Community and the Habits of Democratic Citizenship:
An Investigation into Civic Engagement, Social Capital and Democratic
Capacity-Building in U.S. Cohousing Neighborhoods

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ABSTRACT

Community and the Habits of Democratic Citizenship: An Investigation into Civic Engagement, Social Capital and Democratic Capacity-Building in U.S. Cohouisng Neighborhoods

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Widespread concern over recent changes in American civic life has spawned arguments in a range of disciplines about the importance of social capital, citizen civic capacity and deliberative democratic engagement in supporting the development of engaged citizens, as well as supporting a democracy that is effective, publicly-minded and accountable.

This study contributes to this literature by empirically investigating the potential for a specific type of place-based community development called 'cohousing' to enhance the quantity and quality of resident civic engagement. Cohousing neighborhoods marry elements of social contact design with democratic self-governance and intentional social practices designed to build trust and cohesion among neighbors. In addition to investigating civic engagement in cohousing, this study investigates the degree to which U.S. cohousing neighborhoods build social capital, develop residents' democratic capacities and provide a platform for deliberative democratic practice.

The results of the study indicate extraordinarily high levels of civic engagement by U.S. cohousing residents as compared to both the general population and to individuals with similar educational, income and racial characteristics. A multiple-case analysis of three neighborhoods, selected for positive deviance in civic engagement levels, were found to possess high levels of trust, social cohesion and norms of reciprocity. Case community residents were also found to be developing a range of democratic capacities, individually and collectively, particularly through engagement in community self-governance via structures of distributed leadership and the use of consensus-based, community decision-making processes.

This study suggests that self-governing, communities of place, such as cohousing neighborhoods may represent a promising new avenue for enhanced citizen-engagement at the grassroots-community level. These neighborhoods also represent an excellent arena for future investigation into conditions, necessary and sufficient, to catalyze increased democratic capacity and civic engagement on the part of citizens.

DEDICATION

To Will and Nick.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Purpose

Different models and conceptions of democracy lead to quite different, and often conflicting, prescriptions for the role of the citizen. This study's objectives were derived from theories linked to a public ideal of citizenship, which suggests that democratic societies must support the development of a civically active and engaged citizenry in order to maintain legitimacy and to protect against the undue or self-serving influence of wealthy or other powerful segments of society on the workings of government.

Empirical evidence of recent declines in civic engagement in America has generated concern among advocates of democratic self-government. This apprehension has been exacerbated by evidence of what many regard as diminishing government accountability, from debate over whether the George W. Bush administration willfully deceived the American public during the period leading up to the Iraq war, to suspension of habeas corpus in detention of "enemy combatants" and a national energy policy crafted in strict secrecy alongside powerful energy industry lobbyists. The state of American democracy, from the perspective of the public democracy advocate, appears troubled indeed.

These concerns highlight the imperative of identifying and investigating approaches to revitalizing citizenship so that Americans might claim the promise of democratic governance that is honest, reliable, transparent and public-spirited in serving the national interest. A number of scholars in recent years have focused on the value of social capital and citizen deliberation as well as opportunities for civic capacity building through civil society- based association for improving the quality and accountability of democratic systems of governance. These claims have arisen as mounting empirical evidence has suggested a steady erosion of traditional stocks of social capital and shifts in levels and types of civic engagement in United States (U.S.) society.   This suggests a

need for systematic identification of initiatives with the potential to re-engage citizens effectively in the civic sphere and in the workings of our democracy.

The literature often references strong and vibrant communities as spaces that naturally lend themselves to development of social capital and though which individuals can readily connect to democratic opportunities. Thus, active community-building is seen as one potentially fruitful avenue for encouraging a more fully engaged citizenry. Such action encompasses a range of approaches from community organizing, which focuses on connecting and empowering local residents to organize for collective action, to promoting the spread of "social-contact design": the creation of built environments that encourage human connection and shared social identity.

This study investigates the implications for citizen engagement and democratic capacity building of *combining* elements of community organizing with social contact design at the level of the neighborhood in a specific model of community-building called cohousing. Citizens typically turn to cohousing as a way to create neighborhoods that meet their perceived needs for community. Projects usually begin with a small group of people hoping to create a cohousing neighborhood in a particular locality. If the group survives the early stages of self-organizing, visioning, planning and expanding, they eventually evolve in to a more formal organization that oversees the physical design and development of the neighborhood in conjunction with contracted professionals. Once building is complete, residents continue to organize themselves for the long-term collaborative governance and maintenance of their communities, usually in ways that are deliberative and egalitarian in character.

Relatively limited scholarship on cohousing has been undertaken to date. Existing scholarly works have largely focused on the effectiveness of social contact design in facilitating a sense of community (Torres-Antonini, 2001, Williams, 2005), cohousing as a manifestation of feminist ideals of housing and neighborhood (Hayden, 2002) and the neighborhood form's potential to increase environmentally sustainable technology application and practice (Meltzer, 2000). No research has systematically investigated

cohousing as a locus for increased civic engagement or as a site for building social capital and citizens' democratic capacities.

This work contributes to the literature on democratic citizenship by investigating the potential for housing developments, which combine community organizing and social contact design (e.g. cohousing), to contribute to increased civic engagement and democratic capacity building among residents. The study also serves to expand significantly the scholarship documenting and exploring the nature and potential of cohousing in America.

1.2 Study Overview and Central Research Questions

The study began with the hypothesis, based on anecdotal evidence, that cohousing residents exhibit higher than nationally-average levels of civic engagement. The first phase of the research sought to test this claim by investigating how levels and types of civic engagement within cohousing neighborhoods compare to U.S. averages (as reflected in the results of a national benchmark survey administered by the Saguaro Seminar at Harvard in 2000 and 2006). Given strong evidence from the initial investigation indicating comparatively high levels of civic engagement among cohousing residents, the study's next objective was to understand better *how* and *why* this result might be occurring.

Several questions guided this additional examination: Do cohousing neighborhoods simply attract individuals who are pre-disposed to extraordinarily high levels of civic engagement, or do residents perceive changes in their civic and democratic dispositions and behaviors, related to their experience of living in cohousing? Which relevant attitudes, behaviors and capacities appear to change and to what degrees? Where do cohousing residents tend to direct their increased civic energies? Does the neighborhood itself tend to absorb them, or are residents also increasingly engaged beyond the neighborhood's bounds?

Finally, this effort explored the matter of whether residents' tendencies towards increased civic engagement could be linked to the influence of factors proposed in the democracy theory literature as specifically civically and democratically enabling—such as the presence of high levels of social capital, opportunities to develop democratic capacities through association, and/or resident participation in deliberative democratic practices. More specifically, the research explored the issue of the degree to which these supposedly enabling factors were present in the cohousing neighborhoods studied and, if so, how they were manifested. Are any patterns of positive deviance in key behaviors or experiences observable across selected case communities? Finally, what specific characteristics of cohousing neighborhoods appear most significant in fostering the observed civic and democratic effects?

To address this complex array of questions, the research employed both quantitative survey methods and case study analysis. The survey-based portion of the study employed a pre-existing instrument, originally designed and tested at Harvard University's Saguaro Seminar, to gather data about civic engagement and social capital from 647 adult residents located in 56 different completed cohousing communities across the United States. This information was then statistically compared against a nationally representative pre-existing data set generated as part of a Saguaro Seminar study in the year 2000, which used a slightly longer form of the same questionnaire. The cohousing survey results were also compared against results from a re-administration of the Saguaro Seminar survey in 2006. This analysis must be considered preliminary due to the fact that raw data from the 2006 version was not yet available for scrutiny. Survey results from each study were analyzed to determine how levels of civic engagement within cohousing communities compared to U.S. averages—as reflected in the Harvard data.

The second phase of the study involved case studies of three developments selected from the larger population of completed cohousing communities. These case analyses focused on 1) identifying perceived changes in attitudes and behaviors of residents after they moved into cohousing, 2) gathering detailed descriptive data on neighborhood design, social life and governance practices of the neighborhoods and

3) collecting multiple forms of data and evidence on resident behaviors and practices related to civic engagement, social capital, capacity building and deliberative processes.

1.3 Definition of Terms

Civic Engagement

This study defines civic engagement as all forms of political participation, civic leadership, social giving and volunteerism, associational involvement, donation to charity and participation in civic discourse. The Saguaro Seminar, from which this definition is partially derived, considers all of these factors as a part of a very broad definition of social capital (Saguaro Seminar FAQ, 2005). The subset of elements highlighted here under the heading of "civic engagement" are not delimited to contradict the Saguaro Seminar's definition, but to add an increased level of precision to the identification of a specific set of behaviors considered in much of the democracy theory literature as "civic or democratic" in nature.

Social Capital

Social capital is commonly defined in the literature as "the information, trust and norms of reciprocity inhering in social networks" (Woolcock, 1998). Robert Putnam, in his work with the Saguaro Seminar, has defined social capital as "the collective value of all 'social networks' [who people know] and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other ['norms of reciprocity']" (Saguaro Seminar FAQ, 2005). "Social Capital" as used here draws from both of these definitions in focusing specifically on the value of trust, norms of reciprocity and social cohesion within networks of human relationships.

Democratic Capacity

In *Democracy and Association* (2001), Mark Warren, identified a set of key "democratic effects" that citizens may experience as a result of engaging in various forms of association. This study uses Warren's democratic effects as the basis for defining democratic capacity as composed of: 1) a sense of efficacy or political agency, 2) access

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to information, 3) political skills - communication, negotiation, leadership, organization etc. 4) an individual capacity for deliberative judgment and 5) civic virtues (Warren 2001, p. 71-72).

1. 4 Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study: its objectives, context within the literature, methods and central research questions. *Chapter 2* offers a review of the theory and literature most relevant to the study. *Chapter 3* outlines the study's research methodology while *Chapter 4* analyzes descriptive data on contemporary cohousing in the U.S in order to acquaint the reader fully with the contours of this neighborhood form. This chapter also profiles the cohousing population that participated in the national survey as well as each of the three case communities studied. *Chapter 5* examines data collected from both national and case study surveys on civic engagement by residents of cohousing neighborhoods, comparing information derived from cohousing respondents against data from a nationally representative sample. This chapter also investigates whether residents of case study neighborhoods have experienced self-reported changes in their levels of engagement after moving into cohousing *Chapter 6* provides a detailed analysis of social capital, democratic capacity building and practices of deliberative democracy in cohousing as revealed by the three case communities, with the purpose of exploring how and why civic engagement and democratic capacity building efforts might be informed by cohousing community experience. *Chapter 7* summarizes the study's principal results and offers conclusions. Appendices contain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval letters and copies of the national cohousing survey and focus group questions used in the research.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THEORY AND LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter contextualizes the present research in the body of literature and theory related to democratic forms of citizenship and engagement in America, as well as in the limited existing literature on cohousing.

The review begins by contrasting two competing ideals of democratic government and citizenship and then sketches a range of theories associated with what might be termed a "public" ideal of democracy. These theories are then combined to construct a model of the ideal citizen from a public democracy perspective. A review of the empirical evidence on national trends related to civic and democratic engagement follows. The subsequent section examines three theoretical approaches to building civic and democratic efficacy: It presents a review of the literature on Social Capital and its links to 'making democracy work' as well as a review of developmental theories of democracy and the literature related to theory and practice of deliberative democracy. This review of the relevant theoretical literature is followed by a typology of the specific practices identified to date as potential enablers of increased civic and democratic engagement. Cohousing is then located as one option within this broader typology. The chapter concludes with a descriptive overview of cohousing along with a review of the scholarly literature related to this neighborhood form and how the present research relates to, and builds upon, the existing scholarship.

2.2 Protective vs. Public Models of Democratic Citizenship

At least two competing ideals of democracy and their concomitant definitions of citizenship have been present in American politics since the nation's founding. One—variously termed "liberal-minimalism" or "protective democracy" —has its roots in the political philosophy of John Locke, who saw democracy primarily as an instrumental means of protecting individual citizens' rights to life, liberty and property with a minimal

role for the average citizen in the day-to-day workings of democratic governance (Somerville & Santoni, 1964; Carter & Stokes, 2002). The other, which can be broadly termed "public" democracy, may be traced to Rousseau and, in the American context, to Thomas Jefferson (Sehr, 1997). According to this ideal, democratic governments exist to serve the people, not simply by defending against threats to their liberty and property, but though active discernment and promotion of the broader public interest. In this view, legitimate forms of democracy depend upon ongoing and active participation by a citizenry that possesses both a capacity and a propensity for critical and reasoned engagement in the public sphere (Sehr, 1997).

2.2.1 American Protective Democracy: Origins and Definitions

The protective democratic ideal was reflected in the liberal political philosophies of a number of the nation's founders including James Madison, who sought to incorporate into the Constitution and Bill of Rights permanent protections for individual rights to property and liberty (Sehr, 1997 p. 32). Madison and the other authors of the *Federalist Papers*, were suspicious of direct democracy. They doubted its practicality on the scale of the nation-state, and had little faith in the capacity of common people to govern. They feared that direct popular participation in public affairs would inevitably lead to instability and ill-conceived projects resulting ultimately in threats to both private property and liberty that would undermine the regime's capacity to ensure individual freedom. For these reasons, they advocated strict limitations on direct forms of public participation in the new government (Carter and Stokes, 2003; Hamilton, Jay and Madison, 1961 ed.). Under the proposed system, the primary means for citizens to participate in public affairs was through voting for representatives who would be charged with carrying out the actual business of government and representing the interests of constituents (Sehr, 1997; Carter and Stokes, 2003). The protective model views citizens primarily as competitive individualists, oriented to calculating and promoting their self-interest in both politics and the economy. Accordingly, Americans could not reliably be expected to value cooperation over competition or to voluntarily sacrifice self-interest for the common good. As a result, the protective model called for regulation of publicly undesirable behaviors primarily by means of laws and a corresponding threat of official

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sanction in cases of violation, as opposed to attempting either to foster or appeal directly to citizens' sense of honor, duty and civic virtue (Carter and Stokes, 2002).

2.2.2 American Public Democracy: Origins and Definitions

Thomas Jefferson, while agreeing with the basic tenets of liberal philosophy, differed from Madison in his views on public participation in government. He argued that a well informed, educated and democratically engaged citizenry was the best defense against governmental corruption and abuse. He advocated the establishment of a highly interactive relationship between government and citizens in which the government would seek to support the development of a democratically capable populace by purposefully educating the public's ability to reason. Citizens, so educated, would be expected to engage routinely in civic and social endeavors that would give them a direct stake in the political process and the practice of democracy. This, he argued, would both protect against the establishment of a ruling aristocracy based on wealth or social position, and would enhance citizens' ability to recognize and challenge abuses of power in government. Ultimately, he believed that citizens were the only reliable guardians of freedom (Jefferson, 1787 in Peden, 1982). Jefferson thus envisioned a vital role for the people-or at least for the nation's white male citizens-in a representative republican government, including a significant degree of direct popular participation. He believed deeply in the potential and the necessity for common people to participate actively in their government in order to ensure that it served the public interest (Sehr, 1997). From Jefferson's time forward, a wide range of theories and arguments aligned with this ideal have been used to challenge the adequacy of the liberal-minimalist model of democracy and its conception of the role of the citizen.

This research flows from theories and scholarship based in the public democracy tradition. The literature espousing and developing the public democracy ideal is too large to be given comprehensive treatment here, but the following section does summarizes a number of scholarly perspectives that are foundational to the current research.

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2.3 Public Democracy: Theories of Citizenship and the Public Sphere

Alexis de Tocqueville, in his treatise *Democracy in America*, highlighted the vibrant associational life of Americans as a key incubator of the civic habits and virtues necessary to support a democratic government that served the public interest (Tocqueville, 1969 ed.). John Dewey, 20th century pragmatist philosopher and ardent public democracy advocate, also emphasized the importance of the public sphere in supporting democracy. Dewey considered public communication to be the glue that holds a democratic community together. He proposed that the process of people discussing their individual and group interests, needs and prospective actions is what allows them to discover their shared interests and to chart potential individual and collective action (Dewey, 1927 in 1988 ed.). Communication in the public sphere, he claimed, provides information that allows people to understand the possible consequences of actions and circumstances and, through the medium of discussion, allows the formation of public opinion which can, in turn, become the basis for democratic action (Dewey, 1927). For Dewey, citizen engagement in the public sphere was a vital means of initiating social change and ensuring political accountability, as well as protecting against the ever-present danger of a government dominated by powerful and moneyed interests. Dewey was particularly worried about the effects of increasing industrialization and urbanization on the public sphere and observed a troubling decline in public discussion and action in his own time (Dewey 1927 in Hodgkinson and Foley, 2003). He believed that it was both possible and desirable to develop inclusive, democratic publics, primarily through adoption of inquiry-based forms of education that would nurture the critical and democratic capacities of citizens (Sehr, 1997).

In *Strong Democracy* (1984), Benjamin Barber has argued that governments in democratic societies are legitimate only in so far as they have the continued support of their citizens. But a society with a population that is politically ignorant, alienated and disengaged, he suggests, is incapable of conferring authentic democratic legitimacy and is equally incapable of holding government accountable. For this reason, he contends that only a politically and civically engaged population can secure a legitimate democracy. Barber has argued that such engagement must be grounded in ongoing civic education,

open arenas for participation and public decision-making possibilities for ordinary citizens. He does not reject liberal democracy, but he strongly critiques the liberal-minimalist conception of the narrowly self-interested citizen as limited and deterministic. Accordingly, he has called for a greater sense of civic responsibility on the part of citizens, as well as a definition of democratic rights and responsibilities that goes well beyond the pursuit of private interests (Barber and Battisoni, 1993). Barber echoes Dewey in claiming that civic virtue grows out of public engagement. Like Dewey he argues for creation of social structures that support and encourage active citizen engagement in civic and democratic processes (Barber, 1984; Barber, 1998 in Hodgkinson and Foley, 2003).

Many critical theorists including Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse and Jurgen Habermas, have questioned whether liberal democratic forms of government are adequate to guarantee authentic freedom or autonomy for citizens within an ostensibly democratic society. They share a concern over what they observe to be the human tendency to embrace servitude unwittingly and to adhere to conditions of oppression, particularly within the context of modern industrial capitalism. They argue that the potential for freedom that is present in liberal democratic systems of government can only be truly activated through development of the citizenry's individual and collective capacity for critical awareness (Brookfield, 2005). While Fromm was relatively pessimistic about the possibility of systematically awakening such capacities in citizens within the context of a capitalist paradigm, Marcuse believed that people could be helped towards such awareness by experiences that challenge their assumptions and ordinary modes of thinking, for example, through encounters with works of art, theater, music and literature that create opportunities for reflection and shifts in perspective (Brookfield, 2005).

Habermas, meanwhile, has focused on the public sphere as a central arena for development of critical forms of self-awareness and autonomy. For Habermas, the public sphere is the place where individuals can organize with others for social change and for the extension of democratic processes (Habermas 1992 in Brookfield, 2005). Habermas defines the public sphere as the civic space or "commons" in which adults come together

to debate and decide their response to shared issues and problems (Brookfield, 2005 p. 230). He sees the public sphere as a "network for communicating information and points of view" (Habermas, 1996, p. 360). The streams of communication that flow through this network are, in the process, filtered and synthesized so that they coalesce into "bundles of public opinions" ((Habermas, 1996, p.360). In this way, the public sphere, can serve as "an intermediary between the political system, on the one hand, and the private sectors of the life-world and functional systems, on the other"(Brookfield, 2005, p. 373). Habermas claims that society is more or less democratic according to the processes its members use to come to decisions about matters that affect their lives. The more democratic a society, the fuller the information bases or sources to which its citizens have access and the fewer the distortions that constrain their communication (Brookfield, 2005). In his view the more freedom of conversation that people enjoy, the higher the likelihood that true critical reason—reason employed to create a just and humane democracy—will emerge.

In a similar vein, Joshua Cohen and Andrew Arato (1992) have argued that autonomous institutions outside the state and the market provide the scope for independent voice and initiative in modern societies and are essential to the constitution of a genuine public sphere. They emphasize the shared responsibility of the interventionist modern state and the corporate economy in undermining the ability of citizens to frame independent judgments, to assert authority over their lives and otherwise to develop and encounter community. They insist that only an autonomous and vigorous civil society can reinvigorate public communication and public life and suggest that social movements are important expressions of such autonomy (Arato and Cohen, 1992 in Hodgkinson and Foley, 2003).

Deliberative democracy theorists have built upon Habermas's work to advocate creation of public democracy by "providing avenues for political participation within existing patterns of representative politics" (Bohman and Rehg, 1997; Gutmann and Thompson, 2004; Held, 2006 p. 250;).   Deliberative democracy theorists claim that political choices and outcomes can be made more legitimate through increased institutionalization of processes that promote public deliberation (Stokes in Carter and

Stokes, 2002). Although deliberation has always been a valued part of the democratic process, modern theories concerned with the idea view it as 'transformative modes of reasoning" (Held, 2006, p. 252) that have their roots in Habermasian ideals of 'communicative action' and are based upon the notion that legitimate law-making is founded upon the reasoned consent of the citizens after engaging in a process of free and rational discourse (Stokes in Carter and Stokes, 2002). Advocates for this perspective seek to increase opportunities for citizen engagement in choice-making processes on the premise that forums for multiple types of deliberation contribute to increasing the democratic character of society as a whole and have the greatest potential for engendering the increased autonomy and critical awareness on the part of citizens that is so vital to promoting government that is, equitable and responsive (Warren, 1992; Guttman and Thompson, 2004;).

Feminist theorists bring the idea of an 'ethic of care' to theories of democratic citizenship (Gilligan, 1982; Dietz, 1987; Tronto, 1987;Gould, 1988). They specifically reject the atomistic notion of the self in society, in favor of a conception of individuals as socially constituted, interdependent beings. Indeed, Carol Gould has proposed that the fundamental units of society are individuals-in-relations (Gould, 1988). She critiques the notion of privatized, individualized democracy as based upon false (or myopic) assumptions and argues that freedom should be understood as self-development which depends upon both the fullest possible realization of the individual *and* community (Gould, 1988). The 'ethic of care and responsibility' provides the foundation for a feminist vision of public democracy, which evidences equal concern for individuality and community.

2.3.1 Imagining the Ideal Public Citizen

From the theoretical perspectives presented here, it is possible to construct a core set of values, habits and capacities characteristic of the ideal citizen from a public democracy perspective: such a citizen would understand the vital role that the government plays in promoting and securing the public interest and would feel a sense of responsibility for both supporting and demanding good governance and public

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accountability at all levels of government. This responsibility would not simply be exercised through voting, but also through taking an active interest in public affairs, seeking information about issues of public significance, engaging skillfully in conversation and deliberation with others about issues of common concern, communicating with public officials, participating in various forms of civic and voluntary association and/or social movement activities. This citizen would aspire to develop well-reasoned and critically aware opinions and would have a capacity to tolerate differences of perspective and values. She would be capable of engaging in civil discussions across difference and of evolving and transforming her judgments through such deliberative processes. She would have an awareness of her rights, as well as an appreciation for the rights of others. She would believe that people are not always and only competitive individualists, but are also interdependent, responsible to others, and embedded in networks of relationship and care. From a public democracy perspective, such citizens in critical mass would provide a vital bulwark against co-optation of government by anti-democratic interests and would help to ensure election of publicly accountable representatives fully empowered to act in the public interest. These citizens would also contribute to strengthening the fabric of society by contributing through leadership, service and engagement to meeting needs and advancing issues that contribute to the quality of social life by seeking to discern and to advance principles of justice, equity and human wellbeing from the local to the global.

2.4 Evidence on the State of Public Citizenship in America

Empirical evidence on civic engagement and the state of public citizenship in America is decidedly mixed, but a preponderance of scholarly research points to significant declines in the quality of civic engagement in recent decades and highlights worrisome trends that appear to be taking the average American ever further from the ideal outlined above.

A number of studies indicate that Americans' faith in government and interest in public affairs are in serious decline (Torney, 1975; Levine, 1980; Fetters and Brown, 1984; Barber,1993;). Alienation has become a central indicator of a modern political

crisis, whether it is measured by plummeting electoral participation figures, widespread distrust of politicians or pervasive apathy about things public and political (Barber, 1984). Declining numbers of Americans participate purposefully in public life, either as individuals or as members of organized groups. They lack experience gained through democratic practice, the knowledge and skills necessary for effective democratic participation and the inclination or cultural habits that foster participation in activities oriented to shaping society (Sehr, 1997, p. 18).

Even scholars who dispute the conclusion that civic engagement is in overall decline, accept empirical evidence indicating profound shifts in the way citizens participate in public and civic life. Civil society organizations have proliferated in recent decades, but have also become increasingly specialized and professionalized (Fiorina, 1999). Voting rates dropped about 25 percent between the1960's and the 1990's (Skocpol and Fiorina, 1999, p. 2) and Americans are participating less in many kinds of shared social or civic endeavors. Scholars have documented erosions in forms of social life that are neither market based or coerced by the state (Putnam 1995; Putnam 2000; Wolfe 1998). While active and intense levels of voluntary participation, particularly with respect to specific causes or movements, appear to be on the rise among certain segments of the population, this is accompanied by increasing obstacles to more routine or generalized forms of public participation on the part of average citizens with everyday concerns (Fiorina, 1999). While historical records, data from national membership organizations and survey research all show declining participation in civic associations where members are actively involved and likely to interact face-to-face, the number of national lobbies and advocacy organizations where members are more likely to write a check or add their name to a membership list or petition has increased (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999).

Critical theorists point to the high levels of complexity and differentiation in the modern era as major factors contributing to collapse of the public sphere. Habermas contends that "the communicative network of a public made up of rationally debating private citizens has collapsed" (Habermas 1973; Brookfield, 2005). This lack of a public

sphere, he believes, is a boon to governments that seek to steamroll a vision of the world they wish people to accept as self-evident. A public sphere that debates the legitimacy of questionable public policies is to put the matter delicately, extremely inconvenient for a regime determined to tamp down public criticism of its actions. He also contends "the electronic mass media of today is organized in such a way that it controls the loyalty of a depoliticized population" (Habermas, 1973, p.4). Under conditions of a severely diminished public sphere where citizens lack the communicative vehicles through which they can meet, discuss and decide their responses to the ways economic and social forces are shaping their lives, the effect is that people are left "privately vociferous but publicly voiceless" (Brookfield, 2005 p. 375).

2.5 Turning the Tide: Fostering Civic Engagement and Democratic Citizenship

While the current picture, by many accounts, may appear bleak to advocates of public democracy, much recent scholarship has been devoted to gaining a greater understanding of conditions, structural and otherwise, that cultivate development of civically engaged and democratically capable citizens. Such understanding is perhaps the first step in turning the tide toward greater degrees of responsible public engagement. More theories and scholarship have been generated on this topic than can reasonably be encompassed here. To address what otherwise might become a confusing welter, three somewhat distinct but complementary approaches are elaborated here. These are prominent in recent democracy-oriented literature and are especially relevant as a theoretical foundation to help readers make sense of the data analysis presented in Chapter 6. This section offers a summary review of (1) Social capital theory and its relevance to democratic efficacy (2) Developmental democracy theory with emphasis on its approaches to fostering democratic citizenship capacities and (3) Deliberative democracy as a means of fostering personal autonomy and democratic consensus building.

2.5.1 Social Capital and Democratic Efficacy

A prominent stream of recent theory and research has focused on civil society as a source of attitudes, norms and values that help to 'make democracy work' (Putnam, 1993). Perhaps the most influential scholar associated with this stream of research is Robert Putnam, who has built upon the work of James Coleman (1988) to develop a theory of 'Social Capital' that has fuelled an explosion of both supportive and critical research and scholarship. Putnam has suggested that social capital may be defined as social networks and the social trust and norms of reciprocity that sustain them and argued that these are crucial to a healthy democracy. Social capital, he contends, inheres in relationships and can be identified at multiple levels, from the family to the nation-state. Irrespective of the level of analysis under consideration, he argues that social capital results especially from within civil society and a robust associational life (Putnam, 1993; Putnam 2000).

A body of recent scholarship has catalogued evidence of a decline in social capital across the United States (Paxton 1999; Putnam, 2000; Narayan and Cassidy 2001). Putnam (2000) found significant evidence of overall deterioration in community and organizational life, engagement in public affairs, community volunteerism, informal sociability and levels of social trust over the past three decades. Similarly, Narayan and Cassidy (2001) found a consistent decline in civic participation between 1974 and 1996, as measured by levels of political engagement, trust, associational membership, security and crime and family stability and integrity,. Paxton (1999) in a study of changes in social capital between 1975 and 1995 found strong and consistent evidence of weakening (0.5% per year) levels of generalized trust over the period.

Putnam has argued that interaction with others in face-to-face settings allows individuals to learn to work together to solve collective problems. In this way they gain social trust. He contends that wise public policies, robust economic development and efficient public administration all flow from such social trust. That trust is grounded in regular and cooperative interactions. He has postulated that democracy itself is an outgrowth of dense small-group ties and the positive attitudes and actions these evoke

from individuals. For this reason he is alarmed by survey research that points to deterioration in both quantity and quality of interaction among Americans as well as reductions in levels of trust in government (Putnam, 1993; Putnam 2000).

Putnam's work has been hotly debated among social and political scholars, but few dispute the centrality of his studies in sparking a burgeoning wave of interest and research on social capital. The concept has now taken on a life of its own as a way to conceptualize and operationalize the benefits that networks of relationships and norms of trust and reciprocity bring to individuals, communities, economies and democratic forms of governance.

This interest has resulted in a large number of studies that have sought to measure social capital and its relationship, not only to democratic participation, but also to a wide range of quality-of-life issues: crime rates, mental and physical health, educational attainment, governmental efficiency, individual income levels and economic performance. Social capital is believed to contribute to the creation of benefits in each of these arenas in a variety of ways, including reducing transactions costs, facilitating the dissemination of knowledge and innovations and promoting cooperative and socially minded behaviors (Coleman 1988; Helliwell and Putnam, 1993; Putnam, 1993; Helliwell, 1997; Knack and Keefer, 1997; Inglehard, 1997; Narayan and Prichett, 1997; LaPorta and Knack, 1997, 2000; Runyan et al, 1998; Manning and Fullerton, 1998; Bryk, 1999; Kawachi 1999; Putnam, 2000; Rose, 2000; Halpern, 2000; Woolcock, 2001; OECD, 2001; Rice, 2001; Stone, Gray and Hughes, 2003).

Putnam has succinctly summarized these claims concerning the collective benefits of social capital:

> It is becoming increasingly clear that social capital has an enormous array of practical benefits to individuals and communities. What is more, social capital has what economists call 'positive externalities'. That is, networks of trust and reciprocity not only benefit those within them, but also those outside them. Consequently, when social capital is depleted, people suffer in clear and measurable ways, and there is a ripple

effect beyond the scattering of lonely individuals. Shoring up our stocks of social capital therefore represents one of the most promising approaches for remedying all sorts of social ills (Saguaro Group 2000, p.4).

Other scholars have brought additional perspectives to the social capital debate. They have noted that social capital is not inherently good and have highlighted the potential 'dark side' of social capital; the ways that networks of trust and reciprocity can be used to perpetuate class divisions or serve purposes that undermine general social well-being such as in the case of mafias, violent gangs and terrorist networks. (Bankston and Zhou, 2002). Critics have also raised questions about who should be responsible for increasing stocks of social capital in society, if this is indeed a desirable goal, and concerns about whether the nation's most marginalized populations are likely to benefit. Putnam has been criticized for appearing to lay this responsibility at the feet of civil society institutions and individuals (Edwards, Foley and Diani, 2001). In the case of disadvantaged individuals and communities, taking responsibility for social capital building in the face of severe social and economic challenges seems a tall order. A number of critics on the left insist that the federal government should support community and social capital building through targeted policies, programs and expenditures. These analysts fear that social capital will be used as a convenient excuse to shift responsibility for serving the needs of disadvantaged populations away from the national government to less well equipped individuals, local governments and civil society organizations (Amin, 2005). Others demand that social capital advocates recognize the importance of power and sources of economic capital in successful efforts to build links that truly benefit communities and individuals (Flora, 1998; Servon,1999; DeFilippis, 2001). Some critics see a potential for social capital to be used in political debate to attribute poverty and marginalization to moral weakness on the part of individuals or groups and thus to label low-income populations "undeserving others" (Bacchi and Beasley, 2004).

Taken together, these criticisms warn against adoption of a social capital building agenda as a cure-all for the nation's social, economic and political ills. They note the limitations and pitfalls that such an agenda may face and highlight the potential for

unintended consequences. However, few, even among the concept's harshest critics, entirely deny its relevance to community building and social policy.

2.5.2 Developmental Theories of Democracy and Civic Capacity Building

Developmental (or what Mark Warren terms "expansive") democracy scholars support the notion that capable democratic citizens are made, rather than born. Proponents of these theories postulate that citizens are capable of developing democratic or civic values and capacities through a variety of means. These theorists lay particular emphasis on civil society and voluntary association as a fertile breeding ground for the habits and capacities essential to active democratic citizenship (Hirst, 1994; Cole, 1920; Pateman, 1970; Barber, 1984; Bellah et, al, 1991; Cohen and Rogers, 1992; Putnam, 1993; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady, 1995; Mansbridge, 1995; Sandel, 1996; Habermas, 1996). Through engagement with such "schools of democracy", such scholars contend, citizens have the potential to transform themselves, becoming more autonomous, more empowered and thus more capable in governing their own lives and contributing effectively to the public sphere (Stokes in Carter and Stokes, 2002).

This tradition can be traced to J.S. Mill, who valued democratic engagement as a means to self-improvement. John Dewey and democratic socialists such as G.D.H. Cole (1920) and T.H. Marshall (Carter and Stokes, 2002) developed it more fully in the 20th century. The developmental perspective encompasses expansive and associative theories of democracy. Scholars in these traditions share a view of civil society as a space for democratic development and participation outside of either state or market which has the potential to deepen democracy from the local to the national. (Hirst,2001; Warren, 2001; Stokes in Carter and Stokes 2002). Developmental democracy theorists focus on civil society as a vital locus for engaging and nurturing the democratic citizen although they do not deny the importance of the state's role in providing the education, health and social welfare context that enables citizens to become active and democratically engaged (Marshall, 1950; Stokes in Carter and Stokes, 2002).

In *Democracy and Association* (2001) Mark Warren sought to outline the general means by which associations might produce effects that are democratic. He concluded that this occurs in three main ways:

1) Via 'developmental effects' which support citizen participation and decision-making,

 2) By means of 'public sphere effects' in which the actions of discrete associations spill over into the larger public sphere and

3) Through 'institutional effects' that allow decisions to be transferred into aggregated opinon-formation and policy-making (Warren, 2001, p 61).

Warren's outline of citizenship enhancing developmental effects is particularly useful for this research, in that it provides a theoretical basis for later evaluation of developmental effects upon residents of cohousing neighborhoods (as a particular form of civil-society based association).

For Warren, 'developmental effects,'   "encompass the ways in which associations may contribute to forming, enhancing and supporting the capacities of democratic citizens, ideally underwriting the capabilities of individuals to participate in collective judgment and decision-making and to develop autonomous judgments that reflect their considered wants and beliefs" (Warren, 2001, p. 61). He defines 'autonomy' as the capability of citizens, individually and collectively, to hold their interests with due consideration and to provide reasons for holding them (Warren, 2001. p.62).

Warren delineates five developmental effects which might be enhanced through associational involvement: 1) citizens' sense of efficacy or political agency, 2) their access to information 3) their political skills 4) their individual capacity for deliberative judgment and 5) their civic virtues (Warren, 2001, pp. 70-71).

Warren defines *efficacy* as "the feeling that one could have an impact on collective actions if one chose to do so, the confidence necessary to action and the habit of doing something about problems when they arise" (Warren 2001, p 71) He argues that people can be acculturated to such confidence, assertiveness and agency by having

experiences in which their efforts or judgments had impact (Warren 2001, p.71).

Associations, according to Warren, often serve as collectors, organizers and conduits of *information* that educates individuals about matters relevant to them. Information gives citizens the means to know what is happening in government and society and empowers them to demand transparency and public accountability (Warren 2001,p.71)

Political Skills, according to Warren, include things such things as "public speaking, self-presentation, negotiation and bargaining, developing coalitions for collective action and creating new solutions to problems, learning how and when to compromise, and recognizing when one is being manipulated, pressured or threatened" (Warren, 2001, p. 72). Warren finds that these capacities are most likely to be cultivated within smaller scale associations that deal with problems of collective action in face-to-face settings, particularly those that lack strongly hierarchical leadership structures (Warren, 2001, p.72). Many democratic theorists now emphasize the developmental effects of democracy and suggest that individual engagement in associations will contribute to the cultivation of *civic virtues*. Warren defines such virtues as: "attentiveness to the common good; concerns for justice; tolerance for the views of others; trustworthiness; willingness to participate, deliberate and listen; respect for the rule of law and respect for the rights of others" (Warren, 2001, p.72). These develop a disposition among citizens toward responsible and active engagement in the civic sphere.

Finally, Warren observes that it is possible to feel effective, possess information, and political skills and the capacity to relate to others with reciprocity and trust and *still* fail to reflect effectively on ones own interests and how they relate to the interests of others. To address this challenge, citizens must have opportunities to develop their critical analysis and cognitive skills. These intellectual capacities allow individuals to reflect upon, and evolve their own preferences to represent more accurately their authentic needs and to find ways to negotiate meeting those needs and preferences in conjunction with others. Warren, along with many proponents of deliberative democracy (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1996; Benhabib, 1996), believe that the development of these capacities occurs most readily in situations where individuals

confront some degree of conflict or dissent under conditions which encourage and enable that situation to be resolved deliberatively (Warren, 2001, p.75).

