

Feeling at home doesn't have to mean others feel unwelcome

HOW WE use the city depends a lot on how we identify with different parts of it. Cape Town is not a big city, by world standards, but it is too big for most of us to be comfortable with. From afar, a city that looks crowded and busy and decidedly unfriendly. Up close, it's personal: we carve out spaces that we become familiar with, and ignore the rest.

It's interesting to speculate about why people living in Johannesburg are willing to travel further than their Cape Town counterparts, for work and entertainment. Is it because they rely more heavily on dispersed social networks than on geography to define their communities?

Each of us belongs to more than one community, because our communities aren't all based on where we live. Work, religious affiliation, social connections and sport all bring us together for different reasons, in different places. But Cape Townians are strongly territorial.

People living in Rondebosch treat

Men About Town mokena makeka and rory williams



Delville like it's on the other side of the country, and Hout Bay is another world altogether. And there are even bigger divisions between the Cape Flats and suburbs near the mountain.

When we talk about lack of integration, what we often mean is that separation creates inequality and poor access to the opportunities provided by a city.

Cape Town's social networks expose many people to a wider cross-section of people than was the case thirty years ago, and these networks are communities that help people identify opportunities and get jobs. But the city is not as inclusive as it should be.

Urban planning needs to improve transport links and create opportunities for people to live closer to jobs, shops and

other destinations, but it also needs to create places where people feel at home.

The neighbourhood in which we live can be the most significant of our communities, and it can be an alienating environment, but not always in ways we expect. Someone might move from Woodstock, an area that many consider to be run-down and dangerous, to a more upmarket suburb like Kenilworth, only to find themselves more vulnerable because of the lack of social cohesion in their new area.

Woodstock's strength, at least in parts, is its diversity and activity. It has neighbourhoods where people watch out for one another from their stoeps. It has old and young, learning from each other. And it has streets that encourage interaction. Some people have more than one geographically-based community – particularly those who have migrated from rural areas or other countries and still have family or other ties where they came from.

These links are important. They can be practical, channelling money back to the home base. But they are also emotional, affecting where people feel "at home". Are new arrivals trying to put down roots, or do they feel transient? How should planning respond to this?

Even if we have links elsewhere, we define ourselves to a large extent by our local community affiliations and by identifying with the spaces we inhabit. We form associations that make sense to us as individuals, and we try to do this in manageable chunks.

We need the sense of belonging that they provide, but communities can only survive if we encourage them to form naturally. Real communities, by their very nature, are exclusive: they have some unifying force, whether that is geography or a set of ideas or commitment to a project.

As long as community identity emphasises positive attributes that enable us to work together and comple-

ment our strengths and weaknesses, this kind of exclusivity shouldn't be a problem.

The point is not that communities should be kept separate. Communities will overlap, blurring their boundaries. The point is that our level of comfort relating to people of other communities depends on feeling at home in our own communities, and a task of the urban project is to help make both possible.

As we try to heal divisions within society, the question is not so much whether we have a common culture, but whether we can accept our quirks and differences.

Let's not slip into the mistake of confusing "equal" with "the same". In search for a form of integration that is beneficial for all our communities. Meaningful unity, that which commits us all to addressing the challenge of human upliftment, requires us to embrace our diversity.

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