have harnessed it in the creation of their residential developments. The developers spoke of master plans in a practical sense. Developer 4, for example, spoke of the physical nature of the master plan.

Master planned communities from our perspective are developments that we've created from nothing and we start with the end in mind...So you know you can tag master plan to a variety of different aspects within the development. Whether that be parks, reserves, lakes. It could be style of housing. It could be the inclusion of retail. It could be the inclusion of preschools. Retirement villages. L3 zonings as opposed to the 1 zoning - or anything included as well as.

For Developer 5 the master plan means that nothing is left to chance - it takes all problems into account. The lessons that society has learned along the way are "injected" into the

master plan. “Communities have traditionally grown organically.” The benefit of a master plan is that everything can be planned in advance - it has set boundaries. The master plan for Developer 5’s largest residential development was, in part, influenced by overseas designs. He made reference to Celebration, in the United States. Celebration, in Florida was developed by the Walt Disney Corporation as a safe, walkable town with community values at its heart. Developer 5 said he looked at this town in order to critically evaluate it. He also looked closely at the literature on master planned communities. “There are elements of the New Urbanist philosophy that we’ve pulled out and applied to Heathcote.” Developer 5 made it clear that it is not his intention to create another Celebration. Instead, it is his goal to create a place in which Cantabrian values take precedence.

While the master plan is an important aspect of residential subdivisions, some developers have also recognised the importance individual expression and the ability of property buyers to tailor their experience to meet their own desires. RD Hughes’ Gainsborough development has used a theme of fine art throughout its marketing campaign. The development’s tagline is “The fine art of living” (RD Hughes, 2010b).



Figure 6.1 Example of an expression of ‘architectural artistry’ in a residential subdivision.

Christchurch's latest masterpiece is being produced as yet another landscape upon which you can express your architectural artistry. Gainsborough of West Melton, a master planned community with a stunning array of section sizes averaging around 2600m² (RD Hughes, 2010b).

This tactic is a way of letting potential buyers know that while there may be a master plan, they still have control over how their own section of the community will look and feel. Figure 6.1, for example, shows that some developments allow for residents to express themselves through the design and landscaping of their house and section. This freedom of expression is often not completely unchecked as protective covenants are implemented to protect the investment of property buyers and ensure a more harmonious community.

6.2.1 Design influences

It is important to gain a deeper understanding of the design ideas that have a bearing on the creation of residential developments. Only Developer 5 specifically mentioned New Urbanism as an influence on design. There is one New Zealand property development company, Bluehaven, who claim to “fully embrace the principles of New Urbanism.” The promotion of New Urbanism plays on a sense of nostalgia for the past while at same time claiming to be able to create future-proof housing developments. “This unique focus on urban planning combines traditional neighbourhood values, treasured from the past, with the very best planning for the future.”

‘Our vision is committed to bringing the skills and techniques of New Urbanism,’ says General Manager Jason Macdonald, ‘to responsibly contribute and embrace the dynamics of the seaside regional growth in creating places of lasting experiences - places where people can BELONG’... New urbanism describes a unique approach to neighbourhood building. Put simply the design is focused on creating an interactive community where quality of life for all residents is second to none (Bluehaven Management, 2011a).

Surveyor 2 mentioned that inspiration and ideas came from ‘Googling’ other examples of residential subdivisions around the world and visiting other developments to see which areas they could improve in and what ideas they could borrow.

It's a lot of things and you look around at lots of... in designing we look around at lots of developments – ones we've done and ones other people have done. Quite often we look on the internet – Google subdivisions overseas. Generally, there's probably not... it's not like we're inventing a new widget or something. There's lots of examples out there... And it's really good to have pictures and photos and things so that you can show the developer – hey look this was done over here or this was done over here and you know, what do you think of this? And does this fit with your vision and your marketing plan and things like that. And that's from all around the world.

Surveyor 2 said that in general, the ideas presented are well received by the developers as long as they are marketable and do not cut too deeply into the financial bottom line.

Surveyor 3 also acknowledged the influence of overseas subdivisions. However, he noted that while some overseas designs are favourable they are not always able to be emulated in Canterbury due to the local legislation.

Overseas trends I suppose have a place and they do influence us to some extent. I think we're also very much bound up by what we are able to do with the site in terms of the rules and the planning requirements applicable to that site. So we don't often... we might say that we like something that was done overseas – we'd like to copy that but in actual fact our local bylaws and council rules might hinder that to a certain level.

Another restricting factor mentioned by the surveyors is the topography and layout of the site. This has a large impact on how the subdivision can be laid out. Drainage, trees and other topographical features were mentioned as influences on the master plan of a subdivision. “Then we have to look at the traffic routes and the roading and the pedestrian links and come up with a design I guess that integrates those and allows people to move freely through the subdivision” (Surveyor 3).

Not all influences on design come from overseas trends. Some of the developers' ideas come from more local sources. While Developer 2 mentioned that he takes ideas from the Gold Coast in Australia he also mentioned the influence of places in the North Island and Christchurch. Interestingly, not all the ideas come from recently developed residential subdivisions. One example given by Developer 2 describes an idea taken from a well established suburb of Christchurch.

At Marsden Park you'll notice a one way road around the back of the playground and tennis court. That came from Shands Park down Riccarton Road – the one with the fountain at the front? I always liked that – the outlook of the houses overlooking that reserve. And mine faces north, but it gives the playground and the tennis court a bit of surveillance. But it feels nice.



Figure 6.2 **The fountain and surrounding reserve to which Developer 2 referred. The reserve is surrounded by a crescent-shaped road like the one in Developer 2's subdivision.**

It is important to note that the size of the subdivision is an important influence over whether or not certain elements are feasible. The term 'master planned community' is something that is afforded only to larger subdivisions and new towns. The small scale subdivisions created by Developer 3 for example, would not be at all conducive to a master plan given the tight profit margins and insufficient space available. Surveyor 3 reinforced this, using connecting pathways between streets as an example. "You usually end up, if you do make a connection, you end up losing two sections and probably costing a whole heap more in roading costs. So you have to balance that against the good of actually making a connection."

While the size of the development and the influence of other subdivisions and towns (both locally and from around the world) are influencing the designs of new residential developments it is important to note the more personal influences that stem from the property developers themselves. Developer 2 and Developer 4 both mentioned life experiences as an important influence on the overall vision for community within their subdivisions.

It's also the upbringing as well – you cast your mind back and you want to be in property, then you relate your life experiences with what you would expect if you are a buyer... With how we grew up as kids. What we were given – what we were privy to, what your parents worked hard to give you. And you relate that all together.

Developer 4 said that experience is more important than anything else in regard to design influences. The lessons learnt from past developments and the ideas that stem from the personal life experiences of the developers can both influence the way in which they attempt to build community elements into the environment. Developer 2 spoke of providing “tools” within the built environment so that people can “make it work themselves.” I will now discuss these ‘tools’ or ‘mechanisms’ which are utilised by developers to harness community in the creation of their residential developments.

6.3 Connecting the people

My discussions with developers and surveyors yielded varying opinions on various types of connectivity within residential subdivisions. Some interviewees were interested in pedestrian walkways and cycleways while others seemed more concerned with road widths and traffic flows. For Developer 2 the creation of walkways that connect different parts of subdivisions are a crucial way to stop residential areas becoming “compartmentalised.” He criticised one of the local territorial authorities for lacking the ability to create pathways and cycleways: “And no thoughts or considerations or provisions for linkage because the asset manager here didn’t think they had they had the ability to make it happen.” The Regent’s Park subdivision in Christchurch is an example of a residential area that could have become compartmentalised due to geographic features and its own layout. Pathways and bridges were integrated to link the various parts of the

neighbourhood (see Figure 6.3) to negate the effect of compartmentalisation. Developer 2 emphasised the importance of pedestrian connectivity to children who wish to navigate subdivisions without using main roads – correlating the need for these linkages with community.

But kids living in this subdivision might want to play with the kids next door. You've got to be able to let them walk or bike through without them going away out to the main road and back in again. But it's community – you've got to have linkages and walkways and things for them to get around, you know?

Surveyor 2 also highlighted the importance of pedestrian connectivity, identifying it as an important catalyst for the new residents to become acquainted. “People are going to be walking around the neighbourhood in the evening, going for walks and talking to people in their gardens and things like that. So I think it's all part of it.” He encourages developers to include, where possible, linkages between different areas of a development. Developer 1 sees this as an important ingredient of a developing community. “I think the best way of at least giving the opportunity for real communities to develop is to encourage as much interaction as you can. Because you're not going to get it if they don't mix.” Connectivity was identified as one of the major design concepts of a subdivision along with section sizes, parks and reserves. Surveyor 2 also identified the more practical social benefits that stem from a walkable subdivision.



Figure 6.3 An example of pathways connecting different areas of a residential subdivision in northern Christchurch.

And then you're looking at the connectivity and how people walk around the community... And if you've got lots of different routes that people can walk around it encourages people to get out there more because they can have a different route every time... It's just to get around the area a lot more. If you know a few people around the neighbourhood it's easier to walk and have a few beers rather than having to worry about driving and things like that.

Connectivity becomes especially important in larger subdivisions or new towns where commercial activity is present. They provide ease of access for residents to support commercial entities. Developer 1 emphasised the importance of connectivity to the town centre. “The cycle ways and the walk ways will be another means of encouraging people to use the same access to facilities – particularly the town centre.” Likewise, Surveyor 2 underlined the importance of incorporating connections so that people can walk to commercial areas, rather than having to take their car. “Also if you’ve got the shopping centre the quickest way by road might be around there, but to walk around takes forever. By having linkages all the way through you can get there a lot quicker.”