2.5.3 Deliberative Democracy Theory

The third set of theories to be examined here, those developed around the label deliberative democracy, explore the cultivation of democratically capable citizens Deliberative democracy theorists share with developmental democracy theorists, an emphasis on civil society as a vital arena for both self-transformation and for democratic capacity building in order to enhance personal and political autonomy in the public sphere (Warren, 1992).

The term "deliberative democracy" is a relative newcomer to the democracy debate. First coined in 1980 (Bessette, 1980), the term gained currency in the 1990s as numerous books and articles appeared on the subject (Habermas 1987; Cohen, 1989; Warren 1992 & 1996; Bessette, 1993). Although the theories of deliberative democracy put forth in these works draw on a variety of philosophical and political traditions, they are all grounded in the conviction that public dialogue and public deliberation ought to be regarded as an essential component of democracy. Each of these authors also contends that democracy derives its legitimacy from citizen participation in public deliberation. Deliberative democracy builds on the assumptions of participatory democracy (Pateman, 1970). Nonetheless, it focuses primary attention on decision-making at the micro-level and on the potential individual and communal transformation that may occur through deliberative processes that occur there (Behrouzi, 2005).

Deliberative democracy theorists argue that if individuals were more broadly empowered to influence choice making, especially in the institutions that most directly affect their everyday lives, those experiences could be transformative. Individuals would become more public spirited, more tolerant, more knowledgeable, more attentive to the interests of others and more willing to probe their own interests. Transformations such as these would improve the workings of higher-level representative institutions, as well as mitigate threats that democracy is often held to pose to rights, pluralism and

governability. Deliberative democracy theorists contend that institutions which make collective decisions in democratic ways will tend to generate new forms of solidarity, cooperation and civic attachment. Of the variety of possible democratic experiences, deliberation is most central to these generative and transformative effects (Habermas, 1987; Cohen, 1989; Dryzek, 1990; Fishkin, 1991; Yankelovich, 1991; Mouffe, 1992; Cohen & Arato, 1992; Gutmann and Thompson, 2004)

The self-transformation thesis relies on three assumptions:
1) that democratic opportunities can transform individualistic and conflicting interests into common and non-conflicting ones and do so while developing citizenship capacities that ultimately reduce threats to rights and pluralism,
2) because these transformations reduce conflict, they allow reduced use of power as a medium of political action and,
3) far from being a threat to individual liberty and autonomy, practicing deliberative forms of democracy is *necessary* to the values of self-development, autonomy and self-governance (Warren, 1992).

According to deliberative theorists, democracy is best defined as "collective self-rule under conditions that provide relatively equal chances for citizens to influence collective judgments and decisions (Warren, 2001, p. 60). This view implies both equitable distribution of power in the collective decision-making process and similar participation in building collective judgment. Democracy implies processes of communication through which individuals come to know *as individuals* what they want or think is right. Their beliefs and preferences should not be the result of manipulation or received opinion, but instead, of considered adherence (Warren, 2001).   From this vantage point democracy involves a communication process whereby a collectivity comes to develop a shared judgment of what is right, or best. For this to occur, opportunities must be created in which the diversity of ideas and opinions initially held by individuals can be transformed through a process of reasoned, equitable, dialectical communication, into judgments or decisions to which all parties can consent. Public deliberations are assumed to be organized around appeals to the common good. A

decision reached through deliberative process is ideally not a compromise reached among opposing particular interests, but rather a cooperative search for truth grounded in a framework of commonly accepted moral and rational principles (Behrouzi, 2005).

Deliberative democracy, much more than adversarial democracy, depends upon a baseline of shared skills and assumptions in participants. The process is not necessarily intuitive for a people accustomed to metaphors of political contest that results in clear winners and losers. There are a growing number of resources available to the general public which aim to support individuals and groups wishing to engage in deliberative democratic processes.

The *National Center for Deliberative Democracy (NCDD)* has translated deliberative democracy theory into a set of practical guidelines. (www.thatawayl.org/exchange/resources, accessed 08/01/07). These guidelines provide a bridge between sometimes esoteric theory and deliberative practice by average citizens in every day settings such as workplaces, classrooms and community groups.

The NCDD on defining deliberative practice:
"When we have to make important decisions we deliberate. We will consider the merits of a range of alternatives and weigh the advantages as well as the tradeoffs of each. After thinking the issues through, we will try to make the best possible choice, the one that best answers our particular needs. It may not be perfect but it is informed by all of the information that we can bring to the decision at the time. […] Deliberation requires a commitment on the part of all who enter into the process to listen to the perspectives and the knowledge of all who are participating and try to learn from one another." (www.thataway.org/exchange/resources, accessed 08/01/07).

The NCDD on the difference between deliberation and debate

"We all know why debate skills are useful. We use these skills when we want to persuade another of the merits of our ideas. But what if our ideas are not fully formed? What if the issue is complex and involves multiple interests? How do you generate new approaches that address multiple needs? This calls for careful listening and an openness to the knowledge and views of others. It requires building new ideas and new approaches together. This is deliberation. Deliberation is a cornerstone of democracy. Learning these skills increases the capacity of students to participate fully in democracy." (www.thataway.org/exchange/resources, Accessed 08/01/07)

NCDD Suggested Guidelines for Deliberation

- Speak your mind freely but don't monopolize conversation.
- Listen carefully to others. Try to really understand what they're saying and respond to it, especially when their ideas are different from your own.
- Avoid building your own argument in your head while others are talking. If you are afraid you will forget a point, write it down.
- Remember that deliberation is about sharing ideas and building new ones. It is not a contest to see whose ideas are best.
- Try to put yourself in someone else's shoes. See if you can make a strong case for an argument with which you disagree. Are there things you appreciate about that perspective?
- Help to develop one another's ideas. Listen carefully and ask clarifying questions.
- Paraphrase each other to confirm understanding of others' points.
- Build off of each other.
- Be open to changing your mind. This will really help you to listen to others' views.
- When disagreement occurs don't personalize it. Keep talking and explore the disagreement. Look for common concerns beneath the surface.
- Be careful not to discredit another person's point of view.
- Remember that, although you are trying to listen and build on one another's ideas, that doesn't mean that everyone has to end up in the same place.
- Don't be afraid to say you don't know or that you have changed your opinion.

(www.thataway.org/exchange/resource, Accessed 08/01/07)

In spite of increasingly available resources designed to support everyday use and practice of deliberative democracy, a criticism that has yet to be fully addressed is the

difficulty of achieving genuinely deliberative processes in everyday practice given that success depends heavily on participant capacities for listening, communicating effectively and being open to alternative perspectives. Pre-existence of these skills and levels of awareness in participants cannot be assumed. Such skills are not likely to be developed simply through exposure to a set of written guidelines, or even given the presence of excellent facilitators. Successful practice may depend upon ongoing opportunities for learning and development. Therefore attaining widespread citizen engagement in genuinely deliberative forms of democratic participation is no simple feat.

2.6 Contemporary Approaches to Encouraging Public Citizenship

Numerous innovative approaches have been employed across the country to develop social capital and or enhance civic engagement. Each approach presents certain strengths and limitations. A range of strategies are briefly introduced here, not to analyze their relative effectiveness, but rather to provide a rough map of the broader landscape within which cohousing as a locus for grass-roots democracy building may be conceptually identified.

Educational institutions have traditionally been viewed as arenas for promoting the development of democratic citizens. While recent pressure to adopt standardized learning may be serving to limit relevant innovations in the K-12 public school setting, institutions of higher learning are increasingly experimenting with programs which combine academic content with opportunities for service learning and connection with local community issues and needs (Ostrander, 2004; Rubin, 2000; Marrasse, 2001). In addition, classroom learning, at least within certain disciplines, is slowly shifting away from the 'sage on the stage' model and towards teaching and learning approaches that are more discussion-based and designed to foster deliberation and critical thinking on the part of students (Sehr, 1997; Kelle in Burstyn, 1996).

Philanthropic foundations, have underwritten a range of civil society based initiatives that have sought self-consciously to foster new forms of civic engagement and to create forums for citizen deliberation on issues of public concern. These include the

movement to develop 'Study Circles' (Scully and McCoy in Gastil and Levine, 2005) and 'Learning Democracy Centers' (Schwinn et al in Gastil and Levine, 2005). Government agencies, particularly in the planning arena, are also experimenting with collaborative forms of governance and decision-making that bring a range of stakeholders together to deliberate and assist in the crafting of policy (Gray, 1991; Sandercock, 1998; Isenhart and Spangle, 2000 Sokoloff et. al. in Gastil and Levine, 2005; Cheng and Fiero in Gastil and Levine, 2005). Experiments in workplace democracy, including the creation of work place cooperatives and worker-owned businesses, have also yielded rich opportunities for employees to develop their democratic and participatory capacities (Rothschild, 1986; Adams & Hansen, 1992). New technologies and the expansion of the Internet have created opportunities to support civic engagement practices, through vastly expanded access to information and new possibilities for organizing community actions, fundraising, engaging with government officials and participating in public debate and discussion (Behrouzi, 2005; Bonner et. al. in Gastil and Levine, 2005; Lukenmeyer et. al. in Gastil and Levine, 2005; Weiksner in Gastil and Levine, 2005).

Place-based community organizing and community development initiatives hold great potential for creating social capital and stimulating civic engagement and democratic empowerment at the grassroots (Flora, 1998; Kretzman and McKnight, 1999; Warren, 2001; Rubin and Rubin, 2001). Community organizing, particularly among working class and disadvantaged populations, engages the populations least likely to have their interests directly represented within the larger political sphere and perhaps those populations least likely to have easy access to the various democracy building initiatives already described. Mark Warren highlighted ways this could occur in *Dry Bones Rattling*, his 2001 study of the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) network. There he argued:

> Community building is rapidly emerging as a vital new force for revitalizing democracy at the ground level. It represents a serious effort to reverse what scholars have recently identified as the decline of social capital, that is, the steady deterioration in the social fabric and civic life of American communities. What unites these diverse phenomena is a focus on patient, relationship building at the local level, with efforts directed towards concrete improvements to the communities where families live and work. These efforts are rooted in community institutions that engage the participation of Americans often left out of

elite-centered politics, especially women and people of color. These participants draw upon value-based commitments to family and community, and, at their best, to social justice and racial inclusiveness as well (Warren, 2001; p.9).

While community organizing focuses on building social networks around common interests, New urbanist and "livable community" initiatives focus more upon the built environment and its relationship to fostering (or inhibiting) community cohesion, social capital building and increased quality of life for residents. Proponents of new urbanism encourage a rethinking of the urban landscape and a shift away from sprawling, isolated and car-centered suburbs, towards more integrated, walkable spaces that contain a mix of uses and housing types, while providing inviting public spaces that encourage social interaction and play (Jackson, 1985; Calthorpe, 1993; Katz 1994; Kunstler, 1994; Langdon, 1994; Wolfe, 1999).

Forms of community linked to place have traditionally served as a breeding ground for social capital formation (Jacobs, 1961; Ehrenhalt, 1995) and as an arena within which of civic engagement norms are commonly developed and transmitted. But, changes in the physical, social and economic landscape in recent decades have shifted the nature of communities of place, tending to make them substantially less interactive and cohesive. It is common nowadays for neighbors barely to recognize one another, let alone interact in substantive ways. Cohesive neighborhoods still exist, but their numbers are unquestionably on the decline (Bellah et. al, 1985). A number of social and democracy theorists have pointed to dangers to our nation's collective social well being and the vibrancy of our democracy, associated with the breakdown of cohesion within America's communities of place (or communities *linked* to place): neighborhoods, churches, social clubs and other forms of regular, non-specific civil society association (Bellah et. al, 1985; Walzer 1991; Etzioni, 1993; Fukuyama 1995; Barber, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Hayden, 2002). These scholars argue that social capital, defined by trust and cooperation, facilitates collective action to address community issues. In this view, maintaining or raising the local stocks of social capital is critical to creating sustainable communities that are capable of meeting the needs of residents in democratic ways (Briger and Luloff, 2001).

Cohousing can be viewed as one approach to building sustainable communities from the ground up. These are not communities based upon tradition and kinship, but neighborhoods intentionally built to foster a cohesive sense of community among residents. We therefore now turn to a description of this new form of neighborhood and a review of the related literature.

2.7   Cohousing as Synthesis and Potential

Cohousing is a civil-society based initiative that incorporates elements of community organizing and social contact design. These projects are typically activated at the grassroots by citizens seeking to create neighborhoods for themselves that reflect a strong sense of community and social cohesion. These neighborhoods are not developed with the direct intention of fostering increased civic engagement or democratic capacities in residents, but this study suggests that such effects may constitute a significant positive externality of this type of neighborhood development.

2.7.1 History of Cohousing

In the mid 1960s traditional forms of Scandinavian collectives provided inspiration to a group of Danish citizens led by architect Jan Gudmand-Hoyer to create the first cohousing neighborhood. They termed their new housing idea *bofoellesskab* or "living community" (McCamant and Durrett, 1988). The idea caught on in Denmark and soon spread to Sweden and the Netherlands. This housing model was seen as a way to respond to the unique demands of modern life: reducing the burden of housework for women and improving the lives of working parents and their children. It was also an appealing means of enhancing social relationships and creating an increased sense of community among neighbors (Meltzer, 2000).

Over time in these three nations, the cohousing approach garnered increased support from both public and private sectors in the form of government and private financing programs and incorporation into land-use and development policy, to the extent that many new housing developments are now built with some reference to cohousing

principles. In this way, cohousing in these areas moved from being an alternative, grass-roots phenomena, to a rather mainstream housing option (Williams, 2005).

Two American architects, Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, studied the model in the 1980s and published their research in the widely distributed book *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves* (1988). The book inspired the development of the first wave of American cohousing pioneers. Today there are close to 100 completed cohousing neighborhoods located throughout the United States and more than 100 additional projects in various stages of development (www.cohousing.org; accessed 08/04/07). A nonprofit national association—the Cohousing Association of the United States—disseminates information and provides support to those interested in this housing model. The Association also connects cohousing communities across the country through a national listserv, conferences and regular publications (Torres-Antonini, 2001).

Cohousing has not enjoyed the same level of social and government support in the United States as in northern Europe. To date, in the U.S., these initiatives remain almost entirely private in origin. Many are driven by future residents who are willing to commit tremendous resources of time and money (as well as to bear significant financial risk) in order to gain the anticipated benefits of living in this type of community. Progressive private developers have fostered some developments as well, but the priority placed on future resident involvement has kept most mainstream developers from considering these types of projects. In direct contrast to Europe, cohousing neighborhoods have developed in most U.S. states largely in spite of existing financial, housing industry and local government policy and practice, rather than because of it.

2.7.2 What is Cohousing?

The national cohousing Web site defines cohousing as "a type of collaborative housing in which residents actively participate in the design and operation of their own neighborhoods"(www.cohousing.org/overview, 06/25/2007). A central aspect of living in a cohousing neighborhood is balancing privacy with community life. Neighborhood

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physical design encourages both social contact and private space. Private homes contain all the features of conventional houses, including fully equipped kitchens and living quarters, but residents also have access to shared facilities such as a 'common house,' jointly maintained green spaces, community gardens, 'outdoor rooms' and playground areas. Cohousing residents are typically committed to actively creating a sense of community within the neighborhood. A number of researchers regard American cohousing as an attempt to compensate for the stresses of detached suburban living characterized by a separation of work, care and leisure into highly differentiated environments, by bringing neighbors together to build supportive and nurturing communities (Franck & Ahrentzen, 1989; Fromm, 1991; McCamant & Durrett, 1994; Norwood & Smith, 1995; Hayden, 2002).

Neighborhoods are usually composed of attached and single family homes along one or more pedestrian streets or clustered around a courtyard. Parking is generally kept to the periphery and private-unit garages are rare. Neighborhoods vary in size from 7 to 67 households, with the majority falling in the range of 20 to 40 households. The specific aesthetic design features of neighborhoods are diverse and reflect a mixture of resident preferences combined with site constraints and regional architectural idioms (www.cohousing.org; accessed 07/15/07). The common house is the social center of the neighborhood. It generally provides a large dining room and kitchen, lounge area, meeting rooms, recreational facilities, mail pick-up, bulletin boards, children's spaces and frequently also guest rooms, a workshop and laundry room. Optional community meals are usually available in the common house two or three times a week.

U.S. cohousing has been developed by a range of approaches including resident-led, developer-led, partnership, retro-fit and original construction (Williams, 2005). Most cohousing communities in the United States are structured as condominiums or planned unit developments. In the less common 'lot development model,' residents jointly own the common property and facilities and are the sole owners of the lot on which they build their private home.   Residents manage the community cooperatively, through a homeowners association composed of all adult home-owners in the community.

Leadership is typically non-hierarchical and responsibilities are highly distributed. Committees are typically formed to carry out the work of maintaining the community, planning events and creating policies. Most community-level decisions are made using a consensus model. Although many groups have a policy of voting in the event that the group cannot reach consensus on an issue, in practice the need for such voting is rare. The prevailing norm is for neighbors to resolve conflicts, when they arise, through non-violent interpersonal communication. When this fails, most communities have more formalized conflict resolution structures and processes in place to assist residents to achieve mutually satisfactory resolution without resorting to litigation.

The Six Defining Characteristics of Cohousing Neighborhoods

The literature used in developing most cohousing neighborhoods in the United States suggests that six core characteristics must be present for a neighborhood to qualify formally as 'cohousing' (www.cohousing.org, 06/25/2007; McCammant & Durrett, 1994; Hanson, 1996;). Communities that lack one or more of these features may be 'cohousing-inspired' but cannot accurately be termed 'cohousing' neighborhoods. A list of those primary characteristics follows accompanied by a brief description of each.

1. *Participatory Process*. Future residents participate in the design of the community so that it meets their needs.

2. *Neighborhood Design*. The physical layout and orientation of the buildings encourages a sense of community. For example, private residences are clustered on the site, houses face one another across pedestrian pathways or courtyards and cars are kept to the periphery.

3. *Common Facilities*: Common facilities and shared open spaces are an integral part of the neighborhood, supplementing the private homes.

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4. *Resident management*. Residents manage their own neighborhood, and perform much of the work required to maintain the property. They participate in preparation of common meals and meet regularly to address problems and develop community policies.

5. *Non-hierarchical structure and decision-making*. Neighborhood residents take on leadership roles, but no single individual serves as community leader. Residents participate in collaborative forms of decision-making and community governance. Most cohousing neighborhoods use some form of consensus as their decision-making model.

6. *No shared community economy*. The neighborhood is not a source of income for residents. Most residents earn their income outside the community, though working from home is common. Each household maintains complete private control of its finances.

Although still small in absolute numbers, cohousing neighborhoods are becoming more common in the United States. Cohousing has proven more popular than either collective housing or income-sharing intentional communities, largely because cohousing communities reject the idea of having set ideologies: there is an absence of social hierarchy and lack of shared economic systems. Cohousing has a pragmatic focus that makes it attractive to a wider audience than the more radical experiments in communal or cooperative living (Williams, 2005).

2.8 Themes in the Cohousing Literature:

2.8.1 Feminist Conceptions of Housing

In *Redesigning the American Dream: Gender, Housing and Family Life,* (2002) Dolores Hayden offered a feminist Marxist critique of traditional American housing options. She found these woefully inadequate for contemporary families. She cites European examples of cohousing as the kind of collective neighborhood solution she

considers the best antidote to gender inequalities in the nation's housing stock. She calls this a 'female-friendly neighborhood model,' because it incorporates women's particular needs and interests into its central scheme by providing affordable, convenient domestic support services such as childcare, community dining facilities and communal laundry facilities which relieve women of domestic burdens and abate the isolation they so commonly face in traditional housing schemes (Hayden, 2002).

Horelli & Vespa (1994) view cohousing as one means by which to empower women, characterizing cohousing as an intermediary social structure that allows a number of tasks traditionally assigned to individual households, and particularly to women, to be transferred into the neighborhood. Examples include cooking and childcare duties. This eases individual burdens, and has particular benefits for disadvantaged citizens by providing additional sources of support.

Scanzoni has also argued that cohousing addresses nicely the challenge of suburban alienation because it encourages household interdependence, which should lead to greater equality between members of society (Scanzoni, 2000).

2.8.2 Fostering social cohesion through design

Cohousing exhibits many of the aspirations of new urbanism (Torres-Antonini, 2001). New urbanism and cohousing strategies are based on social contact design principles which aim for higher densities, mixed use and the creation of convivial public spaces as well as pedestrian-friendly environments (Torres-Antonini, 2001, p.14). Various studies have considered the social contact design principles adopted in cohousing (Franck& Ahrentzen, 1989; Fromm, 1991, 1993, 2000; Hanson, 1996). This research has generally suggested a positive link between social contact design principles and levels of social interaction, but lacked a detailed assessment of those ties. Torres-Antonini (2001) has studied the impact of design features on social interaction, participation, community support, unity and safety in cohousing, with respect to six specific factors. Overall, she found that opportunities for social interaction and safety were increased through social contact design, while participatory, supportive behaviors and unity seemed to be

independent of it. She speculated that other important factors were likely influencing the five social behaviors, including common goals, the organization of communal activities and joint ownership and management of space. Williams (2005) built upon Torres-Antonini's work (2001) to explore how personal, social and design factors, separately and in combination, influenced social interaction. Her goal was to understand better how design, social and personal factors reinforce each other to promote social interaction in cohousing. She found that the personal characteristics of residents as well as a variety of formal and informal social factors that reflect these, mediate the impact of design features in cohousing.

2.8.3 Ecological Sustainability

Graham Meltzer (2000) has analyzed cohousing as a locus for increased neighborhood ecological sustainability. He claimed that the intentionality and social cohesion of cohousing neighborhoods facilitates ongoing manipulation of the built environment. That fact, in turn, results in social and environmental gains for cohousing developments. Strong social ties and shared high levels of commitment enable residents to act together when implementing technologies with significant environmental payoffs that would not be feasible on the scale of a single household. These social ties may, for example, allow implementation of a neighborhood geothermal heating system or a highly efficient energy or waste plant (Meltzer, 2000). To make sense of his findings, Meltzer (2000) introduced a heuristic model that sought to capture the enabling link between community-based social relationships and effective environmental praxis. He postulated that in a socially cohesive community: "Circumstance facilitates human interaction which builds meaningful social relationships; supportive relationships in a community context imbue a sense of belonging to that community; belonging (to geographical community and therefore, 'place') induces confident engagement; and engagement with circumstance is the very basis of effective environmental praxis." (Meltzer, 2000, p. 156)

2.8.4 Cohousing as participatory, democratic Common Interest Community

Mark Fenster (1999) has focused on the ways in which cohousing developments have adapted the legal forms of the increasingly common American Common Interest Community (CIC) to a more intensive, deliberative democracy choice process and explicitly striven thereby to foster a sense of community. He argues that cohousing at once creates public community and protects private property. He postulates that the fully realized property rights of cohousing often encompass what CIC proponents most desire, the creation of community through contract and property ownership. Cohousing developments also typically overcome what CIC critics most wish to avoid, alienation from public life and exclusion of outsiders through the creation of anti-democratic gated communities. He suggests that if homeownership constitutes an ideal of 'perfected citizenship' by integrating the individual or family unit into wider systems of property rights, social value and political rights, then cohousing may constitute a form of direct, participatory democracy that not only creates property rights but also connects those rights of ownership and citizenship to an engaged and engaging local community.

2.9 Cohousing and Civic Engagement: A Gap in the Literature

The direct effects of living in cohousing neighborhoods for resident civic engagement and democratic capacity have not yet been researched systematically, although a number of studies do point to the democratic, participatory and collaborative nature of these communities (Fenster, 1999; Meltzer, 2000; Torres- Antonini, 2001; Hayden, 2002; Williams, 2005,). The only existing study to date that has focused specifically on social capital in cohousing was a master's thesis. Its author found a positive correlation between high levels of social capital formation and communities dominated by residents with community-minded (as opposed to utilitarian) motives for residing in their community (Dillman, 1999).

By providing an analysis of the potential for cohousing to serve as an innovative means to foster the development of civic engagement and democratic capacities in residents, this study represents a small but significant contribution to the literature on

democratic theory and public citizenship and a more substantial contribution to

expanding the existing body of literature on cohousing in the United States.

CHAPTER 3
METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This study employed a mixed-method approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004), combining quantitative survey methods with qualitative case study to address its central questions. The research began with an investigation of whether cohousing residents reflect higher than average levels of civic and democratic engagement. This question was examined using standard quantitative survey design, administration and analysis methods (Preece, 1994; Neuman 2003, Fink 2003). The second objective of the research, given evidence of higher than average levels, was to investigate the reasons behind that phenomenon. Cases of positive deviance were selected for further study and analyzed in order to gain insight into cohousing patterns of democratic and civic engagement and to identify possible catalysts for increased engagement within such neighborhoods. A case study methodology (Yin 2003) employing a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection was employed. A variety of methods were used to collect data (Yin 2003, Maxwell 2005), including multiple focus group surveys and discussions, one-on-one interviews with cohousing neighborhood residents, participant observation and extensive documents analysis.

The mixed-method approach to social science research is not without its critics. However, this work was undertaken on the basis of arguments offered by Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2004), Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) and Cresswell (2003). These authors have argued that a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, when carefully employed, can afford excellent opportunities to increase validity and reliability in both describing and explaining social phenomena.

Although adoption of a range of quantitative and positivistic methods in this research may appear to imply ontological and epistemological alignment with a positivist or post-positivist perspective, this is not strictly the case. The researcher fully

acknowledges the arguments of constructivist and post-modern scholars that social reality is highly complex, multi-faceted, inter-subjective and constantly shifting (Lincoln & Guba 1984) and any attempt to explain social reality is powerfully and inevitably shaped by an inescapable set of embedded assumptions which structure the researchers' lens (Denizen, 1984).   This perspective is the researcher's primary tool for observing and analyzing reality, but it also inevitably distorts what it sets out to understand, often by means no more nefarious than practical limitations imposed on what questions may be asked, what methods can be used and what data can be accessed in any given project.

Therefore, research is inevitably selective and that fact can lead to incomplete or even misleading stories about reality that in turn can be used to shape and discipline conventional understanding, particularly if presented as "truth" supported by scientific research. There is danger in this, given that knowledge confers power and the powerful have greater capacity to determine what becomes accepted knowledge. The upshot is that social science researchers face a difficult bind if they hope to conduct ethical and responsible research. They are called upon to be increasingly self-reflexive with respect to their own biases and vigilant in confronting distortion by power interests, while simultaneously laying aside the objective of uncovering grand, encompassing theories of social reality.

In accepting these ontological and epistemological limitations, this researcher does not pretend objectivity in research design or implementation. The central research questions and hypotheses were born out of the writer's experiences, passions, curiosity and hunches. Her lens was shaped in part by the experience of living in a cohousing neighborhood and her curiosity concerning whether study of that neighborhood type might yield valuable insights into the practice of democracy building at the grassroots community level. This research presents one perspective and one set of claims concerning social phenomena related to cohousing neighborhoods. While not claiming to represent 'truth', this analysis nonetheless does makes validity claims based on careful adherence to rigorous research and analysis methods, including procedures designed to corroborate evidence, minimize researcher bias and support a continuously self-

reflective researcher stance. A mixed method approach, that emphasizes triangulation of data, was adopted in part to diminish opportunities for researcher bias to influence results.

3.2 Study Population

A total of 215 self-identified cohousing neighborhoods and groups existed in the United States as of July, 2007. These exhibited various stages of development from just forming to complete with long-term residents (www.cohousing.org; accessed 07/30/07). This research focused on that sub-population of cohousing neighborhoods that identified themselves as 'complete' on the national cohousing website (n = 95, with an estimated total # of residents of 5,000).

The researcher sought to administer the survey instrument to residents of all completed cohousing neighborhoods. Access to residents was eventually granted in fifty-six of the communities contacted and the survey was administered to all willing adult residents in each of the participating neighborhoods.

Three neighborhoods, drawn from the original sample of 56, were selected for more in-depth study. The case communities were selected for positive deviance relative to the overall cohousing population based upon survey responses indicating average to high levels of civic engagement among their residents. Case communities also were selected to represent a diversity of geographic regions, neighborhood sizes and settings (urban to rural).

3.3 Strategies of Inquiry

3.3.1 National Survey instrument: Administration, data collection and analysis

The purpose of the first phase of the research was to test the hypothesis that cohousing residents would exhibit higher than average levels of civic engagement. This concern was investigated by administering a previously developed and beta-tested survey instrument—the "Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey" (SCCBS short form,

Version 1.0, September 2002: see Appendix 1)— to selected cohousing community residents. Harvard University researchers affiliated with the Saguaro Seminar created the survey. It was designed to incorporate indicators of both social capital and civic engagement. The existing, publicly available version of the questionnaire was adopted virtually unchanged. The only adaptations made were those necessary for administration via the Internet and to clarify specific questions for a cohousing audience. The Virginia Tech Statistical Survey Center provided expert assistance in adapting the survey to help ensure high quality responses and maximize comparability with existing telephone-based survey results from a national administration of the instrument in 2000.

The adapted version of the SCCBS was administered via Internet to all adult residents of 56 completed cohousing neighborhoods that indicated a willingness to participate. Hard copies were also made available in each neighborhood. Solicitation first occurred by telephone and email to contacts in each of the 56 communities in order to solicit help identifying a resident volunteer willing to act as a liaison in communicating information about the survey to residents and helping to facilitate its administration when such occurred. In a few cases, the researcher was granted direct access to residents via the neighborhood email list serve. In most cases, though, information about the study was forwarded to residents via community liaisons.

Participation was voluntary, so in order to maximize response rates, several reminder emails were sent to residents of each community. Liaisons were also asked to post flyers encouraging participation in high-traffic neighborhood areas and to mention the survey at general meetings and other community gatherings. Response rates varied widely with rates of better than 60% in some neighborhoods and as low as 10% in others. The variability in response rates from community to community, although not ideal, did not pose a significant threat, since the purpose of the survey was not specifically to compare communities but to gain access to as large a sample of cohousing residents as possible. The final response total represented approximately 25% of the aggregate population of the 56 participating neighborhoods.

The survey was developed and administered using the Virginia Tech Web-based survey tool "survey.vt.edu." Participants accessed the Web-based survey via links embedded in personal emails. Hard copies of the survey were also forwarded to each community, along with stamped, self-addressed envelopes for their return, for those community residents reluctant or unable to complete the survey electronically. The survey was left open for four weeks. Responses were collected and tabulated automatically in the survey database. Six-hundred-and-forty-seven individual survey responses from the 56 separate communities were ultimately received via Internet and hard copy.

Survey data was aggregated and subjected to statistical analysis. Responses from the cohousing survey were compared against data derived from a longer version of the survey administered to a nationally representative sample of 3,003 respondents by Harvard's Saguaro Seminar in 2000. The data used for comparison is publicly available via the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research Web site (www.ropercenter.uconn.edu; accessed 11/12/05). The nationally representative data set was also used to generate a sub-sample of respondents with income, education and racial characteristics similar to those dominant among residents of cohousing nationwide. Data was compared to identify statistically significant differences in responses across the three sample populations. Chi-square was used to establish the significance of results. In July of 2007, the Saguaro Seminar posted nationally representative summary results from a 2006 re-administration of the national survey. No raw data was made available at that time, but changes in aggregate trends are noted in the final analysis of results where appropriate.

Validity and Reliability

The original Social Capital Benchmark Survey was subject to multiple rounds of testing, by researchers at Harvard University's Saguaro Seminar through pilot studies and numerous replications over time. This well-tested and regarded instrument was used in part to help bolster the validity and reliability of this study's survey results. Overall study validity and reliability was also enhanced by adoption of a mixed-method

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approach, where survey findings were investigated, and to some degree tested, through triangulation that occurred as a result of additional qualitative case analysis.

A potential threat to validity came from shifting survey administration from telephone to Internet. This was done out of necessity, given a lack of financial resources needed to hire telephone interviewers.   Expert advice was solicited to identify ways to minimize this threat to survey design and administration. Making paper copies readily available in each neighborhood maximized survey access. Hard copies were completed by hand and returned by mail, with responses then manually entered into the database. Due to practical and financial constraints, this study was not repeatable over time and data collected in the summer of 2006 had to be statistically compared to national sample data collected in the year 2000. Harvard researchers affiliated with the Saguaro Seminar re-administered the national survey in the spring of 2006, and made a summary report of those results available on the Internet, but raw data was not yet publicly available by the completion of this project and so could not be used for direct statistical comparison. Updated information from the 2006 Harvard survey is reported in the data analysis portion of the study, particularly where changes are evident, even though direct statistical comparison was not possible.

There is a tradeoff between comparing identical survey question response data gathered at different times and responses to quite different survey questions at more proximate times. Neither choice is optimal. This research was developed on the view that a stronger case can be made for using identical questions administered in different years in terms of maximizing comparability. Personal beliefs, attitudes and practices (the interest here) are not likely to change radically (in the aggregate) over a period of 5-6 years–although events in any particular year (such as national disasters or elections) may create temporary fluctuations in behavior. The availability of 2006 data, even in summary form, increases the validity of the comparison by identifying shifts in attitudes and behaviors since the original survey was administered. The aggregated nationally representative survey results from 2006 indicate declines (from 1% to 5%) in most forms of civic engagement, including, public meeting attendance, club membership, leadership

or service on committees, participation in community projects, and participation in political rallies, protests, marches or boycotts. As it happens, these results generally serve to strengthen the validity of the original hypothesis predicting high relative levels of civic engagement among cohousing residents as compared to national averages.

Another un-avoidable threat came from the fact that a number of communities were either inaccessible or refused to participate in the study. There is no way to know whether non-participating communities (those that self-selected out of participation in the study) share characteristics that could have significantly affected the survey results reported below. The author's working assumption is that the impact on results from the loss of ineligible cases was small and that factors linked to ineligibility (such as existence of a strict 'no solicitation for any purposes' policy within the community, opposition to the idea of being 'studied' or lack of an individual within the community able to serve as liaison during the time of the study) were not likely to be strongly linked to the factors this research sought to explore.

The average response rate overall, was 25% of the estimated adult population of participating communities. A validity threat, that could not be avoided, was the possibility that individuals willing to respond to the survey were in some way substantially different in their overall views and habits from those who failed to respond. Given that response rates to the national survey were similar, it appears reasonable to assume that both surveys were subject to the same threat in this regard, and are therefore comparable.

IRB Approval

IRB exempt approval was granted for administration of this survey to study participants and all IRB requirements regarding disclosure and ensuring voluntary participation were met. This information was contained both in emails forwarded directly to participants and in the preamble of the Web-based and paper-based versions of the survey instrument. Responses were anonymously submitted, ensuring protection of the confidentiality of individual respondents.

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3.3.2 Case Study Methodology

Research objectives and Justification for use of Multiple-Case Study Method

Given comparative survey results indicating substantially higher than average levels of civic engagement by residents of cohousing neighborhoods, the next objective was to investigate the reasons for the observed difference. Several alternative explanatory hypotheses were considered, including: (1) resident predisposition towards high levels of civic engagement explains the entire observed difference in average levels of civic engagement, (2) cohousing residents are no more pre-disposed towards civic engagement than the average American citizen of similar demographic profile, and all of the observed difference is a result of experiences related to living in cohousing, and (3) the experience of living in cohousing contributes to increasing residents' civic engagement, and accounts for some degree of the observed difference but perhaps not *all* of it.

A secondary objective, given evidence supporting either the second or third hypothesis, was to identify and describe a range of particular characteristics and activities typical to cohousing neighborhoods with possible relevance to increasing civic engagement and democratic capacity on the part of residents. A multiple-case study method was chosen to achieve these objectives with a focus on identifying cases that represented positive deviance with respect to levels of civic engagement. The method followed a replication logic, whereby the researcher looked to multiple cases as a means of identifying areas of literal replication in conditions and effects across cases. Three case neighborhoods were selected for more intense study.

A focus group instrument was developed and administered in each of the three case communities in order to identify changes in residents' levels and types of civic engagement after moving into cohousing. The results were used to refute the hypothesis that all of the observed difference in levels of civic engagement could be attributed to the predispositions of cohousing residents.

Additional data was collected in each case community in order to identify, describe and ultimately compare across cases, a wide range of community characteristics and resident activities that might possibly catalyze resident civic engagement and democratic capacity. In collecting this data, particular attention was paid to gathering evidence which might serve either to corroborate or challenge existing theories of democratic citizenship, particularly theories of social capital, democratic capacity building and deliberative democracy.

Selection Criteria for Cases

Resources and time allowed for the possibility of only three in-depth case analyses. The following criteria were developed to determine which communities to select for further examination, Since the objective of the second portion of the research was to document the potential for cohousing communities to serve as locations of increased civic engagement, survey data was used to identify the subset of participating neighborhoods reflecting some degree of positive deviance in resident survey responses. Neighborhoods were selected which represented higher than average levels of civic engagement relative to total cohousing survey averages. The selection criteria follow.

- A. Neighborhoods with at least a 33% overall response rate
- B. Neighborhoods in which survey responses indicated average or higher levels of civic engagement among respondents.

