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Asset & Strengths Based Community Development

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Key principles: Asset based perspectives

- Premise:
 - All communities have assets/strengths
 - Assets/strengths are multi-dimensional
 - Effective CD engages these assets/strengths
 - Relationship building, visions and plans are key
 - Redistributive process and external resources remain essential

“Community”

- Community: concept defined by context

Community development

- Emphasising inclusive or participatory practices and a valuing of local knowledges
- Asset and strengths based perspectives have been shaped by long standing traditions in community
 - Pragmatism & social reform
 - Inductively theorising from practice oriented research

ABCD and Strengths based

- ABCD = Asset Based Community Development (Kretzmann & MacKnight, Northwestern University, 1990s)
 - Informed by practitioners
 - Community Development origins
- Strengths-based
 - Strengths perspectives (Social Work)
 - Recovery Paradigm (Mental Health)
 - Narrative community practice
 - Appreciative Inquiry

But not ...

UK Community Development Foundation

Achieving Better Community Development

Asset Building

Asset & Strengths based emphasise:

- **Avoid** deficit perspective focusing on a community's needs, deficiencies and problems
- Emphasis on redistribution, requirement for external resources, social justice.
- Process
- Relational & relationship building
- Identifying visions and action plans

Asset based responds to:

- Deficit focused approach is common – draws attention to needs, deficiencies and problems – negative consequences.
- Deficit perspective informs ‘mental map’ of community members, policymakers, media
- Instead:
 - Recognises and values myriad of relationships and connections
 - Creativity, resources, capacities, skills and local knowledges.
 - Does not ignore local issues and problems

Deficits focus

- Results in problems oriented and focus on problem solving
- Without identifying skills, local knowledges, networks these remain hidden
- Reinforces negative and limiting perceptions

The process

- **Asset mapping**
- **Relationship building**
- **Vision**
 - **Vision, options, hopes**
 - **Motivation and building capacity**
 - **Action planning**
- **Mobilizing resources**
 - **Redistributive**
- **Implementation**

Asset mapping process

- From Individual to wider community

1. **People:** The knowledge, skills, talents, experience and expertise of individuals. Asset based perspectives emphasise the importance of gathering knowledge from and identifying the skills and talents from all groups and sub-groups with a community. This includes all age groups and specifically people most likely to experience exclusion and marginalisation.
2. **Places:** The places, natural resources, physical assets such as community buildings and meeting spaces, and the services and programs where people live, work and visit
3. **Networks, informal links and gathering places:** places and networks where people can interact informally, particularly those where people discuss and explore ways of responding to local issues
4. **Partnerships and collaborations:** Collaborative organisations or local partnerships, connections and networks that link the community and its members (i.e. stakeholder network groups, youth networks, local adult or community education networks, regional social or economic development forums; regeneration or revitalisation partnerships). Of particular importance are those organisations that promote and facilitate positive changes
5. **Association, groups, institutions and services:** Local associations (i.e. local commercial, professional or business networks, community centres), community groups, committees, recreational groups, clubs, residents or tenants organisations and institutions and services (i.e. schools, local government, community health, churches, emergency services).

Also... those less commonly considered

6. Local Business: Economic linkages, local businesses and business leaders

7. Culture: mapping significant places, customs, behaviours, activities that have meaning to people and groups within the community.

8. History and/or heritage: Not only the chronological history, but also sites and stories of particular local significance because they help communicate the lived experience and local knowledge. These include previous processes, plans and efforts in community and economic development, such as community campaigns, community planning proposals, community economic development initiatives, previous community visioning activities, other community development/involvement activities.