Reducing the length and frequency of car journeys is another goal of modern urban design. Developer 1 pointed out the importance of providing walkable links to parks and reserves.

So we just said when you design it you've got to make sure that you're doing the right things in terms of connectivity for pedestrian traffic and cycles and try and encourage people to do that. So you want to link your green areas as much as possible so people aren't dependant on having to use a motor vehicle to get there.

The surveyors I spoke to also highlighted the benefits of a subdivision that is designed to promote walking and reduce the use of automobiles. Reducing dependency on cars is not only seen as being environmentally friendly, but socially beneficial also. Surveyor 2 sees connectivity as important because “people can walk around the community and get from A to B. We went through a period where everyone jumped in cars and things like that. Whereas now a lot of people like to walk around where they live.” The benefits of walking as opposed to driving seemed to be associated less with the environmental aspects and more with the social.

So if you provide those links then people can do that walking they will get out and walk to the shop rather than taking the car and driving. But if they're also visiting neighbours around the site it's nice to be able to walk through the subdivision to the neighbours and not necessarily have to get in the car and drive around the road (Surveyor 3).

Increased connectivity is also seen as a way of future proofing subdivisions. Developer 2 provides an example of how entire subdivisions can become compartmentalised if there is no provision for future, neighbouring, subdivisions.

And linkages and walkways are other things – you know, I put them in as a matter of course so that you've got linkage to the next development when it comes on stream. They've spent eight or ten years in Lincoln and they've left out a walkway to the boundary of the university dairy block, which Ngai Tahu are developing, knowing full well that that will link one day.

Developer 2 showed concern for the integration of subdivisions that he had not even developed himself. If individual subdivisions are not linked together via roads or at least walkways they create a higher dependence on automobiles by those residents who wish to visit people in neighbouring developments. It could be argued that this would reduce the level of social interaction between two subdivisions, hindering their capacity to develop a unified sense of community. This raises questions regarding the social interaction between residents of neighbouring subdivisions and the ability of developers to discourage the segregation of different neighbourhoods.

The interaction between roads and walking links was also discussed. Surveyor 3 mentioned that cul-de-sacs are often viewed negatively in planning circles. The integration of a walkway at the end of a cul-de-sac, however, provides a pedestrian link for residents to move freely throughout the community without needing to drive to the end of the cul-de-sac and backtrack to their destination (see Figure 6.4).



Figure 6.4 This cul-de-sac head is linked by a walkway that leads to another street within the subdivision.

6.3.1 Roads to community

Roading or street networks are of course a fundamental aspect of the infrastructure of any residential development. Surveyor 1 told me that most people seem to think that roads are for cars only – but in actual fact they are not. People want their kids to be able to play in the streets. He believes that roads through subdivisions should be more like driving through a park. Roads can be designed so that cars will travel slowly, ensuring the safety of pedestrians. This can be done by reducing road widths and adding cobblestones. However, council restrictions make this a hard concept to develop. Surveyor 2 called for a change in the Council’s regulations on road widths. “They’re governed by 4404 [New Zealand Standard for Land development and Subdivision Engineering] and New Zealand standards and the council codes of practice. It would be nice to cut, to get those down.” Developer 1 is also in favour of narrower roads, citing increased safety for residents.

And that's what safety is all about. Same for the bikes. Making cycle lanes - when you get to a road – making the road design so that it's slightly narrower than they used to be. And we get a lot more... not judder bars but raised areas or narrow areas where people have to slow down so there's a bit more safety involved. You're not running the risk of crossing the road where the car's doing sixty or seventy Ks in a fifty area. The roads are so narrow and tweaked so that you couldn't possibly do that anyway. You'll take the bottom of your car out or something. So it's all of those sort of things that just try and provide a network of walkways, cycle ways and roads that are safer to be on and more user-friendly.

Developer 2 echoed the sentiments of Developer 1. He said that a major benefit of paved road surfaces is that it “slows the cars down – brings them closer together, narrows the carriage way down and gives you that impression – we’ve got to go a bit slower here! You know?” Safety and security, as will be discussed later, are important to the advertising of residential subdivisions – contributing to the promotion of a sense of community.

One developer I spoke to, Developer 4, did not seem to be in favour of narrower streets. Instead, he boasted that the main streets in his developments are at least twenty-two metres wide, enhanced by the optical illusion created by the lack of front fencing. This again relates to the balance between creating a sense of community and providing privacy for residents.

6.3.2 Greening the linkages

There seems to be a fine balance between creating community through green areas that are open to the public and maintaining the sense of privacy that people appreciate. ‘Green linkages’ are certainly a marketable aspect of a subdivision and developers who seek to promote their product as being green and close to nature will appreciate their qualities. It is important however, to find mixed uses for these areas to ensure that they are marketable and do not become green alleyways, fenced off from surrounding homes.

Green links were brought to my attention throughout my observations of subdivisions and during my discussion with Surveyor 3, who said they have two main benefits. They provide views over open space for certain properties. This means that section sizes can be smaller

without necessarily restricting their views. Also, areas for water storage are often scarce within a subdivision. There is a need to treat water on site before it is discharged into local wastewater networks. The green links are ideal spaces that double as water treatment areas and pedestrian and cyclist connectivity networks.

While Surveyor 3 offered a somewhat prosaic opinion of green links Developer 2 concentrated on their social aspects. He said that developers provide these links as a part of their reserve contributions. He sees links such the one in Figure 6.5 as “useless land” that can’t be used for anything else.



Figure 6.5 An example of a green link surrounded by high fencing.

People put up a six foot paling fence on the boundary – fence themselves off from the reserve because they feel impacted upon - on their privacy by people walking through. It’s a huge maintenance cost and doesn’t provide any recreation hardly to speak of, no social cohesion – nothing (Developer 2).

6.4 Streetscapes

‘Streetscapes’ or ‘street scenes’ were frequently mentioned by the developers and the surveyors as a way of encouraging social interaction. Developer 2 is particularly enthusiastic about creating streetscapes that are conducive to community. “Well I’m a fan for... landscapes, streetscapes and layouts that enable them to build a decent home on

their allotment. And then to make them talk to each other and recognise themselves as part of a community.”

I asked Developer 2 what he meant by streetscapes. He emphasised the importance of street trees such as the ones in Figure 6.6, stating that his subdivisions have wide berms with two rows of street trees. Houses themselves can also be an important element of a streetscape. “I guess, for example, the street scene – I quite like two story houses if I can – they’re quite close to the road, overlooking the road and you do get a sense of community when that happens” (Surveyor 3).

Footpaths were also mentioned as an important part of the streetscape. Developer 2 said the local council has a tendency to put footpaths on one side of the road only whereas he puts footpaths on both sides. “People don’t want to walk over across to the footpath and then cross back again at the other end. You know? It’s dumb logic and I don’t believe in it so I put my money where my mouth is and did something different.”



Figure 6.6 Tree plantings make the road narrower and create bordered parking spaces for cars.

The placement of footpaths is also seen as an important part of creating privacy whilst maintaining an attractive streetscape. Developer 2 places his footpaths on the edge of the curb channel. “It just pushes the public away from their house and doesn’t make people feel as though they want to fence themselves away from the public – that sort of thing.” One of the larger developments that I visited during my observations offered yet another alternative. A large boulevard style road was divided by green space with a central pathway leading down the middle (see Figure 6.7).

Fencing was also frequently mentioned during discussions on streetscapes. Developer 2 sees fencing as something that can “make or break a sense of community.” Developer 1 spoke of making the streetscape open and people-friendly. “You’ve got to make it so that people don’t fence themselves in and they are a bit open to talking to their neighbours.” Surveyor 3 reinforced the importance of fencing to community. “It’s important from a community point of view to get to know the neighbours. Because if you’ve got the big fences around the sites you just don’t see your neighbours. Nobody talks to anybody. I asked him, “Is that something that the developers put across to him in their brief?” He said it was an initiative that was not usually put forward by developers, but the surveyors try to convince developers that it is important, “Particularly on common boundaries with reserves and things like that or even street scenes. We try to convince them if we can to put some sort of restriction or covenant on them so that they can encourage some sort of community.”

Developer 2 said he puts fencing covenants on his developments to ensure people do not close themselves off from the public. Figure 6.8 is an example of an open, tree lined streetscape with no front fencing. This is done to negate the effect that high fences have in other more established neighbourhoods in Christchurch.

My experience in the city is that most people are wanting to put up six foot fences on their front boundaries. It locks them in and it locks the rest of the public out. And if you can’t see in and know what goes on behind the paling fence... to me it’s important that you create a living environment that doesn’t force them – or make them want to feel they’ve got to fence themselves in.



Figure 6.7 A road divided by green space and a footpath, leaving narrower one way carriageways on either side.



Figure 6.8 Front fences are prohibited to create a more open and friendly streetscape.

Surveyor 3 supported Developer 2's statement and provided examples of streetscape design that promotes social interaction between neighbours.

There's a lot of existing properties that have just got paling fences all around them and you do not ever see your neighbours from day to day. On a subdivision we're trying to create now we've got these visual boundaries that are see through and you can therefore see your neighbours, talk to your neighbours – say hello in the morning when you go out because you can actually see them there. You're not seeing a big paling fence – that's really quite important. Some subdivisions we're doing at the moment they, don't put fences in the front few metres of the property at all. So you go out, you get your paper in the morning and you see your neighbour, you greet them and do those sort of things.

See-through fencing for reserves was also mentioned as something that “benefits communities immensely.” Again, this highlights the fine balance between a sense of community and the individual privacy of residents.