These selection criteria narrowed the field of possible communities to eight. These eight neighborhoods were then ranked from highest response rates and highest civic engagement indicators to lowest. Geographical location was then considered with preference given to communities located in diverse geographic regions. An order of preference was established in this way. Neighborhoods were contacted according to their ranking with highest eligible communities contacted first. The first three neighborhoods contacted agreed to allow the researcher to visit for a period of one week to conduct interviews, focus groups, engage in participant observation and collect documentary information.

Field Procedures

The liaisons in each community were contacted to gain permission for the visit, discuss logistical arrangements, and distribute information about the research to solicit participation. The researcher stayed in the neighborhood during each field visit either at the common house or in the home of a resident. She participated in all of the regular events of the community, including common meals, parties, social events and some meetings as well as informal conversations and outings to dance recitals, local political fundraising events, hikes and any other activity to which she was invited.

Each visit followed roughly the same schedule. The first three days were typically devoted to mapping the community, gaining access to community documents (by-laws, covenants, articles of incorporation, membership agreements, rules and guidelines, promotional literature, meeting minutes, newsletters, etc.) and setting up a series of focus group meetings and soliciting participation from residents. Focus group sessions were scheduled at various times of day and in the evening with sign-up sheets posted in common areas. In each case, the liaison helped to publicize these meetings and solicit resident participation. From two to three focus group meetings occurred in each neighborhood with between 2 and 10 residents participating in each. Forty-nine (49) individuals across the three communities participated in focus group meetings. Each meeting followed the same agenda. After initial introductions and a brief overview of the research purposes, a questionnaire was distributed to all participants. The survey was explained and questions were read aloud to participants. Clarification was offered upon request. After the questionnaire was completed, the session moved into a facilitated group discussion around a series of specific questions targeted at resident perceptions of changes in capacities, practices and forms of civic engagement since moving into their community. Permission was requested (and universally granted by written consent) to audio record the discussions. The focus group discussions revealed incidents of particular relevance and helped to identify candidates for individual interviews. On average, focus group meetings lasted between one and two hours. The remainder of the week was spent observing community life, talking to residents informally and conducting audio recorded, one-on-one interviews with residents.

Figure 3.1 summarizes the types of data collected and analyzed in each case neighborhood.

Table 3.1: *Log of Evidence Collected in Case Communities*

Sources of Evidence	Descriptive Log
Focus group Surveys:	• *East Village*: 3 focus groups, total of 16 survey participants • *West Village*: 3 focus groups, total of 22 survey participants • *Central Village*: 2 focus groups, total of 11 survey participants
Interviews:	a. *Focus Group interviews (Structured, audio recorded, written consent)* • *East Village*: 3 focus groups, total of 16 participants • *West Village*: 3 focus groups, total of 22 participants • *Central Village*: 2 focus groups, total of 11 participants b. *Individual Interviews*: *(Focused, audio recorded, written consent)* • *East Village*: 10 individual interviews (1-2 hours each) • *West Village*: 10 individual interviews (1-2 hours each) • *Central Village*: 9 individual interviews (1-2 hours each) c. *Informal Information Gathering/Discussion*: *(Source of general information, rapport building, identification of items for formal investigation)* • *All Case communities – Uncounted, no signed consent.* • *Data recorded in field notes only.*

Table 3.1. *Continued.*

Direct Observation and Participant Observation	a. *Observation (logged in separate field notes for each case)* : • Physical layout of community, design elements, landscaping, private and common amenities, architectural and aesthetic characteristics. • Daily activities and interaction patterns between residents, resident use of common house and other shared facilities or common spaces. b. *Researcher Participation in community-based events: (All case communities – notes logged in field notes)* • Meals • Whole group and committee meetings, parties, • Performances, • Outings with residents: (hike, dance recital, local political fundraising event, restaurant meals), • Community meal preparation and cleanup,
Documents and Archival Records	• ***East Village***: -CD with past 10 years of Community Newsletters and 10 years of Community Calendars -Bylaws, CC&R's, Articles of Incorporation -Internal governance documents (policies, agreements) -CD presentation on Community Workshare System -Newspaper and magazine articles mentioning East Village -Printout of all pages of East Village Website • ***West Village*** - Bylaws, CC & R's, Articles of Incorporation - Printout of all pages on West Village Public Web site - Internal Web site access including: Community calendar, list of committees and functions, community vision and mission documents, Consensus process guide, meeting minutes, contact information, committee mandates and membership. • ***Central Village*** - Bylaws, CC & R's, Articles of Incorporation - Internal governance documents (policies, agreements) - Consensus guidelines and guidelines for facilitators - Printout of all pages on Central Village Web site - Technical report on potential for roof solar at CV.

Case Study Database

Focus Group surveys were compiled and responses were analyzed to reveal trends. Original focus group survey response sheets, along with all documents generated in the process of analysis (including tabulation sheets, comparative tables and Excel spreadsheet graphs) were filed as part of the case study database. All hand-written notes from focus group and personal interviews were retained and filed as well. Focus group and formal personal interviews were audio recorded using a digital device. Audio files were stored on CD and on the researcher's personal computer hard-drive. Large sections of interviews were transcribed using the voice recognition software *Dragon-Naturally Speaking 9.0*. All transcriptions were later checked against the original audio recording and corrected by hand. One notebook per case community was used to record field notes. These notebooks were logged and retained in the case study database. All document evidence gathered from the case communities (or their websites) was filed according to community and retained in the case study database.

Construct Validity, Internal Validity, External Validity and Reliability

Figure 3.2. provides the criteria used, as suggested by Yin (2003), to establish validity and reliability.

***Table* 3.2.** *Validity and Reliability Measures*

Criteria	Measures Applied in Case-Study Research
Construct Validity	• *Use of multiple sources of evidence*: . Use of triangulation using the following data sources to examine the same set of research questions: -Focus group surveys -Interviews, -Observation, -Document Analysis. • *Establish chain of evidence:* -Report references relevant data from database -Database maintained for future inspection -Data collection followed procedures from protocol -Protocol links to research questions asked and addressed.
Internal Validity	• *Explanation Building*: The analysis generally conforms to Yin's (2003) description of explanation building by stipulating a presumed set of causal links, based upon existing theory, for the observed phenomenon of high levels of civic engagement in cohousing. These links are too complex to represent in a simple independent/dependent variable relationship therefore causality is established through triangulation of various forms of evidence. • *Address Rival Explanations*: The focus group survey was administered, in part to address the rival explanation that high levels of civic engagement in cohousing are entirely attributable to the pre-dispositions of residents.

Table 3.2. *Continued.*

External Validity	• *Use of Replication Logic*: Tests the study's hypotheses and propositions by replicating the findings in three case communities, where the theory had specified that the same results should occur. Direct replications with similar observed results provided strong support for the hypotheses and propositions of the study.
Reliability	• *Creation of a Case Study Protocol* A case-study protocol was developed and submitted for review to both the research advisor and the IRB. This protocol was closely followed in the data collection and analysis phases of the research. • *Develop a Case Study Database* A case study database was developed and is still being maintained by the researcher. Data collected in the course of this research is therefore accessible for review, assuming adequate steps are taken to protect the anonymity of study participants.

IRB Approval and Protection of Participants

The Virginia Tech Internal (Research) Review Board granted expedited approval of the case study portion of this research. All focus group and interview subjects were informed of the voluntary nature of participation in the study and were reminded of their right to refuse to participate. Written permission was granted in each case when conversations were recorded. The names of case neighborhoods and the names of all participating residents were changed to protect the confidentiality of participants. It is still possible that descriptive elements in the analysis could reveal details that would allow a community or one of its residents to be identified by a reader who is familiar with the neighborhoods in question. For this reason, care is taken to avoid reporting data that might be considered highly personal or sensitive.

CHAPTER 4
COHOUSING: A DESCRIPTIVE OVERVIEW

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to orient the reader to cohousing in the United States. This section also seeks to establish how well the study's samples represent the larger population and characteristics of cohousing residents and neighborhoods. Finally, the chapter outlines the unique characteristics of this type of neighborhood and its residents as compared to more typical neighborhoods and the general U.S. population.

4.2. Profile of U.S. Cohousing in 2007

As of June 2007, 93 cohousing neighborhoods were complete. An additional 100 projects were underway at locations in 37 states. The largest number of cohousing neighborhoods are located in California, with 21; Washington, with 11; Colorado, with 10 and Massachusetts, with 9 (www.cohousing.org, 06/25/2007).

All 93 completed cohousing communities reflect the concept's defining elements of participatory process, design that facilitates interpersonal connections, common facilities, resident management, non-hierarchical structure and decision-making and private finances. Beyond sharing these elements, cohousing neighborhoods vary widely in terms of size, location, composition, house size, architectural design, amenities and specific governance structures, reflecting the preferences, constraints and economic priorities of each community's residents.

Cohousing neighborhoods are found in urban, suburban, small town and rural settings throughout the United States. Roughly half of U.S.-based cohousing communities are urban with the remainder split between rural, small-town and suburban settings (www.cohousing.org, 06/25/2007). In urban areas, neighborhoods are frequently developed on in-fill, retrofit or brown-fields reclamation sites. Recently, cohousing neighborhoods have been embedded in larger New Urbanism-style developments. This

has occurred at Highlands' Garden Village in Denver, Colorado and the Holiday Neighborhood in Boulder in that same state (Langdon, 2005).

An estimated 5,000 people currently live in U.S. cohousing neighborhoods (www.cohousing.org, 06/25/2007) including individuals, single parents, two-parent families with children, couples without children and retirees ranging in age from 55 to more than 90. Most neighborhoods accommodate between 15 and 150 residents and reflect a range of income levels. Economic diversity is reflected in the different sizes and prices of homes in communities, which can vary from a 650-square foot, one-bedroom apartment to a 2,000-square foot or larger, four-bedroom single family home. Cohousing homes typically reflect the local market price for comparably sized units (www.cohousing.org, 06/25/2007). Cohousing neighborhoods evidence significant age and religious diversity but reflect more limited levels of racial and ethnic difference. A large majority of cohousing occupants are white, liberal leaning and well educated. The popular press commonly characterizes cohousing residents as 'cultural creatives' with a communitarian bent. The marketing literature for cohousing communities suggests that they welcome individuals regardless of their age or racial, ethnic, religious, or sexual orientation, but neighborhoods in practice rarely end up with high levels of racial and ethnic diversity.

4.3 Overview of Cohousing Survey Neighborhoods and Participants

4.3.1. Characteristics of Participating Neighborhoods

The unit of analysis for the national survey was the individual cohousing resident, but in evaluating the survey data, it is useful to examine the profile of the sub-set of neighborhoods nationwide whose residents participated in the study. It is also important to establish the representative character of this sub-sample of U.S. cohousing communities , in size, location, urban/rural context, age and other defining characteristics.

As noted above, 56 cohousing neighborhoods, located in 18 different states, participated in the 47 question adaptation of the Saguaro Seminar's Social Capital Benchmark Survey. Profiles of each community are available on the national cohousing website. That fact allowed for creation of a descriptive summary of the participant population. Of the participating neighborhoods, 26 are urban, 14 are located in small towns (at least half of these in university towns), 10 are located in the suburbs of large urban areas and 6 are rural. Twenty-seven of the participating communities were completed in the 1990s and 28 have been completed since the year 2000. The oldest participating community is Muir Commons, completed in 1986, and the most recent is Stone Curves completed in 2006. The average number of households per participating community was 31, with the smallest community composed of eight homes and the largest 67 units.

All of the participating neighborhoods reflect the six defining characteristics of cohousing highlighted in the previous section. All use some form of consensus decision-making and a governance structure that seeks to distribute leadership and work responsibility across the membership. A range of property ownership structures are represented with the most common being either a standard condominium structure or an arrangement in which residents privately own their home and a small surrounding lot along with a share of common land and facilities. All participating communities govern themselves through some form of homeowners association (HOA) and all require household dues payments ranging from 50 to 350 dollars per month. Neighborhoods structure HOA fees in a variety of ways from equal household payments to assessments based upon private square footage or household income. All participating communities expect their residents to participate in decision-making and community work. Most developments support voluntary work participation but recommend a certain number of hours (typically 3-10) per adult resident each month. All participating neighborhoods sponsor one or more community meals per week in the common house with the largest percentage hosting two to three meals per week.

Significant diversity was reflected in the size and location of participating cohousing neighborhoods, with nearly half located in cities and the remainder split

between suburbs, small towns and urban areas across the United States. The national distribution of participating communities reflects the distribution of cohousing in the nation as a whole with eleven in California, nine in Colorado, seven in Washington State and five in Massachusetts. The study population also reflects a mix of older and newer neighborhoods with roughly half completed in the decade before the year 2000 and half afterwards. Diversity in community size is also captured in the study, both in terms of population and land use. There is also a great deal of diversity in building styles and materials, as well as specific site plan configuration.

Despite their diversity of size, location and building style, the participating neighborhoods reflect a high degree of similarity across a range of other factors, from ownership structures to the numbers of common house meals served per week. These shared characteristics make it possible to analyze 'cohousing' as a specific neighborhood type that reflects a distinct set of features regardless of size or location. The survey sample of cohousing neighborhoods proved highly representative of this neighborhood form, capturing its diversity of geographic location, size, age and residents' demographic characteristics.

4.3.2 Demographics of Survey Participants

Of the 647 individuals who completed the national survey, the majority responded via Internet while a minority completed paper copies and submitted them by mail. Response rates from individual communities varied, with an average neighborhood response rate of 25% of the adult resident population. The demographic characteristics of respondents closely mirror other available demographic information about cohousing residents from the national association's website and other publications (www.cohousing.org), and the "conventional wisdom" reflected in the popular cohousing literature.

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As is illustrated in the following figures which reflect national cohousing survey results, participants were found to be predominantly Caucasian, well-educated, middle or upper middle class and were significantly more likely to be female than male. Most were liberal-leaning, employed part or full-time and owned their homes. The age distribution of adult respondents followed a normal curve with a median age of 48 (children were not included in the survey).

**F*igure 4.1.* *Income Levels (Survey Respondents)*
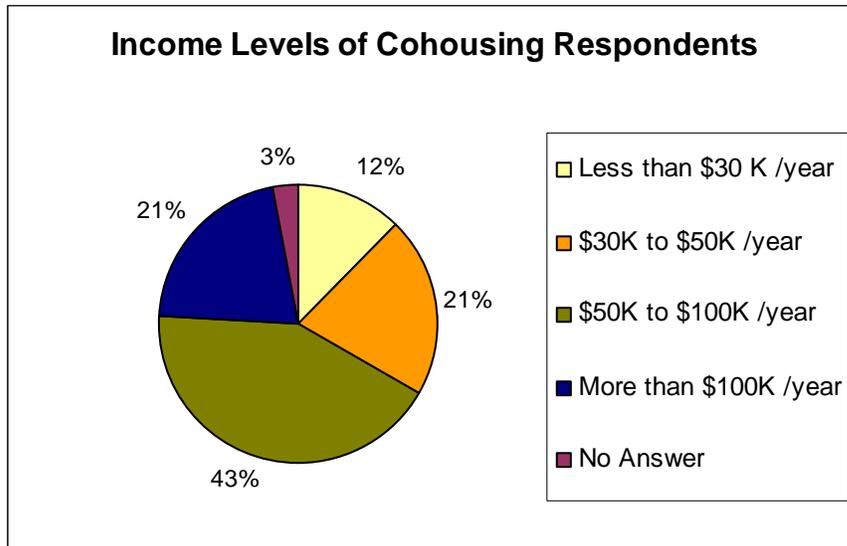
Figure 4.2. *Levels of Education (Survey Respondents)*
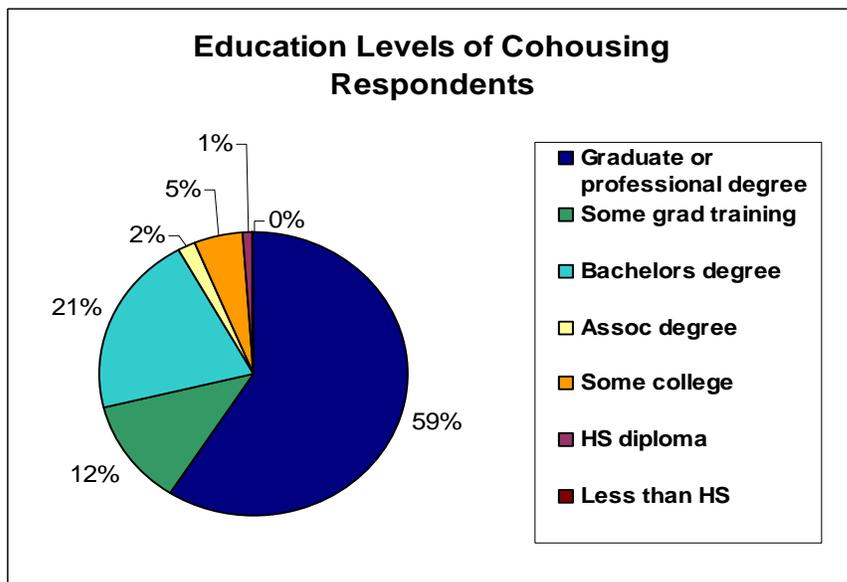
Figure 4.3. *Race (Survey Respondents)*

Race of Cohousing Respondents

- 2%
- 1%
- 1%
- 4%
- 92%

Legend:
- Other
- Asian
- Hispanic or Latino
- African American
- White
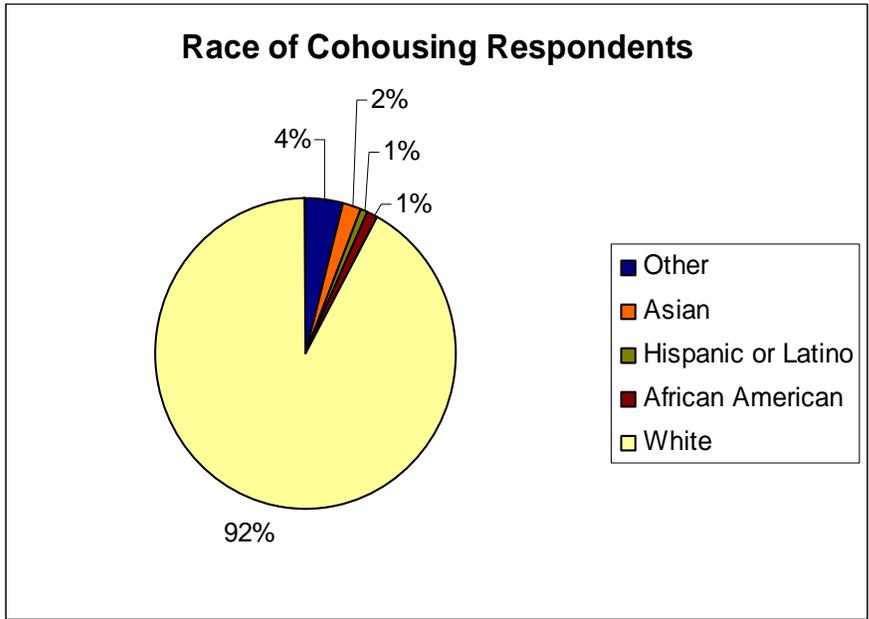
Figure 4.4. *Male/Female Ratio (Survey Respondents)*

Male/Female Ratio of Cohousing Respondents

- 36%
- 64%

Legend:
- Female
- Male
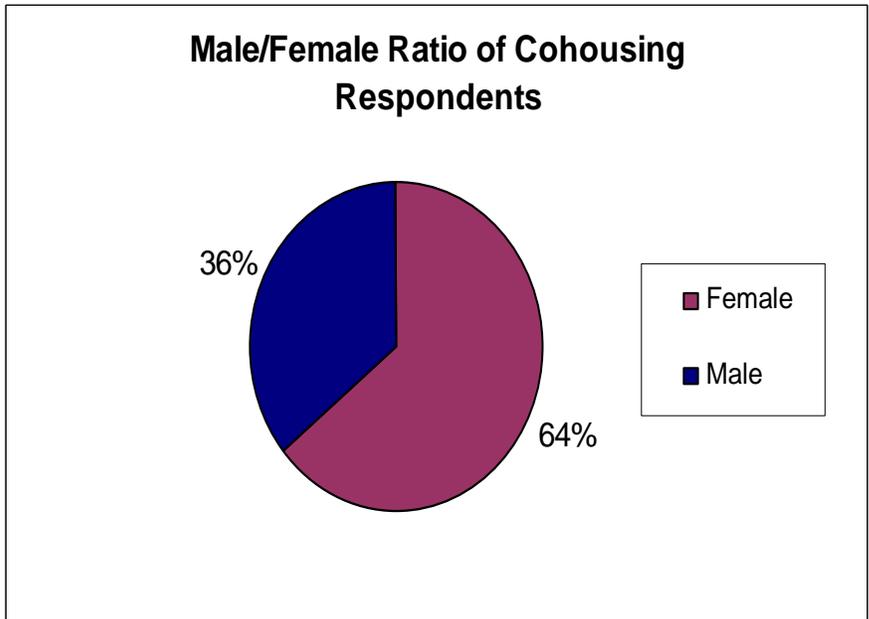
Figure 4.5. Time in Current Residence (Survey Respondents)

Length of time in current residence

- One year or less
- 2-5 years
- More than 5 years
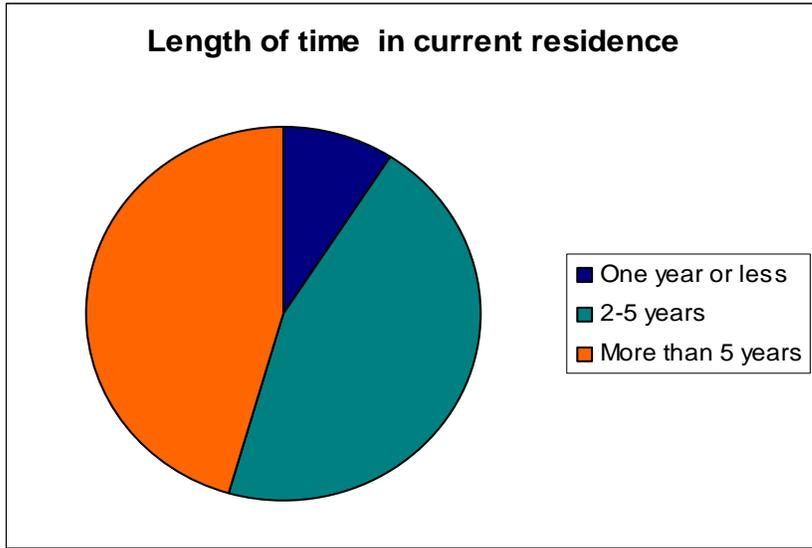
Figure 4.6. Home Ownership(Survey Respondents)

Own vs. Rent

- Own
- Rent
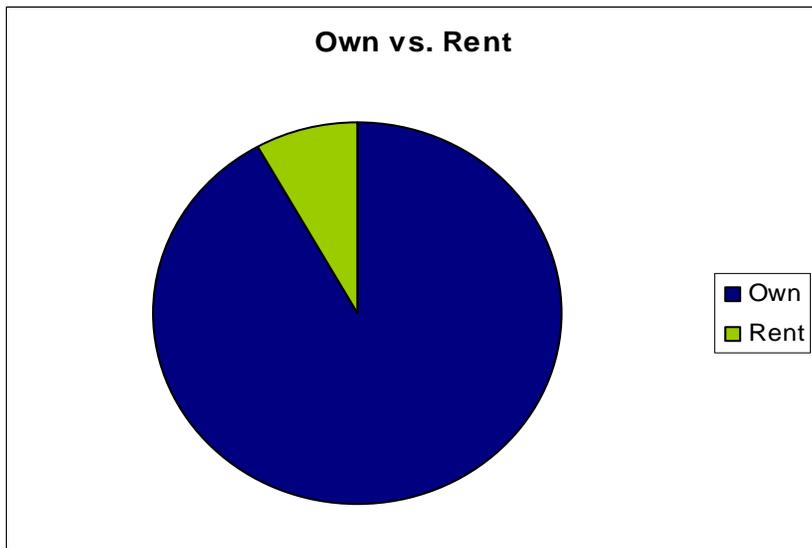
Figure 4.7. Age Distribution of Survey Respondents

Percentage of Respondents Born in Each Decade
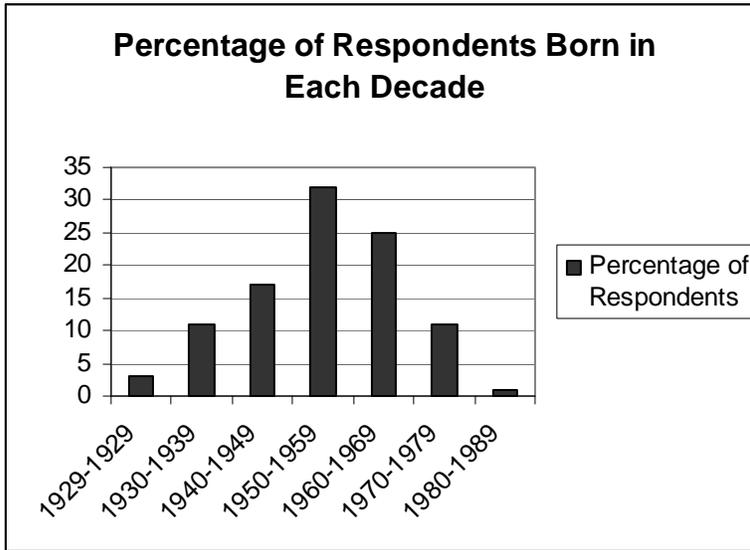
Figure 4.8. Political and Social Outlook (Survey Respondents)

Political and social outlook:
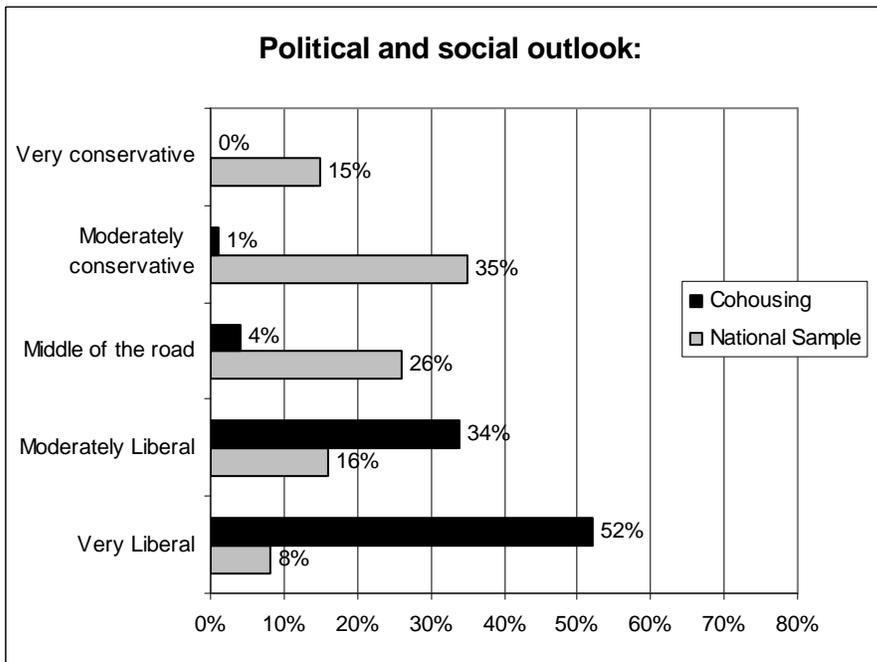
4.3.3. Comparison of Cohousing Residents with the General U.S. Population

Cohousing survey respondents differ from the general population in a number of ways. Caucasians comprised 92% of the study population as compared to 74.7% of the general United States population, according to the 2005 Census (Census Bureau, 2005). African Americans make up 12% of the population but constituted only 1% of survey respondents.

According to the 2005 U.S. Census, 27.2% of the nation's population had at least a bachelor's degree. By contrast, 92% of cohousing respondents reported having completed at least a bachelor's degree, with 59% reporting attainment of either a graduate or professional degree.

The Census Bureau's 2006 income statistics report indicated that 28% of general population households earned less than $25 thousand per year while 12% of cohousing survey respondents reporting household annual earnings of $30,000 or less. The largest percentage of cohousing residents (43%), report household annual incomes of between $50,000 and $100,000 dollars per year. This contrasts with 29% of the general population reporting incomes in that range. Finally, 21% of cohousing residents report household incomes of more than $100,000 per year while 17% of the general population reported household incomes above $100,000. The general population is almost evenly split between men and women, but women made up 64% of cohousing survey respondents. This ratio is corroborated by data reported on the National Cohousing Web site (www.cohousing.org). An approximate 60/40 split seems to be nationally average for the ratio of women to men in cohousing.

These data highlight the unique demographic characteristics of current U.S. cohousing neighborhoods: These communities appear on-average to attract individuals with high levels of education who tend to be white and have moderately high incomes. They tend to be liberal leaning and ecologically oriented in their political and social views and are quite a bit more likely to be female than male. These are also individuals

who strongly value neighborliness and living in a setting characterized by a strong sense of community.

4.4. Overview of Case Communities: East Village, West Village and Central Village.
Three cohousing neighborhoods that participated in the national survey were chosen for in-depth analysis in order to explore the day-to-day functioning of these neighborhoods and their implications for social capital formation and democratic forms of participation. As indicated above, a number of factors guided selection of these specific cases. The purpose of the case studies was to consider commonalities and differences across neighborhoods, with an emphasis on 'positive deviance' as compared to what is typically found in contemporary American neighborhoods. As a baseline for consideration, each potential case had to possess all six of the defining characteristics of cohousing. Communities with survey response rates of at least 33% of the adult population were assumed to be more amenable to participation in further study than those with low response rates, so this factor served as a second criterion for selection. Case neighborhoods also reflected average or higher levels of civic engagement as compared with total cohousing survey average levels.

There is no compelling reason to identify the particular neighborhoods studied or their residents. So, for the sake of protecting the privacy of individuals living in the case neighborhoods, pseudonyms are used to reference communities and their individual participants. Case communities are identified throughout as: "East Village", "West Village" and "Central Village."

A descriptive analysis of the three case neighborhoods along three key dimensions follows: physical and geographic characteristics, neighborhood demographics and social life and finally models and practices of community governance. Similarities and differences across case communities are highlighted throughout. This descriptive analysis is offered to provide the context for the thematic analyses presented in subsequent chapters.

4.4.1 Physical and Geographic Characteristics of Case Communities

East Village

Figure 4.9. *East Village Site Sketch*
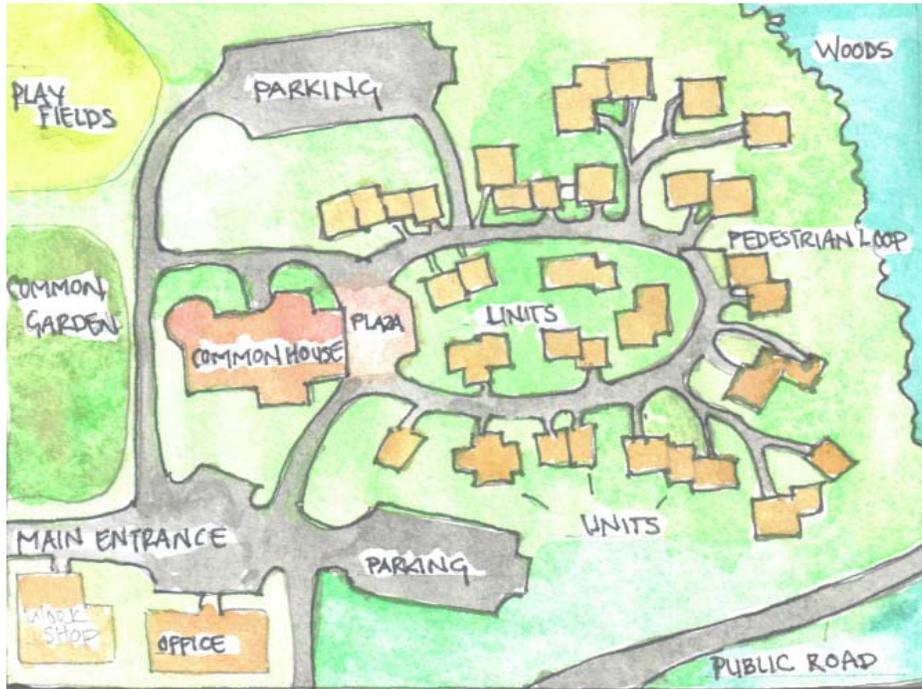
Completed in the early 1990s, East Village is located on the rural outskirts of a small, politically active, university town in the northeastern United States. It is the largest and most rural of the three case study sites, at 25 acres. The property is adjacent to acres of public and private fields and woodlands. A popular local waterfall and public park are also within walking distance of the site. It is possible to walk or bike to a number of nearby local shops, but there are no major shopping centers in the immediate vicinity. The modest downtown and nearby university campus are a 5-10 minute drive away. Two other cohousing neighborhoods are also located in the vicinity.

The development houses 32 household units clustered on 6 of the 25 acres along a pedestrian loop. Two lots on the periphery provide parking for residents. Units are configured into single-family, duplex and triplex buildings. The site also features a

4,500-square foot common house, a workshop, a small office building that mostly rents space to resident-owned businesses, community gardens, a chicken house, play fields and a wooded area.

Homes range in size from 616 sq. ft. for a one-bedroom configuration up to 2,280-square feet for a four-bedroom unit. All houses have front porches that front other homes and the central pedestrian loop. Residences are all variations on 5 basic floor plans with some degree of interior customization.

The common house sits at the base of the pedestrian loop on the edge of a large central patio. It has three levels and is surrounded by open and enclosed porches. Inside, the common house features a large foyer, a community mail and coat room, 2 guest rooms, two meeting rooms, a children's play room (connected to an outdoor play structure), large kitchen, great room with dining tables, sitting area and fireplace, library/media room, exercise room, sauna, 'swap closet' and storage areas.

West Village

Figure 4.10. *West Village Site Sketch*
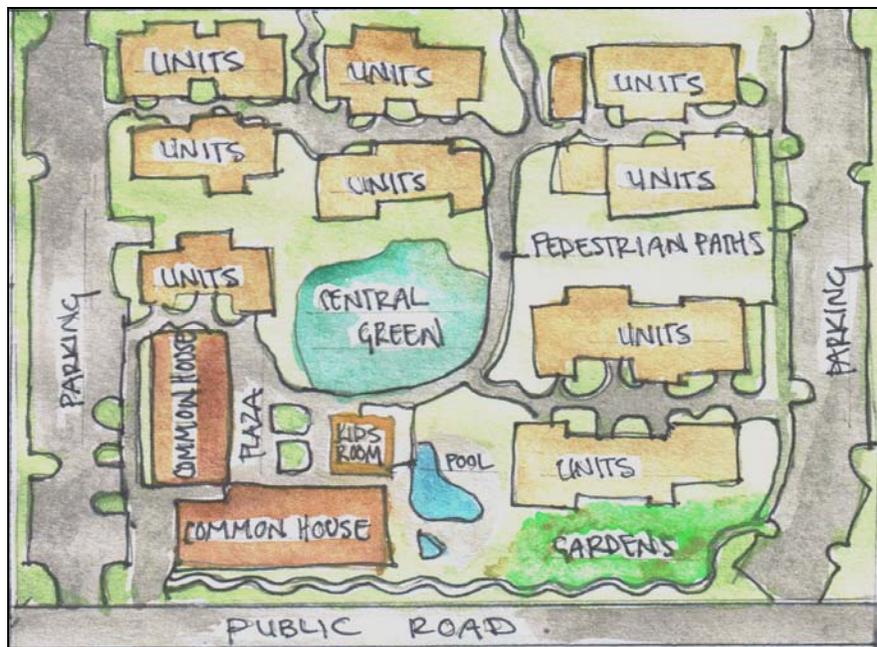
West Village is located in a large southwestern city on a 4.7-acre urban infill lot in a less affluent portion of town. It is bounded on one side by a low-income rental complex and on the other by a string of small ranch-style single-family homes. The city is located relatively close to the border with Mexico and is culturally and economically diverse. The beauty and cultural diversity of the city combined with a number of national park and resort areas nearby, draws significant tourism to the area. The downtown is also home to a large university that provides employment for a number of West Village residents.

The West Village site contains 36 homes configured into attached town-house units that face one another in groups of six to ten along four separate pedestrian plazas. Units vary in size from 600 to 1600 square feet and are based on 5 basic home models, including one, two and three-bedroom units. Homes are configured to maximize both active and passive solar benefits. Parking is located in two lots that run along the east and west boundaries of the neighborhood. The community is located between public roads to the north and south and is situated less than a block from a shopping complex with a grocery store and other businesses.

The common house is composed of three separate buildings facing a central, partially shaded plaza. One building houses the kitchen, great room and sitting area; a second has a community guest room, craft/pottery studio, exercise/multipurpose room and laundry. Mail boxes and neighborhood bulletin boards hang on the exterior walls of this building along covered portions of the walkways and central terrace. The third building is a children's playroom that connects to an outdoor playground A fenced-in community pool and hot tub lies near the common house. Pedestrian walkways connect the common house and central green space to each of the residential plazas. Each home has a small private backyard (usually enclosed with a wall or fence). Each also has a small front patio connecting to winding walkways that define a series of shared outdoor sitting areas. The site is located in a drought prone region so the landscaping throughout the neighborhood employs principles of "Xeri-scaping." The site also includes a small shared garden area with a number of raised beds and compost bins.