Methodological considerations

- Action oriented methodologies
- Reflexivity
- Informs a theorising of social life
- Values and legitimises local knowledge alongside external (to community) 'experts'

Methods

- Include interviews and surveys.
- Numerous templates have been developed for specific community initiatives.
- Strategies also include
 - collecting stories
 - case-histories
 - Inviting community participants to find ways of identifying/illustrating assets (photographs, diagrams)

Reporting – playing back to community

- Reporting – community meetings/workshops
- Theatre
- Installations - *Son et lumiere*
- Exhibitions, displays

Asset based practice

- Way of thinking
- Not fixed model or formulae
- Steps and stages adaptable to particular research requirements

Scenario: Balingup model

Research topic	Research topic <i>The aspirations of elderly residents, now and into the future.</i>
Background:	A community research strategy required community input in a short timeframe Previous experience with community references groups made the research team hesitant to rely on input from a limited group of community representatives. The researchers wanted to develop a process that would enhance capacity among all participants and build a positive research relationship with this community.

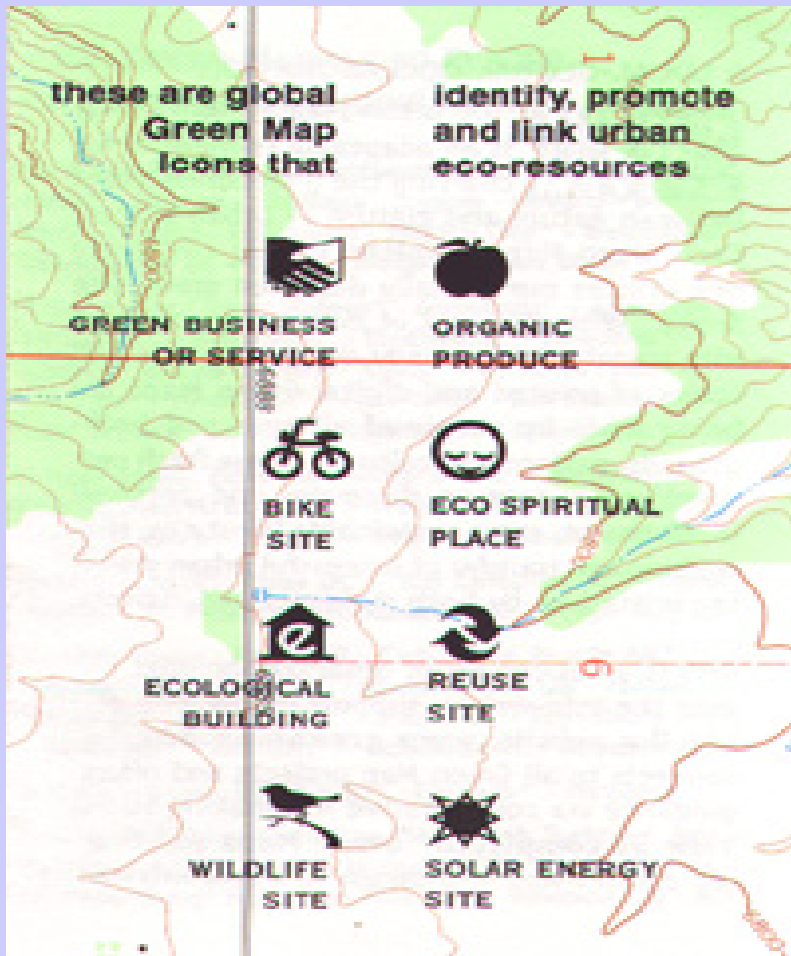
Key steps:

- Established rapport and connections with community
- Community workshop #1: community inventory, input into research design and methods
- Asset Mapping: identified important background and baseline data
- Community workshop #2: test & refine survey tools and information packages
- Information gathering: community researchers complete one-to-one and group interviews
- Analysis & Results: (Done by research team)
- Public event: report findings and celebrate community researcher's role and contributions.

‘Strong’ Community

- Safe (for residents), welcoming, sustainable, and...
- A learning community – where knowledge, skills and confidence can be gained through community activity
- Fair and just – upholding civic rights, and equality of opportunity and recognising and celebrating diverse cultures
- Active and empowering - involving people in local organisations and having a clear identity and self-confidence
- Influential – consulted and providing input into decision-making
- Caring – aware of community members requirements and providing good quality services
- Economically strong – creating work opportunities and retaining a high proportion of its wealth.

Green Map System



- Local knowledge, action & responsibility
- Chart natural and cultural environment
- Shared visual language
- Highlight green resources
- Cultivate participation