6.5 Community focal points

Increased social interaction seemed to be at the forefront of the developers and surveyors' minds during our discussions regarding their interpretations of community. “Community must grow out of communal interaction” (Developer 5). The key to encouraging this social interaction is associated with focal points. Focal points are places within the subdivisions where residents can meet to talk or take part in shared recreation. Such places can include tennis courts, playgrounds, shared barbeque areas, parks, reserves and commercial areas or town centres. It is thought that “Public space provides a venue for chance encounters, which serves to strengthen community bonds” (Talen, 1999, p. 1364). Developer 1 spoke of the importance of ‘getting on’ with fellow residents. He sees focal points as the key to encouraging social interaction between residents.

But like I said before, in terms of planning master planned subdivisions – the idea of community is that where possible, what we want to try to promote is... people will enjoy living in a certain place better if they get on with the people that live with them. And the best way to do that is to encourage them to have focal points where they will meet each other.

Developer 2 also emphasised the importance of getting the residents to “talk to each other and recognise themselves as part of a community.” In this sense, the community exists when people are present. But the encouragement of social interaction through focal points is necessary to help residents to recognise their membership in the community. Surveyor 3 specifically referred to focal points as being at the core of a sense of community.

I think if you talk about the sense of community as being... what I just talked about as some sort of focal point within a subdivision and a reserve and a walking track and a pond or whatever people walk around and enjoy going for a walk around at night with the neighbours...



Figure 6.9 A nature walk crosses a stream in a residential subdivision.

Steps towards creating community include getting to know your neighbours. Attractive public places are important as a starting point for building relationships. Once people get to know their surroundings they will have more pride in their area, they develop “empathy for their landscape” – leading to a sense of community (Surveyor 1). Surveyor 2 mentioned the importance of existing topographical features of sites – particularly Greenfield subdivisions. It is important to utilise features such as enclaves of old trees or streams

because “people will gravitate to places like that.” Figure 6.9 shows an example of a subdivision which has used existing foliage and a stream to create a nature walk. Developer 1 sees an importance in providing public amenities within a subdivision so that residents have their needs catered for without actually leaving their neighbourhood.

Again, it is, it's just a scaled down effort of trying to get people to become more friendly and more neighbourly than they are in a lot of current situations. So while it's slightly airy fairy in terms of the way some people perceive it, there is an underlying, genuine effort to try and make our subdivision more user-friendly and more community minded so that people can come and see each other more and use the facilities that are there, rather than heading straight into the middle of town every time they want to do something.

During my observations of residential subdivisions in Canterbury I noticed that a lot of developments featured focal points such as children's playgrounds and tennis and basketball courts. I decided to find out more about the purpose of including these places and how they relate to community.

6.5.1 Tennis courts, playgrounds and 'little social centres'

I received mixed feedback from the developers and the surveyors in regard to tennis courts, playgrounds and other sites for public recreation. Developer 2 was especially in favour of tennis courts, playgrounds and basketball courts, provided the subdivision was of a certain size to warrant them. He referred to them as “little social centres”, such as the ones shown in Figures 6.10 and 6.11.

These social centres are the key ingredient to creating a community. “I put in a decent kids' playground with a tennis court and a half basketball court. And the community came together and focussed on that point. The mothers with their kids and they'd sit in the sun and they'd become a community.” Surveyor 3 noted that as a subdivision designer, he is not attempting to force people to interact. The purpose of social centres is merely to create a public arena in which the opportunity for meeting new people will arise.

I'm not sure that you're actually trying to get people together so much as making a facility like a walking track or maybe a tennis court or something available for public use and then people meet... because they're out and about, they walk in the same neighbourhood, they see each other, over a period of time they have a dog or whatever and yeah, that's a really good thing. So I think those are the sorts of passive type uses that we're probably trying to design in our subdivisions.



Figure 6.10 This shared area within a subdivision contains a playground, a tennis court and a basketball hoop.

This anecdote from Developer 2 sums up the way he feels about the value of playgrounds in a subdivision;

I've got a daughter that lives in that subdivision there by Brookvale with a couple of toddlers and she crows about the people she meets at the playground. I was down there one day just having a wander around and she came down with the kids and said 'What are you doing here Dad?' And another girl came along and, 'Aw g'day Sarah' and I said 'Who's that?' And she said 'She's a nanny and she works for someone around there and I met her down here.' And it just grows you know. It just grows.

Planning regulations however do not always allow for the building of playgrounds and shared tennis courts. Developer 2 noted that Councils do not always see tennis courts and playgrounds as being “an advantage to community cohesion.” He said that he knows developers who have had plans for tennis courts declined by the council because they do not want the ongoing responsibility of maintenance. This frustrates Developer 2 who said “They [the Council] don’t understand that sense of community that it creates - if it’s properly laid out and located and user friendly.”



Figure 6.11 An example of a focal point in an upmarket subdivision in Christchurch.

Not all of the developers held such a positive view of shared tennis courts. Developer 4 said he does not know of any community tennis court (such as the one shown in Figure 6.11) that is used on a regular basis, unless someone has taken it upon themselves to form a club. There is little point in implementing shared facilities unless they are used frequently by the residents of the subdivision. There is another problem with creating shared facilities such as tennis courts and swimming pools. Issues over maintenance and ownership discourage developers from including tennis courts in their developments (Surveyor 3). Local councils are also hesitant to approve such features for the same reasons. Surveyor 2

believes that tennis courts are conducive to creating community but are not worth the long term problems they will cause.

They're good in the short term. Long term I think they'll create problems for maintenance. Particularly things like tennis courts where in 15 years time they need resealing or re-plexi-paving, you know – who looks after them and who pays for them? It could cost a couple of hundred grand to fix it up... So yeah I think they're good for the community but I think there are problems with maintenance that won't be found out for twenty years time.

Some developers may only worry about the short term benefits. A tennis court or other such shared facility may be an ideal marketing point. The short term result will be an increased sale in sections and the long term problems will no longer be their responsibility., Developer 4, however, emphasised the importance of ongoing good faith with people who buy his sections. He noted that residents can share in the cost of maintaining shared facilities, but that people are “maxed to the eyeballs at the best of times” and would therefore be unwilling to pay an extra two hundred dollars a month to maintain a tennis court that they are probably not going to use. Therefore he does not include in his subdivisions those shared facilities that are expensive to maintain in the long term. The developers who are not in favour of such shared facilities seem to have a genuine concern for their ongoing upkeep. Developer 2, who is in favour of shared facilities, is adamant that they contribute to the development of community, making them a worthwhile investment.

Not all shared recreational facilities are necessarily expensive to implement and maintain. During my observations, for example, I found a public area where tables doubled as chess boards (Figure 6.12). Similarly a pétanque court (Figure 6.13) is another way of encouraging shared recreation and community interaction without the costs associated with tennis courts and swimming pools.



Figure 6.12 Permanent chess tables have been included on a street corner in this subdivision.



Figure 6.13 A pétanque court located within a green space in the middle of a subdivision.

6.5.2 Parks and reserves

Community focal points do not necessarily need to be built in features for specific activities. Property developers must make a reserve contribution of approximately ten per cent of their land. These green spaces are often turned into attractive areas for shared recreation within the subdivisions. According to all three Surveyors focal points such as reserves are an important part of building community. Developer 4 corroborated this, saying that he learnt a long time ago to create parks and reserves (such as the one shown in Figure 6.14) as a way of enhancing a sense of community.



Figure 6.14 Green space surrounds a lake at the centre of this subdivision.

Surveyor 3 spoke of making a community “around the domain/reserve area.” He said the central reserve on one particular development was shaped like a sandal with houses surrounding it so that children could play there safely. People could meet at the reserve and play basketball. “You could go out, have a bit of a walk around the reserve and meet your neighbours there and have a cup of coffee and do whatever.” Surveyor 2 detailed the benefits of shared green space to New Zealand residents.

I think they're [reserves] sort of fundamental to focus points for communities. It's either having a small one where people can walk to and let the kids play while they sit down and meet up with the neighbours or kick a ball around or a larger one where there's a sports field or... organised games of touch and stuff. And I just think that they're quite an important part of development in New Zealand.

Surveyor 2 said it is important to us as New Zealanders that we have direct access to parks and reserves because we originated from industrial England where there were no parks. This resonates with the 'New Zealand dream' of owning a quarter acre section with plenty of room in the back yard. While people may not have this much space in their own section within a subdivision, they are guaranteed to be only a few hundred metres from a park. Developer 1 said it is important to have reserves within subdivisions so that people do not have to go elsewhere to find space for recreation. Instead of driving to the park in the middle of town they can interact with people from their local neighbourhood instead of just driving into their house and living in "their own little world." He emphasised the importance of having neighbourhood parks within 400 metres of every house. Developer 4 claims that residents do not have to walk more than 100 metres to a recreational facility within his flagship development. "And it worked. It didn't matter what street you lived in – you would only have 100 metres to walk before there was some green space. And I think that's pretty important."

Developer 4 noted the networking benefits of reserves where parents come to know each other through their children. He did however mention the marketability of reserves. This is also an important motivation for developers to create attractive shared recreation areas within their subdivisions.

So to me it's just a great congregation point. It gives kids an opportunity to play with their mates within their development. And if you've got kids that have friends then the parents tend to link. And that's just a given. And that's predominantly how we visualise it. But also too I mean if our reserves are attractive people will want to live there because of our reserves being attractive.

In one of Developer 4's more upmarket developments only twenty per cent of the land was developed, and the rest was contributed to parks and reserves. "So that creates its own environment – its own very special environment." This creates a living environment that

encourages interaction and recreation, whilst creating high demand for sections and commanding higher property prices.