West Village is surrounded on all sides by low adobe walls. These do not visually screen the community from passers-by, but do create a sense of enclosure and separation from the surrounding neighborhood. The unique architectural features of the buildings and the intensive landscaping stand in marked contrast to the drab aesthetics of the Village's immediate neighbors. There are no gates or barriers separating the parking lots and sidewalks of West Village from the public roadways but one feels a strong sense of transition as one goes from the public street into the neighborhood itself. The area immediately surrounding West Village does not have the feeling of being a 'neighborhood' or a community with a particular identity so West Village stands out as something different within its immediate context.

Central Village

Figure 4.1.1. Central Village Site Sketch
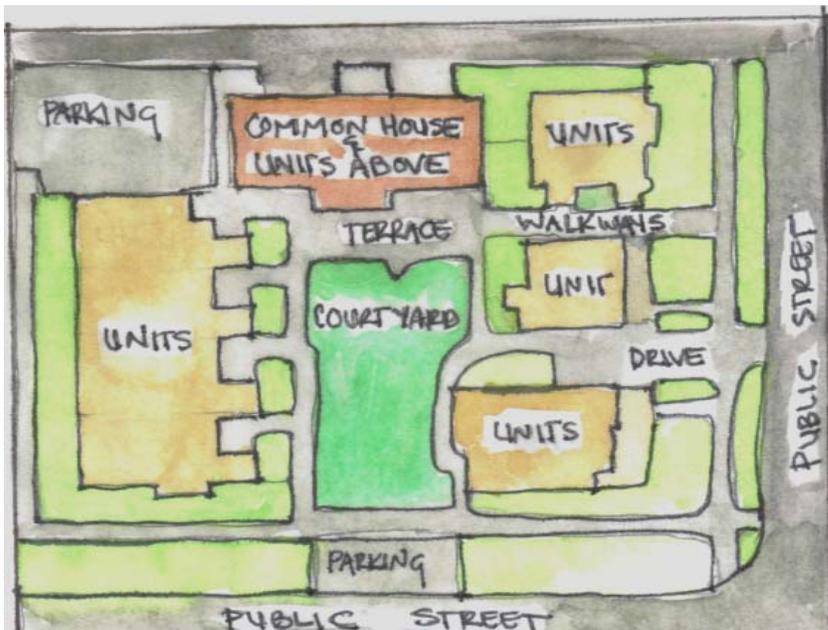
Central Village is an 18-unit neighborhood built on 0.7 acres, one-half of a city-block, in a medium-sized Midwestern city. The cohousing development is located within an older urban enclave that had been a close-knit ethnic Italian community in the early part of the 20th century, but had shifted over time into a neighborhood dominated by minimally-maintained rental units, mostly catering to students from the nearby university. Homes in the area have maintained a measure of the beauty and character of an earlier era, despite their deteriorating condition. Numerous stores, restaurants, coffee shops and a city hospital are within close walking distance of the community.

Two homes on the community site were saved and renovated during construction of Central Village. The new buildings were designed to incorporate similar aesthetic and architectural features to the original buildings, so that the development would reflect the basic character of the surrounding neighborhood. This community has the highest density of the three studied. Indeed, although the community is composed of only five buildings, all but one houses multiple units. The largest residential building houses eight condominiums, with single-story homes on the main level and two-story dwellings above. The second largest building on the site houses the 2,375-square foot common house on the main level and a number of two-story residential units above. The community's other buildings house from one to three units each. Homes range from single story 600-square-foot units to two story homes of up to 2,000-square feet. All buildings face a network of pedestrian paths, a central courtyard and shared plaza. Parking is located in a small underground garage and in an above-ground parking lot at the back of the site. On-street parking is also available to tenants and their guests. Public streets frame the development on three sides.

This small neighborhood-within-a-neighborhood is minimally separated physically and visually from its urban surroundings. Walking past Central Village on the public sidewalk, it is clear that there is something different about this clustered group of houses, but with no walls or other barriers to create a visual screen and an architectural

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idiom that fits seamlessly with the surrounding area, the community is well integrated into its surroundings.

This area is known for extremely cold winters, so a network of underground passageways connects all of the buildings to the basement of the common house and underground parking area. The main story of the common house features a large kitchen and dining room with a fireplace and sitting area. There is a meeting /television room adjacent to the great room that can be reserved for private meals or parties. There are also common laundry facilities, a small play area for children, a craft room and guest quarters. The basement provides additional recreation and storage space. Residents collect their mail and check community bulletin boards for news related to Central Village issues as well as events in the broader community in the common house foyer. Just outside the great room is an ample terrace with a grill and picnic tables for outdoor gatherings in warmer weather. The site is too small to house outdoor play structures for the children, but there is a city playground within easy walking distance.

4.3.1   Demographic and Social Characteristics of Case Neighborhoods

<u>**East Village**</u>

Ninety-six people currently live in East Village. Adults make up about 70% of the community and children or teens the remainder. East Village is approximately 60% female and 40% male. Households reflect a mix of singles, couples, families with children and retirees. Several residents are in their 70's and one resident is under the age of one. Many families moved into the neighborhood with small children soon after the community was completed in the early 1990's and since turnover of homes has been low, there are now a large number of teenagers and fewer very young children. In addition to the homes located in the development, several households on adjacent properties have elected to join the community as 'associate members' meaning that they participate in community meals and social events and gain access to common house privileges in exchange for contributing to neighborhood work and finances.

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Community meals occur twice a week in the common house and one half to three quarters of community residents typically attend. A rotating team of cooks and cleaners prepares meals and residents sign up in advance for days they plan to attend. Most meals are vegetarian and menus seek to accommodate residents' special food needs. All community members who routinely attend meals are expected to contribute to a fair share of meal preparation and cleanup.

Residents often gather before the meal to socialize in the common house and just before the meal is served, residents come together in a large circle to share information and announcements. Residents eat at tables that seat from six to eight people, and choose whether they eat as a family unit or mix with neighbors.

The common house and shared green spaces are also host to a range of community celebrations, performances, meetings and other events. Residents are allowed to reserve common house spaces for private use such as to host office or school parties, outside organizational board meetings or retreats, fundraising events or workshops. Several community groups and clubs use the common house for meetings. These include meditation, parenting and several men's and women's support groups as well as a group that gets together to discuss simple living and increased ecological awareness.

A number of annual celebrations and rituals have evolved over time at East Village These are open to all residents and often welcome outside visitors as well. Examples include holiday festivities around Thanksgiving, Halloween, Winter Solstice, Christmas, Yom Kippur and May Day. There is an annual community musical production and a Spring maple sugaring party, as well as a weekend long annual retreat with a series of workshops and community building events.

West Village

West Village is home to about 90 residents about 72% of whom are adults and the remainder children, aged 2 to 17. The neighborhood is 58% female and 42% male. The community includes a mix of ages and life stages; singles, couples, families with children and retirees.

Residents of West Village often socialize informally with immediate neighbors in shared outdoor spaces located in the center of each small plaza. It is common for neighbors to gather for drinks, cards or impromptu pot lucks at the outdoor tables or sometimes within the individual homes. Common house meals include the whole community and depend upon volunteers signing up to cook and clean. This routine results in one fully prepared and one potluck meal in the common house each week. At certain times of year, when many residents are away, the number of meals in the common house falls to one or none per week.

As in East Village, the West Village common house and shared outdoor spaces are used for a wide range of events and activities including meetings with neighbors to watch films together, to play music, to exercise on community-owned exercise equipment, to work on pottery, to keep an eye on children, to garden, water and weed, to make repairs around the neighborhood, to build things in the workshop, to swim and to socialize in the hot tub. Residents reserve common house spaces for activities related to outside groups with which they are involved including clubs, singing groups, wine-tasting circles, community activist groups, non-profit organizations etc.

Summers are extremely hot at West Village so residents say that they find they are more likely to gather spontaneously during the cooler months when they can spend more time outdoors. Throughout the year, neighbors gather together to celebrate various holiday traditions and annual festivities in the common house and other shared spaces.

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Central Village:

Central Village has the smallest number of residents of the three case communities with a total population of 36. This neighborhood also has the largest percentage of retirees, the smallest percentage of children and the most heavily female resident population with 68% female and 32% male.

Residents gather twice a week for meals together in the common house, typically with one prepared meal and one pot-luck meal a week. A number of residents are involved in the broader neighborhood and political district. A community center is located less than a block away and it sponsors local activities and hosts district neighborhood association meetings. The Central Village common house serves as a frequent meeting and organizing space for neighborhood activities and it is often reserved for speakers, community organizing workshops, belly-dancing classes, board meetings and other events to which Village residents are invited along with members of the broader community. Residents also frequently gather in the common house to watch films, television programs or sporting events. Neighbors gather together regularly to celebrate holidays, birthdays and rites of passage. In the summer months, weekend terrace barbecues, ice cream making parties and neighborhood games of kickball are regular events.

4.4.3. Neighborhood Governance Overview

East Village

The general meeting is the highest decision-making power in the community. The meeting also serves as a core community-development activity, gathering members together to build and maintain their collective community life. General meetings serve as the primary venue to a) govern the shared life and property of the neighborhood through setting policies and agreements, b) approve decisions regarding the annual operating budget, capital expense appropriations, and community/condo fees, c) see that the work

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of the community gets done, and d) address issues and conflicts that arise as the neighborhood grows and changes. The General meeting may delegate certain elements of its jurisdiction to relevant teams or committees.

All East Village membership meetings operate using a consensus decision-process. Except on a vote of 75% of the voting interests [home-owners] present to break consensus, decisions may be made by an affirmative vote of 75% of the voting interests of the Association. No decision to turn to other than a consensus choice-making process may be made until the group has attempted to reach general consent by all reasonable means, including, if necessary, the hiring of an outside consultant to assist the group.

The community uses a "Decision Board" to make and oversee changes or additions to routine procedures, to handle committee recommendations not important enough to bring to a general meeting and to consider new ideas brought by individuals or ad hoc committees and not of sufficient purport for general meeting consideration.

The neighborhood devolves most routine decisions and community work to various standing committees and work teams. These groups make decisions by consensus of their members. Each committee designates a leader to oversee its work and communicate the work needs of the committee to four work team coordinators. The leader is also responsible for ensuring that no key responsibilities fall through the cracks. Some committees may consist of just one person. When such occurs, that individual is considered the effort's leader.

The list of standing committees or work teams which manage the work of maintaining and enriching the community are as follows:
Annex Building Committee
Buildings and Grounds Committee
Common house Committee:
Communications Committee:
Community Support Committee:

Design Review Committee:

Facilitation Committee

Finance Committee

Garden Committee

The "Hub":

Kids Committee

Meals Committee

Landscape Committee

Laundry Committee

Membership Committee

Office Owners:

Social Committee

Residents are expected to become involved in the work of one or more of the committees. The members of the "Hub" keep track of the work needs of the community as a whole and coordinate residents so that all of the major needs and functions are covered.

Residents of East Village pay monthly condominium fees based on the annual budgetary needs of the community and apportioned among homeowners according to home values. All regular members are asked to honor the guideline of contributing 6 ½ hours of work per month to the community. Associates are asked to contribute 4 hours per month. Community work includes all work undertaken through work teams or committees or that is independently contributed to maintain or benefit the neighborhood. There are no penalties for working less than the suggested number of hours, but each resident is asked to join one of four work teams. Work-team coordinators keep rough track of hours worked by members and are authorized by the community to inquire into the situation when an adult is falling substantially short in their contribution of work hours.

West Village

        All major decisions are made at meetings of the entire adult resident population, usually by using a formal consensus model. There is no elected or official leader of the community but officers of the HOA assume nominal leadership functions in order to fulfill their legal structural obligations, and residents fill these positions on a rotating basis. Other residents volunteer to chair the various committees and task forces that manage the day-to-day needs of the community. Lower level decisions are delegated to the committees, teams and work-groups and individuals according to guidelines agreed to by the community membership at large. General meetings of the entire membership occur twice a month and alternate between business and community life topics. Major decisions are made by consensus of the membership at these meetings.

        Most minor matters go to a 'decision board' for deliberation and decision-making. Residents view participation as a foundation of community governance. Engagement is not enforced but everyone is expected and strongly encouraged to attend general meetings. Each adult member is also expected to serve on at least one committee or work team that oversees some aspect of community life and common property maintenance.

        West Village allocates responsibility for various aspects of community management and enrichment to work 'teams' or committees with voluntary membership. All residents are encouraged to join one or more of the following teams based upon their individual skills and interests:

Agenda Setting Team

Cats Team

Community Life Team

Crafts Room Team

Facilitation Team

Finance Committee

Garden Team

Grounds Clean-up Team

Guest Room Team

Hospitality Team

Kids Room Team

Kitchen/Dining Room/Lounge Team

Landscape Team

Laundry Room Team

Maintenance/Workshop Team

Marketing Team

Network Team

Overview Committee

Pet Conflict Team

Pet Task Force

Pool Team

Process Committee

Security Team

TV/Exercise/Meeting Room Team

Weed Team

Work Participation

Residents pay HOA dues monthly. Levies are assessed based on the type of unit owned, with residents of larger homes paying higher dues. Fees cover basic maintenance and upkeep in the community and fund a shared fiber-optic network and modest budgets for those committees that request them. The community as a whole approves the annual budget through a process of discussion and consensus.

Central Village

Neighborhood business meetings take place once a month with a goal of at least 80-90 percent of households represented at any given meeting. Major decisions are brought before the membership for discussion and agreement by consensus. Membership is defined as ownership of a unit within the neighborhood and all homeowners are automatically members of the homeowners association. In cases where consensus cannot be reached, decision is made by super-majority (83.4%) of the home-owners association membership (all adult home-owners in the neighborhood). Each unit, regardless of how many people reside there, is entitled to one vote in the case of an impasse.

A board of directors elected annually from the broader membership, nominally manages the HOA . Directors serve one year terms. The community's bylaws require election of at least three directors who are responsible for overseeing the budget process and any contracts, legal or financial agreements entered into by the community, maintaining records, supervising the maintenance of all common elements and disbursing necessary funds from the association treasury. Residents are expected to volunteer for board membership on a rotating basis. Members also participate in committee and maintenance work as part of the self-management of the community. Resident home-owners are also required to pay monthly association dues

In practice, various neighborhood committees undertake most of the work of maintaining the community and making routine decisions concerning its effective functioning and upkeep. Most residents have responsibility for one or more specific neighborhood jobs. On average residents expect to contribute about eight hours a month to community work (including preparation and clean up of common meals).

The following committees coordinate community work. Their members routinely make decisions by consensus.

Recreation/Social Life/Celebrations

Publicity/Promotion/Marketing

Membership (oversee prospective member process)

Fees and Budget

Group Process and mediation

Common House Kitchen

Grounds/Landscaping/Upkeep

Cleaning common areas

Indoor Common Area Maintenance

Scheduling use of Common Space

Parking

Village Library (Member database, coordination of subscriptions, book acquisitions)

4.5 Summary

This chapter suggests that cohousing is a distinctive neighborhood type, with a set of characteristics that set it substantially apart from more traditional U.S. neighborhoods in a number of ways related to both physical design and neighborhood governance. Survey data suggests that cohousing residents are predominantly white, well educated and liberal leaning. Cohousing neighborhoods are also more heavily female than male. Participating neighborhoods closely represent the nation's cohousing population as a whole evidencing a similar mix of urban, rural and suburban neighborhoods represented, geographic distribution, range of neighborhood sizes, ages and similar demographics.

The case communities represent a range of geographic areas, sizes, densities, settings and ages. Despite these differences, the case neighborhoods exhibit a high degree of similarity in social and governance practices. All sponsor weekly meals in the common house, all make significant neighborhood decisions by consensus, all expect residents to contribute time and money towards governing and maintaining the community and all reflect a strong sense of community and mutuality among residents.

The following four tables summarize the similarities and differences identified across the three case communities with regard to those elements most relevant to the

research. The 'All' columns contain elements that are common to all three of the case communities. The other columns reflect key elements that are either unique to a particular neighborhood, or shared by only two of the three:

Table 4.1. Geographic and Demographic Characteristics Compared

All	*East Village*	*West Village*	*Central Village*
- Near one or more Universities - Mix of Ages - More women than men - Mix of house sizes and values.	- North-East Location - Semi-Rural - 32 units on 25 acres - Adjacent to open land.	- South-west Location - Urban - 36 units on 4.7 acres - Distinct from surrounding neighborhood	- North-Central Location - Urban -18 units on 0.7 acres - Integrated into surrounding neighborhood

Table 4.2. Physical Design Elements Compared

All	*East Village*	*West Village*	*Central Village*

- Clustered housing facing pedestrian walkways
- Parking kept to periphery
-Common House Elements:
    Large Kitchen
    Great room/dining room
    Sitting / meeting room
    Kids play room
    TV viewing space
    Exercise room/equipment
    Guest room
    Laundry
    Plaza/porch area
    Mail delivery
    Bulletin boards
- Central Green
- Semi-private gathering areas: Front porches, balconies or "Outdoor Rooms' /sitting areas.
	- Community gardens
	-Workshop
	-Community office building
	-Sauna
	-Chicken coop
	- Playground
		-Community garden
		-Workshop
		-Bicycle Shed
		-Swimming Pool
		-Hot tub
		-Pottery/craft studio
		-Private backyards
		-Playground
			--Underground tunnels connecting units to Common House and parking
			-Craft room

Table 4.3. Social Elements Compared

All	*East Village*	*West Village*	*Central Village*
-Regular community meals at Common House - Community celebrations, parties, annual events - Informal socializing between neighbors -Mutual aid and assistance -Formal and informal sharing of tools and other items	- Neighborhood List Serve - Community newsletter	-Neighborhood List-serve -Internal Community Website	

Table 4.4. Governance and Organizational Elements Compared

All	*East Village*	*West Village*	*Central Village*
-Home owners association (HOA) composed of all adult, home-owning residents. -Major decisions and community policies made by consensus of the entire HOA membership. -Common facility and grounds management and maintenance by community members. - Community work-share expectation for all able members of 6-8 hours per month -Monthly HOA dues assessed - Distributed Leadership Structure: Committees, task-forces and individual roles take responsibility for minor decisions and management. -No permanent community leaders. Self-selection into work/leadership roles is the norm.	-No formal consensus guidlines	-Formal structure for consensus decision making process adopted by membership.	-Formal structure for consensus decision-making adopted by membership.

CHAPTER 5

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN COHOUSING NEIGHBORHOODS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the study's central research questions related to civic and democratic engagement: Do cohousing residents exhibit higher than average levels of civic engagement? If so, is this simply a reflection of the pre-dispositions of the people who choose to live in this unique type of housing arrangement? If changes in behavior can be convincingly linked to the experience of living in cohousing, what forms of engagement are observable, and are these forms repeated across each of the case neighborhoods?

This chapter addresses each of these concerns in turn. First, the comparative level of engagement among residents is investigated by comparing survey data from 647 residents located in 56 cohousing neighborhoods nationwide, against data from a nationally representative sample of 3,003 respondents, and against a sub-set of 498 responses from a sample derived from the nationally representative survey results. Subset respondents possess education, race and income profiles similar to the average cohousing dweller. The comparison provides an indication of the civic and democratic engagement levels of cohousing residents as compared to national averages. The Saguaro Seminar's original Social Capital Benchmark survey was administered in 2000, while the cohousing survey was administered in 2006. The Saguaro Seminar re-administered its original survey to a nationally representative sample in early 2006 but data from that round is currently only available in summary form. Changes in national survey results from 2000 to 2006 are highlighted in the narrative portion of the following analysis, but updated statistical comparisons could not be generated because of an inability to gain access to the raw data.

Evidence of *changes* in civic engagement post-cohousing move-in, as reported by case neighborhood residents, is examined next. Data collected from focus group surveys

administered to 49 residents in the three case study neighborhoods are presented and analyzed for evidence of change, and whether changes are observable across all three case communities.

The final section presents a descriptive typology of engagement types, based on observation, interviews and document analysis conducted in the three case communities. The typology was developed to identify patterns of engagement and to analyze the degree to which those patterns were observable across the three case neighborhoods.

5.2 Engagement Compared: Results from the National Survey

5.2.1 Civic Engagement Indicators

This analysis compares study population responses to six survey questions developed by Saguaro Seminar researchers to indicate types and levels of civic engagement, including: volunteerism, work on community projects, club or organizational leadership, public meeting attendance, donation to charities and blood drives. These were followed by three questions developed to indicate levels of political engagement: voter registration, interest in national affairs and politics and participation in political meetings, rallies and protests.

Figure 5.1. *Volunteerism*

Number of times volunteered over the past 12 months
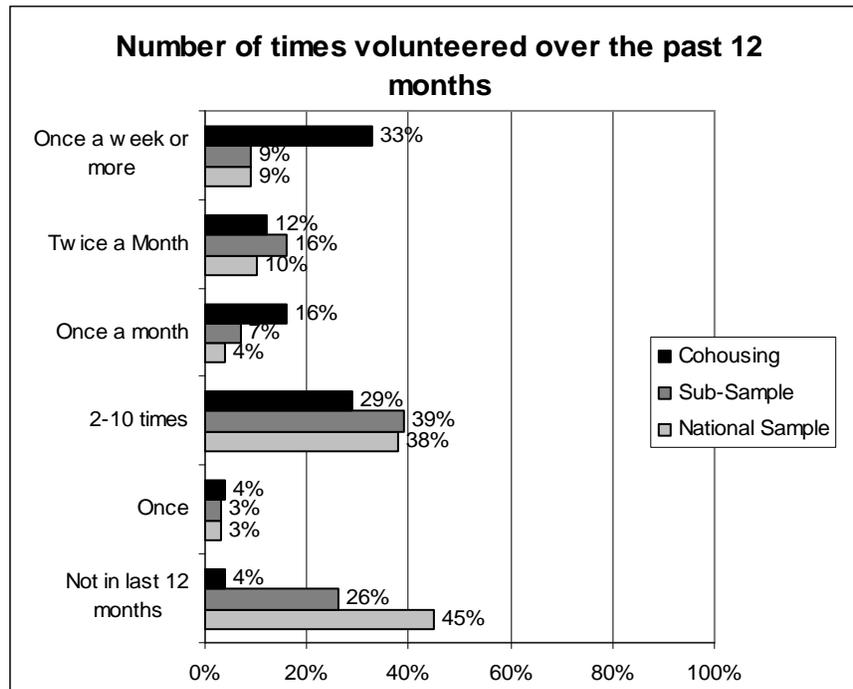
Both the cohousing and national surveys asked participants: "How many times in the past 12 months have you volunteered?" Figure 5.1, suggests that cohousing respondents were significantly more likely to have volunteered during the past year, with 33% reporting volunteer activity once a week or more as compared to 9% of both national and sub-sample respondents. Four percent of cohousing respondents had not volunteered at least once in the prior 12 months compared to 45% of the general population and 26% of the demographically similar population did not volunteer at least once. The 2006 survey reflected a slight increase in the number of times per year nationally average respondents volunteered over levels reported in 2000.

Figure 5.2. *Work on Community Project*
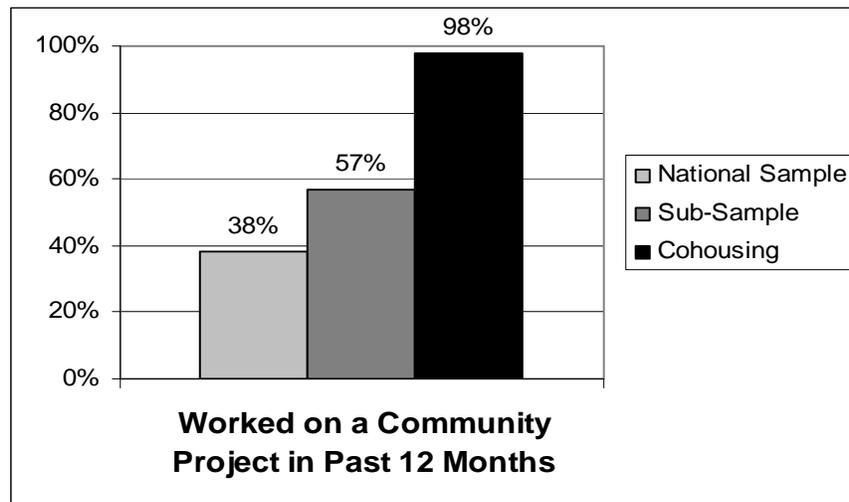
The cohousing survey asked respondents to estimate how many times in the past 12 months they had worked on a community project, while the national survey asked participants to respond 'yes' or 'no' to the question of whether they had worked on a community project in the past 12 months. Results, as reported in figure 5.2 indicate that 98 % of cohousing respondents had worked on a community project at least once in the past 12 months while only 38% of national respondents and 57% of sub-sample respondents had done so. The updated 2006 national survey reflected a 4% drop in the number of participants responding 'yes' to this question. Of cohousing respondents indicating that they had worked on a community project in the past year, 2% had done so once, 17% two to four times, 14% five to nine times, 17% once a month on average, 22% twice a month and 24% of respondents indicated that they had worked on a community project more than once a week on average over the past year.

Figure 5.3. *Served as Officer or on Committee of Local Organization*
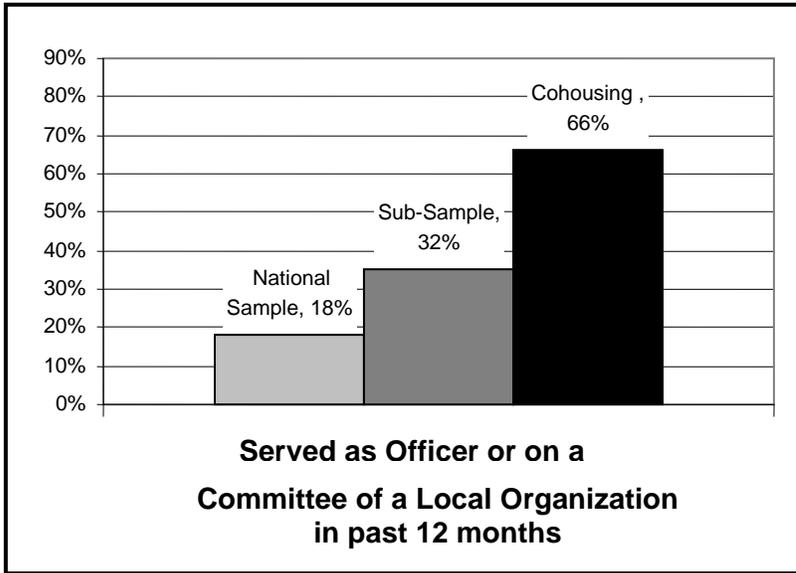
Both versions of the survey asked participants if they had served as an officer or on a committee of a local club or organization in the previous 12 months. Sixty-six percent of cohousing respondents responded in the affirmative as compared to 18% of national respondents and 32% of sub-sample respondents, a highly significant difference. The 2006 national survey registered a 2% decrease from 18% to 16 % of national respondents reporting committee or officer service in the previous 12 months.

Figure 5.4. Public Meeting Attendance

Attended public meeting addressing city/town/county or school affairs in past 12 months

Legend:
- ■ Cohousing
- ■ Sub-Sample
- ■ National Sample

Category	Cohousing	Sub-Sample	National Sample
More than once a week	1%	0%	0%
Once a week	2%	0%	1%
Twice a Month	3%	2%	2%
Once a month	4%	7%	3%
2-10 times	40%	41%	30%
Once	21%	8%	8%
Not in last 12 months	28%	42%	55%
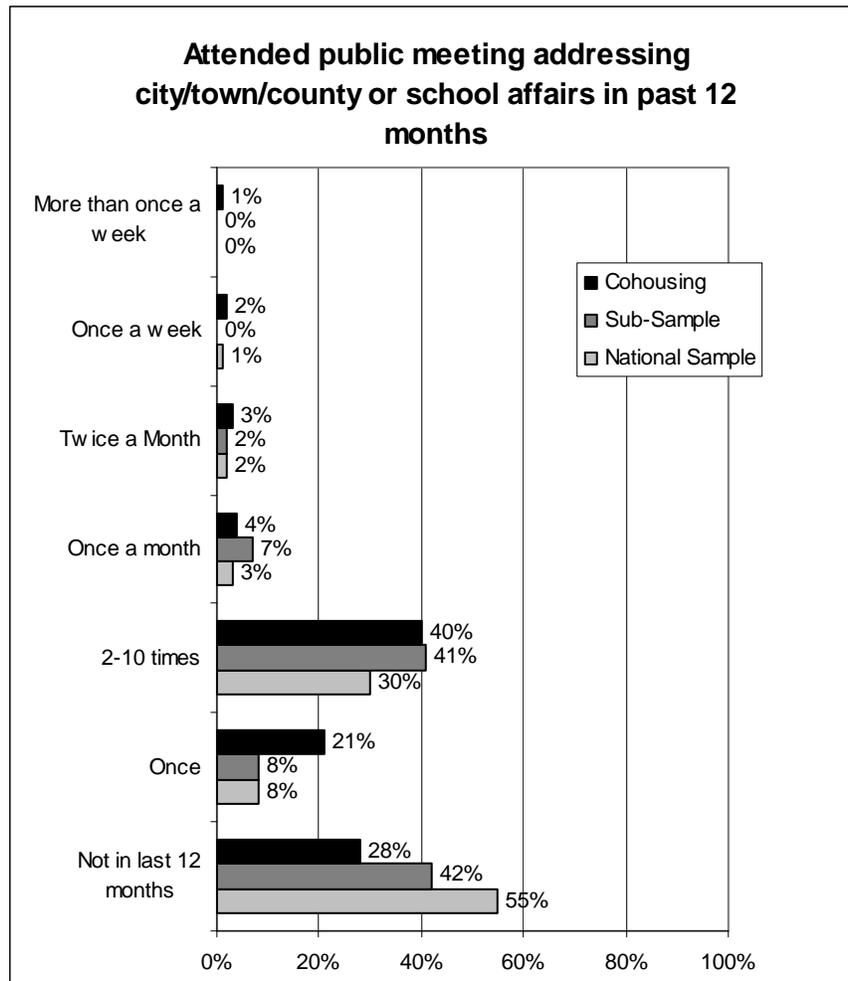
In response to the question: "How many times in the past 12 months have you attended any public meeting in which there was discussion of city/town/county or school affairs?" Figure 5.4 shows that 72% of cohousing respondents reported attending at least one such meeting as compared with 45% of national respondents and 58% of sub-sample respondents. However, the percentage of respondents attending public meetings with frequencies of once a month or more was very close across all three populations. The 2006 national survey recorded a slight drop in the average number of public meetings attended (from 2.9 to 2.6 times per year) as compared to results from 2000.

Figure 5.5. *Donation to Charity*

Donations to Charity

- >$100: 92% (Cohousing), 92% (Sub-Sample), 76% (National Sample)
- <$100: 6% (Cohousing), 4% (Sub-Sample), 8% (National Sample)
- None: 2% (Cohousing), 4% (Sub-Sample), 16% (National Sample)

Legend: Cohousing, Sub-Sample, National Sample
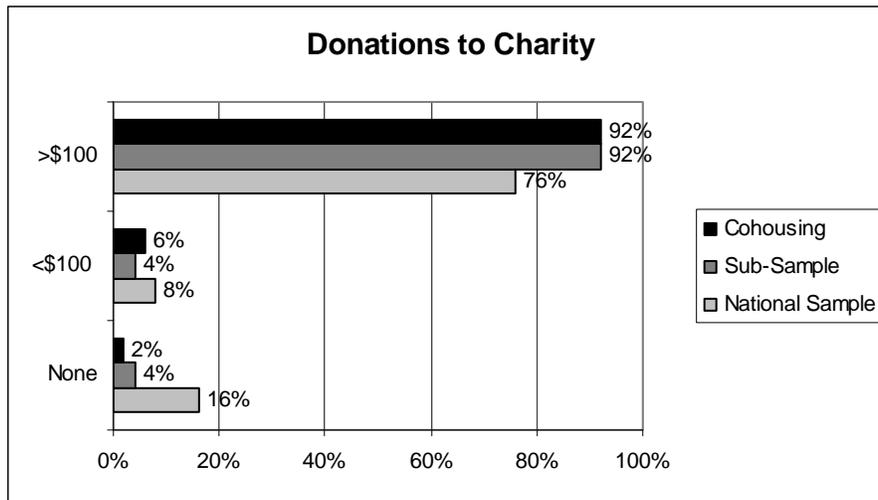
Cohousing residents closely matched the sub-sample of respondents with incomes above $30,000 per year in their charitable giving (religious and secular combined). Ninety-two percent of both populations gave at least $100 a year to charity while 76% of national respondents did so.

Figure 5.6. *Blood Donation*

Legend: National Sample, Sub-Sample, Cohousing

Donated Blood in Past 12 Months
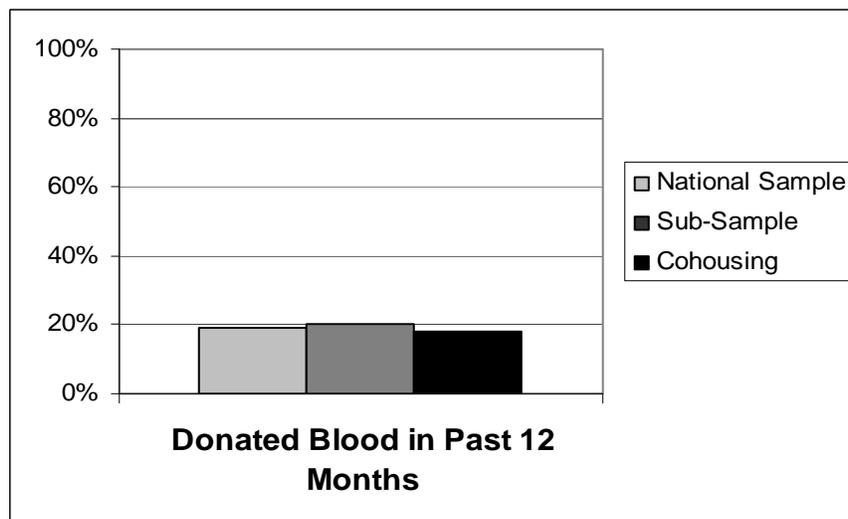
The percentage of respondents donating blood in the previous year was virtually identical across all three populations with 18% of cohousing residents, 19% of national

respondents and 20% of sub-sample respondents. The 2006 national survey recorded a 1% drop in the number of people donating blood.

5.2.2 Political Engagement Indicators

 Figure 5.7. *Registered to Vote*
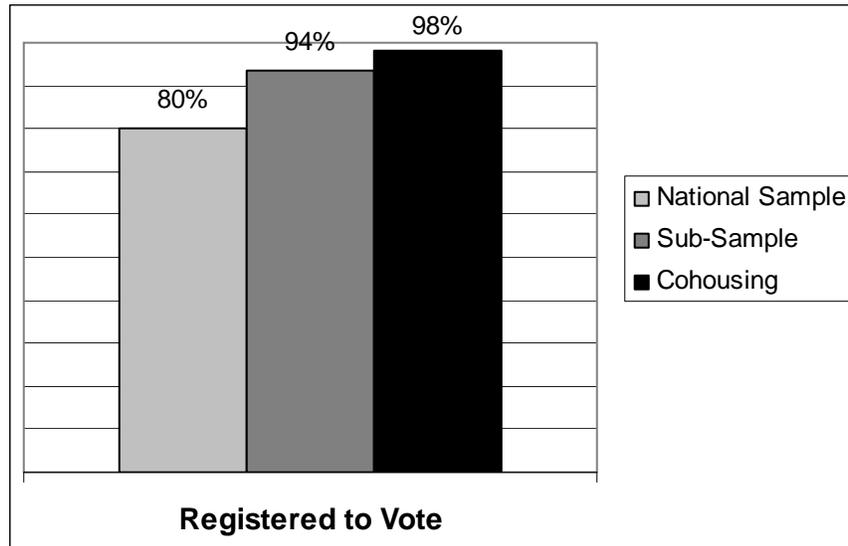
Figure 5.7 presents the percentage of respondents registered to vote in each sample population. Cohousing respondents were most likely to be registered to vote at 98%, but national respondents with similar education, race and income levels were not far behind. This stands in contrast to the 80% of nationally representative respondents registered. Voter registration had increased 1 percentage point to 81% of the nationally representative sample in 2006.

Figure 5.8. *Interest in National Affairs and Politics*

How interested are you in national affairs and politics?

