
Introduction and Information About the Author.

I am currently a social work student at Flinders University concurrently working as a youth worker at two separate community service organisations.

I primarily work for Aboriginal Family Support Services, an organisation that works with Indigenous Australian clients with a background of transience, family disconnection and social exclusion. The clients that I work with have often voiced a feeling of displacement; a feeling that they are the ‘other’.

Similarly, in my second job at the Salvation Army, I work with clients from an extremely impoverished background. As these clients are learning how to budget and support themselves, it often leaves them with little or no money to contribute towards recreational activities. Because of this, I know how important it is for them to have access to neighbourhood ‘green’ spaces where they can build community connections, a way of replacing the family relationships that they often find themselves without.

I have included below my feedback in relation to two specific areas after reading the Natural Resources and Environment Policy Discussion Paper. I have tried to address these through a social justice lens, focusing on building social capital and its impact on the overall social determinants of health on the community.
A Note About Ecologically Conscious Social Work.

It is understood by many members of the social work profession that “green spaces are an integral part of a vibrant urban landscape” (Spijker & Parra, pg. 1011). The Australian Association of Social Workers has stated that “social justice and environmental justice are interconnected.” (Filippaki, pg.14) Similarly, the most widely accepted theory of social capital is the understanding that the more community connections and relationships that a person holds, “the more social capital they possess.” (Lahn, 294) Social capital has a direct relationship to the social determinants of health. This means that an individual’s community connections can influence factors such as employment, health behaviours, social intergeneration and education.

Community Gardens for the Disadvantaged.

While reading the policy discussion paper, I was extremely impressed with the amount of content devoted to the “links between the natural environment and our own wellbeing”. (Natural Resources and Environment Policy Discussion Paper, pg.3). However, I am concerned that due to future housing developments, the policy seems to have outlined an intention to substitute the development of new or expanded communal neighbourhood areas for “green infrastructure.. green roofs and green walls” (Natural Resources and Environment Policy Discussion Paper, pg.19) such as office buildings with green walls or micro garden backyard allotments.

I propose that the inclusion of new community gardens within public green space will help contribute to quality living environments, which the paper refers to “crucial for a sustainable future” (Natural Resources and Environment Policy Discussion Paper pg.5).
Not only would the gardens cultivate a ‘safe space’ for many individuals, the act of gardening has many recognised benefits to mental health “because of the personal, internal contentment that it provides” (Spijker et al., pg.1022). I believe there will be an increase in social capital as community members would interact with each other while growing their own fresh produce. There are numerous other benefits “such as fresh food and social cohesion.. using the social space created for events such as neighbourhood parties” (Spijker et al., pg. 1012). The cheap food source may even be harnessed by the community in the future to assist its more disadvantaged members.

**Biodiversity Development Through an Indigenous Lens.**

When reading your paper, I was thrilled to see that “valuing and enhancing biodiversity” (Natural Resources and Environment Policy Discussion Paper, pg. 11) were specified as key themes. However, I was hoping to receive more information on the way in which the future plan for building “sustainable and liveable urban environments” (Natural Resources and Environment Policy Discussion Paper, pg. 11) will reflect the identities of the Indigenous Australian community. Differing from common perception, “the Australian Indigenous population largely resides in urban areas.” (Lahn pg.294), meaning that members of this community are directly impacted by development choices made in plans such as this. Brough et al. noted in their paper ‘Social Capital meets Identity’ that “displaying a strong Aboriginal identity but also trying to ‘fit in’ to dominant non-Indigenous social spaces was a common source of stress.” (Brough et al, pg.402). Therefore, when proposing development to increase social capital we must also consider the cultural impact of our choices on Indigenous Australians as their “lived identities are bundled up in the same social package.” (Brough et al, Social capital meets identity, pg.407)
I noted that in the Natural Resources and Environment Policy Discussion Paper there is reference to the future aim for the “development of a green cover score” (Natural Resources and environment Policy Discussion Paper, pg.24). I propose that this could also be applied to calculating public space cultural inclusion levels. For example, are there native Australian plants or are signs written in Indigenous languages as well as English?

The paper explains that it is planning to “support the protection of areas with significant environmental values” (Natural Resources and environment Policy Discussion Paper, pg.22) but there is the question of how these values were determined. I believe it is important to allow Indigenous Australians to have a platform to contribute opinions on what natural resources they believe to be valuable. I noted several planned meetings to be held at ‘Kardi Munaintya Meeting Room, Ground Floor, 50 Flinders Street, Adelaide’ but I am questioning if this information was made easily available to members of the Indigenous community, as these often include those that do not have internet access. I also stress the need for Aboriginal Australians to be present at such meetings so that Indigenous members of the community feel comfortable enough to participate. Brough et al. discussed the importance of this, finding that there was a much more successful rate of engagement after “constructing Aboriginal spaces to discuss questions of Aboriginal identity” (Brough et al., Social capital meets identity, pg.408). By doing this, the project can receive cohesive and exhaustive feedback that reflects all members of the community.
References