Developer 2 said that his reserve contributions sometimes depend on the size of the sections within a particular subdivision. In one development, where sections were averaging approximately 2000 square metres, he did not wish to provide any reserve areas. Instead, he gave the Council 1.3 million dollars in reserve contributions to build a reserve a short distance away, so that residents still had easy access to it if they wished. The Council would then maintain the reserve for the residents. The issue of ongoing maintenance is not as controversial in regard to parks and reserves. Surveyor 2 said he does not have any issues with reserves such as the one shown in Figure 6.15 because they are given to the councils anyway. “And that’s part of the council’s job – to maintain gardens and mow reserves. They do their maintenance and I see that as part of the council’s role.”



Figure 6.15 Large grassed areas must be mown and maintained by the local Council.

Not all of the developers I spoke to were enthusiastic towards the community and marketing benefits of reserve contributions. As mentioned previously, Developer 3 sees reserves as a requirement rather than a way of enhancing the appeal of a subdivision.

It may be true that reserves and parks are frequently used by residents of subdivisions, but the extent to which they actually enhance a sense of community by bringing people out into the public sphere is somewhat uncertain. However, if the reserves are well used then the councils will agree to maintain them and if they are attractive then the developers will keep making them to enhance the marketability of their subdivisions.

6.5.3 The town centre

The town centre, town square or community centre (see Figures 6.16 & 6.17 for examples) is referred to by Developer 5 as the “nucleus” of a development. He sees a town centre as being crucial to the creation of a “true community.” A commercial centre is something that is afforded only to very large subdivisions, new towns and further development of existing townships. There has to be a certain critical mass to be able to support commercial ventures. However, there is much difficulty in planning the timing of commercial development to match residential development. A sufficient number of residents are required to attract retailers and to support the new businesses. Developer 5 likened this process to “balancing on a knife edge.” Developer 1 said that the development of commercial areas is easier when nearby commercial areas exist. Residents can use those businesses until the development reaches a mass which is conducive to the development of its own commercial activity. It is more difficult for new towns that are more isolated from alternative commercial centres. Another advantage lies within the ability to create a master plan around a large plot of land. Developer 1 talked about the benefits of having control over one large piece of land.

We’ve consciously thought about how we can create a community by having a town centre so we’ve designed it to have a town centre – that town centre will have some commercial operations and that can be a focal point for the community. Hopefully we’ll have a community hall, a library, those sorts of things to help pull people to the centre.



Figure 6.16 The developing commercial centre of a new town.

Like Developer 5, Developer 1 sees a town centre as being important to the development of community. Developer 1 also underlined the importance of a town centre to the self sustainability of a residential development. People have all the facilities they need in their own neighbourhood, instead of driving to a suburban mall.

So it's a whole life experience type of thing. There's a lot of theory behind it, there's a lot of wishy-washy stuff but the concept is basically understandably quite natural. It all falls back to your ability to be able to provide those services in the middle that your community wants. And then they're prepared, because they like it, to support it by going and fuelling the economy that's required to keep the thing going... So particularly when we've got a, if we can get an opportunity here to get a community centre and a library and other things like that then that's the best way of doing it so we... there certainly is a reliance of us as the developer to go out of our way to create or put into the subdivision things that people want in the community to try and help it build itself into a community.



Figure 6.17 Commercial opportunities develop as the developments increases in size.

The town centre is the nucleus of a development (Developer 5). It must be planned for and its implementation well timed for it to be successful. The surrounding residential areas must also be well planned if they are to be successful. An important aspect of this is the range of section densities.

6.6 Section sizes and housing densities

Providing a range of section densities is important, especially in larger developments (Developer1). By providing people with a choice of section sizes and prices the developers are able to cover a wider range of the market, therefore shortening their selling time. Also, mixed section densities can also be marketed as promoting diversity and therefore being conducive to community.

Developer 1 said that in larger developments the “logical expanse from your town centre is to have your higher density stuff around that and as you get further away from your town

centre you get into your bigger sections.” This is what he has been told by planning experts. The idea is to create a microcosm of the city, like “Cathedral Square or the four avenues - and as you get further out the sections start to get a big bigger.”

Providing a range of section sizes does not only mean a wider net being cast over the market. Developer 5 noted that his company’s largest development has both medium density and lower density housing. This means that there is more likely to be a wider age range of residents living in the development. This relates to the previous discussion on diversity and community. Developer 5 sees the strength of community in diversity. Developer 1 said that this idea has been influenced by overseas trends where higher density housing is more acceptable to the market.

And the theory behind that is, as it has been overseas, has been to encourage better communities by having more people together in a smaller place, less dependency on motor cars for transportation and that sort of thing and also to prevent the sprawl and the use of, in a lot of cases, the use of productive agricultural land gets gobbled up by cities all the time. They’re basics behind it.

Property developers may have the ability to influence the development of community through the densities of sections within their developments. Surveyor 2 sees different section sizes as an important way of encouraging diversity in age groups throughout a development. Younger people are more likely to buy smaller sections with only two or three bedroom houses such as the ones in Figure 6.18 and families are more likely to buy larger sections with more bedrooms and space in the back yard for children to play.

Surveyor 3 also highlighted the need to tighten up section densities in order to use land more sustainably. Land is a finite resource and in the last ten years there has been an effort to use it more effectively in an effort to reduce urban sprawl and decrease dependency on transport. Developers are controlled by the district plan, and local councils are demanding more intense use of land and therefore higher section densities.

Well, a part of the quandary we have in terms of looking at master plans like that is a lot of overseas experts now – and you’ve read this in our papers now – and it’s part of the City Council’s long term plan – is to try and stop too much further urban sprawl and try and get higher densities (Developer 1).



Figure 6.18 Medium density housing within a large residential development, concentrated in one area of the subdivision.

The ‘quandary’ created for property developers is finding a balance between what is permitted by the district plan and what is acceptable to the market. “The problem we’ve got in New Zealand is – that is what makes New Zealand unique is that we have the ability, or have had the ability up until now, to have the old kiwi quarter acre” (Developer 1). The Christchurch market in particular has been resistant to smaller section sizes (Surveyor 3). This creates a dilemma for property developers.

We’re really at that crossroads at the moment as to how easy can it be to encourage higher density without having a market backlash and finding people like ourselves decide that, well there’s no point putting our money into developing Christchurch because there’s no market for them. At the end of the day if we can’t sell them, we’re buggered. So that’s the problem we’re facing at the moment.

Surveyor 3 sees the reduction in section sizes as being “acceptable to the public” in more recent times. This may be due in part to the reduced prices of smaller sections becoming appealing during a period of economic downturn. Developer 1 does not see the Christchurch market quickly warming to medium density housing. He contrasted

Christchurch with Europe where families have been “living in tight knit communities and apartment style living” for up to four generations.” People are born into an apartment and they are comfortable with high density housing when they move away. “New Zealanders aren’t in that mode yet and it won’t be done in the next twenty years – it’ll be a hundred year process at least because you’ve really got to almost breed it into people.” My observations showed that developers are attempting to balance the supply of housing by creating subdivisions with a mixture of housing densities, as shown in Figure 6.19.



Figure 6.19 In this subdivision medium density housing is mixed with lower density housing.

Developer 1 sees the built environment as an important element of a community and it is the responsibility of the property developer to build into a subdivision the things they see as being conducive to community. It is critically important however, that the residents “buy into the concept.” Residents will not buy into the community concept if the developer does

not promote it or attempt to create it.

So you can only do so much and then the balance of it is up to the individual people who decide to live there... You can't just lay it out on paper like that and say 'Well look, now I've got a community.' You've got to have the people and the people have got to have the will to want to do it and we've got to be able to facilitate them by helping them through sponsorship and other sorts of things (Developer 1).

Chapter 7

Community on the Market

7.1 Introduction

Websites, newspapers, and magazine advertisements are all important tools used to market residential subdivisions. Advertising is an important tool which allows property developers to package and sell perceptions of community and togetherness. This chapter addresses the third research question, exploring the relationships established by residential property developers and their associates between community and new housing developments in advertising and related marketing strategies. To do this I looked at advertising material for residential developments around New Zealand, exploring the idea that the real estate industry is selling community.

Examples where community has been used in the advertising for residential subdivisions are examined and the promotion of 'new communities' is considered. I look into how new subdivisions are figuratively attached to existing, more established residential areas, as a way of making them seem more attractive to prospective buyers. I then explore the idea that favourable elements such as rurality and diversity have been attached to community in order to broaden its appeal. Referring to these repackaged adaptations as 'community cocktails', I look at how they help to connect community to new housing developments. Finally I show how advertising elements of the built environment are an important aspect of the marketing strategies for new residential developments.

7.2 Community for sale

Typically, the language in the advertising material for new residential developments emphasises a 'sense of community' or a 'community spirit', making mention of the 'community fabric'. Words such as 'friendly' and 'vibrant' are used to describe these developments that are said to have a 'community feel'.

The opportunity of a lifetime to own premium New Zealand real estate in Wanaka and be part of a relaxed and friendly community... Setting new standards in recreational living, Peninsula Bay will have a true community feel and promote an active lifestyle (Infinity Investment Group, 2010b).

Developer 1 sees the use of community in the advertising as a way of attracting community-minded people to a development.

But if you're promoting it as that type of community, trying to establish a community where you want people to be involved then you're more likely to get those type of minded people to come than you are if you don't promote it.

Infinity, a South Island based property development company, make extensive use of community-oriented language throughout their advertising copy. Pegasus, a master planned satellite town to the north of Christchurch provides a pertinent example. Pegasus is described as a “Vibrant and friendly community... where lifestyle, fun and entertainment are built into the very fabric of the community” (Pegasus Town Ltd, 2011b). Community spirit seems to be an asset which is readily promoted.