Response	Cohousing	Sub-Sample	National Sample
Very	60%	44%	30%
Somewhat	32%	39%	36%
Slightly	7%	13%	21%
Not at all	2%	3%	13%
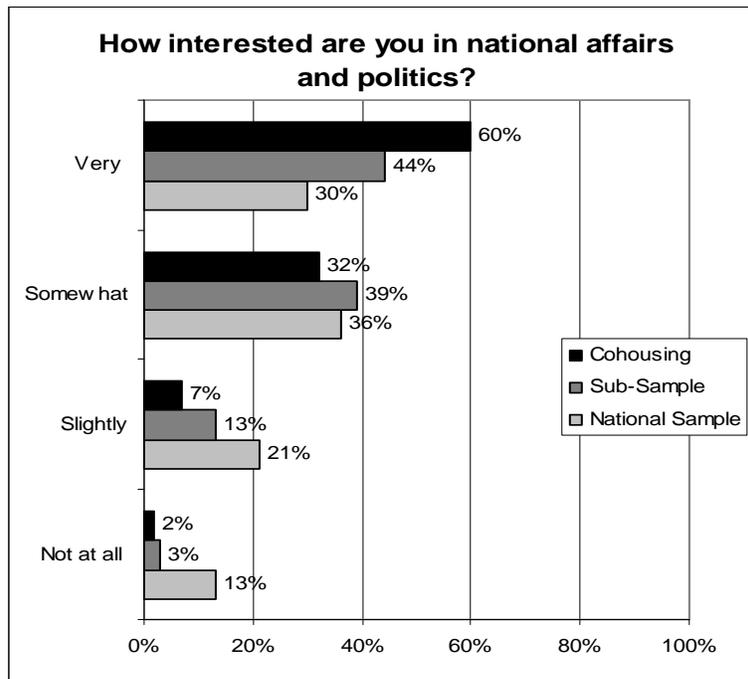
Figure 5.8 presents responses to the question: "How interested are you in national affairs and politics?" Once again, cohousing respondents reported the highest levels of interest of the three sample populations with 60% declaring themselves "very" interested as compared to 44% of demographically similar respondents and 30% of nationally representative respondents.

Figure 5.9. *Attendance at Political Meeting, Rally or Protest*
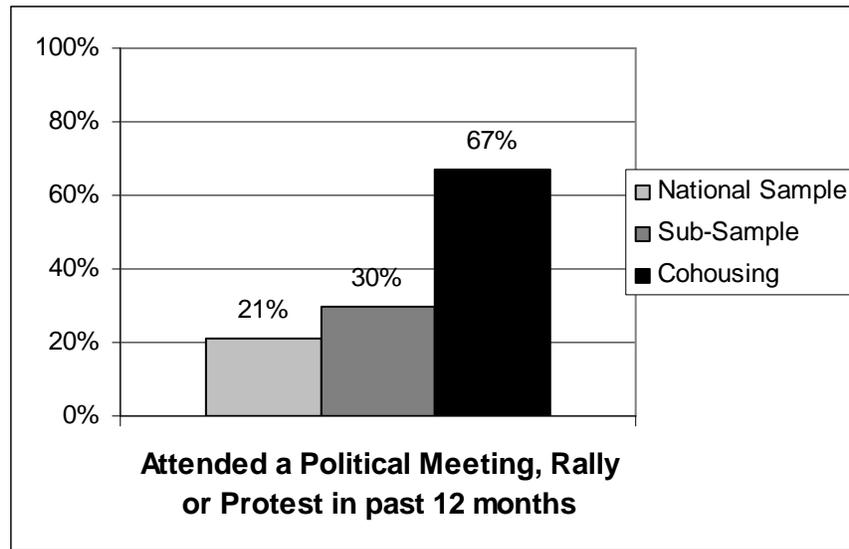
Figure 5.9 demonstrates a substantial difference in cohousing resident behavior relative to both nationally representative populations when comparing attendance at political meetings, rallies or protests over the previous twelve month period, Cohousing respondents were 37% more likely to attend a political organizing or protest event than sub-sample respondents and 46% more likely than nationally representative respondents to do so. There was a 2% average decrease in such attendance in the 2006 version of the national survey.

Summary

Overall, cohousing respondents reflected substantially higher levels of civic engagement than either nationally representative respondents or the sub-sample of that population with similar educational, racial and income characteristics. This difference is most pronounced in donation of time to volunteer efforts, community projects, local organizational leadership and participation and public meeting attendance. Cohousing respondents closely reflected the giving patterns of their nationally representative demographic group for charity and blood donations. The comparative data also suggests dramatic differences in levels of political engagement by cohousing residents as compared to the general population, and even that portion of the general population with similar demographic characteristics.

This data provides compelling evidence of high levels of civic and democratic engagement by cohousing residents relative to the general population and provides an indication of the magnitude and patterns of their differences. Nonetheless, it does not offer any specific explanation for the variation observed. Do cohousing neighborhoods simply attract individuals who are already extraordinarily politically and civically engaged? Some of the popular literature on cohousing suggests that this may be true, and may account for some measure of the observed difference. How much of the engagement reported by cohousing residents is focused exclusively on the neighborhood in which they live? Is it possible that cohousing residents, while giving more of their time and energy overall, are actually spending *less* total time and energy to benefit the world beyond the bounds of their community, essentially privatizing the civic energy of an otherwise active set of citizens?

To address these questions it is essential to look more deeply into the nature of civic and democratic engagement among residents. How have their attitudes and behaviors *changed* since moving into their communities in both the civic and political dimensions? How are they expending their energies and who stands to benefit from their relatively higher levels of civic and democratic engagement?

5.3 Evidence of Change in Civic Engagement: Case Study Evidence

A 39-question survey was developed and administered to 49 focus-group participants in the study's three case communities in order to gather data about the nature and magnitude of changes in resident attitudes, behaviors and experiences after moving into cohousing. Four of the survey questions specifically addressed changes in civic and democratic engagement; asking residents to reflect on whether they were more, less or equally engaged in particular civic or political behaviors after moving into cohousing. Respondents were asked to leave aside reflection of changes attributed to circumstances entirely unrelated to their living environment (such as becoming disabled, bearing children or changing their employment status). When the respondent felt he or she could not disaggregate changes attributable to personal life circumstances from changes related

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to their current living situation, each was given the option of leaving the question blank or marking a neutral response. Most of the respondents had been living in their neighborhoods for more than a year with the majority having resided in their neighborhoods for four or more years. Two respondents had only recently moved into cohousing communities and both expressed discomfort with answering some of the survey questions. They were encouraged to address only those questions to which they felt they could legitimately respond and leave the remainder blank.

Figure 5.10. *Change in Involvement in Neighborhood Issues*
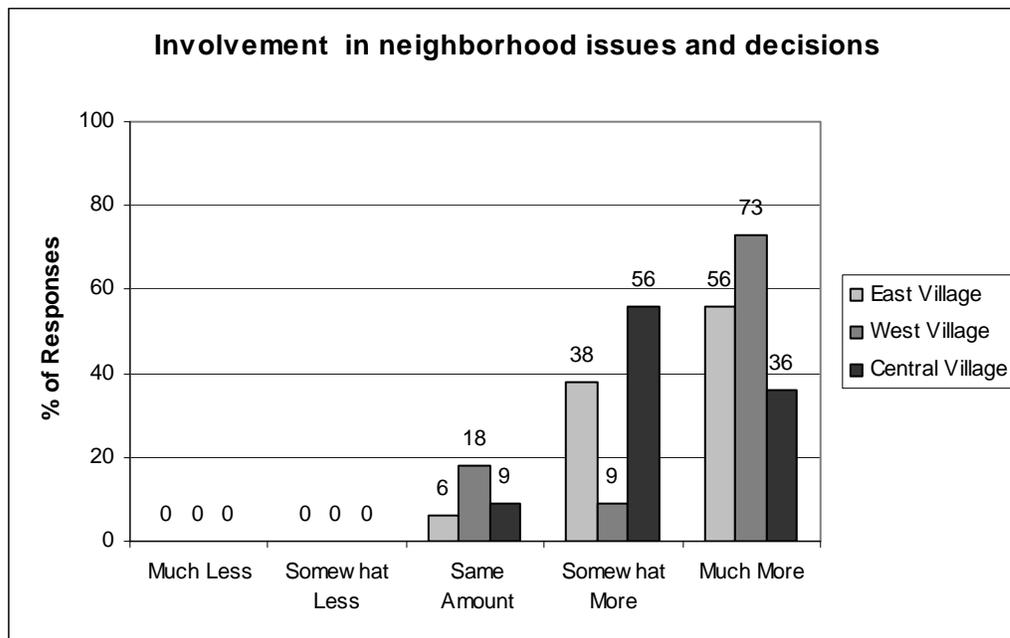
Figure 5.11. *Change in Involvement in Local Issues*

**Involvement in local issues
(Beyond neighborhood)**
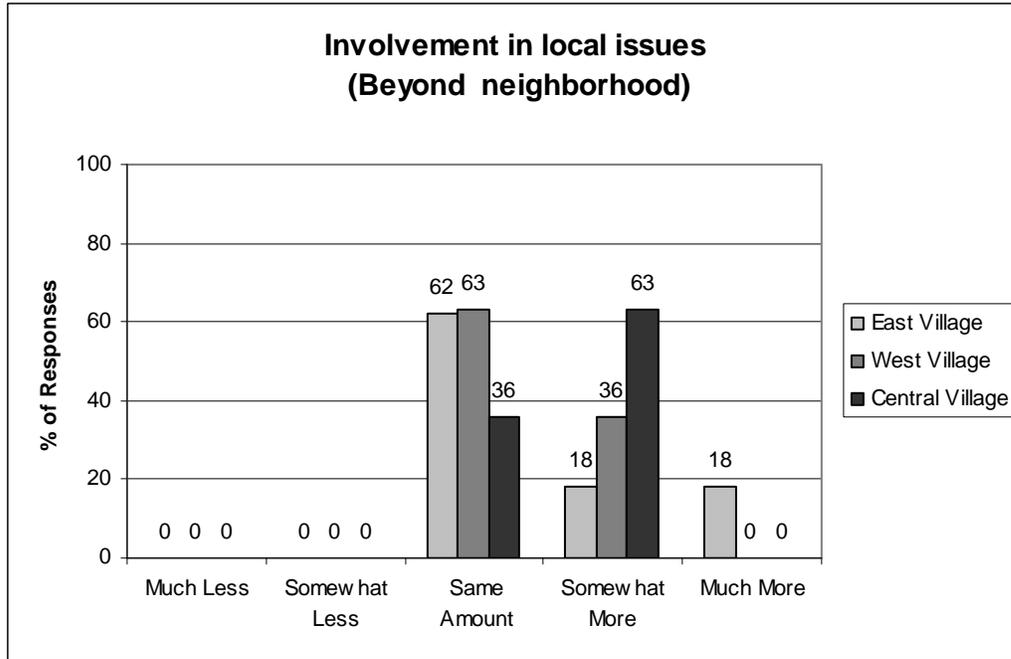
Figure 5.12. *Change in Involvement in National or Global Issues*

Involvement in national or global issues
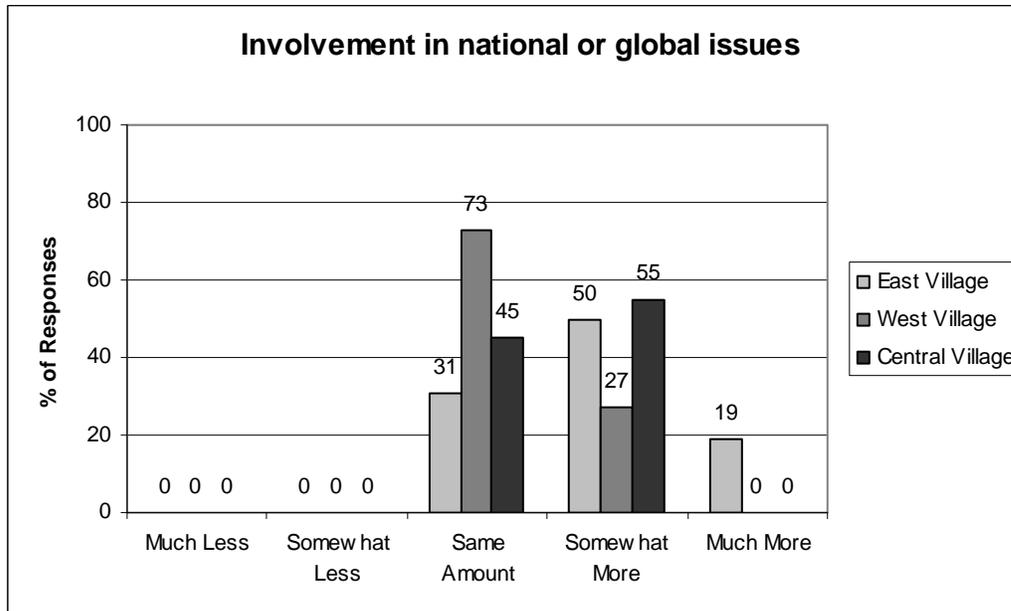
Figure 5.13. Change in Time Spent Volunteering Outside Neighborhood

Time spent volunteering outside of neighborhood

Chart showing % of Responses for East Village, West Village, and Central Village across categories:

Category	East Village	West Village	Central Village
Much Less	0	0	0
Somewhat Less	6	9	9
Same Amount	44	64	36
Somewhat More	25	23	36
Much More	25	5	18
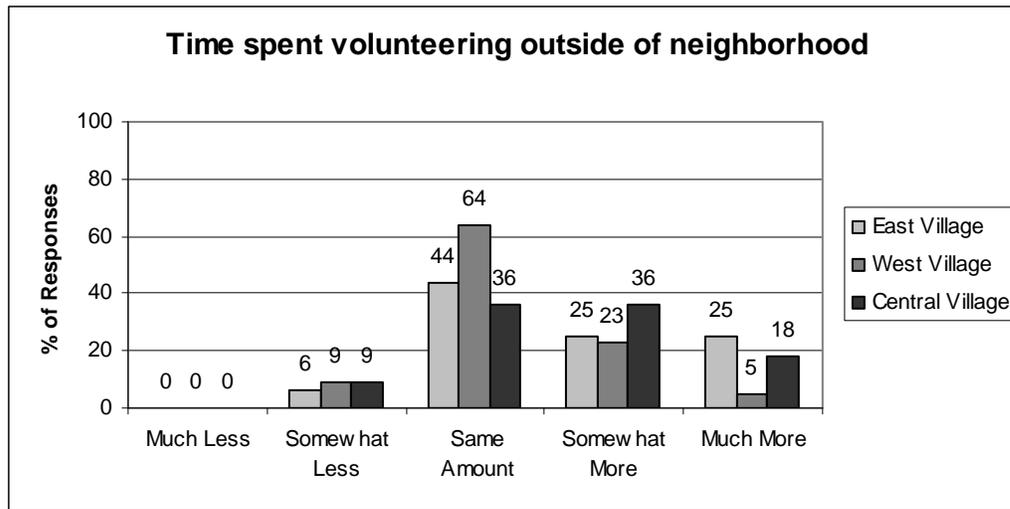
The data presented in these four figures demonstrate that, while residents report substantial increases in neighborhood engagement, this has not come at the expense of engagement in issues and efforts beyond the bounds of their neighborhoods. In fact, a substantial percentage of focus group respondents across all three case communities reported *more* engagement in issues reaching beyond the bounds of the community since moving into cohousing. This finding challenges the idea that cohousing neighborhoods might be diverting their collective civic energies away from broader concerns and towards more privately bounded ones.

By far the most dramatic shift revealed in the figures, however, *was* reflected in levels of involvement in neighborhood issues. No respondents indicated lower levels of neighborhood engagement since becoming involved with a cohousing neighborhood: only 12% thought that their level of engagement had stayed the same and 57% of respondents perceived they were "much more" engaged at the neighborhood level. Increased engagement at the local level were less dramatic but still significant given that no respondents indicated decreased involvement while 42% reported at least somewhat increased involvement in local issues. Levels of involvement in national or global concerns followed a similar trend with no residents reporting decreases and 47% of respondents reporting at least somewhat more engagement. Finally, a small number of

respondents (8%) thought that living in cohousing had negatively affected their volunteer efforts beyond the neighborhood itself, while half of respondents believed that there had been no change in their outside volunteerism and 41% perceived that their volunteerism had increased since they became involved with cohousing.

The following five figures address another aspect of civic engagement: resident engagement in civic discourse. Focus group survey participants in each case community were asked about their perceptions of changes in the frequency of various kinds of civic discourse since moving into their cohousing neighborhoods. The results are presented in figures 5.14 through 5.18:

Figure 5.14. *Change in frequency - discussing neighborhood issues*
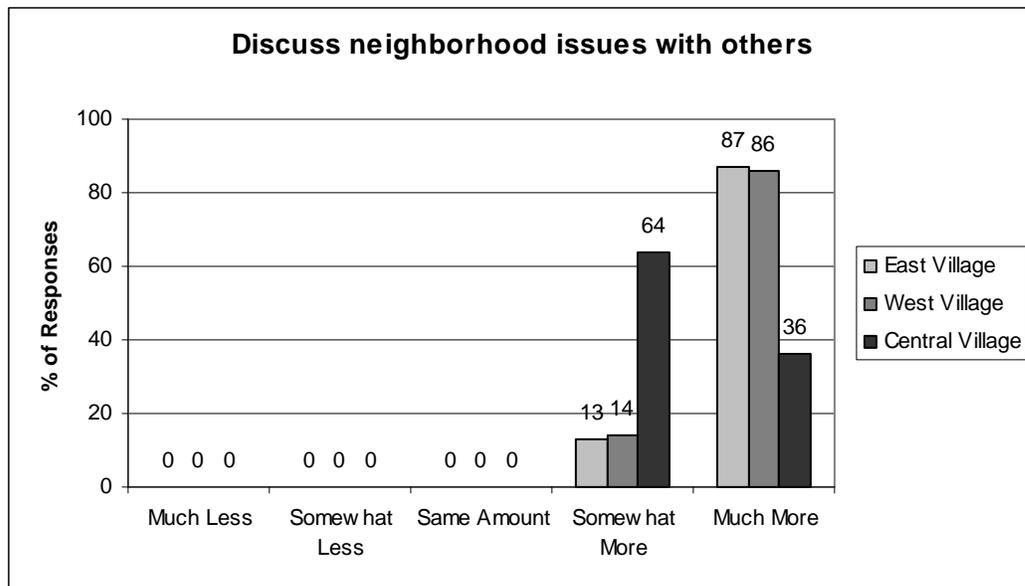
Figure 5.15. Change in frequency – discussing local issues

Discuss local (beyond neighborhood) issues with others
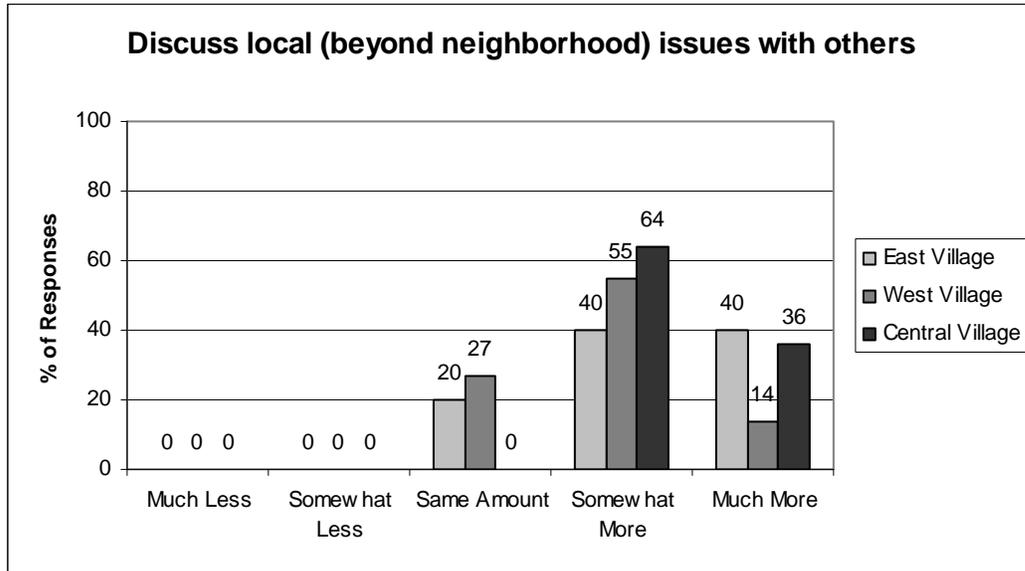
Figure 5.16. Change in frequency – discussing national/global issues.

Disuss national or global issues with others
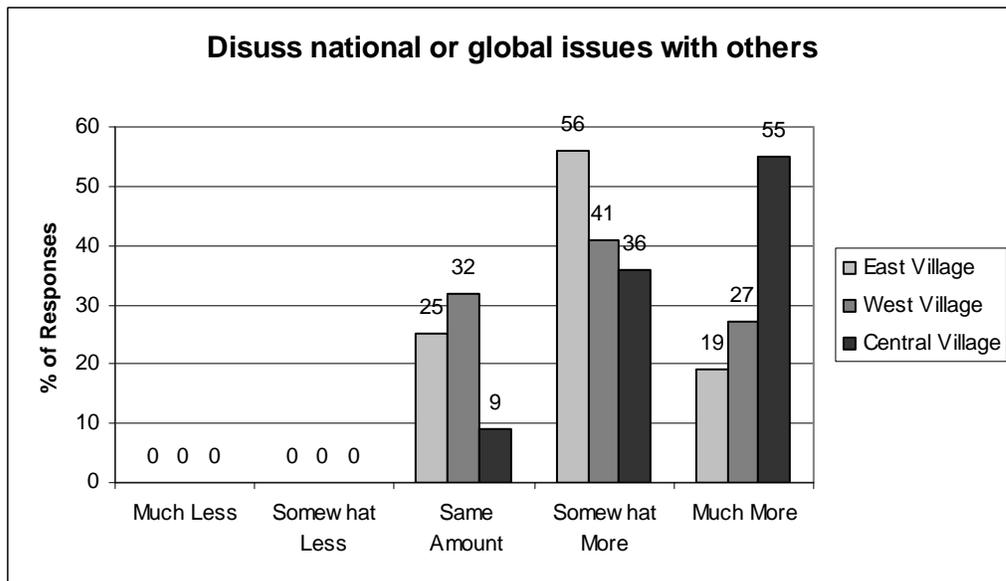
Figure 5.17. Change in frequency – conversing with people of different age, race, religion, background.

Engage in conversation with people of different ages, races, religions or backgrounds

% of Responses

	Much Less	Somew hat Less	Same Amount	Somew hat More	Much More
East Village	0	13	37	31	19
West Village	5	9	27	50	9
Central Village	0	0	27	64	9
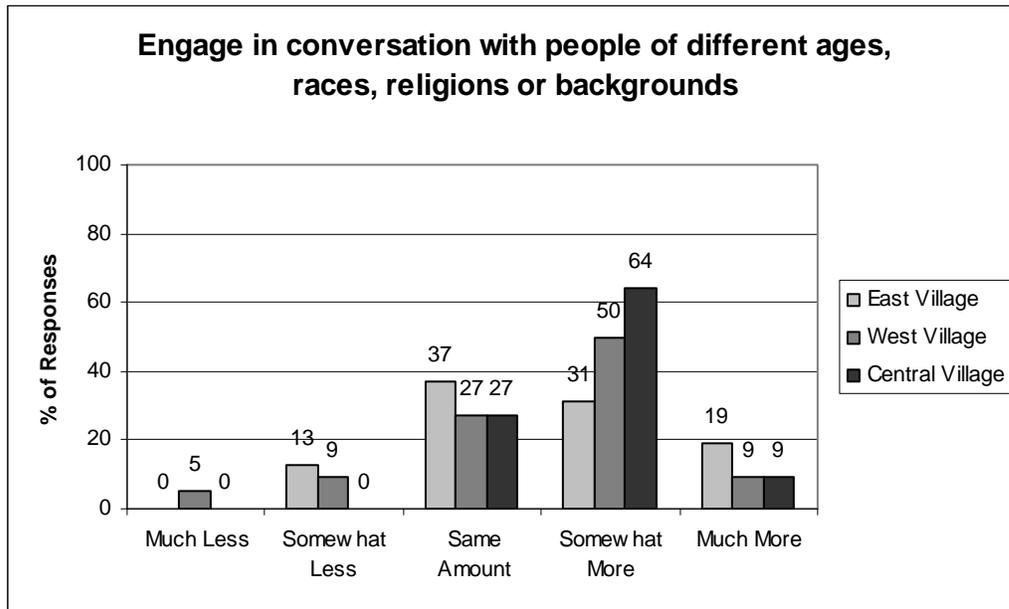
Figure 5.18 Change in frequency – conversing with people with significantly different social or political views

Engage in conversation with people holding politial and social views significanlty different from your own

% of Responses

	Much Less	Somew hat Less	Same Amount	Somew hat More	Much More
East Village	0	33	47	20	0
West Village	5	27	36	23	9
Central Village	0	18	55	27	0
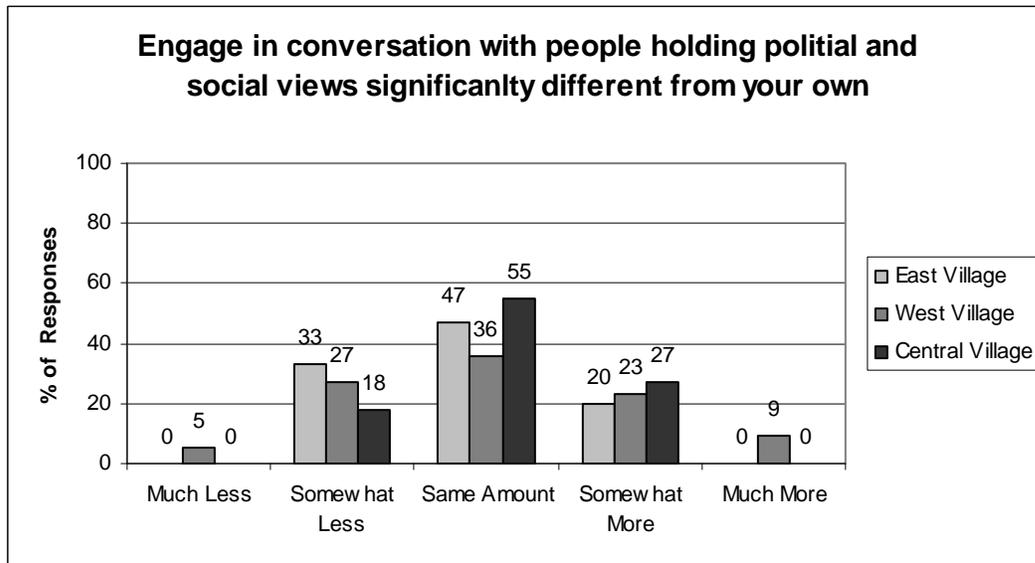
Results indicate residents in all three neighborhoods perceived average increases in how frequently they engage in conversations about neighborhood, local, national, and global issues. The greatest magnitude of increase was in discussion of neighborhood

level issues with no residents reporting the same amount or fewer conversations of that nature. Focus group survey participants did, on average, report engaging in conversations with people reflecting a broader range of demographic characteristics although some percentage of respondents felt that that this type of diversity had diminished since they moved in. Overall participants reported slightly less likelihood of engaging in conversation with people possessing significantly different social and political views from their own.

5.4 Patterns of Engagement in Cohousing Neighborhoods

The combined survey data indicate high levels of civic and democratic engagement among cohousing neighborhood residents and also suggest that these individuals tend to increase their levels of engagement both at the neighborhood level and beyond it, after moving into cohousing communities. This data, however, do not clearly illuminate the specific nature of engagement reported by residents. Accordingly, the following section logs neighborhood, civic and political activities in the three case study neighborhoods, thereby providing a fuller descriptive "picture" of engagement patterns across the case communities. It draws on information from a variety of sources, including participant observation, individual interviews and primary documents. The following categorizes the specific forms of engagement identified in the research. Examples of each category were found in all three neighborhoods studied. The specific examples provided are illustrative and many are unique to a particular case.

5.4.1   Engagement _Within_ the Neighborhood

The following information was obtained from focus group and individual interviews, document analysis (community calendars, newsletters, articles, Web sites, article of incorporation and so on) and informal conversations with residents.

1. *Participation in Community Planning and Governance*
    a. All major decisions made by consensus of the membership
    b. Residents are collectively responsible for setting and enforcing policy that guides and governs the neighborhood. (No central leader or representative decision-making body).
    c. Expectation that members will participate actively in governance through service on one or more committees and by attending general meetings.
2. *Participation in Community Maintenance, Improvements and Projects*
    a. Residents responsible for most management, upkeep and maintenance tasks in the neighborhood.
    b. Upkeep responsibilities are distributed across the resident adult population.
    c. A neighborhood work contribution of 3-8 hours per month is expected from all adult members (typically on the honor system).
3. *Interpersonal Exchange and Support (Informal/ ad-hoc)*
    a. Community-based assistance in the case of illness, injury, childbirth, and age-related needs or family crisis.
        - Examples of these forms of engagement include: Prepared meals, shopping, rides to and from the hospital, minor house alterations, physical assistance getting from place to place, home maintenance and cleaning, emotional support.
    b. Exchange of goods and services
        - Ride sharing, carpooling, driving children to school or activities
        - Borrowing/Exchanging books, movies, food, tools, cars, clothing, toys, furniture, childcare, pet care, plant care, etc.
        - Skill or service giving or sharing: Home repairs, computer assistance, auto repair, interior decorating, accounting and finance, sewing, gardening, landscaping, building, design, art, craft or musical ability, emergency medical assistance.

c. Clubs and social or support groups

- Parents group, "men's group", "women's" group", foster parenting group, simplicity circle, exercise and yoga groups, elder issues group, meditation group, craft clubs, game club, wine-tasting club, music group, garden club, chicken and egg club, pottery group, quilting circle, book club.

d. Celebrations, arts, education and enrichment activities in common areas
- Regular community meals at the common house
- Holiday parties, birthdays, retirement celebrations etc.
- Annual rituals/celebrations (winter solstice, maple sugaring, Fourth of July parade)
- Musical, dance or theater performances
- Art/craft displays in common areas
- Annual retreats (all-day community-building, celebration and work events)
- Educational workshops, classes, visiting speakers
- Common house media events including film series, movie nights, election-night-viewing, televised sporting events.

5.4.2 Engagement Beyond-the-Neighborhood

1. *Electoral politics*
   a. Voting and Elections
   - Reminders posted, driving to polls together, exchange of information and opinions about candidates, fund raising, voter-calling or meet-up events, hosting local candidates to speak at the common house, posting signs (on private homeowner property only).

2. *Social and political activism*
   a. Political, activist or community service group meetings in the common house (Participation not limited to neighborhood residents).
      - Tikkun, Local Democratic party meet-up, Sustainability Group, Bioregional group, Helping Hands, Cambodian Water Project, Doctors for Global Health, Arcatao Sister City Group, Coordinating Committee on Nicaragua, Hydrogen Powered Vehicle conference, Border Project, new cohousing group planning meetings.
   b. Information exchange, debate and discussion:
      - Flyers or articles posted on community bulletin boards, email issue-based lists, informal discussion, exchange of books, articles, films with social/political or activist content, speakers at the common house (Guatemalan Issues, Cambodian Water Project).

3. *Local government*
   a. Service on Town Meeting or local/city/town committees
   b. Attendance (sometimes collective) at public or broader neighborhood/ locality meetings
   c. Hosting campaign events (Q&A, fundraising, speakers forums) for local officials
   d. Dissemination of information related to local issues in the community.

4. *Association/organization/club participation*
   a. Meetings in common house:
      -Home-school group, belly dancing class, board meetings of Doctors for Global Health, Arcatao, The Nicaraguan Relief project, The Men's Resource Center.

5. *Local enterprise support*
   a. Coordinated (but voluntary) buying and sponsorship and provision of work (rental) or distribution space.
      - Community supported agriculture projects, bulk-food buying coop, Organic meat buying coop, solar/alternative energy store,

6. *Arts and culture*

    -House concert series, dance performances, theater performances open to

     the public.

7. *Education/demonstration outreach*

    - Conference hosting (Annual cohousing conference, performers

    workshop, Doctors for Global Health, community organizers training

    workshop, Xeriscape tours, cohousing tours).

8. *Charitable giving/fundraising/volunteerism*

    - Fundraisers in the common house, Helping Hands Initiative, Puffers

    Pond Breakfast, Survival Shelter annual collection, Doctors for

    Global Health mailings.

5.5 Summary Conclusions

This chapter presented evidence addressing three of this study's central research questions. The comparative national survey data indicate that in most areas of civic engagement (including volunteerism, public meeting attendance, work on community projects, service as officer or member of a local committee, interest in politics and attendance at political events), cohousing residents substantially exceed nationally average levels. People with roughly similar demographic characteristics show levels that are also higher than the national average in many of these areas, but still do not approach the levels exhibited by cohousing residents. However, cohousing residents do not distinguish themselves particularly in the areas of charitable giving or blood donation.

The chapter also sought to report how case-study participants' perceived that their civic attitudes and behaviors have been influenced by living in cohousing communities. The data indicates clear trends of positive change in civic engagement behaviors across all three case communities (although to varying degrees). It also reflected percieved

increases in residents conversations about matters of collective or personal concern. The replication in this same basic pattern of increase in each of the case neighborhoods, suggests that the phenomena of increased engagement is not random, or a function simply of resident pre-disposition, but at least in part, is a systematic effect of living in these communities.

The final section of chapter 5 illustrated these conclusions by providing a descriptive typology of civic engagement patterns—broken down by their character and locus— in the three case communities. The particular manifestations of engagement varied from one neighborhood to the next, but examples of each type of engagement were evidenced in each case community. The fact that these behavior patterns recurred across neighborhoods with no direct contact with one another and in far-flung locations, suggests that these are in some way resultants of cohousing as a community form.

CHAPTER 6

SOCIAL CAPITAL, DEMOCRATIC CAPACITY-BUILDING AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY IN COHOUSING NEIGHBORHOODS.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines three different dimensions of civic and democratic engagement within cohousing neighborhoods. The analysis focuses on these elements because relevant scholarship has suggested that they support democratically capable and engaged citizens: social capital formation, democratic capacity building and deliberative democratic practice.

As noted above, Robert Putnam and other social capital theorists claim that 'social capital' in the form of trust, reciprocity and rich social networks is a key contributor to "making democracy work." The first section of this chapter investigates this claim within the context of cohousing by exploring the role of various forms of "social-capital-creating and supporting" engagement among cohousing residents. The analysis first presents survey and qualitative data that measures and describes social cohesion, trust and norms of reciprocity within cohousing neighborhoods. This information was gathered from the national survey and from the three case communities. The data provides a rich picture of social capital formation in cohousing neighborhoods. The section ends with an examination of the role of physical, governance and social structures/processes in facilitating social capital building in the case neighborhoods.

The second part of this chapter explores whether, and to what extent, cohousing neighborhoods support the development of residents' civic and democratic capacities. Specifically, cohousing is hypothesized to produce democratic capacities by facilitating increased access to information, by providing opportunities and incentives for political skill development and by contributing positively to residents' sense of personal efficacy. This section relies on data gathered from the three case communities. As a companion to the analysis in the first part of the chapter that drew on survey data, this section uses information from the case communities to explore the role that physical, governance and social structures and processes play in facilitating information exchange, developing

specific political skills and contributing to an increased sense of personal efficacy among residents.

The third and final portion of the chapter examines the extent to which cohousing neighborhoods serve as spaces for deliberative democratic practice. Gutmann and Thompson (2004) have defined deliberative democracy as "a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives), justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in future" (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004, p. 7).

Cohousing neighborhoods almost universally govern themselves through consensus decision-making and distributed or egalitarian leadership structures. Do cohousing neighborhoods serve as incubators of the capacities necessary to sustain deliberative democracy? If so what can they tell us about the strengths and limitations of such forms of democratic engagement? This section considers the governance model and decision processes employed within most cohousing neighborhoods through the lens of deliberative democracy theory. How closely do cohousing neighborhood decision processes approximate the requirements of deliberative democracy?

6.2 Indicators of Social Capital in Cohousing Neighborhoods

6.2.1 *Social Cohesion*

Its proponents argue that social capital inheres in the structure of human relationships and that it represents the degree of social cohesion that exists in communities. Social cohesion, in turn, arises from, and contributes to, the relationships between people that establish networks, norms and social trust. These, in turn, facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (WHO, 1998). In this way, social cohesion is itself beneficial and also catalyzes other desirable aspects of social capital.

The Social Capital Benchmark survey asked respondents about frequency of visits from friends and neighbors over the previous twelve months as one measure of social engagement. Figure 6.1 compares responses from the national survey of cohousing

residents to Saguaro survey results for respondents with comparable demographic characteristics.

Figure 6.1. National Survey: Frequency of visits from friends and neighbors
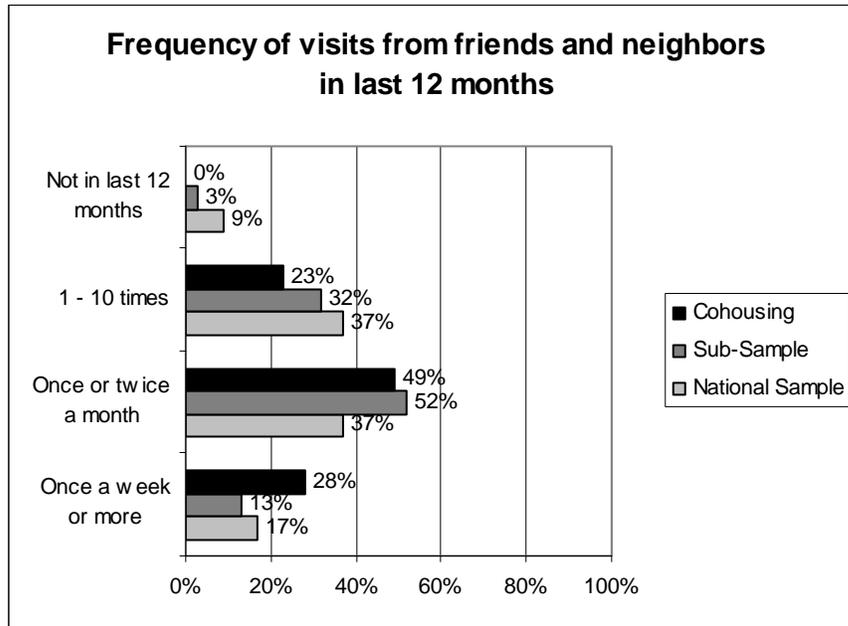
The comparative survey data suggests that cohousing respondents reflect a significantly greater frequency of visits from friends and neighbors than either the nationally representative or similar sub-sample populations.

