



SafeGrowth®

SAFEGROWTH® ***WHAT IS SOCIAL COHESION?***

Gregory Saville (2013)

SafeGrowth differs from other crime prevention approaches such as CPTED because it is an integrative planning process with annual safety plans for creating safe neighbourhoods, improving local trust, and building community capacity. It is based on the premise that crime is best tackled within neighbourhoods by activating local organizations, engaging change agents and partnering with professionals. Because safety is seen as the product of a well-developed neighborhood it follows that social cohesion is a linchpin for successful neighborhood development.

There is no universally agreed-upon definition of social cohesion although there is abundant research about how people come together in common purpose. Social cohesion doesn't just happen. There must be local resources and local people with knowledge, skills, and abilities who know how to encourage a sense of social cohesion. Every neighborhood has people with obvious, or latent, knowledge, skills and abilities. But in some places they may be disenfranchised and inactive.

It is possible to have places where there are many cultural events, festivals for example, and yet still have poor social cohesion. It is also possible to have one group with strong sense of belonging but excluding other groups or minorities in that neighborhood. That is not social cohesion. It is social exclusion! When such places erupt into conflict outsiders ask why. Social cohesion is the glue that binds different people and perspectives together and it takes time and effort to cultivate.

SafeGrowth draws on the definition of social cohesion from 2nd Generation CPTED that focuses on small geographic neighborhoods as a starting place. Effective neighborhood populations vary, but rarely exceed 5,000 with smaller core groups within those neighborhoods ranging up to 150 people.

SafeGrowth also envisions social cohesion on a continuum with some neighborhoods at a weak level and others at a strong level. While there is no simple formula to social cohesion there are at least four elements that, taken together, build a strong sense of place and belonging. No doubt social science and urban planning research will emerge that further refines the boundaries of each element. However for the purpose of SafeGrowth it is sufficient to acknowledge the reality of social cohesion and to appreciate the power it

has to improve quality of life. The four elements do not need to be present in equal amounts. It may even be possible for one element to be absent and still end up with a cohesive neighborhood. However that is much less likely than if all four elements are present to some extent. The four elements are:

1. A sense of commitment to a place,
2. A desire to live, work or play together in harmony,
3. A set of shared values and sense of belonging,
4. A commitment to solving some shared challenge.

1. The sense of commitment to a place can be demonstrated in multiple ways, for example attending social events or participating in local organizations to make improvements to the neighborhood. However demonstrated commitment can also result from making other types of contributions, for example the elderly may be unable to attend local events to assist the neighborhood but instead provide other forms of support.

2. A desire to live, work or play together in harmony is a fundamental requirement for social cohesion. Doing things together is a common activity however in the cohesive neighborhood there is a specific desire to seek them out. Additionally there is a desire to ensure harmony rules over conflict. Conflict may arise, as in all groups, but there is a desire and actions to seek out resolution to that conflict.

3. Shared values and a sense of belonging is another fundamental requirement for social cohesion. However the shared values may or may not relate to values in the larger society, for example religious or political values. Instead in a socially cohesion neighborhood values can simply relate to the shared belief in collaborative problem-solving or respect for diversity. The shared values also need to help provide a sense of belonging for all those in the neighborhood, for example those with diverging opinions or minority status should not feel excluded from neighborhood life.

4. A commitment to solving some shared challenge. Unlike cultural events where people come together for entertainment and play, social cohesion has an added dimension of partnering to address some local challenge. The challenge can be immediate or remote. It can be a single issue or many issues. There are instances when it is possible to create a sense of social cohesion with no challenge, however very few places have no challenges whatsoever. Further, when people come together in common purpose they are more likely to bridge differences of opinion and commit personal time and resource. This element hinges on the truism that a neighborhood unified is stronger than a neighborhood divided.