Community spirit is well and truly alive at Pegasus, with monthly get-togethers proving to be very popular with residents (Pegasus Town Ltd, 2011a).

Live in Lincoln, developed by Ngāi Tahu Property, provides another good example of a ‘vibrant community’ being used to promote the sale of real estate (see Figure 7.1). An image of children dominates the advertisement, creating a family-friendly theme. Images of children playing in the streets are common, presenting the housing developments as safe places to raise children in a friendly environment.



Figure 7.1 Website advertisement for Live in Lincoln (Ngāi Tahu Property, 2011b).

7.3 New communities are growing

Residential subdivisions are often referred to in the advertising material as ‘new communities.’ As one advertisement suggests, “For a lifestyle in a new community, move to Aidanfield.” The Wigram Skies development is described as “A new community being developed on the site of the former Wigram Aerodrome” (Figure 7.2).

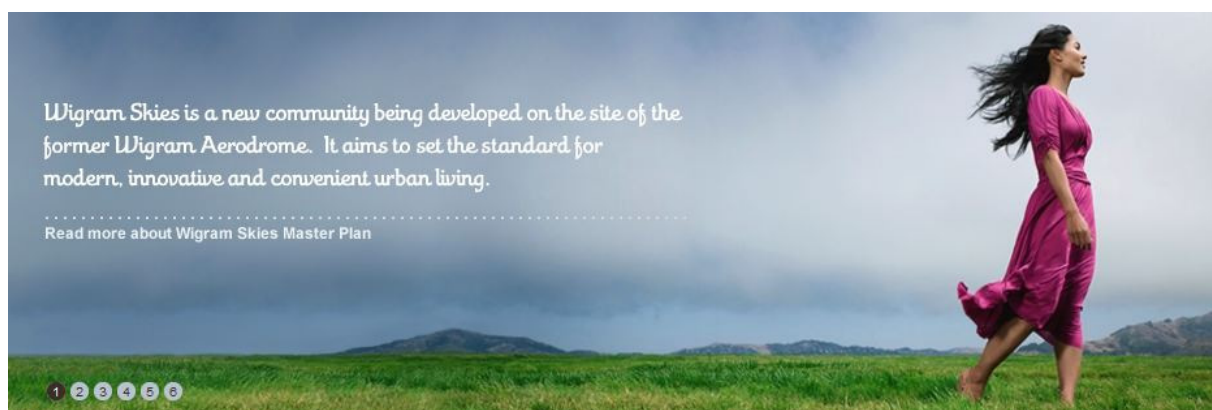


Figure 7.2 Website for Wigram Skies (Ngāi Tahu Property, 2011c).

While new residential developments are promoted as new communities the notion of a community developing over time is also a prominent part of the advertising. While Aidanfield is promoted as a new community, flags along its streets proudly display the

slogan “A community in the making.” Likewise, Millwater is described as a developing community, linking this to its gradual increase in population.

As Millwater grows and the population increase provides a continuous stream of local employment, the need for more facilities to accommodate a developing community has been well catered for (Infinity Investment Group, 2010a).

Pegasus is also promoted as a growing community, stating “You can be part of it too” (Figure 7.3). Advertising for Wigram Skies links the notion of an up and coming community to its own name. The imagery of a new community on the horizon is explicitly linked to the aeronautical theme of the subdivision which is being developed on the site of a former aerodrome (Figure 7.4).



Figure 7.3 Newspaper advertisement for Pegasus Town, north of Christchurch (Infinity Investment Group, 2010 Pegasus).



Figure 7.4 Newspaper advertisement for the Wigram Skies residential development in Christchurch (Ngāi Tahu Property, 2011).

Gillman Wheelans, creators of the Preston Downs residential subdivision have linked the concept of a growing community to the growth of the property buyers' investment (Figure 7.5). Here, we see the use of community mixed with financial incentives, implying that they go hand in hand. The warm notion of a growing community is used to convince potential buyers that it is linked to their own capital gain.



Figure 7.5 A newspaper advertisement for Preston Downs (Gillman Wheelans Ltd, 2010b).

7.3.1 Paperclip communities

The use of the idea that new residential subdivisions are 'growing communities' seems to conflict with another concept that comes through strongly in the advertising material. It seems to be important that potential buyers see these residential subdivisions as being 'established', 'existing' and 'thriving'. This seems to be an effort to confute the perception that new subdivisions lack amenities and the critical mass of people required to create a community. The common method for countering this idea is to figuratively attach the new development to a nearby or adjacent township or suburb. The Prebbleton Central website, for example, describes Prebbleton as "a thriving community with a unique identity" (Prebbleton Central website, 2010) while the Waitikiri subdivision in northern Christchurch benefits from the reputation of surrounding suburbs. "Only 15 minutes to the international airport, Waitikiri sits in a well-established part of the city" (Smith Developments Ltd,

2010a). Similarly, advertising for Preston Downs emphasises the effort to integrate the new development with the existing town of West Melton.

Other existing features of the site will be retained as much as possible to create a distinct 'sense of place' that respects the existing rural character of the West Melton township, integrates the significant site features, and most importantly, create strong community bonds with the established West Melton community (Gillman Wheelans Ltd, 2010d).

Riverside Park capitalises not only on its physical setting but also on the unique character of the existing community of Albert Town.

Ringed by mountain ranges which catch spectacular evening sunsets, the subdivision will form part of a very special community - the existing community of Albert Town (Infinity Investment Group, 2011).

Ngāi Tahu Property's Live in Lincoln development uses the pre-existing amenities and facilities of the established Lincoln township to its advantage.

Adding to the great living environment, there is a strong connection to the existing community offering wonderful sporting and leisure facilities, great educational institutions as well as a growing commercial focus (Ngāi Tahu Property, 2010a).

A newspaper advertisement for Delamain (Figure 7.6) also attempts to assert the subdivision as flourishing, development by using words such as 'thriving' and 'established' alongside an image portraying new houses in the background of an established green area with grass and trees.

This advertisement for Gainsborough (Figure 7.7) attempts to create the image of an established community by publicising sales figures. "Gainsborough is a thriving community with over 100 sections already sold." Juxtaposed with this statement is an image of a happy, smiling family – an image that exudes the qualities of community.



Build now.

Titles available. House & land or sections.

We have over 70 sections right now ready for your own plans or choose from our range of builders' designs, for this thriving, established community.
Tell us what you need and we'll tailor a package to suit.
Call Hamish Wheelans on 03 377 6303 or 021 433 467

NEW SHOWHOME OPEN SUNDAYS 12-4 PM
Jarnac Blvd, opposite Delamain Preschool
delamain.co.nz | yourhouse.co.nz | Development by Gillman Wheelans Limited

DELAMAIN

Figure 7.6 A Newspaper advertisement for Delamain (Gillman Wheelans Ltd, 2010a).



PRICES BEGIN AT ONLY \$199,000

BEGIN YOUR NEW LIFE AT GAINSBOROUGH - TODAY!

Gainsborough of West Melton has been unaffected by the recent earthquakes and with titles already issued all sections are now available to build on. We can tailor any settlement to suit your circumstances - even settle when your home is finished.* Gainsborough is a thriving community with over 100 sections already sold.

Corner of West Coast and Weedons Ross Road.
Contact Bruce Harvey on **0800 667 849** to discuss your options.

www.grd.co.nz

*Conditions apply

**SECTIONS FROM 1200M2 TO 3215M2
INFORMATION CENTRE
OPEN 12-4 PM THIS WEEKEND**

**GAINSBOROUGH
WEST MELTON**
the fine art of living

Figure 7.7 Newspaper advertisement for Gainsborough (RD Hughes, 2011).

7.4 Community cocktails – widening the appeal

It is now obvious that residential real estate developers have made strong connections between community and their new housing developments. Throughout my exploration of the advertising material I noticed community is not always advertised as an individual element. To broaden the appeal of community it is often ‘mixed’ or ‘packaged’ with other favourable elements such as rurality, nostalgic notions of ‘times gone by’, diversity and safety. These elements are combined with the initial idea that community sells, creating a range of ‘community cocktails’ in the advertising material. I will now explore examples of these repackaged versions of community which offer alternative ways of establishing relationships between community and new housing developments.

7.4.1 A slice of country life

Although New Zealand is a highly urbanised country, images of rurality are common in the advertising rhetoric. There remains a certain appeal to the bucolic lifestyle which developers seem to capitalise on through their advertising. The Live in Lincoln housing development, for example, is described as “A new rural community” (Figure 7.8), thus exploiting the well developed connection in the popular mind between rurality and community.

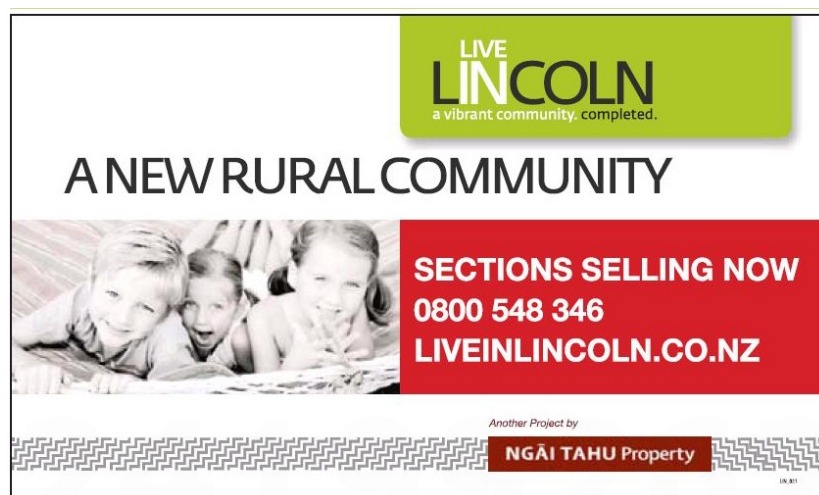


Figure 7.8 A newspaper advertisement for the Live in Lincoln housing development (Ngāi Tahu Property, 2011a).