Five focus-group questions were administered to groups of citizens in the three case neighborhoods to gather information about social cohesion and familiarity between neighbors. Respondents were asked about changes in the number of people with whom they conversed in a typical week as well as about changes in the time they spent in social interaction to gather data about changes in levels and frequency of social interaction. They were asked whether they had experienced any change in how frequently they talked with others about personal matters, how well they felt they knew their neighbors and whether they feel that others knew them well, in order to gain a better understanding of residents' sense of familiarity and connection with their fellow community residents. Together, these questions suggest whether living in cohousing contributes to a greater shared perception of social cohesion.

Figure 6.2. *Focus Group Survey: Change in number of people converse with in typical week*

Number of people you converse with in a typical week
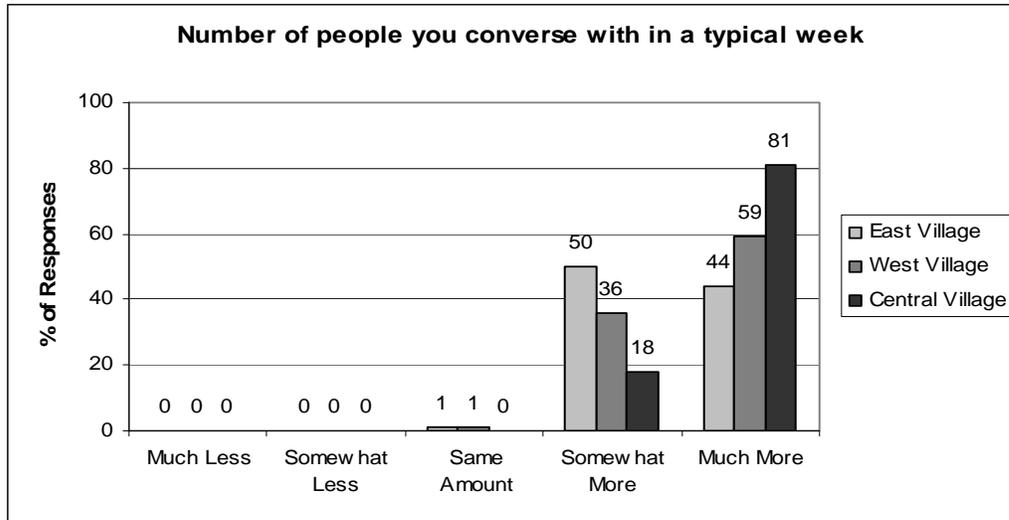
Figure 6.3. *Focus Group Survey: Change in time spent in social interaction*

Time spent in social interaction with others (outside household)
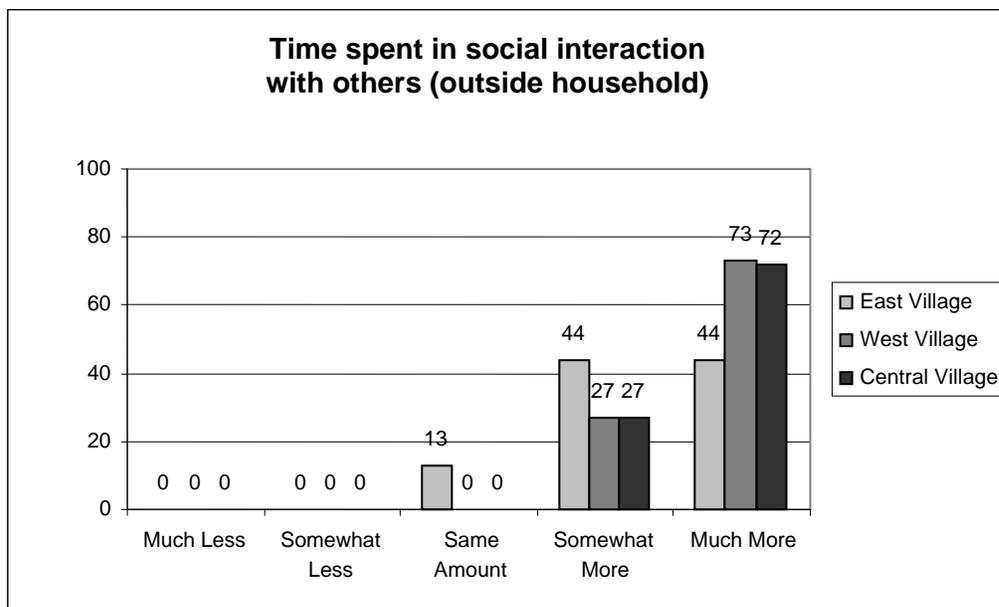
Survey results portrayed in Figures 6.2 and 6.3 indicate strong trends towards increased interaction after residents move into cohousing. Case neighborhood residents varied in the magnitude of changes they reported, with East Village respondents

reflecting more modest increases while West and Central Villages reflected substantial increases in frequency of engagement in conversation and social interaction outside their homes. In spite of this variability, the overwhelming majority of focus group respondents in all three cases indicated increased social and conversational engagement with others after moving into cohousing. No one reported decreased levels of interaction and only a few believed that there had been no change in their participation in such activities.

Figure 6.4. *Focus Group Survey: Change in frequency of conversations about personal matters.*

Conversations about personal matters

East Village
West Village
Central Village
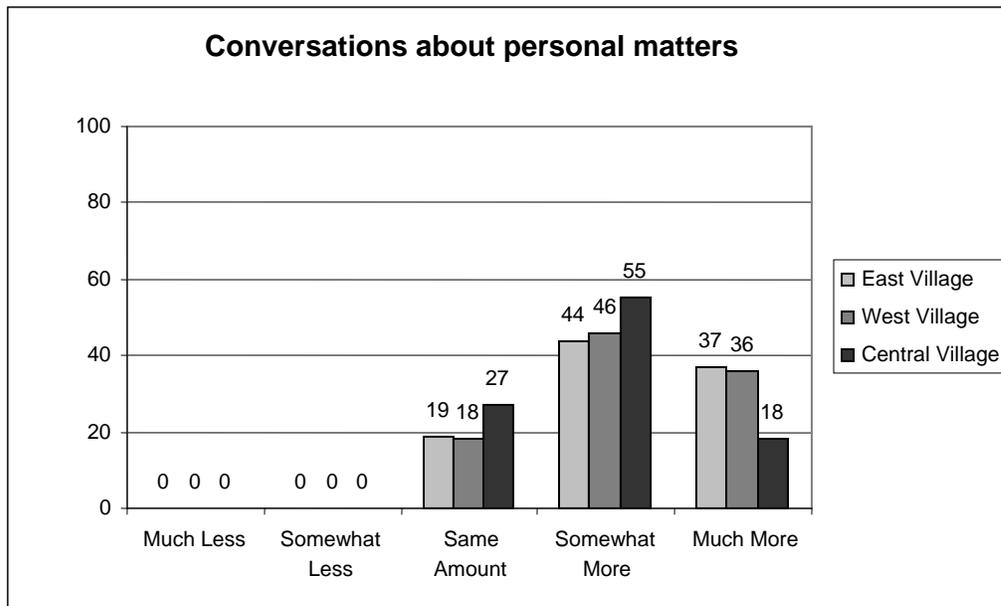
Figure 6.5. *Focus Group Survey: Change in how well residents feel they know their neighbors*

How well you know your neighbors
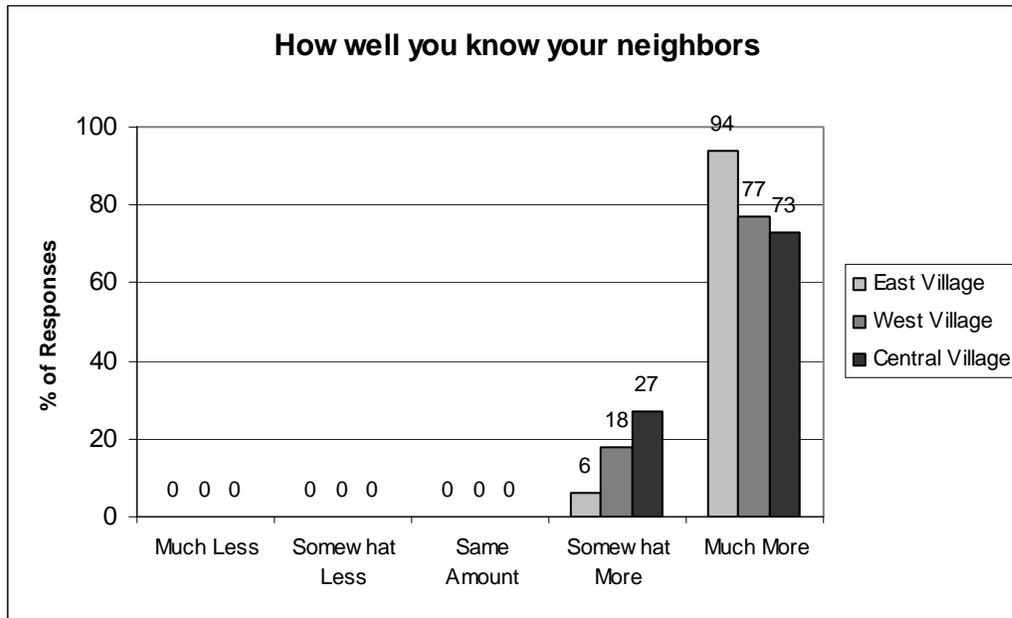
Figure 6.6. *Focus Group Survey: Change in number of people respondents feel 'know them well'.*

Number of people who know you well
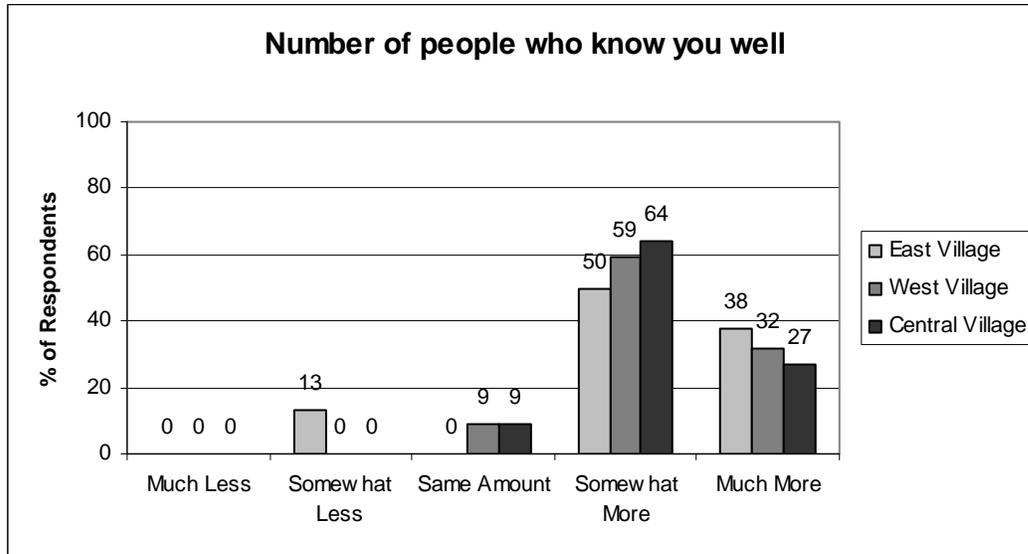
Figures 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 track changes in the quantity, quality and depth of residents' relationships with others. No respondents reported being engaged in fewer conversations with others about their personal lives and only 20% of respondents overall indicated no change in that sort of interaction. Forty-seven percent of respondents

experienced some increase and 33% experienced a substantial increase in how often they shared personal matters with others. More than a majority of respondents in all three communities indicated that they knew their neighbors much better since moving into cohousing. Not quite as many felt that others knew them well. A small percentage (13%) of residents at East Village felt that fewer people knew them well and similar percentages of West and Central Village residents suggested that there was no discernible change in the numbers of people who knew them well.

Summary

Overall, the survey data suggests high levels of social cohesion in cohousing neighborhoods with strong evidence that ties among respondents have been strongly affected by the experience of living in cohousing communities. It is important to recall that East Village, West Village and Central Village were selected partially based upon evidence of 'positive deviance' in levels of civic engagement and social capital. Therefore, these focus-group results cannot be assumed to apply with equal strength across all cohousing neighborhoods. Nonetheless, residents, regardless of personality, predisposition or life circumstance, reported experiencing significant increases in their sense of social cohesion and connectedness upon moving into cohousing. These reported beliefs provide support for the claim that cohousing encourages development of social bonds among neighbors.

The case community data illustrates the specific processes that support the creation of social bonds in cohousing communities. As noted above, a diverse array of data was collected through participant observation, formal and informal interviews, review of neighborhood bulletin boards, community calendars, website information, newsletters, historical records of community events, scrap-books and photographic evidence.

The following section identifies and describes five major types of social interaction observed in all of the case communities that regularly brought community members together in social interaction. These examples were either directly observed by the researcher or specifically mentioned in interviews or community documents:

1. *Meals/Food:*
   a. Twice weekly community dinners in the common house (*All*)
   b. Outdoor wine and cheese party in a shared outdoor sitting area (*West Village*)
   c. Potluck lunches, dinners and dessert parties in resident homes among a sub-set of neighbors, usually adjacent, often spontaneous (*All*)
   d. Outdoor grill-outs, often spontaneous (*All*)
   e. Ice cream socials (*Central Village*)
2. *Parties and Celebrations*
   a. Holiday parties*(All)*
      - NewYear celebration, Passover, Easter, Fourth of July, Halloween, Thanksgiving, December holidays, annual events, community retreats, 'no-talent' show.
   b. Birthdays and personal or community milestone celebrations (*All*)
      - Graduations, retirements, births, goodbye parties, adoptions, rites of passage for girls and boys turning 13, remembrance of neighbors who died.
   b. Musical and arts performances *(All)*
      - Talent nights, singing, music, theatre and dance performances by community adults and children and occasionally guests in the common house or other common space.
3. *Clubs and Support groups*
   a. Clubs*(All)*
      - book groups, craft clubs, wine-tasting circle, musical ensemble practice group, singing group, chicken raising club, film series

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b. Support groups (All)

> -Men's groups, women's groups, parents support group, foster parenting support group, simple living circle, sustainability group, conflict resolution group, 'Convivencia' group.

4. Community Work and Governance

a. General business meetings - usually once or twice a month *(All)*

b. Committee or work group meetings: about once every week or two weeks for most residents. *(All)*

c. Work activities *(All)*

> - Landscaping, weeding, gardening, cleaning, repairing and maintaining common property , common meal preparation and clean-up

5. Spontaneous interaction in shared spaces

a. Common house *(All)*

> - Mail room, TV room, library/reading room, game room, sauna, kids room, craft room, exercise room, laundry, porches.

c. Outdoor common spaces *(All)*

> - Central courtyard or green, community gardens, swimming Pool/hot tub *(West Village only)* pedestrian pathways, picnic tables and other sitting areas, kids playground, parking lots, kids bus stop.

d. Semi-private spaces *(All)*

> - Front porches and private front gardens.
> - Shared outdoor sitting areas: picnic tables, benches etc.

'Anna,' a resident of West Village provided insight into her experience of social cohesion in her cohousing community.

> ***Anna***
>
> *"A great positive, I would say, is being friends with people who I wouldn't normally meet if I didn't live around them…and having a friendship that is very different than any other kind of friendship. It's more like being cousins or being family or extended family… and even the person I dislike the most…if I ran into them and they were in trouble…I would extend my life to help them. I like being around children and being around older people and I like borrowing knitting needles from someone and having a knitting relationship with that person and having a spiritual and meditation relationship with someone else. And my partner, for the first time is reaching out to have friends, which is something he never really did much before. I do find it very annoying at times that I can't get down to my car without having three conversations on the way. Sometimes I don't want to talk to anyone and wish I had an invisibility cloak to put on".*

6.2.2 *Trust*

Levels of trust serve both to indicate and support the creation of social capital. Trust allows transactions to occur between people without the need for formal contracts and complex mechanisms of accountability. High levels of trust allow borrowing and other informal transactions that increase efficiency. Trust decreases the need for monitoring and oversight and lessens the need for detailed contracts and oversight schemes to ensure compliance (Coleman, 1988). Trust between individuals is usually built over time and is a function of repeated interactions in which both parties keep their word and act honorably and reliably without taking advantage of the other (Fukuyama, 1999).

The Social Capital Benchmark survey included several questions that were used to measure trust in cohousing neighborhoods. These responses were then compared to trust in the general population (as represented in the national sample) and to a sample of that national group similar to the cohousing respondents in race, income and education levels. Survey participants were asked about their general levels of trust and to indicate how much they trusted people in their neighborhood. Figures 6.7 and 6.8 depict the results of that effort.

Figure 6.7. *National Survey: General trust levels*
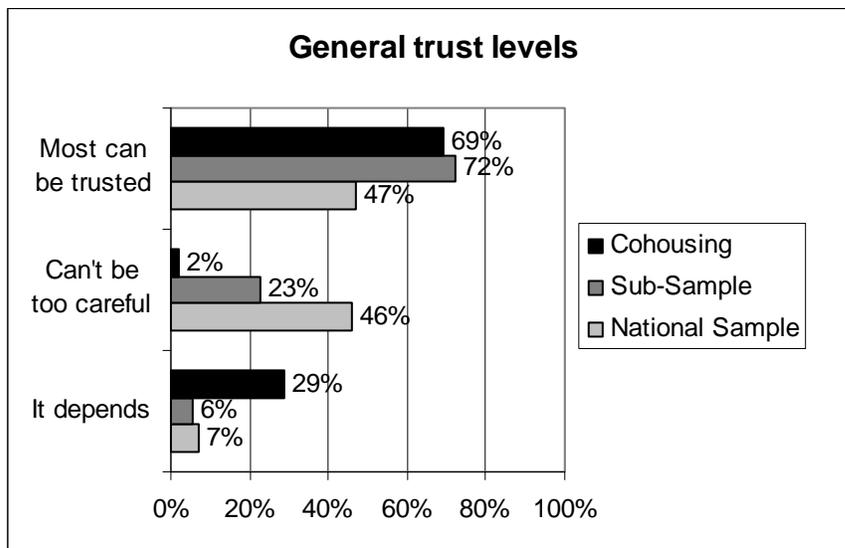
Figure 6.8. *National Survey: Trust towards neighbors*

How much do you trust people in your neighborhood?

Response	Cohousing	Sub-Sample	National Sample
A lot	76%	68%	49%
Some	22%	25%	34%
Only a little	2%	3%	11%
Not at All	0%	3%	6%
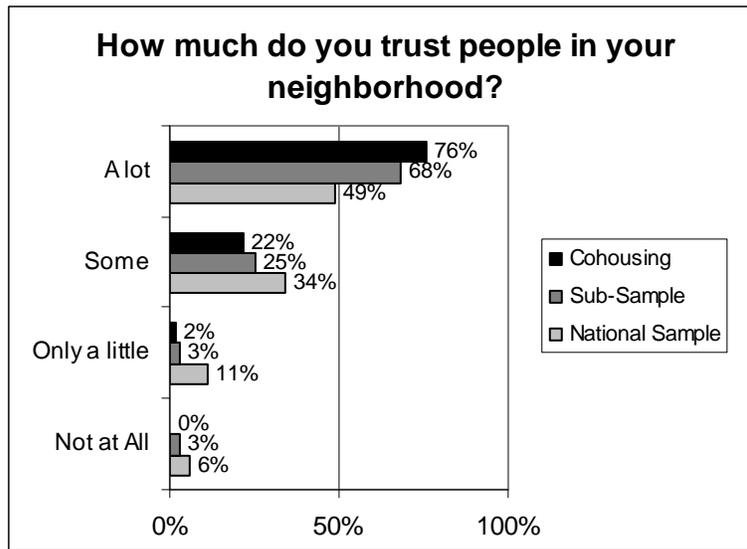
General trust levels were relatively high for cohousing respondents and those in the demographically similar sub-sample as compared to national sample respondents with a slightly higher percentage of sub-sample respondents reporting 'a lot' of generalized trust. On the other hand, only 2% of cohousing respondents indicated 'you can't be too careful' when it comes to trusting others, as compared to 23% of sub-sample respondents and 46% of national sample respondents. Cohousing residents report less active suspicion or mistrust of others than either their sub-sample peers or the general population while not necessarily experiencing significantly higher levels of active or positive generalized trust. Of the three sample populations, cohousing residents report the highest levels of trust toward their neighbors. No cohousing respondents indicated a complete lack of trust in their fellow community residents, while small percentages of both the national and sub-sample populations expressed such active mistrust.

Figure 6.9 compares cohousing participant's trust in national government with nationally average responses to this question:

Figure 6.9. *National Survey: Trust in national government*
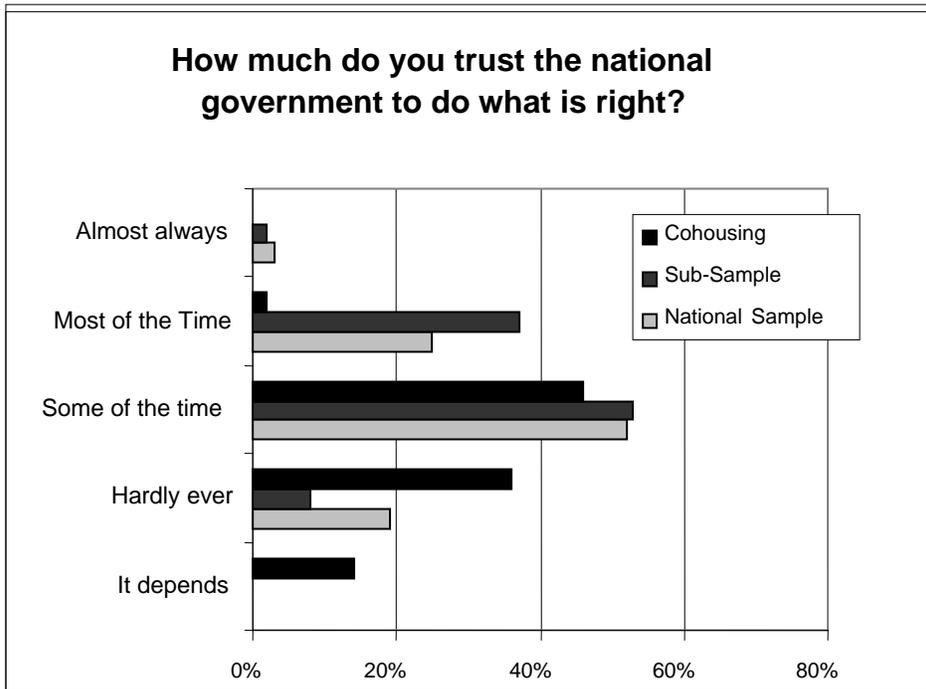
The survey responses presented in Figure 6.9 reveal much lower trust on the part of cohousing residents than either of the nationally representative samples. This may be partly explained by the fact that most cohousing residents report liberal political leanings, and this survey was administered during a period of republican domination of government.

Three focus group survey questions also addressed the subject of trust. Case study participants were asked whether they had experienced any change in their general trust levels and in their feelings of trust towards people in their neighborhood since becoming cohousing residents. They were also asked whether they had experienced any change in the number of people in whom they believed they could confide.

Figure 6.10. *Focus Group Survey: Change in trust towards strangers*

Trust strangers generally
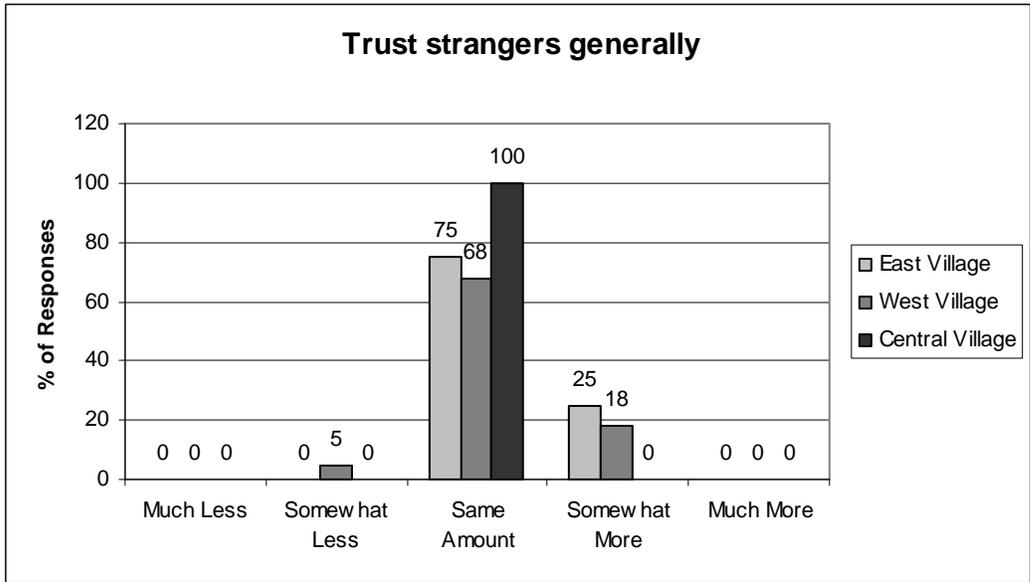
Figure 6.11: *Focus Groups: Change in trust towards neighbors*

How much you trust your neighbors

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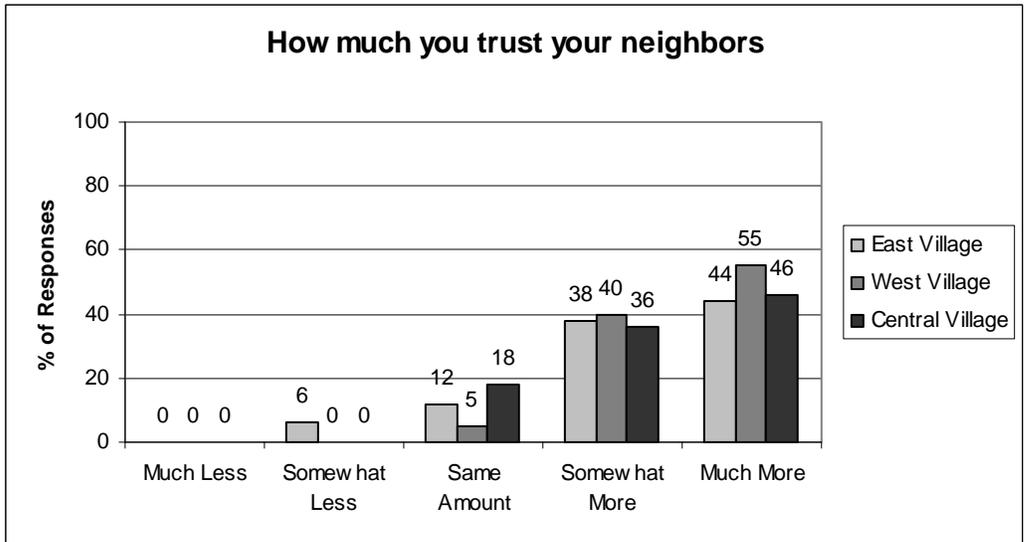
Figure 6.12. *Focus Groups: Change in number of people in whom resident can confide.*

Number of people in whom you can confide
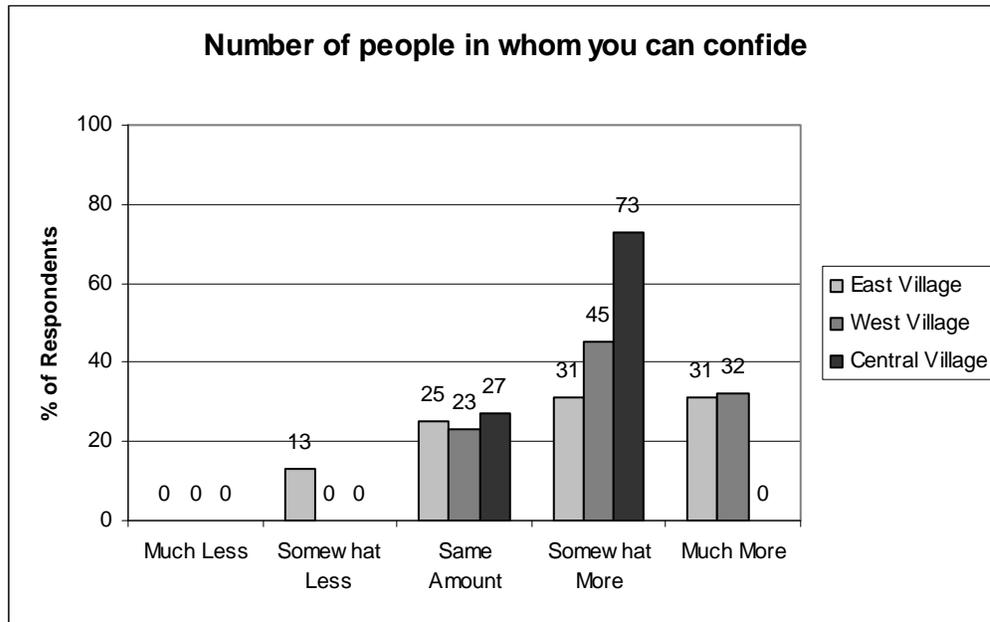
Focus group results indicate only a slight increase in generalized trust for residents of two of the case communities and none for residents of the third. Five percent of East Village respondents (one person) indicated that they felt less generalized trust since moving to their cohousing neighborhood. The trend was more positive regarding changes in trust towards neighbors. In each case, a large majority of respondents indicated somewhat or much more trust towards neighbors than they felt before moving into their present neighborhood. A small percentage of respondents from each community reported no change or a slight decrease in trust toward their fellow residents since moving in. Meanwhile, three quarters of respondents reported an increase in the number of people in whom they felt they could confide, since moving to cohousing. East Village differed from the other two case communities with 13% of its respondents reporting a slight decrease in the number of confidantes.

Summary

Overall, the data concerning overall trust levels in cohousing communities nationwide indicates somewhat higher levels of trust relative to comparative sample populations.

Case-study participants report relatively strong increases in willingness to extend particularized trust, but weaker increases in generalized trust and a few residents report slight decreases in both general and specific willingness to offer trust.

6.2.3   *Reciprocity*

According to social capital theory, well developed social networks, characterized by high levels of trust and norms of reciprocity, create a number of potential benefits for individuals and society. They are postulated to shorten the time and effort required to acquire knowledge, skills or resources thereby reducing search costs. These reciprocal networks of relationship also reinforce compliance with pro-social norms – thereby increasing trust (Coleman, 1988; Putnam 2000; Woolcock, 2001). The Saguaro Seminar survey did not address the issue of reciprocity directly so this analysis rests entirely on data collected in the three case neighborhoods.

Focus group participants were asked to consider six questions specifically aimed at capturing changes in reciprocal behaviors such as helping others and lending, borrowing or exchanging goods and services.

Figures 6.13 through 6.18 address perceived changes in various forms of reciprocity experienced by participants from the three case communities. They address practices of mutual aid as well as the lending and exchanging of goods and services between neighbors.

Figure 6.13. Focus Group Survey: Number of people resident can call in a crisis

Number of people you could call on for help in a crisis
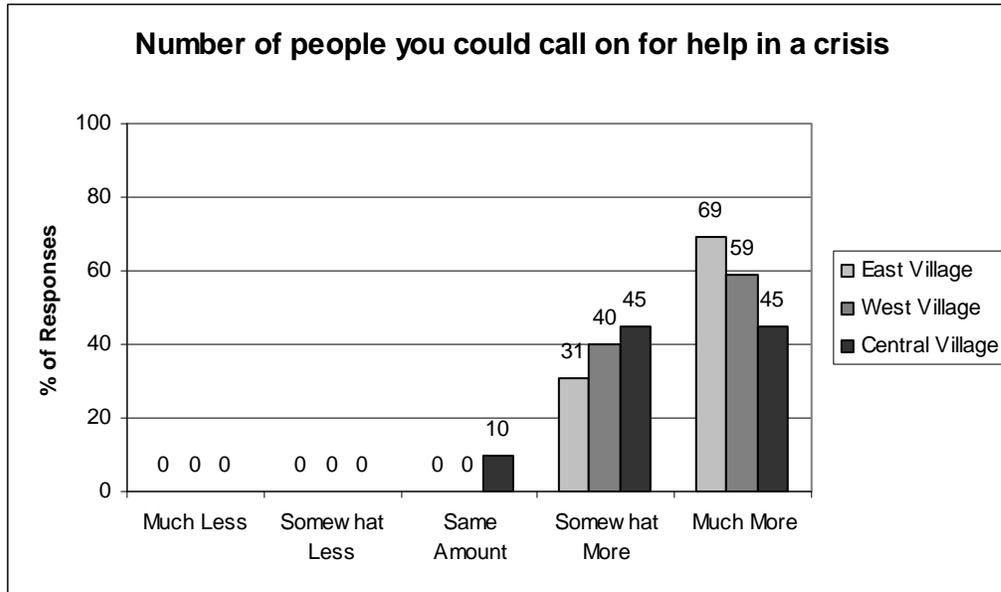
Figure 6.14. Focus Group Survey: How likely to ask for help in small ways

How likely you are to ask for help from neighbors in small ways
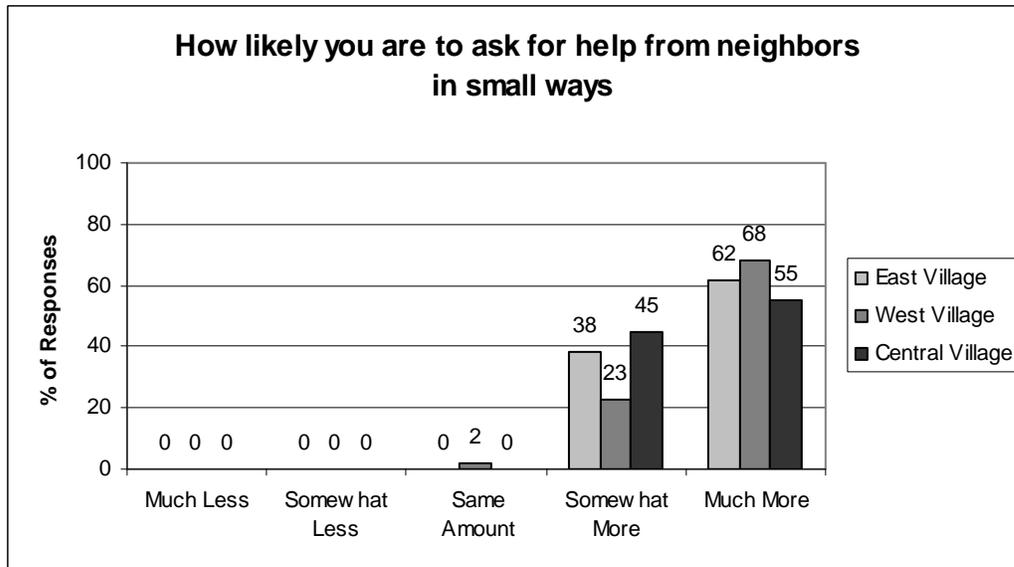
Figure 6.15. *Focus Group Survey: Change in how likely to extend help in small ways*

How often you extend help to neighbors in small ways

% of Responses

Category	East Village	West Village	Central Village
Much Less	0	0	0
Somewhat Less	0	0	0
Same Amount	6	0	0
Somewhat More	44	32	73
Much More	50	68	27
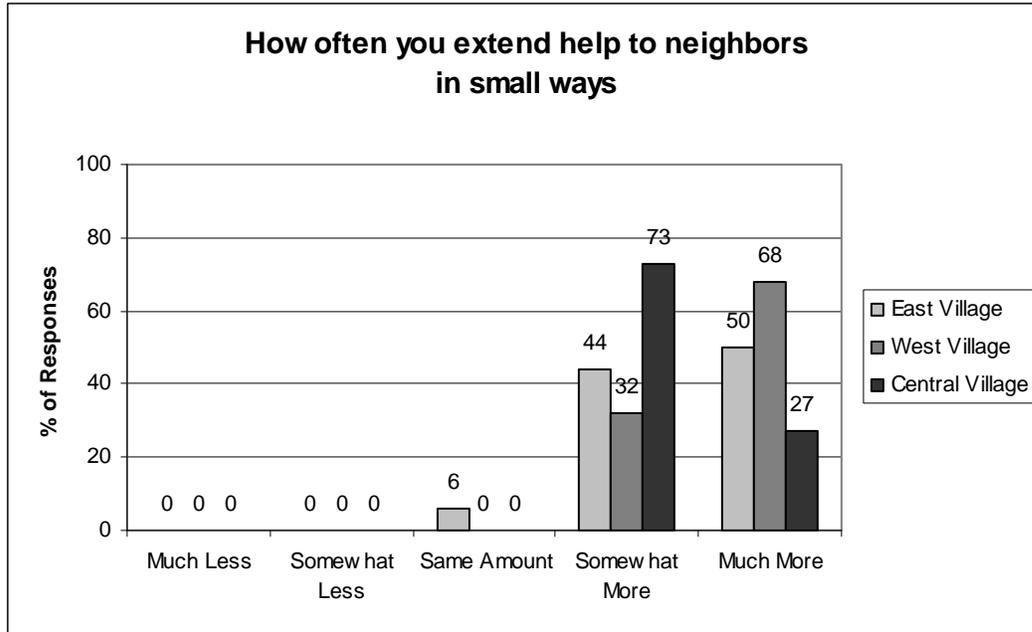
Figure 6.16. *Focus Group Survey: Change in how likely to seek help in larger matters*

How likely to ask for help from neighbors in large matters

% of Responses

Category	East Village	West Village	Central Village
Much Less	0	0	0
Somewhat Less	0	0	0
Same Amount	6	5	36
Somewhat More	38	32	45
Much More	56	64	18
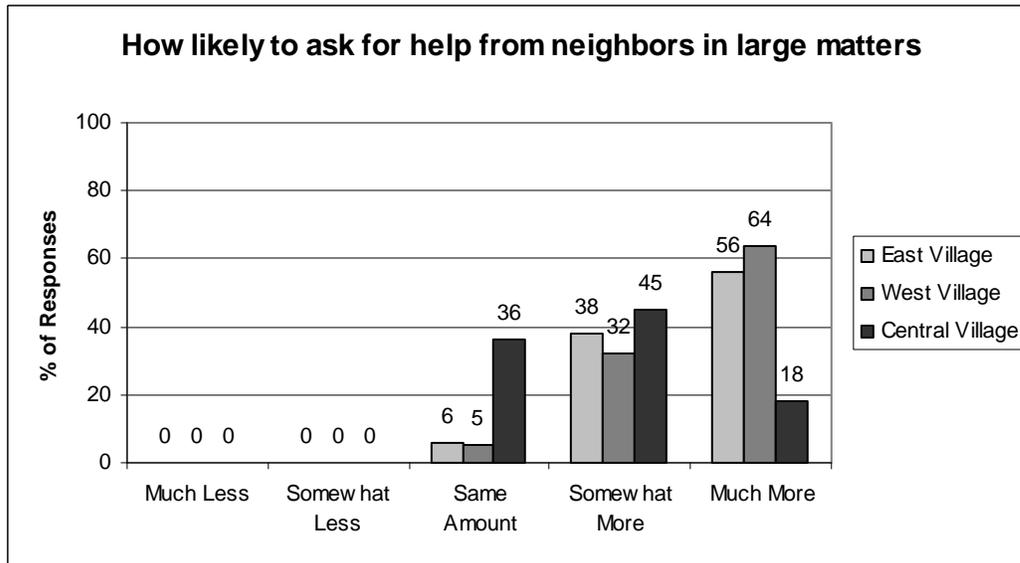
Figure 6.17. *Focus Group Survey: Change in how often resident extends help in larger matters*

How often you extend help to neighbors in large matters

Bars (% of Responses) by category:

Category	East Village	West Village	Central Village
Much Less	0	0	0
Somewhat Less	0	0	0
Same Amount	6	14	18
Somewhat More	38	45	64
Much More	56	41	18
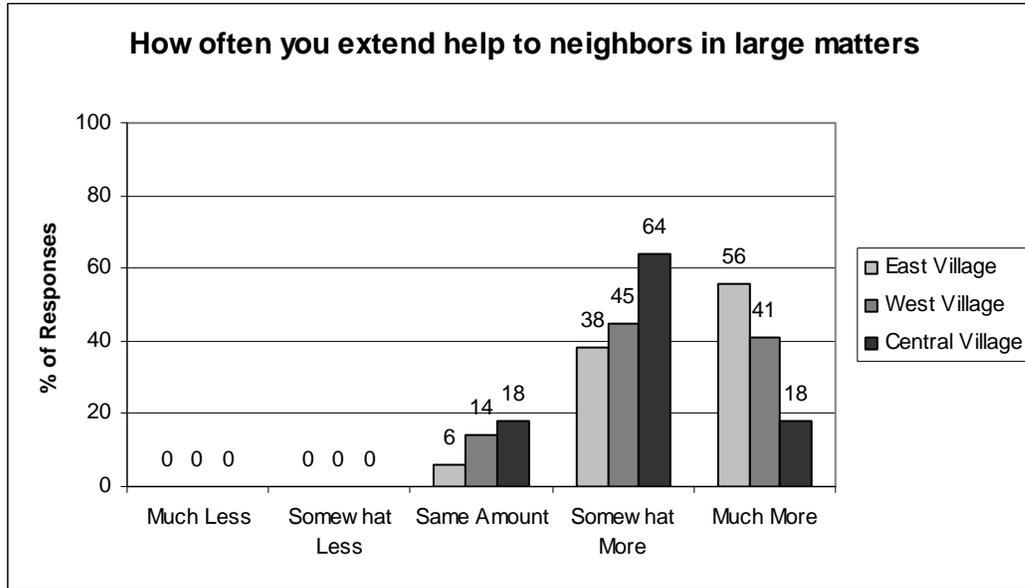
Figure 6.18: Focus Group Survey: Change in Frequency of lending/sharing/exchanging goods

How frequently you lend, share or exchange goods with neighbors

Bars (% of Responses) by category:

Category	East Village	West Village	Central Village
Much Less	0	0	0
Somewhat Less	0	0	0
Same Amount	6	0	18
Somewhat More	13	27	55
Much More	81	73	27
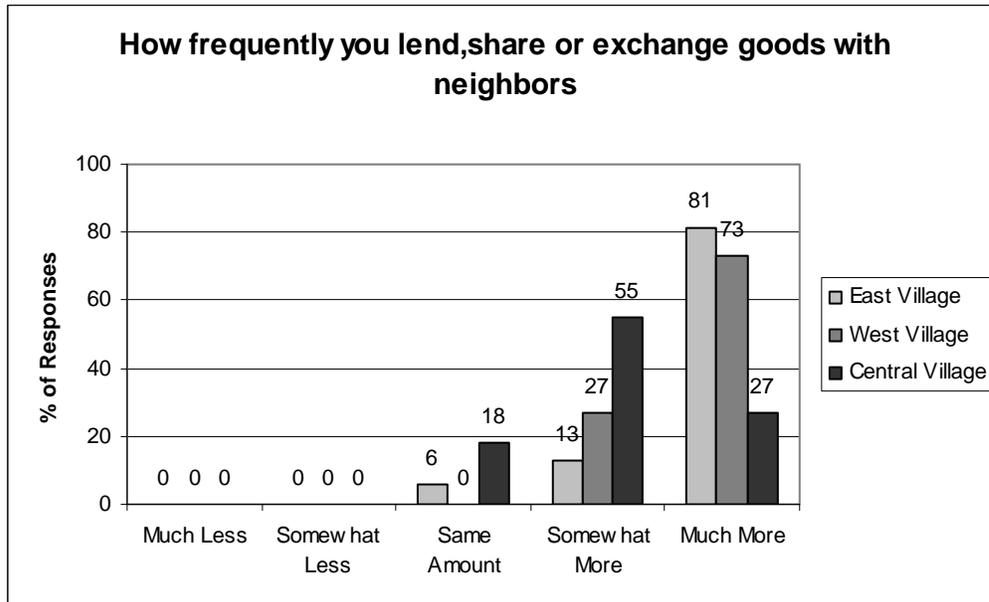
Results across all three cases reflected dramatic increases in residents' perceived practice of reciprocity. Participants, on average, reported being significantly more likely to lend and seek help from neighbors in both large and small matters. They were also more likely to lend, share and exchange goods and services with neighbors than before moving into cohousing.

In addition to focus group and key informant-interview derived information, a large amount of additional qualitative data was collected in the three case communities that suggested both general and specific examples of reciprocity. Information concerning reciprocity in case neighborhoods came from participant observation, interviews and resident storytelling. In some cases, it was derived from newsletter articles or other forms of written documentation. Reciprocal actions and norms were observed to occur in five principal ways. These are presented below and are accompanied by illustrative examples

1. *Community Organization and Decision-making*
    a. Distributed leadership and responsibility (*All)*
        - All adult residents are asked to contribute to the work of managing and maintaining the common properties and other shared neighborhood responsibilities.
    b. Consensus Model of Decision making: (*All*)
        - All adult residents are expected to participate in significant decisions related to neighborhood policy, planning and budget approvals.
2. *Reciprocal Support Networks (Mostly informal or ad-hoc):*
    a. Health Issues (*All*):
        - Caring for a neighbor immobilized after a serious car accident, taking neighbors to hospital or medical appointments, building a Disabled-person-accessible ramp for a neighbor with limited mobility, helping a neighbor claim the body of her husband from the hospital after his death, providing meals and other care for neighbors who are ill or have recently given birth.

b. Financial issues (*All)*

- Forming an investment pool to help a neighbor afford to buy a home they had been renting, financial support for a neighbor going through a divorce, contributing to fundraising efforts by community residents for various causes, purchasing goods and services from businesses owned or managed by a neighbor.

c. Childcare (*All*)

-Informal child-care exchanges, open-door policy, cooperative child care efforts, backup 'grandparents' or 'aunts and uncles' for families caring for foster children.

d. Pet, House and Plant care (*All)*

-Dog walking, caring for homes of neighbors while away, collecting mail, watering plants, feeding animals, forwarding messages, helping with repairs.

3. *Cooperative Efforts*

a. Food cooperatives (*All*)

 - Community Supported Agriculture participation, Bulk-food buying co-op, Organic meat co-op. Chicken and egg raising club.

b. Educational or enrichment opportunities (*All*)

- Non-violent communication workshops, Consensus training, facilitation training, mediation training.

Summary

Overall, the evidence collected in the study strongly suggests the existence of higher than average levels of social capital, including trust, norms or reciprocity and social cohesion in cohousing neighborhoods. The case studies indicate that communities selected for higher than average civic engagement by residents, also appear to reflect high levels of social capital. The data presented here also gives some indication of how design, social and governance structures particular to the cohousing model actively support development of social capital in these neighborhoods.

6.3   Democratic Capacity-Building

In *Democracy and Association (*2001), Mark Warren outlined five main ways that involvement with associations might contribute to an individual's democratic capacities and dispositions. He labeled these the 'developmental effects' of association and included the following factors in this grouping: information exposure, developing a person's political skills, increasing an individual's sense of personal or collective efficacy, enhancing one's deliberative skills and developing a persons 'civic virtues.' As cohousing neighborhoods represent a unique form of association, this section examines, in turn, the degree cohousing residents perceive they are experiencing the first three of Warren's posited developmental effects: information access, political skill enhancement and an increased sense of personal and collective efficacy. This section also explores a number of specific factors that appear to contribute to the observed developmental effects. The final section of this chapter addresses deliberative skill development and civic virtue in cohousing neighborhoods.

6.3.1 *Information Access and Social Learning*

Information is vital to prudent citizen choices, both public and personal. Information also empowers individuals to demand governmental transparency and public accountability. Without relevant and accurate information, citizens have very little basis upon which to make claims or to demand particular outcomes. Mark Warren contends that associations serve as "collectors, organizers and conduits of information that educates individuals about matters relevant to them" (Warren, 2001, p 71). To what extent do cohousing neighborhoods, as both a form of association and a supportive holding environment for a range of subsidiary associations, contribute to increasing residents' access to quality information about relevant personal and public issues?

Three focus-group questions addressed the issue of information access relative to levels of democratic engagement. Respondents in the three case neighborhoods were asked to reflect on changes in their access to information as a result of living in a

cohousing community; first about neighborhood issues, then local matters and finally national or global concerns. The results are reported in Figures 6.18, 6.19 and 6.20.

Figure 6.19. *Focus Group Survey: Change in Access to information about neighborhood*
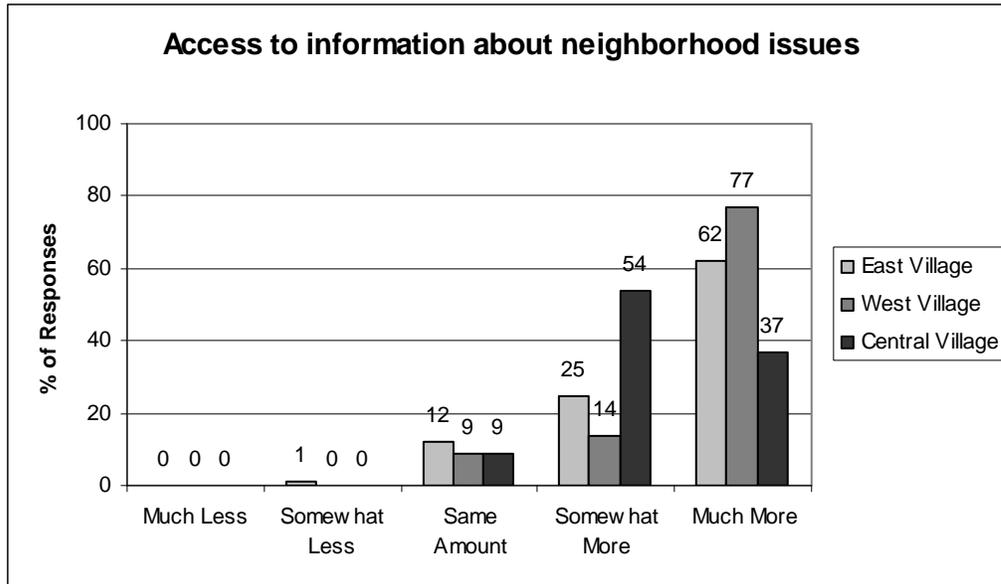
Figure 6.20. *Focus Group Survey: Change in Access to information about local issues*
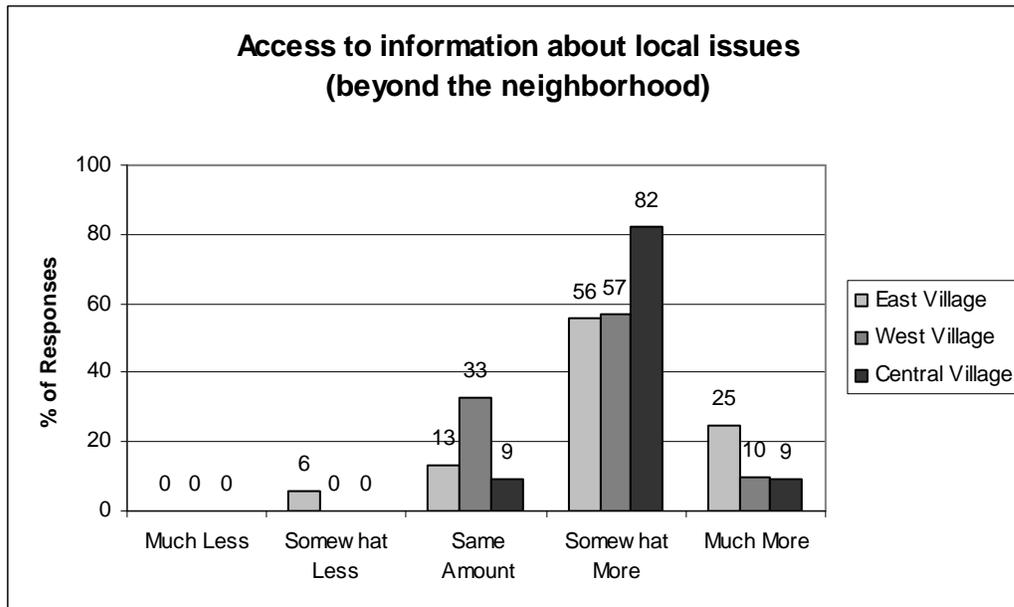
Figure 6.21.*Focus Group Survey: Change in Access to information about national/global issues*

Access to information about national and global issues

A bar chart titled "Access to information about national and global issues." The y-axis is labeled "% of Responses" ranging from 0 to 100. The x-axis categories are: Much Less, Somewhat Less, Same Amount, Somewhat More, Much More. Legend: East Village (light gray), West Village (dark gray), Central Village (black).

Category	East Village	West Village	Central Village
Much Less	0	0	0
Somewhat Less	0	5	0
Same Amount	50	45	36
Somewhat More	31	36	64
Much More	19	14	0

Focus group responses followed similar patterns across the case communities, although they differed somewhat in magnitude. Ninety percent of respondents reported at least some increase in access to information about neighborhood issues. West Village residents reported the most dramatic increase in access to neighborhood information. West Village is also the only community to date that has developed an extensive neighborhood-specific Web site with a variety of features that help facilitate information access and communication among residents. The Web site includes a continuously updated community calendar, business and committee meeting reports and contact information for all neighborhood residents. East Village does not operate an internal Web site, but has an email discussion list that includes all community members. It also offers large numbers of specialized bulletin boards in the foyer and mail-room of the common house.

A majority of respondents in each community also reported obtaining increased access to information about local issues after they moved into a cohousing setting, with 75% of respondents overall reporting at least some increase in access. However, significantly fewer respondents in all case neighborhoods reported 'much more' access to local/town/city information as compared to neighborhood knowledge. Trends across the

case communities were generally similar with the highest percentage of residents in each case reporting 'somewhat more' access to decision-relevant information after locating to their cohousing community.

A weaker, but still positive trend could be observed in reports of access to information about national or global issues. Fifty three percent of respondents reported at least some increase in access to information about national or global issues, while 43% reported no real change and 4% a slight decrease. Once again, the trends were roughly similar in each neighborhood with 81% of East Village, 67% of West Village and 82% of Central Village residents reporting at least some increase in access to national or global issue information.

Additional data on information access and exchange was gathered through participant observation, interviews and document analysis. These sources allowed identification of a number of different avenues of information access and exchange. These may be grouped into four general categories: Formal mechanisms of communication, informal interpersonal exchanges, demonstration/observation/imitation and mining the social network. Each mechanism is presented in the following section, along with examples drawn from the case communities.

1. *Formal Mechanisms of Communication*:
    a. Bulletin boards in high traffic, common areas (*All*)
       - mail-room, common house foyer, along exterior walls of common house
    b. Regular neighborhood newsletters (*East/Central villages*)
    c. Email list serv (*East/Central villages*)
    d. Neighborhood-specific Web site (*West Village only*)
    e. Community events-calendar (*East/Central villages*)
    f. Periodic newsletters (*All)*
    g. Announcements period at general meetings and common meals.(*all)*
    h. Meeting reports and discussion *(All)*
    i. Workshops, Classes, Discussion Groups *(All)*

2. Informal or Spontaneous Exchanges

    a. Conversations at community events (*All*)

        - meals, meetings, celebrations and work parties

    b. "Hanging out" (*All*)

        - watching children at the playground, collecting mail, gathering on porches or in the walk-ways, working in the garden, cooking common meals together, swimming pool, sauna or hot-tub

    c. Teaching, helping or mentoring moments (*All*)

        - crafts, pottery, cabinetry, home repairs, gardening

    c. Discussion and exchange of information resources (*All)*

        - books, magazines, articles, films, websites, news papers

3. Demonstration/Observation/Imitation (Social Learning and cultural change)

    a. Adoption of new Technologies (*All*)

        - roof solar panels, solar ovens, gray-water catchments, hybrid cars, computer applications, line drying systems (clothing), human powered vehicles, compact flourescent light-bulbs, Xeri-scaping, green building techniques

    b. Social /cultural practices (*All)*

        - foster parenting, attachment parenting, local food consumption, bulk buying, supporting local businesses, non-violent communication, biking or walking, composting, recycling, energy and water conservation practices.

4. *"Mining the Network" for Specific Information or Expertise*:

    a. Fixing things, Building things or Dealing with Computer issues (*All*)

        -Community home/auto/landscape/tech savvy "fix-it" people serve as regular resource for less skilled neighbors.

    b. Purchasing decisions *(All)*

        - Membership in CSA, bulk buying, solar ovens, computers, support of local businesses

c. Voting decisions *(All)*

 - Key community members considered "in the know"—
 "particularly about local politics—serve as resource for
 others.

 - Highly politically active and informed members–serve as
 sources of information for updates on issues, national
 political figures.

d. Specialized skills and knowledge *(All)*

 - People with expertise in writing, editing, pottery, interior
 decorating, painting, bike repair, carpentry, knitting,
 quilting, gourmet cooking, music, dance, singing, tapped as
 a teaching or helping resource.

The following observations case community residents illustrate some of
the ways that information is transferred and social learning occurs, in the
cohousing context.

Carol

*From my experience, living here has really increased my participation both in more
city-wide social issues and national issues, in large part because I'm being exposed to
more points of view. But I guess it is that there are more people here who have
something that is important to them….like Anna and my learning more about the stuff
that is really important to her. She pays attention to what's going on and she will put
out to the community an article to read or where there is a demonstration happening. I
may not otherwise be really as interested or passionate about that topic, but it gives me
a way to get into it. Otherwise, I would never take the time because I don't have that
specific interest but I do go participate if Anna is driving already and it is easy for me
to go with her and she's got the signs made and I can go stand at the corner and she's
got the poster ready and I participate in things that I would not otherwise because I
don't have that kind of passion to put in that kind of time that she does. So there are
many neighbors who have their specific interests and I am able to learn about a wider
variety of things through them. I've also seen it with my kids. I think that they get*

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involved in things that they wouldn't have gotten involved in otherwise...like they did the read for peace program because one of the parents here learned about it in school and all the kids got involved and that ended up sparking their interest, or maybe just their awareness, in raising money and donating it to a cause.

Jane

Well.still...because I am connected to 36 other households and they are connected out into the larger community... even if in one way that hasn't directly broadened my engagement ....in other ways it has. Like I stuffed envelopes for Doctors for Global Health, even though I have never been involved with an international medical non-profit before ....I know more about the Israeli-Palestinian situation than I ever knew before because I have a neighbor who cares passionately about that and sends me things by email or talks to me about it and encourages me to sign petitions and things and I just wouldn't necessarily have that kind of contact otherwise. And there are politically engaged people here...and people whose jobs are in different areas outside the community... with whom I can speak about a political issue that will impact them or that they might know something about that I didn't know . I think all of those things have happened to me because I care about a bunch of people and sort of by extension, I care about what they care about and that helps me become more engaged.

George

One example is the Survival Center.... We've done some projects there and one of the members of the community is on the Board of Directors and he has helped to educate the rest of us about their needs.

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> ***Lauren***
>
> *…We get calls from neighbors saying ' I'm headed to the polls and I need to know who to vote for.'*

6.3.2   *Political Skills*

Mark Warren defines the political skills potentially gained through association as "speaking, self-presentation, negotiation and bargaining, developing coalitions and creating new solutions to problems, learning how and when to compromise, as well as recognizing when one is being manipulated, pressured or threatened." He contends that these capacities are likely to be cultivated in any association that deals with collective action problems.

This research sought to identify whether political skills were being developed in the here case communities examined. Respondents were asked whether they had experienced any changes in their level of confidence in expressing viewpoints, their skill level in organizing events or collective actions, their ability to deal with conflict and their leadership and facilitation skills since becoming involved in a cohousing community. Figures 6.23, 6.24, 6.25 and 6.26 reflect residents' responses questions related to these concerns.

Figure 6.22. *Focus Group Survey: Change in Confidence expressing views*

Confidence expressing views

East Village, West Village, Central Village

Category	East Village	West Village	Central Village
Much Less	0	0	0
Somewhat Less	6	9	0
Same Amount	31	23	9
Somewhat More	44	41	64
Much More	19	27	27
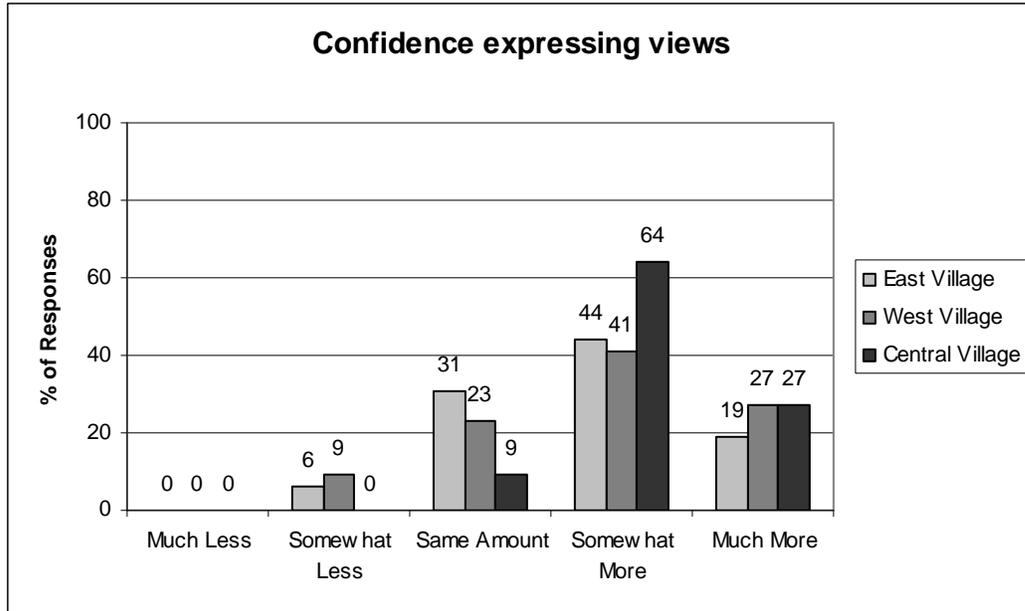
Figure 6.23. *Focus Group Survey: Change in skills organizing events or collective actions*

Skills in organizing events or collective actions

East Village, West Village, Central Village

Category	East Village	West Village	Central Village
Much Less	0	0	0
Somewhat Less	0	0	0
Same Amount	49	42	27
Somewhat More	38	29	64
Much More	13	29	9
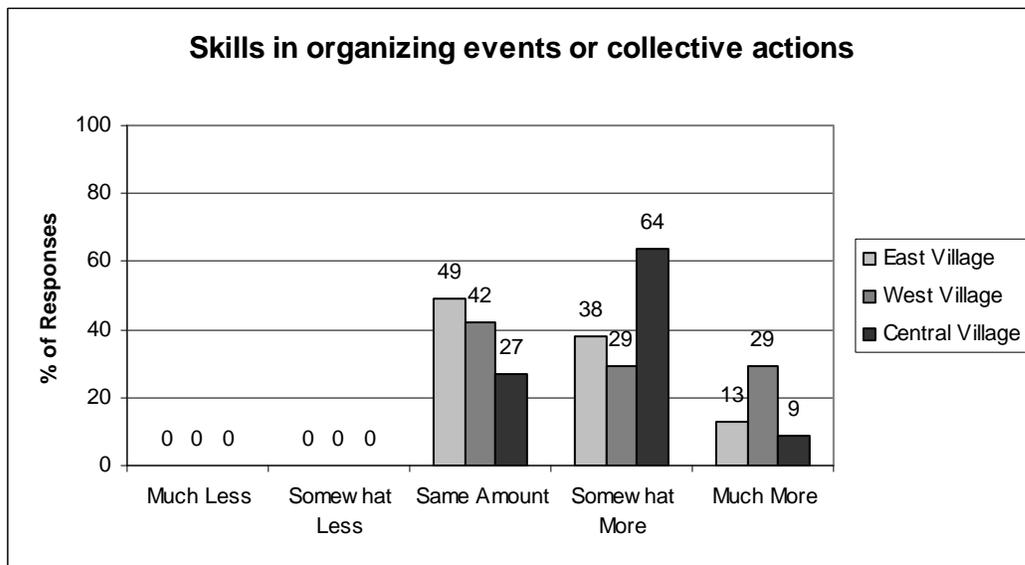
Figure 6.24. Focus Group Survey: Change in skill dealing with conflict
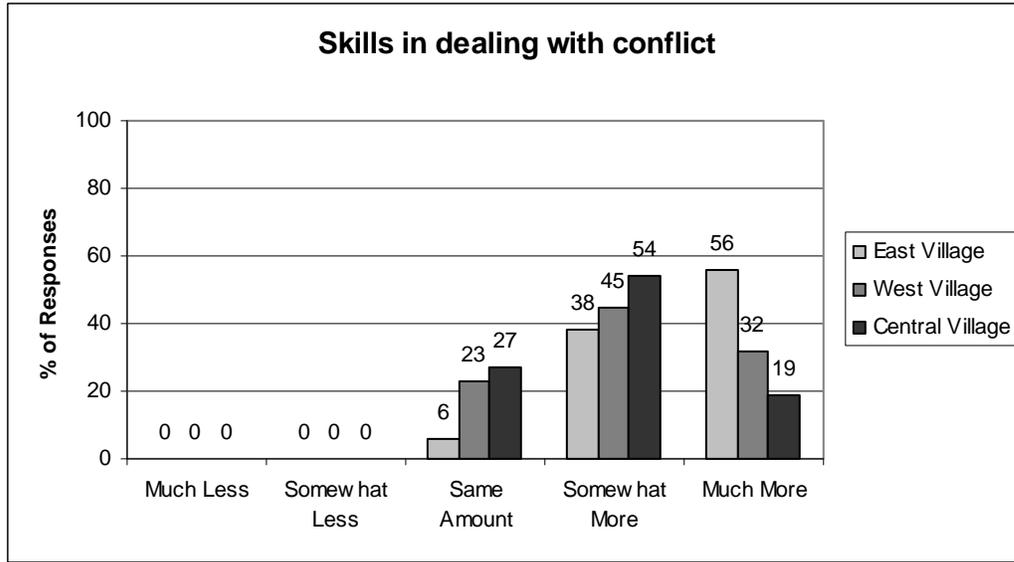
Figure 6.25. Focus Group Survey: Change in leadership and facilitation skills
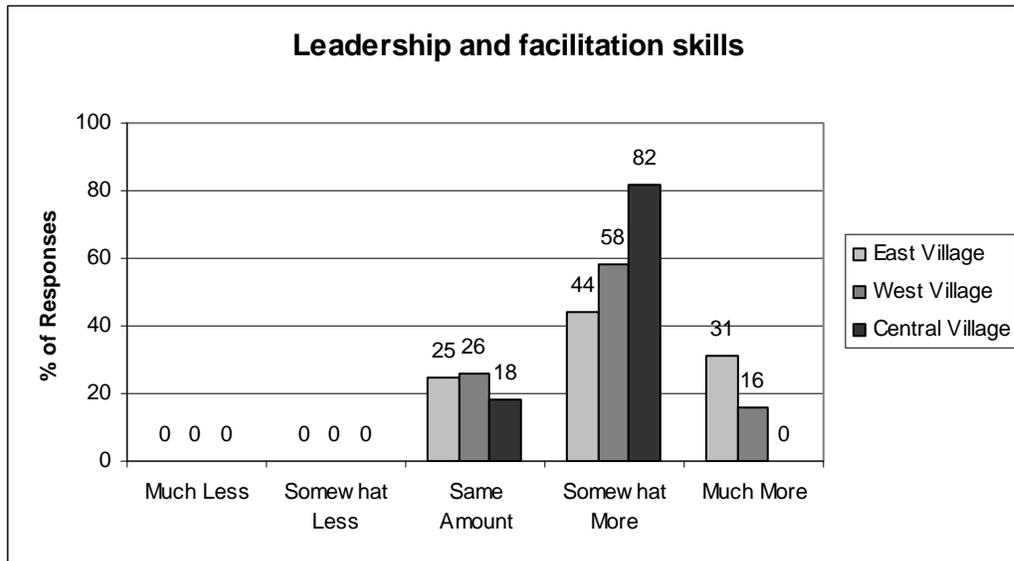
Data from the focus group survey questions provides evidence of perceived political skill development among participants in all three communities. The case communities evidence similar trends. The majority of respondents described feeling greater confidence in expressing their views and opinions since moving into cohousing. And a slightly smaller, but still substantial majority reported increased abilities and confidence in organizing events or collective actions. Respondents on average, across all three cases, reported feeling substantially more skilled in dealing with conflict with 81% of total respondents experiencing at least some improvement in this arena. Nearly 70% of residents interviewed suggested that they have experienced at least some increase in their leadership and facilitation skills. Taken together this data suggests that cohousing neighborhoods are fulfilling Warren's criteria for associations that build political skills.

Additional data substantiating these effects comes from resident accounts, shared in focus group and one-on-one interviews:

Leah

"I think that, besides information and heightened awareness, I think there's just easier access to things. For example, I can call Nina to ask how she will vote on this thing or what is the deal with that thing because she knows more about local politics than I do and stuff like that, but besides all that I feel like living here and being exposed to this and facilitating meetings and things have helped my self… and how you call it… my confidence about going out and doing stuff outside or organizing.…organizing a group making things happen…and maybe it's a function of age too, but I think there is something to being here that gives me the confidence to do stuff like that or to organize politically and being involved in the community, and taking on being president of this or that organization I think has been influenced by my being here."

Anna

…even not just in meetings but working through conflict with people and doing mediation... in the end I think it's made me understand more that there are lots of ways to work through things and also the fact that when you live in cohousing ….you almost have to. So it pushes you to a place that you maybe would have avoided otherwise. I mean certainly there are a few people in from this community that if I didn't….if I lived in the general community with them and they came to meetings I might have left saying "God, I don't have to deal with them. I can go somewhere else" or maybe they would have left. But because you live in a community you find yourself saying "okay well maybe I need to deal with this". And maybe you do take some time off, but eventually you have to go back and try again. Or at least that is my view.

Walter

"There was also the phenomenon of handing around chairmanships of some of these organizations. I was board chair of the men's resource center for a while and then Bob [Village neighbor] took over being board chair after me. In a lot of ways, I think it is a result of interaction between community members as we think about what's available to us, not just out there in the broader community, but also here."

> **Anna**
>
> *"…there is no doubt that yes, I am a lot better at communication. I listen better and I make an effort to listen better and even in things like how to facilitate a meeting and all of those things. I hated facilitation, and I would not facilitate if my life depended on it before, and now I still don't like it and I am still hesitant about facilitating in this community. But I will do it now, after the workshop that we had. I think I could probably do it. And I will do it because I think it is a really important thing to have. I have done some facilitation elsewhere and the way I look at meetings now….is thinking about the way meetings should be."*

6.2.3 Efficacy

Warren has defined efficacy as "the feeling that one could have an impact on collective actions if one chose to do so; The confidence necessary to action and the habit of doing something about problems when they arise" (Warren 2001; p. 71). He asserts that one can be trained for confidence, assertiveness and agency, primarily through experiences in which one does have some impact.

Focus group participants were asked a series of questions aimed at gauging changes in personal efficacy. Each invited to document changes in their felt ability to influence developments in their own life, at the neighborhood level, at the scale of the local community and finally, on issues of national or global significance. Figures 6.27 through 6.30 reflect participant responses to these questions.