The advertising is careful not to portray an image of isolated rural life, far removed from the convenience of the city. The aforementioned Live in Lincoln development is described on its website as “A new Christchurch residential subdivision offering you the benefits of a rural village only 20 minutes from the centre of Christchurch” (Ngāi Tahu Property, 2010b). Nearby Prebbleton Central is “14 kms from Cathedral Square” yet it “has a lovely rural outlook to the Port Hills, with a strong sense of community” (Prebbleton Central website, 2010). By buying a section at Gainsborough “You get the country lifestyle with the big city comfort and convenience” (RD Hughes, 2010a). Similarly, a slogan for Linden Grove reads “Rural romance, city convenience” (Ngāi Tahu Property, 2009). The advertising of the proximity of residential subdivisions to the city is not limited to Christchurch. In the North Island’s Bay of Plenty region “Te Kauri Estate offers you the best of both worlds: a relaxed rural lifestyle, alongside everything the city and surrounding region has to bestow” (Property Real Estate, 2010a).

7.4.2 A longing for times gone by

Developers promote residential developments using the commonly accepted notion of the traditional neighbourhood. Advertising for Anselmi Ridge, for example, plays on this idea and claims to have created such a neighbourhood through its design protocols.

What do you think makes a great neighbourhood? It’s probably something about it being older, full of rich colours, trees lining the streets, the architectural variety or knowing your neighbours (McConnell Property, 2011).

Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Figure 7.9 Advertising for Buxton harks back to times gone by (Buxton Gore Bay Ltd, 2011a).

As shown in Figure 7.9, Buxton in Gore Bay on the coast of North Canterbury is promoted as “Coastal Living inspired by the past, devoted to the future.” The development’s website comprises imagery of the mythical communities of days gone by. Once again, it is claimed that this residential development is able to recapture those feelings of community and connectedness that were thought to be lost.

There is a memory, a trace all Kiwis carry – a shadow of the golden past. A harking back to days gone by when summer lasted half the year, wild unspoilt beaches stretched on forever and seaside communities relaxed and mingled easily... A time when fantails fluttered, bellbirds rang and wood pigeons swooped. And creeks ran pure through the bush. But all that was yesterday, all that is gone. Well, not quite – not just yet. There is still a magical place, a best kept secret, where all this remains – where all this, and more, can become your tomorrow (Buxton Gore Bay Ltd, 2011b).

Similarly, advertising material for Excelsa in the Bay of Plenty harks back to the way things used to be. “Excelsa Village is a reminder that we can still have the quintessential kiwi lifestyle the way it once was.” The advertising links the heritage of the development’s setting to the design of the new subdivision. “The architectural design will be reminiscent of New Zealand’s coastal heritage with a wonderful sense of authentic permanence and timelessness” (Bluehaven Management, 2011b).

7.4.3 Truly a diverse community

Diversity is another concept that is exploited in the advertising. The advertisement (Figure 7.10) for Aidanfield in Christchurch plays on the New Urbanist belief that diversity is conducive to a healthy and authentic community. The slogan ‘Truly a diverse community’ is used extensively in the advertising rhetoric for this housing development. The developers have identified diversity as something that they believe people look for when buying property and subsequently based their advertising around this concept.

Image removed due to copyright reasons.

Please find image at <http://www.aidanfield.co.nz/about.html>

Figure 7.10 Advertising on the Aidanfield website (Aidanfield website, 2010).

Advertising material for Addison in Auckland also advocates the benefits of a diverse range of residents, likening this style of development to a ‘traditional neighbourhood’.

Just like any traditional neighbourhood all kinds of people call Addison home – young people, older people, singles, couples and families that’s (sic) why in Addison Gardens there are many different house types, each with their own special features (McConnell Property, 2010).

7.4.4 Security, safety and a sense of community

Safety and security are intrinsically linked to community in the advertising of residential subdivisions. Security is an important feature of the marketing, especially given that these subdivisions are popular amongst families with children. Safety is used to promote community and vice versa. Here, it is claimed the community actually creates the security offered in the subdivision.

Strong community links that create a family-friendly and safe place to live (Property Real Estate, 2010b).

The rhetoric used to advertise Preston Downs is strikingly similar, emphasising strong links and family and attributing them to the safety of the subdivision.

Sponsorship, support and an involvement with the local schools provided, and continues to provide today, strong community links that create a family friendly and safe place to be (Gillman Wheelans Ltd, 2010c).

In an advertising feature for Gainsborough, the Marketing Director also attributes the subdivision's sense of security and community spirit to the residents.

Our residents have recently formed their own neighbourhood watch program (sic) and the spirit couldn't be stronger (Gainsborough comes through, 2010).

This advertising feature for Addison combines the notions of a sense of community, neighbourhood, safety and amenities.

The ideal is to create a place where people can live with a sense of community in a neighbourhood that's safe and has ample amenities on the doorstep (Homes with views of the future, 2006).

The claim that their subdivisions are more secure is often attributed to the physical design of the development. Open reserve areas, low fences and open, well-lit walkways are cited as being conducive to a safe and secure environment. "The omission of high front fences at Addison aids with security whilst contributing to a feeling of open space. People can see each other coming and going and say hello" (Addison website, 2011). Similar rhetoric is used for the Anselmi Ridge development. "The omission of high front fences also contributes to the feeling of open space as homes are connected to the neighbourhood rather than being closed off" (McConnell Property, 2010).

7.5 Marketing the built environment

Developers are claiming that their new style of community-oriented planning will deliver more than a house; the buyer will purchase a stake in a close-knit community where times were simpler and the people kinder. There is a strong link in the advertising between community and design. The Waitikiri subdivision in northern Christchurch likens its design to European communities and uses its sense of space to promote a sense of community.

Wide open spaces, well designed avenues and a strong sense of community and freedom. This unique residential development incorporates many features and attributes inspired by European communities, separating itself from the chaos and stereotypes of modern subdivision living (Smith Developments Ltd, 2010b).

The website for Ocean Beach in the North Island's Hawke's Bay alludes to the 'community concept' in regard to this method of designing the built environment in such a way that promotes the development of a sense of community.

It is part of the 'community concept' of Ocean Beach to 'create compact, walkable neighbourhood in which a sense of community is likely to develop (Hill Country Corporation Limited, 2011).

Advertising for Addison has even gone so far to say that it is not actually a subdivision being built, but a community. McConnell Property's General Manager, Martin Udale, attributes this planning approach to the Environment Ministry's urban design protocol.

The Ministry says the urban design protocol is about 'building communities and not subdivisions' so people can live and interact together (Lowe, 2006).

The developer of Addison refers to this community-oriented design as 'revolutionary' in attempt to distinguish it from other residential developments.

'Addison was a revolutionary concept' says developer Dan Ogle, 'Papakura District Council has helped develop the framework that makes our community-orientated design a successful reality' (Homes with views of the future, 2006).

There are many other examples in the advertising material of developers using the perceived connection between physical design and community, neighbourhood, freedom and family values.

But many feel we should have seen this kind of neighbourhood a lot sooner as it's designed around people and community (McConnell Property, 2010).

Designed to provide a vibrant community feel, Peninsula Bay, Wanaka will become a warm and welcoming place for your family to grow and play (Infinity Investment Group, 2010b).

'Designed on the philosophy of creating a strong sense of community and identity, The Limes is where residents will be able to create a home, environment, and lifestyle that gives them the freedom to enjoy life', says Hamish Wheelans of Brian Gillman Ltd (Fresh, new style of subdivision, 2002).

The notion of planning contributing to social cohesion is also linked to the aforementioned tendency of developers to advertise their subdivisions as being unified with existing residential areas. Internet advertising for Ngāi Tahu Property's Live in Lincoln development distances the subdivision from others in the area, claiming that Live in Lincoln is designed in a way that will allow for a seamless integration with the existing Lincoln township, which will in turn lead to a unified community.

This development will connect with, and complete, the township of Lincoln. Rather than simply adding 'yet another sub-division', Lincoln Village has been conceived as part of a cohesive plan to link Lincoln University to Lincoln township, creating a unified, modern and friendly community (Ngāi Tahu Property, 2010a).

This is echoed by the marketing of Excelsa which promotes connection and integration, as opposed to just creating a subdivision that is 'tacked on' to an existing residential area.

Unlike many residential subdivisions which sprawl without connection or amenity, Excelsa Village is planned to compliment the Papamoa East Urban Growth Strategy, to be built around connecting neighbourhoods and a proposed cosmopolitan town centre (Bluehaven Management, 2011b).

7.5.1 Self-contained communities

An important aspect of creating these interactive communities is a commercial focus as well as a residential one. New residential developments are promoted as being sustainable, in the sense that people can not only live there, but work, shop and go to school. For example, John Lindsay, a director of the Prestons development in Christchurch stated

Prestons is the first of a new generation of sustainable communities that will create an integrated sustainable urban suburb providing employment, schooling, housing, community and recreational facilities with an abundance of open space... It will be a centre where people not only live, but also work and play (Confidence high with Prestons suburb despite delays, 2009).