Figure 6.26. *Focus Group Survey: Change in ability to influence developments in resident's own life*

Ability to influence developments in your own life

East Village, West Village, Central Village values by category:

- Much Less: 0, 0, 0
- Somewhat Less: 19, 9, 36
- Same Amount: 56, 45, 36
- Somewhat More: 25, 41, 28
- Much More: 0, 5, 0
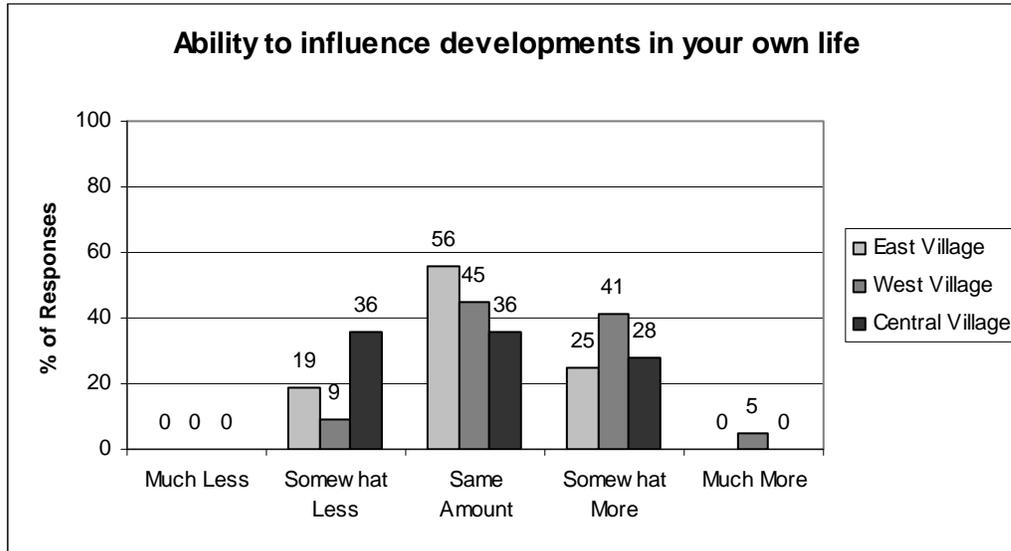
Figure 6.27. *Focus Group Survey: Change in ability to influence neighborhood*

Ability to influence neighborhood issues/developments

East Village, West Village, Central Village values by category:

- Much Less: 6, 0, 0
- Somewhat Less: 18, 9, 0
- Same Amount: 6, 0, 0
- Somewhat More: 32, 36, 73
- Much More: 38, 55, 27

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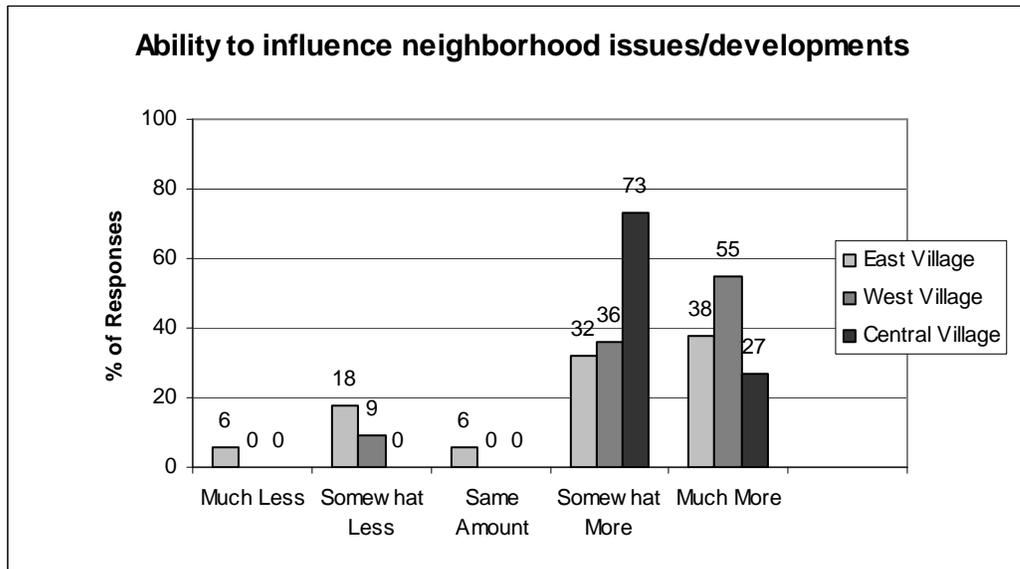
Figure 6.28. Focus Group Survey: Change in ability to influence local issues

Ability to influence local issues/developments

East Village, West Village, Central Village

Category	Values
Much Less	0 0 0
Somewhat Less	6 0 0
Same Amount	6 57 64
Somewhat More	50 43 27
Much More	38 0 9
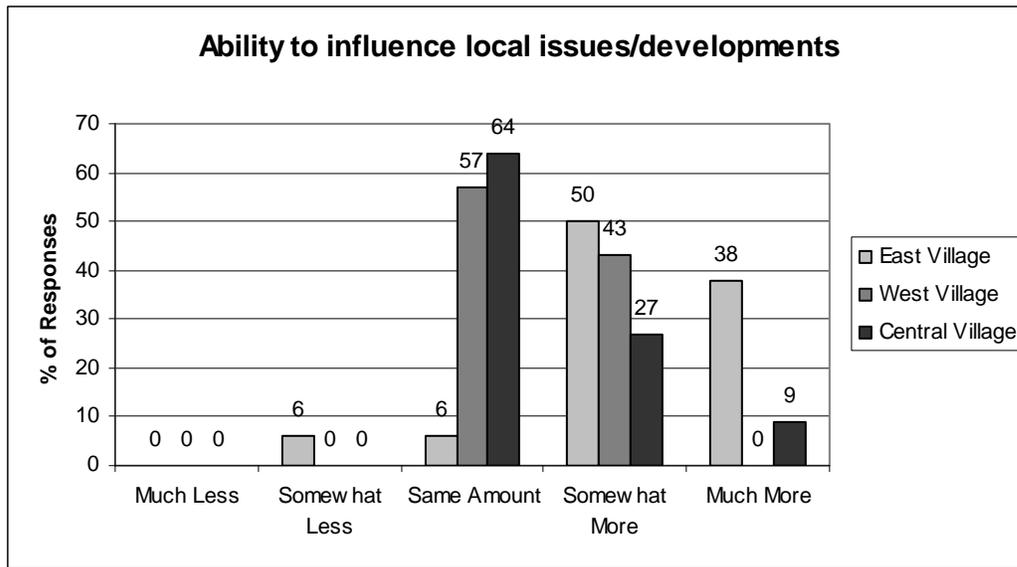
Figure 6.29. Focus Group Survey: Change in ability to have impact or voice on national or global issues

Ability to have some impact or voice on matters of national or global concern

East Village, West Village, Central Village

Category	Values
Much Less	0 1 0
Somewhat Less	6 0 9
Same Amount	56 65 64
Somewhat More	26 34 27
Much More	12 0 0
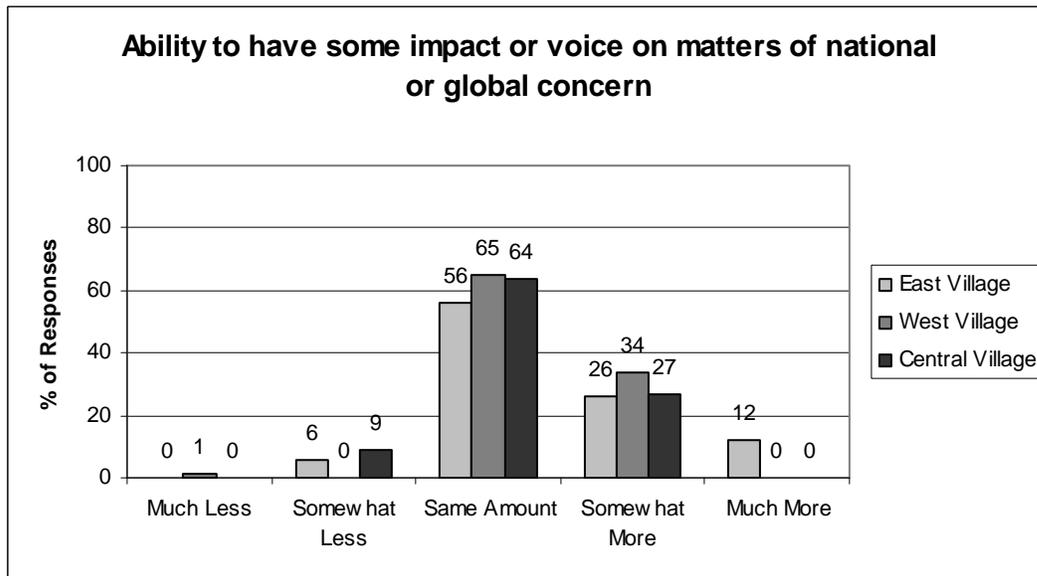
These figures suggest that residents do not perceive a significant change in how much control or efficacy they feel with respect to their personal life. Focus group interviews revealed some ambivalence about this issue. Several residents remarked that life in the neighborhood was frequently so involving

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between activities, responsibilities, engagements and obligations that they did not feel as much in control of their personal time as they had before moving into the community. This ambivalence is reflected in the fact that respondents reported a much stronger increase in their felt ability to influence events in the neighborhood and in their locality than at any other scale of activity. A few respondents did reflect a decreased sense of efficacy at the neighborhood level. This effect was most pronounced in East Village. There, participants also reported a weaker, but still significant increase in their perceived capacity to get involved make some contribution to national or global issues that matter to them. Overall, focus group respondents reported an increased sense of efficacy since moving to their cohousing neighborhoods.

Summary

Overall the evidence suggests that cohousing neighborhoods are serving as effective 'school-houses' for developing residents democratic capacities. They provide numerous formal and informal channels for increased access to, and exchange of, information by residents. Through the participatory governance structures of cohousing neighborhoods, residents are gaining opportunities to develop and practice political skills including self-expression, conflict resolution, organizing for collective action and meeting facilitation. Given this evidence, it is not surprising to find residents reporting an increased sense of efficacy in their civic lives. The data does suggest that one cost of the increased engagement in neighborhood and broader civic issues, may be some decreased sense of control over residents personal lives and private or family time.

6.4   Deliberative Democratic Practice

6.4.1 Governance Processes in Cohousing: Are they Truly Deliberative Democracy?

Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson have defined deliberative democracy as "a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives), justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future" (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004, p. 7).

This section evaluates the structure and processes of governance that occur in cohousing, with particular emphasis on the three case neighborhoods investigated, against the above criteria. The aim is to determine whether cohousing neighborhoods are actually practicing deliberative democracy. If so,, perhaps they are serving as on-going seedbeds of deliberative democratic practice that have thus far gone largely un-noticed by scholars. This would suggest an arena for future study.

Defining Consensus-based Governance in the Cohousing Context

As suggested in chapter 4, a very large majority of cohousing neighborhoods report employing some form of consensus decision-making to govern their communities They also tend to use distributed structures of leadership and organization in the day-to-day maintenance and management of community property and affairs (www.cohousing.org; Accessed 06/07/06). Resident participation in community governance is encouraged and expected. There are multiple points of entry for residents to engage in discussion and collaborative decision-making with their neighbors.

 Each case community identified consensus as its central model of decision-making All three neighborhoods adopted processes whereby significant community decisions were made by a meeting of the entire adult membership of the community (or those who participated). All three communities delegated more mundane-level decisions

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and management responsibilities to a number of smaller committees (with self-selected membership) whose remits were determined by the larger group.

The Cohousing Association Web site defines "consensus" as

A decision-making process by which an agreement is made by all members of the group, rather than a majority or select group of representatives. To reach this agreement, the group goes through a non- hierarchical consensus process with assumptions, methods and results that differ from traditional parliamentary or majority voting procedures. Essential elements include having a degree of trust among members, a common purpose, time to understand the question, problem or proposal carefully, a belief that each person has the right to be heard, and attention to the process used for arriving at decisions. A consensus decision represents a reasonable decision that all members of the group can accept. It is not necessarily the optimal decision for every individual" (www.cohousing.org; Accessed 08/10/07)

The Cohousing Handbook (Hanson, 1996), a popular resource text among groups developing communities, advises that consensus is a commonly adopted form of decision-making in cohousing neighborhoods and argues against groups adopting "unanimity consensus" equated to unanimous voting, which it claims allows groups to inflict on themselves "the worst aspects of individualism" (Hanson, 1996, p32). The *Handbook instead* advises groups to commit to "true consensus" which it defines as "the most inclusive form of decision-making" (Moench in Hanson, 1996, p. 32). The author develops a careful distinction between consensus and unanimity:

 Unlike unanimity, [in true consensus] it is the group that decides whether to honor an individual dissenter. The dissenting voice has the right to be heard but not to veto and the responsibility to accept the will of the group when a dissent is not accepted. In every consensus decision-making opportunity each member has three choices: 1) affirm the decision, 2) step aside and agree not to impede implementation, or 3) request that the group delay implementation of an action until you can make a case for why it is detrimental to the welfare of the whole group (Moench in Hanson, 1996, p, 32).

Of the three case communities, West Village and Central Village have formally

adopted a set of consensus process guidelines that the community follows when making

any consensus decision.

West Village defines consensus as "making decisions by the united consent of

all". Moreover they agree that "in consensus, the group encourages the sharing of all

viewpoints held by those with interest in a topic. These viewpoints are then discussed in a

spirit of respect and mutual accommodation. New ideas arise and proposals are

synthesized, until a 'sense of the meeting' emerges. The process can be aided by a

facilitator" (SC Process Manuel; Accessed 8/11/2007). In the West Village *Decision-

making and Record Keeping Agreement*, five process guidelines are presented. These

guidelines ask participants to 1) speak their mind but in a way that is respectful of others'

time 2) be aware of how often they speak 3) seek out differences of opinion rather than

avoiding them 3) take responsibility for the flow and quality of the meeting by pointing

out disruptors of healthy group process such as interruptions, put-downs, off-topic

comments, dominating comments etc. 4) give their complete attention to the speaker and

listen deeply 5) support proposals that residents feel they can live with, reserving their

right to block for decisions that residents strongly feel threaten the well-being of the

community as a whole (not simply their own preference).

Central Village, in their formal consensus decision-making guidelines, define

consensus as "a decision-making process, which strives for the cooperative development

of decisions and resolution of minority interests. Consensus is reached when a group of

people finds a proposal acceptable enough that all participants can support it, and no one

opposes it. Although all participants may not be totally satisfied with the outcome, no one

feels an unacceptable level of conflict with it" (VCC, Consensus Committee Report,

Revision 2.5, 07/29/99). The document outlines specific guidelines for how to manage

the consensus decision-making process in the context of Central Village. The document

includes criteria for deciding when a decision is, and is not, appropriate for consensus. It

outlines the steps in the consensus process including the time and place that consensus

decisions occur, participation guidelines and how to test for consensus. The guidelines

indicate a clear path forward for when the group fails to reach consensus on a proposal

and outlines the conditions under which voting may be adopted as a back-up decision-making procedure.

Now that the basic elements of consensus decision-making, as used in cohousing neighborhoods, have been described, the following section compares those governance processes, as practiced in the case communities, to the four criteria that define deliberative democracy as outlined by Gutman and Thompson (2004).

Are the cohousing neighborhoods studied *composed of free and equal citizens?*

The bylaws of each of the case neighborhoods define all adult, homeowners in the neighborhood as "full-members" of the community with an equal right to participation in making the decisions of the community through the mechanism of consensus (PVCC Agreements Revision: March 24, 2003; VCC Bylaws: July 27, 1999; SCHA Bylaws). The status of renters is more ambiguous. These individuals are invited to participate in meetings and discussion, but not necessarily given the power to block consensus on issues being considered for final decision by the membership.

Do they justify decisions with reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible?

Formal consensus choice-making as outlined in the popular reference *On Conflict and Consensus* (Butler and Rothstein, 1991), calls for a structured process of deliberation with the following sequence of steps: 1) Present initial proposal to membership 2) Identify and answer all clarifying questions,3) Identify and discuss all concerns about the proposal 4) attempt to resolve concerns, modifying the proposal if necessary to reflect new solutions 5) seek consensus.

The two case communities that adopted formal consensus guidelines (Central Village and West Village) followed this sequence closely in their guiding documents (Consensus Committee Report VCC, 07/29/99; SC Process Manuel; Accessed 07/27/07). Observation of committee meetings in each community, suggests that although not as formally facilitated as a whole-group consensus meeting would typically be, these groups

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employed the same basic process of presenting an idea, engaging in clarification, discussion and modification and then coming to agreement among the members present.

Reaches decisions that are binding for some period of time?

Each case community recorded decisions made by consensus of the membership in a "consensus-log." This record is maintained on-line in West Village and in binders that are kept in the common house, in East and Central Villages. Members are empowered to follow up on implementation of consensus decisions by making reference to choices recorded in the log, either in the context of a membership or committee meeting, or in the course of communication mong members. Members are expected to comply with all community consensus decisions.

Which are open to challenge in future?

Decisions made by consensus, unless specifically tagged with a "sunset –clause," were binding until the membership agrees (by consensus) to change them in each neighborhood studied. West Village made specific provision for reconsideration of consensus decisions in their process manual as follows: "Upon the request of five members, at any general meeting, following the meeting in which it was adopted, a decision may be reopened" (SC Process Manuel; Accessed 07/27/07). Central Village has a similar provision in its process guidelines: "Any participant wishing to revisit an existing decision, shall present his or her concern as an issue at a regularly scheduled business meeting. The facilitator will refer the issue to the pertinent committee for evaluation and subsequent report. The persons wishing to revisit the decision will be invited to participate in that committee" (Consensus Committee Report VCC, 07/29/99).

In sum, when evaluated against the Gutmann-Thompson criteria for the elements of deliberative choice-making, these three cohousing neighborhoods appear to be employing genuinely deliberative forms of democratic governance at the neighborhood level.

6.4.2 *Evaluating Deliberative Democratic Practice in Cohousing:*
Insights from the Interviews

Since cohousing neighborhoods appear to be encouraging deliberative democratic practice among residents, it becomes possible to investigate whether cohousing consensus governance produces the developmental and transformative effects postulated in the literature as by-products of such processes. To investigate this question, interview data collected from focus groups and personal interviews in each case neighborhood and coded and analyzed. Parsing the data in this way revealed several themes.

Focus group participants were asked to identify what they considered to be the greatest benefits and drawbacks or challenges of living in cohousing. The benefits identified were many, from beliefs that this was an ideal environment in which to raise kids, to appreciation of the fact that whenever help of some kind was needed, it was sure to be available. Interviewees identified a number of drawbacks as well. Two of the most frequently mentioned related to the difficulty of practicing the consensus decision process well and dealing with conflict effectively.

Participants in each focus group frequently mentioned struggling with these challenges in one way or another. Nonetheless, no one expressed a desire to jettison consensus-based decision-making all together. Many respondents expressed frustration at how difficult it was to engage in the consensus process or to "sit" with tension or conflict, but most seemed to view this as a developmental process. Residents saw themselves as slowly improving their communication skills and tolerance for engaging in deliberation as well as their ability to address conflict in less destructive ways by increasing their tolerance for interpersonal awkwardness and discomfort.

As noted above, Central and West Villages have adopted formal structures and guidelines for their consensus process. West Community has posted these agreements on their internal Web site for easy review by residents. Central village has its guiding document available in folders in the great room of the common house, where it can serve

as a community reference during meetings/ East Village, by contrast, has not adopted a formal set of agreed-upon consensus process guidelines. Responsibility for managing the process is left to the meeting facilitation team. Although frustrations were expressed in each neighborhood concerning the use of consensus for community choice-making, only in East Village, was there evidence that the consensus process was proving so frustrating and unwieldy that people were opting out of meetings, and were using alternate ways to get things accomplished in the community.

The following excerpts from residents' comments during focus group interviews, provide a rich illustration of the challenges (and some of the joys) related to governing by consensus.

East Village

On the consensus decision-making process:

Alice:
"Sometimes it feels like you are pushing on a rope. It is hard to get to decisions, to get things accomplished."

Joanne:
"I am disappointed at the lack of attention paid to the consensus process and the fact that we don't use much structure; that the structure is amorphous. It takes forever for issues to come up in the group meetings and they just don't end up getting addressed enough in a community minded way. Things then just sort of happen."

Nina:
"I get frustrated with the decision-making process. I don't usually feel strongly about the things that come up…I prefer to kind of live and let live. I am trying to learn to be more patient with the process."

Eva
"The decision-making process here drives me out of my mind. I think it drives lots of people out of their minds. They don't stay in it. We don't force each other to do the work that needs to be done. We don't decide. So some people end up going outside the process… they just go and do it."

George:

"That's another reason that people shy off [from participating in governance of the community], because the more you're involved, the more you have to process with people. It really helps when you can provide a map through that, that's much more structural. A structural map of how to do things. *How* to do things becomes a big issue when it comes to using consensus. If you can just accept C. T. Butler's way, then at least you are part-way there because you have a third party who's deciding for you how to do it. But here we don't have an agreed way to do consensus. So this creates some issues. From my point of view, consensus is like the ultimate creative art so anything that's within the bounds of respecting everyone, and everyone's participation, is fair game to call consensus. The process doesn't always have to look exactly the same. There's no *one* form. Although agreeing on any one form would probably actually be really helpful because you'd have some structure to count on. It doesn't matter so much the particulars of the structure – just having a structure that everyone agrees to follow."

On dealing with conflict:

Walt:

"Over the years we have seen some explosions of anger. It happens way less now but before, it was a real problem. It may be that in less cohesive neighborhoods people might be more careful with one another. Maybe the closeness here caused people to relax their courtesy guidelines. The result was hurt feelings and a sense that the meetings were unsafe. In recent years it seems like things have gotten much better. The trust levels between people have improved. We got to see the consequences of releasing that anger and learned something from that."

Andy:

"Really being close to your neighbors is one of the greatest things about living here. It is one of the downsides too: dealing with the tough stuff that comes from people just being people. It can get messy and difficult at times."

George:

"The difference is that there's somewhat of a border—there's an identity of being a member of a community here. So there's some elemental core, some assumption of caring about each other, even for people you don't like. So when you get in to a serious conflict—the difference between here and somewhere else is that somewhere else you'd call the cops. You'd call the cops, or you'd be in a ten-year feud with your next-door neighbor with the fence in between you and not talking to each other. Here, because of that 'bordered-ness' you've got to deal. To some extent or other, you've got to deal. If it spills out into the community you've got to deal with it. So that's helpful, in that within the context of that there's always enough (no matter how many people are involved in a conflict), there's still a volume of people who are not that invested in either side. So there are always

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people able to hold the whole. Whereas there is no real whole to hold in a cul-de-sac: nothing to bring the whole together. Sometimes maybe you have a Board of Directors or something but only really in a functional sense, not in terms of working out conflicts."

West Village

On the consensus decision-making process:

Rick:
> "It is a lot of work. It is sometimes hard to get things accomplished. The meetings, I have found can be tough, and the process of moving forward can be 'entertaining'."

Will:
> "I am not sure we have very good skills at doing consensus decision-making. It is a hard thing to do and not everyone does it equally well."

Liz:
> "Decision-making is sometimes tough. I do wish it were easier to come to decisions about stuff. And that it were easier for folks to keep perspective. People just get so caught up and tied up in stuff. It is certainly not utopia. We all bring all this stuff to the table. You just hope it is a safe environment to expose all that."

Ted:
> "The idea of collaboration and group decision-making seems sometimes to be very fragile–like it can be very easily upset."

Madison:
> "It can be hard to make decisions here. Because there are people here who don't know how to do it very well— using consensus. It gets easier as people learn better communication skills, but the challenge will probably always be there."

Amanda:
> "I find that now when I go to meetings outside the community that are not consensus-driven, I get frustrated. So I go and get involved in trying to incorporate some of those aspects like hearing from more of the people in the room. I think that living in cohousing and using consensus has definitely affected the way that I operate in other environments. I just incorporate the skills that I have gained to try to make it [the meeting process] better …and help introduce tools that people might not otherwise have access to. Like when I was involved in [a particular organization]: Often times there are many people who predictably wouldn't say anything. My experiences helped me to shift the way that it [the

organization] was run from something that was an autocratic system to something that was a little bit more even distribution of power and how decisions were come to etcetera.".

On the value of adopting a structured consensus process:

Anna:

"It is important—introducing a structure that is sufficiently delineated so that it gives you an idea of where do you go if you are here….and where do you go if you are there. Of course it's not ever all about structure because the structure will not mean that you won't have people who will behave badly, but it will help underline that that is what they are doing. Because you have it [structure], it makes it more overt and therefore easier to deal with."

On Dealing with Conflict:

Lydia:

"It is hard work managing the community. There can be a lot of struggle, a lot of tension on certain things. I don't so much personally feel a part of the struggles usually, but it does create tensions in the community. I don't mind that there is struggle, but it has an effect on relationships."

Erin:

"I don't deal with conflict well. I participate in meetings where there is conflict because I feel like it is my duty to go to community meetings. But it is really uncomfortable for me. I am working on getting more comfortable with conflict since I don't see how I can avoid it, living here."

Leah:

"It is hard to witness other people in pain. Here you are more likely to know when someone is struggling or in pain. And you are brought much closer to that. It is very difficult but it is also good in a way."

Madison:

"I have an example of my daughter: It was a couple of years ago…she was probably eight, and was struggling with another little girl she was interacting with at school. She was talking to me about it and I was saying to her "Have you told her that that bothers you when she does that?" And she said "Yes", that she said: "'It really bothers me when you do x, y and z'… But she just runs away!" And she was so upset that this little girl was just unable to engage with her in a dialogue and it was really revelatory, realizing that she had grown up in this environment where she was so used to talking to other kids in a way that they could work things out and using dialogue…and so it was a shock to her to go to school and realize that she could not take for granted that other kids had learned the same techniques."

Central Village

On consensus decision-making and conflict:

Nancy:

"It is hard sometimes adjusting to not being able to just do whatever you want to do. You need to get consensus first. We did not need that before, when we were living in our farm house on all that land."

Chris:

"The physical and the committee work take a lot more time than I thought it would before we moved in here."

Debbie:

"The amount of meetings and scheduling everything into the calendar can be challenging. Also–dealing with tensions in meetings and in the community. But also I think I have matured with that some over time."

Caroline:

"One of the positives is that living here has meant a lot of personal growth. I was a single mom for a long time: "the boss" and did not have a lot of practice in negotiating with others and dealing with the possibility that others could also be right. I have learned to respect all sorts of different viewpoints and how to better express myself. We learn how to speak our own truth in going through our community processes. I learn by example – watching others do what they do with wisdom and compassion.

On the down side: the community spends a lot of time in meetings. There is always a lot of work that needs to be done. Conflicts come up. I understand that is natural, but it is still very uncomfortable. We have gone through some tough times. We have had some really stressful issues but I think we have come through okay. It does sometimes feel like being married to 34 other people [laughter]."

Interview data reveals a complex set of feelings about, and experiences with, consensus. A great deal of frustration was expressed concerning how difficult it can be to come to decisions and a sense that "doing consensus" takes a high level of skill on the part of participants and facilitators.. Interviewees also reported that the process requires an agreed-upon structure and guidelines to work most effectively. In formal interviews and in more informal exchanges, residents made jokes and rolled their eyes about the

trials and tribulations of using consensus, but alongside the jokes, was a concurrent theme of personal growth. Residents, sometimes grudgingly. expressed a belief that they were developing a range of useful skills through engagement in the community's governance process. They mentioned increasing their ability to listen to different viewpoints respectfully, developing patience, improving their ability to communicate in ways that would be understood and received by others, "speaking their truth" without putting down other perspectives, "maturing" and expanding their ability to sit with, or work through, the intense discomfort that can come along with the experience of conflict or disharmony.

Residents were not explicitly self-reflective about developing a greater sense of "autonomy," or questioning their received beliefs as a result of engaging with the consensus process. However, the indication that this is likely occurring in each of the three neighborhoods was revealed in each community's ability, year after year, sometimes awkwardly and sometimes tortuously, to build united judgment in deciding issues of importance without walking away and without developing overwhelming animosity towards one another.

6.5   Summary Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to investigate a set of factors identified in the democracy theory literature as enabling of increased civic and democratic engagement within the particular context of cohousing. Was there sufficient evidence to indicate the presence of high levels of social capital, opportunities for democratic capacity building, and practice of deliberative forms of democracy in cohousing neighborhoods?

Overall the data strongly supports the claim that cohousing neighborhoods exhibit high levels of trust, social cohesion and norms of reciprocity (social capital). The evidence also strongly suggests that cohousing neighborhoods are acting as arenas for democracy capacity building by residents. Finally, the evidence also supports the claim that cohousing neighborhoods are practicing deliberative democracy in the ongoing governance of their communities.

CHAPTER 7
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Results

A primary objective of this research was to investigate how levels of civic engagement among cohousing neighborhood residents compare to those found among a national sample of citizens.

This study found that overall levels of civic engagement among cohousing respondents were significantly higher than either nationally average levels or those of a demographic subgroup roughly similar to the national cohousing cohort. Differences proved particularly pronounced in the areas of volunteerism, participation in community projects, voluntary organizational leadership, public meeting attendance, interest in national affairs and politics and participation in political meetings, rallies and protests. Cohousing respondents did not differ substantially from the demographically similar group in levels of voter registration, blood donation or charitable giving, although both groups had substantially higher levels of giving and voter registration than the national average.

Given evidence of high civic engagement among cohousing residents, the study sought further to understand better *how* and *why* this was found to occur. Do cohousing neighborhoods simply attract individuals pre-disposed towards civic engagement, or do residents experience changes in their civic dispositions and behaviors, related to the experience of living in cohousing? Which relevant attitudes, behaviors and capacities tend to change and to what degrees? Where specifically do cohousing residents tend to direct their ample civic energies? Finally, which factors, related to life in cohousing, appear significant in contributing to the observed effects? Data from multiple sources including comparative national surveys along with data collected in case studies of three cohousing communities were analyzed in an attempt to address these questions. This analysis did not negate the importance of pre-disposition as a component of residents'

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propensity towards civic engagement, but it revealed compelling evidence of significant positive shifts in residents' civic, democratic and social capital building behaviors upon moving into cohousing, regardless of pre-disposition.

Overall patterns of positive deviance in resident responses to questions of perceived changes in behavior were observed with remarkable regularity across the three case communities studied. In all three cases, residents reflected significantly increased involvement in neighborhood issues. But respondents in all three neighborhoods also reported increased involvement in local, national and global issues, although to a somewhat lesser extent. The majority of respondents reported increased extra-neighborhood volunteerism as well. Frequency of resident engagement in conversations about matters of public concern followed a very similar pattern to levels of civic involvement. Respondents across all three case neighborhoods reported very significant increases in how often they were discussing matters of neighborhood concern. But broader local issues, as well as national and global concerns were also discussed with significantly greater frequency than before residents moved into cohousing. These findings help to mitigate concern that cohousing neighborhoods might simply be diverting residents' ample civic energies away from the larger public sphere and towards more private and parochial concerns.

Qualitative case study data revealed very similar patterns of engagement across each of the three neighborhoods. Residents of all three communities were expected to participate regularly in community governance and maintenance activities. Nearly every resident who was interviewed, reported membership on one or more community-level committee or 'task-force' and residents were universally expected to contribute time to participation in planning, meeting, decision-making as well as in execution of tasks related to community social events or upkeep of grounds and shared neighborhood facilities. Residents in all three neighborhoods were also found to be regularly exchanging a wide array of goods, services and favors: from watching one another's children to trading books, rides, tools or expertise. Each community also allowed residents to use the common house to host personal or community-wide events,– such as

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local fundraisers, workshops, speaker-series, dance classes, clubs of all kinds, film series and voluntary organization board meetings. Residents in all three communities also used shared facilities to host weekly neighborhood gatherings such as meals or meetings as well as periodic events such as holiday celebrations or resident birthday parties. Interestingly, none of the three case neighborhoods were found to be conducting extensive community or political organizing activities within the neighborhoods themselves. Residents, instead were found to be using shared facilities as platforms for personal community organizing or service-oriented activities that engaged a majority of participants from beyond the bounds of the neighborhood (while welcoming, though not actively soliciting, participation from their cohousing neighbors).

In order to better understand the reasons for the civic and democratic effects observed in cohousing neighborhoods, additional research focused on identification of evidence that might corroborate or refute theories of how civic habits and capacities are formed: such as the presence of high levels of social capital, opportunities to develop democratic skills and capacities through association and participation in deliberative democratic practices. To what degree are these theoretically enabling factors present, how specifically do they manifest in the life of the communities studied and what impacts, as suggested by the collected evidence, do they appear to be having on residents' attitudes and behaviors?

As outlined in the literature review section, social capital theory posits that interaction between people in face-to-face settings allows individuals to learn to work together to solve collective problems and facilitates the development of social trust. Residents in all three of the case communities reported increased social interaction and cohesion, increased feelings of trust towards neighbors and high levels of support and reciprocity in social relationships at the level of the neighborhood as a result of living in a cohousing development. Residents' levels of generalized trust appear not to have been significantly changed by the experience of living in these communities, but the national survey revealed that cohousing residents overall do exhibit somewhat higher than average levels of generalized trust. Interestingly, the national survey also revealed extraordinarily

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low levels of trust in the national government among cohousing residents and only moderate levels of trust in local government. While the of high levels of trust reported by cohousing residents conform to Putnam and other social capital theorists predictions, the corresponding low levels of trust in government appear to contradict Putnam's hypothesis that high levels of generalized trust should correlate to higher levels of trust in government. One possible explanation for this discrepancy can be found in the fact that most cohousing residents describe themselves as 'liberal' leaning in their political views while the research was conducted during the sixth year of a republican presidency that has proven particularly unpopular among liberals.

Developmental democracy theory predicts that citizen engagement in various forms of civil-society based association should lead to democratic effects in the form of increased issue-awareness and capacity building on the part of citizens. In apparent support of these theoretical propositions, case study participants reported significant changes in their democratic skills and practices as a result of their residence in a cohousing community. Residents reported enhanced access to public information of all kinds. The strongest increase was in the availability of information about neighborhood level issues and concerns, but substantial positive change was also reflected in access to information about local, national and global issues. On average, residents reported positive development in their democratic/political skills as well. Cohousing residents reported overall increases in their level of confidence in expressing their views, their skills in organizing collective actions, their leadership and group facilitation skills and their ability to deal positively with interpersonal conflict.   Residents also reported an increased sense of personal and collective efficacy in addressing neighborhood, local, national and global issues, although there was no substantial average change in residents' felt ability to control the events and circumstances shaping their personal lives.

Deliberative democracy theorists argue that when individuals are more broadly empowered to influence choice making, particularly in the institutions that most directly affect their everyday lives, they will tend to become more public spirited, more tolerant, more knowledgeable, more attentive to the needs of others and more willing to probe

their own interests. These predicted transformations are thought to contribute to improvements in the workings of democracy more broadly by generating new forms of solidarity, cooperation and civic attachment. The research demonstrated that case community residents were indeed actively participating in highly deliberative forms of democratic governance at the neighborhood level. Residents regularly attended general and committee meetings that were structured so as to engage participants in explicitly deliberative forms of discussion and consensus-based decision making. Interviews suggested that engaging in consensus-based forms of deliberative democracy is by no means easy or always pleasant for residents. As often as not, residents reported experiencing this process as difficult, frustrating and sometimes even frightening or painful. In spite of this, interviewees did not express a desire to move away from efforts to assure an egalitarian, deliberative form of community governance. Instead, they expressed appreciation for the benefits they felt they gained from engaging in that process, not only in terms of empowerment, but also by developing skills and capacities that they are able to use in various other dimensions of their home, community and work lives.

7.2 Conclusions and Implications

The results of the study suggest that cohousing indeed represents an arena for social capital building as well as for nurturing development of civic habits and capacities. A central concluding observation is that that no single characteristic of cohousing on its own appears adequate to explain the effects documented in this study. A number of key elements characteristic of cohousing neighborhoods, including social contact design, community-enhancing social norms and participatory structures of governance, seem to work synergistically; mutually supporting one another to create a fertile arena for enhanced civic and democratic engagement by residents.

This observation can be illustrated by examining the nearly universal example of regular "common meals" in cohousing neighborhoods: Social contact design principles underpin the creation of a centrally located common house as a regular feature of cohousing neighborhoods. Cohousing social norms support the practice of making one or more community meals available in the common house per week. The structures of community governance and management provide the means by which residents organize themselves and confer responsibility for ensuring that community meals are regular, attractive to residents, and well organized. Regular, enjoyable community meals draw residents out of their homes and into interaction with one another. Over shared meals, residents communicate and build relationships. Information about neighborhood, local, or national issues is routinely shared at meals. Opinions are exchanged. Resources are identified. Ideas are hatched and tested. Plans are developed. Commitments are made. Activities are organized.

The civic and democratic benefits of common meals are but one example of the mutually reinforcing, catalytic relationship between the social contact design elements, the pro-social norms and the participatory governance structures that are characteristic of cohousing. The combination of these elements routinely creates incentives for increased engagement while simultaneously lowering barriers to entry, and transactions costs of such engagement for residents. In this way, this research suggests, an over-arching social structure is being created that makes regular, democratic engagement the path of least resistance for residents of cohousing neighborhoods.

If indeed the success of the cohousing model, in actively supporting social capital and civic capacity building, depends crucially on mutually supporting spatial, social and governance factors, this poses a challenge to the design-determinism apparent in new urbanism approaches that attempt to revitalize a sense of community primarily through the vehicle of social-contact design. This study does not negate the importance of social contact design, but rather suggests that development of a substantive sense of community, with potential to activate the democratic potential of citizens, may depend upon much more than mere manipulation of spatial elements. It may depend crucially upon giving

adequate attention to the development of social and governance norms and structures, as well as development of a genuine sense of ownership and investment in the idea of community, on the part of residents. This implies a vital creative role for citizens in shaping and claiming their living spaces – not simply consuming them as they might any other commodity in the marketplace.

The results of this study offer reason for optimism about the potential for cohousing to serve as a viable platform for fostering democratic engagement at the grassroots. Nonetheless, this study ought also to give pause, given the demands that cohousing communities place on residents as compared to those of typical urban or suburban neighborhoods. Cohousing challenges residents to step away from the dominant narrative of our culture as one composed of rugged individualists, jealous guardians of privacy and independence, and asks them to consider others and the disparate viewpoints they invariably represent, in their decision-making on everything from how to manage the family pets to whether it is appropriate to keep a gun in the house. Cohousing communities also expect residents to take responsibility for contributing personal time and resources towards supporting the life and well-being of the neighborhood and everyone in it. It is unclear how many Americans ultimately might be willing to trade a degree of privacy and individual independence to gain the benefits of living in such communities. Since residence in cohousing neighborhoods is entirely voluntary (and must be for them to function as well as they do), whether cohousing becomes a mainstream housing option in the United States which in turn serves to foster democracy at the grassroots, is largely a matter of how much demand evolves in the market for this housing option and how effectively the market is able to meet this demand.

The relatively small number of cohousing neighborhoods in the United States suggests that very limited numbers of Americans are prepared to live in this way, Jumping to such a conclusion, however, may be premature. Investigation of the actual and potential demand for cohousing in America is an important subject for future study. It is also important to note that several, still to be identified, factors may be significantly suppressing cohousing supply below levels adequate to meet even current demand. The

fact that there are waiting lists to gain entry to many established communities provides one indication that cohousing supply does not yet meet existing demand. Notably, this situation is occurring in an era when very few Americans are even aware of the cohousing option.

Further study is needed to ascertain the potential for growth in this type of housing in the United States, and whether it has the potential to become a mainstream housing option here, as in Denmark and other northern European countries. If cohousing *does* become a mainstream housing option for Americans, these neighborhoods may one day make a contribution to the project of re-weaving our nation's social and civic fabric by fostering the kinds of public citizens that Thomas Jefferson hoped would serve as the ultimate protectors and beneficiaries of our nation's democracy.

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