Likewise, the master planned Excelsa development is described on its website as a “self-supporting community with a strong sense of belonging and pride amongst its residents embracing the rituals of daily life” (Bluehaven Management, 2011b). The inclusion of commercial activity in a development is usually something afforded to only the larger residential subdivisions and new towns. Surveyor 2 noted that it is rare to plan for new commercial areas within subdivisions. “It’s not often that you do end up with new shopping nodes. There’s more increase in the existing ones.” The Gainsborough subdivision to the west of Christchurch is not big enough to develop its own commercial centre, so Marketing Director, Bruce Harvey, draws attention to the development’s effect on the existing commercial activity in the existing town of West Melton. “The local community is going from strength to strength with the expansion of the West Melton Primary School and the transformation of the service station into a BP connect, giving the locals their own mini supermarket” (Gainsborough comes through unscathed, 2010).

7.5.2 Parks, reserves, and shared facilities

One of the most common types of amenity that are promoted in the advertising as being conducive to community is parks, reserves and common areas. These places are promoted as places that draw people out into the public realm, allowing them to meet new friends and add to the sense of community within the development. For instance, RD Hughes’ upmarket Waipamu Station development has

focussed on the community aspects of this home away from home. Offering common stables, clubhouses, tennis courts as well as a boat launching ramp. This will be a place for families to enjoy time away together, both as individual units and as a greater community at large (RD Hughes website, 2011).

While reserve contributions may be a compulsory aspect of the property development process, the developers have seen an opportunity to transform them from an obligation into a valuable marketing tool.

The parks and community commons in Addison provide the perfect environment for getting together and an attractive outlook for the surrounding homes. The common areas keep the whole neighbourhood open unlike other suburbs where houses are crammed together. 'There's a real contrast between Botany Downs and Richardson Park - they are just houses in rows, there's no allowance made for a community feel' (Addison website, 2011).

By beautifying these common areas and adding extra facilities such as tennis courts and barbeque areas the property developers are able to enhance the impression of residential subdivisions as communities rather than merely housing developments. The developers of The Limes, now an established subdivision in Christchurch, used these extra amenities as a point of difference in their marketing material. "Within the development there will be a public tennis court, a facility that has proven a real focal point at Milns Estate, forming an important nucleus to create a strong sense of community, Hamish Wheelans says" (Fresh, new style of subdivision, 2002).

Chapter 8

Community Commodified: A Discussion

8.1 Introduction

The objective of this research was to discover if, why and how residential property developers have commodified the concept of community. Within this broad objective was a set of three, more specific questions that needed to be addressed. These questions were:

1. What do residential property developers understand by 'community'?
2. How do residential property developers connect ideas about community with various other aspects in their new housing developments?
3. What relationships are established by residential property developers and their associates between community and new housing developments in advertising and related marketing strategies?

In this chapter I revisit these questions by discussing the results of my fieldwork as they relate to the theoretical perspectives and empirical research presented in the literature review (Chapter 3) and my own interpretation of what I have discovered. The purpose of this study was to help fill the gap in the social science literature regarding the interpretations and practices of private residential property developers in regard to community. Christchurch, New Zealand proved a particularly appropriate setting to study given the proliferation of low density residential development since the 1990s. The use of qualitative social scientific research methods enabled me to answer my research questions and broaden the base of enquiry for future studies.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of property developers' understandings of community, which were presented in Chapter 5. I then discuss how community has become commodified, splitting this into two main parts. In the first part I examine the way in which the built form of residential developments has become a valuable mechanism of commodification, creating a convincing setting for the development of community. The second part considers the role that advertising and related marketing strategies have

played in the commodification process, connecting ideas of community with new housing developments.

Based on my findings and the current debates in the field I shall argue that community has indeed been commodified by residential property developers. I support the notion that while traditional towns and urban areas existed to produce commodities, today community *is* a commodity (Guterson, 1992), a “ready-made accessory furnished by the real estate industry” (Knox, 2008, p. 173). Community has been portrayed in a positive light and translated into the physical environment, thus legitimising and enhancing its appeal. This is a pertinent example of how, in a capitalist society, anything can become a commodity – even something as fluid and ambiguous as community.

8.2 Residential property developers’ understandings of community

It is important to understand residential property developers’ interpretations of community because it is they who are shaping the urban environment based on an idea which is open to a variety of interpretations. The purpose of this section is not to decide whether their interpretations are ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, but to critically evaluate developers’ understanding of this slippery concept so as to gain a deeper understanding of what property developers mean and what they want to achieve when they claim to be creating new communities.

8.2.1 Community revisited

The problematic quest of defining community was highlighted in the literature review (Bell & Newby, 1971; Delanty, 2003; Thorns, 2002) and a range of alternative expressions was put forward. As stated by Rollwagen (2003) in the literature review, an essentialist approach to interpretations of community is too static given the complexities of social interactions and the plethora of interpretations of community across different times, cultures and settings.

The fluidity in definitions of community was evident among the interpretations given by property developers who were interviewed for this research; their explanations of

community were often vague but somehow tied loosely to communal interaction. It is important to note that the social interaction referred to by the developers concerns face-to-face social contact, as opposed to virtual communities such as the ones described by Wellman and Gulia (1999). As such, their understandings of community were centred on people interacting through the use of various spaces (walkways, parks, commercial centres, streetscapes) within the built environment. The developers' interpretations of community puts people within a specific location – a residential development, an understanding which supports those who see geographic location as being important to community (Knox & Pinch, 2010; Manzo & Perkins, 2006). Emphasis was placed on local social institutions such as schools, supporting Thorns' (2002) meaning of community as a local social system. Community becomes the sum of its parts, a combination of social institutions and meeting places within a specifically defined geographic location. For the developers, there are certain elements within a specific geographic proximity that, when combined, will deliver a community.

While it is obvious that people are essential to community, it was interesting to note that Developer 5 attributed the sense of community in his past developments to a strong core of particular people which he referred to as "pioneer residents". This is consistent with what Knox and Pinch (2010, p. 190) referred to as a "pioneer eagerness to make friends in new suburban developments" contributing to social cohesion. Developers rely on the advertising material and the site design plans (an advertisement in themselves) to paint a picture of community that will attract these pioneer residents. There is a perception that if a certain type of community-minded resident can be attracted to a housing development it is more likely that a community will develop.

8.2.2 The trouble with community

While there is a common acceptance that community is beneficial to society (Bauman, 2001; Delanty, 2003; Fitzsimons, 2000), it may be the case that imagined, often nostalgic versions of community are suppressing the more adverse connotations behind the idea (McBride, 2005). Once I discovered that community may not always be a positive thing (Brent, 2004; Bryson & Mowbray, 2005) I asked myself if developers might just be picking and choosing favourable elements of community and ignoring its potentially problematic

tendencies. The issue of diversity provides a pertinent example. A diverse community is one that will entail different factions (Brent, 2004), and will therefore experience conflict and division. While some argue that this conflict is a healthy aspect of community (Oliver, 1979), it may in fact be harmful to social cohesion. The developers agreed that diversity within a community is a good thing which should be encouraged; however, their examples of diversity were centred on a diverse range of age groups whilst ignoring other issues such as those surrounding a mixture of ethnic groups. The imagery developers use to describe community is carefully selected for its positive connotations, while those aspects which are seen as less desirable are ignored. Winstanley et al. (2003) found that despite claims of diversity in associated promotional material the sameness of design and pricing within some subdivisions will inevitably lead to a homogenous group of residents. My research shows that the developers' narrow interpretation of diversity may also be a factor contributing to a community of a relatively homogenous group of residents.

With the rise to prominence of privately developed residential subdivisions it is possible that real estate developers are actually helping to shape the popular perception of what it means to be part of a community. Developers' understandings of community concentrate on its marketable aspects – the things that people look for when buying real estate. This new version of community is simple, centred on social interaction within the confines of a certain geographic location, enhanced by the nature of the built form.

8.3 Connecting community to built form

The question of how community has become commodified by the real estate industry will be discussed in the two subsequent sections; concentrating on the connections that have been made between community, the built form of residential developments and the associated marketing material.

The purpose of my research was not to assess the effectiveness of the developers' methods, but to see how they incorporated their ideas about community into their subdivisions. I expected the developers to discuss caveats and the implementation of community groups but what I found was that the physical design of new housing developments was of crucial importance to the 'building of communities' and was seen as

the most important tool at the property developers' disposal. This raises interesting questions about environmental determinism which, the literature suggests, is highly questionable with a direct causal link between spatial form and human social life being somewhat tenuous (Hayden, 2003; Sorkin, 1998; Talen, 1999; Toker & Toker, 2006; Torre, 1999; Winstanley et al., 2003).

As stated in the previous section, real estate developers' understandings of community are centred on social interaction in a range of spaces within the built environment of a housing development. They use connections between sociability and spaces as if they were tools which might be thought of as 'mechanisms of commodification' – elements of the built form which developers use to enhance social interaction between residents as a way of legitimising the claims of community in the advertising material. Developers exploit places where community is perceived to exist by attempting to recreate them through the built environment (Winstanley et al., 2003). Social interaction, for example, is enhanced through increased pedestrian connectivity which allows residents to move freely throughout a housing development and interact with their neighbours. Similarly, Developer 2's "little social centres" such as shared recreation areas, tennis courts and playgrounds embody community and are perceived to enhance social interaction, appealing to desires for a mythical tight-knit neighbourhood. Not only is this practical, marketable and aesthetically appealing, but it also plays an important role in persuading potential property buyers to believe that community might actually exist.

Another highly marketable representation of community is what the developers referred to as the 'streetscape' or 'street scene'. Again this is seen as being crucial to increasing social interaction within a housing development, the cornerstone of developers' understanding of community. Developer 2 spoke of residents recognising themselves as part of a community, an idea which relates to Garreau's (1991) assertion that community is voluntary in nature. By creating an open streetscape with covenants which prevent residents from building high fences developers are creating an environment in which community is not an option, but an obligation. This narrows the target market, attracting more community-minded people who do not wish to fence themselves off from their neighbours and who take pride in an attractive street front. This helps to give meaning to a place and as Manzo and Perkins (2006) state, people are motivated to seek out places that

are meaningful to them. Streetscapes are sold as ingredients of community, a highly marketable way of connecting community to the built form of new housing developments.

8.3.1 Counting the costs of community

It is obvious that property developers are spending large amounts of money to incorporate features in the built environment which, they believe, facilitate the building of communities. My research results suggests that they do this because the highly marketable nature of community aids in the commodification process and works to increase the profitability of new residential developments

As presented in the Chapter 5, property developers are primarily engaged in the pursuit of profit. While this is not an inherently immoral activity, property speculators have been portrayed in a negative light. Sandercock (1979), for example, wrote about ‘The real costs of property speculation’ in her book *The Land Racket* asserting that wealthy individuals and companies make large profits from speculative activities at the expense of other, not so well-off people who ultimately suffer due to the rising cost of shelter and security. Whilst the moral actions of real estate development lie beyond the scope of this research, I did enquire about property developers’ opinions on balancing their financial imperatives with the goal of creating a community.

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was the developers’ efforts to create liveable, attractive places that are conducive to the development of community because this will actually increase profitability. It is not a matter of planning for community at the expense of the financial bottom line, but rather planning for community because it will make their developments more marketable and attractive to prospective buyers; developers are saying that *community sells*. This finding reinforces the work of Aitken (2009, p. 221) who stated that “community garners significant commodity power” because it is often sought after and chosen.

This speaks directly to the central theme of my research, with this conscious creation of the ‘community product’ underlying my argument that community has been commodified. Property developers are putting money into public amenities, beautification and

connectivity because these features help turn nebulous notions of community into a tangible product to be bought and sold in the real estate market. The physical features of a development make claims of community more convincing and the development itself more marketable, increasing its value and desirability. This raises an important question regarding the relationships established between new housing developments and community in the advertising and related marketing material.

8.4 Connecting community to real estate advertising

The literature review raised a number of issues in regard to the use of 'community' in the advertising of real estate. Community is said to have survived only in a commodified form, exclusively residing in the advertising material of developers and the rhetoric of New Urbanists (Knox, 2008). Indeed, Surveyor 1 spoke of the use of community in the advertising as being no more than a "throwaway line", an opinion which is consistent with Garreau's (1991) discussion with a property developer who said that community does not mean anything more than a marketing term. This opinion, however, diverges from those of other participants who reported on their efforts to create both housing developments and lay the foundations for what they consider to be 'communities in the making' (Aidanfield).

Community, in various forms, is an explicit part of many real estate development promotional strategies. My findings support those who have found that community is marketed as something which can be purchased with the price of a home (Maxwell, 2004; Rosenblatt, 2005; Rosenblatt et al., 2009). Images portraying community and the various taglines and slogans associated with the concept are used to give developments an identity and give the 'product' a particular form. This form is fortified with a range of other qualities, services, facilities and images, often including lifestyles into which one can buy. The sense of 'community spirit' is also an important part the advertising, playing on our "cultural craving for community" (Arvanitakis, 2009, p. 3). Developers create environments which echo the sentiments of community, reinforcing the belief that the desires for community are, in fact, both desirable and obtainable (at a price).

The relationship between the advertising and the built environment raises an important question. Does creating the need for community precede the physical creation of the development? Are developers creating a need by telling people what they desire and then offering it to them in the form of sections in a subdivision? The success of this style of marketing is exemplified by the approach that Apple founder, Steve Jobs took to selling electronic goods.

A commodity, as Marx said, is anything that satisfies a human desire or need. The genius of Jobs was that he told us what we desired and needed before we even realised it. He was the hippie high priest of consumer capitalism... Jobs was adept at turning desires into necessities. He turned technology into an object of worship and a badge of identity (Vallely, 2011).

Like an Apple product, sections within residential developments have become what Knox and Pinch (2010) refer to as 'positional goods' – a showcase for consumerism. Residential subdivisions have become a 'badge of identity', an expression of superiority, prestige and distinctiveness. A desire for community may already be present in some form, but advertising for residential real estate has typified the desire by turning community into something that can actually be bought and sold. As stated by McBride (2005), community is especially conducive to commodification as people never expect their need for community to be gratified, but they go on desiring it nevertheless.

Rosenblatt et al. (2009) found that residential developments were being marketed as a place where community spirit is strong even before prospective buyers have moved in. My own results support this to some extent, although I have also observed that an effort has been made to convey the developing nature of these new communities and their relationship with existing communities. Based on my discussions with developers it is evident that they do not believe community is something that can be created instantly as a consequence of a physical environment. Ultimately it is people that are the crucial element in a sense of community that "slowly builds up" (Surveyor 2) – a view that is consistent with that of Robbins (1998, pp. 40-41), who argued that "community is built over time by the actions of people over time".

The multifaceted and ambiguous nature of community means it is adept at lending itself to a plethora of alternative meanings and expressions. This makes it especially favourable for the creation of 'community cocktails' - repackaged forms of community which represent a range of relationships between community and new developments. This is an example of Caldeira's (2000, p. 263) aforementioned claim that advertisements "rely on a repertoire of images and values that speak to different people's sensibilities and fantasies and thereby address their desires." My results support Forrest's (2004, p. 19) claim that developers are selling community as a combination of lifestyle, security and prestige. By using images and slogans that promote rurality, nostalgic notions of the past, diversity and safety, property developers are expanding the community repertoire, establishing a wider range of relationships between community and new housing developments. Aiding this, the commodification process has seen a cleansing of community, in which its negative features have been purged in order to create a new, marketable version of community which is sold to the public.

The key to advertising is connecting people's desires and innermost concerns to a product. A desire for community has been identified by the real estate industry, typified by a demand for social amenities above and beyond the price of a home. I have already established that developers see community as social interaction within the confines of a built environment. It is through the advertising material, however, that we see an array of interpretations, all helping to establish a relationship between people's desires and the elements of the built form which are designed to embody ideas about community.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

This study explored if, why and how property developers are harnessing and using the concept of community in the creation and marketing of residential developments. Initially I explored property developers' understandings of community in order to explain exactly what is meant when they claim to be creating communities. I found that their interpretation of community is based on social interaction within the confines of a specific geographic location. I then explored how developers go about connecting the idea of community to their new housing developments and found that the manipulation of certain aspects of the built environment is their most valuable tool. Finally I examined the relationships which developers establish between community and new housing developments in their advertising material. Developments are marketed as 'new communities' and, in order to broaden the appeal, the idea of community is attached to other concepts which entail positive connotations.

Based on my research results I would argue that residential real estate developers commodify community by creating environments that are marketed as being conducive to the development of community and by using images and rhetoric in their advertising that portray the positive elements of community. Many of the developments I examined provided compelling evidence that community has become a product which is sold, allowing developers to capitalise on a perceived decline of a sense of togetherness and kinship in cities. This research shows that an intangible concept with positive connotations can be easily commodified and given tangible form in order to further maximise the saleability of that product.

This thesis therefore contributes to the more general literature on commodification, urban change, and community and fills a gap in the literature regarding the motives and methods of private residential property developers.

In the context of debates about the meaning of community, it is possible that the rise of planned residential developments has added yet another dimension to its myriad

definitions, one which is based on selective social interaction and weak associations expressed through geographic proximity. Street layouts, pedestrian connections, landscaping, public recreation areas and design covenants ensure that there is enough substance behind carefully constructed suggestions that community exists without actually demanding active participation in a communal life. Property developers are offering the residents of new developments 'community on tap'. They can choose to turn on the tap by engaging with fellow residents by making use of shops, shared recreation areas and walkways before turning it off by returning to the privacy of their house or back yard. This version of community conflicts with more traditional views which see it as an innate aspect of one's life. "Community was once not something that you chose; it was something you were a part of, that you only separated from with great effort and difficulty" (Marshall, 2000, p. xvi).

The nature of community is so difficult to define because it means many things to people of different cultures, different ages and backgrounds. In their marketing developers target specific groups of certain financial means which are more likely to have a similar idea of the positive aspects of community. Developers have hijacked the term.

New Zealanders cling to the 'rural myth' (Bell, 1997; Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998) in a highly urbanised country, hoping to find an idyllic community within the confines of a new subdivision. Property developers have realised that people are searching for the 'prize' of community and are offering it as an accessory that can be purchased by the hectare. This accessory comes in the form of several ingredients which are all present in the 'community cocktails' seen in the related advertising material where notions of rurality, safety, lifestyle and other social referents are used to sell a product. People know that the past cannot literally be recreated (Bell, 1997), yet they cling to signs of community - ingredients which are said to create an environment which is conducive to the development of community. These ingredients feature heavily in the advertising material and are translated into the physical environment through mechanisms of commodification which validate claims of community.

In Western culture, where society is organised around the pursuit of profit, we are witnessing the "fundamental principle of capitalism that anything can be commodified"

(Bell, 1997, p. 148). The real estate industry is a very convincing example of this, commodifying not only physical goods but also peoples' aspirations and desires. The idea of community has evolved from something which facilitates the production of commodities into something that *is* a commodity (Guterson, 1992). Real estate developers have commodified an essential thread in the fabric of society, weaving it from the marketplace and measuring it with a price tag.

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